

SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES IN *BINTANG* BEER ADVERTISEMENTS: A SEMIOTIC STUDY

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Abstract

Advertising is a form of communication for marketing and is used to encourage and persuade people to take an action. As well as news, advertisements are also used to convey messages. This study aims to analyze verbal and visual signs in Bintang beer advertisements in order to discover the subliminal messages delivered by the company. The data were taken from three selected Bintang beer advertisements. They are Bintang Pilsener, Bintang Zero 0.0% and Bintang Radler. This study used observation method and note-taking technique in collecting the data. The data were analyzed by descriptive qualitative method using theory of Semiotics proposed by Barthes (1998). By conducting this study, it is found that there are interesting unseen messages in Bintang beer advertisements. The finding shows that both verbal and visual signs play crucial roles in presenting meaningful and interesting advertisement to succesfully deliver messages to the target consumers.

Keywords: *advertisement, sign, meaning, verbal, visual*

Abstrak

Iklan merupakan bentuk komunikasi pemasaran dan digunakan untuk mendorong dan membujuk orang untuk mengambil suatu tindakan. Seperti halnya berita, iklan juga digunakan untuk menyampaikan pesan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah tanda-tanda verbal dan non-verbal pada iklan bir Bintang untuk menemukan pesan tersembunyi yang disampaikan oleh perusahaan. Data diambil dari tiga iklan bir Bintang yang telah diseleksi. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode observasi dan teknik catat dalam pengumpulan data. Data dianalisis menggunakan metode kualitatif menggunakan teori Semiotik dari Barthes (1998). Melalui penelitian ini ditemukan bahwa terdapat pesan-pesan tersembunyi yang sangat menarik pada iklan bir Bintang. Temuan pada penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa baik tanda verbal dan non verbal memiliki peranan penting dalam menyajikan iklan yang menarik dan penuh makna untuk menyampaikan pesan kepada konsumen dengan sukses.

Kata kunci: *iklan, tanda, makna, verbal, visual*

A. Introduction

Advertising is an industry used to call the attention of the public to something, typically a product or service. An advertisement is generally considered a public communication that promotes a product, service, brand or event. To some the definition can be even broader than that, extending to any paid communication designed to inform or influence. Advertisements are important for businesses because they are the most direct and proven way to reach potential customers. They can have an instant impact on your business in a number of ways, including: brand awareness, brand reputation, and sales.

Words in advertisements play an important role in complementing the visual aids to sway readers' emotions. Besides the denotative meaning, words also have connotative meanings that can help to create an impact on readers, therefore selecting the right words is important in determining the impact of the advertisement on readers. The words used in advertisements must fulfil the purpose of advertising, which is to persuade the audience to purchase the product. Thus, copywriters tend to bend the rules of grammar, syntax and language to create advertisements that are powerful and effective in its persuasiveness.

Advertisement use two primary forms of communication: verbal and nonverbal. With verbal communication, people express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings through spoken or written language. Nonverbal communication uses other methods, such as body language including facial expressions, gestures, and more. Non verbal communications have a positive impact in boosting your business. Therefore, the use of visual communication is massively growing among business. Over 84% of all marketing strategies use images, popular GIFs, graphics,

animations, and signs among others to pass information. Visual communication has more impact in passing information to people. It is easier to process a visual signal quickly than to read a sentence of a paragraph full of text. An image will pass a lot of information within a short a time because one image can have a thousand words. Research shows that the brain processes images 60,000 times faster than texts. With this background information, it will save you time when using visuals to communicate to people. In addition, people easily forget what they hear or read easily but retain images for long. This is because images are stored in long-term memory, and words and texts are stored in short term memory.

This study aims to analyze the meaning of verbal and non verbal signs found in Bintang beer advertisements. It is crucial to discover the subliminal messages delivered by the company. Bintang beer advertisements are very interesting to analyze since it is challenging to promote alcoholic beverage due to some consideration and regulations. For many years, beer has created the mainstream idea that it is commonly consumed in the party-type scenes. It has also created a popular thinking that people who drink beer are wild, bad, or partying individuals. Nowadays, beer companies have changed that way of thinking and started creating a new ideology, which is more positive, that beer is an alcoholic beverage which can bring people together to have a good time, socialize, or for celebration.

There are numbers of previous research conducted related to this phenomenon. First, an article entitled "Gender Representation in Visual Communication: A Multimodal Social Semiotic Study of Selected Lager Beer Billboard Advertisements" by Kamalu (2019). His study examines how gender is being represented in visual communication using

selected lager beer advertisements in Nigeria. His study is an attempt to use a social semiotic approach in the interpretation of visual communication. This study portrays how words, images and signs in the selected lager beer billboard advertisements act as basic tools in projecting gender misrepresentation in the Nigerian society. This study reveals that media practitioners intentionally produce and use multimodal products that privilege the male gender over their female counterparts in the advertisement of alcoholic products. The exclusion of women in the advertisements communicates the wrong assumption that alcoholic drinks are either not meant for women or that one has to be a “man”, physiologically and psychologically to be a partaker in their consumption.

The second related study conducted by Kartika, Sudipa and Resen (2016) entitled “Verbal and Visual Signs on Airlines Advertisements: A Semiotic Study”. Their study aims at identifying the meaning of verbal and visual signs of airlines advertisements. The finding of their study shows that the visual and verbal aspects have important role in conveying the narration message of the narration. The fusion of the visual and verbal aspects in the video and its narration are the right combination to tell and emphasize to the people about the meaning of the advertisements itself, it would be easier to understand what would be conveyed through the video if the visual signs and verbal representation are mutually supporting with the text.

The third study is an article entitled “The Analysis of Semiotic Signs in the Nudes Eye Shadow Palette Advertisement by Maybelline New York” by Pradnyanita, Pratiwi and Ayomi (2022). The purpose of this study is to investigate the verbal and visual signs in the advertisements and to discover

their hidden meaning. The method used in this study is a qualitative method. The data were taken from YouTube. The data were analyzed by using theory of Semiotic by Saussure (1983), the theory of meaning from Barthes (1976), and the supporting theory of color by Cerrato (2012). The finding shows that the advertisers usually put the hidden message behind the verbal and visual signs in order to make the people curious about the products. The use of verbal and visual signs in the advertisements are equally important. The use of the verbal signs is crucial in giving explanation or or description about the products. Meanwhile, the use of the visual signs can give more emphasis about the uniqueness of the products visually.

The fourth study is an article entitled “An Analysis of Verbal and Visual Signs Found in the Posters of Korean Pop Idol” by Suardani, Pratiwi and Juniarta (2022). The study aims at finding out verbal and non-verbal signs and explaining the meaning as well. The data were taken from ten printed posters of Korean pop idol. This study used the theory of semiotic by Saussure (1983) to find out the verbal and non-verbal signs and theory meaning by Barthes (1968) to find out the meaning of verbal and visual signs in the posters of Korean pop idol. Descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze the collected data. The finding shows that Most of the verbal and visual signs of the posters album and concert of Korean idol convey connotative meaning. The verbal and visual signs used in the posters support the agencies to promote their idols.

The last review of previous related study is taken from an article entitled “Marketing on the Internet: A Semiotic Analysis” by Tsotra and Janson (2004). This study demonstrates how semiotics, which

constitutes the “linguistic turn” in human sciences, is a powerful tool for revealing concealed meanings in Internet marketing. Semiotics deals with symbols in the form of text and pictures, and also with their underlying meaning. Hence, since internet marketing makes extensive use of symbols in order to affect product awareness and cultural meaning, semiotics is a very effective and efficient tool for interpreting online marketing. This paper analyzes two examples of internet marketing and explains how potential consumers with different cultural backgrounds perceive the advertised product. The finding of their study shows semiotics can help internet marketers develop appropriate communication strategies and design communication channels with a certain degree of cultural sensitivity. Overall, techniques such as semiotics influence and can improve the impact and effectiveness of currently used promotional strategies.

Based on the review of related literature above, it can be seen that previous researchers explore various different advertisements as data source. So that, analyzing beer advertisements is still relevant since not too many researchers analyzing beer advertisements especially focusing on the subliminal messages in beer advertisements.

B. Method

This research is descriptive qualitative method. The data were taken from three selected Bintang beer advertisements. The selected data consist of the advertisement of Bintang Pilsener, Bintang Zero 0.0% and Bintang Radler. The data including verbal and visual signs in the form of words or pictures that appear on the advertisements. They are selected as data source since each of them has different combination of verbal and visual signs to show their own uniqueness. The data

were collected by observation method and note-taking technique. There are some steps conducted to get the data. First, by downloading the advertisements from Bintang beer website. Second, observing, reading and taking notes of verbal and visual signs found in the advertisements. Third, classifying the data into verbal and visual signs. Finally, the researchers analyzed the verbal and visual signs in the advertisements using theory of Semiotics proposed by Barthes (1998).

C. Result and Discussion

This section presents the data analysis of three selected Bintang beer advertisements. The analysis is started by presenting the picture of the advertisement and continued by analysing the meaning of verbal and visual signs found in each advertisement. The analysis of verbal signs consists of the analysis of words, phrases or sentences including the implicit meaning carried by those verbal signs. The analysis of visual signs consists of the analysis of any pictures and colors used in the advertisements and their intended meaning as well. The data were analyzed by using theory of Semiotics proposed by Barthes (1998).

Semiotics is the systematic study of sign processes and meaning making. Semiotics explores how humans use and interpret *signs* and *symbols* to communicate, to learn, and to develop knowledge. According to Barthes (1998), signs had both a signifier, being the physical form of the sign as we perceive it through our senses and the signified, or meaning that is interpreted. Barthes also believed that every ideological sign is either a denotative sign system or a connotative sign system. A denotative sign, which is a strictly descriptive system, is the result of the signifier image and the signified concept combining. A connotative sign is one that has lost its

historical meaning. This could be due to a number of things including: changes in culture or terminology, an event, or even just evolution.

Both verbal and visual signs have denotative and connotative meaning. According to Barthes (1998) denotation is the most basic or literal meaning of a sign, e.g., the word “rose” signifies a particular kind of flower. Connotation is the secondary, cultural meanings of signs; or “signifying signs,” signs that are used as signifiers for a secondary meaning, e.g., the word “rose” signifies passion. The analysis of denotative and connotative meaning of verbal and visual signs in Bintang beer advertisements are presented as follows.

Data 1:



Figure 1. Bintang Pilsener

In this Bintang beer advertisement there are two verbal signs that appear. The first verbal sign is “Sun & surf best served with (symbol of star)”. This sentence used the repetition of the similar sound or pronunciation of the word “surf” and “served”. This is such a

unique technique since it is interesting to hear two word with similar pronunciation in a sentence. This technique is very common in advertising which is used as attention catcher. It aims to make the sentence particularly the slogan of the advertisement memorable and easy to remember. In addition, it gives emphasis to the intended messages delivered by the advertisement.

Uniquely, at the end of the sentence it does not use word *Bintang* ‘star’ (the brand of the product), but it uses symbol of the star. In this case, star represents a high quality product since literally star is located high on the sky. Stars are also seen as a sign of excellence. From an early age, children are rewarded with gold stars as a sign of good behavior or a particular achievement. They are seen as behavior modifiers and rewards. It’s not just children who see stars as being symbolic for achievement, stars are also used as a grading system to demonstrate quality for products or services. A star-based rating system is usually a symbol of quality. For example, 5 stars hotel, 5 stars review, or 5 stars rating are all used by businesses and service providers to demonstrate quality. Large online retailers use this rating system for products to build trust and help customers differentiate between poor and high-quality products. So that the symbol of the star at the end of the sentence represents the identity of Bintang beer as high quality beverage product.

In the sentence “Sun & surf best served with (symbol of star)”, the word “sun” and “surf” represent the beach which is also supported by the background picture. This whole sentence implicitly means that Bintang beer is a perfect companion at the beach to spend leisure time with beloved ones. Beer is very identical with having fun, celebration and togetherness. It implicitly encourages people to

involve beer in their activity at the beach to make the moments more joyful. Moreover, the sentence also indicates that Bintang beer is the best quality beer for quality time with friends, family or other colleagues.

The second verbal sign on the advertisement is “Indonesia’s Favorite Beer”. This verbal signs describe that the product is the best-selling and most popular beer in Indonesia. This sentence implied that Bintang beer is recommended since it is consumed by most of the Indonesian. In this case, the advertiser used generalization technique by generalizing that it is the most favorite beer in Indonesia. By doing so, it convinces the people or target consumers that it is worth a try. The more the people drink it the more it is trusted by the target consumers. That is the strategy used by the advertiser to persuade people to buy the product.

This advertisement is also supported by visual aspects which support the verbal aspects to deliver the intended messages to the target consumers. Obviously the setting of the advertisement is at the beach. Beach is identical with trees, sun, wave, sand, and blue sky. We can see them all at the poster. The most eye-catching and dominating picture on the advertisement is the picture of coconut trees which is the icon of the beach itself. The coconut is a universal symbol of the tropics. We can easily find coconut trees on beaches. One major purpose beaches serve to the human race is a venue for relaxation. The coconut tree has been recognized to stand as representation of relaxation. Its heavy presence on beaches is a strong reason for this symbolical inference. It is also considered as symbol of good health based on the highly rich nutrient contents it houses.

We also can see the blue ocean and the blue sky on the advertisement. The color blue

is associated with open spaces, freedom, intuition, imagination, inspiration, and sensitivity. Blue also represents meanings of depth, trust, loyalty, sincerity, wisdom, confidence, stability, faith, and intelligence. Blue can represent rest and can cause the body to produce chemicals that are calming and release feelings of tranquility. Blue is also cooling in nature and helps with balance and self-expression.

In addition, there is also a picture of hammock. A hammock is a sling made of fabric, rope, or netting, suspended between two or more points, used for swinging, sleeping, or resting. It normally consists of one or more cloth panels, or a woven network of twine or thin rope stretched with ropes between two firm anchor points such as trees or posts. It represents convenience, relaxation, and recreation. It gives double impression that you can enjoy your leisure time at the beach by sleeping on the hammock while enjoying the beauty of the beach and listening to the sound of the wave peacefully. Beaches have a knack for easing other senses as well. The sound of the waves repeatedly rising and fall is innately calming; the perfect back drop to meditation, contemplation, and peace of mind. It becomes a perfect moment when you additionally enjoy it with a bottle of beer since it gives you double relaxation at the same time.

Lastly, there is the picture of the product, the Bintang beer, which placed on the wooden bench. Wooden bench is also another typical object found at the beach. It represents nature and relaxation. A bench, a bottle of beer, and the beach are absolutely a perfect definition of relaxation. At this point, the advertiser wants to make the product known by the people through the presence of the bottle of the Bintang beer. By doing so, the people will know and become more familiar with the

product. Moreover, people can easily recognize the product at the market. The more the product appear on the advertisement, the more the people aware of its existence and at the end want to try the beer personally.

Data 2:

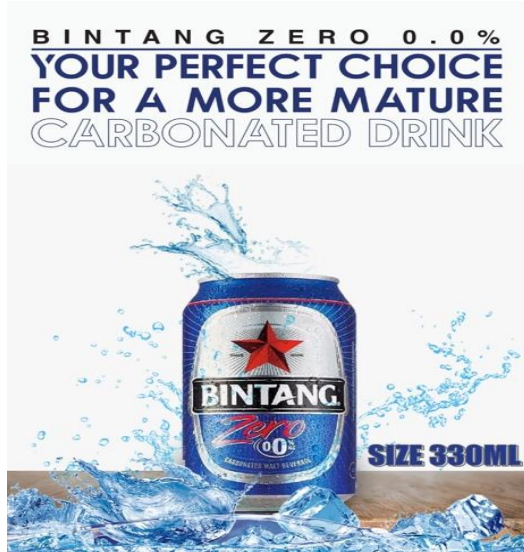


Figure 2. Bintang Zero 0.0%

The first verbal sign is the sentence “Bintang Zero 0.0%”. This sentence shows that this product contains no alcohol at all, although it is a beer product. At the beginning it could be confusing for the readers that it is a beer product with zero alcohol since beer is very identical with alcohol. For the information, in 2005 PT Multi Bintang Indonesia launched the first innovation in a new drink category. Bintang Zero 0.0% is the first carbonated malt drink with no alcohol in Indonesia. Bintang zero 0.0% comes with apple flavor as a choice. One of the reasons why non-alcoholic beer is an effective replacement for alcoholic drinks is because the body associates the flavor and smell with full-strength beer. This leads it to produce dopamine, the same chemical that makes people feel good when drinking alcohol. Research has also found that drinking non-alcoholic beer gives the same

feelings of reward as full-strength beer. This means that people get some of the positive effects of alcohol with alcohol-free beer, without the negative consequences. In this case, this product gives an alternative for people who love beer but do not want to take risks of having health problems.

The second verbal sign is “Your perfect choice for a more mature carbonated drink.” This sentence tries to convince the people that this product is a perfect choice since people still can enjoy the taste of the beer and cut the bad effect of drinking alcoholic beer as well. Non-alcoholic beer has several health benefits making it one of the healthiest drinks available behind the bar. For instance, drinking non-alcoholic beer can reduce the risk of heart disease, help people to sleep, aid bone growth and reduce the risk of getting illnesses like the common cold. Drinking non-alcoholic beer means no more of the negative effects of being drunk, like hangovers, poor productivity, tiredness and making a fool of yourself. That is why it is said as “a more mature carbonated drink”. It implicitly means that people who choose this product are more mature and wise than others who choose alcoholic drink which is dangerous for their health. In addition, non-alcoholic beers are often cheaper to buy than a similar full-strength beer. So, buy this beer can save both your money and health.

Visually the advertisement is dominated by white and blue colors. According to the theory of color term by Cerrato (2012), blue color represents calm, intellectual, paradise, and trust. While white color represents goodness, hygiene, justice, perfection, and purity. In business, the color white is use to communicate cleanliness and safety. Blue and white color are used as the dominating colors in this advertisement to transmit the idea that this product is trusted and

safe for health. Another visual sign in the advertisement shows water splash and ice cubes. It represents freshness. It implicitly delivers the message to the readers that drinking this beer while it is cold will give you fresh sensation, moreover if the weather was hot. The advertisement also shows the product itself, the can of the beer, which is very common in advertising. Showing the product aims to introduce the product to public. By showing the product, people will be familiar with the product and easily find it at stores.

Data 3:



Figure 3. Bintang Radler

There is only one sentence representing the verbal sign in this advertisement, “Fresh your day with Radler”. It implicitly encourages the people to drink Bintang Radler beer to freshen their day. People drink beer for different reasons and the advertiser takes advantage of the people’s need of drinking beer. Abbey (2015) explained a number of different motives for drinking alcohol have been examined, including drinking to enhance sociability, to increase power, to escape problems, to get drunk, for enjoyment, or for ritualistic reasons. Despite this diversity, most research has focused on two broad categories of motivation. The first category revolves around drinking for negative reinforcement, or

what Mulford and Miller (1960) called “personal-effect motives.” This motive has been labeled drinking to cope, and is usually defined as the tendency to use alcohol to escape, avoid, or regulate unpleasant emotions. The second category revolves around drinking for positive reinforcement, or what Mulford and Miller (1960) called “social-effect motives.” This drinking motive has been labeled “drinking to be sociable” and encompasses drinking to be convivial, to celebrate social occasions, and to have a good time with others.

In this case, the advertiser wants to emphasize that whatever the reasons or motives, whatever your life issues, drinking Bintang Radler beer will refresh your day. In addition, the advertiser implicitly convinces the people that beer is not always associated with bad things. It does not make you drunk as long as you know the limit. It gives you relaxation instead, of course if you knew when to stop. So it depends on the users or the consumers. Drinking beer is not always done by people who have problems in their life, drinking is also done to celebrate something special and to socialize with others both in daily life and professional life. So that, it is encouraged to drink beer not only to escape from bad mood, but most importantly to socialize and refresh your mind to start a better day.

Visually, all we can see is freshness. Generally, the dominating colors on the advertisement are blue and yellow. Blue represents the sky and the water while yellow represents the sun and the lemon. Those combinations relate one another. Blue is associated with the color of trust and loyalty. Blue has a calming and relaxing effect that gives people peace and make people feel confident and secure. In terms of the psyche, the color blue is known to impact the mind

positively. When overwhelming emotions consume us, we're encouraged to decompress with the color blue. It's also commonly associated with the ocean. That is why people often go to the beach or looking at blue sky to find peace and refresh their mind. Meanwhile yellow is the color of the sun, smiley faces and sunflowers. It's a happy, youthful color, full of hope and positivity. In addition, yellow is an attention-grabber. So that, the combination of blue and yellow colors are aimed to attract attention and give calming and relaxing sensation for the readers.

The idea of freshness and relaxation is also supported by the picture of water splash and lemons. Lemons represent the flavor of the beer. It is a unique taste of beer with the freshness of lemon. Due to its bright yellow color, lemons are also associated with hope, happiness, abundance, and vitality. There is also the picture of the sun which represents the weather of the day which is sunny and hot. It gives more information about the intention of the advertiser, which is to drag the people attention and convince the people that it is a perfect time to drink a can of fresh cool Bintang Radler beer, especially on sunny day. In addition, there is the picture of the product, the can of Bintang Radler beer, which is floating on the surface of water and also some ice tubes are seen around. It adds the freshness sensation visually. When people saw the picture, it unconsciously will stimulate their brain to feel thirsty and want to drink the cool fresh drink as shown on the advertisement. Finally, it successfully made people taking quick action to buy the product.

D. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the advertisements above, it can be concluded that both verbal and visual signs have significant

role in advertisements. The finding shows that verbal and visual signs in Bintang beer advertisements carried subliminal messages. There are numbers of subliminal messages found in this research. First, the advertiser implicitly stated that Bintang beer is the best quality beer for high quality time with friends and family. In other words, beer can make you get closer to your beloved ones and make your day more special and full of fun. Second, Bintang beer is safe for your health since this product gives an alternative for people who love beer but do not want to take risks of having health problems by launching a product with 0.0% alcohol. Non-alcoholic beers are often cheaper to buy than a similar full-strength beer. So, buy this beer can save both your money and health. Third, the advertiser wants to emphasize that whatever your life issues, drinking Bintang beer will refresh your day. In addition, the advertiser implicitly convinces the people that beer is not always associated with bad things. Drinking is also for positive reinforcement, not only to escape from bad mood, but most importantly to socialize and refresh your mind to start a better day. Meanwhile, visual signs in this advertisements generally represent the idea of freshness and relaxation. All of the advertisements show the product which presented in a very alluring way so that the target consumers are interested to try and taste the freshness of the product and finally take quick action to buy the product at stores.

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