

The Portrayal of Women in Persuasive Advertisement: Semiotic Analysis of Deeja Cosmetic TV Commercial

NOOR HANAN MOHD JAFAR
HAMEDI MOHD ADNAN
University Malaya

ROSLIZA AHMAD
Universiti Selangor

ABSTRACT

The purpose of advertising is to effectively promote items or services so that people will buy them. Repetition of viewing to the advertisement for the desired product strengthens purchasing habits. However, advertisements frequently contain sexual and objectification of women. This study aims to analyse the ethical decision-making that occurs due to the information presented using the micro and macro text of beauty product commercials. Thus, this study employs a social semiotics model to comprehend emotional strategies and contentious images by examining the process, effects, and consequence of ethical judgment; they function as mechanisms for propagating specific social culture and ethical values. Despite several past research studies attempting to discover beauty products' ideology using social semiotic analysis, no significant progress has been made to explore the studies on local beauty products. Therefore, a semiotic analysis will be used to obtain the data, as it is the most effective way of comprehending how meaning is produced in text. This research exclusively focuses on how Deeja Cosmetic advertisements employ female portrayal and the specific creative strategies the advertisers utilise to persuade and control their customers. From the analysis, women were presented inferiorly relative to their personalities and roles. At the same time, the findings indicate advertisers portray women as an object of desire to persuade the audience for the brand recall.

Keywords: *Advertisement, ethics, women objectification, sex appeal, female figure.*

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is an effective and efficient communication medium in disseminating information to consumers about the products or services through various media. Advertising is a marketing and commercial strategy used by businesses, manufacturers, and other institutions by stimulating purchasing behavior of their target audience (Anurekha, 2015). The power of advertising lies in creative strategy, the competence in developing or creating ideas, which attracts attention and allows the marketers and the public to share their meaning. Therefore, it indicates that each person's interpretation of the advertisement is personal, and the information is never totally objective. Broadcast and digital advertising exhibiting a variety of poses, body language, or clothing trends might be interpreted differently by different individuals and subsequently convey the advertisement's message.

Similarly, advertising composed of various complex texts is susceptible to micro-interpretation. However, occasionally, viewers are unconsciously influenced by various macro texts in the advertisement. Therefore, this research aims to study the emotional strategy and controversial visuals in a television commercial by discussing ethical judgment's process, influences, and consequences; they function as mechanisms for specific social culture and

ethical values. With the exception of largely theoretical concerns about sexual appeals or stereotyping, discussions on advertising ethics rarely include visual issues (Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver, 2006); instead, they usually focus on deception (Ullah & Hussain, 2015) exaggerated claims (Lestari, 2020), and targeting of vulnerable consumers, such as children (Nelson, 2018).

Moreover, this study investigates the ethical decision-making that emerges from the micro and macro text of beauty product advertisements. The Deeja Cosmetic television commercial has been chosen to be analysed by using visual semiotic analysis by Gillian Rose (Rose, 2018). To analyse the ethical consideration of visual strategies in Deeja Cosmetic television commercial, which refers to how do the micro and macro text was employed to evoke the emotional impacts and consequently affect the brand image, two research questions are proposed as; 1) What are the micro and macro text used in the television commercial to manipulate consumers who are women? and 2) How do advertising practitioners manipulate images of women as a visual strategy in television commercial?. Based on issue formulation, this research intends to identify visual advertisement, advertising strategies used to deceive female customers, and societal wrongs depicted in the Deeja Cosmetic television commercial.

Deeja Cosmetic is a Limajari Marketing skincare product created by Sherry Ibrahim, a Malaysian actress, in 2018. Based on the Deeja Cosmetics packaging, the product is suitable for men and women. It can be used to treat various skin problems, including pore reduction, uneven skin tone correction, facial skin moisturisation, skin smoothing, and acne and acne scar removal. The product has gained sufficient popularity among Malay viewers through their marketing strategy of sponsoring the television drama series *Nur*, which has 11 million viewers. The writer chooses the Deeja Cosmetic television commercial, which focuses on the beauty product, to discover the trend of beauty advertisement products in developing the concept of women's attractiveness through the implicit and explicit message of the visuals. It is also vital to extensively study the intention and techniques of the marketers used to persuade the consumers through the visual language used. Additionally, the writer intentionally chooses Deeja Cosmetic commercial (DCC) as this product has been issued contain undeclared potent ingredients which may cause serious health risks, including damage to the kidneys, digestive and nervous system by the Ministry of Health Malaysia.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

To grab attention, advertisements frequently cross the line into the unlawful (Shafiq, Haque, Abdullah, & Jan, 2017). Malaysia's government has changed the rigorous Malaysian Advertising Code of Ethics for Television and Radio to control the content of commercials and advertisements by prohibiting the use of sex to promote items and services (Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia, 2021). Scenes of models undressing are not permitted, and female models must be covered from the neckline to the legs. These requirements, however, fall far short of ethical and other standards of conduct, such as honesty (Ikonen, Luoma-aho, & Bowen, 2017), deceptive and unfair practices (Passarini, Cavicchi, Santini, & Mazzantini, 2017), sexual violence (Huhmann & Limbu, 2016) and exaggerated information (Huat, 2017; Lestari, 2020). Because of misleading and deceptive information in diverse advertising copy, customers' perception is adverse toward the organisation (Majedul Huq, 2016). As a result, conventional and branded businesses are unable to achieve consumer satisfaction and their ultimate goal.

Another way used by many marketers to target older adolescents is the use of celebrities. However, celebrities are misused in campaigns (Zaman, Phil, Mahmood, & Arslan, 2015), such as the cosmetic product campaign; Manja Kasih. This television commercial has been criticised in social media when most people feel uncomfortable when stars use sexual elements in advertisements and emotional appeal in promoting the product. Ilham Hassan Fathelrahman Mansour Dalia A. E. Diab (2016) examines celebrity influence on the religiosity of Sudan where Muslims represent the majority of its population. Similar to Malaysia, Islam has an important role in shaping people's beliefs and values, as well as regulating their behaviour. Ilham Hassan Fathelrahman Mansour Dalia A. E. Diab (2016) study demonstrates that religiosity negatively correlates with celebrities' credibility and attitude toward advertisement, implying that the more religious the respondent, the more unfavorable the respondent develops toward celebrities and the less trustworthy he/she sees them.

Figure 1 is another television commercial from AS Legacy that promotes Pucuk Harumnita juice. In this television commercial, advertisers showed a scene of a husband reading a newspaper while his wife was gardening. The image of the husband in this scene can be associated with the authority and the role of executor, which defines that the husband is superior to his wife. When a woman performed a traditionally 'feminine' task such as cleaning and cooking in visual rhetoric, the man who accompanied her usually played no role at all (Goffman, 1976, as cited in Bell & Milic, 2002). One may claim that the male models represented in this scene had a higher status than the female models, which relates to the concept of traditional gender roles, in which males are superior to women.



Figure 1: A scene in Pucuk Harumnita Juice TVC

Figure 2 depicts worsened issues regarding women's degradation in one of the Shopee television commercials that aired on most Malaysian television stations. The Shopee commercial portrayed female models as suggestively dressed and half-naked, which does not comply with Malaysian multiracial culture given that the majority of the population is Muslim.



Figure 2: Scenes in 12.12 Birthday Sale Shopee TVC

Furthermore, some advertisements use outrageous claims that contain the sexual element, for example, *Gel gegetah cinta mengetat dan merapatkan. Vagina kembali dara* (Sticky love gel that tightens the vagina. Become a virgin again). Ethical problem with stereotyping in advertising arises either because stereotyping is a misrepresentation of reality; or a form of morally wrong deception. The use of stereotypes in advertising also harms the people who are being stereotyped, and that act is also morally wrong (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Panarina, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Portrayal of Women in Advertising

Currently, numerous television advertising and women's magazines promote body care products to women, who are encouraged to maintain their appearance at all costs by utilising various cosmetic products (Najihah, 2020). Similarly, Singh & Banerjee (2018) mentioned that women are frequently accompanied by brand ambassadors and endorsements in advertising that products, with the model typically being a well-known individual or celebrity. Thus, people will view commercials not just for good things but also for the image and person portrayed in the product. Recent evidence revealed that visuals in a television commercial, social media promotion, magazine advertisement, or any form of advertising excites consumers' attitudes and inspires customers to change their behaviour (Jain, 2018). The usage of fit, attractive women dressed in tiny suits in cosmetics advertising has drawn criticism from feminist and human rights organisations. On the other hand, advertisers continue to rely on the technique to promote their brands.

Scholars have long debated the impact when advertisers apply specific visual text on advertising campaigns. Some audiences, particularly female audiences, who have poor self-esteem and constantly look down on themselves, are readily influenced by the indications displayed on television commercials, such as the perfect body figure and outstanding skin condition, leading to a materialistic problem (Fung & Ho, 2020). Fung and Ho (2020) further argued that women were portrayed in an inferior manner compared to their capabilities and potential, while men were shown in more egalitarian roles. Grau and Zotos (2016) claimed that some marketers are simply using bandwagon advertising by portraying women, directly impacting girls' self-esteem and breaking down gender equality. The existing body of research on body dissatisfaction among women suggests that increasing the portrayal of healthy weight and overweight women in media ads could assist in balancing, or at the very least mitigate, the harmful impact of the media's habit of idealising slim and too thin women as representations of female beauty (Moreno-Domínguez, Servián-Franco, Reyes del Paso, & Cepeda-Benito, 2019).

Businesses that take a stakeholder-oriented approach to business ethics must understand how each action affects different groups inside and outside the corporation. Moreover, because of the company's ethical business practices, the impact of ethical decision-making based on stakeholder considerations might impact its credibility. As a result, incorporating ethical concepts into business operations is expected to raise awareness among business practitioners of the critical roles of ethics and stakeholder responsibility as determinants of corporate performance.

b. Ethical Consideration In Visual Strategies

Visual communication exists around us, from our toothpaste packaging, social feeds, emojis, and the billboard that passed on the highway. Communication is becoming more visually

oriented than it has ever been. In today's digital era, visual communication has become a powerful tool in leveraging the marketing pitch and demonstrating the benefit of the product and service (Fung & Ho, 2020). Effective visual strategies may draw consumers attention, make a company look attractive, and boost the brand's visibility on social media platforms, respectively. If the marketing plan is balanced with visually appealing images, the likelihood that people would stop and look at the advertisement is very high.

Even if visual communication appears to be an excellent tool, advertisers must tread cautiously while creating their marketing plans. In this regard, visual communication is more like a double-edged sword. Poor quality graphics, whether looking for aesthetic or ethical perspectives, may be unable to transmit the message, may cause communication to be damaged, and may even mislead the audience if they are not appropriately executed (García-Nieto, González-Vallés, & Viñarás-Abad, 2021). Global advertisers were confronted with a difficult situation in which advertisements were created to satisfy the typical standards of being memorable and eye-catching. At the same time, visual strategies relied on ethical values that were appropriate for audiences in a cross-cultural setting (Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver, 2006). The complexity and richness of visual strategies in advertising arises from body movement, facial expression, sounds, voice, text, and music. A single image may contain numerous interrelated signs, multi-levels of meaning, and in turn form a cultural myth for many viewers.

In today's culture, the ethical components of advertising are commonly believed to be necessary. The advertisement itself is criticised by Pirsch, Grau, and Polonsky (2013) as ethically incorrect and deceptive because it forces people to consume products or services and encourages people to behave in ways that are inconsistent with social norms and ethics. Images of women who should look beautiful and stylish and associated with household chores are mainly focused on advertising (Anindya & Defhany, 2019; Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). The importance of ethics in visual strategy cannot be overstated because acting ethically obligates a business to be accountable to the demands of its customers. Companies need to show morality while promoting to consumers because this helps consumers feel as though the business cares about what they require.

In a strategy focusing on what products have to offer, positioning might be based on concrete or intangible benefits (Arens & Weigold, 2021; Belch & Belch, 2021). However, several studies have documented that much of advertising is considered exploitative, vulgar, debasing and stereotypical (Chaouachi & Rached, 2012; Devi Krisnan & Cyril de Run, 2016). Similarly, Passarini et al., (2017) mentioned that companies might employ deceptive visual advertising to increase customer attractiveness or to generate confusion, hence increasing consumption; in certain circumstances, businesses may omit or misrepresent facts. They further argued that unfair commercial techniques and visual strategies might temporarily increase sales. The desire to increase sales may be particularly strong during tough times, when customers are usually spending less, or following a market trend (Passarini et al., 2017). This research corroborates the ideas of Hackley, (1999), who mentioned that advertising poses a unique set of ethical challenges for business ethicists. While advertisements are insignificant forms of entertainment, advertising culture has been used as a metaphor for a widespread moral decline in the post-modern period. Advertisements confuse us because they are a novel and unfamiliar mode of expressive discourse that we struggle to categorise ethically.

Given that advertising's effect is frequently implicit and nuanced, the question is raised as to how advertising practitioners may strike a balance between the value of creativity and a sense of social responsibility. Is it feasible for an advertisement to be considered artistic while being unethical? Is it feasible to transmit a message successfully and ethically through extremely imaginative commercial visuals? Is ethics a constraint on creativity? In response to the questions, Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher of the 18th century, believes that aesthetic judgment is significantly related to conventional theoretical perceptions of nature and that aesthetic judgment bears a strong resemblance to moral judgment (Wahed, Yusoff, & Saad, 2019). When Kant looks at the difference between determinate and reflective judgments, he finds aesthetic judgments to be one of the most interesting types of judgments (Spence & Van Heekeren, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Visual semiotics focuses on the manner in which images communicate as well as the systems that control their use. Semiotics, as an instrument that is intimately related to culture, significantly differs from conventional criticism. Obviously, conventional criticism is concerned primarily with the aesthetic qualities of images rather than with their deeper meanings. In spite of this, rather than merely exploring what something is, semiotics is more concerned with the processes by which meaning is formed (Moriarty, 2002). Fahmy, Bock, & Wanta (2014) examines the emergence of new technology that has formed the agenda-setting for visual information, enticing readers to accompanying narrative and raising the salience of issues inside stories.

Visual semiotic analysis of television commercials would give a more comprehensive meaning predominantly enquires into the ways through which the meaning is created rather than simply investigating what it is (Parsa, 2004). Numerous influential research on marketing and advertising ethics place a premium on advertisements or planning papers, while a substantial number of studies examine the content in greater detail. To fully grasp the message that advertisers wish to express, a careful examination of the text in television commercials should be conducted. One method to comprehend the inferred meaning included in television commercials is to familiarise oneself with semiotic theories investigating the structure of meaning.

In advertising, the image is a perfect 'representation' of life and able to sell everything. Images can sell milk, cars, services, a star, a politician, or a political party. Over the past fifty years, the images have been simplistic and generally less important than the words. Today this situation is reversed. According to Fahmy et al. (2014), advertisements empower unrestrained desires since they are more sensational and clear than the truth. A semiotic analysis method will be employed since it is the most effective means of understanding how meaning is formed in text (Rose, 2018). Semiotics as a method recognises that the meaning of texts, such as television ads, or any other text, is not self-evident. Meaning in semiotics is a result of the relationship between the signifier (picture, colour, sound, word, etc.) and the signified (Hisham, Md Dawam, & Achin, 2019; Jha, Raj, & Gangwar, 2017; Ownby, 2021). Because this relationship is arbitrary, meaning must be constructed socially and historically in the interaction between text and audience. This study used a semiotic method because semiotic models, such as those proposed by Rose (2018), are an advance on structuralist semiotic models. Rose's semiological principles are helpful in understanding how signs in a text function to create meanings that can be explicit or implicit, scientific or common sense, truth or fantasy.

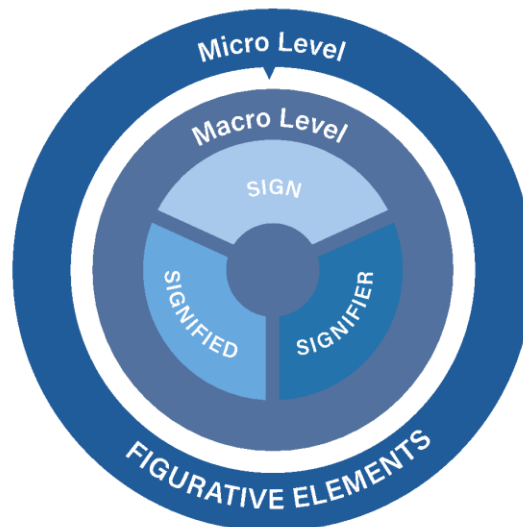


Figure 3: Initial television advertisement analysis framework adopted from Rose (2018)

Furthermore, this research is exploratory in nature. It employs qualitative research processes to determine the presence of the universal ethical principles in Deeja Cosmetic television commercials and the extent to which practitioners are aware of and comply with the code of ethics. In order to describe these texts, explain how the researcher gathered them, and provide contextual details in a manageable and coherent way, the researcher considers them under two broad categories; the micro and macro level, as illustrated in Figure 3. At the micro-level, figurative elements such as plot, theme, expression, appearance, dress, make-up, gesture, sound, etc., have been described in narrative technique to get more extensive evidence of ethical representation in selected scenes. At the macro level, the ideological and mythological view is elucidated through micro textual analysis and vice versa.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 4 is the Deeja Cosmetics' Commercial (DCC) that portrays a man driving a car while admiring gorgeous ladies. There follow a few close-ups of women depicted energetic Malay Muslim women in baju kurung that is traditional Malay costume, jeans, T-shirts, and stylish casual attire, but dressed modestly. Additionally, the women in this advertisement represent their employment as Nasi Lemak sellers, cleaning staff, taxi drivers, and office workers. The scene ends when a man stops the automobile and is approached by a lady who inquires him looking trembling and shocked. He then further answered that he saw all the ladies are attractive and then reflected with a sexually perverted look in his facial expressions and body language. The television commercial's tagline is straightforward: "*Semua pakai Deeja*" (means Everyone uses Deeja). Unfortunately, DCC does not provide factual proof to support the product's efficacy; instead, it provides a subjective judgment of the product's quality or effectiveness.

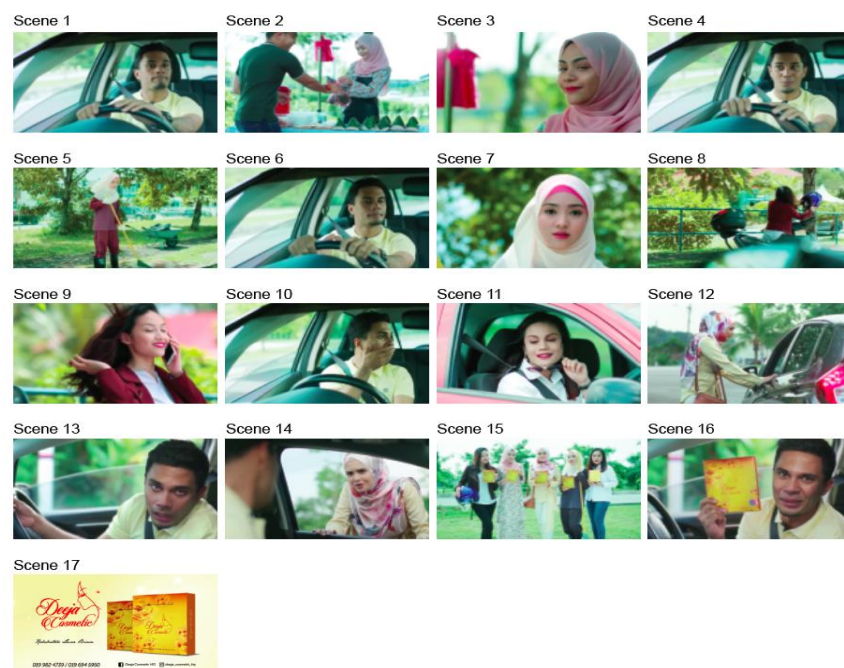


Figure 4: Storyboard of Deeja Cosmetic TVC

While the product gained popularity as a result of its sponsorship of the Nur drama series, the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA) of the Ministry of Health Malaysia has reported that Deeja Cosmetics products, specifically the star cream and vogue cream, contain harmful chemicals such as hydroquinone, tretinoin, and mercury (National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency, 2018). Hydroquinone, tretinoin, and mercury-containing products are considered pharmaceuticals and must be registered with the Food and Drug Administration. Additionally, they may be utilised only under the supervision of a health expert. In this study, four particular themes were linked to determine the existence of micro and macro text and to objectively evaluate its presence. The themes are:

- a. misleading information
- b. woman as a decorative object
- c. gender stereotypes
- d. portrayal of impolite scenes.

According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code (CMCF, 2004), advertising is considered misleading if it contains false, or deceptive material that is likely to influence the consumer to act in a way that they would not otherwise. Women as decorative objects in advertising are a near-classic, dating all the way back to advertising's inception. A woman as a sex symbol of visual attraction for a guy is an endless subject that continues to increase in popularity and has already become ingrained in popular culture. Woman objectification, by definition means the action of degrading women personality and dignity by turning them into objects (Vargas-Bianchi & Mensa, 2020). Furthermore, according to United Nations Human Rights, (n.d.), gender stereotype is a stereotyped opinion or preconception about features or characteristics, or the roles that women and men hold or should possess or perform. A gender stereotype is damaging when it restricts women's and men's ability to develop personal skills, pursue professional professions, and/or make life decisions. Finally, the portrayal of impolite scenes is a theme that represents the value of

respect in the visual advertisement, which investigates the advertiser's displays of respect for the audience (Förster & Brantner, 2016).

a. *Misleading Information*

In scene 15 of this commercial, all women are presented in full view alongside the sentence "*Semua pakai Deeja*" (means everyone uses Deeja). The director uses a simple long shot of a woman to shift the audience's attention away from the discussion and toward the various qualities of the models.



Figure 5: Scene 15 from Deeja Cosmetic TVC

	Signifier	Signified
Site of image itself	Dialogue " <i>Semua pakai Deeja</i> "	Deeja Cosmetic is suitable for all groups of people
	A group of women	Different character/ occupation/ demographic characteristic

Table 1: Site of image - Scene 15 from Deeja Cosmetic TVC

Typically, this commercial used pretty young women's faces to sell the goods (refer to Figure 5). The tagline "*Semua pakai Deeja*" implies that everyone, regardless of age, education, or social class, can own and use Deeja Cosmetic. At the signified level, Deeja Cosmetics seeks to communicate its message through advertising portraying a nasi lemak hawker, a cleaning worker, a taxi driver, a motorcycle rider, and a woman dressed in smart casual wear. Rather than simply providing facts about the product, the marketer attempts to develop a more personal relationship with the target audience. It's worth noting that there is no accurate information about the product, such as the recommended skin type, the ingredients, or how the product works. The advertising implies that any woman who wishes to be beautiful must possess fair skin, smooth skin, a thin figure, and a pleasant-looking appearance. By presenting these idealised images, the DCC creates an illusion that viewers' bodies are deficient in some way. Apart from the flawless skin, this commercial depicts pictures of self-esteem and popularity, implying that using the Deeja Cosmetics product will result in a good conclusion. Women's dissatisfaction with their bodies and skin will benefit marketers and businesses who sell beauty goods aimed to make consumers feel beautiful with claimed to be flawless bodies and skin.

Advertisers use the phrase "*Semua Pakai Deeja*" to instill confidence in consumers. However, DCC does not communicate clearly about the product's facts and efficacy. Rather than that, advertisements conveyed an intangible characteristic of the product, but not the

thing itself. In the absence of proof to the contrary, lifestyle claims associate the product with a target market that the advertiser feels is likely to purchase the product. This type of advertising technique has misled the consumer and may result in material injury to the consumer. The evidence reviewed here indicates that marketers make statements about products that include no facts but may imply false benefits. The National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (2018) confirmed these findings, stating that Deeja Cosmetic products include dangerous substances such as hydroquinone, tretinoin, and mercury.

b. Woman as a Decorative Object

In reference to DCC, several scenes provide ironic visual text on how women have been depicted as erotic and provocative stimuli. Physical contact was depicted in scenes 2 and 3 (refer to Figure 6), in which a *nasi lemak* seller displayed a flirting face to her male customer and a male driver.



Figure 6: Scene 2 and 3 from Deeja Cosmetic TVC

	Signifier	Signified
Site of image itself	1. Female model in <i>baju kurung</i> and headscarve	Politeness/ racial background
	2. Female model in seductive smiling	Woman as a decorative object

Table 2: Site of image - Scene 2 and 3 from Deeja Cosmetic TVC

The appearance of the nasi lemak seller was attractive and decorative, and she was dressed in Malay Muslim garb, including baju kurung and headscarves. In Malaysia, *baju kurung* and headscarves might be seen as symbols of civility (Ismail et al., 2019). The baju kurung is referred to as regional clothing for Malay ladies and satisfies the requirement of Islamic thought that a woman's entire body be covered, loose enough, and not revealing the figure. The nasi lemak seller personality in this television commercial contradicts her postures and facial expression that can be implicitly interpreted as stereotypical gender roles in the advertisement. A faint smile accompanied subservient behavior; by gradually glancing away, a nasi lemak seller conveyed a provocative and flirting message, indicating interest in the man. This mentality is opposed to Islamic teachings, which emphasise decency in all parts of life, most notably between men and women. It has been conclusively shown that Muslim female subject is not solely defined by the veil but by other considerations such as modesty in conduct and the preservation of virginity.

c. *Gender Stereotypes*

Gender stereotypes are exploited constantly in numerous scenarios of the Deeja Cosmetic television commercial. Close-up shots of the female models are featured in scenes 9 and 11 to capture the subject's minute features. The close-up shot alerts the audience to the importance of the lovely and fair-skinned female models. In scene 9, a female model wearing red lipstick is shown tossing her hair and smiling, as advertisers feel this gesture will attract men. Smiling and flipping hair are related to trust and rapport in terms of body language. Scene 9 connotes enticing beauty as a promotional strategy to sell the product at the indicated level. Advertisers take advantage of a cosmetic staple by depicting female models in scenes 9 and 11 wearing vivid red lipstick. Women's associations with bright red lipstick can be interpreted as a beauty symbol, glamour, and personal confidence. This disruptive behavior would have elicited condemnation from some women who saw these ladies as morally deficient.

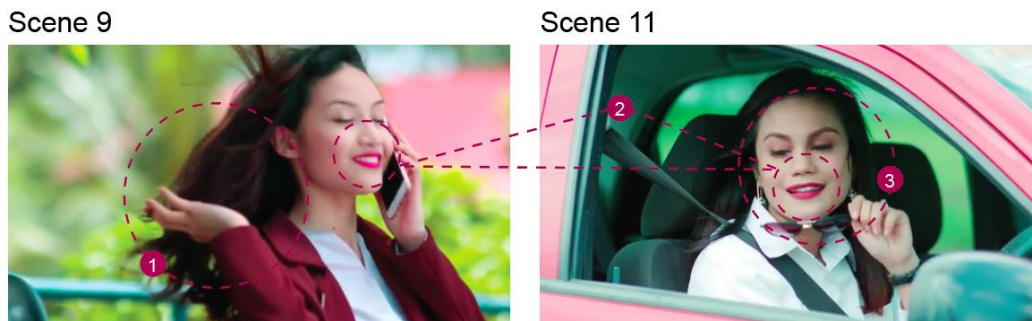


Figure 7: Scene 9 and 11 from Deeja Cosmetic TVC

	Signifier	Signified
Site of image itself	1. Female model shows flipping hair	Seductive beauty
	2. Red lipstick	Beauty icon/ glamour/ personal confidence/ sexually amoral
	3. Female model in flirting eye contact	Harmful women stereotype/ immoral
Site of production	Tight frames of the actors face	To establish a strong reaction to the audience, and to make the audience see the flawless skin of the model

Table 3: Site of image and production - Scene 9 and 11 from Deeja Cosmetic TVC

Elliot and Niesta (2008) argued that colours could also have distinct meanings that have important ramifications for psychological functioning. In their empirical work, Elliot and Niesta (2008) point out that red leads men to perceive women as more attractive and sexually appealing. Red is thought to be an aphrodisiac for males since it connotes sex and romanticism in heterosexual contact. Empirical evidence supports the notion that red has an amorous connotation since colour-associated studies have revealed that people tend to associate red with carnal passion, lust, and romantic love.

At the signifier level, scene 11 is a visual of a female taxi driver showing flirting eye contact with the male driver. The tight frame of the female face in the television commercial is used to elicit a strong reaction from the viewers and to highlight the model's exquisite skin. This strategic approach plays an integral role in the persuasive appeal of Deeja Cosmetic television commercials. The advertisement makes extensive use of body language. It employs a multitude of connotations to broadcast both the brand's identity and image. The television commercial is captured to highlight their stunning skin in the majority of instances. However, the television commercial's most intriguing semiotic components are contained inside its concept of lovely skins, which serves as the advertisement's central signified concept. The image of these attractive ladies, whose skins appear to be lovely, eliciting an image of damaging women stereotype and immoral, which is supported by her flirty eye contact, principally conveys the concept of flawless skins. Given all of this information, it appears that gender stereotyping in advertising persists and is a major component of the overall purpose of brand marketing.

d. Portrayal of Impolite Scenes

Another notable concern from DCC is the visual manifested by impolite postures and facial expressions from the male driver. In scenes 4, 6, 10, and 13 (refer to Figure 8), the male driver is shown in close-up with flirtatious facial expressions and glancing at female models, indicating interest in them. His gestures, such as upward rolling of the eyes, eye movement to the left and right, and head and eyes positioned to look at female models, given the flirtatious signal in facial expression. These facial expressions show the indicated degree, where they are indicative of unpleasant behavior in a man. Furthermore, inappropriate behavior has resulted in the objectification of women, with television advertisements focusing on women as sexual objects rather than conveying the product's message. These findings emphasise the importance of advertisers' and marketers' moral responsibility to avoid depicting illegal activities and behaviour. The finding clearly demonstrates that DCC did not comply with the advertising self-regulation; especially, the ad should not represent any sexual content or materials in order to make their products more desirable to consumers.

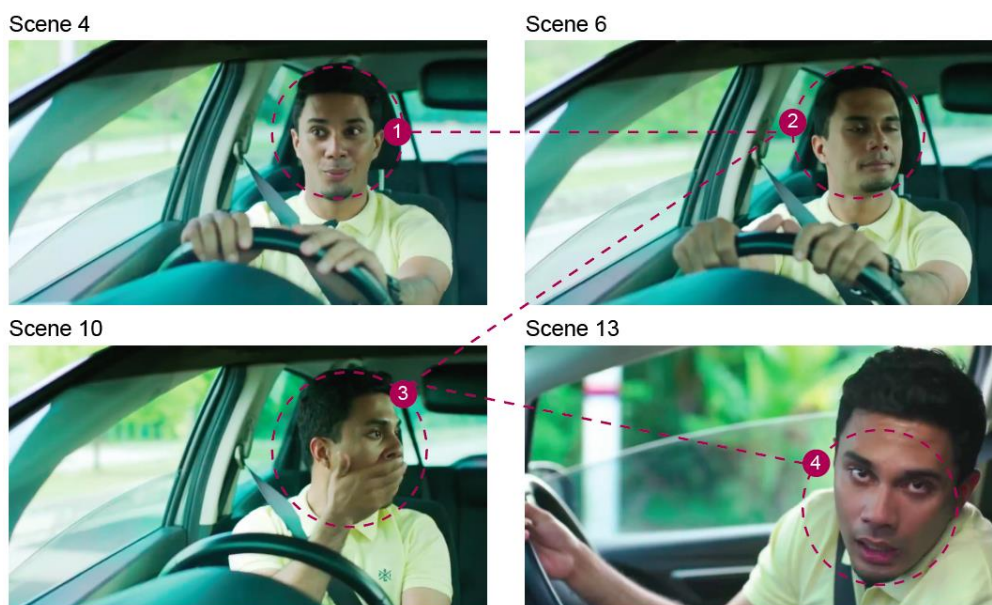


Figure 8: Scene 4, 6, 10, and 13 from Deeja Cosmetic TVC

	Signifier	Signified
Site of image itself	1,2,3 & 4. Facial expressions showed by the man's driver	Flirting/ Objectification of women/ Unpleasant behaviour
Site of production	Tight frames of man's actors	To ascertain the product's efficacy/ Subtle message of sexual harassment

Table 4: Site of image and production - Scene 4, 6, 10, and 13 from Deeja Cosmetic TVC

Other than that, the tight frames of the man actor looking at the attractive ladies connotes the usefulness of the product and as a method to attract attention. On the other perspective, the tight frames of the flirtatious male may be related to subtle indicators of sexual harassment, which are often difficult to evaluate; depending on the consumer group, it may be viewed skeptically. Despite the obvious prohibition on presenting immoral scenes, advertisers continue to use sexualisation to seduce viewers. According to the findings, advertisers failed to make the DCC convey the benefits of the product creatively and ethically. Advertisers should use extra prudence while developing creative advertising content. As a result, creativity must be employed in a way that does not mislead the consumers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This advertisement clearly depicts the stereotype of a lecherous male. Perhaps the intention of the advertisers is to conjure humorous acts through exaggeration of facial expression on the male actor. The gesture, on the other hand, is interpreted as an explicit endeavour (Bell & Milic, 2002). Recent studies have found that gender inequality is still an ideological force in advertising strategy because of the paradoxical adherence of visual rhetoric to it (McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, & Fabri, 2017). This representation is unsuitable for a brand to establish a long-term term success in businesses. In the context of brand image, it will give the brand a negative echo on their reputation.

DCC is an advertisers' visual manifestation that should be more deliberate on delicate issues connoting signifiers and graphic visuals objectifying women as sexual entities. Advertisers portray women as an object of desire to persuade the audience for brand recognition. It has been conclusively shown that advertisements with sexual appeals are more memorable but do not lead to increased sales for the company or product (Wirtz, Sparks, & Zimbres, 2018). In the meta-analysis of 78 studies, the authors found that sexual appeals in the advertisement were more likely to have a negative attitude towards the brand (Wirtz et al., 2018). From the perspective of aesthetics, this form of advertisement reflects lower creative content value as it appeals to ladies who have poor self-esteem but are willing to spend. The association between exposure to an ideal portrayal of women figures and negative self-directed effects were mediated by social comparison processes in this type of advertisement. Advertisements should convey the actual benefit of the product based on scientific evidence rather than exploiting an audience who lacks experience and knowledge. Furthermore, advertising as the medium through which the message is delivered, should play an important role in projecting the correct interpretation of the message to the audience. As a result, advertisers should play an important role in supporting self-regulation guidelines.

It is stated in the Malaysian advertising self-regulation that advertisers must not abuse the trust of consumers with an erroneous message of the product (Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia, 2021). Independent advertising practitioners should be more aware of the advertising self-regulatory guidelines to develop higher-quality and creative visual execution while still adhering to ethical standards. Blaming the media is insufficient because there are non-specific rules gaps in the guidelines such as using the representation of explicit body gestures, impolite facial expression, alluring eye contact, and inappropriate visual framing on body parts. The grey gap in the guidelines caused confusion to advertisers and marketers on adhering to the regulation. Reviewing the regulation requires more specific measurements among policy makers and government bodies involved; aiming at the standardisation of the local culture and sensitivity. The government bodies should strengthen the enforcement of the new guidelines to ensure that visual production adheres to advertising ethical standards.

BIODATA

Noor Hanan Mohd Jafar is a PhD student at the Department of Media and Communication Studies, University Malaya. Her research interests are visual rhetoric and advertising ethics. Email: hananjafar0707@gmail.com

Hamed Mohd Adnan (PhD) is a Professor at the Department of Media and Communication Studies, Universiti Malaya. Areas of expertise include publishing, culture studies, and new media. Email: hamed@um.edu.my

Rosliza Ahmad is a lecturer at the Faculty of Communication, Visual Art, and Computing Universiti Selangor (UNISEL). Her research interests include experimental animations, visual communication, corporate branding, and data information visualisation. Email: liezahmed@unisel.edu.my

REFERENCES

- Advertising Standards Malaysia*. (2021). Malaysian code of advertising practise (6th edition). Author. https://asa.org.my/ManualBookR14_single.pdf
- Anindya, A., & Defhany, D. (2019). Feminisme dan stereotip gender dalam iklan produk kecantikan. *JESS: Journal of Education on Social Science*, 3(2), 113-123. <https://doi.org/10.24036/jess/vol3-iss2/159>
- Anurekha, S. (2015). Analysis of television commercials directed to young adults- ELM and social identification perspective. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1168047
- Arens, W. F., & Weigold, M. F. (2021). *Contemporary advertising and integrated marketing communications* (16th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Belch, G. E., & Belch, M. A. (2021). *Advertising and promotion an integrated marketing communications perspective* (12th ed.). McGraw Hill.
- Bell, P., & Milic, M. (2002). Goffman's gender advertisements revisited: Combining content analysis with semiotic analysis. *Visual Communication*, 1(2), 203–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147035720200100205>
- Bulmer, S., & Buchanan-Oliver, M. (2006). Visual rhetoric and global advertising imagery. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 12(1), 49–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527260500289142>
- Cerrato, J., & Cifre, E. (2018). Gender inequality in household chores and work-family conflict. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1330. <https://doi.org/gd3ng6>
- Chaouachi, S., & Rached, K. (2012). Perceived deception in advertising: Proposition of a measurement scale. *Journal of Marketing Research and Case Studies*, 2012, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.5171/2012.712622>
- CMCF: *Communications & Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia*. (2004). The Malaysian communications and multimedia content code, CMCF §.
- Devi Krisnan, U., & Cyril de Run, E. (2016). Malaysian Malay's Perspective on Printed Sexy Advertisement. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 11(8), 145. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v11n8p145>
- Elliot, A. J., & Niesta, D. (2008). Romantic red: Red enhances men's attraction to women. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(5), 1150–1164. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.95.5.1150>
- Fahmy, S., Bock, M. A., & Wanta, W. (2014). *Visual communication theory and research: A mass communication perspective*. Springer. <https://doi.org/hkdt>
- Förster, K., & Brantner, C. (2016). Masking the offense? An ethical view on humor in advertising. *Journal of Media Ethics*, 31(3), 146–161. <https://doi.org/hwmg>
- Fung, P., & Ho, A. G. (2020). Study on how television commercials affect consumer reactions with visual strategies. In Ho A. (Ed.), *Advances in human factors in communication of design* (AHFE 2019: Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing, Vol. 974, pp. 162-173). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20500-3_17
- García-Nieto, M. T., González-Vallés, J. E., & Viñarás-Abad, M. (2021). Social responsibility and misleading advertising of health products on the radio. The opinion of the professionals. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(13). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18136912>
- Grau, S. L., & Zotos, Y. C. (2016). Gender stereotypes in advertising: A review of current research. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(5), 761–770. <https://doi.org/ggimhh>

- Hackley, C. (1999). The meanings of ethics in and of advertising. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 8(1), 37–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8608.00123>
- Hisham, M. F., Md Dawam, Z. A., & Achin, I. A. (2019). Semiotic analysis on characters 'terbaik dari langit'. *International Journal of Heritage, Art and Multimedia*, 2(5), 124–144. <https://doi.org/10.35631/ijham.250010>
- Huat, A. S. (2017). *The study of visual exaggeration in fast food print advertisements: An insight into Mcdonald's Current practices in Malaysia* [Master dissertation, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman].
- Huhmann, B. A., & Limbu, Y. B. (2016). Influence of gender stereotypes on advertising offensiveness and attitude toward advertising in general. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(5), 846–863. <https://doi.org/hwmd>
- Ikonen, P., Luoma-aho, V., & Bowen, S. A. (2017). Transparency for sponsored content: Analysing codes of ethics in public relations, marketing, advertising and journalism. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 11(2), 165–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1252917>
- Ilham Hassan Fathelrahman Mansour Dalia A. E. Diab. (2016). The relationship between celebrities' credibility & advertising effectiveness: The mediation role of religiosity. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 7(2), 148–166.
- Ismail, N., Malaysia, U., Nur, K., Yusuff, A., Burhan, K., Daud, C., & Kelantan, U. M. (2019). Melestarikan elemen Melayu Islam dalam fesyen pakaian masyarakat Melayu. *INSANIAH: Online Journal of Language, Communication, and Humanities*, 2(1).
- Jain, P. (2018). Visual persuasion - A creative aspect in communication. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IJHSS)*, 7(3), 5–12.
- Jha, A. K., Raj, A., & Gangwar, R. (2017). A semiotic analysis of portraying gender in magazine advertisements. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 22(5), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2205110108>
- Lestari, E. M. I. (2020). A critical discourse analysis of the advertisement of Japanese beauty products. *Izumi*, 9(1), 58–74. <https://doi.org/10.14710/izumi.9.1.58-74>
- Majedul Huq, S. (2016). Unethical practices of advertising in Bangladesh: A case study on some selective products. *International Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Sciences*, 4(1), 10-19. <https://doi.org/hwmc>
- McCabe, M., de Waal Malefyt, T., & Fabri, A. (2020). Women, makeup, and authenticity: Negotiating embodiment and discourses of beauty. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 20(4), 656–677. <https://doi.org/gmgxh2>
- Moreno-Domínguez, S., Servián-Franco, F., Reyes del Paso, G. A., & Cepeda-Benito, A. (2019). Images of thin and plus-size models produce opposite effects on women's body image, body dissatisfaction, and anxiety. *Sex Roles*, 80(9–10), 607–616. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0951-3>
- Moriarty, S. E. (2002). The symbiotics of semiotics and visual communication. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 22(1), 19-28. <https://doi.org/hwmb>
- Najihah, F. M. (2020). The beauty propaganda in body care advertisements. *PARADIGM: Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 3(1), 53–60.
- National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency (NPRA). (2018). Kenyataan akhbar ketua pengarah kesihatan malaysia produk-produk kosmetik yang dikesan mengandungi racun berjadual. <https://www.npra.gov.my/index.php/en/component/content/article/39-press-release-2016/1656-press-release-jun-2018?Itemid=437>

- Nelson, M. R. (2018). Research on children and advertising then and now: Challenges and opportunities for future research. *Journal of Advertising*, 47(4), 301-308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2018.1552218>
- Ownby, T. (2021). Critical visual methodology: Photographs and narrative text as a visual autoethnography. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 3, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.30935/ojcm/5707>
- Panarina, E. (2021). Advertising gender performance: How femvertising represents women. *INTER*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.19181/inter.2021.13.1.3>
- Parsa, A. F. (2004). *Visual semiotics: How still images mean? Interpreting still images by using semiotic approaches*. https://www.academia.edu/5370975/Visual_Semiotics_How_Still_Images_Mean_Interpreting_Still_Images_by_Using_Semiotic_Approaches
- Passarini, P., Cavicchi, A., Santini, C., & Mazzantini, G. (2017). Deceptive advertising and unfair commercial practices in the agrifood sector: The role of the Italian competition authority. *British Food Journal*, 119(8), 1781–1800. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-12-2016-0600>
- Pirsch, J. A., Grau, S. L., & Polonsky, M. J. (2013). “Lose 30 lbs in 30 days”: Assigning responsibility for deceptive advertising of weight-loss products. *Journal of Social Marketing*, 3(1), 56–77. <https://doi.org/10.1108/20426761311297234>
- Rose, G. (2018). Visual methodologies. In E. Mitleton-Kelly, A. Paraskevas & C. Day (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods in complexity science: Theory and applications*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Singh, R. P., & Banerjee, N. (2018). Exploring the influence of celebrity credibility on brand attitude, advertisement attitude and purchase intention. *Global Business Review*, 19(6), 1622–1639. <https://doi.org/gk5fgc>
- Spence, E., & Van Heekeren, B. (2005). *Advertising ethics*. Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- Ullah, N., & Hussain, M. (2015). Impact of unethical advertising, misleading information or deceptive advertising on customer purchasing intention with mediating effect of word of mouth: Case of Pakistan. *International Journal of Innovation and Economic Development*, 1(4), 49–69. <https://doi.org/hwk9>
- United Nations Human Rights. (n.d.). Gender stereotyping. Retrieved on 4 Feb 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/wrgs/pages/genderstereotypes.aspx>
- Vargas-Bianchi, L., & Mensa, M. (2020). Do you remember me? Women sexual objectification in advertising among young consumers. *Young Consumers*, 21(1), 77–90. <https://doi.org/10.1108/YC-04-2019-0994>
- Wahed, W. J. E., Yusoff, S. B. H. M., & Saad, N. (2019). Reliability and validity of questionnaire on assessing the aesthetic perception of design motif applied on Sarawak Pua Kumbu cloth using the art reception survey (ARS). *Journal of Visual Art and Design*, 11(2), 135–145. <https://doi.org/hwk8>
- Wirtz, J. G., Sparks, J. V., & Zimbres, T. M. (2018). The effect of exposure to sexual appeals in advertisements on memory, attitude, and purchase intention: A meta-analytic review. *International Journal of Advertising*, 37(2), 168–198. <https://doi.org/gctkbs>
- Zaman, R., Phil, M., Mahmood, Z., & Arslan, M. (2015). *Effect of ethical issues on advertising effectiveness: A study of Pakistan*. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 7(10).