

# **USE OF INDEXICAL, ICONIC AND SYMBOLIC SIGNS IN COSMETIC ADVERTISEMENTS: A CHARLES SENDER PEIRCE SEMIOTICS**

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## **Abstract:**

*This article examines the value of three visual sign types to attract the attention of the intended target audience. The value of this investigation lies in its consideration of the value of the unstable connotative meanings of the visual signs of cosmetic advertising. Semiotics is touched upon as the broad theoretical background to the study. Thereafter, the discussion moves to the use of indexical signs, symbols and icons in cosmetic advertising in India to ensure audience involvement in the construction of a plausible and implied message. The data illustrates that the meaning of these signs in cosmetic advertising may be vague even though a specific marketing message was intended. Indexical signs are more common in cosmetic advertisements because advertisers hope to create a relationship between the product and another concept by means of indexical signs, which usually have a positive connotation.*

**Keywords:** *visual communication; creativity in advertising; index; icon; symbol; unstable meaning and target audience attention; implied marketing message*

## **1. Introduction**

There is lots of improvement comes in technology, education which gives the better and standard living style. Today people are more concern about hygiene and beauty so before purchasing any product, they keep in mind that whether money is high but quality should be good. The way in which new things are being incorporated in development and technology, the new things in their advertising include the right way. The Verbal advertising tradition is very old, it was advertised for the first time, since the arrival of Word of mouth through hawkers but Now when Visual Advertising comes into existence, there was a lot of changes and successes in advertisements and the perceiving way turns into new insightful approaches. In today's studies, a great emphasis is laid upon signs and symbolic patterns as crucial elements of visual ads. . Since the characteristic of the market is quite high by value,

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thus it attracts many companies to enter to this market continually. Even there is intensive competition in beauty care market; many companies still pay attention to invest in this market to respond for the high demand available in market.

## 2. Advertising:

The main aim of advertising is to sell their product and fulfill the need of buyers. Advertisements is a text which is the combination of all the signs and the combination with signs develops a meaning in coherent and cohesive manner. There are three main of the advertising, in which

- **Identification of the product:** first of all before advertise the product we need to identify the product, which is the best place for launching the product, when, how and why. These all things are important.
- **Information of the product:** the next step is to introduce the product among buyers or viewers. We need to give full information about product.
- **Persuasion:** At last we need to persuade the buyers to buy the product. This is not the easy task because the advertising world is full of competition, and its not easy to convince customer about why to buy this product. This would be difficult, so advertisers use the different strategy for persuading the people.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) once defined advertising as the process of introducing to the public an idea, product or service through a paid announcement from a non-individual and identifiable source to encourage the public to make use of what is introduced.

## 3. Language of Advertising:

The language of the advertisements has to be logical and attractive which give a good impact on the reader or viewer. It is expected to be easy, successful and efficient. As we know the world is full of competitions and competitors and every advertiser give their best for making their advertisements successful but sometimes one advertisement gets more and more success and others cannot. So at that time there is a language only that makes the advertisements unique. How creatively present the language like code mixing, use of hinglish etc. The sale is enhanced and it automatically it improves the profit. English is one of the widely used languages in the world. It is a necessary part to study, and analyze the language features of English advertising. The hinglish advertisements gets more attractive like "Yeh Dil Maange More" (the heart wants more) a slogan of coca cola pick always the hinglish strategy.

## 4. Cosmetic Advertising:

This study focused on women's cosmetic advertising. Although more and more cosmetic products became available for men as well as kids nowadays, the majority of cosmetic products are still directed at women at various ages. Whenever we hear about cosmetic, then in our mind comes an image that is something which makes our face perfect. This happens because cosmetic has created an illusion among people that cosmetic is real beauty, without cosmetic your beauty has no value. This thing is sitting in the mind of the girls, the more cosmetic they apply, and

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the more beautiful they will be. The advantage of this myth is that whenever girls get a new mascara or lipstick, a different joy and excitement appears in them. Today, advertisements are taking advantage of this thing and are expensive to costly cosmetic advertising and people are also liking it and buying. Cosmetic advertising has changed the thinking of people if you use this product, then you look younger and if you use the product again, then the complexion will become white. By having a clearer understanding of the rituals, myths and emotions generated from wearing face make-up, marketers will be better placed to communicate more successfully with the consumer.

## 4.1. Images in cosmetic advertisements:

Images of cosmetic advertising are advertised to meet the needs of cosmetic brands and products and people who use models or celebrities who look absolutely fresh and young will see people start beating their role models. And their mind comes in their minds that if we also use this product, we will also look like this. In cosmetic advertisements, the age of female model are from 18 to 25 years. If we do not read the text and see only the image, then we can understand its message very well because the excitement and happiness can be seen easily on model face., hence the images are very much kept in mind by purchasing any product.. Cosmetics advertisements posters are used to reach out to the masses and make them aware about the existing product or a new product or any interesting offer that the brand plans to present to its customers. The majority of cosmetics are marketed using the message that the female appearances can be improved with the aid of products: one has the opportunity to look younger, slimmer, prettier, and so on.

## 4.2. Brand

The Brand is considered as a name and symbol of a company. Brand plays an important role in creating a positive image among customers. Brand name has the ability to create loyal customers as well as to retain market share of the company. Loyal customers always remain faithful or loyal to a brand, they repurchase it and through word of mouth they recommend it to others.

## 5. THE SEMIOTIC APPROACH

The term semiotics derives from the Greek word semeion meaning 'sign'. The birth of the science of semiotics can be attributed mainly to the work of two men, the American philosopher Charles Peirce, and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.

Ferdinand de Saussure, the other founder of semiotics saw signs as the basic unit of meaning and he defined two parts of signs.

1. **Signifier** — The form of a sign. The form might be a sound, a word, a photograph, a facial expression, a painting of a pipe, etc.
2. **Signified** — The concept or object that's represented. The concept or object might be an actual pipe, the command to stop, a warning of radioactivity.

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. How these signs and symbols are interpreted is studied under semiotics. Advertisements have many hidden signs and meanings in it for example brand name, logo, package design, colour, punch line and trade mark etc. The objective of semiotics is to learn and interpret the message which is conveyed in advertisements. The different elements of advertisements can be interpreted at two levels. First, the outside level and second is original level. The outside level uses signs creatively to create an image or character for the product. These signs can be images, words, fonts, colours and slogan. The original level is made up of different unseen meanings. The arrangement of images, words, colours, and slogan must be interpreted by the audience or consumer.

Signs are major part of the language, a language carries different kinds of signs in it for example, images, sounds and words, all come under the umbrella of sign.

Semiotics includes three schools of thought.

- First conforms to the Russian formalists,
- Second deals with the de Saussure, Barthes and Peirce's perception of system of signs.
- Third, which is inspired by the ideas of Michael Halliday, is related to social semiotic approach that influenced various linguists to extend the idea into studies of literature.

## 5.1. PEIRCE NOTION OF SEMIOTICS: THE PROCESS OF SEMIOSIS: TRIADIC AND UNLIMITED

According to Peirce, a **sign** may be simple or complex. Unlike Saussure, Peirce does not define the sign as the smallest unit of signification. Anything or phenomenon, no matter how complex, may be considered as a sign from the moment it enters into a process of semiosis. The process of semiosis involves a triadic relationship between

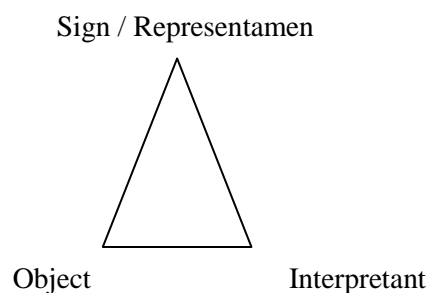


Fig.

- a sign or representamen (a first):- The **representamen** is a thing that represents another thing: its object.
- an object (a second) : The **object** is what the sign represents.
- an interpretant (a third): an interpretant, the sense made of the sign in the mind of the observer (this can be another sign)

## 5.2. TYPES OF SIGNS:

There are 3 kinds of **signs**: the **ICON**, the **INDEX** and the **SYMBOL**.

### ICON

The **icon** is the simplest since it is a pattern that **physically resembles what it 'stands for'**.

- A *picture* of your face is an icon of *you*.
- The picture of a *smoking cigarette with a diagonal bar* across the picture is an icon that directly represents '*Smoking? Don't do it*' (at least it does with appropriate cultural experience).

### INDEX

An **Index** shows evidence of what's being represented. A good example is using an image of smoke to indicate fire.

- dark *clouds* in the west are an index of impending *rain*,
- a *scowling facial expression* is an index of *displeasure* or concern (to a human),

### SYMBOL

A **Symbol** has no resemblance between the signifier and the signified. The connection between them must be culturally learned. Numbers and alphabets are good examples. There's nothing inherent in the number 9 to indicate what it represents. It must be culturally learned.

## 6. Objectives of the Study

- To examine how indexical, iconic and symbolic signs are decoding different messages on consumers in cosmetic advertisements?
- Which sign are mostly used in cosmetic advertisements and which of them are really effective?
- How these signs helpful for make cosmetic advertisements successful to promote the product or by showing a celebrity, which is one of the stereotypes imaginary to show the quality of the product?



## 7. DATA ANALYSIS

Here, the selected two beauty adverts have been analyzed using the above mentioned concepts of semiotics, visual signs i.e. iconic, indexical and symbolic.

### 7.1. ADVERTISEMENTS:

**7.1.1 Paris:** there's a bit of Satan in....Satin finnish paris evening lipstick.



Fig. 1:

#### 7.1.1.1 Semiosis process of the Icon from the first datum

- **Gestures and picture meaning**

In this first datum, exist a picture of model which is seems to have a confident and happy face and at the back of girl there is a picture of satan who have horrible red body with two horns and trying to attack on her(the girl) and also girl are showing here in a very confident eye movement which signifies she has no fear of satan.

- **Colour iconic meaning:**

This picture also seems hot and brave, because contrast color of the background is dull yellow which represents caution and red is the color of fire and blood, so it is associated danger here. And the lipstick colour is also dark red is associated with willpower.

### 7.1.1.2 Semiosis process of the index from the first datum

And then, indexical analysis of this datum is the reason and cause behind using satan image with girl who applying lipstick. The image of **Satan**, is the prince of evil spirits and adversary of God. Satan is traditionally understood as an angel (or sometimes a *jinnī* in Islam) who rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven with other “fallen” angels before the creation of humankind. The slogan the bit of satan is in lipstick means there is some features of satan in the lipstick.

For eg the greatest trick the devil could ever pull is convincing the world he didn't exist likewise the paris lipstick also can distract the mind of men , it gives the angelic look.

And, the women's winning smile is the reason of winning hearts of men through the lipstick.

### 7.1.1.3 Semiosis process of the Symbol from the first datum

After that, symbol analysis of this datum is the word or sentence that written on the advertisement, like as “there's a bit of satan in.. satin finish.” And the symbol of satan culturally treated as pure devil. Then, the process of semiosis is the advertisement tagline “there is a bit of satan.” which is have a role as [R] and show that the lipstick is not has a big size, but it is compared with satan which is attractive and unique [O]. Next, the relationship between the representamen with the object shows that the interpretant [I]

### 7.1.1.4 Interpretation:

1. There is a clear meaning of this advertisements that there is bit of satan in lipstick that's why the colour of lipstick is red as satan is also red colour. But in other hand there is a image of girl who have confident face with fearlessly eyes, which shows that she have no fear of satan. This shows the confident and fearless nature of girl
2. Another interpretation is possible that as we know red colour is so attractive and sexy and when the girl is applying red lipstick, she looks so hot and all men gets attracted and infatuate towards her look that's why the term “bit of satan in satin finish lipstick” used here because red colour attracts men so here satan is metaphorically used.

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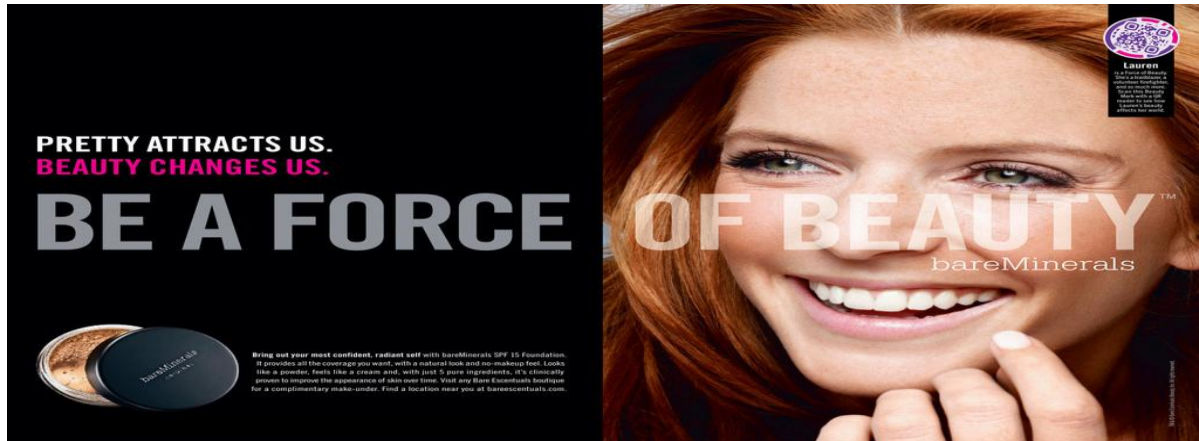
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## 7.1.2: Bare Minerals: Be a Force of Beauty



### 7.1.2.1 Semiosis process of the Icon from the first datum

In this first datum, exist a picture of model which is seems to have a confident and very happy face and colour of model is beige colour a compact is also have black box with beige powder and the background black colour. This is the comparative analysis between background colour and compact. This description becomes as representamen [R], also impressed hot and spicy as object [O]. After found the representamen and the object, the next step is find the interpretant which is here seen as a girl is happy because after applying compact she looks attractive and fair complexion, which is a symbol of being pretty.

- **Colour iconic meaning:**

This picture also seems hot and brave, because contrast color of the background is dull yellow which represents caution and red is the color of fire and blood, so it is associated danger here. And the lipstick colour is also dark red is associated with willpower.

### 7.1.2.2 Semiosis process of the index from the first datum

And then, indexical analysis of this datum is the reason and cause behind using happy and fair complexion girl image. The reason behind the smile and her happy face is nothing only a fair complexion which she gets possible only by this face powder. The background colour and compact box colour is black because Black is associated with power so here behind using black colour there is a strategy for showing the power of fair colour. And, the women's smile is the reason of her happiness.

### 7.1.2.3 Semiosis process of the Symbol from the first datum

After that, symbol analysis of this datum is the word or sentence that written on the advertisement, like as **Pretty attracts you Beauty changes .....** “Be a force of beauty.” ,



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Fairness of skin objectively refers to a certain level of pigmentation of skin. But in the culturally constructed world it is embedded with socially defined meaning. The socio-cultural conditioning in India places skin fairness on a higher altar of desirability and even godliness. The desirability of fairness stems from the hidden meaning. The study reveals fairness is both an end state itself and also instrumental. It is a personally desirable state for being 'perfect', 'Godly' and 'treasure'. At the same time it is coveted for its instrumentality in achieving the desired end states of existence. The fairer people feel psychological 'high' by feeling 'confident', 'attractive', 'admired' and 'envied'. Then, the process of semiosis is the advertisement tagline **Pretty attracts you Beauty changes you.....** “**Be a force of beauty.**” which is have a role as [R] and show that the compact is not has a big size, but the girl fair and happy face easily defined the meaning and this is attractive and unique [O]. Next, the relationship between the representamen with the object shows that the interpretant [I]

## 7.1.2.4 Interpretation:

- Compact is shown in this entire picture, which is black from above and the color of its powder from the inside is beige as the black color has always been considered as a dependent and inferior color, in the same way in this picture it has been given a message that rid off the dark complexion and bring a white complexion because white is the demand only. So that there is one interpretation is possible that Concepts related to complexion particularly fairness often used interchangeably with pale skin, are associated with class-based hierarchies attributed to cultural co modification. The diversity of brown or black skins being visually dominant. Advertisements for fairness products promise whiteness to 'non-white' consumers, who use cosmetic products to become fair and fairer.
- Another interpretation is possible that it has always been seen that people want a woman to be perfect, she should be perfect in every way, whether it is height, color, and skin. Here the tagline which says “**Be a Force of Beauty**”. There should be power of beauty inside every woman, that is, those who are beautiful, they have power, they can suffer in this world, and those who are not beautiful, there is no value in this world, there is no power and if we analyze the subheadline which is “ **Pretty attracts you Beauty changes you**” If seen, inside this word, there are very deep meanings hidden such as the first line “pretty attracts you”, that is, only the beauty attracts the people and in the second line it is written “Beauty changes you”, If you are beautiful then people's thinking will change in every way for you. Your value will increase. On the fact that If a woman considers herself to be normal beauty, but the society realizes her every moment that she should be beautiful, perfect etc.

## 8. Conclusion:

In Cosmetic advertising Iconic, indexical and symbolic sign are equally valued. In every advertisement all the three signs are seen but the iconic and symbolic signs are mostly used. The advertisers have the means to promote ideal standards of beauty. Women, the main consumers of beauty products consciously or

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subconsciously are coaxed into buying the products advertised. Thus it seems it is not easy to ignore the persuasive nature of advertisements. They shape ideas of what it means to be a woman in our society. Language is a powerful tool which can shape people. The above analyzing advertisements are showing that women who wear makeup are the most beautiful and attractive women. Their happy and shining face easily tells the message about their happiness after using the product.

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