

DISCOVERING THE MEANING OF SIGNS IN PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISEMENTS

I Wayan Juniarta¹, I Komang Sulatra², Rhido Eka Zanuara³, AAA Dian Andriyani⁴

^{1,2,3,4} English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Foreign Language Mahasaraswati
Denpasar University, Bali, Indonesia

Email: jjuniarta@gmail.com¹

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Abstract: *This study concerns in analysing the meaning of verbal and visual signs in four Public Service advertisements. This study aims to find out the verbal and visual sign as tool in discovering the meaning related to important issues occurred in the society recently. The method used in analysing data is qualitative method in order to conduct a clear and well-organized description about the phenomena which is being identified. Furthermore, descriptive study in textual analysis is applied to analyse the signs used in the public service advertisement. This study applied the theory of sign element by Saussure (1983) and theory of meaning by Chandler (2007). The finding shown that there were purposes of warn, reminding people to do positive thing related to the topic of advertisement which is shown by the object, such as: human, buildings, cars, photos or images, colour, smartphones, as well as sentences and coloured word used in the advertisement. The discovered meaning in this study has successfully shown the issues that is occurred in the society which gives the impact for the audiences in emerging the sense of empathy of the issue itself.*

Keywords: *semiotic, public service advertisement, verbal sign, nonverbal sign*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis makna tanda verbal dan visual dalam empat iklan Layanan Masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tanda verbal dan visual sebagai alat dalam menemukan makna terkait isu-isu penting yang terjadi di masyarakat akhir-akhir ini. Metode yang digunakan dalam menganalisis data adalah metode kualitatif dengan tujuan untuk melakukan deskripsi yang jelas dan terorganisir tentang fenomena yang sedang diidentifikasi. Selanjutnya, studi deskriptif dalam analisis tekstual diterapkan untuk menganalisis tanda-tanda yang digunakan dalam iklan layanan masyarakat. Penelitian ini menerapkan teori elemen tanda oleh Saussure (1983) dan teori makna oleh Chandler (2007). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ada tujuan untuk memperingatkan, mengingatkan orang untuk melakukan hal-hal positif terkait dengan topik iklan yang ditampilkan oleh objek, seperti: manusia, bangunan, mobil, foto atau gambar, warna, smartphone, serta kalimat. dan kata berwarna yang digunakan dalam iklan. Makna yang ditemukan dalam penelitian ini telah berhasil menunjukkan isu-isu yang terjadi di masyarakat yang memberikan dampak bagi khalayak dalam memunculkan rasa empati terhadap isu itu sendiri.

Kata kunci: *semiotik, iklan layanan masyarakat, tanda verbal, tanda nonverbal*

Introduction

Communication is an activity which is done by two people with the aim of conveying idea, expressing the feeling and sharing information or news. It is a part of human life as a social being. Recently, the way how people communicate one to another is more vary. Unlike the people in the past who communicated directly, communication can be done indirectly. One of the ways to carry out the communication is through advertisements that massively occurred in newspapers, televisions, radios, and internet. The term of advertisement according to Merriam

Webster (2017) refers to an announcement about promoting a product, event or service which is presented or broadcasted for the public through a mass media. One of the purposes of advertisement is to draw sympathy about what is being shown in advertisement itself and this will lead onto public service advertisement. Sari et.al. (2022) mentions that advertisement aims to provide the idea about how to implement the healthy life that would be beneficial for the society. It means there is at least a message that is conveyed by an advertisement, particularly on its own context, for the goodness of society. Furthermore, Raza et.al (2020) stated that the individual's attention and information surveillance have considerable mediating effect on Precautionary Behaviour Toward Dengue Virus (PBDV) and Dengue-related Public Service Announcement. It means in any form; public service advertisement is able to awaken the society awareness further change their behaviour toward a social issue occurred in their community. It shows how strong is the impact of public service advertisement in changing the society habits toward a better one in order to elevating their quality of life. In this study, the discovering of the meaning in public service advertisement is chosen since there are many values, advices and information that are quite challenging to be interpreted through the signs occurred in the advertisement. It can be seen from the method that is used by the creators in making the advertisement in more creative way. As it been mention by Siscar. Et. Al (2022) that the audio-visual advertisement posted in YouTube has gained the affinity of the audience's attention toward the creativity instead of the using of celebrities, picturization and it is creating a new domain or area audiences' preference toward public service advertisement. Instead of using words or sentences, any kinds of sign such as gesture, colours, even sound are used in presenting the advertisement to convey the creator's idea or feeling. However, the signs which are showed in the advertisement may become difficult to be comprehended by the audience since each sign stand for something else and it may lead to different perspectives based on the context of situation in the advertisement. For example, in a public service advertisement about the danger of smoking, red colour is used in one of the sentences in the advertisement. Red colour, as the sign in the advertisement implies a meaning "dangerous" due to the topic of the advertisement is used to warn the audience. In the other side, the red colour conducts a meaning "death" since the effect of smoking is not good for human body and causes many serious health problems that lead to death. There are many contents of public service advertisement which are aimed to remind, warn, or inform the people about something that need to be considered. Thus, this study tries to discover the meaning of verbal and visual signs used in audio-visual public service advertisement.

Research Methods

The data source of this study was taken from four public service advertisement in YouTube. There were many public service advertisements that could be found. However, the data for this study was limited into two public service advertisements chosen with several different topics: global warming and safety riding. Public service advertisement was used as the data source since it became a media to persuade the people to do positive things in a unique and attractive way. The chosen advertisement would be downloaded and saved into a specific folder. Through the audio-visual data source, the data of verbal and nonverbal sign would be collected. Furthermore, this study was conducted through observation method which was done by collecting the scenes from each advertisement that contained any symbol and word or sentence. There were 3 techniques were conducted in collecting the data, they are: Downloading the advertisement, observing and taking note every sign that is occurred in the advertisements, and classifying the verbal and visual sign of the advertisements. Afterwards, the analysis was conducted through qualitative method which was based on the theory of signs elements by Saussure (1983), theory of meaning by Chandler (2007). The analysis was conducted through formal dan informal methods which is implemented with presenting the pictures of captured

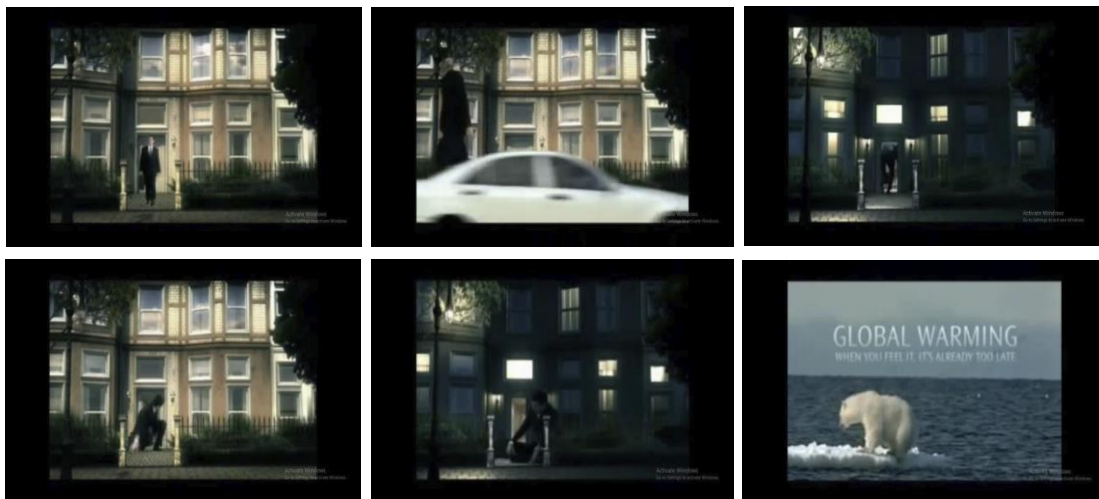
scenes in the advertisements and described the meaning of verbal and visual signs that presented in the captured scenes.

Findings and Discussions

There were four public service advertisements in which the images of several scenes on each public service advertisements were used as the object of this study. The verbal signs used in these public service advertisements have the meaning to warn and remind the readers about the cause that might happened to other living creature because of an action that is not appropriately done. Furthermore, the nonverbal signs presented in the advertisement shows building, car, human being, animals, water, mobile phone as the object that frequently used in public service advertisement and related one to another in some areas of life. Moreover, these objects are a representatives of instrument used in portraying the meaning of these advertisements. The further analysis of these advertisement can be seen in the next part

Data 1. Public Service Advertisement on Global Warming

The main topic presented in the advertisement was concerning about the global warming, the factors that could cause this phenomenon and the effect that affected the environment and living creatures. The analysis of the captured scenes could be seen as follows.



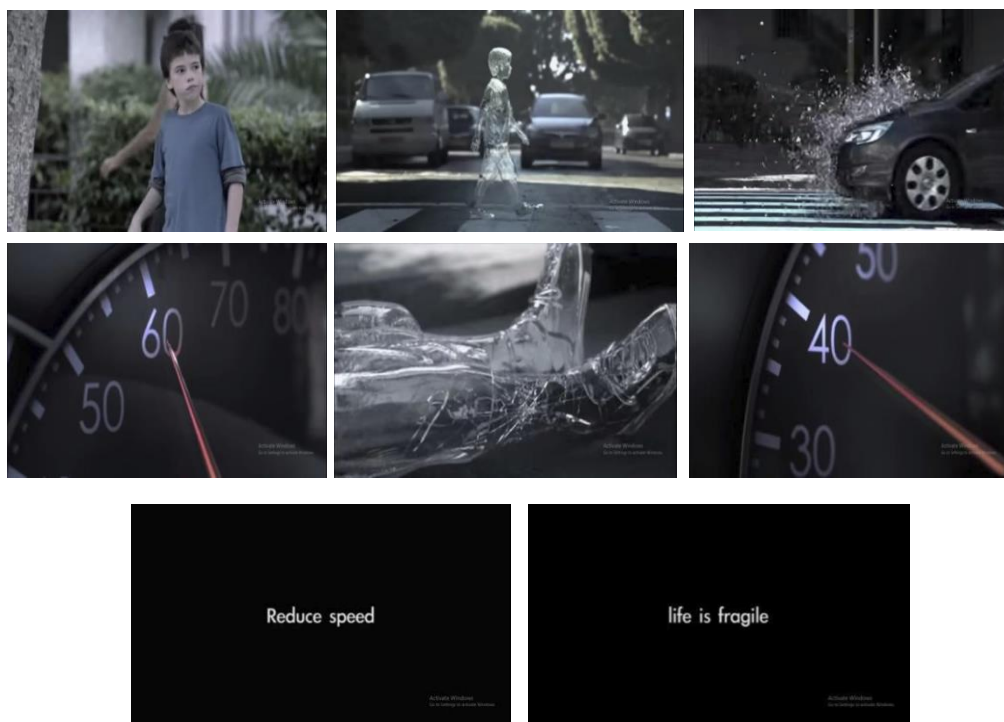
Picture 1. Set of captured scenes in Public Health advertisement on Global Warming

There were a noun phrase and a sentence in the end of the advertisement “GLOBAL WARMING” and “WHEN YOU FEEL IT, IT’S ALREADY TOO LATE” that could be classified into signifier in verbal form used in this advertisement in which each verbal sign could be described as follows. Those verbal sign denoted as well as signified a meaning in which had a purpose to warn and remind the people about the effect of global warming recently which started to change the climate, reduced the polar area which could raise the water’s surface and made the earth’s temperature increased. Meanwhile, the sentences conveyed a message if global warming affected human life as well as the other creatures such as animals and plants without anyone aware about it, until they finally realized when the nature started to degrade as the result of global warming. Based on visual signs in the advertisement, there were a man with black suit and trousers, a big house and a white car which could be classified as the nonverbal sign used in the advertisement. Those objects were used to describe an urban life as the signified where most of the people were working in

the office which was shown by the man's fashion style as he was going to work in the morning as his activity every day. Meanwhile, the big house that appeared in the scene above connoted a concept about the buildings in the city which were built with modern or stylish architecture and in a big shape. In this case, the house in the advertisement was used to show a kind of shelter which could be found in the city. Furthermore, the car conveyed an idea about the citizen who lives in the city and their habits in travelling from one place to another place by driving a car. The behaviour of using car as the main transportation in the city instead of the public transportation, could lead to the traffic jam which could be found in many big cities. Aside from the traffic jam, the usage of car could cause pollution that affected the ozone layer as one of the global warming's factors. The carbon dioxide produced by the transportation and the other gases were trapped in the atmosphere and each of these gases could remain in the atmosphere for a very long time. As the time passed, the man was not aware if his surrounding changed especially his house that became smaller and he could not enter his house because of that condition. Then, the scene moved into a polar bear which confused and could not move anywhere due to the ice plates around the polar bear as its house were melted. Thus, the scene where the man could not enter his house was similar with the situation faced by the polar bear. As the nonverbal sign, the polar bear was used to represent the living creatures especially the animals which lost their home or habitats due to the effect of global warming. In this case, the man was used as the representative of the polar bear that suffered from the effect of global warming that melted the ice which was the ecosystem for the inhabitants of the polar area.

Data 2. Public Service Advertisement on Safety Riding

The advertisement was created with the aim as a warning to any drivers to be more careful in driving as well. There were many signs used in the advertisement which is explained as follows. The advertisement presented a boy and a car as the sign in nonverbal form to deliver the idea from the creator. Those scenes could be seen below



Picture 2. Set of captured scenes in Public Health advertisement on Safety Riding

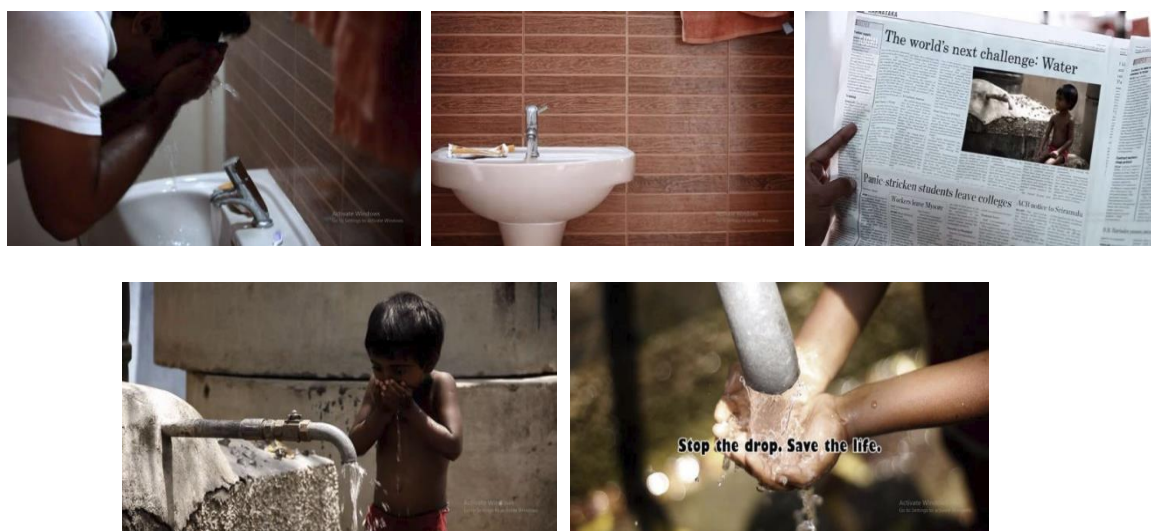
In the sets of capture scenes above, there were two sentences featured in white colour while the background was in black colour applied in the closing sequence of the advertisement served as verbal signs. The first one is “LIFE IS FRAGILE” was categorized as a sentence in statement form which was aimed to tell the audience about how worthy the life is. Instead of using that sentence as a statement, it purposed to remind the audience as well. The second one is “REDUCE SPEED” was an imperative sentence that was classified as the signifier which implied a meaning about advice to the audience to pay attention for the speed meter of their vehicle to avoid any unwanted incident. As a sign, the sentences with white colour in black background implied a meaning or signified which had a purpose to get attention from the audience as well as to persuade the audience to drive with more awareness, especially near the crossing sign. The sentence “LIFE IS FRAGILE” had a meaning that life is very precious and could not be taken back once it lost. Furthermore, the sentence “REDUCE SPEED” delivered a message to the audience to pay attention for the speed while they were riding car or motorcycle as well as a solution to avoid any accident that might kill someone. In connotative meaning analysis, the sentences above conveyed an idea from the creator about the cases of accident that involved speeding and lack of caution of riding that caused many.

Furthermore, some nonverbal signs were featured in the sets of pictures above and the analysis will be explained as follows. The first is, **nonverbal sign is the boy** as the signifier was used as the model of the advertisement and signified a meaning about a male child or a young male person. The boy also connoted an innocence, pure or fragile being in order to get sympathy from the audience. The next is **the body** that is made from transparent glass showed in one of the scenes implied a meaning about a hard and transparent material which was similar with mirror, plate, glasses and other things that was fragile. This sign was used to represent a life. Another nonverbal sign is a **car** in the advertisement was used to apply a signified about a vehicle that has four wheels. The car was a media to convey the creator’s idea about the accident that mostly involved the car. And then, **the speedometer** of the car which had a meaning about an instrument in a vehicle which showed how fast the vehicle was. It connoted the awareness of the drivers. Last nonverbal sign is **the black background** in the end of the advertisement was categorized as a signifier which signified about something negative, bad and unpleasant. The first signifier which was showed in the advertisement was a boy who would like to cross the road. The boy connoted an innocence, pure or fragile being in order to get sympathy from the audience. The reason of choosing a boy in this advertisement rather than a girl was to create an idea that a boy tended to be an independent individual. They liked to do everything alone to show their boldness. It was very different with the girl who needed to be accompanied by someone. At first scene, the boy and his whole body looked like as a human being how it supposed to be featured. However, when he stepped on the road, his leg turned into glass and it spread into the rest of the parts of his body. These signs as the signifier created a signified that explained if human body would be similar as glass when they were on the road since the glass signified a meaning about a hard, usually transparent and fragile object that was used to make windows or bottles. In connotative meaning, the body made of the glass in the advertisement also could be interpreted as soul or life of the boy. The use of car in the advertisement connoted the condition or any possibility that might happen on the road, such as the attitude of the drivers who were not aware with the pedestrian on the road. In this case, the car was interpreted as the threat to the boy. This idea was supported by the following scene that used a speed meter as the sign in nonverbal form. A speed meter of the car which reached 60 km/hour in one of the scenes showed if the speed of the car was quite fast while there was a boy who crossed the road. Here, the speed meter connoted an idea about people behaviour in driving the car and being ignorance to their surroundings especially when they were driving a car on the road.

Because of that velocity, the car hit the glass-made boy until it broke into pieces. This scene signified a meaning of an object which was destroyed hit by the fast speed car. This scene created a connotation about the worst thing that might be happened which was caused in a car accident that made someone lose his life. Many people died in car accidents that involved over speeding. When this happened, the loss would be suffered either by the driver and the victim. In this case, the broken glass body was a representative of someone who died.

Data 3. Public Service Advertisement on Saving Water

This advertisement was created to show as well as to remind the audience about the importance of water. There were verbal and nonverbal sign which used as the signifier while the signified of each signifier were purposed to convey the meaning and created connotation as well. The set of captured scenes is shown as follows



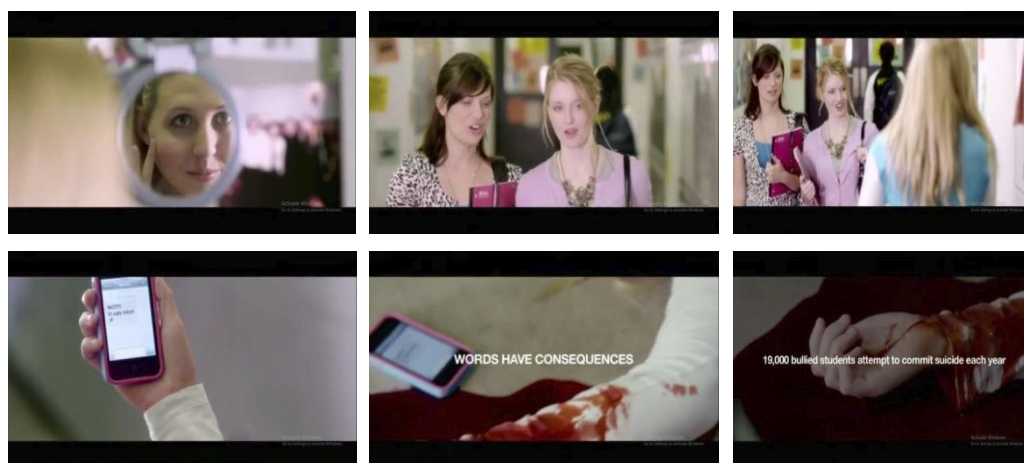
Picture 3. Set of captured scenes in Public Health advertisement on Saving Water

There were two verbal signs that is presented in this advertisement. The first is the sentence “Stop the drop” was classified as an imperative sentence which signified a meaning about warning for the audience to stop wasting the water. The other sentence is “Save the life” which implied a meaning about an invitation to the audience to save the poor people who struggled to get clean water by saving the water and use it necessarily as well. The sentences in the last scene of the advertisement created connotation about an idea related with the people bad habits toward the water; they used the water excessively without realizing that many people were suffering from drought. Therefore, the best solution to prevent this issue is to use the water necessarily. Furthermore, there were four nonverbal signs presented in this advertisement. The first is a **man** who appeared in the first scene of the advertisement was classified as the signifier which signified a meaning about a male adult. The first is a man connoted a meaning about a person who was not care with his surroundings. **The next is a washbasin** which appeared in the following scene implied a signified about a large bowl that had faucet and fixed to the wall in a bathroom. This sign was used to connote the behaviour of the irresponsible and ignorant people in using water. **A newspaper** is the third nonverbal sign presented in this advertisement. It signified a kind of printed media that contained news and any information. Moreover, it connoted a warning about the effect of water waste that became the world’s next challenge and serious issues to be considered as well since some water resources around the world started to decrease and it will lead onto global issue. And

the last nonverbal sign is a **poor child** who was showed in the advertisement signified a meaning about a child from drought area or region who suffered from the lack of water. The explanation above shows the messages conveyed to the audience that people should use maintain water they have properly since the use of excessive water will lead into lack of water issues in other regions.

Data 4. Public Service Advertisement on Words Have Consequence

This advertisement aimed to remind the audience to be careful in conveying their opinion or feeling. Word was defined as a single unit of language which means something and could be spoken or written. In relation with the definition of word, this advertisement was created as a media to describe the verbal bullying and the effect that would be inflicted. The set of captured scenes of the advertisement is presented as follows



Picture 4. Set of captured scenes of public service advertisement on words have consequences

The advertisement presented four verbal signs in order to convey the meaning. The first sign is an **utterance** “nice shirt” from one of the female students was categorized as a signifier which signified a praise or compliment to someone. This statement connoted a kind of mocking someone in another way. The next verbal sign was a **short message** “NOT!! U ugly bitch :P” in the student’s cell phone was categorized as a signifier that signified a meaning about a system for sending written message from one mobile phone to another. The main point of the short message was the intimidation content to the female student. As the signifier, the word “bitch” was described as a kind of an animal; it referred to a female dog. However, this term also categorized as a slang that defined as an offensive way or referring to a woman, especially an unpleasant one. In this case, the message received by her might be sent by one of the female students who disliked her appearance. Nonetheless, the word “bitch” connoted a discrimination and humiliation toward the women that happened in the society. The supported idea that approved these explanations could be seen from the gesture showed by those students as well as the facial expression and the tone of voice when one of them uttered “nice shirt” to her. Moreover, as soon as they walked away, she checked her cell phone and got a message from someone that stated “NOT!!! U ugly bitch :P”. Furthermore, the verbal sign was a **sentence** “WORDS HAVE CONSEQUENCES” which was displayed in the end of advertisement signified a warning to the audience to be careful in saying something. This sentence had a meaning that every word that were uttered might affect another people feeling, emotion, and personality, which led to unwanted action. In addition, it was aimed to remind the audience to be more careful in choosing words to other. Lastly, the last verbal sign is a **sentence** “19,000 bullied students attempt to commit suicide each year” was a signifier that

signified a data that showed the number of casualties which were resulted by the bullying action. This sentence was used as a warning and an invitation to stop bullying. Moreover, there were four nonverbal signs presented in this social advertisement which will be described as follows. **A girl** who was looking at a small mirror in her locker was the signifier that showed in the advertisement which signified a meaning about a student who studied in a college or university and prepared several things before the class began. This is the first nonverbal sign that is presented in this advertisement. The next nonverbal sign was **Two female students** in the advertisement was categorized as the signifier which signified the other students who studied in the same place as the girl. In addition, it connoted an idea about stereotypes and discrimination to another person. The third nonverbal sign was **a gaze** as a gesture of insulting which was classified as signifier that signified a meaning about an intimidating or mocking act that was done to threat someone. The last nonverbal sign is **Blood's stain** which occurred in the end of the advertisement was the signifier which signified a mark that was caused by an injury. As it convey the meaning, this advertisement tried to delivered the message that people sometimes were not aware with the use of words in the communication and thought that was only a simple matter. Moreover, several people used a kind of words which were rude, harsh or unpleasant as a joke to another people without respected their feeling. Bullying was a serious problem that should be considered since the result could lead to an unwanted accident

Conclusion

Based on the analysis in the previous chapter, the conclusion that can be taken out of two public service advertisements is that the verbal signs were used as a media to deliver a warning and advice to the audience about the recent issues that occurred in the environment and society which was caused by their behaviour in their life. Furthermore, nonverbal sign found in the public service advertisement were displayed in the form of human, car, and polar bear to show the relation of human behaviour in urban areas which frequently use car to travel which apparently cause the pollution and as the result, it will reduce the amount of iceberg, the natural habitat of the endangered animal polar bear in north pole. Furthermore, the presence of boy and car in the second advertisement is also has a meaning that the ignorance in riding the car will cause the loss of something as precious as human life, which was represented by a boy who has a longer future. The man, water, and skinny boy in the third advertisement showing the cause of using the excessive water which gives the effect to people on the other region who are struggle to have a clean water to be consumed. The last advertisement has shown the use of girl, mobile phone, and blood as the sign to convey the meaning of using the word appropriately since the use of in appropriate word can lead into somebody else's action. Thus, the creativity of these advertisement creates more impact for the reader in noticing that the bad habits that was usually done would be happened will created a negative impact of others.

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