Investigation of Industrial Brands Advertisements based on a Social Semiotic Approach

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Abstract

Advertisement is a necessary approach for promoting and selling products and introducing various services to intended audience nowadays. However, advertisement without paying due attention to the audience and their comprehension ability will prove ineffective. Semiotics, in addition to providing techniques for strengthening advertisement messages, is also effective in detecting hidden meanings or concealed values systems. This study examines advertisement tactics and techniques of industrial brands in their advertisement signs and billboards by use of social semiotic approach. In this study, after an overview of collected samples from printed advertisements on industrial brands billboards, the items were analyzed by use of Kress and Van Leeuwen analytical method based on social semiotic approach. And the methodology of this research was descriptive and analytical.

Keywords: Graphical Advertisements, Social Semiotics, Persuasive Advertisement, Advertisement of industrial products.
Introduction
Advertisement is a necessary approach for promoting and selling products and introducing various services to intended audience nowadays. However, advertisement without paying due attention to the audience and their comprehension ability will prove ineffective. Semiotics is conveying the message to the audience by use of briefest method available. Through social semiotics use in commercial and industrial advertisements, we can convey the intended message utilizing the simplest method available. With their clear and strong expression, signs and symbols can convey tremendous amounts of information through visual and textual representation to the audience. Proper use of signs and symbols in promoting products is considered among the most effective methods of selling products and services in the world, which by connecting with the audience facilitates the selection of suitable products and goods (Danesi, 2009: 294).

In this study, the researcher tries to investigate symbols and techniques governing the promotion of industrial brands in Iran with an emphasis on social semiotics.

What is Advertisement?
Advertisement is an organized and cognizant attempt to manipulate emotions and understanding and shift the attitude and behavior of the audience towards the direction intended by the advertiser (Kia, Saeidi, 2004: 85).

Commercial Advertisement
In today’s world, advertisement has become a giant trade and industry. Advertisement is both an industry and a tool used by many different individuals.

Each year, tremendous cash flows are allocated for advertisement purposes. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out advertisement campaigns in an efficient and effective manner. Since advertisement serves a lot of objectives, the extent of its functions is also very wide.

It is possible that in a small, simple, and low population society, the relations would be completely personal, direct, and face to face; hence there would be no need for other types of relations. However, in a big, complex and industrial society, besides face to face relations, we also have to utilize indirect relations. Advertisement will appropriately meet this requirement of contemporary societies.

Advertisement is a strategy which has attracted a lot of attention to itself due to the parameters of size, distance, convenience, and cost. We advertise because it helps us in realizing our goals (Farbey, 2007: 15).

What is a brand?
Based on the definition provided by the American Marketing Association, brand is “a name, word, sign, symbol, or logo, or a combination of the above which is used for identifying the goods and services of a seller (or a group of sellers) in order to create distinction in the competition arena” (Kevin Lane, 2012: 4).

Semiotics
Semiotics is the science of investigating different signs and symbols, the factors affecting the process of creating, exchanging, and interpreting them, as well as the rules governing the
symbols and the nature of the relation and meaning in different phenomena and sign systems (Mohajer, Nabavi, 2010).

In simple language, semiotics is the disciplined and organized study of a set of factors affecting the creation and interpretation of signs and symbols (Emamifar, 2011: 18).

The intellectual and social life of human beings is based on the creation, utilization, and exchange of signs and symbols. When we pose for a photo, speak, write, read, watch a TV show, listen to music, or look at a painting we express a symbol-based behavior (Danesi, 2009: 57).

Semiotics attempts to analyze meaning through investigation and theorizing about signs and symbols (auditory, visual, tactile, linguistic, and so on) and the way they are formed. The meaning cannot be studied separately from subject and the human being who defines it and utilizes it in his or her everyday life, as well as the cultural system which creates it (Emamifar, 2011: 27).

**Text Analysis Tool based on Kress and Van Leeuwen approach**

The analysis tool in this study is the Multimodal Discourse Analysis. It is one of the branches of discourse analysis which is rooted in social semiotics.

Multimodal discourse analysis is a novel branch of discourse analysis which relates the study of language to the study of other sources of signs and symbols including images, actions, music, sound, and film. It tries to find the mechanisms of creating meaning in multimodal phenomena, i.e. phenomena with various sign systems. And attempts to discover the sources of signs and symbols and semantic expansions occurred in multimodal phenomena (Emamifar, 2011: 200).

**Social Semiotic Method**

The stages of this method are as follows: (I) finding semiotic signs and symbols; (II) extracting meaning potentials; and (III) plotting the network of sign systems for each source and analyzing the social relations of text.

**Social Semiotic Analysis of an Image**

Social semiotics considers three descriptive roles for each visual text:
- a) The representation role (narrative, conceptual)
- b) The interactive role (contact, distance, angle of view)
- c) The combinatory role (information value, framing, significance)

**Semiotics of Advertisements:**

Semiotics of advertisement is the analysis of advertisement as a text; and the discovery of meaning begins much like in other fields of semiotics including semiotics of images, urban semiotics, and cultural studies with Roland Barthes and mythology. In his short essays, Barthes (1954-1956) investigates the workings of myths in modern societies. According to him, everything can turn into myths i.e. a messenger. The focus of Barthes on other aspect of signs and symbols (their false aspect), and efforts to remove myths from cultural manifestations of French culture such as entertainment, sports, food, and so on presented semiotics capabilities as a method for analyzing advertisement texts for two groups. The first group includes the readers or the audience of the advertisement, since the process of decoding advertisement texts and discovering meanings and range of implications in these texts will help this group to reach an understanding of cultural mechanisms in modern societies.
However, later on, the ideas of Barthes on the meanings embedded in the deep structure of these advertisement texts and the idea that the main objective of semiotics was to discover these hidden meanings was moderated through the social and cultural semiotic approaches, causing the main objective of advertisement semiotics to shift from discovering the meaning to explaining the meanings in these texts; indeed, according to Williamson (2000) this science seeks the translation of sign systems and the mechanisms of establishing an ultra-system. The second group includes manufacturers or the creators of advertisements since the processes of encoding and creating implication systems through semiotics will help them influence the unconscious mind of the audience to encourage them buy goods or services. According to Basy and Danesi (2002), when using persuasive signs and symbols, the goal of advertisement semiotics is not in fact to criticize advertisers or change the motivations of customers. Rather, by analyzing the advertisement texts in a certain context, semioticians are trying to find out what the messages extracted from an advertisement are, what the customer has understood from that advertisement, what the meaning of the advertisement is and most importantly how an advertisement creates meaning (Kamran, 2013: 52).

Creating Meaning in Advertisements
Investigating the methods of creating signifying systems in various texts, including written text or an image, is one of the most studied subjects among artists, sociologists and the experts of communication science. Making use of their familiarity with the functions of signs and symbols and by emphasizing social and cultural psychology, designers of this type of advertisement have been able to promote their products and present them to the customers. Graphics (visual communication) is a branch of advertisement which attempts to not only directly affect the audience to satisfy them, but also to use indirect functions such as mental clichés and the creation of myths to promote the products (Emamifar, 2011: 21).

Advertisement Strategies
The methods used by the advertiser to affect people are called advertisement strategies. These methods vary and each one of them has a special function. Advertisement does not exist in a vacuum. Each method may be successful in a situation and unsuccessful in the next one and this depends on the conditions of advertisement. Some of these conditions and attributes are: traditions; rituals and customs which involve the desires, wishes, and interests of people; the level of social awareness and understanding; the type and extent of prior information and knowledge of individuals; and the advertisements of competitors which are presented to the individuals. These are all some of the conditions effective in advertisement and the advertiser has to consider them while selecting his or her methods and strategies (Asadi, 1992: 208-211).

Satisfying the Audience
Satisfaction is a communication process and its goal is to persuade the receiver of the message. In other words, a persuading message will convey an idea or a behavior to the receiver and it is expected that this message affects the audience or the receiver of the message. Victoria O'Donnell and Jon Cable define persuasion as a complex, consistent process with mutual reaction where the sender and the receiver are bonded through a verbal or non-verbal symbol through which the persuader tries to influence the receiver so that a change in his or her attitude or behavior is realized because the receiver had had some attitudes and understandings which were expanded or changed.
In the persuasion process, the significant attributes of the sender of the message and the audience will be considered and it is suggested that any kind of change in the attitude is possible through the accurate processing of information related to the subject of the attitude or the change is occurred in a self-motivating manner where the individual will respond to persuading signs and symbols and consequently changes his or her attitude. The first type is considered the main method or conduit of persuasion and the second one is called the auxiliary method (Kia and Saeidi, 2004: 180).

Advertisement Strategies (Techniques) in the Media

1. The strategy of being simple,
2. The strategy of repetition in advertisement or repeating unitary or homogenous elements (beat)
3. The strategy of exaggerating a special feature,
4. The strategy of providing a rational justification,
5. The strategy of using the trust people have in celebrities,
6. The strategy of mentioning the benefits of flying with the flock,
7. The strategy of emphasizing the importance of consistency with time and emphasizing abstract ideas,
8. The strategy of expressing metaphors and indirect discourse,
9. The strategy of symbolic discourse,
10. The strategy of exciting the child inside using childish images,
11. The strategy of creating the feeling of need,
12. The strategy of formalism and conveying new phenomena,
13. The strategy of exciting emotions,
14. The strategy of creating the feeling of happiness and fun,
15. The strategy of creating fear,
16. The strategy of expanding and spreading the local culture,
17. The strategy of introducing an advertisement character,
18. The strategy of creating color attraction for a rapid and straight discourse

In this section, we will analyze an instance of a billboard for an LG brand appliances advertisement in Iran though the social semiotics approach and using the analysis tool of Kress and Van Leeuwen. Then, we will discuss the governing signs and symbols and the type of advertisement strategy used in this billboard (Rahbarnia and Mehrizi Sani, 2008: 89).
The Representation Role:
In this image, we have visual and textual levels. And in the visual level, we also have two patterns; namely, narrative and conceptual patterns.

The Narrative Pattern: with a quick look at the picture, we can find out that while the image volume is higher than the text volume, the textual level manifests itself more significantly; this is due to the utilization of warm colors (magenta and yellow) in the golden point of the frame.

In this part of the frame, all the necessary and important information are conveyed to the observer in a suitable and easy to understand combination. In the visual portion of this billboard we can find two main frames. In the right-side frame, a TV set with a ribbon can be seen and three lines of text have been used for completing the meaning (for a limited time, get a gift, LED TV). If we read all these three lines continuously, we will understand the meaning and in fact it will become one complete sentence. However, separately, each one of these lines on its own has meaning and is readable. The phrase “for a limited time” at the top of the TV has been shown with a smaller font but with two magenta lines wrapped around it. The other two phrases are at the bottom of the TV; they have identical fonts but different colors. This change of color, changes the order of reading the sentences. In other words, in the left-hand side frame and in the textual level of the frame, we will first see the main line (Saving Energy with Inverter Technology) written in two colors: magenta and green. Again, using color, each sentence and word gets a special role to play. Under the word “Inverter”, there is a green arrow, indicating the energy label and showing A+++.

In the visual layer after the yellow arrow which enters the frame from a different space and plays an interactive role, we can see a dish washing machine, a side-by-side refrigerator with an open door and full of carrots, and a washing machine with the LG brand in the middle of the frame. At the front of the fridge, there are two rabbits standing while holding carrots, there are also two penguins standing beside the washing machine, a river is going by their feet and there is a clothing rope with the clothes of the penguins. All these images are depicted in an open field and in connection to each other.
In the conceptual meaning section of the visual layer, we are faced with two different spaces; in the right-hand side we have a real space talking about a gift (a ribbon-wrapped TV indicating a gift) and the left-hand side space which is an unreal and fictional space. However, by continuing the left-hand side hills, the designer has been able to maintain the connection between these two different spaces. The visual attraction of this advertisement is the fictional space which attracts the attention of the audience on the first sight. The designer presents the appliances in the nature and depicts their use by the animals. The animals cannot use these appliances, so why has the designer used the animals and why has he or she used rabbits for the fridge and penguins for the washing machine?

In order to answer these questions, it is better to first consider the textual layer of the image. In other words, in this advertisement, the texts help us understand the story. In the textual layer of this billboard, the most powerful line is “Saving Energy with Inverter Technology” because of the font size and the magenta color. Ordinary people may not understand what this technology is but they will understand whatever it is, it saves energy and the energy label of A+++*, which is the highest symbol on an energy label and shows low energy consumption and high efficiency, under the word “Inverter” is a depiction of the phrase and it is familiar for the observer. In order to better understand the conceptual layer of this advertisement, we have to understand the characteristics of the inverter technology:

*The most significant characteristics of devices equipped with the inverter technology include low energy consumption, lowering costs and higher consistency with the environment. The unique inverter technology reduces energy consumption significantly.

One of the methods for reducing energy consumption in LG’s inverter is the higher efficiency in a smaller time frame. The inverter technology in this product not only reduces the power consumption but also reduces the noise of the device significantly. Using this type of compressor in a device like a fridge will maintain the freshness and the taste of food products and the noise of the digital compressors are significantly lower than the traditional ones.

After reading the characteristics of this technology, we can understand the designer’s idea. The most important feature of this technology is its consistency with the environment, so the intelligent designer has used the nature and depicted the appliances in a natural field and even used animals to better convey the message. One of the characteristics of the rabbits is their strong auditory capacity and as mentioned above, in this technology the noise of the device is reduced significantly compared to the traditional devices so while the rabbits have strong ears, they cannot hear any noise and they are calmly standing beside these appliances and using them. A little bit to the left, two penguins are depicted while playing in water. As we all know penguins are great swimmers and they spend most of their time swimming in the ocean and probably the inverter technology is so consistent with the environment that instead of swimming in the ocean, the penguins decided to swim in the LG washing machine since it feels as if they are in the ocean. Overall, the story is trying to introduce this new LG technology which is very consistent with nature.

In the conceptual layer of the text, we see the usage of color, sometimes for being seen at the first sight like the main line (get a gift) and sometimes for creating coordination between the texts and their efficiency and functions like the word “Inverter”.

Moreover, the logos used in this image are depicted out of the center of the image, but their warm colors attract the attention.
The interactive role:
Considering the distance, in this image we can see a long shot view. We can see two view angles simultaneously in this image. The view angle of LG appliances and the yellow arrow which is from bottom to top: this angle is used here for magnifying and depicting the power of the appliances, which also created a type of emphasis and focus. The direct view is used for depicting the other items on this billboard. This view creates the highest level of engagement with the observer. Moreover, the appliances are viewed from three angles, which is the best view for depicting a product.

The combinatorial role:
The information value in this image is from right to left, which is emphasized by the yellow arrow. In this image, we can discern two main frames; the first frame in the right-hand side, one where the TV set is located and the second frame is the abstract section of the image, where the appliances are depicted in the environment.
In the first frame, there are a number of secondary frames: the TV set, the upper text, the lower text, the Goldiran logo; in the second frame we can see the secondary frames including yellow arrow, the main title text, the green arrow, the dish washing machine, the fridge, the washing machine, the penguins, the green hill, and finally the LG logo. However, all these frames are depicted harmoniously and the yellow-color frame works as a connection between the two main frames.
As mentioned above, the significance in this image is created by using warm magenta and yellow colors.
The governing advertisement symbol in this image is the humoristic space and saving energy. At the first sight, the observer will face the textual layer of “Saving Energy with Inverter Technology”. The designer emphasized this technology to introduce the products and by creating the fictional space, the designer attracts the attention of the audience. However, in the first sight, the coordination and consistency with the environment is not obvious for the observer and if he or she does not have background information about the inverter technology, he or she will not be able to understand the meaning of the images. after that, the eye will see the yellow-colored arrow, which informs us that the purchase period has been extended. It moves the eye from the entrance point (in fact, the lower layer which is a ribbon-wrapped TV set; the color of the ribbon and the arrow have been intelligently selected identical so that it creates a linear color structure which guides the eye) to the other side, which consists of the LG appliances in a fictional environment. In fact, this arrow is the connection between the right-hand side and the left-hand side frames. Another important point is the color selection which attracts the eye to the main line of text at the first sight. This attraction is created by the font size and the magenta color. There is color coordination in the image frame. However, the sections requiring more attention has been given the warm magenta color.
The dominant advertisement strategy in this image is creating the feeling of happiness and fun. A fictional environment, culminating in an abstract world using the combination of a real world and a fictional one, produces a happy and fun image. In comparison with the serious message of the advertisement, this fun environment creates willingness and positive emotions in the audience. The second strategy is to promise a prize in a limited time for the audience so that he or she be urged to purchase quickly in order to use this opportunity. Of course, the smallest phrase in the frame “for a limited time only” emphasizes this idea.
Furthermore, using the strategy of presenting rational justification will influence those audiences who are more rational with the idea of saving energy consumption.
Overall, in this advertisement, the designer has been able to convey the following messages to the audience:
1. The prize for purchasing in a certain time period will be an LED TV set.
2. These appliances are equipped with the inverter technology, they use less energy, and they are designed in consistency with the environment. At the same time, the appearance of the products is also depicted.
3. In order to convey information to the observer, the designer has used two levels; namely, textual level and visual level. In the textual level, the designer is brief and strong. In the visual level, a fictional environment is used to have a long-term indirect influence on the observer.

Conclusions
Using strong texts as the dominant sign in the image of the LG advertisement billboard is highly effective considering the extended role of the visual and conceptual levels. Moreover, using crowded combinations, and direct usage of goods or products are dominant in the image.
The advertisement strategies used for industrial brands are as follows:

a) The strategy of promising lottery, game, or prize
These strategies will persuade the audience and in some cases, they play the main role in the identity of the billboard. In another LG advertisement, the role of this strategy (using prizes) is reduced and it is combined with other strategies and the space for this strategy has been reduced to one third of the frame; however, it still plays its role perfectly. In the majority of advertisement samples investigated by different studies, a number of advertisement strategies have been used simultaneously. For instance, the LG billboard uses the strategy of giving prizes, creating the feeling of happiness and fun, and providing rational justifications simultaneously.

b) Creating the feeling of happiness and fun
The strategy of creating the feeling of happiness and fun is used to persuade the audience. For instance, in the advertisements for LG products, a fictional and unreal environment is created and the fun connection between the products and use of products by animals has culminated in a happy environment for the observer.

c) The strategy of providing rational justification
Among the analyzed advertisement billboards, one of them uses the strategy of providing rational justification. In this strategy, the goal is to provide a rational message for the audience and introduce the real functionality of the product or service. In this strategy, the goal is not to create an attractive image or a fascinating song to attract the audience. This strategy uses logic, inference, and facts to provide the audience with information regarding the capabilities and functions of the product. For instance, in the advertisement for LG products, the line “Saving Energy with Inverter Technology” is convincing for the audience searching for logic and rational thought.

d) Using color attraction for rapid and strong discourse
Using color attraction excites the emotions and creates a better understanding for the audience. Due to possessing attractive color levels, this type of advertisements can attract the attention quickly and entice the observers. Based on the above-mentioned points, color in
advertisements should be in line with the subject of message, space and the audience. In the analysis of the advertisement for LG products, the magenta color of the line “Saving Energy with Inverter Technology” attracts the attention on the first sight.
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