Female Sexuality in Pepsi Commercial (A Study of Discourse of Advertising)

Yuliza Ria
Retno Wulandari Setyaningsih

English Department, Universitas Airlangga

Abstract

Artikel ini membahas peran bahasa dalam iklan, terutama dalam iklan komersial di televisi, melalui wacana seksualitas perempuan untuk menjual produk. Studi kasus yang digunakan adalah iklan Pepsi yang memanfaatkan selebriti perempuan sebagai pemeran utama guna menunjukkan cara wacana seksualitas perempuan dikembangkan oleh iklan Pepsi. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah analisis deskriptif dan teori yang digunakan adalah Wacana Iklan dari Guy Cook. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan gambar, musik, ucapan dan tulisan dalam iklan Pepsi menghasilkan kesatuan dalam membangun wacana seksualitas perempuan. Pepsi menggambarkan bahwa setiap perempuan bisa menjadi seperti pelaku dalam iklan Pepsi; memperlihatkan kulit tubuh, menonjolkan seksualitas perempuan, mengambil peran dan menjadi perempuan yang kuat dengan minum Pepsi. Dari data yang diperoleh juga diketahui bahwa Pepsi telah mengembangkan wacana seksualitas perempuan ke arah yang positif, yakni seorang perempuan mampu mempengaruhi orang lain melalui kekuatan keperempuanannya dalam budaya yang menindas.

Keywords: iklan, analisa wacana, seksualitas perempuan, iklan televisi

Introduction

Sex appeal is becoming very common in today’s advertising (Hyllegard, Ogle & Yan, 2009). It is manifested in many forms, and the most common manifestation is having models wearing sexy or revealing clothing (Reichert, 2003). The use of sexuality has stirred up many controversies in society. Nowadays, there is still an enormous variety of discourse of female in advertising to appeal to the consumers. It is mostly found in sexist advertisements, to sell products such as cigarettes, jewelry, fragrance, cosmetics and fashion goods. It is an interesting topic to discuss considering discourse of female sexuality development in advertisement.

Advertising is one form of discourse which greatly influences modern society. Form of social communication in advertising is the synthesis of many components. In fact, advertisements are multimodal, and can use pictures, music, and language, either singly or in combination, as the medium permits (Cook, 2005). These multimodal advertisements are visible on television. Advertising through television is very effective as it is more appealing, eye catching, and all designed to elicit an emotional response in the viewer that both grabs their attention and helps communicate the advertising message (Peterson & Malhorta, 1998). Since this study analyses multimodal advertisement, the writer adheres to the use of the term “discourse” proposed by Cook (2005) who defines it as “text and context together, interacting in a way which is perceived as meaningful and unified by the participants’. The context here is understood in the broadest sense, including the reader and the writer, the situation, the function, the multimodality, and background knowledge.

In this study the writer uses the theory from “The Discourse of Advertising” by Cook (2005). In his book Cook argues that advertisements are always in complex interaction with the texts around them, with music and pictures, and with the people who make and experience them (2005, p.19). When music and pictures combine with language to alter or add to its meaning, then discourse analysis must consider these modes of communication too (2005, p.1). Therefore, this study examines the nature of the discourse of advertising. It focuses on the interaction of language, image
and layout, and examines advertising persuasive strategies. According to Lavine (1999), media has the potential power in shaping people’s self concepts. This study focuses on Pepsi commercial which is most likely offering guidance on matters of the ideal image of female from the perspective of a particular discursive formation. Here, the writer tries to elaborate how language is used in this commercial to show the female sexuality discourse.

Many studies had explored how sex is used in advertising (Lin, 1998; Ramirez and Reichert, 2000; Ganahl, 2003) and also the objectification of female in advertising (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003; Stankiewcz & Roselli, 2008). While previous studies have found that females often appeared on advertising to carry out sexualized and eroticized depictions in sexist advertisements, this study focus on the female sexuality discourse developed in Pepsi commercial, a gender neutral advertisement. Therefore it is quite different from other studies and quite important to conduct.

Method of the Study

This descriptive analysis study is intended to illustrate the way Pepsi commercial developed the discourse of female sexuality through its picture, music, and writing. Thus, the theory of Discourse of Advertising proposed by Guy Cook is used as the research tool. The sample taken for this study is “New Gladiator” Pepsi commercial starring Britney Spears, Pink, Beyonce Knowles, and Enrique Iglesias. This commercial aired on the television and internet along 2005-2011. The video length is about three minutes, divided into four scenes according to the camera’s shot transition. The sample of this area for the study is chosen on purpose, considering that all four celebrities in this commercial were popular cultural icons, whom millions adored, worshipped, and easily identified with. In addition, “New Gladiator” commercial reached the top five commercials that have been viewed most and drawn most hits of all time on YouTube (CBS News, 2010).

Data Presentation

Guy Cook’s Discourse of Advertising theory raises two quite separate problems of how to transcribe music and pictures on the page, and how to analyze their interaction with each other and with language. According to Cook, besides written or spoken languages, music and pictures are part of the discourse of advertisement, and to ignore or downplay them is a serious distortion (2005, p.30). Thus, a brief description of some significant pictures, music, speech and writing taken from the commercial is presented below:

Picture

![Picture 1](Picture 1) ![Picture 2](Picture 2) ![Picture 3](Picture 3) ![Picture 4](Picture 4)

Picture 1 shows the situations behind bars, and the gladiators wear bronze bikini costumes. Gladiators in general wore minimal amounts of clothing and almost all of the different types of gladiators fought with bare chests, which the Romans viewed as a symbol of masculine virility (Alchin, 2008). In contrast, the essence of the costumes would be different towards women. It gives a sense of femininity and exposes the sexual attractiveness of the actresses.

Meanwhile, the emperor sits in his throne and drinking Pepsi (Picture 2). His role suit the general agreement that women face more barriers to becoming leaders than men do, especially for leader roles that are male-dominated (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Then one by one, the gladiators walk in confidently towards the arena (Picture 3). According to Reichert & Lambiase (2003, p.16), suggestive dress is often represented by open blouses with partially exposed cleavage, tight-fitting clothing that accentuates the body and mini-skirts. Here, the viewers are forced to gaze through female endorser sexy bodies. However, though the gladiators look sexy, they show no seducing expression.
Further viewers may expect that gladiators to fight. Yet, all of them just stand in the middle of the arena, throw their weapons, and sing “We Will Rock You” song (Picture 4). Here, we can see how women are often presented as desirable commodities (Goffman, 1979). Pepsi use the actresses’ female sexuality to become the objects for pleasure. They sing passionately, with a sense of anger rush within their expression, but still sexy. Once they start dancing and singing, the spectators get fired up and excited. Ramirez and Reichert (2000) stated that viewers consider physical characteristics the most sexual appeal in advertising and the sub-categories of these characteristics are clothing, attractiveness and body. Thus, though their facial expressions are not seducing at all, their appearance, gestures, and attractiveness still exposing sexuality.

Music

Cook emphasized that although music may have no semantics, in the sense of making reference to the world in a way which will be understood in a similar way by all members of a community, it does have, as language also has connotations (2005, p. 35). The music and the singing voice pass through four phases, distinguished by marked changes in speed and beat. The first phase conveys a sense of urgency building to a climax, the sound of the stamping and clapping create an opening rhythm. The second phase releases the tension of the first with a confident beat as the drums enter for the upbeat of the second phrase. In the third phase this rhythm are in the climax tense, a loud sound of percussion appears, and also a beat rhythm sound effects. Finally the last phase repeats the second, confident and release the tension as before. The entire song is filled with the rhythm of clapping and stamping.

The real attraction of this song is the stamping effects, and this stamping effect was created by stomping and clapping by the singer and the spectators. All of these music effects are significant to embrace the female sexuality discourse since it expresses the up and down feelings of the people who see a sexy woman sing and dance, and also support the tempting characters of the sexy and courageous female gladiators.

Speech and Writing

This commercial contains verbal and nonverbal speech. The jingle, the written text, and the brand names are the only language used. The speech is supported by gesture, expression, and action conducted by the actor and actresses. It appears in a form of a song which is sung, rather than spoken, by Britney Spears, Pink, and Beyonce Knowles, with inevitable eagerness.

Cook (2005, p. 79) stated that to describe a language, it is quite sensible to tackle meaning through semantics and pragmatics, because they do provide reasonably clear-cut procedures for formulating meaning. The song is originally carries a story about the futility of a man. The first stanza is about a boy who is dreaming of a better life, in the second stanza the boy is now a young man battling to reach lofty goals, and the song ends with with an old man’s dreams unfulfilled (Whickersham, 2010).

The commercial closed with a written text “Dare For More” that appear very briefly in the bottom of the screen (Picture 5). It is written in a simple white font. While the words “Pepsi” is visible on the product itself.
The Discourse of Female Sexuality in “New Gladiator” Pepsi Commercial

Picture, music, speech and writing, are the three major modes in multimodal advertisement. According to Cook (2005, p.35), the effect of the advertisement is not to be found in any of the three major modes alone, but only in their combination because each mode gains from the other. This part of the study examines the effect of the selection and combination of the different modes in advertisement, and of three sub-modes of language: song, speech and writing. As a result, the cohesion between picture, music, speech and writing found represents the intention of Pepsi commercial to persuade the viewers by using female sexuality discourse is explained in this section. The relation of the words to accompanying pictures and to the phases of the music is set out, approximately in Appendix.

According to Cook (2005, p. 38) pictures do far more than carry a story. Therefore, not only have pictures gained ground, but also language, where it is used, leans further and further towards the meanings it derives from interaction with pictures. “New Gladiator” Pepsi Commercial is set merely in one setting of place, which is an outdoor arena. Gold and silver are the dominant color of certain objects within the commercial. The three gladiators also wear gold and silver clothing and accessories. These colors represent their social standing or wealth (Alchin, 2008).

The music intention is to support the song. Cook (2005, p.50) stated that music has connotation in which may evoke a certain mood or associate with quite specific places; however, some connotations are both predictable and unpredictable. Moreover, certain types of music might signify ‘cheerfulness’ or gloominess’. Accordingly, the melody played in this commercial is a cheerful melody rather than gloomy melody.

Along with the song, the back sound plays a beat rhythm. The rhythmical music indicates the power of song and the spirit of the spectators and the three gladiators. It also set the mood of the viewers. The singing voice of the gladiators is one of the important parts, since each singer has her own characteristic and this is useful to grab people’s attention or as means giving sensation. Cook (2005, p.71) stated that voice quality serves as an index of such passing emotional states as happiness, sensuality, optimism.

The actresses’ speech are sung, rather than spoken. Cook (2005, p.24) mentioned that sounds and vision are the vehicle of face to face interaction, while through writing we neither see nor hear our interlocutor. Thus, performing a song may give deeper understanding for the viewers. The gladiators use movements as attraction although they seem to do it unintentionally. For instance, move the hips and shake the breast as they dance and sing attractively. Ramirez, & Reichert, (2000) stated that "suggestive" are also generally considered examples of sexually oriented appeals in advertising. Suggestiveness has also been defined as "having or possessing sexual stimuli that triggers or arouses ideas about sex in a person’s mind" (Reid, Salmon, and Soley 1984, p. 215). Hence, even though they do not seduce the viewers directly, it still considered as a sexual appeal.

As previously mentioned, the song, "We Will Rock You" is originally performed by Queen. This legendary song was also used in many movies and some individual artists remake the song as such increasing its familiarity and popularity. The choice of words is also interesting because it is loosen up on one side but confronting on the other. Focus on the speech and the paralanguage, the writer relates the denotative and connotative meaning from certain phrase of the song to female sexuality, for example:

“Buddy, you're a boy, make a big noise, playin' in the street. you're gonna be a big man someday” 

The words “buddy” and “boy” are usually carried out in men’s conversation. The phrases “make a big noise, playin' in the street” are also closely related to men’s activities. Instead, its connotative meaning refers to the female gladiators in Pepsi commercial. There must be a reason why they do not change the lyrics. The writer assumes that it is to emphasize the endorser strong characters as they want to be recognized equally as men and by that also to make it sounds more sensuous.

Another example is: “You got a mud on your face, big disgrace, kickin’ your can all over the place” The phrase “mud on your face” denotes an insult for someone, and “big disgrace” means the shameful feeling that comes afterward. The lyrics continue with the phrase “kickin’ your can all over the place” that symbolizes a wish for revenge, but there is not much you can do about it. The
The connotation of the word *you* refer to the women who are being undervalued by the society and the emperor who repressed the gladiators.

The most repeatable phrase in this commercial is “*We will we will rock you*” This is the chorus of the song, which is repeated several times. “*You*” here is intended for the emperor for those gladiators tried to dethrone him. On the other hand, women have typically viewed their bodies as “objects”, with physical beauty determining how they and others judge their overall value (Martin & Gentry, 1997). Thus, the way the female gladiators shout and sing this part with passion demonstrate their desire to be recognized more than just through their physical beauty.

Another lyrics obviously sung by those gladiators is “*Buddy, you’re a young man hollerin’, fightin’, in the streets, gonna take on the world someday*” The word *hollering* is used instead of screaming, and *fighting* are lexically means to scream and engage in a battle or combat, which is not something that women usually do. If we see this phrase through female sexuality discourse, it could be related to an optimistic view as the gladiators believe that they *gonna take on the world someday*. Moreover, the word *fighting* is considered sexy as it is supported by the appearance of the sexy female gladiators.

The next lyrics clearly heard is “*Blood on your face, big disgrace, wavin’ your banner all over the place*” The phrase “*blood on your face*” has a denotative meaning of what people got from a fight, where blood is everywhere, but it connotes the spirit of the female gladiators. “*Wavin’ your banner all over the place*” is supported by the gestures of the female gladiators, as they move their breasts, buttocks and thighs when they sing it. Thus, the connotative meaning is that they want peace by offering their sexuality.

The last lyrics forwarded is “*Buddy you’re an old man, poor man, pleadin with your eyes, gonna make you some peace someday, somebody better put you back into your place*” The denotative meaning of the phrase *pleading with your eyes* is to entreat earnestly for something. The writer assumes that it is more sexual to use the word *pleading* rather that begging or asking. The word *you* connotes the women that longing for peace or freedom.

Further, the writing appears in this commercial can be classified into two main categories, the brand name and the tagline. In this case, “*Dare for More*” approximate meaning based on the picture shown along with this tagline is related to the building of discourse of female sexuality, and it delivers the popular message that women become “*more*” by wearing “*less.*” The tagline markets revolution in masks of bondage and nudity while playing on existing tensions about the current state of female sexual power. Since Pepsi represents sexual freedom, anxieties about female ownership of sexuality are resolved simply by purchasing Pepsi (Levande, 2008). However, the audience here is expected not just “*daring*” for more, but they are also “*begging*” for more.

In addition for the depiction of female sexuality, some scenes in this commercial show the body of the women from waist to the head (Picture 3), some others captured their face (Picture 4). In one hand, this scene aim directly to portray the woman’s expression. In contrast of their erotic appeal as a sexy gladiator, their expression while singing is full of anger without seduction. When the three gladiators enter the arena, the camera captured the woman’s appearance and exposing their sexy body (Picture 3). However, the situation where models are used for their sex appeal or as background decoration is considered a reflection of female objectification (Massey, 2006).

According to Elliot, Jones, Benfield, & Barlow (1995) the dominant positive themes shared by both sexes involved equality in sexual representations and sexuality as art. Thus, the writer assumed that in doing so, the commercial shows a positive representation towards female as they appear to be as strong as men in a different way. Pepsi creates the portrayal of the sexy women by utilizing the popularity of the actresses which already have the image of sexy and talented idols. Overall, the women portrayed as a courageous being. Connected with Pepsi’s marketing strategy, Pepsi could use these actresses as Clow & Baack (2007) argued that they help create emotional bonds with the product, subsequently if such celebrity is advertising for a specific product, its sales will increase since the fans will start buying it. This marketing technique is called branding by association, which is a transfer from the qualities of the celebrity to the brand.
In the end, Pepsi commercial successfully developed the female discourse into a positive female sexuality discourse to attract the viewers as it offers a depiction of liberated women. Positive discourse here refers to the implicit attitudes towards stereotypical depiction of female sexuality in advertising. While in the speech and music, the writer also found that these two aspects enhance the female sexuality through the power that it brings to the viewers, from the tempting beats to the sexy voices of the female endorsers.

**Conclusion**

In relation to advertising, discourse analysis is defined as the study of the relationship between language and its intertextual, social and intercultural contexts in which it is used (Cook, 2005). This study used three notions of modes in Cook’s theory, which means to examine the music, pictures, and language of the advertisement in order to describe the way the advertisers of Pepsi developed female sexuality discourse. This descriptive analysis showed that the three notions of modes had successfully created a discourse coherence to promote Pepsi by using female sexuality.

Based on the analysis, the female characters represented in this commercial is a female that has more than just a good figure and a pretty face but also portrayed as a ‘sexy’ and ‘courageous’ being that has power and charismatic. The music added to endorse these characters in the commercial. It presented a confident melody with stamping effects associated with the confident and courageous female gladiators. The speech, in a form of a song, is used to captivate viewers’ attention through the sexy and mesmerizing voice of the famous female actresses. The writing is the word Pepsi itself and ‘Dare for More’ as a tagline that embody the female discourse.

Pepsi has presented certain ideal of female through its female sexuality discourse in its advertising. The female that illustrated as having no freedom, due to a repressive culture, by taking advantage of their opportunities; showing some skin and embrace their sexuality may become a powerful woman and drink Pepsi as the reward. The use of picture, music, speech and writing in this commercial created a coherence to develop the discourse of female sexuality. In the end, the conclusion of the study is that Pepsi had developed a positive female sexuality discourse to attract the viewers so that they could identify themselves with the idealized Pepsi female endorser.

This is a case study of Pepsi commercial, one of the world’s famous multi-billion dollar soda brands (Beverage Digest Company, 2011). The writer highlights one Pepsi television commercial, “New Gladiator” starring Pink, Britney Spears, Beyonce Knowles, and Enrique Iglesias. As a case study, this sample is not in the capacity of representing all Pepsi commercial.

**References**


