“Whiteness in a tube”

A Semiotic Analysis of TV Commercials in the Philippines

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Abstract

This thesis uses semiotic analysis to analyse five TV commercials from the Philippines that advertise skin whitening cosmetic products. The chosen TV commercials are from between 2011 and 2013 and can be found on YouTube. The aim of the study is to investigate why the products are popular and what it is that makes people buy them. The research question of the thesis is: how are skin whitening products depicted in TV commercials in the Philippines? The theories and concepts used in this thesis are colourism, whiteness as a commodity and the power of advertisements. The products in the commercials are depicted in a way where people can gain racial capital by whitening their skin, which leads to success in love and work life. The products also depict the ideal of white beauty by associating white skin with better qualities and by using celebrities in the commercials.

Keywords: Semiotic analysis, skin whitening, TV commercials, the Philippines, colourism, racial capital, advertisements.

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1 Introduction

Wandering through a cosmetic section in a big supermarket in Southeast Asia I noticed how many of the products were advertised as whitening products. This made me browse these products more and it turned out to be harder to find a product without any whitening agents in it than finding a product with these agents.

Skin whitening cosmetic products are very popular in many Asian and African countries, for example in the Philippines. The industry is booming and expected to be worth 23 billion US dollars in 2020 and there is an estimation that half of the Filipina women have used some kind of skin whitening product in their life (Rondilla, 2009; Thuy, 2017). The growing market value is mainly fuelled by the ever-growing middle-class in developing countries in non-western societies who have more money to spend. The appeal of these products, such as skin whitening soaps, creams, exfoliators and tablets is boosted by advertisements that promise the user a whiter, fairer and more radiant skin. These products can also be called brightening or lightening products and are usually targeted at the face and upper-body. These products are made for all genders. What is more, these products have been proven to be physically harmful and can cause, for example, cancer and liver damage (Ravichandran, 2013). Regardless of the possible harmful side effects, more and more consumers are getting their hands on these products.

This phenomenon is interesting to study since many of the people who use these products are from the Asia-Pacific region and Africa, where the majority of people usually have a darker skin. Therefore, this phenomenon raises many questions: why do people, despite the harmful side-effects, want to whiten their skin? Where does the desire for a whiter complexion come from? What kind of role does society have on skin whitening? Is skin whitening comparable to skin tanning or putting on makeup? Thus, this phenomenon is IMER relevant and important to study, because it is interesting to explore the reasons why people who have a darker skin colour want to achieve a whiter and fairer skin colour to stand out in non-western societies.

Moreover, the phenomenon in the Philippines is particularly interesting given the colonial history. The colonial rulers, Spain and the US, both implemented their own ideas and views of race, which can still be seen today. Recently, the rich powers of Asia, such as Japan and China, also have an impact on how skin colour is perceived in the Philippines.

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1 Whitening, bleaching, brightening and lightening are used interchangeably in this thesis.
1.2 Aim and Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the reasons for the growing popularity of skin whitening products by analysing how skin whitening cosmetic products are being advertised in five Filipino TV commercials found on YouTube, published between 2011 and 2013. Moreover, the aim is also to analyse how the commercials view and how the products depict the differences between dark and white skin and how the different skin colours are presented in the commercials. Therefore, the research question of this thesis is: *How are skin whitening products depicted in TV commercials in the Philippines?* Five TV commercials have been chosen for the analysis in this thesis. The videos are found on YouTube. Chapter 4.2 will discuss the materials more.

1.3 Outline

This introductory chapter presents the problem, the aim, the research question and the delimitations of this thesis. Chapter two will present the theories and concepts, focusing on the problem area and the power of advertisements. Chapter three will introduce semiotic analysis and methodological framework. In chapter four, the chosen video material will be presented and analysed according to the methodological and theoretical framework. Finally, in chapter six, the thesis ends with a conclusion and a summary of the most important findings.

1.4 Delimitation

This study does not aim to reveal the intentions of the companies that made the commercials, nor will it study their real intentions and thoughts on how the commercials and products are presented. This study does not take into consideration which network aired the commercials nor the time slot when the TV commercials were shown. This thesis will analyse the reasons for the way the TV commercials are depicted the way they are. The analysed material has been found on YouTube and posted there within a time period of 2011 and 2013, however, no emphasis is to be put in this time period. The real-time of broadcast on television has not been taken into consideration. Lastly, I will not focus on what kind of social impacts these particular TV commercials have had nor the evidence of colourism in the Philippines, I will merely focus on the presentation of the product in the commercial.
2 Background

The Philippines were a Spanish colony from the 16th century until the end of the 1800s. During the Spanish colonial rulership, the racial stratification was noticeable in the society (Kramer, 2006). The society was divided according to people's ancestry and birthplace. Moreover, the Spanish used the same kind of measures to control the population that they used in Latin America, for example putting the people with the lightest complexion at the top of the hierarchy. The important groups were mestizo groups who acted as a bridge between the native population and the Europeans, working in occupations such as economics and landholdings. The Spanish rule was followed by the American rule, from the late 1800s till 1946. After the Spanish rule, the USA colonized the Philippines with rules and laws resembling Jim Crow laws that preferred people with lighter complexion and Western ancestry (Dixon & Telles, 2017). Thus, the Filipino society has been shaped greatly by views and ideas from the former colonial rulers. Moreover, the influence from the area, such as China and Japan have also had an impact on different aspects of the society, such as beauty.

Skin whitening products are very common and popular in the Philippines. There is an estimation that every one out of two women in the Philippines has used these products at some point in their life and a survey conducted in 2004 by Synovate suggests that 50% of the respondents are using skin whitening products. The products rely on advertisements with slogans and promises that the user “get 99% whiter, better” (Rondilla, 2009: 63). Furthermore, advertisements in the Philippines usually stars an Asian woman with characteristics such as dark hair, shining white skin and big eyes (Rondilla & Spickard, 2007) that show the beauty ideal in many Asian countries: being Asian with features normally associated with Western people. Dixon and Telles (2017) argue that nowadays Filipinos view "East Asian Beauty" (p.411) as the one to achieve, a beauty view that has been defined and created by rich East Asian countries, e.g. South-Korea, Japan and China. Therefore, nowadays' mass media has a large impact on views of beauty and consumer behaviour.

What is more, Rondilla (2009) argues that globalization also has a significant role in the growing popularity of skin whitening cosmetic products. Rondilla states that:
...globalization involves the flows of ideas, products, images, and so forth, that, through technological advances in the media, closes the gap between perceived differences among people (Rondilla, 2009: 65).

Therefore, the images and views that are produced in rich countries, i.e. countries that have more resources to spread their ideas, have a better opportunity to influence other countries with their view of their image of beauty. Companies from the Western world, such as L'Oréal can sell the same whitening cream in many different countries and thereby spread that one view of beauty (Rondilla, 2009).
3 Theories and Concepts

3.1 Colourism

The skin tone is the main interest in the theory of colourism, rather than racial or ethnic identity (Hunter, 2007). Hunter (2007) argues colourism to be

the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of colour over their dark-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2007: 237).

Discrimination due to skin-colour is evident in many situations, for example, light-skinned African American and Latin American people in the US earn more money (Hill 2000; Espino & Franz 2002; Mason, 2004; Hunter, 2005; Dixon & Telles, 2017). Moreover, light-skinned people of colour in the US tend to marry spouses with higher status, live in better neighbourhoods with better housing options, make better occupational choices, have better health and carry out more school years than their dark-skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2005; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007; Dixon & Telles, 2017). These factors were also evident in many cases where the people who were studied came from the same backgrounds. Therefore, these differences between education, quality of life and income between light-skinned and dark-skinned people of colour in the US creates an inequality gap within a minority that is already behind in aforementioned aspects compared to the majority (Rondilla & Spickard, 2007).

The history of colourism dates back to early hierarchies in Asia and the colonial times when Africans in the Americas were slaves (Hunter, 2007; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007). Colourism during the time of enslavement of Africans benefited the ones who mimicked the oppressors culturally, ideologically or even aesthetically (Hunter, 2007). What is more, the opportunities and resources that would have been unthinkable for the darker-skinned slaves, sometimes were accessible for the light-skinned slaves. These opportunities were, for instance, other less manual labour and learning how to read. After the emancipation, the slaves who had received better resources during the slavery started to work as teachers, clerks and in businesses. It was often these freed slaves, who had a lighter complexion, education, capital and skills in leadership who became the leaders of the newly emancipated African Americans (Hunter, 2005, 2007; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007; Dixon & Telles, 2017).
During the colonial times in Latin America, the colonizers explicitly endorsed their own version of the caste system, “castas” (Dixon & Telles, 2017: 409) which categorized and divided the population according to their skin colour and race, putting the European elites and colonizers with lighter complexion at the top and the indigenous and black people at the bottom (Hunter, 2002; Dixon & Telles, 2017). What is more, during the late 19th century, many Latin American countries wanted to “whiten” (Dixon & Telles, 2017: 409) their population with immigrants from Europe, during a time when white supremacy was gaining more support. However, as segregation and the division of people according to their race was gaining popularity in the US, many Latin American countries started to celebrate their mixed-race identity. Therefore, many Latin American countries wanted to also show their difference as a melting pot of different ethnicities and races compared to the US where race was politicized, and people were divided and categorized according to their race (Dixon & Telles, 2017). Still, the people of the so-called melting pots of Latin American societies had their differences in education, class etc. based on their skin colour, thus, many prestigious occupations and political power positions accumulated to the light-skinned people and colourism was evident in these societies (Dixon & Telles, 2017).

Hierarchies and classism reinforced colourism in Asia (Dixon & Telles, 2017). For instance, colourism in India has a great connection to the caste system where dark skin is associated with lower caste and therefore lower income, education and status (Rondilla & Spickard, 2007). The caste system made a deeper impact during the colonial times when the ruling elite of the British people maintained their power and domination by appointing people from the higher caste to administrative and high skilled jobs and also to assist the British elites (Dirks, 2011). This is also evident in other colonized countries, where the colonial elites appointed people to help them, usually people with whiter skin colour (Fanon, 1964). On the other hand, white skin has been desired for centuries in some other Asian cultures such as Japan where white skin has been associated with purity, better class and feminine beauty (Dixon & Telles, 2017) and since the Edo-Era (1600-1868) having a whiter complexion has been seen as a duty of Japanese women (Rondilla & Spickard, 2007; Li et al., 2008). Moreover, Japanese art often depicted Japanese people even whiter than Europeans (Dixon & Telles, 2017). However, the colonial rule and Western influence is evident in other Asian countries such as the Philippines which was first colonized by Spain and later by the US (Singson, 2017). The impact of colonization and white supremacy has changed the view of beauty in the Philippines and in
other Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia and Vietnam. The beauty ideal and preference is light skin but with Asian features, often adoring people with one Western parent (Hunter, 2007; Dixon & Telles, 2017). On the other hand, in many Asian countries, dark skin is associated with manual labour in the fields and therefore with poverty and light skin is associated with prestige and white-collar occupations. These associations are still strong and continue to influence Asian people’s perception of skin colour around the world (Hunter, 2007; Singson, 2017; Dixon & Telles, 2017).

3.2 Whiteness as a commodity

During the colonial times, the European colonialists proceeded to create a notion that the European civilization was superior to any other civilization. Importing and advertising European commodities and ideas into the colonies pervaded the idea of a superior European civilization. These commodities had the capacity to present and export the characteristics of European civilization and thus, achievable by consumers around the world: create knowledge, have an identity and a consciousness (Blay, 2011).

In the 17th century, bathing was not common and was only done to cure sickness. However, when colonialism spread together with the concept of a superior European civilization, Europeans became more and more interested in cleanliness. The cleanliness that was associated with the European civilization was in contrast with the dirt that was associated with the non-European civilizations, all in the construction of a European identity (Blay, 2011). Thus, soap started to become an item and a symbol that promoted the colour white as the colour of civilization and it worked as an instrument of the colonial mindset (Blay, 2011). Furthermore, Europeans felt the duty to civilize the uncivilized, and this could have been done with the soap, which also became an important commodity in trading for example in exchange for more expensive items such as ivory and gold (Blay, 2011).

Advertisements have played a big role in selling commodities that have been used to spread the idea of the superiority of the European civilization. Moreover, Blay (2011) argues that

Commodities were not just things to be bought and sold, but with the persuasive imagery used to market them, they further represented ideas and attitudes to be consumed as well (p. 15).
Therefore, the aim of the advertisement of commodities was to “domesticate” (Blay, 2011: 15) the inferior civilizations via exporting and manipulating the people into buying these commodities. For example, advertisements by Pears’ Transparent Soap from the 19th century show us how soap was used as an exporter of the idea of European superiority (Pears’, 1890s). Therefore, these advertisements reinforced the idea that the Blacks were inferior to the Whites.

The idea of the European civilization being superior to other civilisations was rooted in whiteness. The whiter one were, the more power and abilities they could possess. Women, often viewed as the mothers of nations, the producers of future generations, needed to be as white as possible in order to give birth to the whitest of all (Blay, 2011). Therefore, the elite started to whiten their skin with various kinds of substances, and skin whitening cosmetics increased in popularity in Europe during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. These cosmetic products also became popular in the Americas regardless of age and class when immigrants imported them back to the colonies.

The beauty ideal has not shifted since the colonial times, skin whitening products are becoming more and more popular every year in the Global South. The rich countries, where the biggest cosmetic companies usually come from, are the Western European countries, Japan and the US. By producing these products these countries also create most of the images of ideal beauty, therefore contributing to the global image of white beauty with the help of mass media, which consequently makes skin whitening products more popular (Hunter, 2011). What is more, the attributes that the images and ideal of white beauty represent, e.g. power, beauty, affluence, sophistication, modernity and of course whiteness, appeal to the masses (Hunter, 2011). These attributes are commonly transformed to the people and consumers with mass-media such as advertisements, television shows, movies and celebrities that represent the European culture, white beauty and aesthetic is something positive, admirable, worthy and valuable (Hunter, 2011). Advertisements have an important role in representing and feeding ideas to the public. Advertisements with celebrity endorsements are particularly effective, since the celebrity can make a product appear more effective, and celebrities in advertisements can also show that their success and beauty are attainable by skin whitening. Celebrities in mass-media can therefore also endorse the phenomenon of skin whitening all together, and make it look like something common (Hunter, 2011).
Hunter (2011) argues that the modern technology together with the old colonial mentality has created a field in a globalized world where consumers can buy “racial capital” with skin whitening cosmetic products. Therefore, with the features of the appearance, one can turn it into racial capital. An individual can use their racial capital to for example gain wealth, a better occupation, status, social networks etc. Moreover, the feature that Hunter presents to be the most profitable is the colour of the skin, particularly a light skin, therefore, existing racial hierarchies gives racial capital its foundations (Hunter, 2002, 2011). Racial capital focuses on the appearance and how other people see the person, rather than focusing on the identity or how the person identifies itself. Furthermore, racial capital is mostly applicable to non-Western societies were white complexion is considered more valuable, desirable and admirable than dark complexion (Hunter, 2007, 2011).

The consumers of skin whitening products might not want to be white or achieve a white identity, but the high market value of these products suggests that consumers are trying to achieve a whiter skin in comparison to their peers in the same ethnic or racial group (Blay, 2011; Hunter, 2011). The desire for a whiter skin usually goes together with the desire for a relationship, higher self-esteem, better job opportunity or promotion. Moreover, with the high increase of the middle class and their purchasing power, more people have better opportunities to buy racial capital and therefore compete for better job opportunities than before (Hunter, 2011).

3.3 The power of advertising

Fletcher (2010) defines advertising as having four components: firstly, it is paid for, secondly, it is communication, the bridge between the sender and the receiver. Thirdly, advertising is intended to achieve something, and lastly, it is supposed to persuade and/or inform. Moreover, Fletcher (2010) argues that advertisements usually have persuasive information from the advertisers and an advertisement without a persuasive message would not be an advertisement per se.

Bezuidenhout (1998) argues that the essential function of persuasive advertisements is to influence the audience, the receiver of the advertisement to act in a certain manner or to take some kind of action. Advertisements are not created from out of anywhere, they reflect the time and space where they are created. The advertisements work as a crucial medium to push ideology by reflecting the ideas, norms and views of a certain society (Bezuidenhout, 1998; Correa, 2011).
Furthermore, advertisements are everywhere around us and they are all filled with representations of different aspects of the society such as gender, people, social class and so on. Correa (2011) argues that advertisements have a power to influence the mind, the attitudes and the opinions of the receiver. Therefore, advertisements are not just trying to sell some product or idea, they are also selling the ideology and alters the way we see different aspects of our world. Moreover, advertisements are important since they can be used to transfer attitudes, opinions and norms (Bezuidenhout, 1998). For example, during the colonial times, the imperialist exported commodities to the colonies and advertised them as having qualities associated with European civilisation. Moreover, as stated before in chapter §3.2, companies use celebrities in their advertisements to their advantage. Businesses often use celebrities as the protagonists of commercials to strengthen the image of the company and the brand (Balci & Özgen, 2017). Moreover, using a celebrity can strengthen the memory of a particular advertisement and help to recall it, which consequently also strengthens the image and influence of the particular brand and company.

In conclusion, the chosen theories and concepts will provide a good starting point to answer the research question, since the aim of the study is to analyse how skin whitening cosmetic products are depicted in the chosen TV commercials. Moreover, this chapter will also help to understand the reasons why the products are depicted in the way they are. The method used to answer the research question will be presented in the next chapter.
4 Methodology

This part of the thesis will be focusing on methodology and the implications of the chosen method. The chosen method is semiotic analysis which has been used to analyse and study the content of advertisements and TV commercials in order to discover the underlying meaning behind them (Anderson et al, 2006; Li et al., 2008; Correa, 2011; Freire, N. 2014; Balci & Özgen, 2017). After this introduction, I will present the theory of the chosen method, semiotic analysis and why the method was chosen. Furthermore, the data collection and analysis will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

Advertisements are everywhere, in fashion, sports, politics etc. In a competitive world, companies must advertise their products in order to keep the company alive (Bezuidenhout, 1998). Moreover, advertisements are seen as important tools to store cultural text and images (Li et al., 2008). Therefore, advertising is viewed as the most effective measure to reflect opinions, ideas and beliefs. Advertisements are viewed as the mirror of the needs of the consumer and thus, work as a reflection of the society (Bezuidenhout, 1998). Moreover, advertisements reflect the ideas, the attitudes and the views of an ideology that serve to uphold the company behind the advertisement (Rose, 2007; Correa, 2011). Therefore, advertisements have the power to alter the cultural norms, trends and values thereby making semiotic analysis a useful method for this thesis to uncover the ideology and meaning behind the advertisements (Rose, 2007). Using the theories and concepts presented in the previous chapter will also help to uncover the ideology and the meaning behind the commercials.

4.1 Semiotic analysis

Semiotics is the science of how signs make a meaning (Anderson et al., 2006; Balci & Özgen, 2017). The linguist Saussure can be seen as the pioneer of semiology which is “…science which studies the role of signs as part of social life" (Chandler, 2002: 6) whereas semiotics refers to Charles Peirce's tradition of "formal doctrine of signs" (Chandler, 2002: 6). However, Chandler (2002) argues that semiotics nowadays is used as a term to cover the whole field of study of how signs make meanings.

The basic element of the Saussurean model of semiotics is the sign, which can be virtually anything: a picture, an advert, a commercial, a poem and it is the component in the
creation of meaning (Chandler, 2002; Rose, 2007). Moreover, the two factors make up the sign; the signified and the signifier. The signified is an object, a concept or a mental image that the signifier makes. We can see the signifier as a materialistic object of the sign, something that can be touched, seen, heard and so forth (Bezuidenhout, 1998; Chandler, 2002; Rose, 2007). A sign requires a meaningful signifier and a consistent signified that make sense in a particular society. A sign can be recognized by the composition of a signifier and a signified. For example, in certain cultures a red-rose can be used as a signifier of love, love being the concept, the signified (Anderson et al., 2006). Furthermore, the syntagmatic and paradigmatic signs. Syntagmatic signs are important especially in film studies since the surrounding signs give the sign its meaning. For example, signs in a film get their meaning because of what had happened in a previous scene (Rose, 2007). Moreover, linguistic messages in a commercial can also act as a syntagmatic sign (Seiler, 2005). Paradigmatic signs get their meaning from a contrast and opposition to other signs, for example, Rose (2007) states that we understand a sign of a baby as a baby because we know that it is not an adult.

The relationship between a signifier and signified is arbitrary, thus the connection between the signifier and the signified ought to make sense to a particular group of people given the common cultural setting, the norms and ideals that surrounds them (Bezuidenhout, 1998; Chandler, 2002). Therefore, the TV commercials analysed in this thesis will be analysed having the theories and concepts in the background to reveal the connections between the signifier and signified. Since the relation between a signifier and signified is not deeply-rooted and essential, the difference between a signifier and signified is important to distinguish, therefore the relation can be problematized (Rose, 2007).

Furthermore, Rose (2007) argues that the difference between a signifier and a signified is useful in interpreting advertisements. She states that:

...adverts work by transferring visual and textual signified onto their product. Thus, the sign in an ad’s image and writing usually signify notions of taste, luxury, health and happiness and so on, and adverts attempt to shift the signifiers from the signs in the image and text to their own product (Rose, 2007: 89).

Therefore, the essential function of advertisements is how they shift the signified from one signifier to another. Moreover, this process can also make certain objects taken for granted for having particular characteristics and qualities, Rose (2007) calls them “objective correlates”
For example, a naked muscled man has been represented as reliable, strong and attractive, therefore the image of a naked muscled man has become an objective correlate of reliability, strength and attractiveness. These qualities can subsequently be shifted from a sign of a man to a brand name by advertisements (Rose, 2007).

4.2 Materials

The primary materials used in this work consist of selected YouTube videos. I have selected five videos. The primary search words used were “skin whitening commercial philippines”. The videos were selected from 10 search pages. The selected videos are from the companies SkinWhite, Ponds, Olay and Nivea. The brands of the commercials were not decided beforehand; thus, the commercials were chosen at random. The chosen commercials are appropriate for this study since they all are advertising a cosmetic product targeting to people who want to whiten their skin in the Philippines. Moreover, the commercials are chosen particularly to answer the research question “How are skin whitening depicted in TV commercials in the Philippines?”.

During the research process, some other search phrases and words were also used such as “skin lightening commercial philippines” and “skin bleaching commercial philippines”. However, these search phrases resulted in similar videos such as the primary search words did, therefore whitening, lightening and bleaching are used interchangeably. Moreover, I have the privilege of having a Filipina friend who helped me in this search process to get an insight into the phenomenon and popular brands, and also to find interesting videos for my study.

For the study, I filtered videos to fit the criteria. I wanted commercials that were known brands in the Philippines, but the popularity or the view count of the videos were not taken into consideration. Moreover, the commercials could not exceed over one minute and the primary language should be English.

4.3 Interpretation of materials

This thesis will use semiotic analysis to answer the research question: how are skin whitening products depicted in TV commercials in the Philippines? The chosen TV commercials are analysed according to the structure, guided by Seiler (2005) which presents four steps for semiotic analysis: the first step is to present and describe the commercial. What is the
commercial about, what are they selling, what is the environment and so forth. The second step is to identify the signifiers and the signifieds of the commercials. The third step is similar to the second, it is to identify the paradigmatic and syntagmatic signs. Syntagmatic signs make sense because of the signs that came before. Paradigmatic signs make sense because they are contrasted to another sign. The last step is to identify the principle at work of the commercial, basically the basis that the commercial is built upon.

Furthermore, this analysis will also take into consideration the following aspects of commercials guided by Dyer (1982) in Correa (2011): the objects and different parts of the commercial, the relation between the objects and the social world, the underlying principles and ideology and the non-verbal communication such as behaviour, physical looks etc.

The analysis will be divided into two main groups according to the TV commercials and their main plot: love and attention from the opposite gender and success in career. This division has been done by viewing the video material and considering the environment, the main characters and the plot of the videos. This division will provide a better structure to the analysis and to the research question and conclusion.

4.4 Why use semiotic analysis is this thesis?

In our everyday life, we are constantly met by signs with various meanings and we interpret the signs in relation to our own references to make sense of their true meaning (Rose, 2007). Studying the different signs that surround us makes us more aware of how signs create realities that we take for granted (Chandler, 2002). What is more, Chandler (2002) argues that meanings do not transfer into people’s heads and minds, meanings are created by people via convoluted interactions between “codes or conventions” (Chandler, 2002: 15) something that most people are not aware of. Therefore, semiotic analysis can turn images and signs into words that can be analysed. Semiotics offer various logical terms that help us describe the signs and understand how they make sense. Furthermore, semiotics can give an analytical precision for the study of signs, however, is it not always certain that semioticians use these rules precisely (Chandler, 2002; Rose, 2007). Therefore, semiotics can also be used as a “general-purpose tool” (Chandler, 2002: 208). Since advertisements are viewed as the mirror of the society, reflecting the ideas, norms and views of the society, semiotic analysis is a useful tool to reveal these underlinings and
cultural aspects that steer the society and the advertisements. Semiotic analysis is, therefore, a useful tool to analyse TV commercials which are full of signs that create different meanings.

In conclusion, semiotic analysis is a practical method to analyse advertisements and to uncover the underlinings and meanings behind the advertisements and how different things are represented in the advertisements. Different signs in the commercials create different meanings, which with semiotic analysis can be studied. Together with the theories and concepts presented in chapter three help us understand the different signs and meanings behind the five chosen commercials from the Philippines.
5 Analysis

The analysis is done according to the previously presented semiotic analysis framework to answer the research question: How are skin whitening products depicted in TV commercials in the Philippines? The different underlinings and meanings of the commercials and the advertised product are going to be analysed in this chapter. The analysis chapter will be divided into two main subgroups according to the chosen material. First subgroup is *love and attention from the opposite gender* and the second is *success in career*. The chosen material is divided into these groups in consideration of what the products main storyline and plot is and who are starring in the commercial.

5.1 Love and attention from the opposite gender

This part of the analysis will discuss whiteness as a commodity to gain the racial capital that with the qualities of the appearance, women can achieve e.g. success in love. Moreover, the paradigmatic sign will also be analysed, such as dark and light skin and their connotations. This chapter will analyse the three out of five chosen commercials. TV commercials are from the brands Pond's, SkinWhite and Nivea. The plot, environment and characters of all five commercials were considered and three of them fits the best into this particular chapter.

5.1.1 Analysis of commercial - Pond’s Detox Spotless White

This commercial is for Pond's Detox Spotless White cream. The commercial features a school girl and a schoolboy. The environment of the commercial is at a school. The format of the commercial begins with a voice-over talking about the product and its qualities. The commercial also features a scene with a skin colour scale, where the girl has the darkest skin colour. The colour scale moves to the lightest colour and the scene changes back to the girl and the boy in the
school environment. Music starts to play at the end of the commercial. After the scene with the
two main characters, the commercial ends with the scene of the product advertised with the logo.

At the beginning of the commercial, we see a girl wearing a white cardigan opening her
school locker and hiding behind the locker door when a boy walks past her. After this, she looks
at the locker door mirror and touches her face while sighing. The voice-over starts to talk about
the product and the skin colour scale is shown, changing from the darkest skin to the whitest.
The voice-over tells us that the product lightens dark spots, acne marks and that it also reveals a
fairer skin. The skin colour scale ends at the lightest colour and we are shown the girl in the
fairest skin colour. Her clothes are also different, they are no longer white, instead, they are
bright pink. The guy who previously walked past her now notices her and drops his bag,
resulting in everyone around them tripping and falling like dominoes. Music begins to play and
the lyrics "can't nobody hold us down" is heard while the boy and the girl stare at each other and
slowly move closer to each other through the people lying on the floor. The scene ends with the
product display and the logo "Pond's White Beauty" and a colour scale from dark to light.

The signs of this commercial are: the product, Pond’s cream signifies a flawless, fairer
skin, the girl’s first outfit signify a shy person with bland colours, wearing a cardigan and a
blouse, in contrast to her second outfit, which is pink, and signifies aspects of femininity and
outgoingness and socialness. The music and the lyrics “can’t nobody hold us down” acts as a
syntagmatic sign and signify empowerment. The paradigmatic signs in the commercial are the
girl’s two different outfits.

The main sign of the commercial, the product of Pond’s cream, is a commodity that is
used to transfer ideology, customs and norms to a wider population. The population that is going
to accept the ideology that the product is transferring will participate in that ideology and
promote it (Bezuidenhout, 1998; Rose, 2007). Pond's is a brand owned by Unilever, a
transnational company based in Western Europe. Thus, the product signifies some aspects of
Western European civilisation. During the colonial time, European colonists tried to keep up the
notion of European superiority by exporting commodities such as soaps (Blay, 2011).
Advertisements were used to increase the popularity of a commodity since they did not only sell
the item it advertised but also the ideas, the norms and the ideology behind the commodity.
Therefore, I would argue that this commercial, advertising a brand from Western Europe,
signifies the idea of Western European superiority in ideas and norms. Moreover, Unilever,
being a Western company, has the power of creating the notion, the images and the norms of white-beauty; the things that are to be seen as beautiful and the idea that people should aim for. This is also evident in the slogan of the Pond's brand "White Beauty", which also acts as a signifier of the ideal beauty, usually exported by the powerful Western nations. Having an idea of white beauty, the company reinforces colourism in the Philippines. By telling people through their commercial that one should whiten their skin in order to get attention from the opposite gender, fuels the notion that having a whiter skin gets you a better chance in love.

Since the product signifies flawless and fairer skin, it tries to sell the notion that skin should be flawless and fairer. Perpetuating the notion that one's skin colour should be whiter to fit into the beauty ideal created and circulated by the rich western countries, where most of the cosmetic brands come from. In the commercial, the girl hides behind a locker door from the boy and looks at the mirror and looks worried while touching her face. Her skin tone represents the darkest skin colour in the skin colour scale, which is shown in the commercial. After she finds the Pond's cream, her skin colour changes to the lighter colour of the colour scale and she is noticed by the boy who had previously walked past her. In this commercial, the Pond's cream also signifies love and attention from the opposite gender. At the beginning of the commercial when the girl was "dark" she was not confident enough to look at the boy or talk to him, and instead hid from him. After her skin turned whiter, she had the courage to face the boy, come close to him and be the middle of his attention, instead of fading into the background. Therefore, the Pond's cream does not only signify love and attention, it also signifies empowerment, decisiveness and courage.

What is more, this commercial is based on the notion that the Western world dictates and creates the images of beauty and circulates them with brands and advertisements. With the image of white-beauty, this commercial and its product targets people with dark skin and with imperfections, it encourages them to whiten their skin in order to be empowered and to be able to find love. Moreover, the product in this commercial is depicted as a commodity which can help a person gain racial capital by whitening the skin. With white skin, one can get attention from the opposite gender and be in the centre of attention. What is more, the product creates a meaning, that being whiter gives you better chances at finding love.
5.1.2 Analysis of commercial - SkinWhite Soaps

This commercial is for the company SkinWhite's bar of soap and it stars a boy and a girl lying outside in the grass. The target audience is women in the Philippines. The format of the advertisement begins with a scene showing the two main characters while hearing the voice-over of the boy and romantic music. The scene changes to a scene presenting the product and its different qualities with the voice-over of a woman. The scene cuts back to the two main characters and the commercial ends with a presentation of different SkinWhite soaps.

The commercial starts with the boy staring at the girl and a voice-over saying: "I love her beautiful blush white skin... just maybe she's the one". The girl glances at the boy and the boy tries to look away but keeps staring at the girl. A woman's voice-over starts to talk while the scene changes to the presentation of the soap and its different qualities: "captivate him with your favourite SkinWhite soaps, with the breakthrough Synchrowhite action" one can hear her say. The soap promises whitening, moisturizing and protective qualities. The scene ends and cuts back to the original environment showing the girl and the boy lying next to each other. Now they both look at each other and the boy touches her cheek while the song sings: "She's the one". The scene cuts to a presentation of all the different SkinWhite bars of soap with a voice-over telling us: “SkinWhite - for a beautiful blush white skin”.

The signs of this commercial are: the SkinWhite bar of soap which signifies a beautiful, smooth, even, protected and white skin. The Synchrowhite action signifies a new technology and the lyrics “She’s the one” signifies that the boy has found love. There are no explicit paradigmatic signs in this commercial such as the juxtaposition of dark and light skin colour.

The main sign of this commercial is the bar of soap that is being advertised. The bar of soap is promised to give different qualities to its user, most importantly whiter skin. Even though the brand, SkinWhite, is from the Philippines, the advertisement and the brand behind the advertisement is trying to create and spread a view and a norm. With advertisements, various
qualities are shifted to the product which helps the company and the brand spread their agenda (Rose, 2007). The boy in the commercial is attracted to the girl, we are told how much he loves her skin and wonder if she is the one. The woman’s voice-over tells the viewer to “captivate him with your favourite SkinWhite soaps…” therefore the SkinWhite soap signifies power and love. With the power from using the soap, the commercial tells us that a potential love interest can be “captivated” with a white, smooth and even skin tone. Therefore, by buying this soap, girls can gain racial capital which can be allocated to different things, but in the case of this commercial, girls ought to use their racial capital to “captivate” a love interest. The skin tone is also depicted as the most essential characteristic of the girl, as it is the only thing we hear the boy mentioning.

The sign of “syncrowhite action” quality of the soap signifies a new technology. The company is trying to sell the product by marketing it as more effective. With the sign, the company creates a view that the old soaps and other soaps on the market are not effective enough to whiten the skin. Therefore, a new technology has been developed to make people get even better results. Furthermore, the company behind the soap tries to change the population’s views and opinions by manipulating the audience into thinking that they need a more effective way to whiten their skin.

Finally, the lyrics in the end saying: "She's the one" signify love, and that the boy in the commercial has found love. At the beginning of the commercial, the boy was indecisive and wondering whether or not she was the one. But because the girl uses the SkinWhite soap with the new technology, she convinces the boy that she is the one for him. Thus, the sign of the lyrics signifies that any girl using this particular soap can make a boy sure about their relationship.

In conclusion, I would argue that the product in the commercial is depicting the same kind of notion as the previous commercial did: with a whiter, lighter skin, a person can gain racial capital and therefore get a partner, or in this case, a boyfriend. Even though the company behind the product is not from the Western world, it still has the opportunity to create views and ideals of beauty, which strengthens the views coming from the Western world. These views and opinions also work together to strengthen colourism in the society and showing that having whiter skin makes you more successful, at least in love.
This commercial is for Nivea and it stars two women walking down a street. The target audience is women. The format of the commercial starts with the interaction between the women and the men walking by. In the middle of the commercial, there is the presentation of the advertised product and its different qualities. The commercial ends with a new interaction between the women and another group of men. There is a fast-paced music playing throughout the commercial.

The commercial begins with two men walking past two women on a street. The voice-over of the woman in grey is heard saying: “Hey, they’re checking us out! Let’s give them a show”, whereas she pulls her blouse down to reveal her shoulders. The men walking by them do not look excited, whereby the woman in grey makes a sad face, while evaluating her skin’s condition by touching her skin. The scene cuts to a presentation of the product and its qualities. The scene shows a half-naked woman gently showing off her skin, while it magically turns lighter/fairer/whiter whilst the voice-over continues to talk about the different qualities of the effectiveness of the product. The scene cuts back to the two women walking. This time it is the woman in blue who pulls down her blouse to reveal a whiter skin, compared to the woman in grey. The voice-over is heard saying: "Fair skin isn't enough, it has to be healthy too". At the same time, a group of men are heard walking by them, and one man almost trips.

The signs of the commercial are: the product, Nivea Body UV Whitening Serum, which signifies repairing, whitening and protecting the skin. The scene where the woman in grey is evaluating her "dark" skin condition with the voice-over: "Sun-damaged" works as a syntagmatic sign and it signifies a bad condition of the skin, caused by sun exposure. Moreover, the skin colour of the woman in grey acts as a sign, opposing the healthy, non-damaged, whiter skin of her peer in blue. The skin colour of the woman in blue is also a sign, therefore these different skin colours act as paradigmatic signs.
The product advertised in the Nivea commercial promises to repair the dull skin from sun-damage, to whiten the skin, and also to protect the skin from future sun-damage with an "innovative serum". Nivea is a German brand; thus, the brand signifies aspects of European civilisation. Not unlike the first commercial analysed, this commercial also has the power to create the image of ideal beauty and to spread it across the globe with different products and advertisements as a western brand and company. The product promises to whiten the skin; therefore, the product also signifies whiteness. Moreover, that whiteness can be bought with a cream. The cream also transfers the ideology, the view of beauty created by the company to the consumers.

Furthermore, the commercial presents the product to be a help for a dull and sun-damaged skin. The phrase "sun-damaged" in the commercial is a sign that signifies dark skin. Sun damage has medical reasoning, but there is also the notion in many Asian countries that dark skin is associated with outdoors labour, which in itself is associated with low social class and poverty (Hunter, 2007, Singson, 2017; Dixon & Telles, 2017). Therefore, white skin is associated with high social class and prestige. In this commercial, the connotations of dark and white skin are reinforced. There is much evidence from different countries, where lighter skinned people of colour earn more money, finish more years in education, live in better neighbourhoods and have better health (Hunter, 2005; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007; Dixon & Telles, 2017). Even though this commercial does not explicitly mention the aforementioned aspects of colourism, the underlying idea of skin colour and its qualities can be seen.

What is more, the dark-skinned woman in grey does not get positive reactions from the men walking by, they even frown at her. Their reaction makes her sad and she evaluates her skin’s condition. However, her friend in blue gets attention from another group of men walking by, and we understand that it is because she has whiter skin than her friend. The women’s different skin colours signify many things. The darker skin colour signifies unattractiveness, which does not attract positive reactions from the opposite gender. However, the whiter skin colour attracts and makes the men trip, we thereby understand that the white skin signifies beauty and attractiveness. Therefore, with the Nivea product, women can attain racial capital, which subsequently gives them better luck in love and more positive attention from men.

In overall, the commercial is based on a juxtaposition of white and dark skin colour to show the different aspects of both skin tones. White being the more attractive one and dark being
the inferior one. Moreover, the Nivea product is shown in the commercial as a tool to repair one’s “sun-damaged skin” that does not gain attention from men, so that it becomes fairer and healthier and make men gaze so badly that they trip when they see you.

5.2 Success in career

This part of the analysis will be focusing on the two out of the five chosen commercials that focuses on career and prestige. The analysis will focus on colourism and how light-skinned people of colour are more successful in their careers. The analysis will also discuss whiteness as a commodity and Western influence of the perception of beauty. It is to be noted that both of the commercials in this part of the analysis star Filipina celebrities, therefore the impact of celebrity endorsement will also be analysed. The commercials were chosen because of their plots, their characters and their environment. The commercials chosen to analyse in this chapter are the brands from the Western world; Pond’s and Olay.

5.2.1 Analysis of commercial - Pond’s Skin Whitening Vitamin Cream

This commercial is advertising Pond's Skin Whitening Vitamin Cream. It stars the Filipina celebrity and movie actress Claudine Barretto. The format of the commercial includes a scene of Barretto speaking in an indoor environment, the scenes changes to different scenes showing the product and its qualities. The commercial ends with a visual presentation of the product and by showing Unilever’s logo.
The commercial starts with Baretto going through her old pictures and saying “I was so dark before... and many people commented that I wouldn't succeed in show business. I had to work hard and take care of my skin if I wanted to succeed". After this, the scene cuts to a scene showing several pictures of various faces together with Barretto’s face, the voice-over tells us: "Just like the millions of lives touched by Pond's Whitening Vitamin Cream…” and continues by demonstrating the qualities that the product promises with Baretto. The scene cuts to showing us Baretto’s face in three different skin tones, from dark to light. The commercial ends with the presentation of the product and the slogan “for flawless, rosy white skin” and with a logo of Unilever.

The signs of the commercial are; the product that signifies flawless and rosy white skin. Baretto signifies fame, success and prestige. The Unilever logo signifies a Western ideology of beauty. Her old photos with her dark skin signify unsuccessfulness. Her voice-over at the beginning of the commercial "I was so dark before…” is a syntagmatic sign signifying that darkness is associated with unsuccess.

The main signifier of the commercial is the product that is shown to “even out pimple scars” and to whiten the skin. With the celebrity endorsement, the product becomes more appealing to the audience and the audience becomes more convinced as to how effective the product really is. The celebrity endorsement also boosts the image of the brand and the company. Celebrity endorsements generally appeal to the audience in a way that it tells us that a celebrity’s beauty, prestige and successfulness can be attainable by the product advertised. In the case of Pond's commercial, the beauty and success of Baretto are shown to be attainable by whitening the skin.

Furthermore, Baretto's voice-over at the beginning of the commercial tells us that people did not believe in her being successful in show business when she was dark. In the commercial Baretto is a lot lighter than she was in the old pictures she was going through. She also says in the commercial that "I had to work hard and take care of my skin if I wanted to succeed". This perpetuates the beauty idea that dark skin is a bad skin colour that needs to be taken cared of. Just as in the Nivea commercial, where a bad skin was a sun-damaged skin that did not attract men, in this Pond's commercial Barretto, had to take care of her dark skin. By using Pond's cream to whiten her skin she could succeed and be successful in the show business.
In conclusion, the product in this commercial is depicted as Baretto’s career saver. When she was dark skinned nobody believed in her and now that she has whitened her skin, with the aforementioned product, she can pursue her dream and have better chances to succeed in her career. This message reinforces the colourism theory presented in the theory section about how light-skinned people of colour tend to do better career wise than darker skinned people of colour.

5.2.2 Analysis of commercial - Olay Natural White Soap Bar

This commercial is advertising the Olay natural white bar of soap and it stars the Chinese-Filipina celebrity, Kim Chiu. The format of the commercial includes a scene of Chiu using the product and demonstrating its qualities indoors, followed by a scene with other people and a final scene presenting the product and the brand. There is a voice-over during the whole commercial.

The commercial starts with Chiu examining her skin looking unhappy. The voice-over tells us: “Why let your skin keep you in the shadows? Step out from the dark with Olay natural white”. The scene cuts to a scene with Chiu using the product on her skin, magically turning her skin brighter. The voice-over explains that with the soap, one can bathe their body in light so “You can step out from the dark, into the spotlight”. After using the soap, Chiu runs out in a white dress in the middle of people, while the crowd cheers and the cameras are flashing. During this scene, Chiu says: “This is your moment!”. The commercial ends with a scene presenting the product together with Olay’s logo and slogan: “Challenge what’s possible”.

The signs in this commercial are: the product that signifies glowing and fair skin, the logo and brand Olay, which signifies Western ideology of beauty. The cameras and the cheering
crowd signify fame and popularity. The dark and light skin colour acts as paradigmatic signs in this commercial since they are presented as opposites. The syntagmatic sign of the commercial is the linguistic message, the voice-over during the commercial, telling us: "You can step out from the dark, into the spotlight", "This is your moment!" and the slogan of Olay "Challenge what's possible".

The product, a bar of soap, promises its user a glowing bright skin and spotlights, contrasting the darkness and being closed in. This message suggests that a person with dark skin should stop hiding indoors and use this skin whitening product in order to step "out into the spotlight". This suggests that people with dark skin are ashamed of their dark skin and therefore cannot be out and open, thus to being truly out around people one should use this bar of soap to "brighten their skin". What is more, in many Asian countries, dark skin is associated with manual outdoors labour and other blue-collar occupations and light skin are associated with indoors white-collar occupations. In this commercial, however, the position has been shifted, the dark-skinned woman spends her time indoors because she does not want to show her skin. After brightening her skin and turning whiter, she can truly go out and enjoy the company of other people.

The brand Olay is an American brand and it signifies Western ideology. Like other brands analysed in this thesis, brands can produce their own view of beauty and spread it to other countries in the world with mass media. The view transferred with this product and the commercial is that whiteness is beautiful and that with a white skin one can step out into the middle of a crowd and be the centre of the attention.

The cameras and the cheering crowd signify fame and popularity. With the celebrity endorsement of Kim Chiu, the product is more appealing to the audience (Hunter, 2011). Moreover, the cameras and cheering crowd tells us that by using this product, one can also achieve such beauty, popularity and prestige as Chiu. The scene in the beginning, with Chiu examining her “dark” skin, gives us the impression that even a famous celebrity could have had skin “issues” too, and that the soap helped her overcome these issues and that the soap gave her better chances in show business. With a celebrity starring in a commercial that advertises skin whitening products, skin whitening becomes normalized. Moreover, Chiu saying: "This is your moment!" in the commercial tells us that by using this soap, one can start living and achieving their dreams in a way that was not possible before. With a light skin, one can have better
opportunities, e.g. to get a better job, a promotion and/or a husband and to possibly even star in a soap opera.

In conclusion, the main idea of the commercial is that by using the bar of soap advertised to whiten the skin, people can stop hiding in the dark and worry about their dark skin, step into the spotlight and achieve the same kind of beauty and prestige as Kim Chiu, the endorsing celebrity.
6 Conclusion

Advertisements are viewed as reflecting the society’s needs, opinions, views and norms. They also work as a medium for companies to uphold an ideology and to spread the ideology across the globe. Since most of the TV commercials found were targeted at women or had a woman as the protagonist, it can be assumed that the idea of beauty shaped by companies and brands mostly affect women. The first three commercials analysed depicted the product as a way to gain racial capital in order to succeed in love and to get attention from the opposite gender. Pond’s commercial with the celebrity Baretto depicted the product as something that helps you succeed in getting better job opportunities. In the last commercial for Olay's bar of soap, the product was depicted as a way out to the world by whitening your skin. With celebrity endorsement, the prestige, beauty and success of the celebrity is to be believed as something that is attainable by using the soap. Different companies create images of beauty and spread these images around the world, changing people's perception of what is considered beautiful. It also perpetuates colourism in non-western societies, where light-skinned people achieve greater things in life than their darker skinned peers.

Furthermore, the skin whitening products in the TV commercials were depicted as a way to achieve love. Without using the whitening product advertised, one cannot find love, be empowered, take care of themselves, succeed in life, career-wise and so on. The TV commercials also strengthen the view that a woman's appearance is everything, without taking care of her appearance she cannot achieve things in life.

The chosen commercials in this thesis might not be representative of all commercials in the Philippines that advertise skin whitening products, but they give an insight to the wider phenomenon, that is evident, not only in the Philippines, but also in many other societies. The popularity of skin whitening products is growing and one of the reasons to why is because of the way these products are being advertised in TV commercials. With the different connotations to dark and light skin, and by the use of celebrity endorsements in TV commercials, skin whitening is being normalized and will ultimately become something that is inevitable for a dark skinned person to do, to be able to succeed in life, love and employment.
References

Literature


Videos


