

## SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS ON WEIGHT LOSS PRODUCT ADVERTISEMENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*The objectives of this study were to find out the types of semiotic signs, the verbal and visual meanings of these signs, and the relationship among verbal and visual signs used in weight loss product ads. Qualitative method with descriptive approach was used in this study. 10 weight loss product ads were used in this study. There are icons, indexes, and symbols found in this study. There are 10 icons (100%), 7 indexes (70%), and 4 symbols (40%). Peirce's theory was used in finding the types of semiotics in this study, and Saussure's theory was used in finding the verbal and visual meanings as well as its relationship among them. The result of the study shows that the verbal and visual signs are used to create clear meanings and both of them have strong relationship in delivering messages of the products.*

**Key words :** *Semiotic, Weight Loss Product Advertisements, and Verbal and Visual Signs.*

### 1) Introduction

Saussure (1996, p:16) states that language is a system of signs that expresses ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, and many others. People depend on language and people use language to convey something to other people or simply to express their feelings or thoughts by way of certain communications. There are at least two ways of communicating which are verbal and visual signs. One of the studies of linguistics that studies signs and meanings is semiotics. Chandler (2007, p:10) states that people have to learn to understand meanings of particular signs in any cultural contexts in which they are engaged. Semiotic seems to be the key of interpretation of anything we see in our daily lives. According to Pierce, cited in Noth's book (1990, p:36), semiotic signs are classified into three groups; (1) icon, which is the connection between sign and object because of its similarities, (2) index, which is the connection between sign and object because of cause and effect, (3) symbol, which is the connection between sign and object because of the agreement or convention in societies. Meanwhile, Saussure's theory of semiotics namely significant (*signifier*) and signified (*signified*), is used to get meanings of verbal and visual signs from three types of Pierce's semiotics model.

Everything we encounter verbally or visually around us has meaning. The *Indonesian flag conveys a particular meaning, the red color represents bravery and the white color is the sign of purity. Another example of a visual sign is the traffic light. Each color conveys a different meaning. Red means "stop", yellow means "get ready" and blue means drivers "can go".* Verbal signs are everywhere. For example, in "Nutrastart", a weight loss product, there is phrase which states "*kick start to a great start*". The verbal

*message in this advertisement invites interested persons to realize that they have to do something to get started. They need to buy this product in order to get in shape.*

Based on the phenomena above, the writer was interested in weight loss product advertisements because it is one of the most effective tools used to introduce products within a society. He believes that this study is needed in order to reveal how signs work in advertisements to create interest in the products advertised. This study revealed the use of semiotic signs, icons, indexes, and symbols. Therefore, he was interested in conducting research on a thesis entitled "Semiotic Analysis on Weight Loss Product Advertisements". The researcher concentrates on analyzing the three types of semiotic signs, verbal and visual signs as well as the relationship between them.

Moreover, there were several problems of the study formulated in the research. Namely: (1) what are the types of semiotic signs found on weight loss product advertisements, (2) what are the verbal and visual meanings of signs found on weight loss product advertisements, and (3) what is the relationship between verbal and visual signs found on weight loss product ads.

#### A. Methodology

There were 10 advertisements obtained online that were used as data. They were mostly manufactured in the U.S.A. Only a couple of them were produced in different countries such as Japan and South Africa. They were collected from November 14<sup>th</sup> through November 25<sup>th</sup> of 2015 for publication. In collecting the data, the researcher used four steps. Firstly, he collected the ads on Google and printed them. Secondly, he selected 10 ads by using purposive sampling to find which ads contained verbal and visual semiotics based on Saussure's theory. Thirdly, he listed the samples on a table. Finally, he classified words and phrases based on

Saussure's theory, interpreted his findings, and drew conclusions based on the findings.

## 2. Result And Discussion

The researcher found 10 icons of signs, 7 indexes and 4 symbols in 10 weight loss advertisements. The percentage of each type can be seen in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1. Icon, Index and Symbol

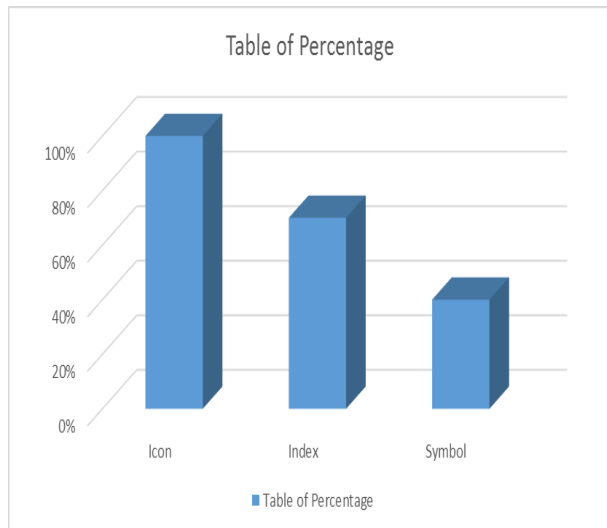


Chart 1 shows the total of icons, indexes and symbols. They were the semiotic types that were found in each weight loss product advertisement. The result of each type was slightly different. The percentage of these 10 weight loss advertisements were as follows: 100% of the advertisement had icons, 70% had indexes and 40% had symbols. It could be seen from this result that icons were dominant among the two other semiotic types. It was clear that the weight loss product advertisements liked to use the icons sign simply because it was catchy. They instilled a very little sign on it, yet this sign will tell almost every aspect that the advertisers want. However, the indexes and symbols were not neglected. They helped the icon sign to make the meaning crystal clear.

There were 10 weight loss product ads analyzed. They were *Dietrine*, *Hoodiap57*, *Hydroxycut*, *La-Mar Reducing Soap*, *Nutrastart*, *Protein World*, *Seven Break Gel*, *Shred*, *Uzap*, *Vegetable Juice Enzyme Magic*. The findings of this study shows that all of Pierce's classifications of icons were significantly found in each advertisement followed by indexes, and symbols. The verbal and visual meanings were equally found in 10 advertisements. Each of the advertisements contains verbal and visual signs. The verbal and visual signs have a crucial role in creating meaning for each product. Also, the relationships between verbal and visual signs are interconnected. The fact is that they clearly support each other in delivering the messages of the ads. Both verbal and visual signs have successfully delivered meaningful messages for the products.

### 1) Dietrine

**Carb Blocker & Fat Blocker**  
 Lose Weight the Easy Way  
 Eat What You Like When You Like

Dietrine Carb Blocker is the first nutritional ingredient that has been clinically & scientifically proven to neutralize starch, found in your favorite foods such as potatoes, breads, & pasta.

Dietrine Carb Blocker allows you to enjoy the foods that you love without all the calories.

**2 Free Bottles**

Dietrine™ Carb Blocker will help you:

- Blocks Carbohydrates
- Increases Metabolism
- Reduces fat storage
- Boosts energy levels
- Controls carb cravings

[Click Here to Learn More](#)

\$100 Saving for a limited time when ordering our Maximum Results package

Gambar 1. Dietrine, Carb Blocker & Fat Blocker

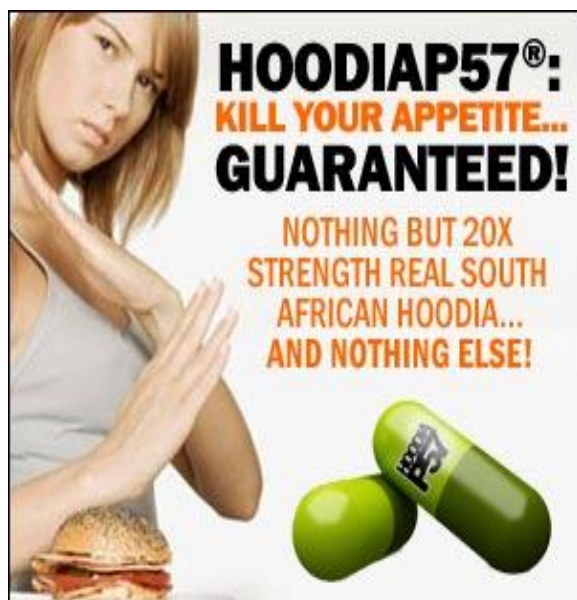
The first advertisement of weight loss is classified as icon and index. The colors and images on the ad make it iconic. It attracts the attention of the reader using various colors and an image displaying what they claim the product will do for the consumer. The two free bottles are offered with the effect shown in the image.

The verbal sign in this advertisement is "Eat What You Like When You Like". Many people, especially women, are afraid of eating a variety of foods because they do not want to become overweight. Some women are sometimes willing to go on an extreme diet. They eat very little in order to have a slim body like models found in advertisements. For these reasons, the advertiser smartly uses a short verbal message "Eat What You Like When You Like". The advertiser tries to persuade the audience who likes to eat, but wants to be slim. The advertiser tries to instill the idea that getting a slim body is not as difficult as people think by using the statement "Lose Weight the Easy Way". Many people believe that "You are what you eat". This means that if you eat healthy food you will be healthy but if you eat unhealthy food you will be unhealthy. Therefore, women do not have to be afraid anymore to eat as they want because there is Dietrine. This product has the ability to block carbohydrates and fat. Women now can consume this weight loss product and they can eat any food they like without having a guilty conscience.

The visual sign in this weight loss product is the excited woman who will happily eat a donut. She is not like many other women who normally are worried about eating specific foods that can cause someone to gain weight quickly.

The verbal sign in this advertisement is "Eat What You Like When You Like". This message clearly says to the audience who consumes Dietrine to not be afraid of eating anything they want because this weight loss product has the ability to block fat and carbohydrates. The visual sign of the woman's face also supports the verbal sign. She has no fear of eating any food she desires, not even donuts, which are high in sugar and cause rapid weight gain.

2) Hoodiap57



Gambar 2. Hoodiap57, Kill Your Appetite

Iconicity is evidence that human perception is highly attentive to recurrent pattern of color, shape, dimension, movement, sound taste, etc. The first inscription, cave drawings, and pictographic sign of humanity indicate that iconicity has always played an important role in human development. Therefore, the sign of this advertisement is categorized as an icon sign and “your” is the index sign.

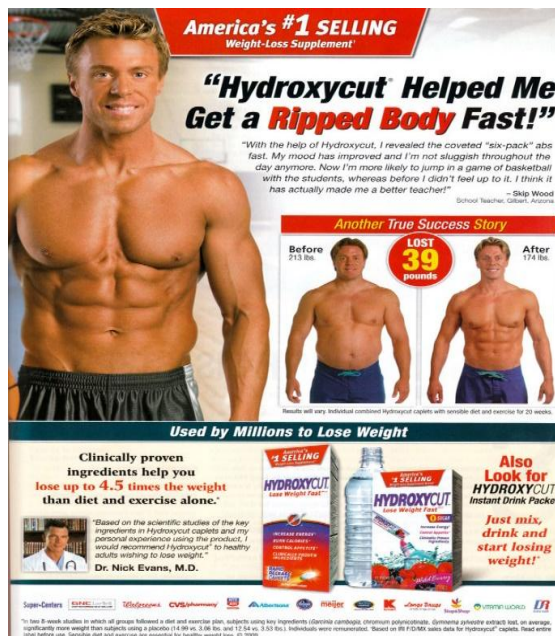
Looking at the words can indicate the verbal sign. The verbal sign in this product is “Kill Your Appetite”. The advertiser uses the word “kill” in the product to show what this product can do for the audience. But it does not mean kill the appetite completely because if it does so, then people will get sick and even die. It actually means control your appetite because eating too much is not good for anyone. For example, it will affect health. Having an overweight body will lead both women and men to diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, liver damage, and many others. Many people desire a slim body, they try to do a diet but it is way too difficult. So, by buying this product, people do not have to suffer through a crazy diet. They just need to take this product and it will control the desire to overeat, and most importantly they will acquire the slim body like they desire.

The visual signifier communication is usually understood as the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless messages. Therefore, the visual sign in this weight loss product is the blonde woman with her hands crossed. She looks like she is refusing to eat junk food. She has actually been helped by this product to help control her appetite by not over eating but still enjoying food like the hamburger shown above.

The verbal and visual signifiers relate to each other. The verbal and visual signs in this product support both sides in order to create a clear message to the audience.

“Kill Your Appetite” is the verbal signifier that is followed by the visual sign of a woman who is refusing to eat the hamburger. In conclusion, if any woman takes this weight loss product pill, she will be able to control her appetite. She will not eat too much food especially junk food that is bad for your health, money, and appearance.

3) Hydroxycut



Gambar 3. Hydroxycut, Helped Me Get a Ripped Body Fast

This type of this advertisement is icon. As was explained in the first advertisement that semiotic sign groups photographs as an icon type. The verbal “Me” is the index, and “Ripped Body” is the symbol of a body with a six-pack.

The signifier of the verbal sign in this advertisement offers a great solution to any overweight man. The verbal says “Hydroxycut” Helped Me Get a Ripped Body Fast” which is the first thing that any man would see. Moreover, the literal meaning of ripped is torn or lacerated. These days the term of ripped body is used to define “well defined muscles, six-packs or stoned”. So, the verbal message of this advertisement literally signifies that this weight loss product can help any man to cut their body fat and cause them to have an athletic ripped body. The promising statement offers two advantages for those who buy the product; which are losing body fat quickly and having an athletic ripped body without spending much time exercising in a gym.

Therefore, the advertiser again depicts the man who has the ripped body with a smile as the visual sign; he also shows two pictures of men with a big belly before consuming the product and the ripped body man as the result of consuming the product. The aim of this visual message is to prove to the audience that if any man buys

this product, then they will get a ripped body like the man in the advertisement attached.

This advertisement is flawless. Everyone wants to have a ripped body as fast as possible as mentioned in the advertisement. Therefore, this advertisement has created a good connection in delivering the message of the product where the verbal 'Get a Ripped Body' signifies that any man obviously can get a ripped body by consuming the product advertised, and the visual picture of a man with a ripped body amazingly supports the verbal message of the product. Both signs are combined together to explain the benefit of this product to its audience.

#### 4) *La-Mar Reducing Soap*



Gambar 4. *La-Mar Reducing Soap, Wash Away Fat and Years of Age*

The type displayed by this advertisement is iconic sign since it has very clear drawings of three stages of weight loss of a woman on it. The icon itself is the connection between sign and object because of its similarities. The exclamation mark "!" in the word "reduce" is also the symbol that stands for command in this advertisement.

Most people think that being a fat woman is not good for their health and appearance. The perception of less healthy might be correct. However, many slim women get sick too. Also, the people who say that a fat woman is ugly are absolutely rude, racist, and their judgment cannot be justified. The fact is that many fat women are beautiful. The standard of beauty sometimes depends on the country in which people live. The standard of beauty that people have created is always subjective and debatable. It seems that people will never be able to find an absolute standard of the beauty because every person has their own definition of beautiful. However, many people from differing countries believe that a beautiful woman is only a woman who has a slim body. Therefore, the signifier of verbal sign in this advertisement is Wash Away Fat and

Years of Age, the word "wash away" in this advertisement indicates the function of this soap that has the ability to wash away body fat. The advertiser clearly signifies this verbal sign to say to audience that by using this soap one can make women become slim. This advertisement also has features that tell the benefit of this product such as it can reduce fat in any part of body desired without other means, and women can get slim as they wish. Wash Years of Age also indicates that when people use this soap, they will look younger than their actual age.

The visual signifier in this advertisement lies on the iconic sign of the three pictures of the woman who has been transformed into a slimmer body after taking the product advertised. This is actually the proof of the quality of the product. Any woman who buys this product will have the same experience as the woman in the picture. They will obtain a slim body and will live a long life.

The advertisers always create an understandable message within their advertisements where the verbal signifier, which is words, will always support the signifier of the visual sign of its advertisement in order to deliver the message of their product clearly, which is to claim to cut peoples' body fat easily and quickly.

#### 5) *Nutrastart*



Gambar 5. *Nutrastart, Kick Start to a Great Start*

This semiotic sign can be classified into iconic sign as it is explained in the previous advertisements as this advertisement has a picture that indicates the category of the iconic sign in semiotic. The measured-string is also identified as a symbol of being slim. Pierce called the object of an icon the "immediate" object. He explained the actual referent, which lies outside the sign and may be represented in an infinite number of ways through the "dynamical" object.

The verbal signifier sign in this weight loss product is 'Kick Start to a Great Start', the verbal message in this advertisement invites women to realize that they have to get ready to do something with their body fat. It also tries to tell the audience not to put off a good thing if they can do it now because how you begin is important. In this case, women should choose the best weight loss product to consume as their first step to having a slim body. The message implicitly says that if you are fat then you have

to decide to buy and consume “Nutrasrat” because this product has the ability to make women become slim with its contained benefits.

The visual signifier in this advertisement is the woman who is wearing a pink shirt with a black skirt and holding a measuring-strip. This signifies that she has the body shape that she has been dreaming of. She has successfully gotten her dream body because of the Nutrastart she has consumed.

The relationship between the signifier of verbal and visual signs in this weight loss product advertisement is that the visual sign strongly supports the verbal. The verbal sign ‘Kick Start to a Great Start’ uses the visual signs through a picture of a slim woman to prove the benefits of each weight loss product advertised. It is obviously not enough if the advertisers display a verbal sign or visual sign only within their advertisement because women will be more interested in visually seeing what they can achieve, for example, how slim they will be if they buy the product advertised.

#### 6) Protein World



Gambar 6. Protein World, Are You Beach Body Ready

This type of this semiotic sign in this weight loss product is icon and index. The woman serves as the icon of the product and the personal pronoun “you” as the index sign. It relates the participants who are taking part in this situation with each other.

The verbal signifier in this product is ‘Are You Beach Body Ready’; beach body here implies a slim body. This verbal statement literally signifies if any woman is ready to have a slim body, like the woman on the beach that wears this swimming suit showing a slim body, she should buy the product advertised. This also means that by having a beach body, it will make any woman become more confident in wearing any clothes they want. They do not have to feel insecure when they hang out with friends or boyfriends anywhere or at

anytime because they have the body they desire and feel confident when people see it. Otherwise, if they are fat, they will have less confidence when they are wearing their clothes. For example, when they are wearing their swimsuits on the beach or just hanging out with friends or boyfriends. Women now days are afraid of having a fat body, their perception of a fat body somehow are very intimidating. That is why they would try anything that can help make them slim.

The visual sign in this product is the woman who is wearing the yellow swimming suit. She has curves, long hair, tanned skin, beautiful, and confident in her swimming suit. The model of this advertisement represents a beach body. The visual sign tells all women who do not have a slim body to quickly buy the product and consume it regularly in order to have a beach body like the model captured in the advertisement.

The signifier of the verbal and visual signs in this advertisement is that they support both sides in order to make it more interesting. A picture of a beautiful woman who wears a swimsuit supports the verbal statement, ‘Are You Beach Body Ready’. She is always confident to go to the beach because she has a slim body. This also tells women that they can feel the same by consuming this product.

#### 7) Seven Break Gel



Gambar 7. Seven Break Gel, Get Slim in 7 Days

This advertisement is classified as an iconic sign because it has a photograph of a model as the object; it also has symbolism from the white color of her outfit that indicates cleanliness and beauty. Therefore, the advertisement above has iconic and symbolic signs.

The advertisement above also has both verbal and visual signs. The name of this product is “Seven Break Gel”, and the verbal sign is “Get Slim in 7 Days”. The advertiser smartly displays a promising extravagant statement that he instills on the advertisement in order to trigger a lot of attention from the audience to at least notice it and read more about it. People’s perception

about getting a slim body is somehow only a dream. It requires a long process and is difficult. Therefore, the advertiser tries to change people's perception about how long a process is required to obtain a slim body. He delivers an interesting verbal message within the advertisement. Only 7 days is extremely fast for someone to reduce body fat. This promise might seem too exaggerated. After all, there are very few persons who do not want to have a slim body. That is why this verbal signifier is very attractive to its viewers.

The visual sign is attached by displaying a slim woman wearing a revealing white outfit as a signifier. It is signified that the advertiser is trying to say that if you buy and apply this weight loss gel, you will get a slim body like the model displayed in the advertisement.

This advertisement shows an epic combination where the verbal and visual signs support each other in order to achieve the advertiser's aims in selling the product where the verbal "Get Slim in 7 Days" is supported by the visual sign showing "a slim woman wearing a white outfit". This advertisement actually tries to say that if any woman buys and uses this weight loss gel, they can get a slim body in 7 days as the woman captured in the advertisement who has experienced getting a slim body by taking it for 7 days.

8) *Shred*



Gambar 8. *Shred, Use Shred and Look Better Naked*

This photograph has indicated the icon sign. Iconicity abounds in all domains of human representation. The photograph of the woman wearing underclothes that match the color of the product depicts pleasures that will be experienced by consuming Shred. Not only is she not fully dressed, but also she is depicted beginning to remove what she is wearing.

The verbal sign in this advertisement is "Use Shred and Look better Naked", this advertisement means that having a slim body will make a woman more comfortable, beautiful, and interesting because she can

wear no clothes if she desires and will look perfectly good. The word naked attached can appeal to couples who are looking for romance and excitement. It implies that relationships will be more fulfilling and rewarding with a body that looks good naked. Therefore, the message in this advertisement offers the woman with a slim body more romantic relations.

The visual sign in this weight loss product is the blonde woman who holds her black underwear revealing her slim body. The advertiser has matched the color of the woman's cloths with the packaging. They both are black and she looks sexy.

The relationship between the verbal "Use Shred and Look Better Naked" and the visual image in this product has the same idea as the previous advertisements in that the visual and verbal sign need each other to support the idea that they have created which is to sell this weight loss product to as many people as possible.

9) *uZap*



Gambar 9. *Uzap, Slim down. Tone up. With Uzap*

This advertisement depicts a man who needs to lose weight and lacks tone. The picture displays the need that is answered by the verbal statement "Slim down. Tone up. With uZap." Therefore, the sign captured in this advertisement is classified as an iconic sign, and its index is the words down and up.

The verbal sign in this weigh loss product is "Slim Down, Tone Up, with uZap, with uZap, it's easy to get in shape. Just zap-zap". The literal meaning of Zap-zap is to destroy, in this case to destroy body fat. The need of getting into shape is not only for women. Many men are willing to spend a lot of time and money to go to a gym and buy supplements to help the process of reducing body fat. So, what the advertiser implies in this advertisement is that he offers any man or woman the opportunity to destroy their body fat by using the uZap machine. This machine is very easy to use, any man or woman can put this machine anywhere they want on their body. This machine has the ability to make people

lose their body fat and become toned. In addition, people will prefer this machine to pills because it is practical, quicker, and healthier.

The visual sign in this advertisement is the man who shows his belly fat. He tries to tell the audience who identify with the same type of belly that they can also use this product to destroy body fat.

The verbal sign in this weigh loss product is Slim Down, Tone Up, with uZap, with uZap, it's easy to get in shape. Just zap-zap is emphasized the by visual sign of the man who shows his belly fat. He tries to identify with the audience who has the same belly so that they will use the product he is promoting.

#### 10) *Vegetable Juice Enzyme Magic*



**Gambar 10.** *Vegetable Juice Enzyme Magic, 3 Size Done in 2 Weeks*

This advertisement is classified as an icon sign. Iconicity is evidence that human perception is highly attentive to recurrent pattern of color, shape, dimension, movement, sound taste, etc. This advertisement used the appearance of movement and color. The yellow arrow that points to her body is the index that stands for the product that will help women who need to lose weight in their waist.

The advertisement above has both verbal and visual signifiers. The name of this product is "Vegetable Juice Enzyme Magic", the verbal sign of this product is "3 Sizes Down in 2 weeks". This verbal statement is very interesting either to those who have over weight bodies or simply to anyone who sees it. It has never been easy for some women to lose body fat especially when they have gone through pregnancy, some more than once. There are many obstacles to keeping their bodies slim. For example being busy taking care of their kids, husbands, or even helping others who have no other help with chores in their homes. Because of these reasons, they spend a lot of time helping their families and

eventually do not have time to care for themselves by doing exercises and taking care of their bodies. The advertisers have researched this situation. Therefore, the verbal message of this product tells women that this product has the ability to size down their clothes' size in just 2 weeks. For example, before a woman consumes this product, she might use the extra large size, but after she has consumed the product regularly, the size of her clothes could go down to a small. This promising statement is very tempting. After all there is no woman who does not want to lose body fat in such a short time considering it is almost impossible for her to lose body fat the regular way.

The signifier of visual sign is attached by displaying a sexy woman in a white outfit. She looks confident holding the yellow measuring tape around her hips. This visual sign actually shows a woman successful in obtaining a slim body after consuming Vegetable Juice Enzyme Magic for 2 weeks. The advertiser has successfully shown that this product can transform the body of any woman to become slim if they are willing to buy and consume the product advertised.

This advertisement shows a perfect combination where the verbal and visual signs are connected. The visual sign of a sexy woman with her white outfit supports the verbal "3 Size Down in 2 Weeks". She looks confident holding the yellow tape over her hips. The purpose of the verbal and visual signs in this advertisement is actually the same as the other weight loss products, they are basically trying to say that if any woman buys and uses the weight loss product, then they can get slim. The woman captured in the advertisement is the one who has experienced getting a slim body in 2 weeks by taking the product advertised.

### 3. Conclusion

It can be concluded that all of the advertisements use semiotic signs. They are icons, indexes, and symbols. The signs are used to make them interesting, understandable, and effective. The verbal and visual signs are always added in weight loss product advertisements in order to deliver the clearest message about the supposed benefits of the products advertised. In 10 out of 10 or 100% of the advertisements, icons were observed, indexes were observed in 7 out of 10 or 70% of the advertisements, and symbols were observed in 4 out of 10 or 40% of the advertisements.

The verbal and visual signs are always attached in all 10 advertisements. Their appearances were meant to make the advertisements clear for the audience. The verbal sign plays a strong role in persuading the audience to pay attention on the product that is being advertised or sold. The visual sign is also crucial. Some people like to see something visually rather than verbally. The role of the visual sign in an advertisement is extremely important in convincing the audience to buy the product that is being advertised.

Also, the relationship between verbal and visual sign is tight. Both of them always support each other in

delivering the messages of each of the products advertised. The function of a verbal sign is not clear enough without the help of a visual sign while the verbal sign adds credibility to the visual. Both signs rely on each other in creating a clear meaning of a certain product that is being advertised. Therefore, when the verbal and visual signs are attached in one advertisement, the message of an advertisement can be achieved.

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