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# **Representation of Gender Equality in Downy's Product Advertising: A Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to semiotically analyze the representation of gender equality in Downy's product advertisements. This research uses qualitative research with constructivist paradigm approach. The researcher determines that the object of this research is the advertisement itself, namely the Downy version of the 'Together with Downy Harumkan Namamu for Free Expression' version. Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that this advertisement displays a clear meaning where this advertisement mentions many stereotypes of prohibitions or limitations that exist in society against women, this advertisement also mentions that these stereotypes are not always true as long as it is beneficial for themselves and many people. In addition, this reaffirms that a woman really needs to get equality, with the expressions shown in the advertisement convincing that women are also capable and have high enthusiasm to do anything they want. Furthermore, this advertisement wants to show the myth that is interpreted about the stereotypes that exist in society where women have many limitations such as in expression, in career, and in leading.

# Keywords

Equality; gender; advertising; semiotics; analysis

Budapest Institute

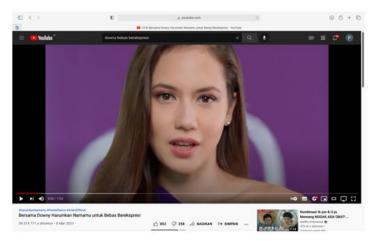


# **I. Introduction**

Currently, new products are emerging which make consumers confused in choosing which product to consume. This is an opportunity for producers to steal the attention of consumers, producers must make maximum efforts to inform their products and offer them (Indarto et al., 2022). There are so many efforts by producers to promote, it can be through public relations, sales promotion, digital marketing, advertising and many others. Advertising is one of the most frequently used forms of promotion and effort to attract the attention of consumers, according to research conducted by Gusmansyah (2019) proving that broadcasting advertisements with mass media provides a strong image which will further influence the minds of viewers. That way the ad should really be made as attractive as possible so that consumers are interested and always remember the product.

According to Purbasari & Jakti (2014) advertising is a communication process that has important strengths as a marketing tool that can help sell goods, offer services or services, and provide ideas through certain containers in the form of persuasive information. Each product has its own way of making advertisements for its products, food products have their own way of representing food, as well as household products which have their own way of representing their products.

This study photographed an advertisement for the Downy product version of "Together with Downy Make Your Name for Free Expression" which is an advertisement related to clothing fragrances where the product representation scenes are filled with the majority of women's activities who are passionate about free expression in realizing their dreams and aspirations, advertisements It stars Pevita Pearce. In the ad, Downy also tries to break the stereotype about women who can't be free and are always constrained by rules. The advertisement wants to prove that the rules or myths that exist in society about women are not an obstacle to free expression. Downy tries to convince women that as long as they can be confident, they can change these rules and as an encouragement to be free to express themselves and make their name known. The perspective of this advertisement has a hegemonic nature towards women where men are made so that they have no power over women (Ghani & Sunaryo, 2020). In the advertisement there is also an effort to fight against domination so that the position of women and men are equal, where this advertisement tries to show that it is not always men who dominate over something.



Source: data proceed **Figure 1.** Downy's ad version of "Together with Downy Make Your Name Good for Free Expression" on the YouTube platform

Downy's ad version of "Together with Downy Make Your Name Good for Free Expression" was broadcast on the YouTube platform in 2021 with a duration of 1 minute 34 seconds and until this research was written the ad had been viewed more than 39 million times. This advertisement features five Indonesian women who have succeeded in making their names known, including Pevita Pearce (Actress), Andini Effendi (Senior Journalist), Renatta Moeloek (Celebrity Chef), Kiky Saputri (Stand Up Comedian), Jeanne Phialsa (Drummer). It started with Pevita Pearce coming out of the elevator and telling stories about stereotypes about women in society and she also convinced women to remain free to express themselves. After that, there was a scene showing Kiky Saputri who had succeeded in making her name known in her own way, after that it was continued by another woman who was mentioned earlier. The ad ends with Pevita Pearce giving a motivational sentence to invite other women to make their name proud.

In 2017, we launched a gender equality campaign to show the world what we see equality. The campaign has been viewed millions of times in more than 180 countries and was named one of the most inclusive ads of 2017 by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA). We focused on three areas where we could make a specific difference, for clans & media namely "ANA found that 28% of ads reflect women negatively. As one of the world's largest advertisers, we use our strong voice to help break those stereotypes and motivate change to happen.



Source: data proceed Figure 2. Protector & Gamble Indonesia Official Page

From the statement given by P&G, it can be seen that that is the basis for the Downy advertisement version of "Together Downy Harumkan Your Name for Free Expression" was produced, and this advertisement is the object of this research. In connection with this information, the author sees those efforts to promote gender equality campaigns cannot be separated from the utility of a product, based on the majority of cultures, the use of fragrances is quite close to the representation of women. There is a relation between gender equality and Downy's products, which actually in this Downy product advertisement wants to say that this woman is strong. Even by washing clothes, a woman is actually strong and must remain and not lose to men. The visual representation of advertising cannot be separated from the utility of a product.

The focus of this research is how these advertisements can be represented in the form of visualizations that display an effort to include or send messages of gender equality to consumers. This research focuses on researching from the semiotic side which only focuses on the content of this Downy product advertisement.

To see the meaning of signs, symbols, and myths contained in the Downy product advertisement version of 'Together with Downy Make Your Name for Free Expression' the author uses a qualitative research method with a semiotic approach belonging to Roland Barthes which explores the meaning of signs, symbols, and myths.

## **II. Review of Literature**

## **2.1 Mass Communication**

According to Widayai & Hartati (2014), mass communication certainly has characteristics that are different from other types of communication, namely as follows: a) Mass communication has a source where not just one person, but a formal organization and the "sender" is usually a person. skilled communicators; b) The message is distinctive, diverse, and predictable and the message is usually "processed", standardized, and the latter is always duplicated; c) The relationship between a sender and a receiver is rarely interactive but one-way. The relationship is not personal, and also usually non-moral which occurs if the individual and the message disseminated or traded for money or exchanged for certain attention, meaning that the sender has no responsibility for the consequences; d) Recipients of information are part of a broad audience; e) Mass communication often takes

the joint contact of one sender with many receivers, makes a wide impact in a short period of time and evokes sudden action from the audience together.

## 2.2 New Media

The development of the current media can be said to be very rapid and fast moving, the emergence of new media or new media also brings its negative and positive sides. New media or online media has a definition like a product of communication that has a relationship between technology and digital computers (Firza, 2022). New media is used to explain the emergence of computerized and networked digital media as an effect of the development of information and communication technology (Wiranito & Wahjuwibowo, 2020). This online-based new media can certainly reach more people and audiences, nowadays almost everyone in the world uses new media or social media. This social media can be used with technology such as computers, smartphones, tablets and other similar things that have an internet connection.

## 2.3 Advertisement

Kotler and Armstrong revealed that advertising is a visual message to offer products to the public. Through advertising can represent an invitation as the delivery of a certain hegemony to the public. That's because advertising is a form of communication that aims to invite someone to choose their product, either according to their wishes or ideology. Advertising is a message that offers a product that can be used by the public or consumers. In addition, there is still a definition of advertising according to experts, namely according to Monle Lee and Carla Johnson, quoted from (Adi, 2021) and Luthfiyah & Kinanti (2020) advertising is a commercial and non-personal communication that has links with an organization whose products are offered to consumers. target audience, through mass media, such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, direct mail, outdoor billboards, and public transportation. The definition of advertising according to Lee and Carla emphasizes that advertising is a commercial communication from an organization whose products are offered to audiences through mass media.

# **2.4 Semiotics Roland Barthes**

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is actually a derivative of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, de Saussure played an important role in the pioneers of Structuralism, besides that he also published the concept of semiology. De Saussure's opinion about langue is a sign system that expresses ideas and there is also an alphabetic sign system for the mute, symbols in rituals, and signs in the military field. Langue according to de Saussure is the most important system. Therefore, he created a science that examines signs in social life which is included in the section of social psychology, then he named it semiologie. Linguistics is one part of science that is included in all these signs, and the rules of semiotics can be implemented.

# **III. Research Method**

This research uses qualitative research with constructivist paradigm approach. The researcher determined that the object of this research was the advertisement itself, namely the Downy version of the 'Together with Downy Harumkan Namamu for Free Expression' version. The researcher determined that this qualitative research used data collection techniques using two types of sources, namely primary and secondary data. In this study, secondary data was obtained from analyzing media texts by exploring directly each scene

or scene from product advertisements. In addition, secondary data for this research is a library study where literature and references that are related to this research will be searched to obtain data. The data analysis technique in this study uses Roland Berthes's analysis which focuses on the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth.

# **IV. Result and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Research Result**

The researcher raised an advertisement for the Downy version of the product "Together with Downy Make Your Name for Free Expression" to be the object of this research. The ad displays scenes that show jobs that are far from depicting a woman, even the work tends to be identical to men, these women are passionate about being free to express themselves according to their wishes without having to care about existing stereotypes. Downy's ad version of "Together with Downy Make Your Name Good for Free Expression" raises the background where Downy is trying to break the stereotype that has long circulated in society about women, namely that a woman tends to be not free who is constrained by the existing rules in society. The ad also wants to prove that these rules or myths cannot be used as an excuse or obstacle for women to be free to express themselves, and can prove that women can do whatever men do and show the importance of gender equality.

With Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, the author analyzes and interprets the scene, which focuses on the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth. According to Barthes, denotation is the first order that has a closed nature. Odilia (2020) explains that denotation is also a sign that has the most real meaning, while to show the significance of the second stage Barthes uses the term connotation. The connotation in Barthes's thinking is identical with ideological operations or what is referred to as myth, which functions to find values that apply at a certain time and provide the truth (Dewi & Dewi, 2021). In addition, the myth referred to by Barthes is an understanding that has existed before or something that has existed in society for a long time. In a book written by Barthes in 1957 with the title "Mythologies", the first time to understand myth is that myth can be said to be a message, which means that myth is not an idea, object, or concept but a mode of meaning in the form of a form. The form in question needs to be related to history, or there is a situation that encourages the form to be used, and should be disseminated in the community.

The researcher will present seven scenes that contain the meaning of gender equality in the Downy product advertisement version of 'Together with Downy Make Your Name for Free Expression', which focuses on the scene and narrative of the advertisement, and simultaneously also presents the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings found in the advertisement. The ad is as follows:

#### a. First Scene

The first scene at 00.00 - 00.10 is the prelude scene which shows a girl commonly known as Pevita Pearce coming out of a door while looking around, then wearing a purple dress walking towards the camera with a sharp and serious gaze. The background of the scene as a whole is seen when the camera moves away, namely there is a female mannequin wearing feminine clothes.



In this case, the writer wants to divide it into two things in general, namely denotation and connotation. In terms of denotation, connotation, and myth. As explained as follows:

In terms of denotation, in this scene there is a gesture from Pevita after she exits the door, she slightly looks around by looking to the right and left. This scene also shows Pevita walking straight ahead, according to the KBBI (2021) upright means being alert or not limp.

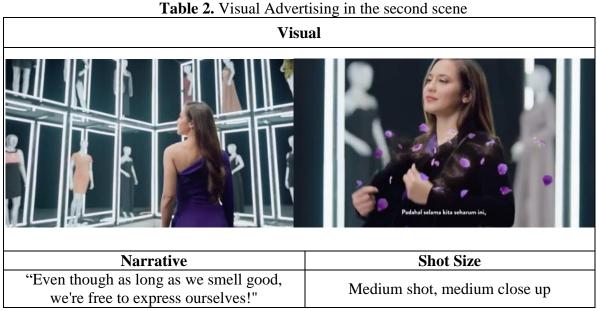
The clothes used by Pevita in this scene are purple dresses, according to the KBBI (2021) the dress itself is a European model women's dress, while according to Susiyanah (2019) a dress is a piece of clothing that has a brodice and a skirt. This scene also has a collection of neatly arranged mannequins or mannequins, the mannequins are both wearing dresses but the colors are brighter than those worn by Pevita. Mannequins according to the KBBI (2021) are dolls that resemble the whole body or half of the body, which can usually be removed to display clothes in stores.

In connotation, the word ladies in this scene is said by Pevita as if she were talking to the audience of the Downy advertisement version of 'Together with Downy Harumkan Your Name for Free Expression' which is female, from the beginning it was clear that the target audience for the advertisement was women. Overall, the narrative presented by Pevita shows that women are often connoted in Indonesian society as people who have many limitations in doing things. In contrast to men who are actually encouraged to do anything, and are encouraged to be skilled in any field.

Meanwhile, from a mythical point of view, this Downy advertisement tries to show that As is inherent in Indonesian society, a girl is often prohibited or restricted from doing something by her parents. Most parents in Indonesia think that it will be dangerous or can harm them if their daughter does something that is not usually done by women. But this ad wants to try to break that assumption.

## **b. Second Scene**

The second scene, at 00.11 - 00.18, looks like Pevita has entered a room filled with mannequins and all wearing women's clothing, Pevita looks around and then starts wearing a blazer while enjoying the fragrance of the clothes she is wearing, after that she attaches the zipper on her blazer.



Source: data proceed

From a denotational point of view, Pevita is standing looking around and at the same time Pevita is also wearing a black blazer, then looks at the camera and says "even though as long as we smell good, we are free to express ourselves!". The narration is found at 00.12-00.15 and 00.17-00.18, the word 'free' in the KBBI (2021) has the meaning of being completely free or having no obstacles, not being disturbed, and so on so that you can move, talk, act, and others freely.

As for the connotation of this scene, in this scene Pevita says "even though as long as we smell good, we are free to express ourselves!", the word 'expression' indicates a job or action. Based on the existing narration, the version of Downy's advertisement 'Together with Downy Make Your Name Free for Expression' wants to invite women to be free to do whatever they want, whether it's a job or a hobby. As long as the woman is comfortable and sure about what she wants to do, there is nothing wrong with doing it.

And on the mythical aspect, there is a reality in Indonesian society that women find it difficult to express themselves, because culture in Indonesia seems to limit a woman from doing an action such as working. This happens because women are still considered as weak people, in contrast to men who are always required to be strong and can do many things. This scene wants to show and invite women to be confident and free to take action. **c. Third Scene** 

The third scene at 00.19 - 00.26 shows a woman who has a comedian background, she is performing her joke material in front of a large audience. While showing her joke, the woman laughed out loud, as did the audience who also laughed out loud.



On the denotative aspect, Kiky's expression in this scene begins with a confident or strong expression, then starts with a cheerful expression. Sturdy according to the KBBI (2021) is firmly fixed, not easily broken or damaged, strong, steadfast as regarding the stance, heart, and others, while cheerful according to the KBBI (2021) is a face and face that is radiant, shining, and bright. Kiky in this scene is standing casually while holding the microphone in her right hand, and her left hand moving to follow the flow of her speech. The word relaxed according to the KBBI (2021) is free from tension or in a free and relaxed state, while microphone in Indonesian according to the Cambridge dictionary (2022) means loudspeaker.

While on the connotative aspect, this scene actually wants to show that a woman is seen as bad if she doesn't maintain her behavior in front of many people, such as laughing out loud. This scene also shows that it really doesn't matter if a woman acts like that, as long as it can make people laugh and have fun. This is reaffirmed by the narrative that says "for example, they say we can't laugh, but if we can make other people happy, why not?". The narration illustrates that most Indonesian people have the assumption that a woman must maintain her attitude not to laugh out loud, but the sentence also wants to break that stereotype by saying 'but if you can make other people happy, why not?'. The sentence wants to tell you that it's okay to laugh out loud or out loud if it can make other people happy and laugh too.

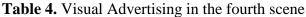
Meanwhile, on the mythical aspect, this Downy advertisement wants to show that it is okay for women to laugh out loud, especially if we can make other people laugh too. In reality, a woman is required to maintain her attitude, especially those that can embarrass herself. Women must remain calm and tend to be quiet, women like that are seen as better by society than women who are frivolous. Meanwhile, it is rare for men to comment if he laughs out loud or does other things that embarrass him.

# d. Fourth Scene

In the fourth scene at 00.27-00.35, it shows a woman wearing a hijab who is a drummer, she is seen screaming and then playing her drum with enthusiasm. There were also several guitar and bass guitar players who accompanied him in playing the drums. The

atmosphere in this scene is also dominated by the color purple, such as from the clothes and lighting.





Source: data proceed

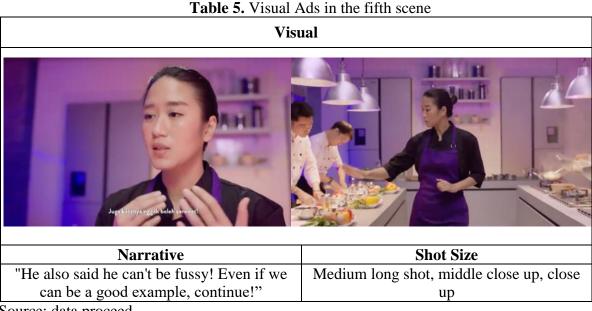
The narration said by Pevita in this scene is "continue, you can't be emotional, so if you can make others excited, keep going!". The word emotion according to the KBBI (2021) is an overflow of feelings that develops and subsides in a short time, while the spirit according to the KBBI (2021) means strength or joy and inner passion, feelings of the heart, lust such as the will and passion to work, fight, and others.

In this scene, Jeanne uses a black jacket, black itself has the meaning of strength. The use of a jacket makes Jeanne seem stronger, because actually the use of a jacket can give a masculine impression. A high angle camera angle is used in this scene, it adds a dramatic feel to the scene. Moreover, the shot size used is a close-up that focuses from the neck to the tip of the head, so that Jeanne's expression can be seen clearly in the frame.

This ad seeks to prove that women are also capable of playing the drums, besides that this Downy advert aims to break the stereotype that says that women should not be emotional. Women are often required to always control and suppress their emotions, even though it doesn't always have to be like that. Emotion is an overflow of feelings that everyone has the right to express, including women, if the emotions that are poured out are good and can also make other people excited then it's fine.

## e. Fifth Scene

Seconds 00.36 - 00.48 in this fifth scene shows a woman who has a chef background, named Renatta Moelok or commonly known as chef Renatta. In this scene, chef Renatta is depicted as a head chef who has a male chef subordinate. He is seen explaining something to his subordinates, correcting the work of his subordinates, and giving instructions to his subordinates.



The expression shown by chef Renatta in this scene is serious and firm, the word 'serious' in KBBI (2021) means really, not joking, while firm in KBBI (2021) means clear, clear, true, real, sure and certain or no hesitation, no vague. In this scene, chef Renatta puts on an expression that is earnest, sure, and doesn't hesitate, this expression gives the impression of chef Renatta who is firm and authoritative. This can be seen from the way chef Renatta speaks, from the way he explains, corrects, and explains things to his subordinates. With chef Renatta's body movements moving his hands while speaking, then pointing at an object using his index finger, it made chef Renatta look like he wanted to emphasize what he was saying.

This shows that there is a myth that women who manage men are considered less good, because so far it is men who are considered worthy to regulate. Women are usually only listeners and those who only obey. But this ad is trying to convince women and society that it doesn't matter if women can be an example to others in a more talkative way.

# f. Sixth Scene

In the sixth scene at 00.49-00.57 seconds, it shows again the figure of a woman who has a journalist background, she is a senior journalist commonly known as Andini Effendi. In this scene Andini is depicted as crowding with other journalists and reporters to try to interview sources and take pictures with the camera held by the reporter.



The dominant color in this scene is blue. In many western countries the color blue is usually associated with trust, balance, and loyalty, while in eastern countries the color blue is symbolized as nature such as the sky and the sea that provide tranquility, freedom, and life. In addition to blue, in this scene there is also a striking color, namely purple. The purple color in this scene is used as the color of the clothes worn by Andini, and is also used for the color of the mic.

Although the scene in this scene looks rushed and crowded, Andini remains calm in dealing with the situation. Andini looks very professional when interviewing sources, she looks calm and curious, not nervous, not confused and not in a hurry, different from other journalists and reporters who look very rushed, running around, and jostling.

This indicates that there are still myths. In this case, this Downy advertisement wants to show that the actions of women who are too ambitious in pursuing careers are considered by most Indonesian people as unacceptable, because there are still many assumptions where women work only at home, taking care of their husbands, children, and taking care of work. house. However, in reality, there are now many women who are successful with careers of their own choosing, and are still able to take care of their husbands, children, and take care of housework. In contrast to men who are actually encouraged to pursue a high career.

## g. Seventh Scene

In this scene, Pevita Pearce appears again, but this time she is fighting against two men to protect herself. It was seen that Pevita fought these two men with full strength, so that she managed to fight the two men. The background in this scene is outdoors, in front of a mini market and at night.



Black is the dominant color in this scene, starting with the clothes used by Pevita and the two men who are Pevita's opponents. The background at night also gives the scene a darker feel, and adds a touch of black. The purple color in this scene is quite an accent but still steals the attention, it is found in the LED lights and the lines on the pants used by Pevita.

In this scene, Pevita performs a self-defense action that creates movements such as kicking and punching, these movements are thrown at two men who are her opponents. This Downy advertisement wants to show the stereotype that exists in society where women who leave the house late are often considered naughty women, even though not all women who go out at night do things that are not right. The reason women are not allowed to go out late at night is also because of security issues, even though the risk is the same as for men.

# 4.2 Discussion

After the researchers analyzed the 7 scenes in the Downy advertisement version of 'Together Downy Harumkan Your Name for Free Expression' above, from the 7 scenes the writer chose scenes that contained the meaning of gender equality. Furthermore, the researcher will describe the results of the analysis related to the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myths contained in the advertisement, this description is intended to determine the representation of gender equality in the Downy advertisement version of 'With Downy Harumkan Your Name for Free Expression'.

The researcher managed to observe the denotation sign in Downy's version of 'Together with Downy Make Your Name for Free Expression' version, this advertisement tells about women's anxiety in acting to express themselves, such as freedom in the profession, pursuing a career, and hobbies, in the advertisement mentioned several stereotypes about women who exist in society and also inserted constructive sentences to break the stereotype. This advertisement shows several activities carried out by women, among others, being comedians, drummers, head chefs, and journalists. Self-defense scenes are also shown in this ad, which is usually done by men, but in this ad it was the women who managed to win against the men.

In this advertisement, Pevita becomes a woman who is quite dominant, because all the narratives from beginning to end are filled by Pevita. Apart from that, Pevita started and ended the scene in this ad, but this ad managed to divide its focus not only to Pevita but to other talents in this ad. They are great women who have very interesting hobbies and careers as mentioned above, these women are Kiky Saputri, Jeanne Phialsa, Renatta Moelok, and Andini Effendi. All of these women have their own charm in stealing the audience's focus, their work and hobbies are interesting because it is very unusual for a woman to have a job and hobby like the one in this ad.

The atmosphere in this ad is dominated by the color purple, from the beginning of this ad from start to finish. Besides being dominated by purple, this ad also uses a lot of black. Bright colors are still used in this ad, but the percentage is not much and is only used as an accent. The colors used tend to be dark colors, not bright and flashy colors. Although the colors used tend to be dark, the atmosphere given in this advertisement can still bring the impression of being cheerful and happy, firm and brave, and full of energy and enthusiasm. In addition to denotation, the researcher also succeeded in observing the connotative meaning of the Downy advertisement version of 'Together Downy Harumkan Your Name for Free Expression', which is as follows:

Aspect	Explanation
Narrative	This advertisement wants to show the assumptions or stereotypes about women who have been around for a long time and are believed by most of the Indonesian people. In addition, the narration in this advertisement also says a sentence that seeks to break the existing stereotype in order to uphold gender equality.
Color	The dominant color is purple, from the beginning to the end of this advertisement purple is quite dominant in every scene. The color purple itself reflects ambitious, independent, visionary, and mysterious, this meaning is in accordance with the message to be conveyed that women are described as having an ambitious, independent, visionary, and mysterious soul.
Facial expressions	The facial expressions given by each woman generally show a serious, firm, and confident expression, but do not leave a sinister impression, but on the contrary.
Body movement	Judging from the body movements of each woman in this ad, it shows a firm and energetic movement.

Table 8. Analysis of the connotation aspects of the research object

Source: data proceed

Next is the myth, the myth that is meant by Barthes is an understanding that has existed before or something that has existed in society for a long time. In a book written by Barthes in 1957 with the title "Mythologies", myth can be said to be a message, which means that myth is not an idea, object, or concept but a mode of meaning in the form of a form. The form in question needs to be related to history, or there is a situation that encourages the form to be used, and should be disseminated in the community.

## **V. Conclusion**

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that this advertisement displays a clear meaning where this advertisement mentions many stereotypes of prohibitions or limitations that exist in society against women, this advertisement also mentions that these stereotypes are not always true as long as it is beneficial for themselves and many people. In addition, this reaffirms that a woman really needs to get equality, with the expressions shown in the advertisement convincing that women are also capable and have high enthusiasm to do anything they want. Furthermore, this advertisement wants to show the myth that is interpreted about the stereotypes that exist in society where women have many limitations such as in expression, in career, and in leading.

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