



Signs in Social Media Marketing: A Case Study on Dior Beauty Advertisements in Instagram

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 16 July 2026	Semiotics examines signs and symbols, exploring meaning formation and their functions within social contexts. Many consumers do not realize the deeper meanings contained in advertisements, as these messages are often conveyed implicitly through visual elements. The significance of this study is to help audiences understand how modes of sign, such as iconic, indexical, and symbolic used in digital advertising, especially in social media marketing. The research aims to explore how these modes of signs construct meaning in Dior Beauty Instagram advertisements and how they support the brand's image. Using a qualitative method based on Mackiewicz, selected posts featuring Jisoo (09 September 2025) and Jenna Ortega (02 January 2026) were observed and documented. Data were analyzed using Chandler's theory to explain how visual signs convey meaning. The findings show that each advertisement combines two iconic signs, one indexical sign, and one symbolic sign. Iconic signs appear in the models and products, visually resembling reality and being recognizable to viewers. Indexical signs are shown through visible product effects, such as smooth skin in the setting powder advertisement and bold red lips in the lipstick advertisement, demonstrating a cause-and-effect relationship. Symbolic signs, such as the Dior logo and Instagram username, represent brand identity through shared cultural understanding. Together, these signs create implicit meanings that link Dior Beauty products with elegance, flawless appearance, and ideal beauty. This research implies that understanding semiotic and visual strategies in digital advertisements can increase audience awareness of how brands communicate identity, value, and perception through subtle visual messages.
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1. Introduction

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, focusing on how meaning is formed and how these elements operate within social contexts (Al-Khawaldeh & Al-Rabadi, 2023; Chandler, 2001; McBurney, 2006; Sebeok, 2001). According to Chandler (2007), the types of signs most easily brought to mind are those commonly encountered in daily life, such as traffic signs, pub signs, and zodiac signs. Signs are found everywhere in daily life, including in advertising, where a sign can be anything that represents a product, brand, or idea, whether it is an image, slogan, sound, or gesture that conveys a particular message to the audience. In the digital era, Instagram has become a powerful platform for brands to communicate their identity and connect with consumers through both visual and verbal content. Many brands take advantage of Instagram's power to promote their products; one of them is Dior Beauty. Dior Beauty, as a luxury cosmetics brand, consistently uses Instagram to project its elegant and exclusive image. However, many consumers do not realize the deeper meanings contained in Dior Beauty Instagram advertisements, which are often conveyed through signs that form implicit meanings within them (Sari et al., 2021).

Several studies regarding signs in advertisements have been conducted many times, especially in digital advertisements. The advertisements that were studied were digital in Starbucks Advertisements, where the research is about signs, and the study found an equal use of implicit and explicit meanings, with both verbal and nonverbal signs working together to attract consumer attention (Casmita et al., 2024). Similarly, another researcher also examined signs in the For Women by Women: IDOLE Lancôme Advertisement and found that the advertisement includes verbal signs that occur both orally and in written form, and also contains non-verbal elements in the form of images, graphics, and color (Dewi et al., 2022). In addition, the study on Maybelline advertisements found that both verbal and nonverbal signs play an important role in advertising. These advertisements often use short phrases and connotative meanings to attract attention and create curiosity (Dewi et al., 2021).

There was also research on signs, particularly in Instagram advertisements, which focused on how visual and written elements are used in promoting tourism. The study analyzed three poster advertisements from a travel company based in Bali to understand how messages were delivered through different types of signs. It found that all three posters contained both verbal and non-verbal signs, showing that the company used multiple methods to attract attention. The verbal signs included various phrases and complete sentences that were used to clearly deliver the advertiser's message to the viewers. Meanwhile, the non-verbal signs were made up of images, models, and scenic backgrounds, which helped to visually support and enhance the message being shared (Jaya & Skolastika, 2024).

Moreover, there was a study about signs in Facebook advertisements, especially those related to tourism in Gianyar. The study focused on how signs were used in eight tourism advertisements taken from Facebook. It found that the eight advertisements contained a total of 24 verbal signs and 24 non-verbal signs. Verbal signs most often appeared as sentences that carried denotative meanings, which means they gave direct and clear information to the audience. On the other hand, non-verbal signs, usually in the form of images, tended to convey connotative meanings, which gave additional or symbolic messages related to the tourism content (Janarki, 2023).

Furthermore, there were studies about signs, especially in social media and web-based advertisements. This study examines signs in Rexona Clinical Protection advertising, identifying six verbal signs and six non-verbal signs, eight denotative meanings, and four

connotative meanings in Rexona Clinical Protection advertising (Arinata et al., 2022). Additionally, a similar study was carried out on clothes advertisements, which found that verbal signs express messages clearly and informatively, while visual signs like images are used to enhance the attractiveness of the advertisement (Apriana & Pratiwi, 2022).

Besides that, there were also studies about signs, especially in printed advertisements. Specifically, the studies in facial wash advertisements identified that verbal signs in facial wash advertisements convey product information and benefits, while also serving a persuasive function, whereas nonverbal signs use colors, models, and product images (Andriani & Santika, 2021). Additionally, a related study was also analyzed in BMW Car Advertisements, which identified six verbal and seven non-verbal signs, along with twelve connotative and three denotative meanings. Additionally, a related study was also analyzed in BMW Car Advertisements, which identified six verbal and seven non-verbal signs, along with twelve connotative and three denotative meanings. Verbal signs appeared in the form of text, while nonverbal signs such as car images, backgrounds, and colors supported the overall meaning conveyed in the advertisement. The analysis revealed that verbal and nonverbal elements work together to enhance Interaction In communication and make the message more impactful and easier for the audience to understand (Sari et al., 2021). Furthermore, a study on signs in global warming advertisements found that global warming advertisements aim to persuade people to avoid environmentally harmful actions by using both verbal and non-verbal signs to convey meaning (Hostiani et al., 2022).

Other studies focusing on signs in movies were also conducted, one of which used the movie *Mr. Harrigan's Phone*, revealing that signs are also present in cinematic works. These signs are not only found in advertisements or novels, but also appear throughout films. The study analyzed the movie as data and identified various types of signs, such as icons, indexes, and symbols (Antari et al., 2023). A similar study also discusses the structure of signs in the British film *Awaydays* (2009), using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. The study found that the film uses semiotic structures to explore themes of masculinity, belonging, and youth rebellion. It shows how signs function not only to build narrative coherence but also to reinforce or question dominant ideologies (Pratama & Budi, 2025). Another study is about the types and functions of signs found in the film *Spider-Man: Far from Home*. It found that the movie contains 3 icons, 5 indexes, and 8 symbols. The icons include 3 ideational metafunctions; the indexes include 4 ideational and 1 interpersonal metafunction; and the symbols consist of 6 ideational 4 interpersonal, and 4 textual metafunctions (Loi et al., 2022). Furthermore, a study about the kinds and functions of signs found in the movie *The Hitman's Bodyguard* also highlights the use of various signs. It found that signs can be identified throughout the film and this showing a diverse application of semiotic elements (Kurniawan et al., 2022). Lastly, a study about Signs Found in the Movie 'Uncharted' found that the movie contains 3 icons, 5 indexes, and 3 symbols. The icons include 2 ideational and 1 interpersonal metafunction; the indexes include 3 ideational and 2 textual metafunctions; and the symbols consist of 2 ideational and 1 interpersonal metafunction (Hatin, 2024).

Thus, the previous literature demonstrates that Instagram has become a powerful platform for major brands, particularly for promoting their products. However, in practice, many consumers still encounter difficulties in interpreting the meanings conveyed through product-related communication. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implicit meanings embedded in brand images and product representations through the perspective of modes of signs.

2. Literature Review

Semiotics continues to develop its foundational theories, particularly those proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure (Bilhaj, 2025). Peirce's triadic model of the sign (sign, object, interpretant) remains central, with applications across various disciplines (Lomas, 2019; Nöth, 2014). The interdisciplinary nature of semiotics has been emphasized, particularly through its integration into fields such as linguistics, philosophy, and cultural studies. This transdisciplinary approach is considered essential for addressing complex research issues (Deely & Semetsky, 2017).

Semiotics has been applied to digital networks and user interface design. Studies have shown that intuitive interface cues can improve website usability and the user experience. These studies also emphasize the importance of semiotic principles in human-computer interaction (Islam & Tétard, 2014; Jensen, 2015). Semiotics has been used to analyze communication processes in the marketplace by drawing analogies between language systems and the exchange of commodities (Nöth, 2006).

Semiotics has played a significant role in analyzing cultural artifacts, such as Chinese ceramics, to uncover cross-cultural communication and symbolic meaning (Wu, 2025). In the arts, semiotics has been applied to theater and film to examine how signs convey ideological perspectives and narrative structures (Khafaga, 2022).

3. Method

This research used a qualitative method, following the approach by Mackiewicz (2018). According to Mackiewicz (2018), qualitative methods relied on text and image data, involved specific steps in data analysis, and applied various research designs. In this research, the focus was on how modes of signs were used in digital advertising, particularly on social media platforms such as Instagram. This method was chosen because it aligned with the research being conducted, which included documentation and observation to analyze the data.

This research used Dior Beauty Instagram advertisements as the main data source. The data for this research were taken from Dior Beauty's official Instagram account. The data consisted of 1 image of Jisoo Blackpink, posted on 09 September 2025, and 1 image of Jena Ortega, posted on 2 January 2026, from the advertisements. These posts were chosen based on their relevance to the research topic. The data were expected to contain various modes of sign, such as iconic, indexical, and symbolic, which were used to construct meaning in the advertisements.

This research used the observation method to collect the data. First, the data were searched in Dior Beauty's Instagram posts. Then, the researcher carefully observed the advertisements that were likely to contain various modes of signs. The observations focused on visual elements within the posts, and only relevant posts were selected. After that, the selected data were documented through screenshots for further analysis. Finally, after data collection, the data were organized by categorizing the visual elements and texts according to their types. This organization helped to systematically analyze the different modes of signs present in the advertisements.

The data were analyzed using Chandler's semiotic theory to identify and interpret various modes of signs such as icons, indexes, and symbols within the advertisements (Chandler, 2007). The analysis focused on how different modes of sign worked together to create meaning. This combined approach aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Dior Beauty communicated through its Instagram advertisements. The results were presented descriptively with examples from the data. To maintain reliability, the analysis was

reviewed regularly to ensure consistency with the theoretical frameworks.

4. Results and Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study based on the analysis of signs found in Dior Beauty's Instagram advertisement. The analysis identifies three modes of signs according to Chandler, namely iconic, indexical, and symbolic modes. Each of these modes contributes to the construction of meaning and plays an important role in shaping Dior Beauty's luxurious brand identity on social media.

In the iconic mode, the signs work through visual similarity with real objects. The model (Jisoo) and the Dior Beauty setting powder are presented in a realistic and detailed way, so they directly resemble their real forms. The audience can clearly recognize the model's face, makeup, and the actual product's shape. Because these elements look like the real things they represent, they function as iconic signs. This mode helps the advertisement present the product clearly and makes the promotion easy to understand. As a result, viewers can immediately identify what product is being shown and who is representing the brand.

In the indexical mode, the signs show a direct connection between the sign and its meaning, usually through a cause-and-effect relationship. The smooth, flawless skin shown on Jisoo's face is presented as the visible result of using Dior Beauty setting powder. The skin condition functions as evidence of the product's performance, linking the product to the outcome. Because the facial appearance indicates the effect of the product, it belongs to the indexical mode. This use of indexical signs strengthens the advertisement's message by showing the real impact of the product, which makes the claim more convincing to the audience.

In the symbolic mode, the signs depend on shared social understanding rather than visual similarity. The Dior brand logo "CD" is an example of a symbolic sign in the advertisement. This element does not physically resemble the brand itself, but people recognize it through cultural knowledge and agreement. Their presence provides brand identity, authenticity, and prestige. By using symbolic signs, the advertisement communicates ideas of luxury, elegance, and high status associated with Dior Beauty. This strengthens the brand image and positions the product as part of a premium beauty brand.

Table 1. Mode of signs

No.	Modes	Mode Makers
1	Iconic mode	The Model and the product
2	Indexical mode	The product effect
3	Symbolic mode	Dior Beauty Logo

1. Iconic mode

An iconic sign is a sign that looks, sounds, or feels similar to the thing it represents. Based on the data collected from Dior Beauty advertisements on Instagram, several elements can be categorized as iconic signs. These elements visually resemble the real objects or ideas they refer to, so the audience can recognize them easily. In advertising, iconic signs help communicate product characteristics and visual messages directly to the audience. In Dior Beauty advertisements, these signs can be observed through images of beauty products, models, and other visual elements that resemble their real-world counterparts. The data of these iconic elements are explained in the following section.

Datum 1.

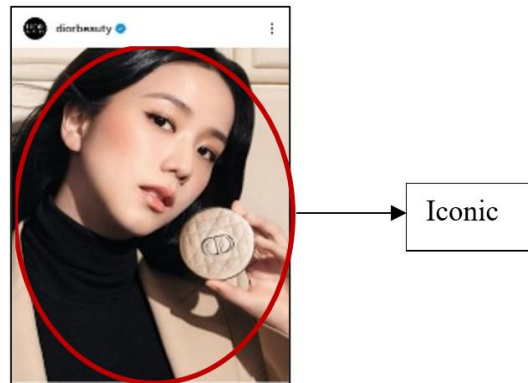


Figure 1. Jisoo Blackpink and Dior Beauty Setting powder
(Source: @diorbeauty)

This image presents Jisoo Blackpink in a Dior Beauty advertisement. She holds Dior Beauty setting powder near her face with clean and natural-looking makeup. Her facial expression appears calm and elegant while looking directly at the camera. The product is clearly visible together with the model in the image. Jisoo's elegant and refined public image aligns with Dior's luxury brand identity, which may be one reason she is chosen as a brand ambassador. As a globally popular K-pop idol, she also helps the brand connect with both Asian and international consumers. Her presence, therefore, supports the brand's image of sophistication while expanding its global market appeal.

According to Chandler (2007), an iconic mode is a sign that looks like the real object it represents. In this Dior Beauty advertisement, Jisoo and the setting powder are depicted realistically. The audience can clearly see Jisoo's face and the actual shape, color, and packaging of the product. Both the model and the product resemble their real-life counterparts, which is a key characteristic of an iconic sign. Because the meaning is built through visual similarity between the sign and the real object, these elements are categorized as iconic signs. The use of this mode helps show the product clearly, makes it easy for viewers to recognize it, and makes the advertisement feel more real and convincing.

Datum 2.

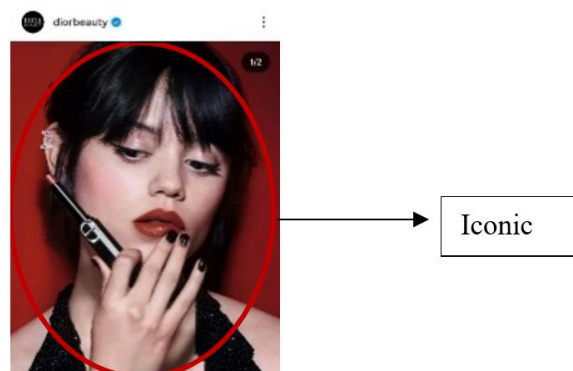


Figure 2. Jena Ortega and Dior Beauty Red Fortune Lipstick
(Source: @diorbeauty)

The image of Jena in this Dior Beauty advertisement shows her holding a lipstick close to her lips, with the product's shape and color clearly visible. The lipstick tube and the brand design can be seen in her hand. Jena's face, makeup, and lip color are presented in detail. Her

strong and distinctive visual image, which is widely recognized through her acting roles, aligns with the bold and expressive character of the lipstick. As an internationally known actress, her presence also helps Dior connect with a global audience and present the product as suitable for diverse consumers.

According to Chandler (2007), an iconic sign is a sign that looks like the real object it represents. In this Dior Beauty advertisement, the model (Jena) and the Dior Rouge “Red Fortune” lipstick are clearly shown as the main focus. The audience can directly see Jena’s face and the lipstick’s real shape, color, and packaging. Both the model and the product look similar to their real-life forms, which is the key characteristic of an iconic sign. Because the meaning is built through visual similarity between the sign and the real object, these elements are categorized as iconic signs. The use of the iconic mode in this image helps show the product clearly, makes it easy for viewers to recognize it, and makes the advertisement feel more real, believable, and trustworthy.

2. Indexical mode

An indexical mode is a sign that has a real connection with what it means, and this connection is often based on cause and effect. Based on the data collected from Dior Beauty advertisements on Instagram, several elements can be included in the indexical mode. These signs show a direct relationship between the sign and the reality they represent, which makes the meaning clearer. The data of these indexical elements are explained in the following section.

Datum 3.

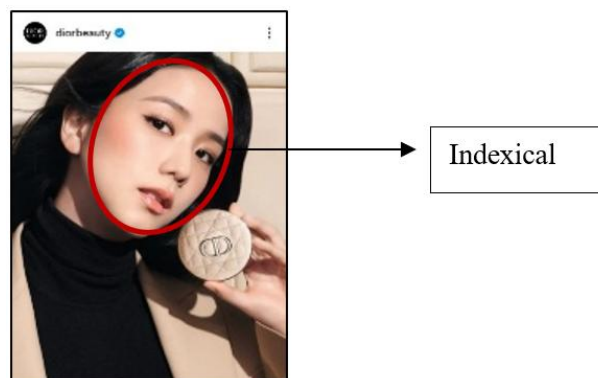


Figure 3. Jisoo Blackpink and Dior Beauty Setting powder effect on her face
(Source: @diorbeauty)

The portrait of Jisoo from Blackpink in a Dior Beauty advertisement. Jisoo is shown from a close distance, with the face clearly visible. The makeup on the face looks neat, and the skin looks smooth and well-finished. The expression appears calm, and the head is slightly facing forward. A Dior Beauty setting powder product is also shown in the image near the face area.

According to Chandler (2007), an indexical sign has a direct connection with what it represents, usually through a cause-and-effect relationship. In this advertisement, Jisoo’s smooth, matte, and flawless skin is shown as the visible result of using Dior Beauty setting powder. Her skin condition is not just decoration but a sign of the product’s effect on the face. This shows a direct link between the product and the result, which is the main characteristic of an indexical sign. Because the meaning is built through this cause-and-effect relationship, the facial appearance in the image is categorized as an indexical sign. The use of the indexical

mode helps show the product's real outcome, allows the audience to see the result clearly, and makes the product claim more convincing and believable.

Datum 4.

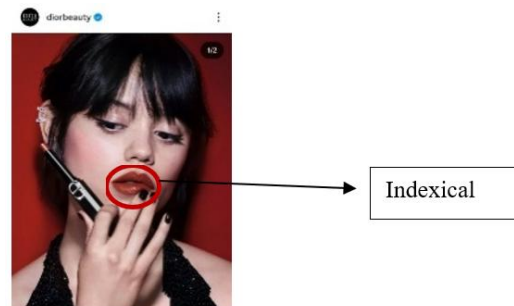


Figure 4. Jena Ortega and Dior Beauty Red Fortune Lipstick effect on her Lip
(Source: @diorbeauty)

The image of Jena in a Dior Beauty advertisement shows her lips colored with bright red lipstick, and the lip area is displayed clearly. The red lipstick stands out compared to the rest of her facial makeup, making it the main visual focus. The contrast between the bold lip color and the softer makeup highlights the lips strongly. The viewer's attention is directed to the appearance and detail of the lips. The product being promoted is directly related to the lip area shown in the image.

According to Chandler (2007), an indexical sign has a direct connection with what it represents, usually through a cause-and-effect relationship. In this Dior Beauty advertisement, the bright red color on Jena's lips is shown as the visible result of applying Dior Rouge "Red Fortune" lipstick. Her lip appearance is not only part of the visual display but also a sign of the product's effect. This creates a direct link between the lipstick and the result seen on the lips, which is the key characteristic of an indexical sign. Because the meaning is built through this cause-and-effect relationship, the red lips in the image are categorized as an indexical sign. The use of the indexical mode helps show the product's real outcome, makes the effect easy for the audience to understand, and makes the advertisement more convincing and believable.

3. Symbolic mode

Symbolic mode refers to signs whose meanings are established through social conventions, cultural values, and shared understanding rather than visual resemblance or direct connections with the objects they represent. These signs require people to learn and recognize their meanings through social interaction and cultural experience. In advertising, symbolic signs communicate abstract ideas and values associated with a brand. In Dior Beauty advertisements, these signs represent concepts such as luxury, elegance, exclusivity, and high social status. The Dior brand logo, for example, symbolizes the brand's identity and the values associated with its products. Therefore, analyzing symbolic signs helps explain how Dior Beauty advertisements communicate brand identity and construct meaning beyond the products' functional purposes. The meanings of these symbols are reinforced through repeated exposure to the brand across different advertising platforms. As a result, symbolic elements can influence how consumers perceive the brand and associate its products with particular lifestyles and social values. The following section presents the analysis of symbolic elements identified in the advertisement.

Datum 5.

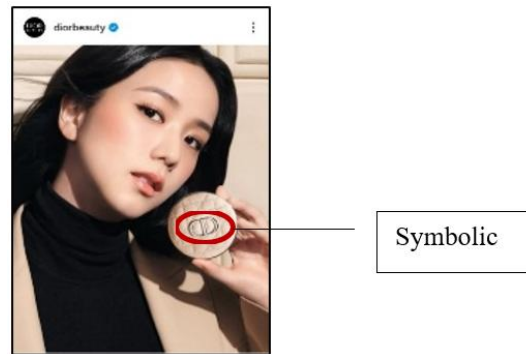


Figure 5. Dior Brand Logo on the product (CD)
(Source: @diorbeauty)

An image of Jisoo in Dior Beauty product in the advertisement. The Dior brand logo “CD” can be seen on the product. These elements are presented in written and graphic form. These elements are clearly shown together with the product in the image.

According to Chandler (2007), a symbolic sign is a sign whose meaning is learned through social agreement, not because it looks like what it represents. In this Dior Beauty advertisement, the Dior brand logo appears on the product as an important visual element. These signs do not visually resemble the brand itself, but viewers understand that they represent Dior Beauty because it had learned its meaning through culture, media, and shared knowledge. This shows that the signs work through convention, which is the key characteristic of a symbolic sign. Because the meaning is built through learned recognition rather than visual similarity or cause-and-effect, these elements are categorized as symbolic signs. The use of the symbolic mode helps provide brand identity, shows that the product officially belongs to Dior Beauty, and builds trust and authenticity for the audience.

Datum 6.

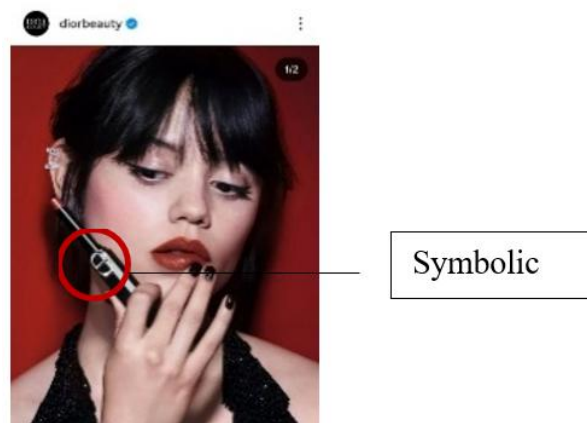


Figure 6. Dior Beauty logo (CD) on the product
(Source: @diorbeauty)

The picture of the Dior Beauty product advertisement on the product is the Dior brand logo. Its elements appear as written and graphic marks in the image. These signs are presented clearly together with the product.

According to Chandler (2007), a symbolic sign is a sign that does not look like what it represents, and its meaning must be learned through social agreement. In this Dior Beauty

advertisement, the Dior brand logo appears on the Dior Rouge “Red Fortune” lipstick as an important visual element. This sign is used to give information and show that the product officially comes from Dior Beauty. It does not visually resemble the brand itself, but viewers understand their meaning because it had learned it through culture, media exposure, and branding. This shows that the signs work through convention, which is the main characteristic of a symbolic sign (Danesi, 2006; Hodge et al., 2019; Mikhaeil & Baskerville, 2019; Paraskevaidis & Weidenfeld, 2021; Putra et al., 2017). Because the meaning is formed through shared knowledge rather than resemblance or cause-and-effect, these elements are categorized as symbolic signs. The use of this mode helps make the brand easy to recognize, shows product authenticity, and guides the audience to the brand’s social media for more information, which increases trust in the product.

In short, this research demonstrates that the advertisements have successfully integrated iconic, symbolic, and indexical modes to construct not only the identity of the brand linking to its products but also the elegance and beauty of using the brand. By breaking down the modes used, the combination of signs is used to highlight the products to implicitly promote the value of the products.

A primary limitation of this research is the restricted sample size because this research only focuses on two specific advertisements featuring Jisoo and Jenna Ortega. This finding may not fully represent the semiotics strategies employed across Dior Beauty’s entire digital marketing portfolio. Thus, generalization regarding how the brand deliver its value cannot be drawn due to this limitation. To address the limitation, it is recommended to employ mix-method study with a bigger sample size.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Dior Beauty Instagram advertisements, the findings show that each image contains three modes of signs that work together to deliver the promotional message. In terms of Chandler’s semiotic theory, two iconic signs are found in each image, namely the model’s face and the cosmetic product, because both look like their real forms and can be recognized directly by the audience, and their meaning is to show the product and beauty realistically and believably. One indexical sign appears through the visible beauty effect, such as smooth matte skin in the setting powder advertisement and bold red lips in the lipstick advertisement, which show a cause-and-effect relationship between the product and the result, meaning that the product is presented as the reason for the beauty outcome. One symbolic sign is also present, seen in the Dior logo, brand name, and Instagram username, which represent brand identity through shared social understanding, and their meaning is to signal authenticity and strengthen brand recognition. Overall, the analysis shows that each Dior Beauty advertisement image consistently combines iconic (2), indexical (1), and symbolic (1) signs to communicate that Dior Beauty products are strongly associated with elegant, flawless, and ideal beauty.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contribution

Ni Nyoman Yudi Supartini: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

I Gusti Ngurah Adi Rajistha: Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing.

I Made Astu Mahayana: Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing.

Statement of the Use of AI

The authors declare that, during the process of writing this paper, they used generative AI to refine the grammar, readability, and language; however, all research outputs and content were reviewed and verified by the authors.

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