

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers several components, including background of the study, statements of the problems, objectives of the study, significances of the study, scope and limitations, as well as definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

In many cultures of the world, menstruation has always been considered a taboo thing since centuries ago (Yagnik, Construction of Negative Images of Menstruation in Indian TV Commercials 2012). Many negative myths overshadow menstruation in women. In India, menstruation is considered dirty, unholy, and cursed. In countries where feminine hygiene products cannot be easily afforded, girls prefer to ditch school during their period rather than dealing with embarrassment due to leaky blood (Yagnik, Mis-fitting Menstrual Hygiene Products: An Examination of Advertisements to Identify Gaps in the Diffusion of Innovation 2016). According to a poll conducted in August 2017 by the girls' rights charity Plan International UK, 2 out of 3 girls across the UK are uncomfortable talking about menstruation to their father and brother, and 1 in 4 women feel uneasy and awkward when talking about this with a fellow woman, even in some cultures in Indonesia, a woman who is menstruating is required to retreat to an alienated place (Hoskins 2002).

Mentioning sanitary pads in public is considered embarrassing as there are many name adjustments for sanitary pads, products that are monthly used by the majority of women around the world (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler 2013). The

term “Japanese bread” is very common among Indonesian women when referring to sanitary pads, as well as other Asian countries that still make the mention of sanitary pads for women by using indirect words because they are judged to be more polite (Yagnik, *Construction of Negative Images of Menstruation in Indian TV Commercials* 2012).

The advertisements for sanitary pad circulating in the Asian media also seem to agree and confirm this negative notion. There are many scenes with distinctive elements, ideas, and symbols that often appear in sanitary pads advertisements aired on television in Indonesia, such as the use of blue instead of red liquid as an illustration of menstrual blood (Saz-Rubio and Pennock-Speck 2009), that occurs very commonly in advertisements for sanitary pads circulating in Indonesian mass media.

This phenomenon of sanitary pad advertisements with certain types of images that are oversimplified about menstruation in women has occurred not only in Indonesia but also in other Asian countries. Other Asian countries have for years brought up the same concept for their sanitary pads advertising (Yagnik, *Reframing Menstruation in India: Metamorphosis of the Menstrual Taboo with the Changing Media Coverage* 2013). In these advertisements, allegorical images, such as flowers and hearts are used by advertisers, as well as euphemisms such as refraining from the use of the word menstruation which emphasizes secrecy, avoidance of shame, and freshness (Merskin 1999).

Language is the most important communication tool. When language is used in the context of communication, it blends with the culture (Rabiah 2012).

Therefore, there is a linguistic phenomenon in sanitary pad advertisements that can indicate the identity and beliefs of a culture. This phenomenon shows that every element in advertisements represent implicit meaning that the producers want to convey to the viewers. In this case, it cannot be separated from the heavy influence of cultural beliefs in the Asian community, which still view and treat menstruation with a negative stance.

Moreover, Asian sanitary pad ads display menstruation as a stain and disgrace of a woman's image as a sacred object, and the problems of women's lives can be solved by using advertised sanitary pad products (Przybylo and Fahs 2020). It is unfortunate because even in modern times, many Asian cultures still regard menstruation, a completely natural and involuntary biological process (Harrison 1997), as a shame and must be hidden. It has contributed to the suppression of menstrual literacy and consequently led to misinformation on reproductive health, especially for young women who are still learning about this matter.

The statement above is in line with Baidhowi's (2018) statement, which considers that the Indonesian ads for sanitary pads gives the wrong impression about menstruation through various aspects of the advertisement. Moreover, the common Asian sanitary pad ads videos display a notion about how the female model is constructed, for example, energetic and beautiful (Sari 2012).

In contrast to Asian, the Western sanitary pad company made interesting advertisements that not only concentrate on the product but also show social conflicts and moments that happen in daily life (Przybylo and Fahs 2020). Without basic taglines such as "protect, fit, comfy," or white clothing like in Asia, Western

brands managed to break the stereotypes through their video advertisements that menstruation is completely natural, blood is normal, not embarrassing. Hence, it should not be an obstacle that restricts women's activities. Western communities are more likely to be empowering, progressive, and positive in their representation of menstruation, while Asian communities tend to take a conservative approach by offering solutions to women's worries during menstruation.

This study focuses on the multimodal analysis of sanitary pad advertisements as the object of the study. This research analyzes two advertisements entitled *Charm Safe Night - Beauty Secret 30'* and *Bodyform Dailies: Extra Protection Liners*. Charm is a Japanese brand founded in 1961, produced by a giant company, namely Unicharm, which is claimed to be the largest manufacturer of hygiene products in Asia and the third-largest in the world. Reported from Kontan.co.id, Charm brand ranks second in the feminine hygiene market in Indonesia (Qolbi 2018).

Meanwhile, Bodyform is a Swedish product manufactured in UK. Bodyform is a regional brand of Libresse, an international brand of feminine hygiene products owned by Essity, a Swedish personal care products company. Libresse has developed into a global brand. Its products are now sold in 101 countries and areas worldwide and lead the market trend in Europe and South America. Based on these two brands' achievements and wide reach, the researcher believes that each of these brands is suitable to represent the respective Asian and Western cultures.

To promote or inform a product or service, advertisers use advertisements as one of the communication tools. According to (Moriarty, Mitchell and Wells 2011), advertising is a type of marketing communication. It is a general term that refers to all forms of communication used by advertisers to reach their customers and deliver the message. It is persuasive and carefully targeted. Advertisers have their strategies for each product they advertise. They try to build a branding that is in demand in the market. A video advertisement is one means of marketing goods targeted at optimizing benefit by its function as a persuasive tool.

In the field of language, both linguistic and non-linguistic texts or multimodal texts (both linguistic and non-linguistic), the function remains the same. Words are not the only medium for communicating with one another. Different modes of sign are also used for meaning-making, a term that refers to multimodality. The words make the images understandable: they are “glosses” for the images (Olowu and Akinkurolere 2015), some of which do not convey much information in themselves. Images do not “speak for themselves”; they become intelligible because they are accompanied by words, and words come alive when coordinated with pictures. Thus, there are three “modalities” that interact together: spoken words, visual text, and images (Kress, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* 2010).

Suprakisno (2015) argues that advertisements have a multidimensional meaning in that they deliver a message not only through language or verbal features but also with visual elements. The language in the advertisement uses transactional language that prioritizes the content of the communication. There is no direct

feedback or interaction from the audience. The use of multimodal in advertising is to examine the communicative function. It is to reveal the communicative purpose of images and texts. Because multimodal analysis tries to comprehend the power and meaning of a text that integrates multiple modes such as verbal, visual, and aural, it is vital to research multimodal in an advertisement to understand the complexity of meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: Grammar of Visual Design* 2006).

There are a number of valuable studies of advertisements using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) and Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) theories of multimodal discourse analysis that have been done by several researchers. Fathimah (2014), Afifah (2017), Olowu and Akinkurolere (2015), Savitri and Rosa (2019), and Amatullah, Rosa and Fitrawati (2019), all of which discuss multimodality in commercial products advertisements circulated in mass media based on the theory of Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). They examined how multimodal discourse analysis as a method that takes into account multiple modes of communication interact with each other to create semiotic meanings.

However, none of these studies provided a multimodal analysis of the women's sanitary pads advertisements. Besides, not many researchers have examined the multimodal comparisons between advertisements produced in two culturally different communities. Most of the studies discuss how semiotic tools and visual and verbal elements are related without giving a further example of the cultural background. In this study, an analysis of multimodal advertising is

elaborated by linking it to the cultural background. The results of these five studies provide insight into the importance of understanding multimodality and the correlation between multimodality in advertising. Nevertheless, there is an urgency to investigate how multimodality in sanitary pad advertisements expresses meaning in relation to the depiction of menstruation in two different cultures.

In this study, the researcher wants to analyze multimodal elements in these advertisements and relate them to the stigmas and cultural beliefs of the communities. This study is analyzed using the theory from several scholars. The theory of multimodality by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) in their *Systemic Functional Grammar* and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) in their *visual grammar* theory. Halliday and Hasan (1985) suggest that there are three theoretical assumptions of the social semiotic approach to multimodality. First, social semiotics posits that representation and communication are constantly based on a variety of modes, all of which have an impact on the meaning of the world (ideational meaning), position us with someone or something (interpersonal meaning) and generate a structured text (textual meaning). Multimodality is intended to examine how, in all modes, these meanings are realized.

Multimodality systems are analyzed based on principles drawn from Halliday's three metafunctions. This research aims to compare the multimodal elements of Asian and Western sanitary pad advertisements in relation to the different cultural beliefs and stigmas they hold on menstruation. Therefore, comparing advertisements of sanitary pads in different communities can give us

insights on the differences, what causes them, and their impacts, as well as possible similarities, which can then be used for improvement.

1.2 Statement(s) of the Problems

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulates the problems as follows:

1. What are the multimodal elements in Asian and Western sanitary pad advertisements?
2. How do the multimodal elements in Asian and Western sanitary pad advertisements represent different views on menstruation in relation to cultural beliefs and stigmas?

1.3 Objective(s) of the Study

Related to the problem's statements above, the objectives of this research are:

1. To identify the multimodal elements found in Asian and Western sanitary pad advertisements.
2. To discover how the multimodal elements in Asian and Western sanitary pad advertisements represent different views on menstruation in relation to cultural beliefs and stigmas.

1.4 Significance(s) of the Study

Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the field of discourse study as a source of multimodal studies for video advertisements, especially on how semiotic resources in this advertisement reveal meaning, how linguistic elements reinforce visual meanings and verbal texts and how the elements

(visual and linguistic) express meanings and the relationship between verbal text and visual image in the advertisement.

Practically, the result of this research can give a number of contributions. It is expected that the results may provide new insight, especially for advertisers and brand companies, to see what they can improve in their advertisements so that advertisers can be wiser in making ads that do not provide bad representation for women and menstruation. Good representation is important because it signifies a symbolic social existence. Moreover, it can provide beneficial information to English department students who plan to organize research in the same field.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This present research is limited to the multimodality in Asian and Western sanitary pads advertisements. Sanitary pad advertisements analyzed in this research are from the brands “Libresse” as the representative of the Western community and “Charm” as the representative of the Asian community. These brands are chosen with various considerations, one of which is because they are well-known and are widely used in these countries.

The multimodality elements are examined based on a concept derived from Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2004) Systemic Functional Grammar. This concept was extended by Kress and van Leeuwen in 2006. Halliday argues that language has three metafunctions, these are ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. Based on the background of the study, which has been discussed above, the researcher would like to limit the focus of this study to the analysis of the ideational metafunction for the verbal data and representational and interactive

meaning for the visual data. This study does not provide verbal and visual explanations in advertisements with different objects.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

The definition of an important term is given as follows:

- Cultural beliefs: a collection of behavioral patterns linked to values, manners, and attitudes that have been shared and passed down by members of society to successive generations (Neuliep 2012).
- Stigma: any stain or mark that distinguishes certain persons from others (Goffman 1963).
- Asian: an umbrella term covering the heritage of various cultures or social structures, ethical norms and values, nations, and philosophical systems in the Asian community. Geographically it most often includes almost all parts of the Asian continent, the Mediterranean region, and several countries and cultures of eastern Europe (Blakesley and Hoogeveen 2011). Asian is usually associated with conservatism and traditionalism.
- Western: a cultural pattern that encompasses traditional customs, belief systems, political systems, artifacts, and technologies originating from western civilizations. The West refers to Europe and areas whose populations have had a large presence of particular European ethnic groups since the 15th century Age of Discovery. Westerns are usually associated with liberalism and progressiveness (Kurth 2003).
- Menstruation: bleeding that normally occurs every 28 days without any visible wounds or apparent injuries which occur exclusively in females,

starting during puberty, disappearing during pregnancy, and terminating during middle age (Menstruation in Girls and Adolescents: Using the Menstrual Cycle as a Vital Sign 2015).

- Advertisement video: a promotional strategy that employs audio-visual means to sell or offer goods, services, or ideas publicly sponsored, non-sponsored, and non-personal (Stanton 1984).
- Multimodal Discourse Analysis: an approach in which various modes are integrated to generate meaning in a multimodal text that includes textual, spoken, visual, audio, music, and many others for communication purposes (Ventola 2004).