

# Understanding Simulation and Simulacra in Samsung Commercial as Powerful Public Relations Strategy

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine whether the students of Politeknik Negeri Jember could understand the embedded meaning in the Samsung mobile phone commercial as they were in taking the public relation class. Most of the students tend to agree to choose Samsung as their gadget compare to other mobile phone brands regardless the functionality of the phone. Hence this study helps to examine and deliver plausible idea the image of Samsung that they uphold when choosing the gadget. Thus, this study uses purposive sampling of 30 students to determine whether they understand the work of simulation and simulacra in the commercial to provoke the customer into buying the product. The students were given the basic theory of semiotics in the initial meeting to understand the power of governing crowds using symbol in order to justify their reasoning into the image being displayed in the mobile phone commercial. This study concludes that most of students agree to buy the products without concerning the utilities but more into making a social statement when buying into the product. The images of having high social status, and become the part of global community are the significance being attached not only to the product but to customer possessing the Samsung mobile phone.

*Keywords: public relation, semiotics, Samsung, simulation and simulacra*

## Introduction

Understanding how public relation works in advertisement requires strong concept of semiotics as the study of signs and symbols. Semiotic helps to uncover the encoded meaning in signs directed in the advertisement such as commercial. Samsung as the brightest android based mobile phone plays symbol in the ads to provoke the consumer into trusting the water proof mobile phone Samsung galaxy s7. The commercial was played for the student in public relation class and the respond showed strong tendency to buy the commercial compare to other brand. The arguments show positive respond to the brand but the students fail to point out the thought provoking images in the ads which can possibly to escalate the brand image. They enjoy the cinema on the ad but they could not understand the implied meaning of the ad. Hence, this study is conducted

in the public relation class to see how the 30 students respond to the commercial and decide for themselves for buying the phone.

Commercial is narrated through story to convey the message implicitly. This helps the buyer to buy the smartphone not because they are given strong information about the advancement of technology but more into the sensation and reputation they are attaching to themselves after buying the smartphone.

The semiotic analysis being employed in this study is proposed by Jean Baudrillard, the French philosopher and postmodern thinker for semiotic study, where he cites that goods can only be prestigious if they have turned into signs. The purchase of something beyond utility, its status, and aesthetic or luxury value, for with the passage from a utilitarian culture to a consumer culture the consumption of sign values takes precedence (Jean Baudrillard, 2017). Following this, the action of buying smartphone is no longer essential for the utilities but the sensation of making statement and reputation when buying it. Thus, public relation's task is to foster prestige for its client and to present its message in such a way that it 'thereby renders it ready for acclamatory assent in a climate of non-public opinion' (Habermas, 1991). Following the notion of the two thinkers above, the study is to see how the students of public relation class grasping the implied message and justify their argument on why they buy or not buy the product so they know how to work with sign and symbols for their future carrier pursuing as an expert in public relation practitioner.

### **Theoretical framework**

The connection between semiotics and public relation is summarized in the saying "Since crowds do not reason, they can only be organized and stimulated through symbols and phrases" (Fellow, 2010). The study of semiotics bridges the discipline of language to the applied science of public relation. Semiotics helps to understand how to govern people's mind when using language verbally is not efficient thus it requires symbol to amplify the message in broader yet effective way.

Following the European tradition of signs from Saussure who places the definition of sign as the combination of signifier and signified, Jean Baudrillard enhances the theory of signs by introducing the theory of simulation and simulacra which he says to develop in four different orders of stages such as these followings.

- 1) 'the counterfeit of the real' exemplified by the production of the copy as equivalent to the original in the period from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution;
- 2) the mass production of series of exact replicas or mass objects associated with the Industrial Revolution;
- 3) 'the disappearance of the referent' as the relationship between images, subjects and events is totally transformed as the world is constituted in and through models, codes and digitality; and
- 4) a fractal or viral order where in the absence of reference points culture and politics are characterized by uncertainty and non-equivalence (Richard G. Smith, 2011)

The idea of simulacra lies in the point 4 where signs have less interest to the reference anymore but more into constitution of the images being displayed, thus phone is no longer seen as the tool for communication or car as transportation vehicle but more into the constructed idea or image proposed by the simulation. Simulation generates the illusion of the human imagination with blurry difference between reality and representation. The consumer consumes what the simulation has to offer as self-fulfilling prophecy which has been inscribed (Jean Baudrillard, 2017) Simulation has the power to formulate the abstract to become concrete. The abstract and imaginary ideas within the consumers thought are being inscribed using images to provoke consumer's mind. The process where consumer believes the simulation better than the reality, this is called the trap of simulacrum.

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyper-real. (J Baudrillard, 1998)

The constructed imaginary simulated in the commercial is presented as the “reality” without referencing to the reality anymore or in this case cellphone is not seen as communication device only but something else. The purpose of simulacra is to control human by trapping them in the constructed reality delivered by the simulation. Thus human, as in audience of the commercial cannot live without believing the simulation and simulacra by breaking down the difference between the real and the artifice (Richard G. Smith, 2011). The phenomenon where consumer culture is having false consciousness, they start to become ‘consumer citizenship’ where their consumption circulation offers more experiences of agency, identity, pleasure, and status (Cronin, 2018)

### ***Related Studies***

Some previous studies presented in this section are more into theoretical study and public relation study. The two studies are delivered to bring more thoughts of how public relation and post structural semiotics could be combined to understand how signs are being employed in the advertisement.

The first article is a study about nation branding employs Jean Baudrillard theory of simulation and simulacra to see how Brand Kosovo practices simulation and simulacra (Kaneva, 2018). This article helps theorizing Media in Nation Branding Special Issue. The result shows that simulacra can be applied into nation branding to give ‘false image’ to the open world because nation has to maintain its reputation.

The second article employs public relations as a communication strategy to justify the notion of publics as reactive entities (Botan & Soto, 1998). The article plays semiotics from both European and American tradition to argue that public is an ongoing process of agreement upon an interpretation, and that during this process a public may well develop an interpretation that is more sophisticated.

The two articles contribute to this following research since they complete the introduction of this study. The first article sees that nation branding can be useful to

promote certain image using the simulation and simulacra theory. However, since it is used to provoke certain image Kanvea does not give the thought of how other people perceive the image. The research is theoretically worked but not yet being tested for further ado. The next research applies theory of semiotic but less advanced since it was conducted in 1998 with structuralism theory to scrutinize public relation efficiency. The theories applies both American and European perspective which help to legitimate that the crowds are indeed have no reason and they need to be governed to minimize the multiple yet limited interpretation of thoughts when deciphering symbols.

This research is to give more understanding on how the subtle message in commercial are guiding the thoughts of the students and see how efficient the communication strategy in commercial could lead more buyers to trust the Samsung mobile phone.

### **Method**

This research was conducted to the fourth semester students of English Department at Politeknik Negeri Jember were in the public relation class. This sample was chosen using a purposive sampling method where the sample was chosen because of a specific purpose (Creswell, 2012). The purpose was the fourth semester students are prepared for the future public relation specialist. They are given communicative strategy to deliver information effectively.

The first step is to decipher the simulation in the commercial by cropping the scene in the Samsung mobile phone ad. Second, the collective simulation is then gathered to conclude the simulacra being proposed for the students. The last is to question the students. The idea is to see how well they could understand the Samsung commercial given to them and then justify their reason to buy or not to buy the product. The students should give their comment to the commercial and justify their answer. The researcher should correlate the simulation and the simulacra in the commercial to the answer provided by the students. Hence, conclusion is made from the 30 subjects.

### **Findings and discussion**

This study is initiated by deciphering what simulation is given scene by scene to audience. The scenes generate narrative to make the commercial smooth in delivering the message. The scene 1 is started by the coming of the Asian boy riding his bike in the city where he meets a group of girls riding car that happen to stop by.

This scene is where the social hierarchy is being played. The boy is from lower economy class compare to the girls. This simulation is shown through the scene where a girl is riding car and the boy is riding motor cycle. The comparison of car and bicycle shows the social status of the boy and the girl. The girl is rich and the boy is poor. The boy was dominated as he cannot get the girl number but to write it in her hand. The boy could not show his phone because the girl does not give her phone number back. As the consequences, the simulation gives strong impression that the boy should wait for a call rather than he calls first.

Scene 1



Scene 2



Scene 3



In Scene 2, the girl says goodbye along with her friends and leaves the boy behind. The scene provokes the customer mind to see how the social economy gap works in the commercial. The boy does not show the phone yet because there is no reason to show it unless he has the permission to save her number. The boy was neglected and deserted to wait for the call. It was the dilemma and insecurity that can be identified by the same age viewers. However, from this city scene the scene moves to the party scene.

The scene 3 amplifies the insecurities and dilemma for the viewers. The audience is intrigued to know more. The boy shows it by once in while checking his phone though he has no phone ring during the party. The party places him in the international situation where mixed nationalities and races attending the party. The simulation gives persona that the boy belongs to the international community where he can engage with many people from many backgrounds but yet he needs to wait for the girl. Showing the phone in the party is also the simulation that the boy is part of the group which is also good for the phone to be attached as well. The phone is not in close up shot to make the audience focus more on the anxiety of the boy.

#### Scene 4



The scene 4 is in the public transportation where he accidentally meets to see the girl who shares the same ringtone and most definitely has the phone like him. The simulation provokes the customer into seeing that the phone is affordable because everyone can buy it and not exclusive. The scene also shows how the socio economic status is not a problem to buy the phone. Public transportation is chosen also to display the meaning of more inclusive phone. Bus is good choice since it is also symbolism of public spaces that everyone can show their phone to other people that is to show their inner preferences. In this scene, the woman is confidence to show her phone and proud to talk to other people in public. The woman is talking on the phone without thinking if she could disturb other people spaces. The girl is around the same age. The old man is not using the phone but he is still okay. The phone in this way is purposively made for youngsters who demand to stay connected.

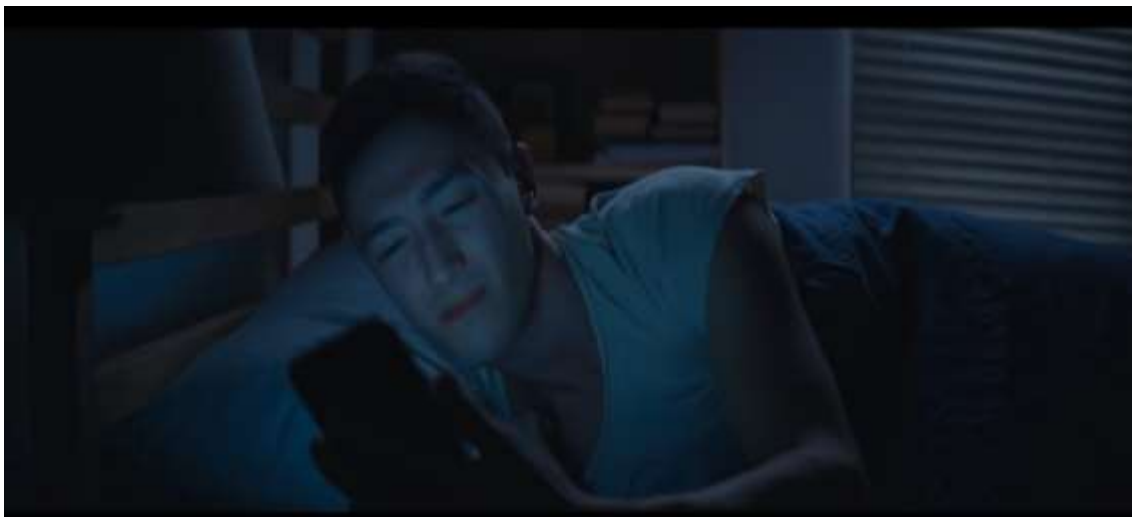
## Scene 5



The bathroom scenes show the advantage of the Samsung mobile phone (Scene 5). Though the boy's hand is wet he quickly gets the phone as soon as it rings. The boy does not hesitate to take the call though he is still naked. This is where the dilemmas given the most. The boy waits nights and day for the call and he still waits in her most private time for the girl to call her back. However, he needs to wait longer than he thought

The bed scene shows the boy with his phone (Scene 6). This goes without saying that Samsung has long battery life that it can stay during the night sleep. Night is good mood to be in the scene because it picture the restless boy waiting for every notification from the girl. The audience also knows without being told that every notification is not from the girl since the boy has the same plain face in the night.

## Scene 6



## Scene 7



The last scene is the kitchen scene where the boy is doing his dishes (Scene 8). He places the phone near the washbasin without feeling risky that the phone may fall into the water. He is quickly looking at the phone when the phone rings though he is in the middle of something. The simulation in the story places a regular boy who is careless every time with common daily activity and the one he cares about is about his future love. The scene does not and never emphasize on the phone but more into the reputation of a boy who has no girlfriend. He might have no jobs, or no good skill but that does not make him restless. What he worries the most is being single and lonely. The fear of the audience happens when the phone falls into the sink but the boy quickly grasps the phone and takes it out from the water.

## Scene 8





The last is a worth waiting scene where the audience finally gets to see the boy to get a phone call from the girl (Scene 9). There is no saying or direct statement that this is the phone call from the girl but the facial gesture from the boy expresses so. The audience is let alone to decide that the boy finally gets to talk to girl.

#### Scene 9



The final scene is in the kitchen. The boy smiles and he knows why he is so happy. The simulation ends here as the anxiety and restlessness of a young boy come to an end. The exploitation of insecurities has been played in the simulation which has nothing to do with the phone but the phone becomes the answer of his prayer. The feeling is connected to the phone not because of its utilities but because it is the antidote of being insecure, left behind, lonely and other complexities which mostly happen to the youngsters. The simulation briefs the audience that the phone makes a statement of confidence and implicitly imprinted to loosen the gap of economy status. The girl who has car is still willing to connect with the boy with bike. Simulation of being international communities and inclusive in this matter also important since they have nothing to do with the phone but the sensation carries on the phone and the buyer who owns it. The boy is in the simulacra as the real has disappeared (Jean Baudrillard & Lane, 2000) and people consume the sign of the phone offered by the simulation.

In this section some commentaries from the students who go hand in hand with the imprinted simulation will be given to underline the implied meaning of commercial. First is Student 12 who replies “I want to buy the phone because Samsung is good, and I think it is better than other cellphone, so I will buy it wiith my bidikmisi scholarship”. The second student, student 25 answers “Samsung is global android phone producer, even Americans, they use Samsung, I watched in some movies”. The third student, student 28, responses, “I feel more proud to show my phone at the café when it is Samsung not other Chinese mobile phone”

The respondents from the three students summarize the whole population statement that they agree to buy Samsung. The simulacra functions in public relation strategy to govern their thought because it is good global smartphone, and it also shows their social status in public so they do not hesitate to show the phone in front of everyone.

## Conclusion

In this study, Simulation and simulacra plays big role in provoking students into buying the smartphone. As public relation practitioner in the future, simulation and simulacra can be applied in the use communication strategy to control, direct and even more govern customer's desire which has nothing to do with the utilities of the products. Students' opinion and commentary after watching the commercial prove to be accurate evidence that emotion can be imprinted in the product through exploiting emotion without doing hard selling. Giving soft selling and implied message is more effective to stigmatize certain product rather than giving direct information about the phone.

In conclusion, this study approves that sensation of grasping a higher social status or hierarchy is understandable due to the narrative and symbolism of the desperate young boy simulates the idea of climbing social prestige. The insecurity, loneliness and being the global community are the sensation to be imprinted in the reasoning when buying the products. The students become more confident because the phone does not only answer they need to stay connected but also the cure for their self-esteem problems.

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