BELO THE BEAUTY STANDARDS: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF BELO WHITENING PRODUCT ADVERTISEMENTS ON FACEBOOK

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the transfer of meanings in whitening product advertisements of the Philippine-based medical aesthetic clinic, Belo, using Peirce's(1867 in Atkin, 2008) theory of signs. Ten advertisements were examined for the elements of sign they contain, namely: the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. These elements were used to describe how feminine beauty is signified in the selected advertisements. The results of the analysis uncovered realities in Filipino society. The signs present in the data were classified into three: the text, the visual imagery, and the colors. These three categories were vital in describing that feminine beauty in advertisements is related to the color of the skin, fragrance, and characteristics such as divinity, freshness, cleanliness, and transformation. Furthermore, the results were observed to reveal Filipino social conditions such as current trends in the beauty industry (online shopping, minimalism, celebrity endorsers) and the persistence of a skin color hierarchy mentality among Filipinos. Advertisements do not only provide an understanding of effective strategies for selling products, but they may also serve as a stepping stone in understanding the culture and values of the market they intend to reach. It is recommended that future researchers take into consideration a quantitative approach to this study to capture more aspects of other possible related studies.

Keywords: *Advertisement, feminine beauty, semiotic analysis, signs*

INTRODUCTION

Beauty is a prey constantly pursued to be translated into a satisfying single definition. Artists seek to communicate it through brush strokes, poets attempt to express it through verses, and photographers set out to capture it through their lenses. However, as Francis Bacon (1597 in Borghi, 2020) wrote in his essay, what lures humans even more about beauty is the impossibility of fully expressing it through anything. Hence, as with other abstract concepts, humans resort to understanding and expressing beauty through language (Borghi, 2020).

"Intense pleasure", "an impression of universality", "perceived harmony", and "meaningfulness" are some of the phrases that people use to characterize beauty in general (Brielmann, Nuzzo, & Pelli, 2021). There is a sense of objectivity, however, beauty can get subjective in the eyes of the beholder even to their other senses. For physical beauty, it has to appeal to the majority (Marwick, 2004). In one way or another, society shares similar concepts of beauty, especially of the physical. Palmer (2013) observed that symmetric, round, and familiar objects are what people would most likely find to be visually pleasing. Similar studies

also observed that although the concept differs from one another, it remains true for the majority that beauty is pleasurable. Beauty is also agreed to be an important element in society as it reflects social issues such as economic status, power position, importance in society, and social taboos (Taga, 2012; Mendoza, 2014). This shows that beauty does not only equate to physical attractiveness as it also entails social benefits that attract people to pursue and incorporate it into their lives. However, this points to the question: who or what sets the standard for beauty?

Instead of agreeing to the subjectivity of beauty, society conforms to a more general concept, which later on was referred to as the "beauty standards." The pursuit of these standards stretches back to Ancient Greece and Rome as cosmetic products such as anti-wrinkle creams and skin care formulas were discovered to be part of the daily routine of women to make themselves attractive (Dolan, 2021). Until today, the beauty product industry still confirms the shared concept of beauty among people, specifically women, as this is something they attempt to represent through their advertisements. An effective advertisement is one that understands the culture and context of the market they are reaching out to (Abokhoza, Mohamed, & Narula, 2019). Beauty product advertisements in East Asian countries differ from those in European countries as they do not share the same culture and historical background. Some international brands also modify their advertisements based on the country they will be marketed to. This is an attempt to make advertisements more personal thus boosting engagement in the market (Kotler, 2008). This suggests that looking at the ideas perpetuated in advertisements may be a good start in understanding the social condition of a certain nation.

Advertisements are the primary method of selling a product. According to Crisp (1987), advertising represents wishes, desires, and problems imposed on consumers. This was also observed in new media as Ali and Husain (2024) observed that even advertisements in the 21st century contain markers that affect consumers. In their study, it was explored that beauty products use transition markers (e.g. "so") to suggest logical consequence that sells among women. Hence, just as beauty product advertisements represent beauty, they are also observed to be constantly fueling concepts in society that keep women's self-esteem low by imposing unrealistic beauty standards that are only achieved through the marketed products (Taga, 2012). Linguistic evidence has been a useful tool to understand the linguistic process of these advertisement materials in exhibiting the mentioned concepts.

Signs are anything that unifies a sound-image and a concept (Saussure, 1915 in Dolan, 2021). It can be described as the primary object of meaning-making as interpreting signs uncovers ideas and concepts associated with a certain representation. For instance, a picture of a beauty product is a direct representation of the product; an index of flowers may be used to represent good fragrance as it is associated with the idea of scent; and finally, involving a wealthy model in an advertisement has no direct relationship to the product, however, it may be used to create a connection between the brand and the consumer's values. This reveals the power of advertisements to influence minds and impose ideas on their target market. The different signs incorporated in advertisements trigger different associations and ideas as this is how the language of advertisement is intended to be communicated. Semiotic analysis helps reveal every idea and belief that an advertisement material may be communicating.

In previous studies of beauty product advertisements in the Philippines, the beauty standards they represent seem to change now and then. From conforming to Western standards, the East Asian concept of beauty has slowly taken over the beauty trends in the country for the last decade (Capistrano, 2018). This can be observed through one form of sign incorporated in these beauty product advertisements which is the increase of Korean models advertising the products. The importance of semiotic analysis in such pursuit of uncovering meanings is the way it deconstructs the concept of the advertisements into smaller units that imply meanings on their own as well. The signs used by advertisers change from

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time to time to meet the cultural context of the market; however, in the Philippines, one standard remains after all these decades: achieving white skin.

Having a white skin complexion has been one of the standards Filipino women adhere to when it comes to achieving beauty. Brown complexion has long been associated with poverty while achieving a white complexion offers an opportunity to improve life through greater aesthetic appeal (Mendoza, 2014). This is the outcome of the long history of colonialism in the Philippines— Filipinos have developed a "colonial mentality" that drives them to uncritically reject anything Filipino to pursue American standards (David & Okazaki, 2006). It is part of the Philippines' post-colonialism era where their colonizers are no longer physically present, yet their attitudes and beliefs remain relevant in the decolonization process of the country (David & Nadal, 2013). Previous studies have shown how the colonial mentality which is carefully indicated in the different aspects of Filipino society is affecting the minds of Filipinos negatively (Decena, 2014). This is illustrated by the existence of a skin color hierarchy among Filipinos. The institutionalized concept of skin color hierarchy upholds the belief that individuals with lighter complexion are more intelligent and attractive (Mateo, 2016). This is the primary factor attributed to the fast growth of whitening product businesses in the Philippines.

Advertising has also been criticized for its impact on cultural values. Wharton (2013) claims that advertising does not only persuade people to consume products but also perpetuates false consciousness and it "manipulates the symbols that serve as the social fabric of human association." Previous studies identified different strategies in advertising that impose their ideals on their consumers. This includes introducing unrealistic beauty standards by using celebrities as models. While many celebrities are marketed to the public as role models, the latter may resort to drastic methods to resemble their ideals. Often, women compare themselves to their representation in these advertisements which often leads to dissatisfaction (Richins, 1991; Lv, Liang, & Luo,

2022). This shows how great advertising can affect nations as it may contribute to how individuals view the value of their lives.

This study focused on the significance of Filipina beauty through whitening product advertisements on the official Facebook page of Belo, a Philippine-based cosmetic company. The company was recognized for "setting new standards for the beauty industry" (Global Health & Parma, 2022); which shows the strong influence of the company on the beauty industry and its market. This also testifies to the importance of the company in developing new trends, perpetuating ideas among women, and reflecting the present state of the nation. Through semiotic analysis, the signs used in their advertisements are examined to reveal the social conditions they reflect and the meanings they generate. The findings of this study are expected to provide a better understanding of the present state of the Philippines when it comes to advertising and the development of national identity.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to identify the signs in the Belo whitening product advertisements on Facebook. These elements were analyzed to generate meanings to uncover the ideas and social conditions these advertisements contain.

It specifically aimed to:

1. identify the signs present in the Belo whitening product advertisements on Facebook from 2022-2023;

2. examine how feminine beauty is signified through the advertisements; and

3. relate the findings of the study to broader Filipino social conditions.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The semiotic analysis utilized in this study was based on Peirce's (1867) semiotic theory, as cited in Cobley and Jansz (1997), Atkin (2008), and Pham (2018), which states that anything that can

hold meaning is a sign. According to Peirce (1867), a sign is a representation of something to an individual. Hence, to understand signs, interpreters play an important role as their interpretation of the sign completes the meaning of the sign itself.
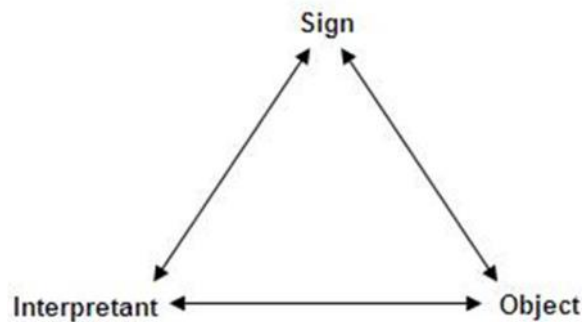

Figure 1. Peirce's (1867) theory of signs

Peirce's (1867) theory of signs was applied to analyze the variables involved and to address the objectives of the study. According to Peirce (1867), a sign is composed of three elements namely the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. These three reveal how signification takes place in a sign. The representation is the sign itself which establishes a connection with the object, and finally, this relationship produces the interpretant. The figure above presents the semiosis process of deconstructing meaning into three elements: the sign/representamen, the object, and the interpreter. Pierce also asserts that signs contain these three elements as they work together to construct a specific effect from the speaker to the receiver. The representamen can easily be understood as de Saussure's equivalent to "signs' '— it could be anything that is perceived to be a representation of an object. This possesses the characteristic of what Peirce calls "firstness" as this is where meaning begins. Although by itself it will not generate any meaning, the representation and construction of meaning begin with the existence of the representamen. Just as the signifier represents the signified, the representamen also represents an object. An object is a derived meaning which may

vary from person to person. The innovation Peirce contributed to the development of semiotics is the third element which is the interpretant. The interpretant binds the representamen and the object together. It states the relation of the two elements to one another and their surrounding. Hence, in analyzing the interpretant, the elements, and their contexts were put into observation to uncover meanings in the advertisement.

The elements of the chosen advertisement material were treated as the signs in this study. Elements such as text, visual imagery, and colors were observed as the representamens. To further reveal the signification of feminine beauty, the association and network of ideas these representamens trigger were referred to as the objects. Finally, the interpretant is the relationship between the representamen and the object. This study was done through the interpretation of the sum of meanings gathered from the individual meanings of the signs identified in each advertisement. The results of the signification were then related to Filipino social conditions as this serves as a key to a better understanding of society and the marketing industry.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a descriptive qualitative design. The qualitative approach ensured the in-depth analysis of the selected advertisement materials for Belo whitening products. The design also allowed the generation of meaning from the advertisements based on Peirce's theory of signs (1867) in relation to current Filipino social conditions.

Sources of Data

The data of this study were obtained from Belo, one of the top whitening product brands in the Philippines recognized by the Global Health and Parma in 2022 for setting new standards for the beauty industry in the country. The brand belongs to the industry pioneers and has topped the ranking of skin whitening products in the Philippines in 2022. The advertisement materials for

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this study were gathered from the official Facebook page of Belo (https://www.facebook.com/beloessentials) from 2022 to 2023.

Sampling Technique

The study used purposive and convenience sampling developed by Reed et al. (1996) in choosing the advertisement materials for analysis. It is a form of non-probability sampling where the researchers choose the data according to their judgment of the data's qualification for the study. Furthermore, it is cost-effective for the researchers as it saves time while also allowing them to choose the materials fit for the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers gathered advertisement materials from the official Facebook page of Belo (Belo Essential). The total of advertisements found were thirty (30) materials. However, those with human or any human body parts posted between 2022 to 2023 were chosen leading to the ten advertisements used for this study. The researchers used these materials for individual analysis based on Peirce's theory of signs (1867) which led to the observation of the sign/representamen, object, and Interpretant present in the advertisement materials. Finally, the results of the individual analysis were organized and summarized to produce general conclusions on the signs frequently used in whitening product advertisements. These conclusions were also used to expand the findings of the study in relation to the Filipino social conditions the advertisements were suggesting.

Ethical Considerations

Belo is one of the top whitening product industries in the Philippines. Over the decades, their products have proven themselves in the market and among their consumers. This is known to the researchers as it led them to select the brand for the analysis. However, the meanings generated from the advertisements selected for this study do not reflect the exact intended meanings of the company. This study only assessed materials that were relevant to its objectives. Hence, it

does not intend to cause any harm to the brand name in general as the study only aims to describe the present condition of Filipino society using the advertisements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representamens in Belo Whitening Product Advertisements

Each advertisement differs in its contents as they promote different products. The three elements of signs were represented by [R] for representamen, [O] for the object, and [I] for the interpretant. This section identified the different elements in the advertisement which act as the representamens. The elements were observed to fall into three categories, namely: the text, the visual imagery, and the colors.

Table 1 shows the representamens in the selected Belo whitening product advertisements. The table consists of three columns. The first column indicates the number of the advertisement respectively. The second column includes a copy of the ten advertisement posters analyzed in this study. Finally, the last column is dedicated to the representamen which was also divided into three categories as mentioned above. The text pertains to the common words observed in the advertisement such as verbs and adjectives. The visual imagery includes visual elements found in the advertisement. This includes the objects in the advertisement such as the product and the model featured. The colors are the common colors observed in the advertisements. These elements were explored to capture how these advertisement posters connect to their market.

Table 1. Representamens in the selected Belo whitening product advertisements

ADVERTISEMENT	REPRESENTAMEN		
	TEXT	VISUAL IMAGERY	COLOR
1	• Verb: smell, can • Adjective: good	• Belo Kojic Acid and Tranexamic Acid product • Hands • Flowers	• Orange • Green • White
2	• Adjective: perfect, beautiful	• Belo Anti Perspirant Deodorant and Underarm Whitening Cream • Filipino celebrity • Shopee logo	• Orange • White • Pink

Source: https://www.facebook.com/beloessentials

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Table 1. Continued

| ADVERTISEMENT | | REPRESENTAMEN | |
	TEXT	VISUAL IMAGERY	COLOR
3		• Belo Whitening Lotion • Hands • Fur background	• White • Pink
4		• Belo Tranexamic Acid • Filipino celebrity	• Orange • White

Source: https://www.facebook.com/beloessentials

Table 1. Continued

ADVERTISEMENT	REPRESENTAMEN		
	TEXT	**VISUAL IMAGERY**	**COLOR**
5	• Adjectives: intense, amazing, free • Verbs: SMELLS	• Belo Kojic Acid and Tranexamic Acid • Filipino celebrity • Shopee logo • Rejuvenating pimple cream • Drop of lotion	• Orange • White • Pink
6	• Adjectives: perfect, beautiful	• Belo Anti-Pespirant Deodorant and Underarm Whitening Cream • Underarm • Shopee logo	• White • Pink • Orange

Source: https://www.facebook.com/beloessentials

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Table 1. Continued

ADVERTISEMENT	REPRESENTAMEN		
	TEXT	VISUAL IMAGERY	COLOR
7		• Belo Underarm Whitening Cream • Hands	• White • Orange
8	• Adjectives: beautifying, stubborn, dark, excess, free • Verbs: erases, brightens, cleanses, eliminates	• Belo Beautifying Bar • Beauty expert • Shopee logo • Rejuvenating night cream	• White • Pink • Orange

Source: https://www.facebook.com/beloessentials

Table 1. Continued

ADVERTISEMENT	REPRESENTAMEN		
	TEXT	VISUAL IMAGERY	COLOR
9	• Adjectives: perfect, beautiful	• Belo under-arm product • White un-derarms • Shopee logo • White-skinned model	• Orange • White • Pink
10		• Hands • A small amount of cream	• White • Orange

Source: https://www.facebook.com/beloessentials

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Objects and Interpretants of the Advertisements

The semiosis process begins with the identification of the representamen which were examined through the analysis of the elements present in the advertisements of Belo whitening products. These representamen produce objects that create a sensation of feeling appeared (Cobley & Jansz, 2002). The objects denote concepts that the representamen refer to. Finally, the representamen and object establish a relationship which is also called the interpretant.

This section summarizes the common elements found in the selected advertisements. It was sectioned into three general categories: the texts, the visual imagery, and the colors. The objects were identified for each representamen which was followed by the identification of the interpretants.

Text. This part presents the textual language as representamen [R] found in each advertisement. Adjectives and verbs were specifically identified as they evoked images and ideas that were essential in examining the ideas represented by the materials.

It was observed that verbs (Table 2) and adjectives (Table 3) were frequently used in the article to express their message. Verbs that imply positive outcomes such as "eliminate" and "cleanses" were used to promote the effectiveness of the products. On the other hand, positive adjectives were used in association with the product while negative adjectives were used to describe the appearances the product hoped to solve. This further revealed that advertisements aim to build rapport useful for influencing by emphasizing its good qualities.

Table 2. Semiotic analysis of the verbs in the selected Belo whitening products

REPRESENTAMEN	OBJECT	INTERPRETANT
brightens, cleanses	Improvement of the current state	Belo products can brighten and clean the user's physical appearance
can	Possibility	Belo products can do what it promotes to the public
eliminates	The action of removing	Belo products can take away the unwanted appearance woman has.

Table 3. Semiotic analysis of the adjectives in the Belo whitening product

REPRESENTAMEN	OBJECT	INTERPRETANT
good, perfect, beautiful, amazing	Positive affirmation of the result	Belo products can produce great results that the user will experience being praised.
stubborn, dark, excess	A negative feature of a person's skin	Women possess an unwanted attribute on their physical appearance that should be removed

This paper found a significant number of verbs and adjectives used in Belo advertisements on Facebook. The researchers found that most of the promotional image of Belo that incorporates words or taglines in their advertisement commonly include the verbs "brightens" and "cleanses" which represent the object [O] of improvement on the current state. The relationship between the representamen and object produces the interpretant [I] suggesting that the Belo product is capable of making the user achieve a brighter and cleaner physical appearance. The verb "can" introduces the object [O] of possibility which presents the interpretant [I] which means the Belo product is able to do what it promotes to the public. Additionally, the verb "eliminates" produces the object [O] referring to the action of removing which brings out the interpretant [I] implying that the Belo product can take away the unwanted appearance any woman has. Lastly, the verb "smells" presents the object [O] referring to the sense of smell which builds the interpretant [I] proposing that the Belo product has a scent that the target user will be able to smell.

Bai (2018) mentioned in his study that it is common for cosmetic advertisers to omit verbs as long as it does not affect the understanding of the whole commercial. This gives the impression that the use of verbs is not that significant in achiev-

ing effective communication in advertising. But despite that, the researchers agree with Christianto (2020) that verbs are employed to assist the purpose of an advertisement, which is to provoke and persuade the viewer to consider getting the item being promoted because of its features and ability that will enable the user to obtain the good result presented. In addition, both authors confirm that advertisers also use simple action words for easy understanding and recollection of the commercial as well as successful marketing of brand publicity. This is consistent with the findings of this research as the verbs found are straightforward and not complicated.

Furthermore, the use of adjectives is found in the materials analyzed in this paper. The words "good", "perfect", "beautiful", "beautifying", and "amazing" all represent the object [O] referring to a positive affirmation of the result. The representamen and object relationship brings out the interpretant [I] which implies the Belo product will produce a great outcome when the audience decides to use it. The adjectives "stubborn", "dark", and "excess" display the object [O] of a negative feature on a person's skin which the interpretant [I] suggests that women possess an unwanted attribute on their physical appearance that should be removed. Also, the word "intense" appeared in the advertisement which indicates the object [O]

referring to a greater degree of result which produces the interpretant [I] proposing that the Belo product can give a higher level of effect to the person who will use it. Finally, the adjective "free" represents the object [O] referring to the product that does not cost any penny which introduces the interpretant [I] implying that a charge-free product will be included when a person purchases the product advertised by Belo.

Christianto (2020) found in his study that adjective is the third most used lexical feature in any advertisement. The author confirmed in his paper that adjectives do not only describe the features and quality of the product but mainly praise and beautify the item being advertised. Bai (2018) also proves in his study that adjectives are frequently used and are considered indispensable in cosmetic advertisements. Moreover, aside from its function of promoting the brand, the author believes that the adjectives' purpose in an advertisement is to let the audience know what is the product and how is the product. These findings are consistent with what the researchers found in this paper that adjectives are employed to describe the function and quality of the Belo product and how effective it is to the user.

Visual imagery. If there is anything similar for all the advertisements selected for this study, it is the utilization of visual imagery (Table 4 and 5). This section is divided into two: the models and the non-verbal codes (bodily gestures and inanimate objects).

Celebrity models. The selected advertisements made use of two celebrity models. These models are included in the representamens [R] identified in their respective advertisement materials. The concepts they personate are their objects and the relationship of these concepts to the appeal of the materials are referred to as the interpretants.

Table 4. Semiotic analysis of the celebrity models in the selected Belo whitening products advertisements

REPRESENTAMEN	OBJECT	INTERPRETANT
Filipino celebrity	Triggers ideas of success and fame.	Suggesting that the product she advertises can have the same effect in women's lives.
Beauty expert	Represents the credibility of the product through scientific associations.	Suggesting that the product she advertises is safe for use and effective.

The first model is a Filipina actress who is known for her singing, dancing, and acting skills. She is dubbed the "Philippines' Pop Princess" for her exemplary contribution to the Philippine music industry. Her career in show business further developed when she won "Star For a Night (Philippine Edition)" in 2003 at the age of fourteen (14). Additionally, her performance as an actress was also recognized multiple times by the GMMSF Box Office Entertainment Awards in 2008, 2009, and 2013. Her movie in 2019 titled "Miss Granny" also took back her title "Best Actress" for that year.

She is also known for her rags-to-riches story. In an episode of GMA's *"Magpakailanman,"* a Philippine-based television show, the story of the model was retold on screen. This was where it became even known that she came from an average Filipino family with her father earning not more than enough for their family. However, this did not stop her from dreaming big, especially for her singing career. After she won in 2003, she remained in the industry until today as she got back on stage for her 20th Anniversary Concert.

She has been one of the models for Belo whitening products in the previous years up until 2023. In the semiosis process, her presence in the advertisements is the representamen [R]. The object [O] refers to the values she adds to the brand. Her reputation as a successful multi-hyphenated performer in show business is the object. Along with her story of success, she triggers certain associations of values and ideas. Her life reflects a successful story of achieving dreams and becoming relevant. From this, it can be inferred that the interpretant [I] is the relationship between the representamen and the object: the life status of the model is something that can be achieved through the whitening products she advertises.

This is in line with Richins (1991) and Lv, Liang, and Luo (2022) who observed that consumers often compare themselves with the models they see in advertisements. The same can be concluded from the presence of the model in the advertisement of Belo whitening products. Additionally, understanding her life story supports another

claim from Mendoza (2014) that achieving white skin reflects the desire of Filipino women to improve their life quality. The story of the model is a story of success; hence, her name alone gives a sense of hope for consumers to achieve the same.

The second model can be seen in Ad 8. Her presence in that specific advertisement is the representamen [R] and the object springs from the ideas she personates.

This model is the President and Medical Director of Belo Medical Group. She is known to be one of the pioneers of cosmetic surgery and dermatology in the Philippines. She developed trends in the beauty industry that were recognized by Global Health and Parma, a known Italian-based information platform on pharmaceutical and healthcare industries, in 2022. Aside from her phenomenal contribution, she also became an icon for beauty as she remains youthful despite her age.

In the advertisement, the model is wearing a laboratory coat with the logo of Belo on it. This element suggests the expertise of the model in the pharmaceutical field. This is referred to as "The Expert Technique" in the language of advertising. Prelipceanu (2013) described this as a technique to make an advertisement more credible as this adds scientific evidence which tends to persuade consumers to buy the product.

Just as the first model suggests, the values she reflects through the advertisements, the second model upholds certain values that appeal to the character and credibility of the consumers. The object [O] of this representamen refers to the expertise of the model. This is in line with Aristotle's three categories of persuasive language. Under *ethos,* these advertisements intend to convince people that their idea of feminine beauty is credible and reliable as testified by the known models they used. The ideas such as the first model's success, reputation as a performer, and achievements; the second model's success, her knowledge in the pharmaceutical field, and her reputation as a beauty icon are all a reflection of the values the advertisements uphold. These val-

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Table 5. Semiotic analysis of the non-verbal codes in the selected Belo whitening product advertisements

REPRESENTAMEN	OBJECT	INTERPRETANT
	It resonates with the painting "The Creation of Adam" which refers to the miracle of creation and the genius of Michaelangelo. (See Ad 7)	Suggests that Belo's whitening product is capable of the same level of transformation and creation.
	It represents accessibility, effectiveness, desirability, and self-confidence. (See Ads 2, 6, & 10)	Suggesting that the product's ability can effectively and fairly improve underarm appearance.
	Refers to how the model looks straightforwardly to indicate confidence.	The advertisement can turn users to achieve radiant and fair skin leading to beauty and self-confidence.
	The Filipino celebrity attributes a radiant smile and gazes with a smooth touch on the shoulder indicating confidence and satisfaction.	Suggesting that this product is credible and trusted to give fair and smooth skin.
	Seeing that the model is fairly standing without holding any of the products with a confident smile signifies authority and ownership.	evokes the notion of products are reliable, authentic, effective, and safe in achieving smooth, fair, and perfect skin

Source: https://www.facebook.com/beloessentials

ues that were considered the objects point to the interpretant [I] which persuades that the advertisement is a representation of the life that can be achieved through the products being promoted.

Non-verbal codes. Gestures, facial expressions, body language, movements, gaze, and others play an important role in advertisements. These complement the verbal expressions or linguistic cues to express a much more clear and complete meaning (Lacey, 1998), cited by Jauk (2012).

Hand posture is slanted in an upright direction. The left hand is holding the product pouring the lotion onto the right hand. Each hand is the illustration of giving and receiving something. The left hand is the medium to the right hand signifies being the one that gives and introduces the product with all trust seeing that all of the fingers are gently attached to the product and showing its brand name confidently. An open right hand indicates trust and belief in the product's potential benefits. Moreover, the hand gesture is the representamen [R]. The placement of the hands resembles the famous "helping hand" logo which signifies the concept of assisting [O]. This produces the interpretant [I] that suggests the ability of the Belo whitening product to help out in beautifying and whitening.

In Ad 7, the right hand is holding the product showing its brand name and product name without covering it and it indicates the promotion and offering of the product. The tip of the index finger of the left hand with a small drop of whitening cream. This gesture is almost similar to the painting "The Creation of Adam ' by the Italian artist Michaelangelo where " God's right arm is extended as if imparting the spark of life to Adam," (Porter, 2013). Hand gestures in the advertisement imply the same idea, the product acts as the source of achieving perfect skin. By showing the finger receiving the product, advertisements offer that the product is the key to a transformative source of perfect skin. The hand gesture in Ad 7 is the representamen [R]. It resonates with the painting "The Creation of Adam" and it brings to mind the miracle of creation and the genius of Michelangelo [O]. The relationship between the two produces the interpretant [I] that

suggests that Belo's whitening product is capable of the same level of transformation and creation.

In Ads 2, 6, and 9, a half-body image of the models is shown. Happiness can be observed on their face as they pose for a joyful smile. In these Ads, the model's gestures are projected as a happy and confident woman as she shows her armpit directed with the left hand to give more emphasis on having white, perfect, and beautiful underarms. This can also be observed in Ads 6 and 9. Moreover, the objects [O] of these Ads come into one accord: gestures signify accessibility, effectiveness, and desirability. However, some advertisements use body parts as bait to attract consumers. Women's faces and body parts intrigue the attention and needs of the consumers. From this, we can infer that the relationship between the representamen and the object which refers to the interpretant [I] is the opportunity these whitening products offer for a happier and more satisfied life.

In Ad 4, the model's gesture is about applying Belo tranexamic acid (toner) with a brilliant smile and convincing eye contact as the representamen [R]. The object [O] refers to how the model looks straightforwardly to indicate confidence for a person who is avoiding eye contact is insecure and shy (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). The relation between the representamen and the object produces interpretant [I] as the advertisement can turn users to achieve radiant and fair skin leading to beauty and self-confidence.

In Ad 5, the gestures and body posture are the representamen of the advertisement. The model attributes a radiant smile and gaze with a smooth touch on the shoulder indicating confidence and satisfaction [O]. A gentle touch is a gesture that also signifies something else aside from satisfaction as Goffman (1976) cited by Jauk; women are often shown with hands and fingers in a sense of caring for the surface of something. All of these factors suggest that this product is credible and trusted to give fair and smooth skin [I].

Ad 8, the image serves as the representamen of the advertisement, representing the advertisement itself. In this material, the representamen

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[R] is the model's gesture or body posture, seeing that the model is fairly standing without holding any of the products with a confident smile signifies authority and ownership [O]. This evokes the notion that products are reliable, authentic, effective, and safe in achieving smooth, fair, and perfect skin [I].

Inanimate Objects. There had been the usage of inanimate objects in the ad examined. These representamens were observed to be utilized to further create an image that connects to the consumers. Furthermore, it contributes to the overall appeal of the materials.

Table 6. Semiotic analysis of the inanimate objects in the selected Belo whitening product advertisement

REPRESENTAMEN	OBJECT	INTERPRETANT
Flowers	Personates beauty, femininity, individuality, and luxury.	Suggests that the product has a good smell and is harmless. (See Ad 1)

The common inanimate object found in the advertisement is the product being advertised itself (Table 6). In each material, the products were also displayed along with their names and functions. This is common in advertising as it shows the market what exact products are being promoted. However, it was observed that in Ad 10, only the name and the sample of the product were shown. This may suggest a current trend in the advertising industry in terms of visual presentation.

There are other inanimate objects observed in the ad. In Ad 1, flowers are incorporated to express the fragrance of the product. Floral patterns or flowers are observed to be a common element in perfume advertisements as they also reflect the naturality or the chemical harmlessness of the product. This representamen also personates beauty, femininity, individuality, and luxury (Moeran, 2011). It helps the advertisement to communicate the interpretant which relates beauty to fragrance and whitening.

Colors. In view of the many transactions that take place in settings where color can be either a foreground or background feature, color is a crucial part of marketing or advertising. Therefore, due to its market dominance, it is a factor that has a significant impact on customers' views and decisions (Shi, 2013). The representamen [R] refers to the colors themselves while the object [O] is the qualities and associations commonly attributed to the color within the advertisement. The interpretant [I] is the underlying meaning between the representamen and object within the ten selected advertisements. The colors that are frequently present and dominant were observed (Table 7).

First, the color selection was conducted using imagecolorpicker.com, a website that generates the hex code for colors present in images in advertisements. There were different shades of colors present in the advertisement, but to determine the color descriptions and categorize them into primary colors, colorhexa.com was utilized, providing comprehensive color information based on the hex codes. Lastly, the researchers referred to other studies to identify the possible meanings of the representamen [R] which then identified as the object [O]. These were the colors that were noticed to be most commonly used and dominant:
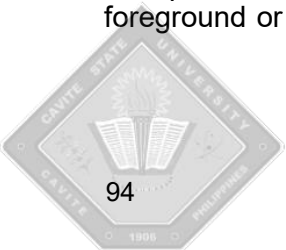
Table 7. Semiotic analysis of the colors in selected Belo whitening product advertisements

REPRESENTAMEN	OBJECT	INTERPRETANT
■ Orange	Sense of affordability, feminine energy, playful, warm, optimistic, enthusiasm, cheerfulness, kindness, joy	Creates an engaging and lively atmosphere in the advertisements, providing a bright and radiant complexion, and creating a cohesive and optimistic brand image.
☐ White	Truth, indifference, freshness, cleanliness, modernity, innocence, purity, cleanliness, equality, completeness, simplicity, new beginnings	Suggests that using the Belo whitening products will result in a pristine and immaculate appearance, the color white further emphasizes the product's effectiveness in achieving a youthful and flawless appearance.
■ Pink	Tenderness, delicacy, romance, love, friendship, softness, gentleness, femininity, passivity, reserve, earthiness, pleasure, joy, amusement	Creates a gentle and inviting atmosphere, evoking positive emotions and creating a sense of affinity with the brand, using pink as the background color for texts enhances their visibility and adds visual interest. Pink influences through emotional connection and enhanced visual appeal

The most dominant and frequently present in the ad is the color orange [R]. Orange carries several distinct characteristics and emotional associations [O]. As suggested by Cerrato (2012), orange offers a sense of affordability, which can influence viewers' perceptions of the product as a cost-effective solution. Moreover, orange represents feminine energy,

In the context of the Belo whitening product advertisements, the presence of orange fosters a welcoming and lively environment. The color's affordability aspect, combined with its feminine energy, playfulness, warmth, sociability, optimism, and cheerfulness, contributes to the overall appeal and positioning of the product. By incorporating orange strategically, the advertisements aim to evoke positive emotions and create an engaging experience for viewers.

The use of the color orange as a background in seven out of ten advertisements and its visibility on the product being advertised has significant implications for the interpretant [I]. The vibrant and energetic nature of orange, associated with playfulness, warmth, sociability, optimism, and cheerfulness, creates an engaging and lively atmosphere in the advertisements. This choice of the orange background influences viewers' interpretations and perceptions, evoking positive emotions and creating a sense of enthusiasm. Additionally, the visibility of the orange on the product enhances its visual appeal, suggesting that the Belo whitening product can provide a bright and radiant complexion. Overall, the strategic use of orange as both the background and a visible element on the product contributes to the interpretant by creating a cohesive and optimistic brand image, resonating with viewers and conveying the desired qualities of the product.

Another dominant color in the ad is the color white [R] which also carries various symbolic meanings [O]. According to Cherry (2022), white symbolizes truth and indifference. It can also evoke a sense of freshness and cleanliness. Additionally, white is commonly associated with a sense of youth and modernity, potentially appealing to a younger target audience. Moreover, a study by Jonauskaite et al. (2020) surveyed the emotional associations of 4,598 people from 30 different countries and found that people often associate white with relief, suggesting that its presence in the advertisements may create a feeling of comfort or calmness. Furthermore, white holds positive connotations of innocence, purity, cleanliness, equality, completeness, simplicity, and new beginnings, as highlighted by Cerrato (2012).

These associations contribute to the overall brand image and shape viewers' interpretations and perceptions of the Belo whitening product advertisements. The presence of the color white in one of the advertisements, specifically the white fur background and the white sleeveless tops worn by the model, along with the model's white doctor's coat carries several interpretive implications [I].

Firstly, the white fur background can reinforce the associations of cleanliness and purity, suggesting that using the Belo whitening product will result in a pristine and immaculate appearance. It may also evoke a sense of luxury or sophistication, as fur is often associated with elegance.

Secondly, the white sleeveless tops worn by the first model convey a sense of freshness, highlighting the desired effect of the product in achieving a bright and radiant complexion. The color white in this context may further emphasize the product's effectiveness in achieving a youthful and flawless appearance.

Lastly, the second model wearing a white doctor's coat carries symbolic connotations of expertise, professionalism, and trustworthiness. The white coat can symbolize the purity of intentions and the commitment to providing quality skincare solutions.

Overall, the use of white in these specific elements of the advertisement enhances the interpretant [I] by evoking a sense of cleanliness, purity, freshness, professionalism, and expertise. These associations reinforce the messaging of the Belo whitening product as a reliable and effective solution for achieving a brighter, more youthful complexion.

Six out of ten Belo whitening product advertisements feature the color pink [R], which holds several symbolic and emotional connotations [O]. According to Cerrato (2012), pink conjures feelings of tenderness and delicacy and is a symbol of romance, love, and friendship. It conveys a sense of softness and gentleness and is frequently linked to femininity and passivity. According to Cherry (2022), pink also represents softness, reserve, and earthiness, underscoring its soothing and calming qualities. Furthermore, the research by Jonauskaite et al. (2020) shows that people frequently connect the hue pink to feel like love, pleasure, joy, and amusement.

The use of the color pink as the background color for texts in the Belo whitening product advertisements has important implications for the interpretant [I]. Pink, symbolizing romance, love, and friendship, creates a gentle and inviting atmosphere. It appeals to viewers who associate pink with softness and tranquility, evoking positive emotions and creating a sense of affinity with the brand. Additionally, using pink as the background color for texts enhances their visibility and adds visual interest. The delicate and calming qualities of pink contribute to the overall aesthetic appeal of the advertisements, making them more visually appealing and memorable. By incorporating the meaning of the color pink in this way, the interpretant is influenced through emotional connection and enhanced visual appeal.

Filipino Social Conditions

As discussed in the first part of this chapter, the selected data contains the three elements of a sign namely the representamen [R], object [O], and the interpretant [I]. These elements were crucial in identifying how meanings were communicated through advertisements. This study examined how feminine beauty is signified through the Belo whitening product advertisements. As it was revealed that this signification expresses itself through the different elements of the advertisement, the next part tackles how the meanings uncovered are a reflection of broader conditions in Filipino society.

Trends in the Beauty Industry in Online Shopping. Online shopping allows consumers to directly avail products or services over the internet with the use of either a web browser or a mobile application. Online shopping features faster searching and leisure browsing without the need to access a physical store. These conveniences shifted the commerce space towards digitalization.

The presence of the Shopee logo in the advertisements exhibits the extent of the digitalization phenomenon. The demand for beauty products has rapidly grown due to the acceptance of technology in the daily lives of consumers, the popularity of social media and more participation in it, and the accessibility of the internet. Namely, according to Quijano et al., (2021), females have more exhibit range of desires and needs in terms of fashion and beauty products compared to men and they turned to online shopping as the easiest platform of the online market. hence, in the modern time wherein anyone can be virtually seen and a large percentage of users target exposures in the online space, the trend and rise in the pursuit of internet fame like influencers, vloggers, content creators, and more, have contributed greatly to the increase in demand and consumption of beauty products.

Minimalism is prominently visible in the analyzed Belo Whitening product advertisements. These advertisements exhibit a minimalist aesthetic by utilizing plain backgrounds and featuring minimal to fewer inanimate objects. Some of the advertisements, such as Ad 3, 4, 7, and 10, employ little to no text, further emphasizing the minimalistic approach.

According to Chinratanalap (2016), minimalist advertisements effectively convey essential ideas or values using minimal elements. This approach, which has become an integral part of contemporary social concerns and art, relies on limited materials and simplified designs. In the context of the analyzed Belo Whitening product advertisements, certain Ads exemplify the minimalist style.

The impact of minimalism in the beauty industry is noteworthy, as marketers embrace the concept of "less is more", recognizing that consumers are information-rich but time-poor. Minimalism in beauty industry marketing encourages consumers to focus on the core features of the brand or product. By minimizing or eliminating unnecessary details, these minimalist designs enable consumers to quickly grasp the intended value or advantage of the marketed product. This simplicity aids consumers in making informed decisions and reduces their cognitive burden in an environment saturated with information but limited time.

The minimalistic approach, evident in the Belo Whitening product advertisements, resonates with the prevailing trend in the beauty industry in the Philippines. The use of plain backgrounds, minimal inanimate objects, and little to no text in certain Ads reinforce the streamlined and focused presentation of the brand and its key attributes. By employing minimalism, these advertisements effectively communicate the value and benefits of the Belo Whitening products, aligning with the preferences and tendencies shaped by Filipino social conditions.

For beauty product advertisements, specifically whitening products, making use of a model has great significance in showcasing how effective the item being promoted is. Even so, if the model is a prominent or famous personality, just like the one who models in the Belo product advertisement. According to Wilton (2015), the deployment of celebrities creates a rigid standard of beauty and it produces credibility and a level of prestige to the marketing material. Famous stars who model beauty products are often idolized and treated as role models by the public which has a high impact on the product's effectiveness. Belo strategically used a celebrity in endorsing their product where they intentionally had someone who did not have white skin originally. Then, because of the whitening product, the model obtained the result Belo promised to the users. This way, the advertisers can gain the public's confidence because of the trustworthy celebrity that promoted the item. This is attested by Pham (2018), who concluded that the beauty and suc-

cess of the celebrity are believed as something attainable by using the product being advertised.

Moreover, the use of celebrities in marketing suggests that whitening beauty advertisements contribute to the ideal image of a woman. It also plays a big part in the public's perception of beauty that in order to achieve beauty and perfection, a woman should have a white and bright skin tone. This research agrees with Pham's (2018) findings that whitening product companies create images of beauty and spread these images around the world, changing people's perception of what is considered beautiful. As confirmed by Wilton (2015) as well, he realized that the use of public figures or idols attempts to create ideals of feminine beauty and somehow perpetuates the unrealistic model of female attractiveness.

Skin-color Hierarchy. The existence of the whitening products itself is evidence that up until the present, there is a desire among Filipino women to achieve white skin. This is further supported by the values and ideas that the selected advertisement reflects on beauty. Based on the findings of this study using Peirce's theory of signs (1867), different elements were utilized to communicate ideas of beauty. This suggests the cultural concept of beauty among Filipino women.

Filipina beauty as observed from the data is associated with the sense of sight. The models used in the advertisements are observed to be fair-skinned, however, it is notable that the one used in the given image is digitally enhanced to meet this criterion.

In Figure 3, the left photo depicts the model without digital enhancement while the right picture is a sample of an advertisement that included her. This digital enhancement may have been done to serve as a testimony to the whitening product being advertised. However, this reflects how advertisements set unrealistic representations in their materials. Nonetheless, this marketing technique was applied to half of the advertisements, suggesting that it is persuasive and effective.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/beloessentials

Figure 3. Comparison of photos of the model

Additionally, the body parts which are also commonly used in the advertisements also radiate fair skin. In advertisements, this is a form of representation of the outcome anticipated by using the respective products. This may also be communicating the desires of the target market which are Filipino women. Thus, reflecting how white skin remains valuable to women over their presumably natural brown skin.

The assumption that the target market of these advertisements is naturally brown-skinned women was inferred from the textual language of the materials. Ads 1, 5, and 8 made use of verbs ending in "-en." This kind of verb usually has a noun base form and adding "-en" signifies that the object being referred to is being made more of that quality. Hence, the words "whitening," "beautifying," and "brightening" used in the advertisements assume that the market does not possess the quality of being white, beautiful, and bright yet. This establishes the need for the product for women to be able to achieve the mentioned positive qualities. Additionally, the colors of the advertisements, specifically orange, entail a sense of femininity hence leading to the assumption that the advertisements were intended to persuade women.

The textual language used in the selected data further reflects the presence of a skin color hierarchy mentality in the Philippines through the pattern of words used in the materials. In Ad 8, the word "dark" was preceded by the negative adjective "stubborn." This stubbornness suggests that the dark spots are difficult to work on therefore creating the idea that there is a problem with having dark spots. In line with Crisp (1987), these subtle messages in advertisements instigate desires among consumers.

The combination of image and text also uncovers the subtle messages of the advertisements. The correspondence of the image to the positive adjectives used is prominent in the selected data. For instance, a common phrase used in three of the underarm product advertisements is "the perfect combination for beautiful underarms." The last part reads "beautiful underarms" and it is always accompanied by a photo of a white underarm. Not only do the images reflect the outcome of using the products but they also set standards on what is beautiful by using texts that complement the images used in the materials.

Results showed that the signs present in the selected data were vital in signifying feminine beauty and upholding beauty standards among women. The choice of words, the visual imagery, and the colors complement each other to communicate meanings. Through this, it was revealed that these advertisements were also a reflection of present conditions in the society such as trends in the beauty industry and the continuous existence of skin color hierarchy mentality in the Philippines.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Beauty has been an integral part of society not only for the physical value it is known for but also for its implication on the social status of individuals. However, it remains an abstract concept whose definition varies among individuals. To solve this ambiguity, language is a helpful tool to communicate these concepts; it is also vital in analyzing the transfer of these concepts within society. One of the most influential senders of messages in society is the advertising industry. They have the power to reach out to thousands of people in a short span of time to achieve the purpose of maximizing their profits. However, to be an effective advertiser, one has to be an effective communicator. This leads back to the vital role of language in examining social conditions from normal daily conversations to mass communication.

This study examined the language used in Belo whitening product advertisements on Facebook from 2022 to 2023 using Peirce's theory of signs (1867) under semiotics. This was accomplished by observing how these materials signify feminine beauty and other social conditions they may be reflecting. The researchers treated the elements found in the data as signs which are the central subject of the study of semiotics. Signs are anything that can hold meaning as described by Peirce. Hence, to uncover the messages in the data, the three elements of signs namely the representamen, the object, and the interpretant were identified and explored.

Ten advertisement materials were used for this study. Each data exhibited a different strategy; however, it was observed that they share elements that led to a better understanding of how meaning is created and communicated. The researchers categorized the patterns observed in the data by grouping the representamen namely the text, the visual imagery, and the colors.

The textual language in the advertisements is a good place to start in understanding the purpose, the target market, and the function of the products being advertised. It was observed that positive adjectives were used to describe the outcome anticipated upon using the products being advertised. Meanwhile, negative adjectives were employed to describe the assumed status of the target market in terms of having dark skin and spots. Verbs are also observed to be used in the advertisements. These verbs shared the characteristics of pointing out a process of transformation. For instance, "brighten" refers to the process of making something bright. This implies that the target market is the people who are not yet in the state of being beautiful in the sense of the implied definition of the advertisements.

The visual imagery is composed of three subcategories: the models, the non-verbal codes, and the inanimate objects. The three categories exhibited how beauty is associated with different characteristics. It was observed that the data used models to uphold success values apart from the representation of what beauty should look like. The non-verbal codes such as the movement of the hands and expression of the face suggested that beauty is associated with openness, divinity, transformation, and happiness. Finally, inanimate objects were found to be integral in establishing a certain picture in mind. For instance, the presence of flowers implied the naturality of the product and its good fragrance.

The use of colors was also examined in this study. The frequent colors observed in the selected data are orange, white, and pink. Related studies support the concepts these colors trigger.
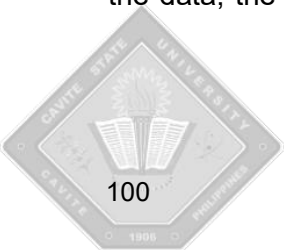
Overall, the ideas of affordability, cleanliness, and femininity are prominent in the selected advertisement.

The findings of this study uncovered broader social conditions and trends in the beauty industry in the Philippines. It was observed that the selected data exhibits the widespread use of online shopping, minimalism in terms of graphic design, and the use of celebrity models in advertisements to communicate their message. Furthermore, through the meanings found in the materials, the presence of a skin-color hierarchy in the Philippines up to this day was revealed. These advertisements were treated to reflect the desires and wishes of the target market; hence, it is implied that the effectiveness of these advertisements lies in the shared concept of feminine beauty between the advertisers and the market.

Conclusions

Findings of the study led to the following conclusions:

Advertisements use positive adjectives to describe the anticipated outcome of using the products, while negative adjectives are used to portray the assumed status of the target market or consumers. Verbs are also utilized to highlight the transformation process. Visual imagery, including models, non-verbal codes, and inanimate objects, showcases the association of beauty with success values, openness, divinity, transformation, and naturality. Colors such as orange, white, and pink symbolize affordability, cleanliness, and femininity.

By analyzing the signs and meanings in the advertisements, this study provides insights into the complex interplay between beauty standards, social conditions, and marketing strategies in the beauty industry in the Philippines. The findings contribute to a profound understanding of how feminine beauty was signified through the analyzed advertisements.

Brand marketers may consider employing semiotic analysis in their promotions to be more effective in communicating their intended message

that influences the public's beliefs and perceptions. Understanding the meaning-making of signs and symbols is also important for language learners as it relates to the culture and social norms of a community.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following key recommendations were made:

To ensure a comprehensive and representative sample, future researchers may expand the number of advertisement materials collected;

To strengthen the analysis based on Peirce's theory, researchers may consider employing systematic and structured coding schemes to categorize the signs present in the advertisement materials. This coding scheme should capture the different types of signs, as well as their relationships with objects and interpretants. To obtain a more distinct understanding of the signs and meanings conveyed in the advertisements, it would be beneficial to incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups with the target audience

Multiple researchers or independent coders may be beneficial to cross-validate the analysis. This will help eliminate bias and increase the reliability of the results.

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