

Semiotic Analysis of Armenian, US,
Russian and Israeli Army Public Service
Advertisings

by

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Introduction

This study is a semiotic analysis of public Service Advertisements of Armenian, Russian, US, and Israeli armies. Given the overall importance of the army in today's Armenian society, it is crucial to study every aspect of it. In general, army as an institution puts considerable amount of efforts to establish good public relations and create positive image in the society. There is no need to emphasize the importance of the communication between the army as an institution and the society. One of the most important and effective tools of communication between the above mentioned subjects is the public service advertising, which proved its efficiency throughout the history. In this regard, creation of efficient and appealing PSAs is very important. This project seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship in public service advertising in general and that of the army in particular. Also, the hope is that advertisers may get some valuable insights into their field of activities, through the better knowledge of semiotics, which is an underdeveloped topic in Armenia. The creation of army PSAs is comparably a new field in Armenia, so the long term and successful experience other countries may indeed be a good example to follow. The semiotic approach is chosen, because it is particularly good to study how the message is constructed and it enables deep analysis of a text or a message not only in its basic interpretation (Denotation), but also the deeper analysis of the message and signs by which the message is constructed.

The countries the advertisements of which were analysed are chosen according to the importance of the army in the country, attention that the army receives from the society and the significance of the army in social life, etc. Two global superpowers with the strongest armies and

two comparably small countries, however, with high significance of the armed forces and with highest militarization indexes; Armenia and Israel.

More than 100 advertisements of the above mentioned countries have been considered for this research. The PSAs were chosen from different sources, (official and unofficial) with wide range of military-related topics they cover (educational, demonstrative, recruitment, anti corruption, etc). However, in the semiotic analysis the stress is put on advertisements made by official bodies. However, the main criteria is not the origin of the PSA but their thematic similarity. (See the part of Limitations) The PSA's of other countries to conduct the semiotic analysis are chosen upon their thematic similarity (made for recruiting purposes). This is done mainly because my observations show that the Armenian army has almost no advertisements for recruiting purposes, and the example of Israel, US and Russia might come to act as a role model for the Armenian army.

Literature review

The Semiotic method

The basic introductory work that will be used in this analysis is Arthur Asa Berger's "Media and Communication research methods" (2010). This is a guide for communication research and

provides necessary information and terminology for the research. It gives us an insight into the semiotics or otherwise, the study of signs. Given the fact that there are some terms and different methods of analysis which have different levels of complexity and depth, some important terms have to be explained to the reader. The first thing that has to be clarified is: What *is* semiotics and where it comes from?

The founders of Semiology and Semiotics are French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, respectively. For convenience both ways of analysis are called semiotics.

Generally, semiotics is the analysis of signs. “A sign is something that stands for somebody or something in some respect or capacity.” (Eco, 1984)

It is important to note that the founders of semiotics looked at the concept of sign from different perspectives. *On the one hand*, Saussure held that signs are made up of sounds and images, which he called signifiers, the meaning they bear in them for the interpreter of the sign. He also claimed that language is made up of signs (words) which bear different-both explicit and implicit meanings. Another important concept is that the relations between the signifier and signified are arbitrary.” (Bignell, 2002) This means that the meaning which is given to the sign or the associations that sign creates in our minds may change over time. For instance, the signifier “cat” has no resemblance with the animal it stands for either by its sound, or by its shape and form. Instead, it is something that has been agreed by convention.

Saussure’s works mainly concern language as the primary medium for human communication, but they also cover non linguistic things (like photographs) which also bear different meanings in them.

“The capacity of linguistic sign to be meaningful depends on their existence in a social context and their conventionally accepted use in that social context (Bignell, 2002)

SIGN

Signifier

Signified

Sound-Image

Concept

Peircean system of signs

American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce had a different approach on sign system. He held that there are three kinds of signs: icons, indexes, and symbols. Icons signify by resemblance. Indexes signify by cause and effect. Symbols signify by on the basis of convention. (Berger 2010)

Photographs, for instance, are icons. Fire and smoke can stand for indexes showing cause and effect. Cross can be taken as an example of symbol, because it acquired its meaning throughout time, and one learns what symbol is and for what it stands for.

Another important concept of semiotics can be derived from the last statement. “The sign derives its value from its surroundings” “Barthes 1978”

Barthes argued that for unbiased analysis the semiotic piece or signifier should be analyzed only within the framework of socio-political or cultural environment in which it occurs and/or is being conceived. Thus, the semiological approach can be highly complex, given the

abundance of signs in many objects or messages and different meanings inherent in them. This leads to manipulations and assigning meanings which are far from the initial intentions of the assigner. “Any sign might be a product of multiple realities depending on the reader’s interpretation of the sign and the context in which it is interpreted. Therefore, it may distort the reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view.” (Volosinov 1986)

For deeper understanding of semiotics and how it works some additional concepts should be introduced.

DENOTATION. Denotation refers to the literal meaning of the term, object or sign. It offers basic description of the object without any in-depth analysis or assigning meanings to the object. For example, the denotative description of the Rolls Royce car is a vehicle with some particular shape, color, price, and technical characteristics that are offered to the buyer.

CONNOTATION. Connotation deals with the cultural meaning assigned to the term, object or sign. Referring to our last example, the connotative meaning of the Rolls Royce comes from some associations, values and meanings that are assigned to it. In this case, Rolls Royce is always associated with luxurious life, expensiveness, uniqueness, and so on. These associations have been assigned to Rolls Royce generally because of its high price, because not everyone can afford him/herself to by Rolls Royce. Throughout time Rolls Royce created its MYTH of being special and unique, thus acquiring connotative meaning of luxury and privileged life.

Hence, the sign Rolls Royce has acquired not only denotative meaning, but also a connotative meaning, generating a whole set of different associations and beliefs deriving from our social experience. That meaning is the other important term suggested by Roland Barthes.

“Media usually aims to connect one signified idea with another or one signifier with another, in order to attach connotations to people or things and endow them with mythic meanings” (Bignell 2002).

According to Jonathan Bignell, that is being done mostly by two ways.

METAPHOR. Works by making one signifier appear similar to another, or in other words, communicating by analogy.

METONYMY. Works by replacing one signified by different related signified, or in other words, communicating by associations.

Let's consider an example. Let us assume that Rolls Royce launched an advertisement in which one opens car's door and a foot steps out from the car, and we see the sign of Rolls Royce on the shoe. This means that the sign of the company is used to attach the connotation of luxury and uniqueness which is available through that sign to the shoe with the same sign. This is an example of a metaphor. But since we see only a foot stepping out of the car, that foot is a metonym which in our mind stands for the whole person. In this example, both metaphor and metonymy have been used, combining signs in complex ways to create a message which endows denoted object with mythical meaning. These kinds of combinations are being used by marketers to create the so called “Goodwill” or “the tangible assets” of the product and thus, justify in some cases incompatible ratio of its initial cost and the final price.

SYNTAGMATIC ANALYSIS of texts. Another important method of analysis is the syntagmatic analysis. Semioticians use this term when referring to the sequences of terms which create meaning. (The term syntagm means chains). This is more of a linguistic tool that is used in textual analysis. There are various approaches to the syntagmatic analysis and different

explanations. “Syntagmatic analysis refers to interpretations that look at the sequences of events that give text meaning- in the same way that the sequence of words we use in a sentence generates meaning.” (Asa Berger: 2010)

Davis and Mules explain syntagm as “the result of using conventional rule to combine a series of elements from various paradigms”.

PARADIGMATIC ANALYSIS of texts. This is another approach to text analysis which doesn't focus on morphological component of the narrative, but rather concerns itself in finding oppositions that generate meaning. While syntagmatic analysis helps us to figure out how the sequence and order of events generates meaning, the paradigmatic analysis reveals how oppositions hidden in the text creates meaning.

Both paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations determine the “value” of a sign. “Syntagms and paradigms provide a structural context within which signs make sense; they are the structural forms through which signs are organized into codes” (Chandler, 1991)

The Global Militarization Index

This part is important to show the importance of the armed forces of the chosen countries and why the study of army PSA's are important. According to the global militarization index by Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) published in 2016, Israel and Armenia are among the most militarized countries in the world holding the first and the third place respectively. It means that “These countries allocate particularly high levels of resources to the armed forces in comparison to other areas of society.” (Bonn int. center for conversions: Muschler Max M. 2016)

The militarization index is defined according to the following criterias.

§ The comparison of military expenditures with its gross domestic product (GDP) and its health expenditure (as share of its GDP);

§ The contrast between the total number of (para)military forces and the number of physicians and the overall population;

§ The ratio of the number of heavy weapons systems available and the number of the overall population.

Country	\$	👤	☰	GMI Score	Rank
Israel	5.9	6.0	3.5	892.9	1
Singapore	5.7	6.2	3.2	870.5	2
Armenia	5.9	5.9	2.9	842.0	3
Jordan	5.7	5.4	3.2	814.4	4
Russia	5.9	5.1	3.2	808.9	5
Korea, Republic of	5.4	5.8	2.9	806.5	6
Cyprus	5.2	5.6	3.2	795.7	7
Greece	5.4	5.3	3.2	792.9	8
Azerbaijan	5.8	5.3	2.8	790.7	9
Brunei	5.9	5.2	2.7	783.8	10

(retrieved from BICC)

Studies in PSA's

In this research only the public service announcements (PSA's) of the Armenian, Israeli, Russian and US armies created or supervised by the official bodies (ministry of defence, etc) will be used for the semiotic analysis. However, in order to have an overall understanding about the general tendencies of PSA's, also other PSA's will be discussed created by not officials. This is necessary, taking into consideration especially the overall small number of Armenian PSA's

compared to the other countries discussed. To demonstrate the relevance of PSA's as opposed to other types of media (posters, etc.), some studies on the effectiveness of public service announcements are introduced.

“The main aim of any PSA is to raise public awareness regarding important social issues, change public attitude towards those issues, and stimulate positive social change.” (Shankar, 2003) The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) of United States has defined a public service announcement (PSA) as “any announcement (including network) for which no charge is made and which promotes programs, activities, or services of federal, state, or local governments (e.g., recruiting, sale of bonds, etc.) or the programs, activities or services of nonprofit organizations (e.g., United Way, Red Cross blood donations, etc.) and other announcements regarded as serving community interests, excluding time signals, routine weather announcements and promotional announcements” (Dessart, 1997). (<http://www.psaresearch.com/bib9830.html>) The leading producer of PSA's in US is the “Ad council” <http://www.adcouncil.org/> which was initially called “The War Advertising Council”, is the one responsible for the content and frequency of advertisements that aired. [Suggett P. what exactly is PSA? Sept.16, 2016](#)

However, the proliferation of PSA's through media faces major problems. In general, PSA is run as a community service at no charge by the media, and since media does not generate profit from airing PSAs, many cable media platforms hesitate to give airtime for broadcasting. (Shankar, 2003) Though it is required by law and regulated by European Broadcasting Union (EBU) to give airtime to the public service advertisements, time restriction remains a major obstacle. Despite this, several researches shown that public service advertisements can be as effective as commercial advertisements (Murry, Stam & Lastovicka, 1996), and that

advertisements that use emotional appeal are more effective than those using logical appeal. (Lee & Davie, 1997) This statement was partially proved by the members of the focus group that were interviewed for the research.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF PSA'S

The first usage of PSA's that more or less resembled modern messages dates back to the American Civil War. Back then, "the government sold bonds via newspaper advertisements provided without charge and placed throughout the North to raise money in support of the war." The same happened when US entered the First World War. Federal committee was created to encourage public support. Throughout passage of time and with the technological advancements, new means of media became engaged in spreading the message (Radio, TV, etc.). Radio started to be used widely to spread messages to public especially during the Second World War as a propaganda for the office of war information. "Print, outdoor advertising and especially radio 21 became the carriers of such messages as "Loose lips sink ships," "Keep 'em Rolling" and a variety of exhortations to buy War Bonds" (Dessart, 1997). What is important to mention is that the origins of public service advertising come from war and army. In that respect, USA has an immense experience and history of using PSAs in the army. There is even an official youtube channel which airs only PSAs for recruiting purposes. This comes to demonstrate the serious approach of US regarding this topic. <https://www.youtube.com/user/USArmyRecruiting/videos>

Both institutional studies of advertising and the semiotic studies highlight the social and historical context in which advertisements influence the society and the individual viewer. (Shankar, 2003)

This can be done by creating an idealistic portrayal, trying to gain emotional response from the viewer. In societies like Armenia that are under constant threat of war, army plays crucial role and is one of the bases and guarantees of the independence and security, thus, creation of a positive image of the army is also very important. In this respect, USA is in a different condition, because military conscription there is not mandatory, so the government needs to pay more attention in creating a positive image of the army to trigger or, if you may say, to tempt potential recruits into the army.

Research Question & Methodology

“Textual analyses of advertisements suggest that the meaning of the message is not inherent in the advertisement, but is contextually determined.” (Shankar, 2003). One way of investigating and understanding the message through which the effectiveness of the communication is determined is to apply semiotic analysis since it enables deep analysis of a text or a message not only in its basic interpretation (Denotation), but also the deeper analysis of the message and signs by which the message is constructed.

The main research questions are the following:

§ How are the messages constructed in the military Public Service Advertisements of different countries?

§ How is the army depicted in those PSA's?

§ What features of the army are highlighted or were intended to be highlighted?

To find out the nature of the influence that these ads had on the viewer, a focus group was conducted consisting of seven people. All members of the group had completed the mandatory military service in Armenia. The aim of the focus group was to reveal how the PSA's of different countries were appealing for them. People that already served were chosen, because they are well aware of everyday realities of the army life so they would approach more critically, without excessive emotions. Also, their perception of the ads aimed particularly for recruiting is of particular interest and significance. Since the military service in Armenia is mandatory for every male citizen of the country, it might seem, that there is no need for recruiting ads. However, these ads are necessary to attract potential officers and people, to build their career in the armed forces, so there is also a need for effective and appealing recruiting PSA's that would present army under positive light and attract potential recruits.

From two to three ads of every chosen country armed forces (Armenia, Israel, USA, Russia) have been shown to them made for different purposes (recruiting, motivational, educational, etc.) trying to cover material that as much depicts every aspect of the military service as it is possible. However, it is not an easy task given the qualitative and quantitative differences and fluctuations of different army PSA's. As an instance, for Armenia and Russia army PSA's are comparably new phenomena, as when Israel and US have more experience in this field.

The questions asked were the following.

§ What did you like/dislike in the advertisements?

§ What aspects of the army life were highlighted?

§ How appealing was the message to you?

§ How what you have seen is different from the realities of the Armenian army?

The aim of the research is not to reveal the effectiveness of the advertisements, as its scale is rather small compared with large-scale sociological surveys with various groups. The research doesn't aim to present in-depth analysis of advertisements, and tackles only the Semiotic analysis of some particular examples of ads chosen by their similar features and thematic analogy.

In addition, the responses of the focus group members will show how they perceived the advertisements, highlight the differences they noticed and how the basic construction of the message appealed to them.

Research Findings and Analysis

FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

The focus group was comprised of seven persons who have served in the Armed forces of Armenia and completed their service recently. (2015-2016). They served in different regions of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh Republic, in different branches of armed forces, (mechanised, infantry, music corps, etc.)

As a whole, PSA's of the Armenian army didn't impress the focus group members. The general response was that "We have served in the army, we know all the aspects of the service. Of course, no one likes being in a dirt or running with whole ammunition" All the members of the focus group agreed on a point that depictions of military field trainings in combination with epic and aggressive music might be motivating and inspiring for those who haven't served yet, but for them it just recalls some nostalgia and memories. They highlighted that the demonstration of the

armament in action is the most appealing and impressive part of the PSA's. An interestingly enough, everybody highlighted the importance of the background music in PSA's. Those PSA's without epic music and demonstration of armament in action (shooting soldiers, firing guns, tanks, etc.) were less appealing to the focus group members. In one ad of Israeli army, where a background violin music was playing, one of the members said "There was an impression that this was the strongest training of the weakest regiment of the Israeli army". In this case, contradicting results are revealed. On the one hand, the majority of the focus group members at first criticised the actual plot of the illustrated PSA's saying that it can be appealing and impressive mostly to those who haven't served yet, on the other hand, the PSA's that didn't portray scenes of active combat, or didn't have aggressive or epic music, got poor responses even compared to the previous one. One of the group members said that he has very positive opinion about the israeli army, however, the music which was used in the shown PSA wasn't appealing and didn't demonstrate the full power of the army. "It doesn't portray an army which is fighting" or "the music is boring" were the main opinions regarding the calm background violin music of the Israeli army PSA. "However, one of the members disagreed with others and claimed that the smooth and calm music signifies professionalism of the Israeli army "We know what we are doing". The same member also mentioned that Armenian ads lack graphical quality in comparison to that of other countries, and that they are generally unprofessional. In an advertising of the Russian army, which was heavily overloaded by statistics, and information about reinforcement of the Russian army, group members mostly replied that "This was rather demonstration of the future than the reality." Group members also found the PSA's of the US army very individualistic, focused rather on a single person than demonstration of the real force of the army and its potential. They consider army as a collective institution and consider

advertisements that try to convey the message through individual approach and depicting a single individual at the process of his service as something fictional. The American ad, that depicted an individual soldier, soldier of UN marine forces was considered unappealing. <https://youtu.be/inSzBLaTiNI> “This was a story of an American Superman” replied one of the members. PSA’s that try to represent army as a place for one’s personal growth, or an opportunity to develop some individual characteristics separate from group efforts are considered unrealistic and fictional. Thus, army is considered only as a collective institution and is efficient only through collective efforts. Given the fact that group members have served in the army, their point of view is shaped also by their own personal experience, which in this case contradicted to the attempt of the ad to portray army as a place of individual achievements and personal growth. Serving in the army is considered only as something mandatory, fulfillment of a duty, rather than an opportunity of career building. In this respect, especially military academies and other military educational centers should consider airing sufficient PSA’s regarding their educational programs.

Although, these opinions are subjective and cover very small amount of data, they come to highlight the necessity and importance of efficient PSA’s for recruiting purposes.

ARMENIAN ARMY

Despite the fact that Armenian army is a part of UN’s Peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan and Kosovo, which implies that its range of functions is wide, in Armenian PSA’s that function of the army (international activities, peacekeeping, etc) is mostly abandoned. PSA’s highlight mostly the the local significance of the armed forces and neglect the international peacekeeping

missions. The army is represented mostly in the context of its defensive capacities, and its significance for the Armenian society and statehood. The target of the Armenian PSA's is the domestic audience. That is because, first of all, the army is represented as a guarantee of Armenian statehood and independence. The defensive capacities of the army are of special importance. "The accent is put on the Armenian soldier as an individual unit and as a collective character standing for the whole army. The target audience for the PSA's is the domestic viewer, since The language of literally all ads is Armenian, which is not the case with Israeli PSA's, considerable part of which is in English. The main objectives of the Armenian army are to guard the secure life of the Armenian society and to guarantee the territorial integrity of the country. It is also Important to highlight that no specific enemy is mentioned directly or indirectly in the ads, regardless the fact that Armenia is involved in a an active military conflict with Azerbaijan over disputed Nagorno Karabakh Republic, the factual independence of the former is guaranteed by Armenia. Not mentioning Azerbaijan as the main foe, but using neutral expressions like "the potential enemy", depicts army under more favorable light, and highlights the fact that the Armenian army is first of all a tool of defense and not of aggression.

ISRAELI ARMY

Compared to the Armenian ones the Israeli PSA's present wider range of the army functions. The main mission of Israel Defense Army (IDF) is to guarantee the security of the Israeli society. However, there are also references to other aspects and functions of IDF, such as the educational activities, and humanitarian and peacekeeping missions across the world. "Thus, IDF is represented as a guardian of regional and international security." (Hambardzumyan, 2016). The

enemy in PSA's are more concrete, but very abstract at the same time. The foe here is not Palestine or any other hostile country, but terrorism in general. Thus, also an attempt is made to justify the use of Israeli armed forces not only within the country but also outside of it, since terrorism is a threat not only to Israel but to the international community in general. On the other hand, portraying the fight against terrorism as the main objective of IDF will present the army under more favorable light, especially within the context of the Palestinian conflict.

One important aspect to highlight is that the official YouTube page of the IDF is very active and airs new PSA's weekly. Also, there are ads which tackle different aspects of the service (motivation, personal growth, etc.). For example, in one of the ads analyzed, the woman soldier who had to climb the rope. This is represented as an act of overcoming yourself and demonstration of willpower. That particular ad lasts less than a minute, but conveys an important message necessary for the success in the army. Also, the relative shortness of the ad is not a unique case for Israeli army PSA's. There are numerous of that kind of short ads, which is not the case with other countries discussed. Besides, taking into consideration some unique characteristics of the Israeli army, as that of mandatory conscription of females, the target audience in case of Israeli PSA's includes women as well.

US ARMY

The army of the United States has old traditions of PSA's airing on various types of media. Throughout passage of time, the US had implemented various ad campaigns to satisfy the demands of the army. For example, when in March 2003 the US army was on its way to Baghdad, the traditional "Army of One" recruiting TV campaign was replaced by another

campaign with various contexts and plots, mainly “ evoking tradition of heroism and sacrifice.” (Bailey, 2007) However, as the campaign in Iraq extended and need for new recruits arose, US army returned to its previous content, ads designed mainly for recruiting purposes. US army shows serious attitude regarding the public service advertisements, and there is an official youtube channel, airing advertisements for recruitment. Representation of the US army is very wide and includes all possible segments of the service (recruiting, educational programs, peacekeeping missions etc.) In the US army PSA’s the mission of the army is to fight “the national, regional and international threat that may occur.” “Thus, an attempt is made to legitimize the interference of the army in different regional conflicts across the globe, justifying the intervention as a necessary move to neutralize a potential threat for the national security.” (Hambardzumyan, 2016) In this case, the threat or the enemy is not specified and is even more abstract than that in case of Israel. The aim is to show that the US army is ready and able to conduct operations regardless the distance. “There are no any aggressive or expansionistic appeals in ads, instead, all potential of the army is to serve humanitarian and defencive purposes” “However, there is a context of global domination” (Hambardzumyan 2016)

RUSSIAN ARMY

The russian army is also illustrated as a global force, capable to conduct global missions across the world. However, with some important differences. The strength of the army is directly connected with the qualitative and quantitative components of its armament. The human resources, individual capacities of the soldiers and officers are secondary. “Involvement of the Russian army in international conflicts is viewed as an attempt to recover the harmed reputation

of the army, to demonstrate the practical knowledge gained during the military trainings in practice.” (Hambardzumyan, 2016) The accent is put on almost exceptionally on the technical and technological modernization of the army, new types of armament and technological renovations that are being introduced in the army. From all countries discussed, Russia is at most concerned with the issue of modernization and renovation of its army. One should always consider that the military reform launched by the president of Russia Vladimir Putin in 2008 continues until now. That explains why Russian PSA’s are so concerned with illustrating the technological capacities and innovations of the armed forces.

“ above mentioned reform. Another very important aspect which is absent in PSA’s of US and Israel, is the issue of corruption. In Russian PSA’s there is an attempt to show the effective fight against corruption in the army, which has always been a problem in Russia. [Gorst, I.\(24 May, 2011\) Russian Military Budget Sapped by Corruption](#)

It is important to mention however, that the majority of the PSA’s that have been observed are taken from sources other than ministry of defence or other official bodies. This means that they neither reflect nor reject the official position of the ministry of defence or the government.

THE SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

Armenian army PSA

This particular Ad is created using monotone and dark colors, with black and white background and active usage of textual messages which appear regularly throughout the advertisement. Overall aggressive mood prevails in the ad, confirmed by the corresponding aggressive music, as well as entire black and white background. Red

color may signify blood and death, as well as black may signify death and power. Red is used here as a contrast to black instead of more usual white color. A lot of textual message is used to form the message of the entire advertising. Depiction of shooting soldiers, cannons and armament which in this case come to signify the armed forces and act as symbolic representatives of what is called army, corresponding the visual representational component of the ad stands as the demonstrative part of the advertisement. On the other hand, the textual component of the advertising comes to assign meaning to the visual demonstrative component of the ad (soldiers and armament.) Texts smash against the screen. Nouns "Mastery", "Sacrifice" "Impudence", "Speed" "Superiority" and " Purposefulness" in Armenian "Վարպետություն", "Անձնուրացություն", "Չանդգնություն", "Արագություն", "Գերազանցություն", "Նպատակասլացություն", appear on the screen forming Acrosticos, the name "Վահագն" (Vahagn) from the initials of the above mentioned nouns. Those verbal signs signify both denotative and connotative meaning. Vahagn was the Ancient Armenian God of War. Here we see an attempt to ascribe those undoubtedly positive features (Mastery, self-sacrifice, superiority, etc) to the Armenian army. This is the denotative part. We may call this a textual, metaphor, or analogy of one object (the Armenian army) and other object (Vahagn). This in its turn, is the connotative meaning. The army is attributed with all those features and parallels are drawn between the army and the pagan God. By that analogy, the army is depicted as victorious as well as was Vahagn. Another connotative meaning that may be derived from the signs is that the Armenian army is the good side and the potential enemy to

which it will fight is the evil side, as Mythologically, Vahagn fought and defeated the huge snake; embodiment of everything evil. The connotative meaning is reachable mostly to the armenian viewer, since it requires knowledge of Armenian history, ethnos, and mythical traditions. The fact that textual messages proceed throughout the whole advertisement and regularly appear in the screen, may imply that the text dictates the meaning of the visual message to the viewer, and doesn't allow the interpreter (Viewer) to freely ascribe meaning. The meaning is assigned to the advertisement through the text.

US Army PSA

A black man approaches to the pool, he is alone, there is no one near him. The camera captures him from the top, the man clenches his hands and lips, the camera shows his eyes from close distance. He jumps into the pool, and when he instantly comes up to the surface, the environment drastically changes and the man comes up not in the pool but in the ocean and fully dressed and armed as a soldier of US marines corps. He raises his hand, a boat approaches him with other US Marine soldiers, they take him into the boat and continue their way.

Two different narratives can be derived from this advertisement: the first narrative depicts a personal struggle. When the man approaches to the pool, he is very anxious. The voice at the background speaks in the first person, so we can assume that the person in front of the pool is also the one who speaks at the background. The voice says, that he faced a big challenge, that he had to overcome. He creches his hands and lips, that signifies determination. The background voice declares: "Don't quit, if you quit now, you'll always quit in your life." These words resemble to his physical gestures (creching the hands and lips) and signify determination. The man jumps into the pool and comes up as a US marine soldier, fully armed and equipped. The

jump to the pool is the necessary step, a challenge, only overcoming yourself, your fears, you can become a soldier of US Marine Corps. The motto of US Marines which appears after the advertisement “The few: The proud: The Marines:” signifies that only challenging yourself and overcoming your fears you can become a member of US Marine Corps. The man also assumes that, when he claims “ I jumped: unsure, comprehensive, scared out of my mind: but I came in a marine.”

Another narrative that may be derived from the advertisement is the issue of racial discrimination, which is not directly addressed or underlined, but exists in the connotative level. Although, the racial segregation in US army is abolished by the executive order 9981 signed by president Truman in 1948, however, racism is still a very sensitive topic in US army.

<https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-military-discrimination>

Taking that into consideration, on a connotative level this particular advertisement creates an image of the US army as a place free of any racial discrimination and prejudices. The central figure in the advertisement is an afro-American. When he comes up as a soldier of US marine, the other group of Marines come to his rescue, grasp his hands and help to get into the boat. This signifies that no matter the race one can always seek help from his keen soldiers. At the end of the advertisement, Marine soldiers are in the uniform of the guard of honor, showing illustrative exercises with their rifles. The hero of our advertising is among those marines. Those exercises come to signify the professionalism of those marines. Our hero stands in the front line, and is the only afro-American present there. This illustrates his superiority in relations to the others, since he is standing on the front line. Also, that signifies the motto of US Marines “The few: The proud: The Marines” showing that he, despite many obstacles and difficulties became one of the few and prouds.

Israeli Army PSA

Three girls are standing in front of the gymnastic rope, which they apparently have to climb. Two of the girls look at the one who stands at the center, she is the one, who apparently will go first. They look at her with doubtful face, doubting that she can climb the rope. She looks at the top of the rope, to the point where she should reach and after a second she starts climbing. When she reaches the top and jumps back she suddenly appears at a military base, with face camouflage and military uniform. At the end of the advertisement on the black screen appears a text with white letters, saying "Challenge accepted".

First of all, attention should be given to the appearance of the girls in the advertisement. The two girls who stay aside are the ones who reject the challenge, and stay aside. Those two girls are chewing gums, which creates a vulgar image of them compared to the other girls who climbs the rope. When she jumps back to the ground, she suddenly appears in a military base dressed in a military uniform and camouflaged face. She is smiling which is a sign of confidence and happiness. Some differences are observed in the physical appearances of the characters in the advertisement. Those two girls are with black hairs and brown eyes, as the one who climbs the rope is with blonde hairs and blue eyes. The difference in the appearance puts the girl climbing the rope in a different, more distinctive position compared to those two. So, she is distinct and superior not only by her action but also by her appearance. In this particular case her Blondeness and blue color of her eyes are signs signifying her superiority compared to the other girls. "The sign derives its meaning also from its surroundings." (Barthes: 1977. P. 48) So, in this particular case, the differences in their appearance obtain particular meaning. This advertisement also challenges the traditional perception about women, being incapable to serve in the army. In the

traditional perception no one imagines women dressed in military uniform and serving in the army.

Russian Army PSA

In the PSA of the Russian army, the the background voice proceeds throughout the whole duration of the advertisement. But in comparison to the advertisement of the US army the voice is not talking in first person. The narrator appeals to the viewer. The main character of the advertisement is the recruiter, the aspects of whose service are depicted in the advertisement (physical exercises, jumping with parachute, etc.)

Throughout the advertising the background voice produces the following text:

“This is the first day of your new life. What happened yesterday, is not important. No one cares who you were yesterday, now it is important who you will be today. What You know about yourself? What are you capable of? Questions may stay without answers, but will you be able to sleep peaceably? To understand yourself, to know the borders of your capabilities. Forget the borders. Are you ready to break yourself? Till the exhaustion. Every day. Here pain tempers (hardens) injuries are parts of everyday routine. You decided to prove something to yourself. It is you, that sees enemy in every shadow, because there can be no fight without an enemy and there can be no victory without a fight. But actually, the main enemy is you; yesterdays you. Your task is to chase the enemy, reach him, surpass, become better than he is, and come back victorious: Because tomorrow is the first day of your new life.”

This advertisement together with those of Israel and US is pretty much individualistic and also tackles the issue of personal growth and motivation. Here, however, we don't see any hint on racial diversity or gender issue. The hero is a man, with masculine body which comes to signify

power (physical) which from the context also signifies power of the will, since the soldier is shown overcoming obstacles, which also requires will-power. Here the obstacle that faces the recruit (potential soldier) is not embodied in a single object, but instead is broke up in multiple hardships as everyday workouts, physical exercises, etc.

Some similar paradigms can be derived from the three advertisements analysed. In all these advertisements there is a limited scope of actions, which are strictly followed and the sequence of those events form the basis of the message of the advertisement. If the sequence of those events are changed, the meaning of the plot will change drastically.

Person	obstacle	Result
Afro-American soldier	Pool	US marine
Girl	Rope	Soldier of IDF
recruit	training/exercise	Soldier

(Paradigms)

Similarities

Some similar features can be observed in the advertisements of the US and Israeli armies. In both advertisements serving in the army is directly presented as a challenge, an act of overcoming yourself. Both statements are supported by textual messages. A concept of a major obstacle is present in both advertisements. That obstacles are embodied in a single object (the pool and the rope). In both advertisements differences of the physical appearance of the main heroes exist, which also illustrate some distinct features of the armies (Afro-American, and a girl) One unique feature of the Israeli army is that females are allowed to serve in the armed forces and, and moreover, their service is also mandatory as that of males. Also, one crucial similarity is the

instant change of the environment from the usual (civil) to the military and extremal. (Girl suddenly appeared in the military base, and the marine soldier appeared in the ocean, fully armed and equipped.) Both advertisings (US and Israeli) present the concept of personal growth and self overcoming, the concept of Uniqueness of a personality. In both advertisements there is the collective symbol of all the challenges and obstacles that future soldiers should overcome embodied in a single obstacle (the rope and the pool) In the Russian army PSA also, self overcoming is the central topic. "Are you ready to break yourself?" The difference here is that the process of becoming a soldier is more smooth and gradual.

Criticism of Semiotics

While the semiotic analysis is very valuable in understanding the process of message construction and how the signs both explicit and implicit affect our understanding of the message, there are some critical approaches towards semiotics. The main problem with semiotics is that the abundance of different signs in any message (visual, linguistic, etc) leaves a lot of place for manipulation from the side of the interpreter. In other words, semiotics is considered to be a very subjective science, since the meaning to the sign is being assigned by the interpreter of the same sign, depending on the cultural, national, religious and other backgrounds of the interpreter. This may lead to different manipulations and assigning meanings which were not initially intended to be assigned. "Any sign might be a product of multiple realities depending on the reader's interpretation of the sign and the context in which it is interpreted." (Volosinov, 1986) Taking this into consideration, every sign should be observed and/or interpreted within the framework of the socio-political and historical environment in which it occurs or conceived. "The sign also derives its value also from its surroundings". (Barthes 1977,

p.48). Given the fact that semiotic analysis is very subjective, it may lead to the exaggeration of some minor aspects of the message and/or omission of some important aspects.

“...the aim of semiotics is to establish widely applicable principles... It is thus vulnerable to the criticism that it is too theoretical, too speculative, and that semioticians make no attempt to prove or disprove their theories in an objective, scientific way” (Fiske 1982, P.118)

Limitations

Some issues that hardened the process of the analysis arose during the research. First was the immense amount of examples of PSA's of Israeli and US armies and comparably less quantity that of Russian and especially Armenian PSA's. This initial issue led to another one: due to their small number, Armenian PSA's lack thematic diversity, as well. Another issue was the absence of exact categorization of ads by their thematic component. In other words, especially in Armenian PSA's there is no a tendency of creating acts covering a single topic or an aspect of the service. The initial criteria to chose were to gather PSA's supervised by the Ministry of Defence of Armenia, by its official representatives (Artsrun Hovhannisyan, speaker of Ministry of Defence), partner organizations and/or individuals. However, the official YouTube page of the Ministry wasn't active for more than three months since my last check in April, 2017. The absence of recruiting ads made me to take an advertisement which was thematically different from that of US, Israeli and Russian army PSAs. Also, due to the lack of thematic variety in Armenian PSAs, the advertisement that was chosen to conduct the semiotic analysis is chosen randomly but the construction and the thematic features of which are common for Armenian PSA's in general. My observations and passiveness of the official media channels of Ministry show that official PSA's are being launched mostly to commemorate some events and dates,

such as the first year commemoration of April escalation of war in 2016 and the advertising launched in March 2017 celebrating the acquisition of “Smerch” multiple rocket launcher by the Armenian army. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzVOfO8s1Jc> Also, Armenia have never implemented any advertising campaigns, such as for example the famous “Army strong” campaign of the US army. The majority of the PSA’s depicting Armenian army is made by different individuals whose connection to the army is hard to identify. Also, the quality (graphic) of all the advertisements is less than that of Israel, Russia, and the USA. All the advertisements discussed have less than “720P” quality on YouTube, while the advertisements of other countries mostly have “720p or 1080p”. The component of the visual quality also was highlighted by the members of the focus group.

APPENDIX

PSAs used for the semiotic analysis

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1idTSSc_7Ts
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1ssn8qwly4>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inSzBLaTiNI>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSEqmtEeo_c

PSA’s shown to the focus group members

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1idTSSc_7Ts
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1ssn8qwly4>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inSzBLaTiNI>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSEqmtEeo_c
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOMn8XxhTUU>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pl_4ptHuyk
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=lcCOIBaQVmw
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KozOsno0hY>

The overall observed PSA’s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tsEe0HULkc> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AN7KB90wND0>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8f0DZLPC7Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7b4N0NCsTII>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUXZVfipC-M>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwJZ6BujjDs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTXX3sPrC0M>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruZR3at5ods>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoPvpVWySQw>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2y_ZHgpc-Wc

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2y_ZHgpc-Wc

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzVO8s1Jc&sns=fb>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w62xJbVV0RM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udQN5skiJbM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfnpYoP1fk4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWC8J93prJU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6aoodn3-IA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2Xr3ID6ITE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x82pYya2BeM>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6e-hl7tos_A

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9gJYVHjoyg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYGISKi4XNs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7K9ngos6fc>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oS2b_TxKf0

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EPrdtc71b0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBaTOyX0jH0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jtx4xCQglUE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lee3vGs324>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTYuUUggN3w>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpJ0-nayuXw>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VzsBcdQ1uY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DozalxAvGes>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJQR2cvLJWg>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mnu95bxOLpE>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqpRXu7_gLI
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRWmN3yacM0>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8MyrX37tTY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xP08wOQHfgk>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOADriqMAeY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tUdOPcet-o>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNjZsCUcIEQ>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwooRHINt8A>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oFkGsT8SmE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sax91LNB9ns>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAp-VdBkIDE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2TFxoCl8nc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF3B6vR9y1o>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DriBYQvG_4
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0Gx3oKac1A>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5RIHo5rh3c>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGbvN0Hq1Dk>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rko_ZTIx2xw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkB_gDmY_ms
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePArSZ5Pe-A>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePArSZ5Pe-A>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0vaqF2WFZ8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7syYj86BxYw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQQuCNbIHtE>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5PJ3O1D_vY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EOyUwvUzJ8>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPMpeEd7L_Y

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_OtCf8lQC8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSYCliZqwY4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8MP4Yfc4-0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3PVj54Hh-k>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scfEcl6BVzE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3NikzEbbPo>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCaMrLBw_NE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RhTmgmn6Pw>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqs_495ojNc

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkqFVSuZfPo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcHU4bAptXg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhxBTED1yks>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9a0mvqYNes>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLil9pT6qKo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRsxBVMwFoU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIFATDe9dsw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlgEuRmQzjc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cq-ZVIZJaI8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inSzBLaTiNI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvQaI582NfU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAPP47VbTeg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CjvcfFPo4kE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMuuRqo7GpM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lztGpORiDbQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86PdF6tXh9A>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gM2U-NhtZX8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CofSOLIXRFo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPXiNhRcqks>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF40SOi-Lvo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn5knzy2oMA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVzktkJ--cs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6lXi4PB07M>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hk-1WQXdjKY>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWu7r3_sCJM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gbpsuCWzXl>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwSJKKYkKbw>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSEqmtEeo_c

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLgwhADBK-0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=He7WUNEkuy8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPBGVZP0GmU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDIzjh1yeRU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sy2bZVc3Pok>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bltWcgmrSxY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWGDBQYZjqQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8QSkISREYM>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6V7LJnfc_6M

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=za85-kCAEPI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqQR2XQOGUo>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xy1u7U3_aK4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcCOIBaQVmw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7OyAb20zwk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuderHy9ges>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GixW5IL650>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6e3kKu5XaU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4onNWn6EshQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiSaWulikqs>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=id6D9Y_gJgs

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(Hambardzumyan, 2016)**

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