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## A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Housing Website Banners

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to examine visual and verbal semiotic modes employed in the housing website banners and to explore how semiotic modes convey the intended meaning in each banner. The data used in the analysis were nine housing website banners from the website of a Thai real estate company named "Sansari." All nine banners collected were banners for Sansiri's single-house projects. Among these nine banners, three were for a single-house project called 'Kanasiri,' three were for a single-house project called 'Burasiri.' The framework employed in the data analysis was Kress and Leeuwen (2006) and Harrison (2008)'s social semiotics. The results from the analysis revealed that the banners of all three housing projects employed quite similar semiotic modes to convey the intended meanings. That is to say: all three housing projects conveyed representational meanings through the action process since vectors could be obviously identified in each banner, though the choice of RPs was different. In terms of the interpersonal meaning, the banners of all housing projects employed an offer process since the eye-docking between the RPs and the viewers was absent. Considering the compositional meaning, the banners of each housing project were fit into the house-shaped frames, which potentially conveyed the sense of living in a dream house. Lastly, all banners included verbal resources which were relevant to the concept and design of each housing project.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Housing Website Banners, Semiotics

### 1. Introduction

At present, it is commonly known that the Internet has changed the face of global trading and business, especially how a business communicates with its customers (Freund & Weinhold, 2002). In the real estate industry, housing websites can be deemed important platforms for people who are looking for an ideal home. These housing websites normally employ banners, which are a form of advertising placed on some specific spots on the websites, showcasing the websites' properties to attract potential customers and provide them with crucial information they need (Peker & Dalveren, 2021). These housing website banners basically contain both visual and textual elements and would last for about one to two seconds to grab the viewers' attention before they move on (Pernice, 2018). Therefore, these housing website banners should be sufficiently well-designed so that they would effectively convey the messages since the use of color, typography, and design elements could potentially create a sense of trust and professionalism among the customers. The use of website banners and their impacts on customers have received a lot of attention from scholars in the field of marketing and advertising since there have been numerous studies published on such topics (Lohtia et al., 2004; Lee & Cho, 2010; Hussain et al., 2018). Nevertheless, in order to add more understanding to the use of website banners, especially how the intended meanings are constructed in the banners, the present study, therefore, attempts to analyze the website banners from a multimodal discourse analysis approach.

Multimodal discourse analysis (abbreviated as MDA) is an approach to the study of communication which takes into account various modes involved in communication, including language, visual images, and even sound. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) posit, different modes of communication work together to convey meaning and understanding. Multimodal discourse analysis is interdisciplinary in nature since it requires knowledge from a variety of fields, including linguistics, semiotics, and even psychology, to explore how different modes of communication contribute to meaning making. This study employs multimodal

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discourse analysis as a framework to investigate various semiotic resources used in the housing website banners of a real estate company. The objective of this study was to examine how visual and verbal resources are employed to represent meanings, as well as to investigate how each visual and verbal resource convey meanings in the housing website banners.

#### 2. Related Literature

#### 2.1 Single House Projects in Thailand

According to the article published by the Economic Intelligence Center, Siam Commercial Bank (SCB), Thailand (2018), the housing market in Thailand is expected to expand significantly after the country's economic status has recovered from the recession caused by the political instability in the country as well as the global financial crisis. Such expansion is also to serve the customers' changing demand and behavior in buying accommodation since more people prefer living on their own to living in a big family with their parents or siblings. Furthermore, it is found that small families show more interest in low-rise households, namely townhomes, semi-detached houses, and single-detached houses, rather than condominiums which do not serve people's demands in terms of space and privacy. In Thailand, there are numerous property developers who continuously launch housing projects for the market. Each of the projects has unique features and facilities offered to the buyers. Due to the highly competitive housing market, property developers need to attract buyers and advertise their projects through various means, such as using housing billboard ads, distributing leaflets, as well as advertising the projects through the company's website.

#### 2.2 Designing a website for Internet Marketing

It is commonly known that the advent of the Internet has changed humans' behavior in various aspects, including communication, education, healthcare, and even how people buy and sell things. At present, e-commerce has been widely accepted and is growing rapidly (Ganguly et al., 2010). People could gain access to the websites or applications on their computer or mobile phone and perform their trading easily. This suggests that the website of any online store must be well-designed so that it would effectively attract customers since the website itself represents the image of the brand and store (Cho & Park, 2001).

Apart from attracting customers, the design of the website should not be overlooked for many reasons. According to Haghighinasab and Tabeien (2008), a well-designed website and its attractiveness play a crucial role in prolonging the visitors' time inside the website as well as nudging them to revisit the website again. Plus, the design of the website could have a direct influence on the survival of the website itself since the users will definitely stop visiting the website if it is too difficult to use, fails to fulfill the users' needs, or lack attractive elements. So far, there have been many scholars who have investigated the relationship between the quality and design of the website and customers' satisfaction and brand loyalty. Among these are, for example, Javanmard & Soltanzadeh (2009), Young and Hyunjoo (2011), and Bai et al. (2008). The results from their study are in a similar vein in the sense that the characteristics of the website have a direct and positive effect on the customers' pleasure, trust, and purchase intention.

In order to enhance the website design quality, Flavián et al. (2009) propose that there are four dimensions which the website creators or owners should take into consideration, namely, shopping process, content, navigation, and appearance. The shopping process means the website should offer the customers sufficient information about the products or services as well as an efficient and easy shopping process. The content refers to the fact that the information must be precise and organized in a clear way making the search for information easy. The navigation means the website should have a simple navigation system that the customers can control and follow with no difficulty. The last one is the appearance which covers the vividness of the website as well as the general look of the website in terms of images, graphics, animations, icons and even colors.

Considering the appearance of the website in particular, banners are likely to be one of the visualization tools that have been employed frequently. Generally, website banners, sometimes called display ads, refer to an image, text, or video-based digital advertisements on websites. According to Peker et al. (2021), website banners usually combine both graphics and textual content. When the customers click on

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these banners, they are redirected to other landing pages where more information about products or services can be found. Apart from this function, banners could also enhance brand awareness and create a positive perspective among customers. The creation of banners which are effective, and appealing is, therefore, crucial.

#### 2.3 Multimodal Discourse

Multimodal discourse analysis is a conceptual framework developed in the 1990s which takes its root in discourse and critical discourse analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Halliday & Hasan, 1989). It stemmed from the scholars' realization that language, though playing a significant role in the construction of meaning, is just a mode of communication. To fully understand how humans convey meaning through discourse, verbal or textual mode alone is not sufficient. Other modes, such as images, sound, scent, and touch must be taken into consideration as well (Harrison, 2008).

There are several approaches to multimodal discourse analysis. One of these approaches is social semiotics which was originally developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, who can be considered pioneers in analyzing visual cues (Punkasirikul, 2018). The social semiotic analysis of multimodal discourse is grounded on Halliday's functional linguistic theory (Bi, 2019). Under this theory, Halliday (1994) posits that the function of language could be categorized into three metafunctions including 1) ideational metafunction which is used to express the discourse producer's perception of the world; 2) interpersonal metafunction which is used to present the relationship between the discourse producer and the receiver; and 3) textual metafunction which is used to present the meaning of the text. Kress and van Leeuwen further developed these metafunctions to analyze non-linguistic social symbols based on their notion that each social symbol, linguistic or non-linguistic, is isolated yet bound to each other in the construction of social meaning (Bi, 2019). They propose visual grammar which could be employed to analyze visual images in contemporary texts and divide meaning into three categories which are representational meaning, interactional meaning, and compositional meaning.

Representational meaning refers to how the discourse producer presents thoughts or experiences of the world through the represented participants. These participants could be people, places, or things (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). In addition, the representational meaning itself could be either narrative or conceptual. The narrative representation means the represented participants are presented performing some actions to each other; meanwhile, the conceptual representation means the represented participants are presented in static motion (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

While the representational meaning focuses on the represented participant in the discourse alone, the interpersonal meaning refers to the connection between the visual image and the viewer or reader. It refers to how the viewer or reader is engaged in the visual image through the represented participant's gaze, social distance, and perspective (Harrison, 2008).

The last metafunction is compositional metafunction. The compositional metafunction deals with the layout of the visual image (Yaemwannang, 2017). The compositional meaning can be realized in three ways including information value, salience, and framing. The information value refers to the position on which the symbols are placed in the image. Salience refers to the ways the discourse producer draws the viewer's attention using color, font size, capital letters, etc. Framing refers to how a message is included or embedded in the visual image (Harrison, 2003, as mentioned in Suphaborwornrat & Punkasirikul, 2022).

The multimodal discourse analysis has been employed as a framework in the analysis of discourse in various fields including political discourse, business discourse, gender discourse, and advertising discourse. Concerning the advertising discourse in particular, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is a lack of studies which dive into the discourse regarding the real estate or housing projects. Hence, this present study will fill the gap in the multimodal discourse study by focusing on the investigation of banners available in a real estate website with the purpose to see how messages are conveyed through different modes in the banners. The research questions are demonstrated as follows:

- 1. What are semiotic modes adopted in single-house website banners?
- 2. How do semiotic modes convey the intended meaning in each banner?

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#### 3. Materials and Methods

The data in this study were nine housing banners collected from the website of a Thai housing developer, Sansiri, through https://www.sansiri.com/house/. This developer was selected since it had been listed as one of the top five largest property developers in Thailand according to the information from various property websites such as www.fazwaz.com, www.freshbangkok.com, and www.investasian.com. Such rankings reflected the buyers' trust in the brand as well as the company's experience and quality in the housing market itself. All nine banners collected were banners for Sansiri single-house projects. Among these nine banners, three were for a single-house project called 'Kanasiri,' three were for a single-house project called 'Saransiri,' and the other three were for a single-house project called 'Burasiri.' These three projects featured a small-sized single house, a family-sized single house, and a large family-single house, respectively. It should be noted here that the banners on the Sansiri website came in two forms, i.e., still and video banners. However, the video banners were purposively excluded from the analysis, and only still banners were gathered since the framework employed in the study were appropriate for the analysis of still picture only. In addition, all nine banners collected were multimodal, which meant that the banners contained both verbal and visual modes. In this study, the social semiotics originally proposed by Kress and Leeuwen (2006) was employed as a framework for the data analysis. Such framework aimed to analyze the meaning conveyed through visual clues in the picture. Nevertheless, Harrison (2008) worked on Kress and Leeuwen's social and proposed more concrete resources for each metafunction. So, in order to ease the analysis of the website banners, Harrison's guideline was adopted. The resources of each metafunction proposed by Harrison (2008) were presented in the table below:

**Table 1** Harrison's guideline on metafunctions and resources, adopted from Suphaborwornrat and Punkasirikul (2022)

Metafunctions	Resources	
1) Representational	Structures	Processes
	Narrative: Viewers imagine a	<ul> <li>Action: The story is built from the RPs' actions</li> </ul>
	story about the RPs by	• Reactional: The story is built from eyelines between RPs
	themselves.	
	Conceptual: Viewers interpret	• Classificatory: RPs are considered as group members
	who or what the RPs represent.	• Analytical: RPs are considered as parts of the whole concept/structure
		• Symbolic:RPs represent themselves and also symbolize
		some ideas
2) Interpersonal	Feature	Feature Processes
	Gaze	• Demand: RPs look at the viewers directly to create a
		strong involvement
		Offer: RPs do not look at the viewers
	Distance	• Intimate: Head only
		<ul> <li>Close personal: Head and shoulders</li> </ul>
		• Farpersonal: Upper half
		• Close social: Whole body
		• Far social: Whole body with space around the RP
		Public distance: Torsos of several people
	Horizontal perspective	• Front: The RP belongs to the viewer's group
		Oblique: The RP does not belong to the viewer's group
	Vertical perspective (RPs -	• High: The RP looks down -more power
	visual text and RPs – viewers)	• Medium: The RP has the same eye level – equal power
		• Low: The RP looks up – less power

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Metafunctions	Resources	
3) Compositional	Information value: RPs' placements suggest different information roles.	<ul> <li>Given/New: RPs on the left half are given information while RPs on the right half are new information</li> <li>Ideal/Real: RPs on the top half are ideal while RPs on the bottom half are real</li> <li>Center/Margin: RPs in the center are important while others are subservient</li> </ul>
	Salience: The way the RPs catch viewer's attention.	Size: Big RPs show great salience     Focussharpness:RPsthatare not focused show less salience     Tonal contrast: High contrast area suggests more salience     Colorcontrast:strong saturated colors have more salience     Foreground/Background:An RP in the foreground has more salience
	Framing: The connections between RPs	<ul> <li>Framelines: Lines in the pictures suggest the connections between the RPs.</li> <li>Pictorial framing devices: RPs are connected</li> <li>Empty spaces: RPs are separated</li> <li>Colors: More continuity in colors creates stronger connections</li> <li>Visualshapes: More continuity in shapes suggests stronger connections</li> </ul>

### 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 'Kanasiri' website banners







Banner 1 Banner 2 Banner 3

The representation meaning could be classified into two types, i.e., narrative representation and concept representation. The narrative representation is marked by a vector or a strong diagonal line in the picture, while there is no vector in the concept representation. From three website banners of a single house project called 'Kanasiri,' there were two main represented participants (abbreviated as RPs) who were clearly a couple. It could be seen that these RPs were involved in the narrative representation since the vectors were visible. In banner 1, the vector line could be drawn from the female RP's hands to the hair of her partner as she was using scissors to cut his hair, and there was also a vector from the male RP which extended towards the mirror he was holding. In banner 2, the vector lines could be drawn from the RPs' hands towards the gardening equipment they were using to trim the shrubs planted in front of their house. In banner 3, the vectors came out of both RPs' bodies in the simultaneous bi-directional representation as they were leaning towards each other while watching T.V. The action processes in these three banners were transactional since there were clearly actors and goals in which the vectors emanated from and to, respectively. These action processes also reflected a life of a couple and the activities, both indoor and outdoor, that they could do together in a day when they were together in their dream house.

Concerning the interpersonal meaning, all three banners fell into the offer processes since the RPs did not look at the viewers directly to create a strong involvement. In addition, in banners 1 and 3, the RPs were shown in the far personal position since only the upper half of their body were shown to the viewers. In banner 2, the RPs were positioned in the far social position since they were in an open space, and their whole body was shown to the viewers. In addition, all the pictures used an oblique horizontal perspective since the RPs were not facing the viewers from the front angle. The use of such far distance and oblique perspective may indicate the unfamiliarity between the RPs and the viewers. Nevertheless, they also suggested that the viewers were observers who learned about the RPs' happy and fulfilled life from afar. In addition, the use of a front horizontal perspective showed that the RPs and the viewers belonged to the same group, and the viewers could share their experience if Sansiri was their final choice.

In terms of the compositional meaning, it could be seen that all pictures were put in a house-shaped frame, which potentially created a strong connection with the RPs' who acted as the residents in the house. It also helped the viewers to clearly visualize what life could be like in a dream accommodation. In addition, in all three pictures, the RPs were positioned at the center or near center which represented that they were a center of attention and a crucial point where meanings were conveyed. In all pictures, the colors of the RPs' clothes, belongings, and vehicles were purposively and mainly red, purple, and grey, which matched well and stood out from the surrounding background, which was mostly white, brown, green, and dim light. Regarding the verbal resource, the text "Feel Complete" was printed on the bottom right of each banner. This text was printed in white and was surrounded by a house shaped frame in transparent red. The color used was quite contrasting, and red color made the white text clearly visible and able to catch the viewer's attention. The interpretation of the verbal resource "Feel Complete" was closely related to the concept of this housing project proposed by the Sansiri itself. The name 'Kanasiri' was equivalent to 'Plenty of Happiness' in English, and it represented the company's goal to make the housing project an origin of happiness and a place where residents would feel complete since they could conveniently employ the space, either inside or outside the house, to perform various activities they preferred.

# 4.2 'Saransiri' website banners



FEEL



Banner 4

Banner 5 Banner 6

From the three 'Saransiri' website banners posted above, there were four RPs altogether. Obviously, these RPs had a strong relationship with each other since they appeared to be members of the same family. Similar to the 'Kanasiri' website banners, it could be seen that the RPs were involved in the narrative representation since vectors were visible in all banners. In banner 4, there were vectors moving out from the RPs to the front as they were merrily running and walking across the wooden bridge toward the viewers. In banner 5, the vectors were projected from the parents towards the girls as they were holding the girls' legs up, as well as the vectors coming out of the girls who were moving forward using their hands. In banner 6, the vectors emanated from the father who was using his arms to carry his daughter. The action processes in each banner could be deemed transactional since there were actors and goals. These action processes represented quality time the family members could spend together in the house and in the village common areas to strengthen the bond and love in the family.

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Regarding the interpersonal meaning, all 'Saransiri' website banners could be considered falling into the offer processes since all the RPs did not directly make eye contact with the viewers. In other words, the viewers were outsiders who may not have been directly involved in the RPs' actions but were drawn to observe their happy life from afar. Interestingly, the RPs in each banner were positioned at a different distance. In banner 4, the RPs were shown at a far social distance since the whole body of the RPs was clearly seen with space around them. In banner 5, the RPs were at different distances. The girls were at a close social distance since their whole body was shown and they were very close to the viewers. However, their parents were at far personal distance since only their half lower body was visible and their heads were out of the frame. The choice of RPs' distance in banner 5 signified the banner creators' intention to draw the attention of the viewers to the girls who were having fun with the outdoor activities. In banner 6, the male RP who represented a father was at a far personal distance since only his upper half was shown, and the girl was shown in close social distance since her whole body could be seen and she was close to the viewers. Nevertheless, all the RPs were facing the viewers from the front angle, which meant that the viewers and the RPs belonged to the same group in the sense that the viewers could possibly have a happy family like the RPs.

In terms of the compositional meaning, it could be seen that the RPs were mostly placed in the middle of the pictures suggesting that they were salient, and they were center of attention from which the viewers could understand the meaning that the banner creators wanted to convey. In addition, the garments each RP was wearing were mostly light blue, deep blue, and white, except for the girl in the last banner, who was wearing a red-strip shirt and old rose short pants. The blue tone colors normally represented peace, harmony, and maturity. So, the choice of colors for each RPs suggested the concept of love and harmony within the family. Furthermore, there was a thin white house-shaped frame enclosing the RPs in each banner. These house-shaped frames enabled the viewers to see the connection between the RP's activities and the house. They also suggested the house and the common areas could be a safe place where all family members could do various activities together. Regarding the verbal resource, the text "Feel in Love" was placed on the bottom right of each banner. The text was printed in a house-shaped frame in green. The green color used represented the green areas in the project where big trees and numerous flowers were planted to create a good ambience for the residents. The choice of wording "Feel in Love" seemed to be closely related to the design concept of the "Saransiri" housing project in which the company offered customers large single detached houses with a design that suited well with families. The project was full of plenty of space, both indoor and outdoor, where members could have a good moment and fulfill each other with love.

# 4.3 'Burasiri' website banners







Banner 7 Banner 8 Banner 9

The last set of banners belongs to the "Burasiri" single-house project. When considering the representation meaning, it was found that these banners employed the narrative representation with both action and reactional processes. There were four RPs in these banners, three humans and one animal. Similar to the RPs in "Saransiri" banners, the RPs seemed to have a strong relationship with each other since they represented members of the same family. In addition, vectors that indicated the action process could be clearly seen. In banner 7, there was a vector emanating from the girl towards the toys she was playing while her parents were involved in the reactional process since they were gazing affectionately at their daughter. In

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banner 8, there were vectors in the direction of the hands of the human RPs towards their dog as they were bathing it outside the house. In banner 9, there were vectors from the male RP who was walking towards the female RP while holding the girl in his arms, and there was also a vector emerging from the female RP's hands which projected towards the picnic items placed on the lawn. These action and reactional processes presented how a family could live a happy life in a quality house project.

In terms of the interpersonal meaning, these banners belong to the offer interaction since there was no eye docking between the RPs and the viewers which meant that there was no relationship between the viewers and the participants. The banners just provided information to the viewers. In addition, all the RPs in these three banners were positioned at a far social distance since the RPs' whole body could be seen, and the scenery around them was presented in a large scale. The decision to place the RPs at a far distance reflected the intention to show the facilities and environment of the project to the viewers. In addition, all three banners employed an oblique horizontal perspective since the RPs did not face the viewers from the front angle and turned either side of their body to the viewers. Such a horizontal perspective may suggest the viewers and the RPs did not belong to the same group. However, it could also mean that the viewers were outsiders who were allowed to see the happy life of the residents in this particular house project.

Regarding the compositional meanings, it could be seen that all the RPs were positioned in the center of the banners. So, they were the center of attention from whom the viewers could gain messages and meanings from the banners. In addition, the garments of the RPs were pretty modern, with blue, white, and yellow tone. The choice of garment told the viewers much about the lifestyle and the level of the RPs, and the colors selected symbolized cleanliness, perfection, happiness, and optimism. Moreover, each banner was framed in a house-like shape. This frame helped the viewers not forget that they were observing the life of the residents in the housing project. In terms of the verbal resource, it could be seen that the text "Feel at Peace" was placed on the bottom right of each banner, and it was surrounded by an orange transparent frame. The choice of wording "Feel at Peace" seemed to be closely related to the design concept of the "Burasiri" housing project in which the company aimed to build a housing project where residents would find peace and relaxation every day. With the nature-based design and unique functional common areas, residents would feel like living close to nature in a resort-like housing project.

### 5. Conclusion

From the analysis of three housing projects by Sansiri, it could be seen that the banners of all three housing projects employed quite similar semiotic modes to convey the intended meanings. These semiotic modes included both visual and verbal resources. The visual resources employed were, for example, the RP's actions, the colors, the position of the RPs, and the framing. Firstly, the banners of all three housing projects conveyed representational meanings through the action process since vectors could be obviously identified in each banner. The viewers could interpret the meaning of the banners mostly through the actions of the RPs in the banners. Nevertheless, the selection of RPs to represent each type of housing project was varied. In the "Kanasiri" housing project banners, two RPs were employed. They were a couple who was in an early stage of their family life, and they represented the target customers of the "Kanasiri" housing project since the price was lower than the other two housing projects. In the "Saransiri" and "Burasiri" housing project banners, more RPs who represented children were included. This suggested that the target groups of these two housing projects must be a family with children and potential buyers since the price for these two housing projects were quite high when compared to the first one. In addition, the choice of colors for the RPs' garments was different in each housing project banner, including red and purple in "Kanasiri," white and blue in "Saransiri," to white, blue, and yellow in "Burasiri" housing project. These colors could elaborate the concept of each housing project well. In terms of the interpersonal meaning, it was found that the banners of all housing projects employed an offer process since the RPs did not make any eye contact with the viewers. So, the RPs did not demand things but provide meanings to the viewers. In addition, the RPs in most banners were set in the oblique position, which meant that they had no direct relationship with the viewers. This was understandable since these banners indirectly convinced the viewers why they should buy a house in these projects by allowing them to observe the private life of several families who lived in the housing project.

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Considering the compositional meaning, one of the interesting aspects was the use of frames. The banners of each housing project were fit into house-shaped frames, which potentially reminded the viewers that the happy moments they see in the banners occurred in the housing projects constructed by Sansiri. Apart from the visual resources, the banners also employed verbal resources to convey meaning. Each banner employed a short caption to convey the concept behind each housing project. These captions helped the banners to be appealing and meaningful to the viewers who were looking at the banners. From all the visual and verbal resources used in the banners, it was obvious that Sansiri tried to create a connection between the housing projects and the image of a happy, peaceful, and complete family which could potentially attract people who dreamed of having a house of their own. The findings of this present study could yield significant implications to the interdisciplinary areas such as marketing, advertising, as well as language studies. For the marketers and ads makers, this study would definitely shed light on how the design of the visual elements and the texts in the housing banners work together to deliver the message and concept of the brands to the viewers. As for language studies, this present study may benefit learners to see the language use when it comes to the creation of housing banners.

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