

## **The social resistance to homosexuality in McCafe Taipei's advertising**

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### **Abstract**

*Advertising is not a tool to sell a product. The ideology that has been carried by the advertising creator is used to resist the common ideology. Homosexuality is still thought of as a sexual deviation and a crime. This research's purpose is to disassemble the homosexuality in the Taipei McCafe's advertising. This research is using popular culture, and Barthes's analysis. From the second order of signification (denotation, connotation, and myth) it is shown that having a gay son is a shame condition for a parent commonly. It is a hard situation for each parent to find out that his son loves a guy too. Through this study, the researcher also found that homosexuals are part of the family whose existence must be accepted by parents. Homosexuals in this advertisement are considered as people who can determine their right to choose their partners and can be accepted as part of the family. In the beginning, advertising is only a tool to sell the product, but this situation shows that becoming gay is a common thing. Homosexuality is just the sexual preference. Homosexuality it is not a sexual deviation. So, parent nowadays, has to accept their son's sexual preference. From this advertising, the advertisers are trying to resist the ideology about refusing the homosexuality.*

**Keywords:** *Advertising; Homosexuality; Social Resistance*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the old paradigm, advertising is often looks only as the way to sell. Petit and Zakon said that advertising is merely a means to an end, and the end is a consumption-oriented. (Zakon, Petit, 1962: 16) But as a product, advertising has so many 'thought' that has been carried on. Nevertheless, the product maker do not realize about the ideology that has been 'sneak' up on their product.

We all know that, there are two medium which can use to publish the advertising. The Above the line which is using mass media and the bellow the line which is using the outer room medium such as billboard, poster, etc. The above the line can use radio, television or the printing medium to publish the

product. But, in nowadays, the technology development carried the newest medium called internet. As a medium, internet has a different type with the others. The internet could relate each people in many other placed in the world. This concept called global village.

In his book, 'The Medium is the Message', McLuhan as the founder of global village points out that:

The medium, or process, of our time -- electric technology -- is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and reevaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing -- you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to 'the others'. And they are changing dramatically. (McLuhan, 1967:8)

Meanwhile Devereux (2007: 51) had been blamed that internet is an agent of "homogenization" that "allows" little room for either local resistance to or local appropriation and reinvention of globalized cultural products. Because of internet we can see so many visual-audio products from so many countries. One of them is advertising. As a cultural product, advertising brings a lot of ideology. One of them is about social resistance for the marginal class.

Around of three years, the gay issued has become huge. For Asian people gay is still taboo. Gays are often still regarded as an abnormal act and mentally ill. In fact, not infrequently gays also experience discrimination. Both verbally and non-verbally. Medibonia (2020: 15) said that participants have cited homosexuality as being unsupported by law or against the law, as a reason for stigma. Adihartono (2020: 271) added that homosexuals are subject to criminalization, systemic violence and discrimination in employment and health care; lack of legal recognition of their families and partnerships; and restrictions on freedom of expression, association and peaceful meeting.

Discussions about gay people are wide-ranging in many aspects. Some have argued that it has been raised from the human rights concept, freedom to live and practice sexual preference, even though it is perceived unconventional by the religious society. In this age of new media, Gay culture has been disseminated globally. (Mokhtar, et. al., 2019: 2).

But since 2016, everything has been changed. Taiwan is to become the first country in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage, after the island's constitutional court ruled current laws defining unions as between a man and a woman are invalid. Taiwan's highest court, the council of grand justices, said barring gay couples from marrying violated "the people's freedom of marriage" and "the people's right to equality". ([www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)).

In his research about "Taiwan's Road to Marriage equality: Politics of Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage", Ming-sho Ho describe about how Taiwan accepted same-sex marriage. Ho said that in May 2017, Taiwan's Constitutional Court reached a landmark decision that marriage should be opened to same-sex couples within two years, making Taiwan potentially the first country in Asia to realize marriage equality (Ho, 2019: 482). For Huang

(2020: 1), that moment was a historic shift in the legal landscape toward marriage equality in Taiwan presents a timely and unique opportunity to investigate the interplay of a lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB)-affirmative policy (i.e., marriage equality) and the well-being of LGB people.

That rule has impartation to the communication product. So is the advertising. The gay resistance has been showed in the product. One of them is the Mccafe's Taiwan Advertising. To narrated homosexuality as a common thinks, is easier with the legalization of same-sex marriage. The Mccafe's Taiwan advertising is narrated about one guy that has been admitted his sexual preferential to his father. On that advertising, his father is accepting that his son is a gay.

As a product, advertising is consists between the signs. The signs that build the advertising are audio and visual. Cobley and Janz describes that science which analyze signs called semiotics. Both of them said, "Semiotics is science which analyze signs or study about how the signs used" (Cobley dan Jansz, 2002: 4). In this research semiotics will use as the research method.

This research is also using Popular Culture as a theory. Popular Culture in the new era could find that based on how the popular culture described trough mass culture idea. Some expert said that mass culture is always in the middle of us. To be specific, this theory implies in three ideas: The first theme is what or who defines the popular culture. What is the source of popular culture? Is popular culture born from common people as an expression of their interest or it has been forced from they who have a social control? The second theme is the impact of commercialization and industrialization of popular culture. The third theme is about ideological role of popular culture. (Strinati, 2007: 3-4). Homosexual has been transformed as a popular culture. Homosexual comes out as an 'interest' that is trying to find the profit. That is showed the quality, beauty, integrity of advertising as a mass communication product that has been shifted to another meaning. The shift is not sent to the people with force, but with entertaining and fun way.

## **METHODOLOGY**

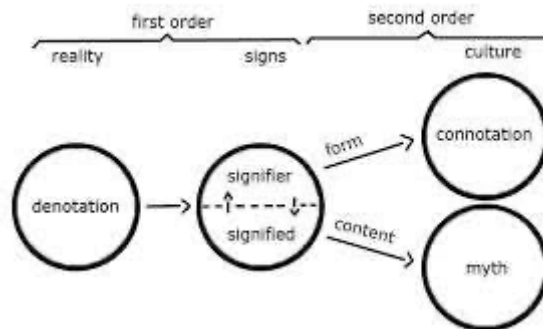
### **Semiotics**

As the method research, researcher is using semiotics. In the Communication of semiotics, communication is the process of using signs and symbols which elicit meanings in another person or persons. (Vera, 2014:1) Meanwhile, Charles Sanders Peirce elaborated semiotics as "a relationship among a sign, an object, and a meaning (Sobur, 2009: 16). Preminger said that semiotics is the science about signs. This science thought that social phenomenon or society and culture are a signs. Semiotics is trying to study about the convention which is has a meaning. Sign is everything-color, cue, eye's blink, object, mathematics formula, etc-that representing the others. (Danesi, 2012:6). So this research would be disassembling the signs that are building the audio-visual advertising product.

Semiotics is defined as the science of signs and symbols and dates from the 17th century in the UK. However, our modern understanding of semi otics comes from the research of De Saussure (2011) in a series of lectures. Halliday (1975) was noteworthy for following De Saussure's theory. For

Halliday (1978), the context was key. Text analysis should begin with context – the study of register and genre (Peluso, 2021: 64). One of the pioneers of semiotics is Roland Barthes. Barthes said language is a sign system that reflection the assumption from society. (Sobur, 2009:63) Barthes is known with his systematic model in analyzing the meaning of signs. His focus is about two orders of signification.

Picture 1 Two Order of Signification (Sobur, 2012: 127)



The first order of signification is the relation between signifier and signified in a sign with external reality. Barthes said that denotation is the most real meaning of sign. Connotation is a term that Barthes used to call the second order. It describes interaction when sign meet the reader’s emotion, and the cultural values. Connotation has the subjective meaning or at least intersubjectives ones.

On the other hand, denotation is what the signs described; meanwhile connotation is how to describe the sign. Connotation is a sign which has a relation with the content through one or more of the other functions. Connotation is working in the subjective steps, so it is unrealized.

In the second order of signification that has a correlation with the content, sign is operating through myth. Myth is how the culture describes several aspects about reality or natural phenomenon. Myth is the social class product that has been dominated. (Sobur, 2012: 128).

Myth is the popular culture forms, but according to Barthes is more than that. “Myth is a communication system (it is what we called message). Barthes point out that: “the signs way, a form”, one of parole... which has been written in a text. Myth it is not describe as the object of message, but it is the way to how to describe the message. (Strinati, 2007:127). Lobodally (2018: 229) said that myth it is not describe as the object of message, but it is the way to how to describe the message. So it can be concluded that myth is a cultural product's perspective on a phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon in question is about homosexuals and their resistance through an advertising communication product.

### **OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH OBJECT**

The object of this research is McDonald advertisements, especially McCafe issued by MCDonald Taiwan. This ad is titled Gay Coming Out Commercial: Acceptance.

This audio-visual ad is one minute 30 seconds long. This ad does not directly show McCafe products. This advertisement tells the story of a discussion between a father and son.

This ad begins with the Mcafe logo as a marker for the father-daughter discussion to take place. The scene then shifts towards his father's sad-looking face staring at one point, avoiding his gaze from his biological son. Then this ad shows the details of the McCafe glass shoot which reads: "I like guys" in Chinese characters. After that his father left his son by hitting his hand on the table. His son had called his father as: Pa.

Then shown his son in a sad state looking down while holding a glass of McCafe. The boy tried to hold back his tears. But not long after his father came with a new McCafe glass. The father then sat in front of his son who was crying.

His father then took his son's glass. His father then added the word accept that you between I and like. The scene then ends with his son crying with tears seeing his father accept that he likes men. Then the two of them drank coffee in front of him, his father smiled, and the ad closed with the words: McCafe: Warm Up the Conversations.

As long as this ad is on air, the producer of the message does not use audio. From the beginning the McCafe logo appeared, until the scene where the child was holding back tears. Message producers only use the atmosphere of the environment to show the tension that occurs during the father-daughter discussion.

However, after the father wrote the words: accept that on the child's glass, then the audio music appeared as the background. The audio music that appears as the background is a piano chime with a fairly fast beat which indicates a change in the mood of the scene for the better and warmer.

In this study, researchers used audio-visual advertising as the object of research. So that every audio and visual element that appears in each advertising scene is analyzed by researchers.

The audio that appears in this ad is dialogue, environmental audio atmosphere and background music. Meanwhile for visuals, the researchers examined every part that appears in the visual such as the color of clothes, body movements, objects that appear and the shooting techniques used by the producers of this advertisement.

## **DISCUSSION**

This research is using semiotics from Roland Barthes, so this chapter will describe the analysis of advertisements based on Barthesian level of signification. At the beginning, researcher will interpret each of the scene with the denotation and connotation level. After that, researcher will analysis the findings about homosexuality and describe the myth level.

Picture 2 Text 1



**Denotation level:** The first picture showed two people in the different age. The older guy is sitting in front the younger guy. The older guy is wearing chocolate jacket and the youngest one wearing the white shirt. In front of both guys there is a cup in the table. Each guy looks serious. Meanwhile, in the second picture showed the detail of the cup. The cup consists of two colors, green and white. In the green zone there is a text narrated: McCafe in red color. In the white zone narrated: "I like guys" (in Chinese language). In this scene there are two types of audios used. At first there was only audio of the environmental atmosphere, which had appeared since the beginning of the scene. However, after the father returned with a new McCafe glass, the audio of the piano sound backsound appeared with a high beat.

**Connotation level:** In this text the advertising creator shows the dialogue between father and son. This situation showed how to come out. The younger guy who is wearing the white shirt is the son of the chocolate jacket guy. In this situation the son admitted to his father that he is gay. Having a gay son is a shame condition for a parent commonly. So is for the older guy. It is a hard situation for each parent to know that his son loves a guy too. At the beginning of this advertisement until the scene of the child crying is shown without any meatball music. Message producers only use the audio of the environmental atmosphere, to build a tense discussion mood between father and son. In film and media production, ambient sound is a standard term that denotes the site-specific background sound component providing locational atmospheres and spatial information of public places (Chattopadhyay, 2017: 352). However, the mood of the scene then changed with the presence of meatball music with a fast twang of piano. Zhang (2020: 261) said the sound, with its timbre, articulation, pitch and volume, provides rather accurate information about the surrounding world. These sound properties "determine the character of the music and its actual sound as well as the reaction to it". This background music is a sign of changes that must be made by families regarding the acceptance of gay sexual preferences. The

heavy and tense problem in this scene also underwent a drastic change, with the actor's drinking coffee served by McCafe. Most gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender individuals are not 'out' to their birth families, or to work colleagues or in public life. This is a standard strategy in all parts of the world, used to avoid stigmatization and discrimination (Sanders, 2020: 359).

After the court result in Taiwan that they admitted same sex marriage, this situation, nowadays has become a common condition. In the beginning, advertising is only a tool to sell the product, but this situation shows that becoming gay is a common thing. Homosexuality is just the sexual preference. Homosexuality it is not a sexual deviation. So parent nowadays, has to accept their son's sexual preference.

Myth level: Homosexuality, in the 19<sup>th</sup> age has become the marginal class. At that age, another sexual preferential has been elimination, marginalization, and criminalization (Wieringa, 2010: 21). This study found a real shift in meaning about homosexuals. People still view homosexuals as abnormal, sick, scum of society and even as folk devils. Adihartono (2021: 146-147) said that only ten gay-friendly countries in Asia, namely Taiwan, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, The Philippines, Hong Kong, South Korea, Vietnam, India, and Nepal which can be categorized as a country capable of accommodating the gay rights. In the other countries in Asia were still can see homosexual targeted for human rights abuses due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

But this McCafe Taipei ad shifts the meaning of homosexuals. Previously, negative labels were always shown, but this advertisement shifts the meaning of homosexuals to a more positive nuance. In this advertisement, homosexuals are depicted as men in general, do not look shy or wear flashy clothes. Through this study, the researcher also found that homosexuals are part of the family whose existence must be accepted by parents. Homosexuals in this advertisement are considered as people who can determine their right to choose their partners and can be accepted as part of the family. From this advertising it is found that homosexual become a popular culture. Homosexual is a common sexual preferential. Homosexual looks as a common good looking people that is part of family.

Advertising is not just a tool to selling a product. By the symbolic transformation in a text (visual-audio) format, this research shows that homosexuality is not a sexual deviation. Homosexuality it is not a class who has to be eliminated or to be labeled as a criminal. Homosexual is just a sexual preferential. Guy who becomes a homosexual is still the part of family, so he is not to be eliminated as a shameless people.

This research shows that, advertising is the way of social resistance. From this advertising, the advertisers are trying to resist the ideology about refusing the homosexuality. Homosexuality has to be accepted as a common people. Homosexuality looks like a popular guy.

Media and their product have so many impacts. Media affects the lives of people. By producing any particular kind of message or advertisement, media can control the public opinion and their attitudes. Nowadays, internet can reach so many people. The products that are shown in internet can control and influence people's opinion and attitudes. It is including the advertising.

Advertising does not only give information about services and products. But the advertising can also build a secondary discourse about society and power relation. From this research we can see that advertising has an important role in the representation of how homosexuality is seen in a society. Thus for this research, the McCafe Taipei advertisements were chosen since they have significance in the representation of homosexuality.

Then in order to study about the resistance of homosexuality in the audio-visual commercials, Barthesian semiotics analysis describes how the audio visual product in Taipei, has been brave to show that homosexuality is a common thing. It is not a sexual deviation anymore, criminal, marginal people nor the eliminated class. Homosexuality is just a sexual preference such as man or woman. So, everyone can be accepted with any sexual preference, including homosexuality.

In the Asian region, gay people or homosexuality is still taboo. So is to representing them in the audio visual products. It is still not appropriate. Homosexuality in such an audio-visual product is still narrated as a criminal, marginal people or the eliminated class. But from the McCafe Taipei's advertisement that paradigm has been destroyed. The constitution that legalizes same-sex marriage has become the 'weapon' for homosexuality to coming out. To show the relationship between a guy in audio-visual product, it is not a taboo thing anymore. So, the advertisement has become the tool to socialize that homosexuality has been accepted by the government.

As we all know, the constitution to legalize same-sex-marriage, is a long way journey. The result needs hard work for almost about 40 years. Either the constitution has been decided, the resistance is still coming until now. Opponents of the bill spearheaded by religious groups threatened to turn out against any legislator that voted in favor for gay marriage. The McCafe's advertisement is just the gate to enter the new audio-visual product era in Asia. The era that can show any sexual preference is equal. Homosexuality can be accepted. Homosexual is not a criminal, marginal people, or eliminated class. So homosexual should be accepted as a common people. Homosexuality has to be accepted in the society, so is in the representation of audio-visual product. Not just in Taipei, but it has to be accepted all around the world. Either in a real world, or in the audio-visual product, such as advertising or movie.

## **CONCLUSION**

The gender dichotomy that is a cultural pattern in society is often the reason for the absence of gender balance. A person's sexual preferences are often determined by the society that forms them. Homosexuals who are not included in the gender dichotomy are then born as people who should not exist in society.

The product of mass communication, which is a place for unifying ideologies, often leads people to create homosexuals as different individuals. Advertising as part of a mass communication product becomes a suggestion to sow the seeds of hatred. However, this McCafe Taipei advertisement has become a mouthpiece to voice the right to life for homosexuals so that they are not seen as different and are part of the family.



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