

Representation of Racism In Dolce & Gabbana Advertising (Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China Commercial)

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ABSTRACT

Petty (2002) in his article states that an advertisement should be responsible for being able to play a positive and useful role. This study aims to analyze an advertisement that represents the elements of racism contained in the Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China advertisement, using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis model. In this study, the researcher used exploratory descriptive research with a qualitative approach. Descriptive research aims to describe a certain symptom. Operationally, this research uses the semiotic method to analyze the research object. The object of this research is the Dolce & Gabbana: DG LOVES CHINA advertisement in video ad format. Based on an analysis using the Roland Barthes method, the Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China advertisement represents racism because there are elements that are considered to be degrading the ornaments inherited by the Chinese people which are considered important and have special meaning for the Chinese people (Ban & Lovari, 2021). In connotation, the advertisement for Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China, by showing a model with a Chinese ethnic background, offends the Chinese ethnicity with representations of racism interpreted by the audience.

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INTRODUCTION

The social domination of races over other races can unconsciously occur in everyday life. Views such as the higher position of a race over other races can be caused by differences in the racial background of each individual. Racial issues in any multi-ethnic region can occur in various forms.

However, the thing that can trigger this problem is that there are differences in views of a race which were initially designed through the discourse of the dominant against other races, then the dominants treated racism which caused the dominant people to do the same thing (Karim & Solomos, 2015).

In an article entitled 'New Racism in Media Coverage', Dijk (1999) said that the media currently plays a role in influencing the new racism. While old racism tends to be visible (such as segregation law in the Southern United States or apartheid law in South Africa), new racism is mostly invisible and exists in media (Dijk, 1999).

One of the media that could host new racism is advertising. In advertising, when a medium meets the market, racism is hidden and can affect minority businesses and minority consumers. One of the advertisements (ad) that contain racism was issued by the well-known fashion brand Dolce & Gabbana on November 18, 2018. Dolce & Gabbana spreads this advertisement for fashion shows in Shanghai. The ad that was uploaded on Dolce & Gabbana's official social media account was considered to have a representation of racism. This is because the ad shows a Chinese woman who seems to have difficulty using chopsticks because the food she wants to eat is Italian, namely pizza. In addition, the ad is decorated with Chinese music and the narrator tries to convey advice to the woman in a tone that is said to sound condescending to the woman for eating Italian food using chopsticks. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze further about racism in advertising, namely Dolce & Gabbana

advertisement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Racism

Racism has long been held up by an ideology that assumes that there is a natural superiority of white people by treating people of color as backward (or can be called inferior) and carrying out slavery in a clear, violent, and official way (Dijk, 1999). However, the new racism does not emphasize the superiority of something or imperfection (genetic biological inferiority), but the new racism emphasizes cultural differences, such as cultural backwardness (Dijk, 1999). Therefore, the difference in the new racism is distinguished by socio-economic decline, not by oppressing other people. According to Denis & Clair (2015), the new form of racism is distinguished by overt actions, emphasizing more on the moral and symbolic context with principles that assume that stereotypes of minorities are inappropriate and by justifying racial inequality. For example, in Pan & Kosicki's research (Pan & Kosicki in Kulaszewicz, 2015), it is found that negative relationship is directly related to media prejudice, in which news reports about racism by associating people of color with various social problems ranging from environmental damage, violent crime, and poverty. In 1990 researchers revealed a new theory of racism and subconsciously suggested that racism evolved and turned into invisible forms. Sociologists support this statement by arguing that the ideology of racism and discriminatory practices have become a tradition in laws, policies, and norms that are accepted unconsciously and structured to benefit a particular group (Dijk, 1999). In turn, this new form of racism manifests itself in the media, namely in advertising.

Advertising And Racism

In an article written by Petty et al. (2002), they examine a phenomenon in advertising, targeting racial backgrounds as a factor that contributes to

racial tension through advertising media. The message of racism in advertising through the media is transmitted through false racially motivated advertising practices, targeting products designed specifically to attract the attention of certain minorities (Petty et al., 2002). According to Plous & Neptune (1997), content analysis of racial prejudice in advertising focuses on two variables, namely minority representation and role portrayal. Research on racial prejudice against advertising will continue to evolve resulting in varied developments, for example, there is research that has established a diminishing tendency to portray African-Americans in the role of a janitor or servant, and in some positions, African-Americans are often described as athletes, entertainers, and charitable recipients (Plous & Neptune, 1997). Petty et al. in their article mention that an advertisement should be responsible for being able to play a role and have a positive use. There are still many advertising agencies that claim that advertising can attract people to buy and use an advertised product but often refuse to be responsible for the harm caused by discriminatory advertising (Petty et al., 2002).

Discriminatory advertising can cause risks that can be categorized into three types of intrinsic losses, namely economic losses, consumer losses, and psychological losses. First, economic disadvantage is where minorities are required to pay more for the product and get less profit than the value of the money they pay. Second, the loss of minority consumers causes health hazards caused by an advertisement that has an excessive meaning about a product when it is not and is very risky because of the lack of information about the product being advertised. Third, there is a psychological loss that occurs when minority consumers feel despised by other people. This can cause a loss when the practice of advertising in the media based on race depicts inequality clearly so that it excludes a minor group of people and undermines the values of justice

and equality (Petty et al., 2002).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used exploratory descriptive research with a qualitative approach. Descriptive research aims to describe a certain condition or phenomenon. According to Sugiono (2010), descriptive research is a method of examining the status of human beings, objects, systems of thought, conditions, or events that attempt to explain certain social phenomena. Qualitative research with this descriptive type is also used to develop theories that are built through the data obtained (Sugiono, 2010). Operationally, this research uses a semiotic method to analyze the research object. The object of this research is the Dolce & Gabbana: DG LOVES CHINA advertisement in the video ad format. Thus, this study aims to find out how the representation of racism in the advertisement of Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China. For data analysis, this study utilizes Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to examine data related to Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China.

Results and Discussion

In recent years, there have been advertisements that were evaluated to be racially offensive. One of these advertisements was issued by the well-known style brand Dolce & Gabbana on November 18, 2018. Dolce & Gabbana has a troubled history. One of their most problematic racism issues was the destruction of their primary clothing show in Shanghai in 2018. Founded in 1985 by Italian designers Stefano Gabbana and Domenico Dolce, Dolce & Gabbana makes men's clothing, women's clothing, accessories, and perfumes or cosmetics, which rose to fame in the mid-90s. But Stefano Gabbana and Domenico Dolce are not at all afraid of creating controversy, putting their brand at great risk, because of their racist views and problems. Previously Dolce & Gabbana released a policy in 2012 to prohibit Hong Kong residents from taking photos outside or inside their flagship store on Canton Street in Hong Kong

To protect "intellectual property". While not particularly surprising for luxury brands looking to maintain their glamorous status, the news that foreign tourists and residents from mainland China were removed from the D&G photo ban caused public outrage. Public protests resulted in the temporary closure of mass stores in China until D&G issued an apology to the public in China (Perspex, 2019)

According to the history of the Dolce & Gabbana company regarding racism, after the incident in 2012 the Dolce & Gabbana company repeated its racist attitude in 2018 by publishing the advertisement for Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China. Dolce & Gabbana spread this advertisement for fashion shows in Shanghai. The ad that was uploaded on Dolce & Gabbana's official social media account was considered to have a representation of racism. The advertisement shows a Chinese woman who seems to have difficulty using chopsticks because the food she wants to eat is Italian, namely pizza. This woman also wearing a red dress with Dolce & Gabbana brand. In addition, the advertisement is decorated with Chinese music and the narrator tries to convey advice to the woman in a tone that is said to sound condescending to the woman for eating Italian food using chopsticks.

As a consequence of the advertisement that was not well received by the Chinese public, Dolce & Gabbana Brand Ambassador Karry Wang announced that he would not be participating in this fashion show. The Chinese model agency that will be participating in the fashion show also canceled its participation due to the ongoing controversy (Cristoferi, 2019). Another consequence caused by the controversial advertisement, many e-commerce companies in China have removed 58,000 of listed Dolce & Gabbana products (Flora, 2019). Several fashion retailers in Hong Kong and outlets in China followed this boycott and stopped selling Dolce &

Gabbana products, as well as several customers returned Dolce & Gabbana products to the stores. This is certainly very detrimental to the Dolce & Gabbana brand business in China. The semiotic analysis of the Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China advertisement video which was analyzed based on the focus of the research contained elements of racism which was described based on Roland Barthes' semiotics which included sign, denotation, connotation, and myth.

Results of data analysis

Barthes (in Najafian and Dabaghi, 2011) believes that people must be fully aware of the ideology around them and the best way is to realize that all natural things with common sense are just myths. For Barthes, the denotative status of images is a "myth", whereas still images are connoted naturally and, especially in advertising, are instruments that originate from a deliberate process of significance to be assigned a priori, therefore encoded into images.

Microinsult is a type of racism characterized by communication that provides rudeness and insensitivity and demeans the racial heritage or characteristics of a person (Gordon & Johnson, 2003; Sue, 2003). Microinsults mean subtle insults, often unknown to the perpetrators, but with a clear way of conveying an insulting message hidden from the recipient. Under the analysis using Roland Barthes' semiotic method, the Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China advertisement represents racism because there are elements that contain microinsults and are claimed to demean the ornaments of the Chinese people's heritage which are important and have special meaning for the Chinese people (Xu, 2018).

In the advertisement for Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China, the words used represent elements of racism. Wang (2018) said that the video featured an Asian woman in a glamorous Dolce & Gabbana dress trying to eat pizza using chopsticks. Using Chinese folk music played

against the background, Chinese dubbing is spoken deliberately in a way to mock Chinese speech. The male narrator's voice goes on to mention how to "properly use chopsticks or a small stick" to eat a dish. "First, we're going to show people how to use this little stick-shaped kitchen utensil" mocks the voiceover when the woman doesn't know what to do with the pizza. "Let's use these little stick-like things to eat some great pizza" he commands in the video. Different mentions of 2 ornaments or cutlery with the food eaten, each of which represents a country with a culture that is not in harmony, can be interpreted as inferiority in Chinese culture where chopsticks are said to use "small stick-shaped cutlery" while pizza which represents Italy is said to be "great pizza". Advertisements show women with slanted eyes, which means the standard stereotype of Asian women's beauty for Europeans and Americans (Puppini, 2018). The female character also wears a dress with red color, which is considered a symbol of the Chinese state. The video ends using #DGLovesChina as well as #DGTTheGreatShow. D&G probably thought that they could tell the audience that D&G loves China through humor. For Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China, this advertisement sells an ideal view of the ethnic Chinese people portrayed by the Italian company Dolce & Gabbana.

Advertising attracts consumers' attention slightly more than products (Parker, 2014). Advertising sells ideas about ethnic class, gender, and beauty. One of the most important points of cross-cultural advertising is that the campaign must resonate well with the target market and local consumers, each of whom has a cultural and linguistic background and may interpret messages and meanings in different ways. In this sense, the choice of chopsticks is unfortunate, because they are a very important symbol of the Chinese people's national-cultural characteristics. Specifically, the two-word opposition between "this little stick-shaped cutlery" and "the

traditional Italian pizza Margherita is excellent", and the greatness of the Italian dish may have sent the wrong message with the assumption of cultural superiority (Puppini, 2018).

In addition, the Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China advertisement has a holistic connotation in that it is as if chopsticks are strange objects and are not commonly used as eating utensils. The voice of the narrator who uses a Chinese accent and speaks Mandarin can also be claimed to make fun of their culture because it can be interpreted that a narrator is a Chinese person who does not understand how to use chopsticks which is an ornament that considered important for the Chinese people themselves.

Based on Ban & Lovari (2021), the description of chopstick culture shown to other ethnicities receives different perceptions when consumed by the Chinese people. The impression that is interpreted by the Chinese people itself has been interpreted as something that is very demeaning to their culture because the message that has been conveyed in the advertisement has been influenced by the experience or culture that lies behind the Chinese people themselves.

As the results of this racist advertisement, most Chinese in mainland China found the advertisement unpleasant, unfunny, racist, and an unbearable insult to Chinese culture and people. This invites harsh online comments in China. In addition from harsh online backlash, there were also protests and boycotts of Dolce & Gabbana products carried out in offline stores as well as online stores in China (Friedman & Wee, 2018). The Communist Party of China makes credits for itself by rejuvenating China or, in other words, returning China to the right path and its glory as one of the greatest powers in the world. Therefore, both the Chinese government and all Chinese people believe that China's new status commanded a new level of respect, especially from the West. Thus, this racist advertisement,

is considered as a deliberate rejection of the Chinese region on a global basis. This results in the backlash and rejection for this advertising in China that considerably huge and significant.



Figure 1. Dolce and Gabbana Controversial Advertisement
Source: Authors Own Documentation

Source: Authors Own Documentation

CONCLUSION

The results of the study using the analysis of the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes' model on the Dolce & Gabbana advertisement: DG Loves China found that the Dolce & Gabbana advertisement: DG Loves China contained an element of racism. From the results of the analysis using Roland Barthes's theory, the Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves

China advertisement wants to convey the advertising message humorously by using a Chinese model eating Italian food (pizza) with chopsticks. It offends Chinese society since the advertisement contained racist representations conveyed in the use of chopsticks for eating pizza and the voiceover that mocks the use of chopsticks. The limitations of this research is that this research only investigate the Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China advertisement, and this research does not investigate other advertisements that might be seen as offensive or insulting for some people. The managerial implication of this research is that cross-cultural advertising must resonate well with the target market and local consumers, each of whom has a cultural and linguistic background and may interpret messages and meanings in different ways. The Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China advertisement fails to achieve this objective. Therefore in the future, The Dolce & Gabbana and other multinational companies should be more aware with cultural differences around the globe, and utilize a more culturally respectful advertisement, in order to gain the foreign customers all around the world.

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