

Perceived Meaning on McDonalds' Happy Meal[®] Promotional Videos by Blue and White Collar Workers in Surabaya

Valerie Febrina Anggara

English for Business Communication, Faculty of Letters, Petra Christian University, Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, East Java, Indonesia

E-mail: valerie_96@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study observes the perceived meanings of McDonalds' Happy Meal[®] promotional videos produced by two different social classes of workers, which are White and Blue Collar workers as respondents. After finding out what the perceived meanings are from the respondents, writer proceeds on to the analyzing process in order to find out the differences between White and Blue Collar respondents' perceived meanings. The study uses descriptive qualitative approach to explain the meaning of qualitative material in a more systematic way. The writer concludes that white collar respondents tend to prioritize pride, prestige and esteem. Meanwhile, blue collar respondents tend to prioritize their primary needs and responsibilities before spending on secondary needs.

Keyword: Encoding; Decoding; Process of Signification; Perceived Meanings

Introduction

Advertisement is becoming more popular nowadays as it is known as a powerful and effective tool to empower brands and products by companies. Thus, the power of an advertisement is relying on the creativity of a particular company. The more creative an advertisement is, the more people will be attracted with it.

Besides advertisements, according to sales promotion theory, consumers are really attracted with promotion or special offer for instance, cost reduction and free bonus. Usually, this way can really attract customers to come and buy that particular product (Drewniany and Jewler, 2005).

The true purpose of an advertisement and promotion is to make customers understand what the advertiser implies and familiarizes people with their brand, which is the most vital aspect in making an advertisement. However, it is undeniable that people are divided into social classes, and different social classes may perceive different meanings from an advertisement, where differences may occur from internal premise or external influence.

In this case, for further research, the writer picked McDonalds Happy Meal[®] promotional videos to be researched as McDonalds is one of the biggest fast-food franchises around the world. The brand of McDonalds itself is already well-known by people, from teenagers to adults. Their "Golden Arch" has become their signifier and trademark and Ronald McDonalds has become their icon as well as McDonalds's "I'm lovin' it" phrase.

Happy Meal[®] itself is a meal which is bundled with a particular toy to conform children's desire on toys and parents concerns on meal. The bundle itself costs thirty three thousand rupiahs which the writer is about to discover on how respondents from two social classes respond onto the value of McDonalds's bundle.

Nonetheless, despite of how successful McDonalds has advertised their brand amongst the people, in America, the homeland of fast-food, elitists have always looked down at fast food, criticizing how it tastes (Schlosser, 2002). White collars prefer having meal in a restaurant to having meal in fast-food outlets. On the other hand, blue collars prefer fast-food meals to restaurants as it is much more inexpensive and it can fulfill their daily diet.

White collars tend to emphasize more on esteem and prestige meanwhile blue collars do not prioritize esteem and prestige and focus on fulfilling their primary needs (Peter and Olson, 1990). Referring to the survey, writer is eager to find out how white and blue collars in Indonesia

perceive on McDonalds' brand and products and to find out the differences and similarities between white and blue collars' perceived meanings.

Method

In this study, the writer uses descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture and breaking it down into variables so the goal is to a comprehensive picture and depth of understanding than a numeric analysis of data (Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen, 2010, p.29). Since the writer's research is to find the perceived meanings of McDonalds's Happy Meal[®] videos. Qualitative approach is appropriate for this research as the writer is interested in individual interpretation and reactions to the object of investigation. Furthermore, descriptive qualitative approach is the most suitable for this research as it is fundamentally interpretive (Creswell, 2003, p.182). It means that the writer is going to face variants of answers and the writer must group them depends on the comparison of the respondents' perceived meanings.

In the process of data collection for the research, the writer retrieved several Happy Meal[®] promotional videos from McDonalds's official channel in YouTube especially McDonalds in Indonesia (McDonaldsID, 2017), watched, and picked various verbal and non-verbal expressions scenes to be offered to the respondents from both social classes. The writer herself is the main instrument of this research since she was the one who both collected and analyzed the data from the source.

After retrieving responds from both social class respondents, the writer proceeds onto analyzing the responds. In order to minimize any mistake and misinterpret, the writer decided to sort the data retrieved into several codes, which are W for white collar workers, B stands for blue collar workers, R# stands for respondents sequence, V stands for verbal expressions, and NV stands for non-verbal expressions.

The writer selected five verbal expressions and five non-verbal expressions as the representatives of five videos in Happy Meal[®]'s campaign. Then, there were five pictures and five verbal expressions from each Happy Meal[®] videos. After putting all the data into the tables, the writer analyzed the perceived meaning. The writer started to analyze each blue collar and white collar's perceived meanings of both verbal and non-verbal expressions.

Findings and Discussions

Following the result of the research, the writer could finally conclude how blue collar and white collar respondents perceived McDonald Happy Meal[®]'s advertisement. Furthermore, the writer also discovered the differences and similarities on how both social classes perceived the advertisement, verbal and non-verbally.

White Collar Perceived Meanings on Verbal Expression Advertisement

The writer found out that on several McDonalds' Happy Meal[®] Verbal Expression advertisements; Happy Meal[®] seems to collaborate with several box office movie characters such as the Emoji movie characters, Smurfs, and Minions. From those movies, writer concludes that how trending a movie affects white collar respondent's perceived meanings. Those respondents would be more attracted to purchase Happy Meal[®] products if Happy Meal[®] is collaborated with several more trending movie characters such as the characters above as they perceived that purchasing those products or ornaments could give some private pleasure to themselves or their children.

Furthermore, white collar perceives that McDonalds Happy Meal[®] bundle turns out to be a beneficial offer for them. For example, WR2 stated that *"it is more economical for parents as the meal comes bundled with a toy."* WR2 perceived that McDonalds Happy Meal[®] bundle is economical yet beneficial as it could fulfill their diet and their children's desire.

Then, white collar respondents tend to complete their series of toys that they have collected from the beginning. Taking WR3 as an example, he stated *"I could not complete the series if I missed one character"*

In the other hand, despite of their similar perceived meanings, there is a quite outstanding different opinion. Taking as an example, WR4 prefers the toys rather than the meal, as she stated *"I*

mostly purchase the bundle in order to complete my collection.” Meanwhile, the other white collar respondents prefer both the food and the toys.

White Collar Perceived Meanings on Non Verbal Expression Advertisement

In McDonalds Happy Meal[®] non verbal expression advertisements, writer found out that white collar respondents are easier to be attracted to the pictured advertisement. Taking as an example, WR2 opines *“McD is one of my favorite meals, with that, just by seeing McDonalds’ package picture triggers me to consume it.”* With that, writer concluded that a perfect set of pictured advertisement could attract white collar customers easier.

Then, writer found out that all white collar respondents have recognized McDonald’s symbolic mode, the famous “Golden Arch”. All respondents agreed that the symbol is McDonalds’s irreplaceable trademark for years.

Furthermore, referring to non verbal expression advertisements, a good set of supporting picture would attract white collars attention easily. As WR5 reckoned, *“The picture itself influenced my children to purchase Happy Meal[®] package”* pictured advertisement could be a way to get their attentions. Moreover, completing a series set of toys could give them much more private pleasure to themselves as they could make their children proud among their friends as stated by WR1, *“Completing all the complete series would make my children proud among their friends.”*

Blue Collar Perceived Meanings on Verbal Expression Advertisement

As stated by BR3, *“I would buy the bundle if there is some spare in my income in order to satisfy my children.”*; writer found out that blue collar respondents perceive that consuming McDonalds as a secondary or tertiary needs which could be fulfilled as long as their primary needs and responsibilities are completed.

Blue collars do not feel that purchasing those toys are obligatory no matter how tempted they are to purchase McDonalds Happy Meal[®] products, either to satisfy their children’s desire or for their own satisfaction. They do not mind purchasing McDonalds Happy Meal[®] bundle as long as they do not purchase it regularly and they have some spare on their income. Previous writer’s statement is supported by BR2 which stated *“It is not possible to consume McDonalds everyday regarding to my income, but it is fine to consume McDonalds in several occasions.”*

Their perceptions prove the theory of blue collars never make esteem and prestige as a priority thing in life. They do not really pay attention to those things even; make them as a priority (Peter and Olson, 1990).

Blue Collar Perceived Meanings on Non Verbal Expression Advertisement

Quite similar to how white collars perceived McDonalds Happy Meal[®] non verbal expression advertisements, blue collar respondents seemed to be a bit more attracted compared to verbal expressions advertisements. BR5 stated *“The food itself and the advertisement both attract me to consume McDonalds”*. Writer concluded that a good set of picture could affect respondent’s opinion related to a particular product.

Writer found out that the reason for blue collars on purchasing McDonalds Happy Meal[®] bundle is quite a different to white collar respondents. Blue collar respondents opine that purchasing McDonalds Happy Meal[®] bundle could be a gift for their children if they have achieved something; as stated by BR3 *“I usually collect the toys to motivate my children so they would study diligently.”*

Furthermore, as BR2 opines *“My children are not attracted to the storyline, they are more attracted to the characters.”*; writer found out that blue collar respondents are quite unfamiliar with box office movie characters which make them purchase Happy Meal[®] bundles just to fulfill their desires if they have income spare.

The Differences between White and Blue Collar Respondents’ Perceived Meanings in Verbal Expressions.

The first difference is on how they value something. For example, Happy Meal® package, white collars feel that the package is so beneficial and economical for them as they could decrease the expenses of buying their children's toys. The opposite opinion comes from the blue collars where they feel that consuming Happy Meal® regularly in order to collect toys for their children will make them be burdened by other primary needs and responsibility at the end.

The second difference is how white collars easily get influenced and persuaded by surroundings. White collars tend to follow their environment to maintain their prestige and pride. For example, collecting a full series of Happy Meal®'s toys, white collars do not mind collecting them as long as it is still affordable. Unlike white collars, blue collars mostly do not care about esteem and prestige as they have their own daily struggle, settling their responsibility along with fulfilling their primary needs with their limited income.

Moreover, the writer also found out that there is a difference on how they educate their children about McDonald's products. White collar parents tend to satisfy their children's desire to raise their children self esteem and prestige among their friends. A massive difference comes from another class which is blue collar parents, they educate their children that a desire must be fulfilled by hardworking and need process to achieve satisfaction.

In sum, according to Saussure (1916) semiology theory, the signification process produces differences between the two classes. With the same signifier and an invitation to complete Happy Meal® toys series, white and blue collar respondents could respond differently.

The Differences between White Collar and Blue Collar Respondents' Perceived Meanings in Non Verbal Expressions.

The only difference that the writer concludes is the awareness of the movie-related characters. For example, white collar parents and children mostly recognize every character on the advertisement that the writer shows to them and their children buy Happy Meal® in order to collect the characters that they love. On the other hand, the blue collar parents and children mostly love the toy or character as long as it is cute or attractive, despite what the role of the character in the movie is, they will not mind.

The writer takes Batman in the non verbal expression as an example. In reality, most white collars do not feel bothered with the dark themed advertisement as it pictures Batman, the dark knight. However, different opinions come from the blue collars where they reckon to be unsatisfied and not interested to the advertisement. They opine that the advertisement is not colorful and does not picture Happy Meal® product.

Using signification process as a base, writer could briefly conclude that the same signifier, Batman, respondents could respond differently.

The Similarities between White and Blue Collar Respondents' Perceived Meanings in Verbal Expressions.

There is one part where both classes agree on which is the lucky chance of winning a tour package to Legoland. Both classes really hope to win the lucky chance so they could make their children happy but both of them also agree that it is impossible to win a lucky chance unless there is a miracle or the goddess fortune are into them. Referring to the result the writer collected, it affirms that risk-free options are always more persuasive rather than a risky option, no matter how small the risk is (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979).

The signifier in the advertisement is an invitation to purchase Happy Meal® in order to win a tour package to Legoland. Both social classes agree that it is barely a chance to win the tour package.

The Similarities between White and Blue Collar Respondents' Perceived Meanings in Non Verbal Expressions.

Both classes agree on two things which are the visual advertisement shows the strong and delicious taste of McDonald's fried chicken, French fries and McNuggets also the uniqueness of McDonalds's trademark. For the unique taste of McDonald's, the respondents opine that no matter how they try to imitate the taste of it, they never could imitate the strong delicious taste of it.

Next is the McDonald's trademark, both recognize that yellow M and the red background become its uniqueness and the worldwide franchise make the trademark is easy to remember and well-known.

This shows that McDonalds has been successfully completed the process of signification where they called as "Golden Arch" which McDonalds used as their trademark from 1968 has become their symbol and signifier. McDonalds's strategy on spreading their outlets has made them familiar and well-known by people, which now, welcome McDonalds.

Conclusion

Following the encoding and decoding theory of Stuart Hall (1980), the process of delivering and receiving message have been perfectly done by McDonalds's advertisement. Their intentions and messages are well received by all interviewee as respondents.

Respondents, as interpretants have decoded the sign and messages well. McDonalds's invitation to collect the complete series of Happy Meal[®] toys is fully understood by both white and blue collar respondents. The only barrier for blue collar respondents to accept McDonalds's invitation is their financial state. Unlike the white collars which are financially secured, the blue collars believe that fulfilling their primary needs is more important than consuming one time meal.

Despite of any differences between white and blue collar respondents, both social classes agree on McDonalds's trademark. According to Peirce's Triadic Sign Model, there are three modes of relationship between signifier and signified which are symbolic, iconic and indexical mode. McDonalds have developed all three, following Peirce's Triadic Sign Model.

McDonalds's Golden Arch, a simple M logo has been declared as McDonalds's symbolic mode. All respondents have agreed that the Golden Arch belongs to McDonalds and it has become McDonalds's trademark and it has not included Ronald McDonalds as their iconic mode and their unique aroma and taste has become a McDonalds's indexical mode.

The writer concluded that McDonalds have successfully completed the signification process. Their efforts for brandings by opening thousands of franchise outlets worldwide, their Golden Arch and "I'm Lovin' It" phrase, including their unique aroma have become a signifier for their trademark.

In order to answer the writer's interest that started this research, writer concluded that daily diet affects the differences between American lifestyle and Indonesian lifestyle. In America, blue collars consume McDonalds as it is their daily diet. As a contrary, Indonesian consumes rice as their main diet. Diet differences have caused how blue collars perceived McDonalds and their products. American white collar sees McDonalds as a cheap meal and prefers medium-high class restaurants to fulfill their esteem and prestige. Whereas, Indonesian white collar sees McDonald as an American product which they feel by consuming McDonalds's products have fulfill their self esteem and prestige. The writer concludes that daily dietary habit as a main cause of the different perception on McDonalds between American and Indonesian social classes.

The research is significant as it shows how respondents from different social classes process the information or perceive the meaning from an advertisement. The writer's conclusion and discoveries can be resourceful and useful information for those who are interested in the field of marketing and Semiotics.

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