

SYMBOLIC MEANING AND CONSUMERS' RESPONSE TO THE ADVERTISEMENT WITH THE THEME OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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The theme of unity of the nation is the interests of all elements of the Indonesian people that consists of many different ethnics and cultures. Indonesian state symbol has motto: diversity in unity. Indomie, one of the biggest company in producing noodles in Indonesia uses the theme of unity in the nation in its television ads, with the diversity of cultural displays. It is interesting that the noodles indeed not from Indonesian culture, but from China. The objective of this paper is to find out how consumers understand the symbolic meaning on the ad and how they respond to the ad. This research is a qualitative research conducted interviews with 20 students ABFII Perbanas Jakarta, Indonesia, which come from various tribes. This paper describes how consumers understand the cultural meaning of the ads, and the response of consumers who were interviewed stated that the ad appeared to have no effect on the number of their purchases.

Keywords: Symbolic meaning, consumers' response, cultural diversity, advertising

Consumers experience variety of advertisements media in their lives. Advertiser must get consumers' attention. However, attracting consumers' attention is not enough, attention should be developed to purchase intention (Jaeil, 2001:177). Advertising has a central role in developing brand image. It informs consumers of the functional capabilities of the brand while simultaneously imbuing the brand with symbolic values and meanings relevant to the consumer (Meenaghan, 1995). Through the process of seeing advertisements, consumers obtain product and cultural knowledge as well as meaning related to the product image or which are created. "Meanings" are symbolic of the interpretive processes that different individuals have for different objects or actions at different times. In the interpretive process, individuals form meanings from different frames of reference and experiences. The meanings are constructed by a combination of the consumer's past experiences, tradition, culture, values, norms, ideologies, needs, and emotions within a given culture (Wells, 1994). Researchers must move beyond to see the hidden meaning in complex messages (Rhoades, 2006).

In commemorating National Awakening Day in May 20th 2008, Indomie issues television advertisement with the theme "One taste", showing many symbols of nation's culture. In this ad people from various ethnic singing with their own languages expressing their devotion to Indomie and Indonesia.

Indomie is instant noodles, which is not originally from Indonesia. However, many people like this food, and even it become daily servings. Instant noodles are dried or precooked noodles fused with oil, and often sold with a packet of flavoring. Although similar products were available in dynastic China, modern instant noodles were invented by Momofuku Ando of Nissin Foods Japan (Wikipedia, 2009). The taste of Indomie's flavor has been adapted to the Indonesian taste.

This article discusses how the ABFII Perbanas students as the consumer interpret the symbolic meaning of the Indomie advertisement and and how they respond to the ad. The paper is structured as follows: in the following section, we briefly present the advertising and symbolic meaning. We, then, present the method and report our inquiry. Finally, we draw conclusion.

ADVERTISING & SYMBOLIC MEANING

The meaning of culture are essentially culturally constituted world. Where, a daily experience in this world understood by individuals based on beliefs and assumptions that come from his/her culture. Thus the culture is the "lens" through which people view products. Second, culture is the "blue-print" of human activity, that determines the coordinates of social action and productive activity, and specifying the behaviors and objects that issue from both. As a lens, culture determines how the world is seen. As a blue-print, it determines how the world will be fashioned by human effort. From the culturally constituted world, the culture meaning flows to the consumption of goods through the collective and individual efforts of the designers, advertisers, producers and even consumers themselves. Then the meaning is drawn from the object and transferred to an individual consumer (McCracken, 1986).

Advertising is basically the process of cultural communication between the producers and consumers in the community (Wells, 1994). Advertising is one of the most powerful tools that can reflect and influence culture. They have an independent reality that allows them to link to our lives and the lives we hope to live. Advertisements allow viewers to create meaning out of what they are seeing (Rhoades, 2006). From a semiotic perspective, every marketing message has three basic components: an object, a sign or symbol, and an interpretant. The object is the product that is the focus of the message. The sign is the sensory image that represents the intended meanings of the object. The interpretant is the meaning derived. (Solomon, 2004:73). Individuals have an important role to play in decoding symbolic meaning. A variation of this interpretation is the recognition that individuals can assign different meanings to the same product because different goals can be met through its consumption (Pettigrew, 2006).

When messages conveyed through advertising, cultural values can be regarded as powerful forces shaping consumers' motivations, lifestyles and product choices (Fam & Waller, 2006). Consumers are often motivated to buy a good or service on the basis of what it represents to themselves, to others with whom they associate, or to some societal referent (Leigh & Gabel, 1992). When ad advertiser is dealing with ingrained, culturally defined behavior, it is easier to change the marketing mix to conform to cultural values than to change the values through advertising (Blackwell et al., 2001:320-321).

Many advertising models were developed during the early 1960s, mostly based on the Lavidge and Steiner (Smith & Swinyard, 1982; Bendixen, 1993; Smith, 2008) hierarchy of effects model. This model proposes that consumers who purchase a product move through a sequential hierarchy from awareness, through knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and ultimately to purchase. This model recognizes three distinct stages of response to advertising: cognitive stage (eg, awareness and knowledge), affective stage (eg, liking and preference) and stage behavior (eg, conviction and purchase) (Bendixen, 1993). This model emphasize the interrelationship among knowing, feeling and doing. All three components of an attitude are important, but their relative importance will vary depending on consumer's level of motivation with regard to the attitude object (Solomon, 2004:227).

METHODS

This study uses qualitative methods. We conducted interviews with the advertising agent Matari Advertising, Jakarta, and with the customers who are the students of ABFII Perbanas, Jakarta. The objectives of interview with advertising agent is to find out their ideas in making this advertisement. We interviewed creative director, copywriter and art director of this ad. Interviews were conducted using open questions and recorded. Interviews were conducted informally with informants in different locations, namely on

the campus, in the boarding house, and in the mall. We selected 20 informants as the object of research, because we thought this advertisement expose variety of ethnics, so we could get various perception from the informants.

Informants in this study consisted of 8 men and 12 women, aged between 20-24 years. They came from different ethnics, namely: Javanese (8 person), Sundanese (6 person), Borneo (1 person), Bengkulu (1 person), Batak (1 person), Pakistani (1 person), and one person mixed breed (Javanese, Padang, Sundanese, and Batak).

Before the interview, each informant was shown Indomie advertisement "One taste" version from the laptop. After that, the interview was done. Interviews were conducted individually by using a tape recorder. Questions are related to their views and feelings about this ad and their response.

Instant Noodle Advertisement

PT Indofood Sukses Makmur is the largest manufacturer of instant noodles in the world, controls 85% to 90% of the Indonesian instant noodle market (Fabiosa, 2006). The advertisement was produced by Matari Advertising, Jakarta, launch for the first time on television on May 20, 2008, coincided with Indonesia's National Awakening Day. This ad is divided into three durations, the duration of 60 seconds, 30 seconds, and 15 seconds. Researchers select the ad with 60 seconds duration as a research material.

The main theme of this advertisement is: "Indomie defines Indonesia diversity in happiness", means that Indomie unifies the differences in happiness, and differences in race, language, dances, taste, and others. This idea conforms with the motto written in the symbol of the nation: "Unity in Diversity"

This ad shows the people from six cultures in Indonesia, namely Betawi, Manado, Batak, Java, Bali and Papua. The Indonesian population is around 231 million people, consisting of 300 ethnic groups spread in more than 18,000 islands. According to the advertiser, those ethnics are considered to represent ethnics from the city of Sabang (the western point of Indonesia) to the city of Merauke (the eastern point of Indonesia).

Informants interpret an ad based on the relationship between a sign or symbol in the ad (Jaeil, 2000). The traditional house, dances, language, songs, and the background scenes used to show the relationship. Informant interprets advertisement based on three relationships, that is a symbol with the product, symbol with the message, and symbols and the message with the product (Solomon, 2004:73).

The relationship between the symbol and the product, explained by Adit's statement that all of the ethnic groups in Indonesia like Indomie. He said:

Definitely, from their songs, although Indonesian culture is displayed by some ethnic, the people from the region Sabang to Merauke, they are well represented. It represents Indonesian region. The Javanese for example, Javanese language may represent the Java island, which consists of Sundanese and Betawi. Then, Bali may represent East Nusa Tenggara and West Nusa Tenggara. And then, Irian (Papua) represents eastern regions. Then, Batak and Palembang represented the Sumatra island. In addition, there is a tourist destination represented by Tanah Lot in Bali, traditional house, I don't know where it is from, and then the Musi river Palembang. Furthermore, Bali necklace, and location in Kuningan, which represents the capital city.

The relationship between the symbol and the message can be clearly shown by Okta's statement as follows:

It is clear from the beginning. That starts from the dance, displays of ethnic variety, from the the songs with each language, hold hands together. That reflects that they have one taste.

The relationship between the symbols, messages and products obtained according to the Febi's statement that even though Indonesia consists of various ethnics, we remain one with the the same food and taste, namely Indomie. Febi said that because he saw the symbols listed in the ad.

Maybe it's because the songs in various languages, indicate the various ethnics. That unite us that, yes ... the food. So, in my opinion, the various ethnics sing their songs, but with one taste the same, Indomie that's it is ...

Advertising works as a potential method of meaning transfer by bringing the consumer good and a representation of the culturally constituted world together within the frame of a particular advertisement. Advertising is a conduit through which meaning constantly pours from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods. Through advertising, old and new goods continually give up old meanings and take on new ones (McCracken, 1986).

Culture can be an ethnicity, religion, dance, food and others. Three informants who come from different ethnics attempt to give opinions about the ad from the point of view and taste food.

Syifa: The contents of Indomie's ad? The story ... It was so culturized in Indonesian society. So it is an ordinary food to the people from Sabang to Merauke. Hehehe ...

Adit: Hmmm ... that ad, the message is, that all of Indonesian ethnics like like Indomie. Indeed, the rice substitute is the noodles ... yes, Indomie it is.

Handy: The message is, that Indomie is acceptable by Indonesian people, such as staple food in Indonesia. Essentially as a substitute for rice.

Adi: Hmmm ... tell about ... hmm ... Indomie's taste is acceptable by all people, in which the people ... especially Indonesian, ya, different ethnics. But it's taste can unite differences the taste of every person. Each ethnic has a different taste. Like Padang, they like hot taste, Javenese like nice taste. But Indomie's taste can unite all of the people taste.

Gilang: The message is about ethnic plurality, and deliver the message that Indomie is accepted by all ethnics. The taste ... can represent a plurality of tribes. Indomie and deliver what could be received by all tribes. It can represent Indonesian taste. Indomie has products like Javanese taste noodles, tuna taste noodles.

Syifa, Adit, Handy, and Adi Gilang Indonesia is part of the Indonesian people that eat rice. However, they have different favourite food. Syifa likes gold fish pepes (boiled fish wrap by banana leaves), Adit likes gudeg (made from jackfruit), Handy like uduk rice (rice cooked with coconut milk), Adi likes Padang cuisine, and Gilang likes bread toast. The differences in their favorites food indicate their diversity, but they show similar opinion in interpreting the ad. In this case the cultural meaning about unity in diversity transferred through advertisement to the audiences.

Informants in this study come from different ethnicity. Based on the answers obtained from the informants, that in addition to food, ethnicity also becomes a factor in interpreting an ad. Fiya, Abe, and Gilang said:

Fiya: In my opinion, about cultural diversity in Indonesia, hmmm ... so what? If we eat the Indomie noodles, we can personally know other cultures. Indomie offer many tastes, from every Indonesian culture. It strengthen our unity.

Abe: Indonesia is, so great! Haha This ad is good in cultivating nasionalism, so we can know Batak's tradition, I am proud there is Batak in the ad. And the Papua's tradition...

Gilang: Hmm My feeling? Hmmm ... I am happy, because there is Javanese. Because I am a Javanese.

Indomie has always issued the product with the taste from various regions in Indonesia and is able to show that diversity in its ad. Indomie has more than 100 taste variants, 62 of which are typical Indonesian cuisine (Lis, 2005). Abe and Gilang were proud when they saw the ad, because it shows their ethnicity. So, this advertisement can bring a sense of pride and nationalism.

The researchers are interested in three informants' answer who understand the content of the ad from a different perspective when researchers ask about what is actually delivered by advertiser's message.

Saw said that the more important message is promotion. For Mita, Indomie ad aims to drive consumer mindset that this brand is the choice of Indonesian people. For Arif, Indomie told about moral.

Saw: The message delivered by Indomie to the consumer, the first thing is promotion, to explain that even there is variety in Indonesian taste, Indomie can be consumed by people from different culture who has different taste.

Mita: The message is ... What I say is, hmmm To shape the mindset, that Indomie is the choice of Indonesian people. "

Arif: In my opinion... it is about the morality. That ad showed variety of ethnic, racial, which is united. They consume Indomie noodles. And this noodles is monopolist. It controls noodles' market share in Indonesia.

Gender is a factor that also distinguishes the results obtained by researchers from the informants. Many researchers said that there were differences in reading the pattern of ads based on gender (Jaeil, 2000). We found it was difficult to get answers from the male informants. Because male informants sometimes answer the questions with a brief and less serious, the researcher must submit a more specific question and investigate further. From the women informants, researchers can obtain detailed answer. It was easier to interview woman.

Hafiz: About the noodles hahaha Hmmm ... Do I have to answer? Hahaha In my opinion, after watching the ad, it showed ... what is it? Hmmm ... ethnic! Ethnic from various region. This ad is interesting, because it displays ethnic from various region. Ethnic Aboriginal, hahaha ... What ethnic ya?

Handy: One Indonesia, one taste.

Hafiz didn't answer the question seriously. Other male informants did it as well. Handy's answer is short and straightforward Even when researcher ask for further explanation, Handy said with the same answer. It is different with Exi's answer to the same question:

Exi: In my opinion, the explanation... is this, so that Indomie is not just for one ethnic, one person, but it is for all ... Indonesia has many ethnic. It is just to attract the consumer, because there are many noodles brand.

Researcher: What message the advertiser wants to deliver?

Exi: Ehmm ... In my opinion, ... Ehmm like I said before, Indomie has been long time in Indonesia. Ehmm ... it wants to show, even it has been long time, the quality does not change. Firstly, mmm ... maybe, the producers are many. With the coming of new brands, most people still mention Indomie (not noodles). If they want to buy another brand they mention instant noodles. So the name of Indomie is in our mind. The markets of instant noodles are in many regions. How many provinces? So they want to show us that Indomie sold in many regions. So, wherever the place, you can get it.

Exi can explain in detail about the ad based on what she feels. She can tell her opinion when she saw the ad by including her elements of personal experience.

CONSUMER RESPONSE

Cognitive response

This stage is the initial phase of a consumer to see and to know the version of the ad Indomie "One taste". To find out whether the customer (informants) know or not, ad Indomie version of "A taste" in the media of television, the researchers asked the question, "Did you see the ad Indomie version of "One taste" in television?"

Since its running from the first time in television media, this ad frequently occur in television, compared with other ads. PT Indofood Sukses Makmur had sponsored many events in some television station in 2008. These programs are to comemorate the National Day of Awakening, Indonesian Idol on RCTI, and some sinetron striping.

Most of the informants had class since Monday until Friday at 08.00 until 19:00. So the opportunity to watch television is after 19:00. All informants had seen this on the television. Eight informants stated that they often see this ad on television.

Affective response

At this stage, consumers respond with their feeling when they saw the advertisement at the first time. To know the feelings of consumers (informants), the researchers ask questions about what they think and feel when they saw the ad.

The interviews showed that most of the informants had difficulty in explaining their feeling. So that the six informants reveal their feelings with the word "cool" which is understood diferently by individual informants.

Ratich: It is good. Cool, different compare to others.

Exi: Cool. Because, mmmh... this ad make us united. So from different ethnic, become united, and also it has songs with different laguages.

Mela: Cool. I am very interested. The ad is very eye catching from the beginning. So ... hmmm I am what is this about.

Febi: Ugh ... cool. The only ad that I like is Indomie's ad. Because I see it ... eggghh,

from various ethnics they sing, but they illustrate the unity. They show one Indonesia.

Eka: Cool. Because this ad explore Something like ethnic diversity and cultures. So I like it.

Okta: Cool. It is cool, because it's from different kinds of culture, are reflected by dances along with songs, and different languages. And with that song they are united. Ya .. it is very good.

Ratich interpret the word "cool" as the expression of the feeling that this is unique compare to others. Exi and Okta interpret the word "cool" with the same perception, it is the expression of sense of unity through the songs. For Mela the word "cool" means interesting. According to Febi and Eka they "cool" means ethnic and cultural diversity.

Apart from the six informants who reveal their feelings with the word "cool", several informants stated that they feel proud when they saw the advertisement. One informant explained that beside national ideology Pancasila (Five Principles¹), the nation also can be united through the food.

Behavior response

This noodles are sold in the stalls, cafés and small kiosks in the street. Most consumers who want to buy the noodles usually mention Indomie brand name. Based on the interviews with the informants, most of the them think that the advertisement is affecting their consumption patterns. Because they have known and consumed Indomie before this ad is shown on television. Some of them even more reluctant to explain details about their answers. As the answers following the three respondents when the researchers asked about the influence of the ad to the intention to purchase.

Zul: I always buy this product. The existence of the ad has no influence to me.

Karini: It is as usual, no influence.

Mela: It is as usual, the ad has no influence.

Zul is a consumer who chooses the Indomie brand because it's not too salty and the noodles is thin, the price is affordable and the quality is good. Unlike the Zul, Karini is a consumer because the flavor is more tasty compared to other brands and the quality is assured. She always buys noodles in the supermarket once a month. Mela is also a consumer who always buys Indomie noodles once a month in the supermarket. Mela chooses it because of the taste and quality

DISCUSSION

CONCLUSION

The advertisement show differences in the language and the ethnicity. This can be captured well by consumers. Informants pay attention to symbols that are made by advertisers such as traditional house, language, ethnicity and the background place.

¹ These principles are: Belief in one God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy led by the wisdom of deliberations among representatives, and social justice for all Indonesian citizens.

Informants can explain what the advertiser wants to deliver, it is about diversity in cultures and unity in taste.

Basically, people watching television is for information and entertainment, not to analyse an advertising messages, so in general they do not think too deeply about advertising (Fam, 2006). The frequency of running the ad on TV is often enough, making the audience recognize and understand this advertisement. But being consumers for long time, most of the informants are not affected in their buying pattern. Nevertheless, consumers' loyalty continues to exist and strengthen.

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