

# LGBTQ MEANING CONSTRUCTION ON THE #FREETOLOVE CAMPAIGN IN CLOSE UP ADVERTISEMENT

## CONSTRUÇÃO DE SIGNIFICADO LGBTQ NA CAMPANHA #FREETOLOVE NA PROPAGANDA CLOSE UP

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the meaning construction of the signs contained in the #FreetoLove campaign in the Close Up advertisement that constructs LGBTQ. This study applied Ferdinand De Saussure's Semiotic Analysis Method in analysing the data. The analysis deeply discussed the concept of #FreetoLove campaign from Close Up advertisement and the appearance of signs in it which was considered to construct the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) meaning in Indonesian version of Close Up advertisement. The advertisement was created in two versions to which one was commercialised globally and the other was for countries whose culture went against LGBTQ. By applying De Saussure analysis, the result showed that non-LGBTQ advertisement of Close up #freetolove adopted LGBTQ signs into the setting of the advertisement. The signs being used were bright colors resembling LGBTQ community, stripe-pattern, and green carnation as the old symbol of gay people.

**Keywords:** LGBTQ signs. #FreetoLove campaign. Advertisement. Semiotic Analysis.

**RESUMO**

O objetivo deste estudo foi investigar a construção de sentido dos signos contidos na campanha #FreetoLove no anúncio Close Up que constrói o significado de LGBTQ. Este estudo aplicou o Método de Análise Semiótica de Ferdinand De Saussure na análise dos dados. A análise discutiu profundamente o conceito da campanha #FreetoLove do anúncio Close Up e o aparecimento de sinais nela que foram considerados para construir o significado de Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, Transgêneros e Queer (LGBTQ) na versão indonésia do anúncio Close Up. O anúncio foi criado em duas versões, sendo uma comercializada globalmente e a outra voltada para países com cultura contra LGBTQ. Ao aplicar a análise de De Saussure, o resultado mostrou que o anúncio não LGBTQ de Close up #freetolove adotou sinais LGBTQ no cenário do anúncio. As placas usadas eram cores vivas que lembram a comunidade LGBTQ, padrão de listras e cravo verde como o antigo símbolo dos gays.

**Palavras-chave:** Signos LGBTQ. Campanha #FreetoLove. Propaganda. Análise Semiótica.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The topic related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (*LGBTQ*) used to be alienated in the past as it was counted to be an act against culture, religion, and social norm. However, over the last few decades, LGBT have tried to be accepted, and treated as the other people. Discussions of their existence among the society become an interesting issue in global politics and sociological knowledge. Society starts to acknowledge the existence of this community among them. The breakthrough happened in 2011 when same-sex marriage had been legalized by law through the contribution of New York State's largest gay rights organization, the Empire State Pride Agenda (ESPA) which has been actively leading the social movement organization to advocate LGBTQ rights (O'BRIEN, 2019, p. 587; ADE, 2019, p. 18-25). Time shows how some communities around the world have gradually changed their negative perception of LGBTQ community to a better one. However, not every country has the same vision related to its acceptance.

Indonesia, a country whose culture is predominantly influenced by religion, holds a very strong root and principle. In their eye, LGBTQ community is something that goes against this principle. This view influences their way of interacting to LGBTQ community. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection reported that there were two opinions related to LGBTQ in Indonesia. The first opinion described extreme opposition of its existence which was supported by *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) or Indonesia Ulema Council, Indonesia's top Islamic scholar body compromising many Indonesian Muslim groups. The second opinion showed indifferent attitude to this community welfare (DAMAYANTI, 2015, p. 4; FATMAWATI, 2019, p. 87). Their rejection and ignorance of the existence of LGBTQ community lead to certain restriction in the society. Unfortunately, there was some oddity appeared in the advertisement being commercialized in Indonesia. Recently, one of advertisements from Close Up tooth paste presented by Unilever, a British-Dutch consumer good company, had appeared to indirectly use LGBTQ elements in one of its advertisements.

Unilever started its mission to spread awareness of the pressure and restriction faced by young generation in their love life (CLOSE UP, 2021; NAIMAH *et al.*, 2020, p. 90). It was where Close Up advertisement with the theme #FreetoLove campaign was created. It promoted equal love for all people from different backgrounds including LGBTQ people. The company took it as a tool not only to promote their product but also to instil their idea about freedom to love. On the positive side, using advertisement to spread awareness is useful since by using it, it will improvise the quality of someone's awareness, responsibility, and freedom (BRIANDANA, 2019, p. 765; INDRAYATI *et al.*, 2020, p. 43). Therefore, it could

be counted as a very strategic movement from Unilever in making use of its advertisement to do the campaign.

However, on the negative side, advertisement could be also be used to draw people's attention and alter their attitudes in order to be able to take control of others' behaviour (POLLAY,1986, p. 18). This was where the issue arose. It was not a major issue if this situation happened in any other country such as United States. Unfortunately, it was very much an offense when the advertisement was being commercially promoted to Indonesia which clearly stated its stand against LGBTQ. It could lead the young generation to oppose their culture and changed their behaviour towards LGBTQ people. That is why the researchers conducted pre-observation study on this Close Up advertisement.

There was a brief observation to compare between Indonesian Close Up version and other advertisements which displayed same-sex couples from Brazil, India, Philippines, South Africa, and Vietnam. Through observation from comparing the advertisements commercialized among the countries mentioned previously, there were clearly differences. There was indeed a different plot used for the Indonesia advertisement as the company's way to appreciate the culture in the country. There were no obvious conversations, gestures, or even LGBTQ actors or actresses used. However, there were clear occurrences of the communities' elements in this advertisement for Indonesian. By omitting verbal conversation or gestures in advertisement, the company used other means to deliver their ideology. Instead of diminishing LGBTQ related content in this version of Close Up advertisement, Unilever deliberately used LGBTQ signs to be advertised for Indonesian consumers.

This conception of what appeared to be indirect campaign for LGBTQ attracted the researchers' attention in conducting a research about signs on #FreetoLove campaign in Close Up advertisement for Indonesia. Signs, being a part of the language to deliver idea, are the most important of all other systems in language expression (DE SAUSSURE in noth,1990, p. 16). There are powerful meaning contained in each sign. These meanings are represented in the system of language to strengthen cultural value of its origin (MAIMUNAH, 2016; MULYANA, 2017, p. 69). Scenes taken from Close Up advertisement in which used LGBTQ signs mapped out the purpose of Unilever. By using them, it was assumed that the company tried to introduce or support the idea of LGBTQ in Indonesia which was the target of this advertisement. Therefore, the researchers came up with the questions of how was the construction of LGBTQ meaning in the #FreetoLove campaign in Close Up advertisement. It aims to understand the construction of meaning behind the signs in their relation to LGBTQ community.

## 2 METHOD

This study used constructivist paradigm, an approach which views communication as the production of an exchange of meanings with the aim to reconstruct and understand various constructs that have been held by others and resulted in new interpretations along with technological developments (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2009, p. 140). Furthermore, the study applied Ferdinand De Saussure's semiotic analysis method which was considered suitable as the basis of analysing the hypotheses. In Saussure's theory, sign is divided into two parts, the signifier and the signified. Signifier explains expressions which can be observed through nonverbal form of language, in this case were signs. Meanwhile, signified emphasizes on meaning represented by the signs in the advertisement which led to the meaning behind every signs being used. In collecting the data, there were two techniques used in this study; (1) primary data obtained from inter-textually observations and analysing signs in the advertising scene that are thought to have constructed signs leading to LGBTQ in Close Up advertisements with Unilever's hashtag #FreetoLove through the nonverbal aspect, and (2) secondary data obtained from article, books, internet, etc.

## 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher applied Ferdinand De Saussure's semiotic analysis to investigate the signifier, signified, and implied meaning of the display in the non-verbal aspect of the shot in Indonesia of the Close Up ad entitled *Lebih Dekat* (Getting Closer). The advertisement for global market were also included in the results for the purpose of comparing the scenes between the two markets, limited to only signs for LGBTQ. Based on De Saussure's theory of signs, the researchers were analysed as follows.

### 3.1 GLOBAL ADVERTISEMENT

The researcher took several scenes from global advertisement of close up from the following countries: Brazil, India, Philippines, South Africa, and Vietnam. They served as a comparison between global and Indonesian advertisement to strengthen the result of the study. These countries did not limit their views to a couple of men and women since there was no restriction in their countries to LGBTQ. The following table showed some romantic scenes of gay and lesbian couples.

**Table 1 - Scenes of Same-sex couple in Close Up Advertisement**

No	Country	Scenes	Gestures
1	Brazil		Hugging between lesbian couple
2	India		Hugging between gay couple
3	Vietnam		Intimate gesture of almost kissing
4	South Africa		Having couple outfits
5	Philippines		Cuddling between lesbian couple

Based on the situation, since the theme of this advertisement was about freedom to love anyone from different background, the advertisement showed several gay and lesbian couples which were

showing intimate gestures between couples. The gesture being used were quiet obvious in describing their romantic relationship so the audience needed not have to search for hidden meaning behind it.

### 3.2 INDONESIA ADVERTISEMENT

After thorough observation, the researcher had gotten signs used by Close Up in its #FreetoLove advertisement for Indonesian consumers. The table below shows the signs which are divided into signifier and signified.

**Table 2. Signs occurred in Close Up advertisement #FreetoLove**

No.	Scenes (Time)	Signifier	Signified
1	00:11 and 00:23	Rainbow color	LGBTQ community
2	00:11 and 00:22	Stripes and earrings	Signs of LGBTQ
3	00:10 and 00:20	Green carnation	Gay symbol

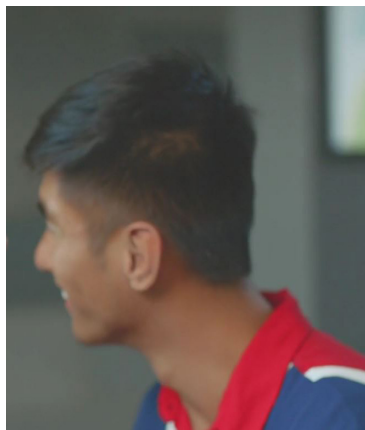
Advertisement is something that people see practically every day almost on every occasion. It is a very suitable and most beneficial tool to influence people. It does not necessarily have to be loaded with words and talks, as visual presentation serve good enough proportion to catch people's attention. As many advertisements are not equipped with lots of words, the significance of the advertisement lays in the interpretation it can trigger which makes visual plays become important in providing meaning (SMITH, 2008, p. 51). Close Up advertisement had their way in getting their aim through. Their advertisement with the hashtag #FreetoLove support the campaign on social media which talked about the love of young people of different ages, castes, cultures, religions, races, and even same-sex relationships. Through its official page, it is stated that they wanted to spread awareness to all people about how they could express their love freely abide their different backgrounds.

Furthermore, the company made a theme suitable for each country their advertisement was commercialized. For Indonesia, it did not include any scene reflecting LGBTQ couple since they needed to adjust it to suit its culture and norm. Unfortunately, even after they had created the content which was acceptable, they still included indirect messages related to their support of LGBTQ in the form of signs. This situation led the researchers to study of what was predicted as indirect campaign to promote or introduce LGBTQ to Indonesian costumers. Instead of focusing on its indirect campaign, the researchers discussed the way Close Up brought about LGBTQ theme implicitly by using De Saussure's semiotic analysis.

LGBTQ has adapted symbols and signs in order to self-identify themselves in the society. Each sign brings its own identity, ideas, and values. Through times, interaction among people in this community

holds the essential key in leading to the development of mindset and views and resulting in alteration of the signs in the communities (MEAD, 1931, p. 266). The researchers had identified the old and new developed signs occurred in the advertisement. The first sign that caught the attention is the use of colors resembling the communities.

**Picture 1 - The male actor in Close Up *Lebih Dekat* Advertisement**



From the picture above, it can be seen the male actor wore the clothes with the combination of red and blue. These colors were the signifier. As for the signified element, it was from the bright colors of red, blue, green, white, grey, and tan reflecting the LGBTQ communities. These colors were found in the clothes worn by the male actor which was the combination of red and blue. There were also several other people who wore blue clothes and the combination of blue and grey. In gay community, red and blue become something to differentiate between the roles with which the partners act upon (MOXON, 1985, p. 3).

**Picture 2 - One of the backup actor in Close Up *Lebih Dekat* Advertisement**





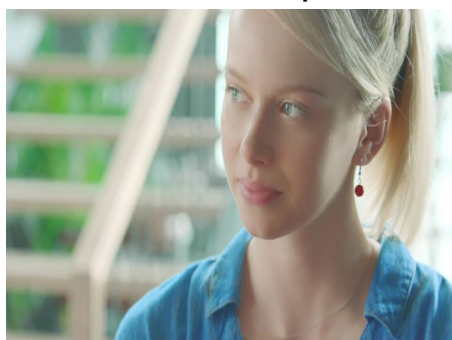
Furthermore, there are different combinations of colors to show the diversity among the people in the community. From the second picture, one person can be seen wearing stripes pattern t-shirt with the combination of green and white as the signifier. These were the colors being used to describe Aromanticism. This sign signified the sub-community which is very well-know with its flags consisted of green, white, grey, and black colors. It is described as one the sexual orientation in which the people in this community are unable to distinguish the relationship they have either to family, friends, or romantic partners (HARDY; EASTON, 2017, p. 98; MASSAY, *et al.*, 2017, p. 1-11).

**Picture 3 - Male and Female Couple in Close Up *Lebih Dekat* Advertisement**



Another point that the researchers discussed was the couple in the advertisement. For the advertisement for Indonesian target market, Close Up needed to follow rules where it was not allowed to include any scene of LGBTQ. Under this condition, Close Up team made a slight change in the scenes. Instead of showing gay or lesbian couple, the scene involved a couple of man and woman of different backgrounds. The man had black skin color and the woman was white, representing different races of people around the world. Meanwhile, the same sex relationship which was supposed to be one of theme of #FreetoLove campaign by Unilever did not occur. However, there is one aspect to be taken into consideration which is the color of the female actress' t-shirt.

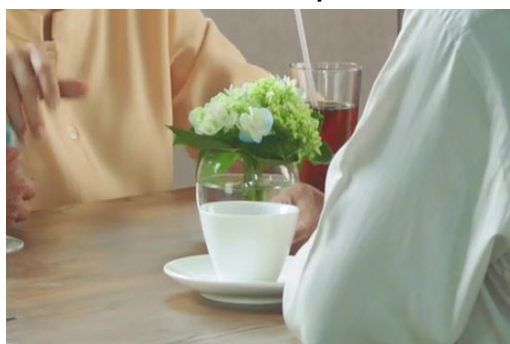
**Picture 4 - The female actress in Close Up *Lebih Dekat* Advertisement**



In the picture above, the girl wore bright blue t-shirt and red earrings. This is the signifier factor. These colors symbolize one category in LGBTQ community which is called genderqueer. In order to understand the concept of genderqueer, people need to comprehend the correlation between colors and gender. The statement “colors differentiate genders” appears to be common knowledge among people. Under certain condition, people are aware of the gender being mentioned when they see particular color. For example, they would understand when a clothing store uses pink curtain for girl dressing room and blue for boy. Based on some documentation by Paoletti, there is a cultural influence in the preferences toward colors to distinguish genders where generally pink is recognized for girls and blue for boys (PAOLETTI, 1997, p. 30). Nevertheless, queer community denies this existence of gender identification.

Genderqueer occurs to facilitate people who do not want to limit themselves based on genders. They usually go against their birth gender and do everything to make it in between female and male (SURIYASARN, 2014, p. 6). Some of these people do not change their body but express themselves in their dress by wearing something to destabilize their gender. In this advertisement, the researchers found that Close Up showed the position of queer by the colors. From the signified factor, the female actress wore a blue t-shirt to show how even though her birth gender is female; she showed masculinity by wearing the color blue. However, she did not stop to show how she could also be on the feminine side by wearing the red earrings.

**Picture 5 - Green Carnation in Close Up *Lebih Dekat* Advertisement**



The last signifier was related to decoration of the café. The company chose to put green carnation on every table. For common people, this is just another type of flowers. However, it has deeper meaning for gay community. It signified one of the oldest sign or symbol for gay community. It was introduced for the first time by Oscar Wilde in 19th century. He used this flower as a sign for his entourage. Every person who was accepted was given green carnation for their membership (STETZ, 2000, p. 90). By using this flower for decoration, it could imply either this café was set to be for LGBTQ people or to support them.

Those are all the signs that the researcher could recognize and analyse in Close Up advertisement *Lebih Dekat* (Getting Closer) version presented by Unilever. Basically, the meaning of colors, which happens to be mostly discussed in this study, is not only limited to the symbolization of LGBTQ community. The researchers discussed it from the community's point of view because of the aim of Unilever's campaign to have freedom to love which included LGBTQ community. It might be acceptable for other countries but unfortunately it was a different matter in Indonesia as the country which is against it. Therefore, this study was conducted to explain the issues of the signs with the aim of a better presentation of advertisement in the future which will be really in accordance with the culture and religion of the target country.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

It is understandably common for a company to deliver certain message through an advertisement. Close Up had aimed to support young generation to have freedom in loving someone without gender restrictions by creating the #FreetoLove campaign. However, the advertisement had not been actually suitable for every country it was commercialised. By applying LGBTQ signs in its advertisement, Close Up indirectly promoted LGBTQ community to Indonesian consumers who were culturally against this ideology of same-sex relationship. The research found that there were several signs being included in the scenes; rainbow colors (signifier) reflecting LGBTQ flag (signified), stripes (signifier) as a patterns being used by the community (signified), and green carnation (signifier) as the sign of gay community (signified). These signs occurred in Indonesian target market to replace the omission of gay and lesbian couples.

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