

Controversies over social group representation in advertisements:

A case study on Hornbach's *The Smell of Spring* narrative ad

Master's Thesis

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Tiivistelmä-Abstract <p>Till date, advertising contents continue to raise controversy in the media due to miscommunication and misinterpretation. This study examines a proposed television ad, it also looks into the intended message to be communicated and how the audience perceive it. The main focus of the research is to explore how controversy is generated when social groups are negatively represented in advertisement.</p> <p>The research uses two different data sets retrieved from YouTube, that is, an ad and the viewer's comments to the ad. The YouTube ad and the viewer's comments are analyzed with multimodal semiotic analysis and thematic analysis respectively. Findings from this study shows an interpretation of the advert from the researcher's perspective and an analysis of the audience's response. This research explains how stereotypes associated with the Japanese, has been implemented in the ad's narrative with a humorous effect. Findings from the data revealed that majority of people from a specific social group found the ad content problematic, thus leading to a lot of controversy. The social group which raised these controversies was identified as Asians. The data sets suggest that Asians found the ad problematic because they identify with the Japanese, shown in the advert. It was gathered that Asians found the ad offensive because it portrayed a wrong impression about Asian women.</p> <p>From this study, it can be said that advertising contents are equally important in defining perceptions towards others in society. Thus, suggesting the importance of being clear with advertising messages.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising continues to play a key role in showcasing brands in society, as such it has become more important to communicate advertising messages effectively. Potter (2009/1958, p.167) posed that “advertising now compares with such long-standing institutions as the school and the church in the magnitude of its social influence” thus suggesting that advertising as an institution exercises social control through “its vast power in the shaping of popular standards”. This is still relevant in today’s society due to advanced technology in the media. The borderless flow of information through online media is faster, more targeted and effective. More so, Potter (2009/1958, p.176) ascribes advertising to an “instrument of social control” to highlight the extent to which advertising can contribute to shaping societal views. Thus, the reach and influence of advertising and the media on societal norms is extensive. A classic example of this can be seen in how the media projects female thinness as beauty which has somewhat become a normal trend of its definition.

Presently, narrative advertising has gained popularity in research due to its advantages in creating better connection and persuasion (Li, 2015). As such, having guided insight in creating contents with narratives is paramount to ‘controlling’ miscommunication. The term narrative was defined in 1982 by Gerald Prince and used in *A Dictionary of narratology* (2003) as the portrayal of one or more authentic or fictional events conveyed to one or more narrators. In simple terms, it is a creative representation of events in a structure that has a beginning and an end. The adoption of narratives is becoming a creative way to engage with people and gradually, this phenomenon has developed in advertising strategies to effectively communicate through contents.

Furthermore, Wala (2015) asserts that unlike numbers and specific data, stories can be very convincing as the human brain quickly retains them and brings them back to memory with less effort whenever the product is encountered. Therefore, telling valuable narratives in ads has developed into a communicative means to connect to customers as it triggers and sustains attention easily. It is further

explained that it often creates a relation with customers as they appreciate and identify with the storyline; it echoes an idea of ‘this is me in this story’ or ‘this is my identity’.

Additionally, storytelling can now be regarded as one of the key marketing communication tools (Fog et al. 2013) in engaging with customers. In comparison to the traditional approach of marketing brands to customers, that is, emphasizing the qualities of the brand as a way of giving customers reasons to purchase a product, narrative advertisement incites interaction and communication with the brand. In other words, narrative ads are characterized by factors such as turning a passive experience of simply viewing to connecting and creating memories for the customer. Thus, this research also highlights the role of narrative as a communicative tool and its use to effectively engage in advertising.

Advertising continues to be a dynamic tool with rapid changes in its creative content, the transfer of delivery channels from television to the internet as well as diverse social media platforms on which viewers receive and remark on contents. Thus, communication has become an increasingly instrumental aspect of advertising. Especially in such a highly interconnected society, companies cannot assume that their ads are aired in specific countries on television and will only reach out to the inhabitants. Hence, ad contents, particularly provocative ones, are easily exposed on social media which makes it open to criticism by people around the world. While utilizing stereotypes and humor may seem highly persuasive strategies for effective advertising (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2016), they may also backfire; even well-meaning contents can easily be misinterpreted. This mainly happens when representation of social groups is involved, and viewers tend to see the content as offensive and specifically targeted towards their group. Yet, there are few research studies which address controversies in advertising with the views of social groups involved in mind. Instead, more researchers focus on identifying what makes an ad controversial.

In this thesis, I examine how social groups are represented in The Smell of Spring narrative ad as well as viewers’ reaction on YouTube. More specifically, my research will explore how

stereotypes and humor are used in the proposed ad with a focus on what message it communicates as well as how viewers perceive it. In addition, I will examine how viewers reacted via social media and analyze their viewpoint with reference to theories in intercultural studies. I review various literature on advertising to explore persuasive strategies used to draw customer's attention. To better understand social groups visible in this study, different groups and how they are usually featured in advertising is discussed. Additionally, ethics in advertising is reviewed to identify what makes ads offensive. The method of exploring the aim of this study takes the form of a qualitative case study approach, with an in-depth analysis of two data sets with distinct methods of analysis, namely, multimodal semiotic analysis and thematic analysis. This thesis serves multidisciplinary bearing as it is relevant to readers interested in marketing and communications, social semiotics, stereotyping, humor, narrative studies, multimodal discourse, public relations, crisis management as well as intercultural communication.

Intercultural communication as an interdisciplinary field can be placed into different contexts of understanding. Thus, in this study, the academic discussion about intercultural communication will be established as a process where cultural identities and meanings are generated. Piller (2012) supports this view by associating intercultural communication to social construction of culture and identities. Piller (2012) describes this idea as constructing culture discursively. This view proposes that there is no such thing as people having a culture (which is often based on nation, ethnic, faith, sexuality or gender category), rather, culture is constructed by people. With my previous study background in advertising and current knowledge in the relevance of narratives in intercultural communication, this research will play a useful role in identifying the communication strategies used.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter reviews literature and theories of previous research works for a guided understanding for this thesis. The topics in this section discuss the use of advertising as a communicative tool, how advertising contributes to defining representation of social groups, strategies adopted by advertising industries to appeal to their target audience and how effective they are. I address aspects of advertising by discussing how advertising functions with narratives, stereotypes and humor. Following this, I also review social representation and constructionism of ethnic, national and social groups in advertising. For further understanding on how representations are likely to emerge, I discuss how stereotypes are used in ad contents. The final part of this chapter reviews ethics associated with ad execution, advertising industries as well as discussion on offensive advertising. By building on the theoretical content of these subjects, I hope to establish a clear background for the analysis of this study.

2.1 Functions of advertising

Advertising as a communicative tool will be discussed in this section. This concept will set the groundwork for understanding how advertising functions in relation to other topics of this study. A review of the rhetorical tradition in the field of communication and its persuasive role will be examined. This will include discussions about the use of persuasive strategies in advertising.

According to Li (2015), advertising is a means of communication to provide product and service information to consumers with the aim of persuading consumers. Additionally, advertising performs other functions such as creating awareness, constantly reminding consumers about a brand or product and reinforcing a product as the right choice (Payton, 2003). Although advertising may have evolved in various modes to ensure an effective message is passed on, research has shown that, the underlying premise of advertising is meant to influence and sell goods or services to customers (Kowalewska & Koszko, 2015). These definitions make it clear that when delivering advertising

information, the ad industry often considers different elements to communicate a message successfully. Hence, choice of words, images, music or characters used in an advertising campaign may apply strategies to ensure that there is an effective communication process where meanings are mutually created (Randazzo, 2006). In this regard, the functions of advertising can be delivered more efficiently with an understanding of its communicative importance.

For many years, it was very common for advertisers to feed customers with information using the above elements without necessarily engaging with the customer. However, this has changed overtime due to a considerable level of openness to interaction when delivering advertising messages (Artemova, 2018). With the use of media analytics and advanced technology, this development is evident, especially in this current generation. In this data driven society, viewers are likely to knowingly or unknowingly contribute to and determine the kind of content they are attracted to. In other words, people have become active customers than passive. As such, advertising industries are gradually becoming more liberal with implementing their customer's opinions.

Subsequently, applying effective methods to draw attention to the product being advertised is important. Common examples of such effective advertising methods in advertising is the use of narratives (Fog et al., 2010), stereotypes and humor (Eisend, 2018) as will be shown in the case of this study. However, it is anticipated that the appropriate implementation of these strategies need to be considered. The use of narratives and humor in advertising are perceived as lacking an intent of persuasion and often associated with how easy it is to remember. This view is supported by Knowles and Linn (2004) who state that when the audience detects persuasion, there could be issues of resistance to the message. In fact, researchers have acknowledged that advertisers create and sell images with meanings encoded into their products, not necessarily the product itself (Payton, 2003). Therefore, it is proposing that the use of effective methods such as narratives or satire portrays an image in ads to reduce consumer resistance.

At the same time, it should be noted that the use of traditional rhetoric and its strategies to maximize persuasion in advertising is also possible (Rana, 2016). Rhetoric has been studied by authors with a comprehensive view on what persuasion means for more than two thousand years. According to Aristotle, rhetoric can be described as the ability to observe the available means of persuasion in any given circumstance (Walker, 2005 cited in Rana, 2016). This can be explained as uncovering every accessible means of persuasion in any field whatsoever. Thus, there are multiple approaches and contexts to which rhetoric has been adapted in human communication and any literary composition with persuasive ends (Rana, 2016). Aristotle explains the common conception of rhetoric as the idea of making others accept someone else's proposition. He presents three rhetoric means of appeal: pathos, logos and ethos which are applied in many modes of communication and usually visible in how people use words to get what they want (Rana, 2016).

Pathos attempts to appeal an audience through their emotions such as joy, pride, fear, etc., logos appeals an audience through factual and logic basis such as analogies, examples, citations and ethos convinces with the character of the presenter with a focus on the authority or attractiveness inspired by them. These modes of persuasion still remain powerful tools today. Additionally, the rhetoric appeals touch on three approaches of persuasive communication which are reason, emotion and character (Rana, 2016). Compelling narratives with such rhetoric appeals are often used in advertising to persuade potential customers to purchase products or services. For instance, for brands like Coca cola, emotional appeal in their ads is usually implemented by associating happiness with their product, promising happiness to customers; thus, their taglines *Open Happiness* informs customers on what to expect from their product. Logical reason in commercials are usually used for body lotions, toothpastes, etc. where nutritional facts, statistics or health facts are focused on to convince an audience. Character establishes credibility when commercials include celebrities, doctors, dentists by word of mouth so that the audience associates the characters with the product.

The underlying question is, does the media influence the audience? A number of concepts such as the agenda setting theory which was developed by MaxMcCombs and Donald Shaw in 1968 touched on this matter. This theory suggests that the mass media pushes ideas, beliefs or values into the audience' minds which in effect influences their thoughts on certain issues. The general proposition of the agenda setting theory is that, it only presents people with ideas on what to think and talk about. Additionally, the theory suggests that the media is a very powerful tool and is able to passively control people's opinions (Griffin et al.,2019). In addition, it states that the media is able to sway people into talking about certain things. However, it does not acknowledge that although the mass media exists, people can choose what media they want to use. Moreover, there are so many platforms and sources nowadays, so people's interest guide their media intake. Although this theory has often been criticized, traces of some aspects can be seen in advertising today. Over the years, advertising has evolved from simply talking about the qualities of a product and the benefits to the focusing on what society thinks about their products. As such ads are created to persuade people to buy a lifestyle, cool personality or a representation of other means of inspiration which can be associated with the brand. Accordingly, advertising can be noted for its influential function in society.

As indicated in this section, advertising continues to evolve in its mode of reaching consumers. Therefore, the adoption of different measures to improve communication process remains vital. In terms of persuasive techniques used in advertising, adapting to consumer behavior can contribute to a more effective communication. The following section describes narrative advertising as a persuasive strategy in advertising.

2.1.1 Narrative advertising

Li (2015) refers to narrative advertising as the use of clever storytelling to provide relevant information as well as develop a sentimental connection with the viewer in order to persuade them. Furthermore, narrative advertising illustrates the experience of the product's usage to the consumers (Randazzo, 2006). The idea of narrative advertising started in the early 80's to attract and keep loyal

customer relationships (Fog et al., 2010). Fog et al. (2010) maintains that advertisers acknowledge narratives as an element for creating a better connection and persuasion. Moreover, Flanagan (2014) believes that storytelling in advertising is essential because customers are more emotionally stimulated than verbally. Clearly, these studies show how narratives touch on consumers' emotions such that they are persuaded to stick to the product. On the other hand, Li (2015) describes narrative advertising as a mode for conveying a subjective experience. This occurs in a series of circumstances and communicates the reaction of the narrator to these circumstances. Thus, I find that it is more useful when these circumstances showcase a self-relevant experience which can be interpreted to the understanding of the consumers.

Before proceeding to how narrative advertising is used as a persuasive tool, it is necessary to understand what narrative is. Narrative or storytelling can be explained as a creative way of putting a structure together such that it has a beginning and an end; storytelling is a real or imagined sequence of related events (Moran, 2016 and Rose, 2011). While Rose (2011) elaborates on storytelling as a form of communication, Moran (2016) presents a fundamental explanation of narrative. Rose (2011) draws our attention to storytelling as innately developed such that meaning making of the world is constructed and shared. It is further explained that, storytelling gives off an interpretive and descriptive insight which is subject to multiple meanings based on context. Hence, suggesting storytelling as usually socially constructed since it relates to social realities and is almost as natural as a language. Narrative is often used interchangeably with storytelling and according to Redick and Underwood (2007), narratives provide symbolic meaning. Redick and Underwood's (2007) idea of symbolic meaning is related to how humans establish meanings by recounting and accounting stories with symbolic actions, deeds or words. As such, it states that narratives should showcase meaningfulness and honesty to end users.

When it comes to the role of narratives in advertising, researchers have established that although narratives are with direct or indirect persuasive intent, they aim at passing on a direct

message with intent (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). In other words, customers feel engaged with the ad message and not necessarily being informed about the product or service. As an example, is how brands stimulate positive feelings in an ad through a compelling narrative. This way, the ad could make potential customers feel connected through the narrative used, hence, encouraging a good reason to make a purchase they are more relatable to. This affirms how narratives can directly or indirectly influence the audience's views on purpose. In saying this, creating contents with storytelling may typically use scenarios that happen in reality. Accordingly, Väre (2014) points out that although storytelling is used to send forth a marketing message, it also conveys a societal one. Rose (2011) also affirms that some events used in narratives may be justified by happenings, symbols or myths that already exist. Storytelling often presents ideas and visuals with a combination of the reality with fictional ideas which may be slightly different from reality (Rose, 2011). It notes that fictional ideas can be added in order to make the story more interesting or more appealing for the targeted group. Thus, despite highlighting the adoption of fictional ideas in narratives, they have some elements of shared meanings or ideas from real life with equally valuable messages worth communicating.

From an advertising perspective, Randazzo (2006) adds that, in order to represent a narrative aligned brand, some brands implement images derived from common social narratives, values or belief systems. Therefore, resonating an appealing identity through storytelling ads may require strategic ways to create meaning for the viewer. However, this could be tricky since an intended idea in such a story would most likely change if not handled properly. That is to say that the consumer's personality needs to be well-known through research, which may include connecting with their values, beliefs, character, etc. to be able to appeal to them (Randazzo, 2006).

The question then is, how does a brand cut through the noise to attract people in a way that is relevant to consumers? Which stories are right to communicate a brand? By drawing on Aristotle's concept of rhetoric, it is worth noting that it is not just about a brand telling a story, rather, there is a

need to tell the audience what they want to hear (Rana, 2016). The inference is that, the audience are often attracted to a compelling narrative. Conversely, considering the use of humor in a compelling narrative may equally maximize the effect of attraction. Most importantly, it could be an effective way to advertise mundane products to cause customers to remember the product/service being advertised. As Eisend (2018) puts it, there is no doubt that humor is a common component of customer relationship and an effective tool in advertising.

2.1.2 Using humor in narratives

Over the years, humor has been uniquely defined and interpreted with different meaning by people. In simple terms, Sen (2012) describes humor as written or spoken jokes and actions which elicit laughter or mirth. However, since this study is also concerned with the importance of social behavior that could stimulate humor in advertising, a different approach will be used. Humor in advertising may be determined on the basis of whether certain elements such as satire, irony, understatements or puns are used (Teixeira et al., 2013). By this, the author makes us aware of features used to stir up humor. The point from this is that, there could be aspects of humor which employ social behavior in an ironic, satirical manner.

Considerable research has been done to explain the role humor plays in ads based on consumer's reactions but most of these studies have been without theoretical explanations (Weinberger & Gulas, 2019). Moreover, consumer responses have mostly been literally related to affective, behavioral and cognitive reactions. Meaning that, based on the circumstance in which it is used, humor could be interpreted in differently. Likewise, research results have shown humor to be the best when it matches the demographic characteristics of the target audience; gender, age, employment, etc. differences (Eisend, 2018; Gulas & Weinberger, 2006).

While researchers have acknowledged the strong effect humor in advertising has on consumer attitudes (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2016), there could certainly be no guarantee for not offending others with the approach. Although, humor is known to generate positive emotions from listeners, there could be

instances that result in negative cognitions and emotions Tajfel, 2010). Point drawn is that advertisers should not necessarily be deterred from adopting humor, rather it provides a cautionary note on how humor is used. Romero & Pescosolido (2008) posit that instances which produce negative emotions in humor may be intentional or unintentional due to failed humor or misinterpretations. This is meant to imply that although humor appeals to people, it tends to be a delicate technique in advertising. From this standpoint, there could be a number of factors which could determine a failed or misinterpreted humor. But it cannot be denied that such humor may serve its purpose to others. However, I anticipate that the nature in which people respond to humor can be attributed to how subjective people are to what they deem sensitive, funny or offensive. Accordingly, Howe (2002) proposed that for humor to be understood, there is a need to read the mind of the humor's target. This implies that a very good understanding of the respondent is commended to be able to create good humor. This is where communication counts as a key player in demonstrating the appropriate use of humor. Thus, without measures, humor contexts are likely to breed negative societal effects.

On the other hand, in expressing emotions, attitudes or opinions on social issues, researchers argue that humor develops in-group relationships, enhances harmony, self-identification or even softens tension among members of the same group and functions as a platform to communicate certain sensitive topics by addressing them humorously (Gogová, 2016; Peters, Holmgren & Oswald, 2015). In that case, there is a chance of creating inclusions, societal distinctions and exclusions among related audience (Howe, 2002). Additionally, the processing style and sense of humor of the respondents also contributes to the effect of humor (Cline et al., 2003). This is because humor is rewarding to groups with the same social knowledge as it resonates with their social knowledge. As such with humor-sharing, the assumption is that groups with a different social knowledge are perceived as foes (Eisend, 2018).

According to Kazarian and Martin (2004), humor can be typically categorized as aggressive, affiliative, self-enhancing and self-defeating. In dealing with humor as a social status manipulation,

Hodson et al., (2010) states that its use may often create a hierarchy thereby downgrading the victim; mainly in reference to aggressive humor. Furthermore, Kazarian and Martin (2004) define aggressive humor as “the tendency to use humor for the purpose of criticizing or manipulating others, as in sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, and disparagement humor, as well as the use of potentially offensive forms of humor” (p.210). In the same light, Hewitt (2002) labels aggressive humor as often directed against out-groups because humor-sharing participants have a common understanding of the subject. The use of aggressive humor is perceived at the detriment of others as a way to enhance the humorist. It presupposes that humor passes on unwelcome associations to such groups which are mocked and perhaps the humorist is relieved that it is not connected with them. Such cases could be offensive as it derides the victim of humor (Romero & Pescosolido, 2008). To put it differently, humor as a social status manipulation function enhances the social status of humorist and lowers that of the victim of humor.

Eisend (2018) maintains that, there are several reasons why humor can influence the rapport between the humorist and its audience as well as increase social bonding. The author illustrates this in the advertising context as a relationship between the advertisers (as humorists) and the consumers. Regardless of the negative implications humor could create, it could also boost in-group relationships and within-group social hierarchies (Eisend, 2018). Based on this, it can be deduced that an effective use of humor provides a sense of shared experience and collective interpretation which in return increases shared cognition. Hence, content creators who consider humor in their narratives need to be informed on what suits their audience and society.

2.2 Social groups in advertising

Tajfel (2010, p.15) defines social group as “two or more individuals who share a common identification of themselves or perceive themselves to be of the same social category”. The basic understanding of a group is two or more people who are socially or psychologically dependent on each other, hence, a person may belong to many different groups. Additionally, social groups share a

unified view based on their own collectiveness which is enough reason for them to be a group; and these social groups can be viewed as a small or large group (Tajfel, 2010). Typical examples of social groups are hockey teams, church group, feminist groups, communication students' associations and so forth. In this section, I discuss concepts to explain what leads to social categorization and how groups are formed, as well as motivation behind taking a stand as a group towards a common action.

Tajfel (2010) notes that social groups exhibit some level of social identification or social cohesion. Social identification theory describes the process of locating oneself or another person within a system of social categorization and used as a standard to define themselves and others (Tajfel & Turner, 2010); the concept is associated with cognitive and often determines how individuals internalize these social categorization to an extent where it becomes a part of their self-concept. Simply put, social identification defines a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership. Conversely, "social cohesion is the sum over a population of individuals' willingness to cooperate with each other without coercion in the complex set of social relations needed by individuals to complete their life courses" (Stanley, 2003, p.9). This illustration of group is related to the cognitive or psychological aspect of acceptance of participants with a subjective sense of togetherness, belonging or 'we-ness'. Meaning that a group of participants may be motivated or feel connected based on a common perception they believe in. As there are several factors which influence people's perception, this could similarly apply with people from a comparable background. This is because certain societal norms, values can indirectly shape their thoughts, beliefs, race, aspirations, etc. Bearing this in mind, it can be said that social cohesion is only possible when there is an agreed perception. In this study, the theory of social cohesion will be used as a general approach in order to explain the common basis of understanding that is expressed among the public towards the ad.

Turning to social identification theory once again, it serves an important role for indicating social groups in the narrative ad of this study for a clear guide in analysis. I anticipate that this will be revealed through viewers' expression of their belongingness to a group, and how groups are

represented in the ad. According to Hogg and Abrams (2006), social identity is developed from features of self-descriptions derived from their membership in social categories such as race, sex, occupation etc. Additionally, Tajfel (2010) interprets social identity as the individual's awareness of being a part of a group. "Societies are made up of large-scale social categories which stand in power, status and prestige relations to one another" (p.24). The authors reason that humans are born into this structure and fall into some categories and not others because of their place of birth, skin color, physiology, and so on. It can therefore be perceived that people internalize the dominant ideology and associate with these publicly defined categories, developing specific social identities that may mediate positive or negative impressions of themselves (Hogg & Abrams, 2006).

The social identity theory approach contributes significantly to understanding the complexities of large-scale group relationships: intergroup conflict, collective action, social movements, etc. (Taylor and McKirnan, 1984; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Hogg and Abrams, 2006). Large groups comprise of numerous members and are often less likely to have social interaction with each other, and not necessarily a mutual attraction (Mcgarty, Yzerbyt & Spears, 2002). On the other hand, Mcgarty, Yzerbyt and Spears (2002) highlight how small groups may be interdependent for various reasons such as satisfying needs, sharing values and validating attitudes by consensus as well as attaining targets. These reasons are known to motivate mutual attraction, influence on each other, cooperative social interaction and communication. It is more about people who feel they fit in a group who have a sort of 'imagined' group characteristics and the emotional ties associated with this. Moving on, Woodside et.al (2008) also make us aware that, from a group identity standpoint, ways in which these groups are represented could generate positive or negative emotions. Most especially in situations involving gender representation in visual media, advertisement plays a major role in setting perspectives in the viewer's mind.

Generally, it can be said that, group identification considers factors which depict differences, gender being a basic example, and connects individuals in a broader sense. Hence, individuals are

easily placed in a category based on some features or by their social circles. This concept is very critical in understanding how people socially identify themselves in the advertisement for this thesis, as well as the basis for cohesion towards controversy. Thus, the above discussion has shed some light on the different categories of social groups that are likely to be visible in the ad.

2.2.1 Social representation

This section illustrates how societies represent and have different perceptions of things in the world. Hewstone and Augoustinos (1998) define social representation as culturally agreed upon explanations which are later regarded as common-sense explanations. Their definition propose that different societies have their ideologies on phenomena (such as peace, sanity, purity, friendship, etc.) backed by cultural and social reasons (p.62). Thus, they believe that this explains why the same occurrences do not resonate for all; meaning that there are different interpretations to what is accepted and familiar. For Moscovici (1988), “social representations concern the content of everyday thinking and the stock of ideas that give coherence to our religious beliefs, political ideas and connections we create as spontaneously as we breathe. Moscovici clarifies that social representation allows us to classify individuals and objects, compare and justify human actions, and to objectify them as part of our social setting.” (p.214).

Moscovici (1988) provides a very broad concept on social representation and shows that everyday thinking about something may be nurtured by mindsets people have in connection with their political ideas, religious beliefs and the common things in society which influences people. Yet, there is a degree of uncertainty around what extent of collectively shared mindsets qualify to be termed social representation. From Hewstone and Augoustinos’ (1998) definition, they are very clear about an individual or a particular society’s own right of understanding in order to make sense of the world. I agree that people do not just represent based on their opinions but draw from a socially understood phenomenon in order to organize their reality. As these may differ from society/person to society/person, it reveals the dynamic nature of representation. However, the two definitions show

that, social representation is very important in communication and interaction, especially among different groups or individuals.

Another view on social representation is that, stereotypes are the foundation of intercultural encounters, hence people who find themselves in such situations often address each other with stereotypes (De Bolla et. al, 2005). De Bolla et. al (2005) point is quite intriguing as it suits representation to an extent which is based on stereotypes. An aspect of advertising that is sometimes overlooked is representation. From this understanding, it can be inferred that when communicating an idea, its representation can often turn out to be contradictory to social representations held by individuals or group. Representation may perceive to be positive or negative depending on how it is carried out (Koven, 2015). However, whenever negative representation is discussed, it comes down to stereotypes.

Although stereotypes are usually simplified and exaggerated, they may often have a level of truth, however, these stereotypical representations could be distorted and outdated overtime. Moreover, they are often used to describe some obvious characteristics of a person or place to quickly give an idea based on the viewer's recognition in ads, movies, etc. Although De Bolla et al. (2005) affirm the need to understand stereotypes in a manner that does not damage society's capacity to engage, Mastro & Behm-Morawitz (2005) confirm that this could still lead to offending people as it may misrepresent them. Such representations in visual media are mostly centered around sexuality, age or ethnicity. Luther et. al (2012) illustrate how advertisement of gender from the 1950's has evolved, yet without significant difference. The research found that in the 1960's, women were portrayed as housewives and as sexualized whereas men were portrayed as breadwinners. There was a gradual shift from the 1970's to the 1990's where women were showed at workplace and men helping at home.

However, Grau et.al (2016) recently conducted a research which revealed that these features and ideologies still exist in advertising. The research argues that the use of traditional gender roles in

advertising has not changed significantly. Kappel (2015) provides an example of how ads tend to associate a man's character with high-status jobs and women as homemakers and sexual objects. Hence, reflection of these gender stereotypes is likely to subconsciously influence viewer's minds on masculinity and femininity in society. This is often illustrated when women are portrayed as sexualized beings by showing more skin, as submissive and vulnerable (Luther, 2012).

Generally, representation can make a narrative compelling, particularly when advertisers have a few seconds to get their message across. However, this could be dangerous for production when people are misrepresented and can tarnish a company's image for years. Considering the contradiction misrepresentation can pose on people's ideologies on certain phenomenon, this section gives an idea of the influence representation has in showcasing social representations in ads.

2.2.2 Stereotyping

Stereotypes have received negative attention in social psychology overtime and is described as classifications of representation for a social class or category (Paek, et al.,2003). Additionally, previous research has established that stereotypes convey a characteristic peculiar to a society (Gohard-Radenkovic et.al.,2004). However, this point overlooks the fact that these attributions are often excessively generalized, with exaggerated features, often far-fetched from reality as well as a negative representation.

McGarty et.al (2002) points out that stereotypes can be perceived as an aid to explanation and as a shared group belief. Stereotypes used to aid explanation means that they are used as a support in explanations to make it easier for people to understand a situation. Stereotypes as a shared group belief on the other hand attempt to understand how come stereotypes are a shared belief as well how and why they are shared. Hypothesis for these commonalities of stereotypical views suggest that these could be because of a common environmental experience to different people or a social representation, shared cultural, knowledge and ideology from different people (McGarty et.al, 2002). An apparent problem with the view on common environmental experience is that there is other

evidence of stereotypes without shared environmentally generated experience. However, the second view, that is, social representation, does not regard mutual social influence being likely to lead people to similar views. Another rationale proposed by McGarty et.al (2002) state that stereotypes are commonly shared because they are normative beliefs just like any other belief. This is not because of the suggested views above but because the participants act to coordinate their behavior. It is further understood that the participants create differentiation to make themselves distinct from the others by “engaging in the process of social influence within groups so that their members become more similar to each other on relevant dimensions” (McGarty et.al, 2002, p.6). The authors approach stereotyping from a different perspective as they illustrate the phenomenon of social groups and relationships between groups. They deduced that stereotypes are highly variable, selective and frequently contested explanations.

Subsequently, stereotypes are known to potentially portray positive qualities supposedly unique to a group. As an example, is when advertising represents Asian Americans as workaholics. That notwithstanding, either positive or negative stereotypes attribute a narrow view of the represented group as they may often be oversimplified. Although stereotypes could potentially portray positive qualities, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) and Koven (2015) establish the risk of following stereotyped conceptions from descriptions that are not derived from participants. Yet, these inconsistencies are challenges which could be attributed to intercultural and cross-cultural fields (Koven,2015). More so, it is demonstrated in how information from essentialist-driven researchers apply a common reliance on national, racial or ethnic stereotypes. An illustration of ethnicity stereotypes in the media is how African Americans are portrayed as not trustworthy, gangsters, ghetto or violent and generalization of Asians with a focus on eastern Asians as mathematics nerd, the Arabic's as terrorist threats.

In fact, a number of intercultural communication institutions claim to offer intercultural communication advice yet execute in national categories. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) cites

examples of several books, articles, websites and services which make proposals on how to improve communication skills with other people, say, a Japanese without highlighting other individual aspects of their identity i.e., ethnicity, personal traits, etc. - which are all important aspects of people during interaction. National characters are often presented with reliance on creating, recreating and sustaining national belonging as a key aspect of contemporary identity (De Bolla et. al, 2005). Thus, such information ends up maintaining national belonging as well as nations as key categories against any other identities associated with people.

2.3 Do national and ethnic group representation in ads matter?

In a project carried out by sociologists, Charles Tilly and Anthony Giddens in 1999, they provided the most basic definition of nation as an established or existing state's political community. Even though the term nation bears a puzzling concept and an unclear definition, it still plays a major role in how people in society identify themselves and how others see them. Hence, this section illustrates how national and ethnic groups are socially constructed and represented. When people are with the mindset of 'imagined communities', in this case, a member of a different nationality or ethnic group, they perceive others as different, leading to a perceived boundary. Anderson (2006) draws our attention to the fact that nationality or ethnicity is imagined as a community because there is a high chance that members who even make up the smallest nation are likely not to meet their fellow members, hear of them, know them or even see them, yet there is the sense of fellowship in their minds. Aside nationality and ethnicity, Anderson (2006) proposes that communities can also be distinguished by the style in which they are imagined. These styles may be through shared language, religious belief, poetry or songs which can also make communities imaginable.

Like the term nation, ethnicity has constantly been undergoing redefinition as given meanings have changed overtime. However, ethnicity is commonly explained by researchers as having a shared culture associated with its construction from religion, language, region, etc. Although this definition carries some truth, it poses some questions in other areas. Little (2014) adds that ethnicity as

identification method is continuously used by individuals and institutions. These constructions may include decisions made by groups or individuals as to how ethnically they identify themselves and others. For instance, their engagements could be portrayed through how ethnic boundaries are in place through political authorities, economic interest groups. Here, people in society demonstrate how it embraces an 'imagined community' which could result to dividing or unifying a population.

Consequently, researchers asserted a commonplace on the concept of nation, race and ethnicity as socially constructed (Ting, 2008). Thus far, I observed that nationality and ethnicity have been used as common denominators by people in imagining their collective belonging. These concepts are accepted as a social construct, hence, understanding them is relevant to this study as it affects the identity formation process of an individual. It is also worth noting that these concepts connect with social identity theory as explained by Tajfel (2010) above. This is because social identification theory and the concept of imagined community seen in nationality/ethnicity correlates with how people use their social categorization as a standard to define themselves. Most importantly, the image of living in communion exists in the mind.

Even though globalization has quickly evolved in this era, there is no doubt to the fact that nations exist as a mental construct. For example, consider football world cups and how citizens get very emotionally attached to winning as a nation. Here, although nations are imagined communities there is the notion to be nationally attached.

The question then is, how are these national and ethnic groups socially represented and constructed? This is often very present in movies, music and even a much more common way is through advertising. I concur that advertisements usually represent nations/ethnic groups as 'real' other than a social construct by striking a difference of nationality/ethnicity when communicating about nations or ethnic groups. These differences could be established through stereotyping, ethnic humor and the like. The methods often work because people feel associated with such ads, as is the case of this study. Although they could be effective strategies for advertising purposes, it is possible

that they are perceived as offensive. In a study carried out on Japanese television advertising, it was revealed that immense racial and ethnic 'others' was used as a selling point for production (Prieler,2010). The findings of the study showed that by portraying 'others' as inhabitants of a different world, 'Japaneseness' was reinforced. They demonstrated this by creating a contrast in their TV ads to represent other racial groups such as blacks, whites and non-Japanese Asians. An illustration of this is when the 'otherness' is used in promoting Japaneseness. Prieler (2010) explains this with an example of an ad which shows a white woman driving a Japanese car in New York City, whistling the song 'New York, New York'. Now, the car is purposely located in one of the most advanced and attractive cities in the world to prove that a Japanese car is even admired there. The persuasive strategy here is to emphasize how international a Japanese brand is. Thus, white people are used in this case to certify the product's quality.

What does this mean for a represented group in visual media, especially advertisements? One of the primary ways in which people could learn about others out of our own reach is through the media. As such how social groups are represented in the media matters.

2.4 Advertising ethics and offensive advertising

Advertising ethics is defined as what is right or wrong in advertising as the role of conduct (Drumwright, 2009). Over the years, advertising has had similar critiques and concerns in ethics, even in the twenty first century (Drumwright, 2009). Nowadays, this has subsequently evolved and extended to issues like the internet among other media. Notable examples of ethical criticisms and concerns in advertising include unhealthy brand comparison, false claims, exaggeration and misrepresentation. As discussed in the previous sections, one of the main reasons why advertisers tend to go overboard when it comes to promoting their products, especially mundane ones are to draw traction and persuade customers.

In their quest to explore ethical issues in advertising, Drumwright and Murphy (2009) undertook an in-depth research by interviewing advertising practitioners in the field. In their findings,

it was revealed that several personnel from the agency were found to have what they termed 'moral myopia' which means a distortion of their moral vision (p.85). Hence, leading to unclear focus on moral issues or some sort of 'moral muteness'. In fact, this meant that ethical issues were not often discussed. On the other hand, there were also a little fraction of these advertising personnel who exhibited moral soundness and “moral imagination; the ability to envision moral alternatives that others do not” (Drumwright & Murphy 2009, p.85).

Without doubt, humor has been a popular communication strategy in advertising (Eisend, 2009), however, ethical issues regarding its use have received less attention (Förster & Brantner, 2016). There are numerous ads with visual and/or verbal elements that are against advertising ethics yet may have not been addressed. Furthermore, Vos (2011) revealed that offensive themes appeared to upset viewers than products and services that are deemed offensive. This means that, emphasis should not only be placed on drawing attention to a product when advertising, but also, how it is executed. Förster and Brantner (2016) add that, on a broader scale, advertising ethics have been ignored and agencies are not prepared to be accountable for these regulations. Conversely, Prendergast (2003) observes that an ad does not solely depend on the product or service to be deemed offensive but also, the type of appeal as well as the manner in which it is presented counts. A factor that is often overlooked by the audience in assessing ads is the context and content. Considering the ad as a whole and not in selective parts is a guideline in judging if it offends or not. It is also suggested that the kind of product or service is an element in considering an offensive ad (Abbasi et al., 2011). Thus, the nature of products may require a particular execution so as not to be considered a likely offensive ad. In addition, it also points out that the advertiser must also consider the audience who are likely to be exposed to the ad. As such the extent of restrictions also forms part in consideration. If this is regarded, children are likely not to be exposed to certain ads in lifestyle magazines, thus, it is not offensive. In that, the approach used to persuade customers to purchase a product can be maximized or be a nuisance if not handled sensitively.

Vos (2011) identifies two forms of offensive advertising namely, advertising related to offensive products and offensive execution of advertisement. In addition, it is pointed out that offensive execution of advertising includes violent execution, racist or sexist which could objectively offend consumers. This could take in the form of shaming, humor, etc. (Vos, 2011). An example of this is a Metro Forward ad for Washington in 2013 which was meant to promote an increase bus reliability. The ad featured a female passenger sharing a conversation with another lady on the Metro's efficiency and reply from the second lady was: can't we just talk about shoes? An anti-sexism group called Ultraviolet reacted to this ad by calling it sexist and offensive. Their explanation was that the ad is supposed to represent everyday passengers, yet it presents women among passengers as shallow.

Without doubt, Drumwright and Murphy (2009) posit that although advertising has been a pressing matter for some time now, there has been less research and remained inconclusive in many important areas. Thus, wrong conducts continue to be problematic in the advertising industry and as such in controlling these problems, this insight is necessary as it could negatively affect a company's brand image. Additionally, the effect of advertising is equally paramount to society at large. Some researchers support this with their cautionary note on the most profound ethical problems in advertising which is "the pervasiveness and unrestricted advertising that threatens to engulf all aspects of the private and public domain" (Spence & Heereken, 2005, p.122).

In a study carried out to investigate regulations of offensive advertising in South Africa, Vos (2011) identifies similar criteria adopted in the British, Canadian and South African advertising regulators. As an example, are similar advertising regulations for British and South African advertisers which states that: "advertising should not contain anything likely to cause serious widespread offense" (Vos 2011, p.91). In support of this advertising code for the British ads is the prohibition of advertising that "offends against public feeling". Ultimately, the Advertising and Marketing practice code which is regarded as the 'golden standard', called the International Chamber

of Commerce states that “advertising should not offend standards of decency currently prevailing in the country and culture concerned” (Vos 2011, p.93).

In addition, similar factors used to define offensive advertising clauses are which are exemplified in Cyril De Run et al. (2010) and Vos’ (2011) research study. The authors provide a good illustration of how there could be subjective opinions on what is regarded as offensive based on how it is interpreted. According to their research, for controversial ad issues, there are usually both sides of the argument from the public aside remarks from the affected group. However, an ad content is not necessarily determined offensive based on the quantity or relevance of complaints received, rather the validity of the complaint. That being said, a review on what defines offensive adverts plays out as very relevant points which will be applied to discuss the stance of the chosen ad for this study in the following chapters.

3.METHODOLOGY

Having reviewed the theoretical background and other research literature in the previous chapters, discussions in this section will cover the aim, research questions, the data sets used in this study and the methods employed to analyze them.

As reviewed in the theoretical background, narratives can be interpreted in different ways by different people. This creates opportunities and need for conducting research on how stereotypes or humor is used in ads to represent social groups and how they are interpreted. Hence, this thesis implements an interpretive approach to develop an understanding of how viewers use social identification to react to the use of stereotype or humor in representing them in the ad. Qualitative methods will be applied in this study to enhance the gathering of holistic perspectives on the presented data sets.

3.1 Research aim and questions

Earlier chapters of this study established how visual media, especially advertising, uses diverse strategies in ads to attract the attention of customers. Furthermore, it was noted that the adoption of these strategies in ads in the form of stereotypes and humor are likely to be informed by ideologies existing in larger societies. This was illustrated by how ads represent gender roles in our society on television. Moreover, in this present age where social media platforms such as YouTube are easily accessible to people around the world, stereotyped or humor ads are subject to diverse understanding and interpretation. That is to say that, ads meant for national television channels are no longer tied to specified viewers, rather they are circulated and viewed by people around the world on other social media platforms. As such, there has been a lot of concern on how these repeatedly used stereotypes in ads have represented social groups. Although ads involving stereotypes or humor are effective tools for advertising (Eisend and Tarrahi, 2016), humor/stereotypes involving

representation of social groups can backfire. As such, it is important to study what can be perceived as offensive and why.

With this in mind, my aim is to examine how social groups are portrayed or represented in Hornbach's, The Smell of Spring ad as well as how viewers reacted via social media (YouTube). This will be carried out by first analyzing how social groups are represented in the ad. Followed by exploring how stereotype has been used to create a humoristic narrative, and then examine viewer's responses to the ad.

In analyzing the said narrative ad and reactions, these are the questions to guide my research:

1. What advertising strategies are used in Hornbach's, The Smell of Spring ad?
2. How are social groups represented in the ad?
3. What are viewers' reactions to the ad?
4. How are social groups visible in viewers' reactions to the ad?

3.2 Data sets

In answering the research questions, two sets of data will be examined in this study. The two data sets for this thesis are Hornbach's TV ad video and the response retrieved from the ad's YouTube comments section. The TV commercial titled The Smell of Spring: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAlyYXRtWvQ> was published on Hornbach's official YouTube channel on March 15, 2019 by Ads of Brands and was retrieved for this research on September 10, 2019.

The ad was published for a German company called Hornbach which operates Do-It-Yourself (DIY) megastores and garden centers in Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Romania, France, Sweden, Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. According to the business history of the Hornbach Group (2019), Hornbach is an independent family run company which was founded in 1877. Hornbach currently operates 158 DIY stores, garden centers and online shops in the nine countries in Europe. The company has more than 20,000 employees with pioneering achievements

such as the first combined DIY and garden center and first megastore. As a company, it offers home improvement and DIY goods aligned to the needs of project and professional customers.

The ad stirred up a lot of controversy which led to several people reacting to it social media, especially on YouTube. Most of the negative reactions were also visible in a feedback from a viewer from South Korea who started a petition on Twitter to remove the ad, criticisms on Hornbach's YouTube channel, a popularly known YouTube channel called Asian Boss, as well as news broadcast by DW TV (a renowned German television channel). The issue was a top story on DW Live TV with the headline: *German ad slammed for 'racist' portrayal of Asian women*. These posted reactions were immense to the extent that Hornbach actually organized a press conference to address the reactions. Drawing on the massive traction and reaction the ad attracted, mainly on Hornbach's YouTube channel, this led to my interest to focus on YouTube channel for the data sets.

In the first part of the analysis I will describe in detail and interpret the narrative content of the English version of the television ad video from a multimodal and semiotic perspective. After this, the response from the audience in the YouTube comment section of the advertisement will be examined. The data in its video format will be retrieved from the official Hornbach's YouTube channel. The ad is a non-verbal communication content with a tagline in the end to describe the intent of the advert (which is The Smell of Spring). As mentioned earlier, the same ad content is used in the different countries where the store operates, except for changes made to the language to suit the different countries. The one minute long narrative ad was selected based on its relevance to the proposed research aim and the heated reactions it received from the audience on YouTube platform. In effect, the study examines how the social group, presumed to be Asians are represented.

The audience's comments will be analyzed as a public discourse on the ad. In other words, focus will be placed on the online discussion from comments made and not the identity behind the comments. Moreover, since a systematic interpretation will be carried out to examine reactions from viewers' comments, comments will be collected from the official Hornbach YouTube channel.

Data sets 1 and 2 are generally explained briefly without critical interpretations in the next section. This will be followed by laying out the analytical methods and how they will be applied practically in analyzing the data sets. In the next chapter, both data sets will be analyzed in detail with the chosen method of analysis.

3.2.1 Data Set 1: The Smell of Spring narrative

Generally, the commercial has no form of verbal communication, which renders it open to many interpretations from different perspectives. The scenes have been explained with a neutral interpretation to the ad and will be further analyzed in the next chapter.

Hornbach's ad starts with four different old white men working in an outdoor garden. The video starts with an intriguing musical background with a woman's voice yet without any meaningful words. The scene shows old men carrying out very physical tasks such as uprooting roots, sawing wood and shoveling gardening soil, resulting in a lot of perspiration. The old men are dressed in dull colored shirts and shorts which have been illustrated as dirty and sweaty from the garden work. In the narrative, there is an emphasis on the sweat and facial expressions of the old men; this is evident as the camera zooms in on the sweaty face and belly of the characters as they work. Furthermore, the old men express themselves through groaning, heavy release of breath and abrupt damping of roots and branches.

As the narrative unfolds, the old men instinctively take off their garden work clothes, that is, the shirts and underwear used for working and hand them over to two men who are dressed up like laboratory scientists. The two men taking the clothes are dressed up in the same clothes, that is, in light colored shirt, pair of trousers, tie, white lab coat and a pair of glasses. The two men have been positioned such that one stands behind by the other, adjacent to a white vacuum packaging machine throughout the video. The vacuum packaging machine which has a Japanese inscription, opens up to receive the collected clothes. Although there are no verbal exchanges between the gardeners and the

laboratory scientists, the gardeners approach the lab scientists, take off their shirts and hand them over which are then put in the vacuum packaging machine.

The next scene plays out packaging of the garden clothes in an airtight transparent bag which are eventually showcased in a vending machine. The narrative continues into an urban Asian city set up where a number of professionally dressed people are seen either walking or sitting. In front of a vending machine is a woman who looks like an Asian. The woman has a short straight black hairstyle in bob with a bang, obliquely set eyes, sallow complexion and dressed up in a smart casual, i.e., ladies' suit and official skirts. The woman purchases the packaged garden clothe, opens the airtight bag, smells and inhales the packaged garden clothes and bursts with excitement, as shown in Fig.1, as the commercial end with the tagline: The Smell of Spring. The woman deeply inhales the packaged content a second time with rolled eyes in excitement and looks aroused.

Figure 1 Advertisement for gardening store company Hornbach: The Smell of Spring



(Heimat, 2019)

3.2.2 Data Set 2: Viewers reaction to the ad

The data collected for the current study was retrieved from Hornbach's official YouTube comment section. The data collected is publicly available and accessible. In total, 1,168 viewers commented on the ad between March 15 and September 10, 2019, however, the data of this study

was analyzed by selecting the first 50 posts in the YouTube comment section of the ad from the date of publication. Although there were as many as 1,168 comments at the time, the most immediate posts from the day the video was published was analyzed. Data collected was limited to 50 because most of the comments following the most immediate reactions were saturated. Besides, the most immediate posts answered the research questions of the study.

From the date of collection, that is, 20th September 2019, data for this study involved viewer's comments ranging from 4-5months old. A major challenge in gathering the comments from YouTube was that, aside English, other languages such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean were used in commenting. However, since the comments were short and the analysis was thematic based, Google Translate was implemented as a tool to convert the foreign language comments to English. Additionally, the translated examples which were used in this study cannot be traced back to the original comments online. In order to provide a translation which had an accurate reflection of pattern as the original, Google translate was implemented. This is because the viewers' reaction did not involve discourse analysis where specific wording, language use or linguistic choice was in focus.

Furthermore, there were comments which used emoticons in their post. Although emoticons are likely to change the meaning of a message, this study did not focus on them in the comments. This is because the emoticons were used only three times and basically expressed what was commented on. Hence, the basic function of the emoticons was to strengthen what had been commented on.

3.3 Data analysis

This study utilizes multimodal semiotic analysis and thematic analysis to examine data collected. Analysis of the video data set will be based on a combination of multimodal discourse and social semiotics analysis. The multimodal approach will be a particularly useful foundation for describing a detailed narrative of the ad while the social semiotic approach will be used to critically

observe, reflect and interpret meanings. For the viewers comments, thematic analysis is adopted to reveal and analyze the patterns found in the commented posts.

3.3.1 Multimodal Semiotic analysis

Data set 1 will be analyzed with what I term Multimodal Semiotic Analysis. Multimodal Semiotic Analysis is a combination of multimodal discourse analysis and social semiotic analysis. Since both methods of analysis are relevant approaches for this study, it is more practical to fuse them without changing their meanings. This way, there is a clear and unified method of analysis for the video data set other than two distinct approaches. Hence, both approaches will be explained separately, followed by an illustration of how they will be applied in this thesis.

Multimodality is the mode of representation including gesture, image as well as music, beyond verbal language (Dash et.al, 2016). The multimodality phenomenon has become well-known due to its “multisemiotic complexity of the representations in the electronic media” (Dash et.al, 2016, p.4). They explained that the multimodal approach is applied to focus on music, gestures, image elements and how it has been used in the discourse. From a broader perspective, multimodality is often interconnected with multimodal discourse, as such it is relevant to have a broader understanding of the topic.

Chan (2013) defines multimodal discourse as the study of the various methods used by humans to communicate. The combination and coordination of different modalities such as the use of voice, intonation, gaze, gesture, positioning and language make an interaction multimodal to create meaning. Nonetheless, O'Halloran (2011) explains multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) beyond the study of language, away from Kress' (2011) definition of MDA. Kress' (2011) definition of MDA refers to the study of language combined with other resources such as gestures, action, music, sound, images and scientific symbolism. Subsequently, explanations presented by Chan (2013) and O'Halloran (2011) acknowledge that communication is inherently multimodal and reveals more about

meanings conveyed. Moreover, both methods explain the ways in which people interact by using multiple modes of different sign systems in different ways.

Kress (2010) defines modes in social and formal terms, making them equally relevant to any aspect of facilitated meaning-making. Kress (2010) discusses social modes as a society and its desire for social recognition, suggesting that a mode is what a community or group wishes to recognize and use as a mode. Burn (2014) presents typical examples of modes such as are gestures, linguistics units, sounds, filming and editing which complement each other in meaning making. In addition, Kress (2010) describes the modes in formal terms as what can be considered and function as a mode. He added that the social and cultural trends are often factors which decide what mode of information is being transmitted. These variables are therefore likely to influence how people interpret modes. Therefore, Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotics theory will be applied to draw on the visual and nonverbal elements in the advertisement. This way, an understanding of the context and the message to be given will be revealed.

Social semiotics can be defined as “the study of signs in everyday life” (Cobley, 2010) or “the use of signs in specific social situations” (Chandler, 2004). Najafian and Ketabi (2011) affirm that advertising is in itself a “semiotic entity”. The authors also demonstrate that conceptions of social semiotics, semiotic tools and codes cannot be overlooked in terms of understanding messages conveyed in advertisements. In essence, social semiotics contribute to developing and discovering of new semiotic resources as well as new ways of using existing ones. Semiotic resources mean objects and observable actions that are related to human interaction with a conceptual semiotic capacity. Fundamentally, semiotic resources are not restricted, signifying that almost everything can be done or made differently. Kress (2010) points out that semiotic resources are created from circumstances related to society, thus bearing the norms of social activities. Therefore, in principle, semiotic resources allow the articulation of different social and cultural meanings (Van Leeuwen, 2005). These resources are then investigated to determine how they are used in specific contexts (historical, cultural

and institutional) as well as how they are planned, taught, critiqued or justified by people. Therefore, the term semiotic resource is significant in the field of social semiotics.

It should be noted that “social semiotics is not a ‘pure’ theory, not a self-contained field, as such it is interdisciplinary since it applies theories and concepts from other related fields” (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p.1). Furthermore, it does not provide ready-made answers, but rather suggests ideas that will help them find solutions (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Accordingly, Van Leeuwen (2005) states that gathering, recording and regularly cataloging semiotic tools are part of social semiotics.

On the other hand, Van Leeuwen (2001, p.92) asserts that “semiotics iconography gives rich insight to the cultural meanings of certain motifs, characters and symbols in pictures. He also notes that semiotics analyzes the effect of construction and modality of the picture on the viewer. Similarly, Väre (2014) inferred from Kuusamo’s (1996) observation on how visual ads and communication play a role in the translation of these visual elements. Such visual elements play an important role in how we perceive and meet the desires of a customer. This can be demonstrated by the manner in which the positioning of an image (as a visual element in ad) creates interest and expresses what consumers can expect by continuing to read the ad.

What is more, there has been growing interest in multimodality research in advertising (Del Saz Rubio, 2009). Del Saz Rubio (2009) states that there is a shift to images and music-based advertising as a means of attracting an audience in advertising rather than language-based ads. Furthermore, in reference to advertising as a semiotic entity, Najafian and Ketabi (2011) suggest that elements related to social contact are likely to be encountered in advertisement messages. Thus, since advertising is a form of communication, it is equally likely to encounter such multimodal elements. A contributing factor to this is revealed by Puppel’s (2010) highlight on advertising as heavily reliant on signs and the basis of every visual message.

Following this understanding on multimodal discourse and social semiotics, The Smell of Spring narrative will be examined to identify the multimodal elements such as image, music, action,

sound and gestures. This way, the method will help illuminate more about meanings conveyed in the ad. Subsequently, social semiotics will be used to indicate the transmitted messages through the semiotic resources used. More specifically, social semiotics will be applied to draw on the multimodal elements in the ad to interpret the meaning and message being delivered. This will be practically carried out by describing the narrative in detail with the multimodal elements and interpreting the text, sound, visual qualities and vehicles that drive the narrative content to make meaning. Basically, as a researcher, multimodal semiotic analysis will help me to ask questions about how meanings are created as well as how meanings come about.

3.3.2 Thematic analysis

Here, I will draw on Braun and Clark (2006) thematic analysis framework and apply it in a structured manner to analyze comments posted on YouTube for the narrative ad. Braun and Clark (2006) state that, compared to other qualitative methodologies, thematic analysis is more flexible as it is not tied to a specific theoretical or epistemological perspective. Accordingly, they inform that thematic analysis identifies patterns or themes within qualitative data. Thus, the use of thematic analysis will reveal the recurrent reaction patterns to the ad in the given data. To cite an example, Guest et.al. (2012, p.9) explains it as functioning with focus on identifying, discussing and describing themes rather than counting frequencies.

Guided by Braun and Clark's (2006) 6-step framework on thematic analysis, the viewers comments were themed. I went through the comments over and over again and noticed that people expressed themselves on three different stances on the ad; being offended by the ad, being entertained or humored by the ad and finding the ad indifferent. Therefore, in analyzing the viewers comments, the selected 50 posts will be carefully studied and categorized under three matching themes, namely, offended, humorous and indifferent. I believe the use of these categories will allow a clear direction for discussion and analysis of the comments.

While reviewing the comments critically, it was observed that there were comments with racism, sexism as well as discrimination accusations. Such comments condemned the ad and also expressed negative emotions with their words. It was noted that racism and discrimination accusations fell in the lines of national identities, social group identity whereas others clearly showcased a difference in national groups with reference to the ad. Based on these, posts which fell in this category were themed as offended.

Criteria set for the humored comments were based on comments which specifically expressed the ad as funny. In expressing humor in words, comments were in short texts such as LOL, hahaha, etc., simply expressing that the ad was funny, with only three emoticon comments to reinforce their statement. Aside comments which were grouped as offended or humored, other comments revealed no sides, meaning comments which do not fall in line with humor or offended as explained above will be themed indifferent.

People who expressed an indifferent stance in their comments explained the idea behind the ad content in their opinion, others drew meaning from the ad whereas others mentioned that the ad was unclear. Hence, the basis for classifying comments under indifferent is that there is no evidence of offensiveness or humor, hence, placing them on a neutral ground. Although most comments were easily categorized in their themes, there were few comments which were quite a challenge to label. This was because some comments were best suited for two categories. This means that there were comments which showcased offended and humored themes or humored and indifferent or indifferent and offended themes. Hence, people who clearly showed two or three stances were themed as such.

According to Stranges et al. (2013), Braun and Clark's (2006) approach to thematic analysis provides a clear and usable 6-step framework which has proven influential in social sciences. Details on how this framework is useful to this study will be explained later in this section. Thematic analysis aims at identifying, analyzing patterns in a given data and using these patterns to address the study to make sense. The aim of a good thematic analysis is not to summarize the data (Stranges et.al, 2013).

Braun and Clark (2006) present two levels of patterns or themes: semantic and latent. Semantic themes focus on the basics of meanings from the data without looking for a deeper interpretation. On the other hand, latent level identifies “the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualization and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (p.84). The latent theme looks beyond the surface meanings of the data in terms of what participants have written or said. This level describes and analyzes with a focus on interpreting and explaining the theme. For this present study, the thematic analysis of the data falls in line with the latent theme approach. This means that themes gathered will be analyzed to identify interpretations from the audiences' point of view in the said context. Since there are 50 comments to be analyzed in the YouTube content, categorizing them will make it easier to organize. Additionally, thematic analysis will be used for data set 2 because the analysis starts with pre-existing themes to identify the relevant cases. Moreover, my study focuses on the people's comment.

Summary of Braun and Clark's (2006) 6-step Framework

Braun & Clark's (2006) six-phase framework will be implemented when conducting the analysis for audience's response of this study. They are:

Step 1. Become familiar with the data: In conducting the analysis, it is important to be familiar with the entire data which will be used. This could be done by reading, re-reading the transcripts, that is, the posted comments and making notes. Similarly, I will pay close attention to the posted comments when gathering my data. When looking at the various responses, I will take note of the specific pattern of ideas or words. This stage of the research process provides important information which will help in tying themes together for a clear idea during analysis.

Step 2. Generate initial codes: The next phase is to organize the data in a systematic and meaningful way by coding them. Depending on the approach for the analysis and its relevance to the research questions, the method for organizing the codes will be determined. In this study, the codes

will be generated after familiarizing with the pattern of ideas or words listed. The different ideas which keep coming up in the comments will then be organized and examined.

Step 3. Search for themes: Braun and Clark (2006) state that a theme is characterized by its significance. Here, the themes are captured in line with answering the research questions or from important elements from the data. However, they explain that, with some data set, there may be an overlap in the coding stage and identifying preliminary themes. Themes collated could then be named and organized accordingly. The themes will be gathered with the motive of answering the research questions in mind. This research process stage will help me to work out how social groups are made visible as well as the viewer's reactions to the ad. At this point, ideas or words which express belongingness to a particular group will count as an element in making social group visible.

Step 4. Review themes: At this stage, the themes are reviewed to ensure they correlate with initial themes in Step 3. They are then modified and developed to make sense by ensuring that all the data is relevant to each theme. There is therefore the need to make sure the themes do not overlap; thus, they are coherent and distinct from each other. Here, it is important to ensure that the selected themes are clear and specific to the corresponding list.

Step 5. Define themes: During this stage, Braun and Clark (2006) declare that the aim is to identify the essence of what each theme is about, how the themes relate and interact with each other if there are subthemes, what the theme means to convey, how the themes are connected to the aim theme. Likewise, this step will be observed to match the aim of the thesis.

Step 6. Writing up: The final step is often in a report, dissertation or journal article format. For this study, the final step will be presented in a report format.

3.4 Research ethics

For every researcher, maintaining research ethics standards while generating relevant knowledge results to successful research work. In this section, principles and standards of ethical issues in qualitative research in the social science field will be reviewed. This will cover research

ethics in collection, analysis, interpretation and discussion of data to assist a transparent result. Since the collection of data for this research is largely reliant on YouTube data, it is equally important to study this area as it is the responsibility of the researcher to be aware of regulations attached to social media data collection.

The use of social media websites (SMW) such as YouTube have gradually become a valuable tool for researchers as well as provided more opportunities to conduct studies (Moreno et.al,2013). YouTube is a video sharing website for people to upload their own videos, share content, watch, like, subscribe and comment. Moreover, the use of social media websites has allowed reaching out to communities outside the traditional form of gathering data at a low cost. For instance, as my study required gathering respondents to share their thoughts on the ad, it was readily available online for use.

Researchers highlight the lack of detailed information when it comes to evaluating information on social medial platforms ethically (Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Moreno, Goniu, Moreno, & Diekema, 2013; Giglietto, Rossi & Bennato, 2012). Thus, the extent to which researchers continue to have little to no guidance with SMW related studies may be a challenge for review boards. However, as a researcher, I deemed it important to consider confidentiality and consent reviewers. In a research article by Moreno et. al (2013), they discuss key points and issues related to conducting research with social media websites. In their study, they explain a number of factors to consider when carrying out an observational research on social media websites. They mention the need to consider whether the research study meets the criteria for research as a human subject and the review needed for such a study. Thus, if the means of obtaining data does not involve interaction with the person who posted it online or has its data identifiable, it is assumed that the research study is public. This is because it does not involve direct contact with human subjects and the content is publicly accessible to any internet user. In addition, Xu et. al (2017) explained that, to be able to use YouTube video as data, the accepted norm among such researchers is that, the data gathered are usually treated as non-

human document. With this understanding, for this thesis, I considered data set 1 as nonhuman and 2 as publicly available for a collective observation.

A major concern which is likely to be raised in this study is privacy of respondents. Another exception stated by Moreno et.al, (2013) regards a research with an analysis of public information on human subjects in particular. This applies to the analysis of YouTube comments in this study which involves following an online discussion to gather an observation of public behavior, hence, no direct interaction with participants. As such, the Google Translate English versions of data set 2, that is, the viewer's comments will be presented as examples and not the originals.

YouTube's privacy standard does not impose limitations on how individuals may use data available on their platform. In utilizing data from YouTube, I considered the ethical regulations required to be carried out. Per YouTube's terms of services, users may access and use the service personal or non-commercial use. However, users were alerted not to collect any information that may identify a person, for example, username unless permitted to. The guidelines mentioned that content posted on YouTube is public but may not misuse any reporting, flagging, complaint, dispute or appeal processes (YouTube Community Guideline, 2019). Furthermore, with recommendations from European General Data Protection Regulations passed in 2016 for handling personal data, I understood that data collected should link the purpose of the personal data collected and the purpose of the intended further processing. As such, handling personal data retrieved from YouTube was for research purposes, thus for a common good.

According to Moreno et.al (2013) observational web-based research is an online research which does not involve retrieving or recording information from participants in a manner that directly or indirectly puts them at risk of public liability or reputational damage. In other words, participants are not aware of the research being carried out. That being said, as an observational web-based researcher, it is important to study the website privacy policy, users' privacy and other legal considerations. Research has affirmed that the deciding factor for a public access to observational

web-based research is when the user chooses to make their published content public or private (Moreno et.al, 2013). Furthermore, the researcher will have to consider if there are factors that reveal the identity of the publisher. To this end, this study does not violate the ethics since the content of the ad is public and the names of participants do not reveal their identity.

4. FINDINGS

The Smell of Spring narrative ad was a remarkable case study due to its connection with misinterpretation, identity, intersectionality, stereotype, humor, representation and communication crisis which are relevant factors in intercultural communication. As briefly explained in the previous chapter, the ad drew a lot of attention from people on YouTube, Twitter as well as DW TV channel which reported on the claims being received with the headline: *“German ad slammed for portrayal of Asian women-Racist, sexist, disgusting. An advertisement by German DIY store Hornbach prompted outrage for showing an Asian woman getting aroused after smelling dirty clothes worn by white men. But the company isn’t backing down.”* (Deutsche Welle, 2019). Factors mentioned above, among other criticisms about the ad stirred my curiosity towards exploring its content.

In response to the critical comments from people, Hornbach held a press conference to address the controversy. According to the press statement released by the company, most of the controversial reactions emerged from South East Asia and the Asian community in Germany. The statement affirmed that the ad raised concerns about an impression that was meant to discriminate and likely to encourage people to act negatively towards Asian women. Hornbach apologized and extended an invitation for a dialogue with people who found the ad problematic. In addition, the company used its website as a platform to clarify any controversies people drew from the ad. An interesting point is that, although the represented group (who were identified as Japanese) were ‘offensively represented’ in the ad, others who identified with Asians found the ad equally offensive.

Following this, this chapter questions what, why and how certain elements were used in the ad. Both data sets were critically examined to interpret the ad in line with the research questions presented.

4.1 Advertising strategies used in the ad

Although there are diverse perspectives from which the video can be studied, this study will focus on what is relevant to developing the narrative. Hence, the analysis of data for the video will focus on multimodal semiotic means of meaning-making. As mentioned in the analysis section, obvious ways of meaning-making in ads involve all the visual, textual, sounds, rhythm and cinematic aspects.

In order to analyze the advert explicitly, the ad content has been split into three scenes. This will allow a critical review and also draw clear inference with the method of analysis. With inference to basic narrative format, the scenes have been split into Beginning (Scene 1), Middle (Scene 2) and End (Scene 3) as shown below. The time stamps placed for the different scenes 1, 2 and 3 are 0.00-0.20, 0.21-0.39 and 0.40-1.00 respectively.

Table 1 *Scene 1* *Screenshots of excerpts from video*

Time stamps	Frame	Sound	Text
0.00-0.02		Opening scene starts with intriguing music	
0.03-0.04		Dominated release of heavy breath sound	
0.9-0.10		Loud groans dominate	

0.13-0.14		Sudden pause of music and woman's voice dominates	
0.14-0.15		Woman's voice begins to pick up gradually in music	
0.17-0.18		Woman's voice in the music rhymes with man's motion	

The opening scene of the ad unfolds with an intriguing music in the background and four gardeners who are carrying out hard work in the garden. Outdoor in the garden, flowers are blossom with bright colors, freshness of leaves are shown with green sceneries, bright and clear weather which indicate elements of the spring weather. All four characters had more or less their physique featured with grey-white hair, wrinkled face and mottled scalp. As such, the characters working as gardeners can be described as old white men. The first character in the opening scene uproots large roots from the soil, the second character empties a bag of earth soil in a garden box, the third shovels garden soil and the fourth saws a piece of wood. At this point, the first character carries the heavy roots with a lot of strength. The visual modes identified in the scene include the looks and facial expression of the characters', the old men dressed in grim clothes, sweaty and express difficulty in the garden work. The task they are carrying out in the garden are portrayed very physical and obvious means by which they express this is by groaning, grimace, heavy sighs and zoomed in framing on the character's sweaty looks as shown in Fig 2. On the other hand, a critical look at this scene reveals a contradiction of an image most viewers are familiar with; to what is unusually characterized in media about old

men. Thus, the viewer of this ad is presented with something unexpected when the old white men are somewhat showcased as repulsive, therefore building up a humorous element.

All four characters' attention are then drawn to two lab scientist who are watching from a distance. Based on the scene, the two lab scientists seem to be waiting for the gardeners to take action, giving the impression that the gardeners know what to do whenever they see the lab scientists. The two men stood in a distance with a hostile facial expression. Beside them is a vacuum packaging machine which automatically opens to receive clothes. As shown in Table 1, in scene 0.13-0.14, one of the lab scientists is behind the other throughout the scenes. Although both men are uniformly dressed, the man in front takes the clothes while the other looks over.

The second gardener turns, with an instantly dimmed facial expression when he sees the lab scientists, the third character also notices the lab scientists with a dazed facial expression and breathes heavily. The first character then damps the heavy roots with a disgusted look and groan as he also realizes the presence of the lab scientists. From Scene 1, the combination of heavy gardening, old men's expression of hard work with sounds (groaning, heavy sighs), zoomed in frames on certain elements, musical background and the environmental conditions of spring shown suggests relatable qualities to help the viewer to draw meaning.

Fig 2. *Zoomed in framing*



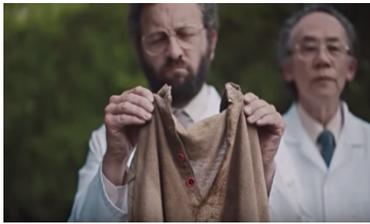
(Heimat, 2019)

Scene 2

The ad continuous into Scene 2 where the gardeners approach the lab scientists, take off their working shirts, under wears and throw them at the lab scientist in front. He inspects the shirts and underwear before dropping them in a vacuum packaging machine while the other lab scientist behind looks over despairingly (see Table 2, scene 0.32-0.32). Here, it is observed that although there are no verbal communications, a lot of interaction is done non-verbally. This could suggest that all participants know what to do or it was a sort of routine to the gardeners without any surprises. This is illustrated when the lab scientist signals the gardeners to take off the underwear with his facial expression and eyes.

While the gardeners took of their shirts, the camera's frame emphasized the gardener's hairy chests while the woman in the soundtrack gave off sounds by rolling her tongue loudly. As the lab scientist inspects the dirty shirt, woman's voice in music begins to pitch with a yearning and moaning sound. The corresponding use of the woman's sounds at the same time as the undressing of the gardeners and emphasis on the gardener's chest also provokes a subconscious thought of excitement. The woman's voice continuously pitches in the music as the lab scientist inspects the dirty shirt. This is a possible explanation for an unpleasant sight because the lab scientist behind grimaces and looks away despairingly. Music stops abruptly as another scene shows the inspected clothes being processed in a factory in an airtight sealed bag. Here, the ad depicts an unusual image of being excited about dirty and smelly shirts, sweaty and hairy chests of old white men to the viewer. Again, the ad uses contrasts of expectation versus the expectation of the viewer to create humor. On the other hand, the dirty shirts resulted from the work carried out in the garden during spring. This can be compared with the representation of spring, which the woman's voice is the background is yearning for.

Table 2 Scene 2 *Screenshots of excerpts from video*

Time stamp	Frame	Sound	Text
0.23-0.24		Woman rumbles tongue in music as the man takes off shirt	
0.29-0.32		Woman's voice instinctively rises after sudden pause when dirty shirt is inspected	
0.32-0.32		Lab scientist behind sighs and makes grimace	
0.40-0.41		Music stops	

Scene 3

The next scene illustrates an urban Asian city set up which is shown as misty and grey. Here, a young Asian looking woman stands before a vending machine. She purchases one of the packaged

shirts from a vending machine, quickly opens the package, inhales deeply and exhales the content with the displayed text *The Smell of Spring* on screen. The woman's face lightens up with a big smile, showcasing excitement and takes a deeper breathe of the content of the package. The camera is then zoomed in on the second expression by the woman. This time, she rolls her eyes in excitement and appears to be aroused. Consequently, the background music pitches with the woman's moans. Her character is professionally dressed in ladies' suit and official skirt, with short straight black hairstyle in bob with a bang, a sallow complexion and obliquely set eyes. Additionally, the vending machines placed in the scene, clothes sold in a vending machine and the Japanese text on the vacuum packaging machine are modes which suggests the young Asian woman is intended to represent Japanese.

Pondering on Scene 2 (0.32-0.32) and Scene 3 (0.50-0.51), I question why the lab scientist reacts to the gardener's shirt in despair whereas the Asian looking woman, with excitement? The understanding gathered is a similar illustration of the fetish stereotype called *buru-sera* attached to Japan. Again, juxtaposing a detestable smell versus a very pleasant smell. *Buru-sera* is a word generated from a Japanese origin and a paraphilia referred to sexualized attraction to the underwear or school uniforms of girls or young women (Jisho, 2019). An article by Griffiths (2014) explains details of this myth. He describes it as a fusion of the word *buruma* meaning bloomers (that is, the bottoms of gym suit) and *sera-fuku* meaning sailor suit which is the traditional school uniform for Japanese schoolgirls. According to Griffiths (2014), *buru-sera* shops date back as far as the 90's where young girls sold their used underwear (meaning they were soiled with bodily fluids of the original user) and school uniform to shops. Griffiths (2014) says that, it was a common practice in Japan for schoolgirls to sell their used underwear and school uniforms to make money. The used clothes were in turn purchased by interested buyers (who were older men) who smell them for sexual stimulation and gratification. After some time, these used clothes were sold in vending machines which was a much more beneficial way for shy customers. However, in 2004, regulations were passed, and the *buru-sera* phenomenon was banned.

Given this insight, there is a clear illustration of implementation of the buru-sera phenomenon in reverse in the Smell of Spring ad. The underlining idea behind buru-sera is that a young girl gives away her used underwear or school uniform and is purchased by men, however, in the ad, old men give away their shirts and underwear which was purchased by a young woman. To be more specific, the used shirts and under wears of the old white gardeners have been packaged for sale in the vending machine and purchased by a young Asian looking woman. The Asian woman smells the used shirt/underwear and looks aroused (see Table 3, scene 0.56-1.00), complemented by the soundtrack selection used in the ad to enhance this idea.

Table 3 *Scene 3* *Screenshots of excerpts from video*

Time stamp	Frame	Sound	Text
0.42-0.43		No music except dominant sound of bustling factory area	
0.50-0.51		Music starts immediately with woman's voice	
0.52-0.55		Woman's voice rises with moans and yearning sound while ad character exhales	The Smell of Spring appears on screen

		smell from package	
0.56-1.00		Sound of character strongly inhaling a second time with rolled eyes	Hornbach logo appears on screen

In general, it seems that a common pattern which was identified in the video is an interplay of contrasting elements and ideas to generate humorous effect. Many of which include the bright and blossom nature in Scene 1,2 versus the grey and misty urban city in Scene 3, woman versus men, old men versus professional young woman, freshness of the smell of spring versus dirty/sweaty vacuum-packaged shirt, sexy music versus disgusting hairy and sweaty looks as well as the buru-sera versus reverse buru-sera. This combination of findings provides support for the conceptual premise that the ad uses stereotypes, unconventional ideas and juxtapositions to create a humoristic effect. Moreover, after analyzing the data, findings show that aside the buru-sera myth which received the attention, other stereotypes present in the ad were: men associated with heavy garden work, men as scientists and the urban city displayed as polluted and grey. The question then is, why viewers focus on the racism and sexism portrayed in the ad but does not consider the other stereotypical representations. This indicates a clear reaction to what viewers choose to make a visible problem in the ad.

As far as the press conference statement and the separate website for clarifications provided by Hornbach is concerned, the intention of the ad was to reverse the typical gender clichés of women undressing. Hornbach acknowledges that the ad implied a different perception, especially from the East Asians as indicated in their reactions. However, the company mentions that the ‘smell fetish’

stereotype was implemented in the ad, explaining that it similarly happens in other countries in the world. They also accept that the buyer used in the ad is an Asian woman, confirmed the inscription on the vacuum packaging machine to be Japanese and that the city portrayed can be related to Japan since it is known for the “vending machine culture”. According to their explanations, the stereotype was used by applying a creative twist in a humorous way.

The Smell of Spring ad was successful in drawing traction with their narrative. With over 90,000 views on YouTube, the results show consistency with discussions pointed out in the theoretical background. The use of stereotype or humor (Eisend & Tarrahi’s, 2016) as well as a compelling narrative are showcased as effective tools for advertising.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the non-verbal nature of the ad renders viewers or researchers subject to different interpretations conditioned to their society; especially without knowing the used stereotype in the ad. For instance, the reversal of buru-sera in the ad can have other ideological underpinnings such as being interpreted as an empowering feminist message. With inference from the theoretical background, this is to say that, instead of the usual association of women taking off clothes/nude or sexualized in ads, the men are rather portrayed as the sexualized. Moreover, it is possible that viewers who do not have this insight may find the ad humorous, offended, unclear or construct ideas about the represented group.

4.2 Offended, humored and indifferent reactions

With inference from Braun and Clark’s (2006) six-phase framework and a thorough study of the data, the comments were grouped based on the posted reactions. As explained in the methodology, the themes were categorized based on three stances expressed in the posts, that is, viewers who were offended, viewers who found the ad humorous and others who were indifferent about the ad. More so, comments which were fit for more than one category were themed as such.

Overall, it was evident that some viewers had a different subject position than others. There were very few positive comments as compared to negative. It was observed that, the audience’

responses were mostly with brief statements, rhetorical questions and very few emoticons. Responses from the three themed categories draw interesting factors which will be discussed below.

From the data collected for the offended responses, it was apparent that viewers felt the content of the ad implied disgust, discrimination, racism, sexism, stereotypical thoughts whereas others traced the content to looking down on Asians, an insult to Asian women, white supremacy and as far as raining word attacks on Germans. Some reactions also centered on the fact that Asians were not represented with dignity, the ad demonstrated discrimination about Asians. Additionally, most viewers who commented in either Japanese or Chinese spoke against nationalities whom they felt looked down on Asians. Example of such offended posts are:

Are Germans so great? I'm gonna slaughter the Jewish people because I'm such a commercial.

The first example of the comments above uses sarcasm to express their thought. The viewer uses Germany's past about Nazi Germany's persecution against the Jews to interpret the motive behind the ad. Here, the comment implies that the intention of this commercial is a German way of making the 'others' feel less powerful. In other words, Germans are using the commercial as a means to demonstrate their superiority. With the offended posts such as this, accusations operating along national lines and national identities made strong statements which provoked the thought of "us versus them", making a "Western-Asian" division visible. Other comments made are:

It came out white supremacy, how much racism can you feel? Germany. Nothing has changed since the massacre from discrimination against Jews. Germans are really the worst alongside America & England.

So sick! I really hope that the Germans in Shanghai will roll back, neuropathy, a group of lower education humans!

Hitler's consciousness level

It was observed that most of the comments in relation to national lines were posted in Japanese, Chinese and Korean. Here, the viewer claims that the ads intention is to show the racist belief of white people as sovereign to people from other races. It continues by ranking Germans as the highest among the Americans and English which they perceive in the same light. An interesting point to these comments was how the basis of condemnation was traced to Germany and its dark history with discrimination during Adolf Hitler's era. On the other hand, in Germany's defense, a viewer stated that:

Please don't judge Germany. Condemn the company.

Another perspective to this is how easily viewers draw conclusions and reference nationality (in this case Germans) collectively for what a company had done. Comparably, the viewer's defense sentiment also demonstrated identifying with nation as imagined. This can possibly suggest why people made social group or nation a justified basis to condemn or defend the Germans. The question then is, why do people easily address this issue in this mode; with the manner of Germans vs Japanese, Easterners vs Westerners or Asian vs White? Again, reviewed in the theoretical background, this concept could be referenced to seeing an imagined community in the ad; although there is no face-to-face contact, there is an imagined comradeship defending themselves against a *supposed threat*. Aside some condemning posts identifying with national groups, it was noted that some posts sided with Asians or Asian women. Comments like '*This is just a short film that insults Asian women!*', *I can't believe that some people don't see this as racism. That is totally disgusting*' and '*Don't look down on Asian*' features how Asian and Asian women as a social group is visible in the viewers reaction. This kind of reaction can be associated with Tajfel (2010) social identification theory. This is supported by Tajfel's (2010) view on how individuals internalize social categorization to an extent where it becomes a part of their self-concept. It is notable that although there are often less likely to be social interaction among the viewers, their posts indicated a sense of belongingness to a group. Especially as this is a virtual reaction to the ad, it can be referred to as a large group with an imagined

community cognitive. Similarly, bearing the understanding on social cohesion, a shared perception among the participants seems to be a basis for stirring them towards condemning the ad. Here, it can be assumed that, based on their social group, participants are willing to condemn the ad in order to defend their group's image. Moreover, as discussed earlier, the pre-existent view on social comparison and categorization may also be a determining factor for viewers who found the ad offensive.

From the offended comments data, it was noted that there were overlapping elements which themed offended and indifferent. Most of such comments briefly highlighted their indifference towards the ad and why they found the ad offensive. While some explanations centered around the lack of clarity or uneasy impression from the ad, other detailed topics such as the orient and the business perspective of the ad were brought to fore:

Putting the sexism and racism aside- I don't think this is even a good advert. Just surprise in this PC culture this ad got passed their media and the test audience team. On the race issues- this type of stereotypical view of oriental pep with strange fetish will continue if the groups affected don't speak out/ complain about the ad. Orientals are easy target as historically are very passive on these issues and don't like to draw attention to themselves. On the business side- There is no such thing as bad publicity...this might be the angle they were going for? As I have never heard of this company previously.

The viewer demonstrates an understanding of how stereotype, sexism and racism is used in the ad to increase publicity. It is worth noting that the viewer comments on 'PC culture' which stands for Political Correctness culture. Merriam Webster dictionary defines political correctness as conforming to a belief that language and practices which could offend political sensibilities (as in matters of sex and race) should be eliminated. The comment makes us aware of how sensitive society is to sexism and racism. Similarly, although the ad makes an innocent representation, they seem to be receiving more criticism on racism and sexism. One could also say that Hornbach dwells on microaggression to support humor elements of the ad. However, currently, it seems impossible to

associate humor with such contents since they are easily criticized. Thus, it is possible that society may be using PC culture to control what kind of contents should be shown in the media.

Another interesting aspect of this comment is that, the ad takes advantage of the orient's stereotypical association with being passive, quiet and submissive. This comment mirrors Edward Said's (1978) theory on orientalism which considers most of Asia as orient. Edward Said describes orient as a system of representation which has been constructed by political forces in order to dominate the orient. According to Said, the westerners used stereotyping as a means to justify their superiority over the eastern culture. He highlights the binary view of self versus other to project the nature and logic of identity. Here, the viewer encourages the orient not to suppress their expression against the supposed stereotype. This view supports the PC culture and exposes an essentialist and offensive concept of 'race' and 'orients'. Furthermore, it draws on self versus other as the object of review to encourage the orient to prove the stereotype wrong.

Next, comments which regarded the content funny with reasons were rather few. Most people simply stated that the ad was funny without any special basis whereas another sarcastically associated the smell illustrated in the ad to "German Smell of Spring": *'Maybe their German spring smells like the smell of underwear😂'* and *'LOL! Spring has never smelt this bad'*.

Among themes which fell under humorous and indifferent, a viewer who identifies as Japanese draws on her experience while living in Germany. She claims that she has personally not encountered any of such buru-sera vending machines in Japan. She also mentions that although it is not known among the Japanese that Westerners think such vending machines exist, she was asked about it in Germany several times. Noting the contrast to some viewers who used their national identity as a basis to condemn the ad, I found it compelling that this view addressed the issue in a more humorous light. This comment demonstrates emotions towards the ad content which may have

been influenced by perception from her informed experience while living in Germany. It should also be noted that the person also accepted the use of the implemented buru-sera stereotype attached to her nationality; another evidence of nationality as an imagined community.

For the comments which were indifferent on the video, their response generally informed on what the ad should rather have depicted. Another recurring issue which surfaced in this theme touched on the stereotype, Buru-sera attached to Japan as discussed in the previous section:

Reverse Japanese schoolgirls used panties

But what if Hornbach actually wanted to trigger the self-proclaimed SJW and the Tumblr morons to make them think about reality outside of their website 😏. Japan has Vending Machines with used panties and its socially accepted there. China imports Canadian Air in pressurized cans amass so people can smell fresh air for the first time of their life-Reality got this sick sadly. The ad shows a really dark truth in a humorous weird way. I think even if it's really odd, its def. hit the right spot also Japanese women don't react really bad on it, mostly they're laughing about it.

The second comment appreciates that the company used a clever idea of creating the ad content with seemingly known facts. It points out valuable ideas, while associating them with stereotypes (... *Japan has Vending Machines with used panties and its socially accepted there...*). Meanwhile, the mentioned stereotype stands to be disproved since Japan banned *vending machines with used panties* (buru-sera) in 2004 as discussed in the previous section. Claims such as '*China imports Canadian Air...*' indicates the viewer's belief that the ad simply brings out uncomfortable realities of what is accepted as normal in some countries. Although it acknowledges the effect of humor in presenting these '*dark truth*' it seems to find nothing wrong with the ad bringing the truth to light. However, according to the basis of argument, this '*dark truth*' about Japan may not be justified since buru-sera currently stands banned. These points and more from the viewers raise the thought of how ads use marketing strategies to send messages to the public. Despite the fact that some of the audience had their subjective opinions on the ad, more comments criticized the strategy used to market the product.

Overall, some people clearly identified Buru-sera, others do not. While some people identify themselves as members of the offended group, others do not; some appreciated the ad as funny, others explained the ad for others while others condemned it on moral grounds. Elements of offensiveness mentioned by the audience are sexism, racism and looking down on Asians and white supremacy. As interpreted and reiterated in the audience's response, this representation was illustrated with buru-sera in reverse. More so, it was observed that the posts showed how social groups featured in their comments. This was visible in how people used their nationality or social group belonging as a basis to explain and justify their claims. For instance, with comments such as *I'm Japanese and find it funny* or *Korean, Chinese and Japanese nationals and Asians are united*, etc.

Consequently, a number of audiences' responses which were associated with Asians or Asian women reacted offended to how they had been represented in the ad. Here, the interplay of gender, nationality and ethnicity are seen to work together as the buru-sera concept is implemented. It is notable that this falls in line with the concept of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Her definition of intersectionality has evolved and recognizes the need to understand interaction of different social identities and acknowledges the difference that exists among groups. In this study, intersectionality is visible when the ad represents one character as a young woman, Japanese and Asian; to basically claim one person inhabiting more than one category. As such in this case, individuals are placed in a situation where they are likely to encounter a combined effect of racism and sexism. A good reflection of this is when Asian women find themselves in a position of what some people term 'double jeopardy' and are affected by the fact of being both a woman and an Asian. These different identities experience the world differently, facing discrimination in different ways, through gender, race, nationality which have been marginalized in society. Moreover, not only does identifying with being a woman throw in common grounds of discrimination, but also their nationality and 'race'.

Finally, as discussed in the theoretical background, Vos (2011) pointed out that offensive execution of advertising includes violent execution, racist or sexist which could objectively offend consumers. This could take in the form of shaming, humor, etc. Based on this argument and the findings gathered, this ad could be termed as an offensive execution in the eyes of the offended group. This means that, other groups which perceived the ad without pointing out these features may find the ad inoffensive.

5. DISCUSSION

In this study, the video and YouTube comments of The Smell of Spring narrative ad were analyzed with multimodal semiotics and thematic analysis respectively. The ad was created for a company called Hornbach, a German DIY megastore with garden centers in some European countries. This ad was chosen as a case study due to the backlash and criticism it received from viewers after it was published on Hornbach's official YouTube channel. Moreover, the ad provides significant elements needed to examine how social groups are represented or portrayed in an ad as stated in the aim of this study. An important finding that emerged during the analysis of the ad was an implementation of a stereotype related to buru-sera. Additionally, analysis of the viewer's responses discovered how eagerly people drew on group identities to explain and assess the ad.

In this section, I will discuss the findings of this study with respect to the research questions listed in the methodology section as well as suggested implications of this study. I will first answer the questions in relation to the findings developed, followed by explanations to help us to understand the implications of the study. The research questions are:

1. What advertising strategies are used in the Hornbach's, The Smell of Spring ad?
2. How are social groups represented in the ad?
3. What are viewers' reactions to the ad?
4. How are social groups visible in viewers' reactions to the ad?

RQ 1: Advertising strategies used in the ad

In reviewing the literature of this study, it was indicated that diverse strategies are used by advertisers to attract viewers attention, make their product/service memorable or create a positive brand image. Aside the implementation of narratives in ad contents to engage and persuade the targeted audience, the use of stereotypes or humor were established as effective tools for viewers to remember ads, especially for mundane products. It is therefore apparent that using narrative in

advertising truly engages with customers since it communicates a self-relevant experience interpreted to the understanding of the customers (Li, 2015; Fog et al., 2013; Flanagan, 2014). More so, implementing stereotypes and humor as part of the narrative content could be an even more effective tool for advertising due to its appealing nature (Eisend & Tarrahi's, 2016), thus enhancing better connection with customers.

As such, in examining The Smell of Spring narrative ad, it was important to explore the advertising strategies used to persuade and attract attention of the targeted audience. In order to identify the strategies used in the ad, the video of the ad was critically reviewed and analyzed. Findings of the study revealed the adoption of stereotyping and humor in the ad. It was noted that the ad uses a combination of narrative, humor, gender and stereotype.

As discussed in the theoretical background, a lot of advertisements are commonly reliant on stereotypes in creating contents, thus confirming The Smell of Spring's ad as evidence. The ad appears to draw on the buru-sera phenomenon, a stereotype associated with the Japanese in the narrative. As explained by Griffiths (2014) in the previous chapter, the buru-sera myth dates back as far as the 90's where young girls sold their used underwear and school uniform to shops to make money. However, in 2004, regulations were passed, and it was banned. In the implementation of this stereotype in the ad, the buru-sera phenomenon has been creatively used in reverse by switching the gender roles. Thus, instead of the usual idea of men purchasing used underwear/clothe of young girls, a young Japanese looking woman is shown purchasing used underwear/clothe of old white men. Given this premise, the irony or reverse of gender roles in the buru-sera concept suggests a humorous effect. Moreover, the narrative falls in line with Kazarian and Martin's (2004) description of aggressive humor. They state that aggressive humor purposefully criticizes or manipulates others through teasing, ridicule and sarcasm as well as potentially offensive forms of humor.

As explained in the theoretical background of this study, the use of humor usually creates hierarchy to the mocked group, in this case the Asian women. As such the humorist is relieved that it

is not connected with them, rendering such humor offensive (Hewitt, 2002). This view is visible in controversies addressed by the press statement released by Hornbach which specifically stated that, the Asian community in Europe and South-East Asians perceived the ad to be discriminating and could encourage people to act negatively towards Asian women. It should also be noted that this perception interpreted from the ad by the Asian community in Europe and South-East Asia came out as contrary to Hornbach's intended message, which was to reverse typical gender clichés of women undressing in ads. Conclusions drawn by the Asian community in Europe and South-East Asian group show the perceived social group which they identify with. To put it differently, the group identifies with the Asian women, thus presenting a fused social group made up of ethnicities (i.e. Asians) and gender (i.e. Women).

With reference to data collected from the YouTube comments, viewers also interpreted the ad in terms of the represented group in focus. The reactions from some viewer's showed corresponding result with Hornbach's press report on the Asian community and their condemnation on being negatively represented. Some viewers interpreted the ad as offensive towards Japanese women while other found it offensive towards Asian women. Viewing the ad from another perspective, it can be said that the so called *Asian women*, depicts an overlap of a young woman as well as an Asian, which can be associated with the concept of intersectionality developed by Crenshaw (1989/2018). The interplay of the two social groups, that is, gender and ethnicity are seen to work together as the *buru-sera* myth is implemented. Aside this, for someone who identifies more with Japanese women, an interplay of nationality and gender are seen to work together. Hence, these different identities are likely to experience the ad differently, thus, facing discrimination or gratification in different ways; through gender, age, ethnicity, nationality that have been marginalized in society. As such in this case, not only does identifying with being a woman throw in common grounds of discrimination or gratification, but also their nationality, ethnicity and age.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that The Smell of Spring narrative ad justifies Weinberger' (2013) findings which states that 94 percent of practitioners regard humor as an effective way to gain attention. The Smell of Spring ad gained a lot of online presence on mainstream and social media with this strategy. These were visible in the feedback from a viewer from South Korea who started a petition on Twitter to remove the ad, a press conference held by Hornbach in response to the controversy on a separate website, criticism on YouTube channel, a popularly known YouTube channel called Asian Boss, as well as news broadcast by DW TV. Although the use of these advertising strategies promoted the brand, reaction from most viewers showcased the need to consider sensitivity to the narrative content. Drawing from this, it should be noted that even though concepts or stereotypes used in creating humorous effects may not necessarily be true, they can lead to a societal representation and construction towards groups. Accordingly, it can be described as a way through which advertising contents contribute to social construction of group identities as well as construction of social reality where meanings are produced and negotiated (De Fina, 2012 & Galbin,2014).

Overall, the use of stereotyped narrative that works with humor in The Smell of Spring ad was successful in attracting attention to the brand. However, as an organization or company it may be necessary to factor in its influence on potential customers, effect on purchase of the product as well as the image of the brand. Moreover, it is essential to question if all publicity good publicity? Although there is a high chance of increasing brand awareness, they may be for the wrong reasons (Eisend, 2006). That is to say that it is necessary to be cautious with the kind of advertising strategies adopted, especially when implementing stereotype in ads with regards to social groups as it may backfire. Besides, negative reactions may tarnish the image of the brand or equally depict a bad impression of the brand as was the case for Hornbach. Although there was some amount of positive reactions to the Smell of Spring ad, on April 2, 2019, Hornbach had to address an increasing number of critical comments received on the same ad campaign. The company sought to avoid

misinterpretation by providing a clear position in the controversy surrounding the ad. In their response to viewer's criticism, they apologized for the impression the ad caused, extended an invitation for a dialogue at the company's headquarters and used the company's website as a platform to point out any clarifications. It can therefore be argued that, the type of appeal as well as the manner in which an ad is presented counts in maximizing or making the ad a nuisance if not handled sensitively (Prendergast's, 2003).

RQ 2: How social groups are represented in the ad

As the chosen ad for analysis received several critical comments in Japanese, Korean or Chinese on Hornbach's official YouTube channel, it was important to explore why. Additionally, the press conference held to address the controversy surrounding the ad explicitly stated that most of the criticisms came from East Asia as well as the Asian community in Germany. This led to my curiosity in finding explanations for the backlash, thus exploring how ads represent groups.

After analyzing the ad, the findings indicated the possible social groups that are visible in the ad as well as how they had been represented or portrayed. More specifically, the ad showed how different social groups emerged through the stereotypes used. It was interesting to note that although there were other social groups shown in the ad, such as old men or gardeners, there were no controversies raised regarding those groups. Therefore, provoking the thought of why most of the people who opposed the ad raised concerns only about discrimination against Asian women. A possible reason for this reaction is that the woman who smelled the used clothes of the white old men played the 'victim' in showcasing the humorist effect. In the analysis of the ad, it was found that features which enhanced the thought of 'Asian women' as the social group is the use of elements such as the looks of a Japanese woman character as the buyer, Hornbach's confirmation of Japanese writing on the vacuum packaging machine, the 'vending machine culture' which is associated with Japanese as well as the reverse buru-sera phenomenon. Another point taken is that, although elements in the ad pointed to a lot of similarities with the Japanese, the controversies raised against the ad perceived

the ad as discriminatory towards *Asian women*. Hence, the findings developed show that the people who condemned the ad identify the Japanese woman as part of a larger social group, which is the Asians. This perception, in other words, drives the thought that if the ad discriminates against Japanese women, it means all Asians have equally been discriminated against. The ad seems to specifically produce a representation of Japanese women, but I find it interesting how people who do not belong to this specific group, somehow expand this representation to all Asians. For instance, with comments such as *'Korean, Chinese and Japanese nationals and Asians are united'*. Considering critical analysis of the elements identified in the ad was purely out of theory-based exploration and the press statement released by the company.

From a broader perspective, the ad features different social groups which viewers may identify themselves with; old white men, lab scientists, young Asian women, women, men and old men who do garden work. However, in response, there seemed to be a dominant voice which condemned the ad as identified by the company in their press information. The data showcased a lot of negative emotions than positive were posted on YouTube. This is because, ways in which groups are represented could generate positive or negative emotions (Tajfel, 2010). Although this may not necessarily confirm Tajfel's (2010) claim, it could be possible that people who posted more negative reactions felt more inclined to do so compared to people who were positive, indifferent or found it humorous.

RQ 3: Viewers reactions to the ad

As part of examining The Smell of Spring ad, it was important to explore how and what the viewers reacted to in the ad. Aside from the fact that posting on YouTube was a good way to know how people perceived the ad, it also provided audiences with a voice. This is in contrast with the conventional way of watching commercials on TV with almost no outlet for expressing their thoughts. Analyzing reactions from the audience allowed this thesis study to be seen from other perspectives other than the researcher. In addition, information developed from the viewer's reaction sources the

basis of this thesis as it directly provides data on how people interpret the ad, the motivation behind their reaction, how viewers see different social groups as being represented in the ad and how they sometimes draw on their social identity to validate their reactions towards the ad.

In all, there were viewers who were offended by the content, those who found the ad humorous, viewers who tried to explain the concept behind the content and others who stated that they found the ad unclear. Aside controversies from Hornbach's YouTube channel, the ad also received criticism from a written petition from an offended audience on Hornbach's twitter page. All these reactions collected for the analysis in this study showed that a dominant group responded offended to the narrative ad. Most of the members who made up the dominant group similarly matched the group identified by Hornbach's press information, which is the Asian community. This correlation with people who commented on YouTube was determined from the languages used by the viewers in commenting on the ad; which were in Korean, Japanese and Chinese. This is not to imply that the use of these languages' points to the people's national roots, rather, that there may be a high chance that the people who commented with these languages identify with the Asians (Anderson, 2006).

From the observed connection between the use of the buru-sera stereotype and the dominated response from this particular social group, it can be explained that the Asian group identifies with the Japanese woman in the ad, leading to dominance of offended reactions. In effect, the affected/represented group, according to the press report and findings developed can be affirmed as Asians. Some viewers expressed that they had not been well represented and that it was a way for the whites to showcase their white supremacy whereas others felt the ad looked down on Asian women. Another interesting perspective which was observed was how some viewers criticized Germans rather than Hornbach. The idea of addressing the ad as a nation from the perspective of Nazi German history and using it as a bases for explaining racism in the ad was made visible. In fact, this addresses a very important point on how some viewers label the creators of the ad as 'Germans'. In their comments,

viewer's stances constructed Germans as the 'negative other' based on the historical awareness of German identity as tarnished by the anti-semitism or the prejudice against Jewish people. Their reactions tend to make the German's past their present in order to support their statements (Siddi, 2018).

Even though the company applied reversed stereotype as a support to make it easier for people to understand the message behind the ad (McGarty et.al ,2002), it was interpreted rather differently. Accordingly, the ad sparks a lot of negative reactions from potential customers based on their own interpretation. Here, it was noted that although a number of characters associated with white people and Asians were illustrated in the ad, a lot of criticisms emerged from the Asian community.

RQ 4: How social groups are visible in viewers' reaction to the ad

While reviewing the data for viewer's reactions, several people commented with reference to their social belonging to a group. As such, it was essential to explore this field as it significantly throws more light on the aim of this study. Findings on this study indicate how viewers expressed themselves in ways that portrayed a sense of belongingness (De Bolla et. al, 2005; Stanley,2003) as suggested as an element of a group in the theoretical background. Data gathered show how people identify themselves with nation or social group with expressions such as *"I am Japanese and found it funny"* *"Don't judge Germans"* *"Korean, Chinese and Japanese nationals and Asians are united."* Hence with the mindset of 'imagined communities' as explained by Anderson (2006), viewers responded by claiming identity which drew a boundary. Effectively, others were perceived as different. Aside this, it was observed that viewers made social group visible in the comments by positioning themselves or claiming ownership of the social group. Thus, some viewers who identified themselves with a social/ethnic group justified their entitlement to react in a certain way. People demonstrated this by claiming membership as a social group, that is Asian, with posts like, *Germans are really the worst alongside America & England* and then used this to criticize the ad. People also claimed membership of a national group, for example, a Japanese who lived in Germany and used it

as a status or right to explain the ad to others. For instance, with comments such as *I am Japanese and found it funny... I used to live in Germany and was asked about it several times...Plus, Germany has a reputation for its unique sense of humor, resulted in this.*

In effect, the represented group, felt defensive with their belongingness as a group against the others whom they felt threatened by. Thus, there was a unifying basis for the represented group to prove a point or explain why they felt they had not been well represented in the ad. The data shows the stereotyped group who were represented addressed the ad as Germans and condemned Germans as such; showcasing Asians versus Germans. It should be noted that most of the audience who referred to the ad as ‘made by the Germans’ mostly commented in Japanese, Korean or Chinese. Thus, another evidence of how nationalism and social group belongingness plays a role as mental construct and social construct (Tajfel, 2010 and Ting, 2008).

One could also associate constant repetition of Asian women, Japanese women or Asians as the victim in the ad since there were no comments which addressed women per se as victims. This raises a remarkable contradiction to Hornbach’s press information which stated that the ad was intended to debunk the stereotype used against women. Rather, it was interpreted as discriminatory against the Asian women. A possible perspective on this could be pointed to how sensitive the society has become such that expressing stances on certain topics seem inappropriate. This might play out as no surprise since people easily accuse stance or content related to culture, gender or race. Nowadays, people have become more active to such topics, thus making society determinants of what media should project. As inferred by Potter (2009/1958), this could be because society has become aware of the influence of advertising as an instrument of social control.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore how social groups are represented in Hornbach's, The Smell of Spring ad as well as how viewers reacted to the ad via social media (YouTube). The research identified elements and strategies which were used to represent social groups in the case of this study. Findings revealed that the stereotype called buru-sera was used as an advertising strategy in The Smell of Spring ad to create a humorous effect. Furthermore, narrative was equally implemented as an engaging tool, coupled with stereotype to enhance humor in the ad content. Buru-sera, which is a stereotype attached to the Japanese was creatively implemented in reverse in the ad, thus portraying Japanese women. The use of the buru-sera myth in reverse plays out as humorous, however this strategy leads to a lot of controversy from most viewers who identified themselves as Asians. The controversial reaction from the Asians stated that they had not been well represented in the ad. Although there was a lot of demand to take down the ad, Hornbach did not yield, rather, the company held a press conference to address clarifications in the ad to the represented group.

In order to determine the opinion of others on the ad, it was important to examine the viewers reaction to the ad. Feedback from viewers was relevant in drawing connections or differences in interpretations made from analyzing the advert. It was clearly shown that, interpretations made from the ad were supported and to some extent explained by comments made by viewers. Although most people who commented in Chinese, Korean or Japanese reacted negatively, there were a few comments which responded rather humored or indifferent and tended to explain the concept used in the ad. Moreover, the languages used by people who had offended stances correlate with the South East Asian group which was also established by Hornbach. The unifying basis which was commonly observed among the group was that the Asian/Asian woman had not been well portrayed in the ad, hence responding as the victims in the use of aggressive humor as explained by Kazarian & Martin (2004). In light of this, the group had a common reason to have a stance against the humorist; an evident illustration of imagined community as a mental construct. Meanwhile, it was interesting to

note that there were no complaints about the old white gardeners (another visible social group in the ad) as being portrayed negatively.

In all, this case study raises the question of how far advertising industries can go with stereotypes. It also questions if such ads are necessarily a bad thing, because after all, it attracts the needed attention to the brand. More so, what ethical measures are in place to monitor these kinds of ads. Aside this, following Hornbach's management of crisis communication, it provides a reminder of no publicity as bad publicity; especially considering the controversies the ad received and the company's refusal to take it down. The Smell of Spring narrative ad crisis corresponds with advertising controversies of other brands such as Nike, European Union, Dove, Pepsi, Nivea and H&M which have faced similar criticisms in relation to depicting racism, discrimination, misjudgment and shaped how gender roles are portrayed. A more specific example is Pepsi's controversial ad in 2017 which was accused of mocking the Black Lives Matter Movement. In the ad, Pepsi was trying to project unity, peace and understanding but rather, it was interpreted as underrating the event of the Black Lives Matter Movement which was a widespread of protest against the rampant killings of black people by the police in the U.S. As mention in the discussion section, all these examples reflect how 'sensitive driven' society is on such topics.

On a broader scale, does the media contribute to reinforcing ideas that makes something a racist or sexist event? Advertising inclusive. As the agenda setting theory clear states in the theoretical background setting, mass media equally persuades ideas on what people should think about. Although, people have a diverse platform to choose from, constant pattern on certain topics in the media may cause people to react. Nowadays, this is more advanced as people can easily create online communities to drive an audience in support of social movement.

Finally, as Drumwright and Murphy (2009) put it, these have been pressing matters in advertising for some time now and as such this study confirms and contributes to bringing it to attention. Apart from addressing advertising companies, findings from this research study can also be

applied to other organization who rely on these concepts to address the public such as movie producing industries, publishing houses as well as international organizations like World Health Organizations, United Nations, European Union, etc. This study provides insight to advertisers to be more cautious about the kind of content used to draw attention to their product.

6.1 Limitations and Recommendations for Further research

As a researcher, I found the non-verbal nature of the narrative ad challenging in providing a factual conclusion to the interpretation of the ad. Hence, it is likely that some important elements or perspectives from the advertiser's point of view may have been overlooked. As part of the limitations, it was noted that although viewers gave their interpretations of the ad, there was less reaction in the YouTube comments from people who did not complain about the ad. Reactions from the people who did not complain about the ad would have provided an underlining picture of the effect of the ad on both sides, that is, the group which was affected/represented/complained about the ad and the 'unaffected'/group which did not complain. It would have been interesting to determine if the unaffected group found the ad humorous, offensive, indifferent or unclear.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the press statement affirmed that the intention of the ad was to debunk the typical stereotype of gender clichés by portraying the woman character as self-confident in the ad since the men rather than the women are seen undressing. However, less controversy from people who did not complain about women smelling the clothes/underwear of the men may be a basis for confirming Hornbach's focus on Japanese/Asian women and not all woman per se. Nevertheless, it provides an opportunity for further studies to seek the opinions of the other social groups.

In addition, tackling the study with a crisis management perspective could also be remarkable. This can contribute to crisis management by identifying the things that create conditions for crisis to occur. This knowledge allows interested companies to proactively prepare by developing diverse and effective strategies towards controlling similar crisis. Effectively, companies who are well prepared

to tackle these issues do not risk an expensive loss when customers mistrust their product/brand. In addition, the data used in this study provided concrete information, supported by conclusions made from Hornbach's press conference statement. Hence, it is recommended that further research on this study should pay more attention to how companies can avoid such communication crisis and also how best they can be resolved when such issues occur.

Another limitation of this study was with the languages which were used in commenting in the selected post. Most of the viewer's reactions relied on Google Translate to understand most of the comments. Even though to some extent the ad comments were understandable, they were by no means easily interpreted. As such, with less language barrier, some comments could probably have been interpreted with a clearer understanding.

6.2 Implications

The findings of this study provide insight for advertisers who are heavily reliant on stereotypes and humor narratives as strategies to attract attention to their products. Furthermore, this research contributes to knowledge on crisis communication and the role of an organization in resolving them. Although in this case, Hornbach did not apply the public feedback of their audience to modify the ad or take down the ad, the company addressed the issue with a press conference and statement to clarify the ad. This insight is relevant to how organizations need to be prepared to address crisis communications when they arise.

With The Smell of Spring narrative ad as case a study, the researcher illustrated how social groups are represented in ads and how viewers reacted. From a more specific perspective, the study showed how social groups were represented in The Smell of Spring narrative ad. Findings gathered from analyzing the data from viewers suggest that advertisers need to be sensitive to the kind of content as well as strategies used to portray social groups. This is because, in as much as publicity will be gained, the image of the brand may be blemished. Moreover, the adoption of social media in advertising gives viewers a platform to voice out their opinions on what kind of content they deem

appropriate. This is because advertisements that are not created with the audience in mind may lead to misinterpretation, and in effect may influence society or develop misconceptions towards people, especially social groups. After all, Hornbach's ad could also be interpreted as well-meaning, and seen as carrying a message to portray women as confident in breaking the buru-sera myth. However, it is easily misinterpreted by viewers who see racism and sexism in the ad.

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