



## Out of the Closet: The Role of Gay Men as Reflected in the Philippine Advertisements

Aileen Bautista<sup>1\*</sup> and Allan Villaverde <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> De La Salle University - Manila

<sup>2</sup> De La Salle University - Manila

\*Corresponding Author: aileen.bautista@dlsu.edu.ph

**Abstract:** The roles of men and women in a society are reflected upon how they are portrayed in various advertisements (Salonga, 2018). However, in the Philippine society that is known to be the top 10 among the “gay-friendly” countries (Tubeza, 2013), no recent study has validated this claim. Hence, this paper attempts to explore how the Philippine society views the roles of gay men in its society based on how they are portrayed in television and Internet ads. Using the Social Identity Theory as the study’s framework, this research adapted the studies of Salonga (2018) and Oakenfull and Greenlee (2004). In addition, this study uses content analysis and multimodal approach to dissect the cultural, linguistic components of the adverts that present various rules and roles that are assigned among gay men. The findings of this study reveal that gay men are viewed to have superficial roles in the Philippine society. However, the recent gay advertisements are used as tools to correct wrong notions about them. Thus, maximizing the capacity of the advertisements to be the platform in reshaping the current roles of gay men in the Philippines.

**Key Words:** sociolinguistics; gender; gay study

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the Philippines being a predominantly Catholic nation, effeminacy did not disappear in Philippine society since the time of the Spaniards (Garcia, 2008). In fact, in the paper of Manalastas, Ojanen, Torre, Ratanashevorn, Hong, Kumaresan, and Verramuthu (2017), it was reported that the Philippines was one of the gay-friendliest nations in South East Asia. Singaporeans, Thais, and Filipinos were found to be the least rejecting of gay orientation in the region (Manalastas, et al., 2017).

However, if the Philippine society were truly tolerant of (male) homosexuality, Filipinos would see them, not “just flaming transvestites shrieking their

heads off on TV sitcoms and variety shows” (Garcia, 2008) instead of being human beings. Furthermore, he asserted that “Filipinos have yet to see transvestism as legitimate in ‘serious’ professions—male senators filibustering from the podium wrapped in elegant, two-toned pashminas, or CEOs strutting around open-air malls wearing power skirts and designer leather pumps in public” (Garcia, 2008).

Parallel with such aversion towards gay men in the real world, advertisers in the reel realm may also project such a prudent approach to having gay-themed commercials (Cabosky, 2017). It is due to the fact that a number of male and female heterosexual consumers or viewers are still uncomfortable toward gay content, especially when the content tends to be intimate (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2004; Tsai, 2017). For example, a



Presented at the DLSU Research Congress 2019  
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines  
June 19 to 21, 2019

2014 poll found that a plurality of Americans thought it was “inappropriate” for ESPN to show a same-sex kiss following the gay athlete Michael Sam’s drafting into the National Football League (Cabosky, 2017). Therefore, ads containing gay or lesbian characters may not be that salient, unless these ads are designed to tap the pre-determined groups of consumers – gays and lesbians (Cabosky, 2017). To simply put it, there seems to be a niche audience for these gay-themed advertisements rather than the mainstream audience (Cabosky, 2017); thus, posing issues because of the assumed lewdness in their themes, they are not considered for public consumption (Cabosky, 2017).

Those issues birthed the use of gay window advertising or inclusion of implicit gay themes or messages to the ads, the advertisements --- or informally called as adverts. As the rise of the power of the LGBTQ+ these days, adverts have become more upfront that they intentionally show commercials that reflect who they are.

It is interesting that the inclusion of “a gay market by and for gay people” gave birth to the marriage of the social and the capitalist movement (Johnson, 2018, p. 55) as we gear towards the fruition of globalization.

Given the rise of the LGBTQ+, it is piquing to explore the identity of gay men based on the gay advertisements. In response to this, this research is inspired by Salonga’s (2007) investigation on the role of women in ICT related Philippines commercials.

Based on the existing studies about gay commercials which are mostly quantitative in approach, (Cabosky, 2017; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Oakenfull, 2012; Branchick, 2007). One study aimed at understanding the view of heterosexuals with regard to the gay or homosexuals (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005). Meanwhile, the research of Oakenfull (2012) explored the influence the gender identity to patronage products. The study discovered that most products are perceived to have gender in which most products have sex-typed identities like masculine or feminine (Oakenfull, 2012). In addition, strongly identified gay males have higher usage of feminine brands than the weakly-identified gay males. For Cabosky (2017), his study showed that despite gays possessing purchasing powers to be tapped by advertisers, gay commercials still have a target or niche audience, not to be mainstreamed. Branchick’s (2007) study, which analyzed and annotated transcripts found out that gay men and lesbians could determine the subtle gay themes. However, homosexuals could not.

From a few pieces of literature in relation to this present study, it is evident that only one study explored through content analysis. Also, no existing studies were conducted

Moreover, this paper aims to find out the perceived roles of gay men as presented on the television or internet adverts and to know the acceptable or the ideal gay men based on how they are portrayed from the television and the Internet adverts.

Based on these aims, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceived roles of gay men in Philippine society as presented from the television and Internet ads?
2. What are the acceptable gay men, and the “ideal gay men” based on how they are portrayed on television / Internet ads?

In this paper, acceptability is defined as tolerance and freedom to do what an individual does, wear what s/he desires, and be respected accordingly without being judged, mocked, hurt, or killed (Garcia, 2008).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979). Based on this theory, society is composed of the main groups. In each group, “inter-conflict” is inevitable as some members of the group cannot conform to all the expectations and rules in the group.

As a result, this conflict forces the group to experience “social change” and “social mobility” (these terms are not used for their sociological sense). “These conflicts can be conceived, therefore, as creating a subclass or a subcategory of the subjective intergroup dichotomization characteristic of that extreme of the belief continuum” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 79).

Hence, the birth of “social categorization,” which is a cognitive tool that “segments, classifies, and orders the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of action” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 84). This results in the “differentiation” that “maintain[s] or achieve[s] superiority over an out-group on some dimensions. This means that the roles of the other members of society are dictated by the dominant group.” Hence, the new sub-group, who is now considered as the



“minority,” cannot overpower the existing dominant group as the dominant group is still controlling the minority group.

## 2.2. Research Design

The design of this study is adapted from the study of Oakenfull and Greenlee (2004) that used multimodal analysis, coding, and categorization of themes and patterns presented in the ads. Concerning the areas to be coded in the gay men advertisements, the study of Branchick (2007, p. 148) was used where advertisements were coded based on the following components:

1. the presence of intimacy (men touching or embracing each other in an affectionate or eroticized way);
2. celebrities or other models known to be gay;
3. men undertaking an activity typically done by married couples (like raising a child, looking for a house to buy or rent);
4. men in an effeminate pose;
5. men dressed as women (in “drag”);
6. men undertaking traditionally “gay” occupations like hairdresser or decorator;
7. men depicted as rejecting women’s advances; and
8. men depicted as being rejected by a group of men.

However, other recurring themes and components which were not mentioned above were also noted because these were the unique characteristics that the Philippine advertisements have that other countries do not.

Aside from the guidelines used in the study of Branchick (2007), the advertisements were coded according to the following components:

1. verbal;
2. non-verbals (facial expression, hand gestures, distance from other characters, actions);
3. clothing and accessories;
4. setting (place and scenario);
5. background music;
6. the message of the texts;
7. voice over;
8. storyline / plot; and
9. relationship of the product to the gay man and other characters.

## 2.3 Data Collection and Sampling

This study used all the nine existing advertisements that were aired on national television or were shown through YouTube, which had explicit inclusion of gay characters and/or endorsers, and plot related to gay. Hence, advertisements that are categorized as “gay window” advertisements were excluded.

Gay window advertising is characterized by the absence of any gay character, but the actions, objects, and/or dialogues and expressions suggest gay themes, which is more likely to be identified by gay people but not the heterosexuals. Also, it has a danger for it to be overinterpreted. Given this issue, the researchers decided to adopt the parameters that were set by Branchick (2007). Based on this, the study used all of the following advertisements with gay characters:

1. Uber Philippines
2. Bench Fragrances: How long can you keep a secret?
3. Smart
4. Globe: #ThisIsWhyIROamInBangkok
5. Pantene (Kevin Balot)
6. PLDT commercial (Gerard Anderson)
7. Minola Cooking Oil
8. Alaska Crema asada
9. Funstastyk Young Pork Tocino

## 2.4 Data Analysis Procedures

After the selection of the adverts based on the study of Branchick (2007), each aspect of the commercial was analyzed through the coding process that is used by Branchick (2007) and Oakenfull and Greenlee (2004). The two researchers provided separate codes for each commercial, which may have focused on the non-verbals, linguistic features, symbols, background music, presence, and the roles of other characters, story, and connection between the product and the theme of the advert. Aside from the content, the adverts were analyzed linguistically and culturally with consideration on social, family acceptance, national awareness, and global trend. Thus, employing multimodal analysis, coding, and categorization of themes or patterns in the adverts.

During the instances when the two raters did not agree on the coding, another person who is learned in gender studies broke the tie.

After the coding of data, the researchers attempted to look at the emerging themes from the data. Also, the new themes were well scrutinized.

### 2.5. Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the perspective of the viewers during the analysis of the adverts. Hence, the study does not assume the perspective of the advertisers or the company owners of the merchandise or products being advertised.



**In set:** Bella Y. is on the line hearing the entire conversation between Fil guy and Caucasian guy  
**Agenda:** Look for the "hiya hiya" needle that the Fil guy's grandma asked him to look  
**Clothing:** Fil guy denim jacket and shirt, jeans, and sneakers

Fig. 1 Sample Multimodal Analysis Preliminaries

Moreover, the existing number at the onset of the coding and analysis of this study was only nine commercials with gay characters, and all of these are included in this study. However, a few adverts that have been released while this study was ongoing were no longer included.

In addition, the terms "gay men" and "homosexual" can be interchanged in this paper. The term queer is not used in this study since its definition is quite ambiguous as various researchers and authors define it.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. The Perceived Roles of Gay men in the Philippine Society

Based on the data, the findings revealed that gay men have no established roles compared to the males and females. However, the adverts mostly point out that gay men serve as a source of entertainment in Philippine society; hence, to elicit

joy and laughter among the viewers. This is portrayed in Bench, and Globe adverts where gay men are commonly sharing their "fun" and "romantic" anecdote to their peers or through social media. This was evident in some comments of the viewers on these videos. Some, though, found the videos "cute" and unorthodox.

Despite the absence of a definite role of gay men in society, an emerging role that is assigned to them is to give care, like that of a mother's care. Sadly, though, it is to take care of their own kind and to empower one another to be bold in facing the tide. These can be observed in the advertisements of the gay icons like Vice Ganda who has a subtle way of empowering the gay community through the line: "*hindi porke't ganun na ang nakasanayan, ganun na dapat...*" and Kevin Balot in her Pantene commercial when she was holding the hands of the younger gay men. This emerging role validates the claim of Tajfel and Turner (1979) that when a sub-group detached itself from its former group, it adapts the roles of any major groups that exist, which is usually the opposite role of the group where they came from. In the context of this study, gay men are undergoing a process of "social mobility" from the lens of Tajfel and Turner.

In addition, albeit the absence of any established role of homosexual in the Philippines, it is important to acknowledge as reflected in some adverts, the Filipino families --- headed by the patriarchs --- become more open to their family members who come out of the closet. In the adverts of Smart and Bench, the gay men had difficulty in revealing their gender preferences to their fathers until it was shown that the fathers accepted them because of their love for their sons. It is important to take note, though, that none of the adverts showed a confrontation or a face-to-face encounter where the gay characters unfurled their capes. In Smart, the Facebook chat was utilized for this purpose while in Bench, the father wrote a short note to his son that he was able to "smell" him.

Oakenfull's (2012) study presented that establishing gay identity and their recognition in society may comprise of the following levels: 1) attraction; 2) sexual experience; 3) "self-labeling"; 4) self-disclosure; 5) acknowledgment of the value of both the homosexual and the heterosexual. Thus, everything begins with the shallow perception about the homosexuals until it is used as leverage for ulterior purposes such as total integration in the target community.



### 3.2. *The Acceptable or Ideal Gay*

#### 3.2.1. *Muted Clothing*

It is evident that all advertisements — in exception to Kevin Balot's Pantene advertisement — show that gay men should wear muted clothing that does not distinguish them from the male populace. All commercials even those of Vice Ganda show that gay men wear pants. For Bench commercial, the only indicator that the character is gay is his pink t-shirt and a small scarf wrapped around his neck. For Uber, Smart, PLDT, Minola, and Globe, the gay characters do not have any distinct clothing that identifies them as gay men. Interestingly, even Vice Ganda's clothing in the Funstastyk Pork Tocino commercial is muted: light gray coat and pants.

Garcia (2008) explained that despite the existence of cross-dressing in the Philippines, this is "only allowed on certain social classes and with certain acceptable contexts among entertainers and *parloristas* (beauticians) for instance during carnivalesque celebrations and fiestas" (p. 11).

Conversely, despite the common male clothing for gay men on commercials even for Vice Ganda, Kevin Balot seems to be the only gay personality who wears feminine clothing in the form of a long white dress. Balot, being a beauty title holder and transgender, is the only gay personality who wore a dress on gay-themed Philippine advertisements used in this study. Looking into the year this advert was posted compared to other gay adverts, this ad is considered the latest. Given this, it may be assumed that the Philippine society is slowly opening its doors to gay men especially that the comments of the viewers in the advert are mostly positive.

#### 3.2.2. *Youthful*

None of the adverts presented old gay men, even the Pantene Kevin Balot advert that showed different gay men of the age. Garcia (2008) blames this negative thinking to the presence of "effemophobic rage" among gay men whose legitimate social purpose may be to "remind Filipino children what they should never be" (p. 402). This

strong prejudice shows the "horrors" of living a life of a male homosexual especially when one reaches old age. Also, this is the phase where one "struggles oscillate between exuberance and pathos and between survival and loss as gay men struggle and maneuver in order to survive" (Manalansan, 2006, p. xiii).

#### 3.2.2. *Subtle Actions*

Focusing on the non-verbals in the adverts, most gay characters appear to behave like men. For example, the Minola advert shows a gay man who lives with his partner. This could not be guessed by the viewers if the YouTube video title did provide any form of a hint. That is because he looks like an ordinary man who works in an office. In addition, patting the shoulders and leaning on the partner is the only way to show intimacy between gay couples.

In terms of flirting, the Bench and Uber ads show that flirting must be in a subtle way, and it does not involve physical contact of any kind.

Based on the results of Cabosky's (2017) study, the portrayal of intimacy among gay-themed adverts diminishes as the scene becomes more intimate (p. 158); thus, veering away from the expected "immoral" acts. In addition, the gay-themed ads of the study showed same-sex intimacy through eye contact or patting the shoulders only.

#### 3.2.3. *The Model Offspring*

It is observed that four out of the nine adverts showed gay men are loving, responsible, and respectful sons. For Bench, the son pays respect to the father by doing the "mano," a sign of respect and by not being rude. For Globe, the gay man is a responsible grandson since he searches for the *hiya hiya* needle that his grandmother needs. All these show that advertisements provide a condition that society accepts gay men only when they are loving, responsible, and respectful sons. This conditional acceptance is a positive indicator that gay men are in the process of being accepted in the Philippine society. Likewise, it is too obvious not to ignore the fact that patriarchal acceptance is present in the two adverts (Bench and Smart), which shows that the reward of being a good son is to be accepted by one's own father.

From the advert, Kevin Balot's mother formalizes her acceptance in their family even though her father is still alive. It must be noted,



however, that Balot's father has also accepted her as reported by GMA Network (Medina, 2012). Upon close inspection, Balot's mother was strategically chosen for the advert because of the feminized values of care and nurture that are key values in the role of Balot to empower gay men.

Given all these folds of acceptance, despite the presence of the condition, acceptance is already precious in a country where homosexuality has been "demonized as a result of cultural and religious brainwashing (Garcia, 2008). Despite the claims that the "mirror" point of view in advertising exists, as it "reflects the values that exist and are dominant in society" (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 762), it is observable that "social change" can still thrive.

However, the fathers of the adverts with sons are both depicted as "authoritarian" which is, according to Grau and Zotos (2016, p. 763) is the usual depiction of men in a male-dominated society as age is a representation of power.

It is interesting that there hope despite the rift between the male-glorifying Philippine society and the LGBTQ+ community, to Philippine society slowly recognize another class group.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the roles and rules with regard to the gay men in Philippine society as shown from the Philippine television and Internet advertisements. Using the methodological framework of Branchick (2007) and Oakenfull and Greene (2005) in analyzing the text and the Social Identity theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), the study revealed that gay men have a superficial role of being the source of entertainment. However, it is evident that Philippine society is slowly accepting and accommodating the gay men, despite the parameters or conditions set for them.

#### 5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researchers thank Dr. Jose Cristina Pariña, Dr. Paolo Niño Valdez, Mr. Leif Andrew Garinto, and Mr. Jerico Esteron who guided, provided insightful suggestions and extended generous help and motivation in the readings about Philippine Gay Studies.

#### 6. REFERENCES

- [AlaskaMilk]. (2017, October 17). *New Alaska Crema-Asada 2-in-1 Sweetened Thick Creamer*. [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJrGpHc0yn0>.
- [BENCH/]. (2018, February 18). *How long can you keep a secret?* [Video File]. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mw\\_gHMNs5iE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mw_gHMNs5iE).
- Branchick, B. (2007) Queer Ads: Gay Male Imagery in American Advertising, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 10:2, 147-158, DOI: 10.1080/10253860701256232
- Cabosky, J. (2017). Advertising Gay and Lesbian-Themed Films to Mainstream and Niche Audiences: Variations in Portrayal of Intimacy and Stereotypes. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 25 (3), 151-165.
- [findnemo21]. (2010, July 11). *PLDT gay commercial*. [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YB7Zc26DOI>.
- [Fluidpost Ph]. (2012, October 9). *Funtastyk Young Pork Tocino TVC / Magnifique*. [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGkr4RfqPWs>.
- Garcia, N. C. (2008). *Philippine Gay Culture*. Diliman Quezon City: University of the Philippine Press.
- [globeph]. (2016, December 14). *#ThisIsWhyIROam in Bangkok*. [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPGw5mvQmKc>.
- Grau S. L. & Zotos, Y. C. (2016). Gender stereotypes in advertising: a review of current research.



**DLSU**  
**RESEARCH CONGRESS**  
Towards Industry 4.0  
Knowledge Building

**20**  
**19**

Presented at the DLSU Research Congress 2019  
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines  
June 19 to 21, 2019

- International Journal of Advertising*, 35 (5), 761 – 770.
- Haddock, G. & Zanna, M. P. (1998). Authoritarianism, values, and the favorability and structure of antigay attitudes. Herek, G. M. (Ed.). *Stigma and Sexual Orientation: Understanding Prejudice Against Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals*. Vol. 4. CA: Sage.
- Manalansan, M.F. (2006). *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press.
- Manalastas, E., Ojanen, T., Torre, B., & Ratanashevorn, R. (2017). Homonegativity in Southeast Asia: Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 17(1), 25-33.
- Medina, A. (13 November 2012). Beauty queen Kevin Balot happy to be accepted as a transgender by her father. *GMA News Online*.
- [Minola Premium Cooking Oil]. (2017, February 3). *Ngayong buwan ng pag-ibig, let us celebrate all kinds of love*. [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuzxHXEZi3w>.
- Oakenfull, G.K. (2012). Gay Consumers and Brand Usage: The Gender-Flexing Role of Gay Identity. *Psychology and Marketing*, 29(12), 968-979. doi:10.1002/mar.20578
- Oakenfull, G. K., & Greenlee, T. B. (may 2005). Queer Eye for a Gay Guy: Using Market-Specific Symbols in Advertising to Attract Gay Consumers Without Alienating the Mainstream. *Psychology & Marketing*, 22(5), 421-439. doi:10.1002/mar.20066
- [Pantene Philippines]. (2018, November 27). *Strength knows no gender. #StrongerNow* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZPhdSPsKzs>
- Salonga, A. O. (2007). *The Perfect Woman: Gendered Texts and High Technology in the Philippines* (R. F. Tupas, Ed.). Quezon City, Diliman: The University of the Philippines Press.
- [Smart Communications]. (2016, July 2). *Break down barriers and welcome change!* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHp-9aSQrk0>
- Social Media in The Philippines: A Year End Report. (2016, December 22). Retrieved March 13, 2019, from <https://houseofit.ph/understanding-social-media-in-the-philippines-a-year-end-report/>
- Tsai, W. (fall 2011). How Minority Consumers Use Targeted Advertising As Pathways to Self-Empowerment: Gay Men's and Lesbian's Reading Out-of-the-Closet Advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 40 (3), 85-97. doi:10.2753
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. *Political Psychology*, 276-293.
- Tubeza, P. (8 June 2013). PH ranks among gay-friendly in the world. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. Retrieved from <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/76977/ph-ranks-among-most-gay-friendly-in-the-world>
- [Uber]. (2017, April 26). *Hatid I #UBERSTORIES I Uber*. [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8ZDacSrQFg>
- Whitam, F. & Mathy, R. (1986). *Male Homosexuality in Four Societies: Brazil, Guatemala, the Philippines and the United States*. New York: Praeger Pacific.