THE MYTHOLOGY OF FEMINITY IN THAI SOCIETY REFLECTED IN ADVERTISEMENTS

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Abstract - This research aims to study about mythology conveyed through advertisements, particularly about feminity in Thai society. The results suggested that the meanings are made in advertisements by using signs. The researcher used semiotic analysis under the concept of mythology including the social and political contexts. The findings revealed that the meanings are made for women in Thai society as a mother and a wife which can be interpreted from mythology concept that women are regarded as a follower in Thai society.

Keywords - Mythology, Feminity

I. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a communication means used in marketing for selling products and services which is an important tool in consumer society. Advertising is also a communication purposes to persuade the consumers to make a decision for their consumption by using various channels. The more the marketing business grows, the higher the competition of marketing and servicing are. Besides, television has changed the system to be digital and results in the bigger number of channels that are broadcasting. This fact somehow supports more possibilities for more advertising accordingly. Moreover, advertising has also become a mass industry, especially through television. Henceforth, it can be said that advertising is surely important in the contemporary society. It has also grown into a part of daily life for people in the society. Although advertisements last only few seconds, [1] often times, they tend to be broadcasted through various presentation strategies. Thus, it can also be assumed that advertising does not only aim to sell products but the roles or the contents in advertisements may form a certain concept, belief, or value for the society. The meanings may be conveyed through cultural beliefs which can be naturally acquired. In other words, it can be seen as a deceptive concept or as known as 'mythology' for the people in the society to internalize unconsciously. [2] It is unarguable that advertisements, especially, on televisions nowadays, have had a huge influence on people's lives in the society since they are familiar media for everyone in the family. We can also say that each family owns at least one television. Moreover, the surveys from different websites such as kapook, prachatai, blognone, and siamintelligencer found that the two most watched TV. channels in Thailand are channel 3 and channel 7, accounted for 68 percent and 58 percent, respectively.[3] Therefore, the researcher had an interest in studying about mythology which is mediated through advertisements, particularly, the mythology that relates to feminity in Thai society by using the analysis of symbolic meaning in order to understand the mythology embedded in product advertisements.

II. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The advertisements used in this study were broadcasted on TV. channels, channel 3 and channel 7. The criteria for selecting the advertisements is that they are broadcasted on the two most watched TV. channels in Thailand. This study focused on the texts of the advertisements. The selected advertisements were broadcasted during a six-month period from January, 1st 2018 to July, 1st 2018.

III. METHODOLOGY

This current study on "The Mythology of Feminity in Thai Society Reflected in Advertisements" employed a textual analysis drawn from Saussure's semiotics and Barthes' myth. The method included identifying a various forms of signs in texts as presented in television advertisement in both linguistic and visual signs. Then, analyses on the meaning of signs and myth were conducted using the framework of Barhtes in connection with the Thai societal, political, economic and cultural contexts.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Semiotics

Semiotics is a concept, developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, which explains the process of signification or how to interpret signs appearing in texts as the whole product of communication.[4] and Roland Barthes further developed this concept to study myth. Barthes investigated the relationship among the signifier, the signified, and the sign. The signification of signs is arbitrary and therefore the meaning conveyed can be interpreted at multiple levels depending on individuals, agreements and regulations that are commonly known in society. In an attempt to analyze myth, Barthes drew on Saussure's work so as to understand and reveal ongoing, yet not widely

spoken, events in society.[5] Similarly, the current study conducted a literature review of these studies and then analyzed myth on the basis of Barthes' investigation of myth.

4.2 Myth

The "myth" is a concept developed by Roland Barthes, a French social critic. Barthes' analysis on myth presents an attempt to unveil occurrences that are not spoken in general. In other words, myth is referred to as "illusion", meaning speaking a particular language about something but the way people describe it varies from one to another. This is because individual speakers often put their own values when they speak. Myth can be communicated through anything that can be conveyed, and thus not necessarily limited to verbal languages. It may include, for example, paintings, photos, plays, campaign poster, sports, drinks, food, etc.[6] An analysis of signs drawing on Barthes' myth framework can be categorized into significaiton or structural semiology, which proposes that individual semantic units are not alone, but closely related into the central structure and thus enables a single unit meaningful. The signification process depends on the internal network and relations among each unit. According to the basic rules of signification or language use, myth is similar to a language or any other type of signs such as traffic sign. That is, these signs serve their duties with semantic units, or technically known as signs. In other words, myth is part of signification or language use, with no reliance upon contents or getting the meaning out of contents. This concept focuses on the importance of judgment in terms of interpretation of contents, the making of internal language structure, and cultural perspective on phenomenon.

V. THE RESULTS

From the study of mythology concerning feminity in Thai society using television advertisements analysis, the researcher found that the content meanings are made through various forms of sign. A great number of signifiers are used to make meanings of many different signifieds. The texts' meanings are read and analyzed by semiotic analysis. The findings revealed the samples of advertisements broadcasted on television selected for this study includes various products for various target groups such as children, adults, men, and women. The products are consumption goods such as body lotion, food seasonings, shampoo, soap etc. The analysis showed that the texts of the advertisements make the meanings of feminity in Thai society in two meanings as follows.

1. Meaning making of feminity in Thai society as a mother. From various advertisements' texts, it is mostly found that the most obvious meaning making of feminity is motherhood.The meaning is reflected through signs in the texts which presents women as a main presenter in some certain advertisements. The women's roles in the advertisements are quite similar such as doing a laundry, cooking, cleaning the house, caring for both children and a husband even though the roles are not necessarily relevant to the products of that advertisement. For example, the advertisement of an infant formula which should present about the quality, taste, or benefits of drinking it but the text emphasizes and presents a picture of a mother arranging her child's school bag by putting a bottle of milk in the bag. Another one is an advertisement of a mosquito repellent which also emphasizes the role of a mother spraying the mosquito repellent on her children's bodies. Lastly, an advertisement of an aspirin whichdoes not present the qualifications of the medicine, instead, it presents the role of a mother who has to take care of her child when being ill.

2. Meaning making of feminity in Thai society as a wife.The advertisements also make meanings of women as a wife through signs in the advertisements' texts such as the concept of beauty which obliges women to take care of their body at all times including smooth skin, bigger size of breasts more than they really are, or a perfect body shape. In contrast, these mentioned activities are not related to the products. For example, an advertisement of instant coffee when its qualifications should be emphasized such as the taste or fragrance, instead, there are other meanings which are made in those advertisements such asa focus on a body shape of the coffee drinker or drinking coffee makes you fall in love with the other coffee drinker. Lastly, an advertisement of toothpaste when it does not only present the qualifications of the toothpaste but also presents the role of a woman taking care of her husband even when brushing his own teeth or an advertisement of food seasoning which also presents the role of a wife cooking delicious food for her husband along with the qualifications of the product. In short, the women's roles presented in these advertisements is an ideal wife. The meaning making of feminity in Thai society through advertisements broadcasted on television showed that Thai women are meant to be a mother or a wife. However, if we critically analyze its mythology, we could see that the advertisements made the meanings of Thai women to be the follower by emphasizing the women's roles such as caring for the family or the domestic affairs without presenting the possibilities for women to work outside the house. The popular advertisements reflect the picture of a narrow space of work or a house and this has created the beliefs and valuesfor Thai society regarding Thai women as a follower or a carer for the house. These beliefs and values obstruct and oppress women to be under the power of patriarchal society either intentionally or unintentionally and this mythology is presented in popular advertisements.

VI. DISCUSSION

From the findings of'Mythology of Feminity in Thai Society Reflected in Advertisements' using textual analysis under the concept of semiotics is a study of meanings in terms of mythology. The findings of this study revealed that the meanings of women are made and presented as a follower. Its mythology reflects an illusion of Thai society in a way that both men and women are equal in their opportunities such as in education or employment. Nonetheless, Thai women are still restricted in the reality from the social structures including morality, values, or cultural beliefs. In addition, women are regarded as a follower even if they ever become a leader, they can only perform their duties in their own family alone. The social structures restrict and marginalize women from social participation as can be seen from the advertisements that attempt to construct or emphasize the mythology of Thai women as inferior. It can be expected from the society that men are the leaders and determiners of social values [7] or a dominant in the society by pressuring their power [8] as presented in the advertisements.Importantly, the mythology of Thai women as a follower conceals the actual power relationship in the society and also patronizes the benefits of men.

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