

On-Screen Inclusivity: Analyzing the Concepts of Family in Three German Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

Cultural and social changes in an increasingly tolerant and progressive German society allow minority families to emerge in the community. Companies use the relatively new family diversity issue to create advertisements with this theme to create an original advertisement. Besides, many companies wish to make a statement that they uphold diversity by showing inclusive advertisements on family concepts' diversity. Among these advertisements, three German advertisements raise the theme of family diversity, namely *Bärenmarke: Nichts geht über Familie* (2019), *Telekom: Für alle die Familie sind* (2017) and *McDonald's wünscht allen Familien einen frohen Family Day* (2019). In this study, the author used a descriptive method and four variables of family concepts based on *Family Report* (2017) to find out each ad's strategies in providing space for various family concepts to package an inclusive ad. The result is that despite applying different strategies, all advertisements try to embrace inclusiveness value in portraying family.

Keywords: Diversity, Inclusivity, TV Advertisement, Family

1. INTRODUCTION

Every individual has been a part of a family. It is a place to experience socialization for the first time. Family and society exist in a structural relationship as the society is built upon families [1]. In living in a society, there are dynamic cultural and social values that constantly transform along with zeitgeist changes. These changes may influence the definition of families in a particular society. In several western countries, there is an increasingly liberal and progressive worldview that paves the way for family definitions formerly unexposed to a broader public. Today, with the proliferation of new family-related concepts, a conventional family is no longer the sole definition of family.

The presence of family diversity is relatively new among many societies. Despite the possibility of provoking hostile receptions, the novelty of this issue (along with how the issue itself is presented nowadays) implies the value of originality. Originality suggests the capability of thinking independently and creatively. It also implies the quality of becoming unique, exciting, and distinct from others. On the other hand, the family is also a notion which typically carries the value of familiarity. Familiarity can be defined as the feeling of knowing a particular set of knowledge or objects or the quality of being well-understood. Something may become easily recognized (familiar) because of a longstanding or close relationship. Both originality and familiarity are two aspects that are essential for the public in seeing an advertisement. The strategy of fusing

originality and familiarity may produce advertisements that are memorable for consumers [2].

In Germany, family advertisements on TV have existed since the 20th century [3]. Family advertisements have become a standard format in promoting many products. *Pro-Medienmagazin* wrote that, many companies prefer conventional views rather than their progressive counterparts in producing German TV advertisements. Advertisement content usually presents the image of a happy family consisting of a father, a mother, and two children. There is also a clear division of roles among family members, in which the women take domestic responsibilities while the men work in public spaces [4]. For the wider public, such an element of domesticity carries the value of familiarity. This value exactly becomes the selling point of the advertisement. Although the family sector in Germany is experiencing a crisis of childlessness [5], family-themed advertisement is still widely produced by many German companies.

From the explanation above, it is safe to conclude that up to this point, the depiction of families in advertisement has been focusing on a widely accepted concept of family. In German law, a "family" consists of parents and their children. The subject of "children" may refer to either biological children, stepchildren, or adopted children [6]. From such definition, children are consequently an essential factor in constituting a family. In addition to this, based on [8], a nuclear family (a Caucasian family consisting of a father, a mother, and biological children) is a core concept of family in Germany. This concept of a nuclear family becomes a

traditional family in Germany, which influences advertisement with conventional views.

Nevertheless, today is increasingly diverse concepts of the family influence the dynamics in which advertisements represent a family. Corporations have started presenting diverse concepts of family as a support for inclusivity agendas. In the Cambridge dictionary, the word “inclusivity” is defined as a quality of attempting to involve different types of people while treating them fairly and equally [7]. Inclusivity may be understood as a practice or a regulation involving exempted or marginalized groups of people, such as minority groups, which also exist in Germany’s new family concepts. According to data from [9] married heterosexual couples with minors are the most representative group of the German family, consisting of 5.5 million out of 8.8 million households in total. The quantitative gap between majority and minority families in Germany is noticeable. With such few numbers, it would be difficult to find minority families in real life that their existence might not be perceived as “real”. This condition leads to the stigma against minority families, who are deemed strange or unusual. Nonetheless, with their massive number, advertisements on TV hold the power to present any discourses on these families to the broader public. Drew in [3] argues that it is possible for social discourse and family culture to be influenced by TV advertisements, which develop definitive versions of a family. It could seemingly be achieved through acts of consumption. By watching TV advertisements, consumers may be presented a form of subjectivity, which goods are consumed by an ideal family and which brands should be chosen to make the ideal concept a reality. Therefore, TV advertisement functions as a text that produces the ideal family’s discourses and broadcasts the idea to family spaces worldwide. It normalizes subjectivity in a presented family while making the idea known to a broader public [3]. Therefore, the presence of diverse types of families in TV advertisements can be used by companies to create positive interpretations of these minority families.

This article discusses the themes of inclusivity in German TV advertisements, which represent different concepts of family. The word “family” typically implies a father, a mother, and at least a child. The nuclear family is the foundation of ideal consumptions acceptable to a middle-class TV audience of the 20th century [3]. Unsurprisingly, family-targeting advertisements frequently presented this model of family. However, over the last three years, TV advertisements in Germany have started to show alternative concepts of family, where there is diversity among the family members. This kind of advertisement is but companies’ attempt at introducing new concepts of family. In other words, the companies give a subtle statement that they support values of diversity by representing an inclusive concept of family. Focusing on this phenomenon, this research aims to observe how each advertisement gives space for each family concept (whether they belong to the majority or

minority group, how space can be understood to advocate agendas of inclusivity to the public.

2. METHOD AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The data are gathered from a search using the following keywords: “*Familienwerbung*“, “*Familie Werbespot*“, “*Vielfältige Familienwerbung*“, and “*Inklusive Familienwerbung*“. The search result shows that the criteria of this study are fulfilled by three advertisements: *Bärenmarke: Nichts geht über Familie* (2019), *Telekom: Für alle die Familie sind* (2017) and *McDonald’s wünscht allen Familien einen frohen Family Day* (2019). The three advertisements offer their own products, which differ from one another: Bärenmarke sells dairy products, Telekom provides telecommunication services, and McDonald’s offers their food.

This research is not the first to discuss topics of inclusivity or family in advertisements. Analyzing TV advertisements for video game consoles produced by Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony, Alexander Michael Vollbach’s thesis *Diversity and Inclusivity in Video Game Advertisements: An Exploration of Video Game Console Commercials from 2003 to 2017* identifies variations and trends in relevant advertisements’ representations of race, gender, and age from 2003 to 2017. In brief, Vollbach’s work argues that there is a lack of minority group representations in advertising, and this implies potential impacts for certain groups in a society. The thesis uses the theory of cultivation and reveals problematic patterns and the few representations of colored groups, women, and non-adult people. Although the game industry generally does not seem to move in a direction where there is a better situation in terms of diversity or inclusion, some of Vollbach’s findings indicate this industry’s possibility soon producing advertisements that represent their consumer base better.

Meanwhile, a journal article written by Christopher Drew titled *Wholesome homosexuality: Normative childhoods in same-sex family advertisements* studied 40 TV advertisements in 10 countries. The advertisements showed same-sex couples and were issued from 2005 to 2015. By applying the multimodal discourse method, the article shows how families with same-sex parents, despite gaining more visibility in mainstream media, are depicted by TV advertisements through a normative lens in terms of gender and social class. The domination of normative discourse exerts the portrayal of families with same-sex couples. It proves that the increasing visibility and acceptance of same-sex couples in advertisements does not necessarily welcome the family’s diverse portrayal. On the contrary, normative representations of gender and social class of families with same-sex couples imply hidden requirements to make a traditional dream for an ideal family come true. These points show that the article indirect connection to inclusivity in made-for-family advertisements with the primary variable of families with a same-sex couple.

Christopher Drew’s journal has explained how a type of minority family (in this case, same-sex family) is represented in advertisements. However, Drew’s analysis does not explain how such representation can be understood as a support for the agenda of inclusivity. In addition to same-sex families, this article also considers other variables such as conventional families, single-parent families, and ethnic minority families (Germany).

With these variables in mind, the issue on which the analysis is focused is how advertisements strategize in giving space for diversity in family concepts to support the agenda of inclusivity. This issue will be explored by a descriptive method, reviews of relevant sources, and applying the theory “Four variables of family concepts” as written in the book Family Report (2017).

3. INVOLVING NEW CONCEPTS OF FAMILIES AS A FORM OF INCLUSIVITY

As a relatively new theme in Germany, family diversity may become a strategy adopted by companies to produce original advertisements which may attract the attention of consumers. Unzicker and Grau’s research in [7] reveals that the German society is gradually becoming more tolerant and shows more support to diversity. With such condition, it is becoming much safer for companies to articulate themes of diversity in their advertisements. Presenting advertisements which display images of diversity and inclusivity leads to a more positive brand image among a society which also supports the aforementioned values. Among other advertisements which revolve around this issue, three German advertisements which present the issue of family diversity are *Bärenmarke: Nichts geht über Familie*, *Telekom: Für alle die Familie sind*, and *McDonald’s wünscht allen Familien einen frohen Family Day*.

This research adopts the concept of family as described in the book Family Report published by Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in 2017 [3]. In the book, there can be found two graphs which categorized types of families in Germany. The first graph classifies families into married heterosexual couples with children, unmarried heterosexual couples with children, same-sex couples with children, and single-parent families. Meanwhile, the second graph classifies families according to their migrants or non-migrants’ background. While gathering data from these sources, this article does not differentiate marriage status as this variable cannot be identified through visual cues. The variable “families with migrant backgrounds” is also replaced in this study into “ethnic minority families” as migrant families with Caucasian origins (those with Turkish, Russian, Polish nationality) have a Caucasian appearance as German people do. In other words, it is impossible to discover one’s nationality through mere visual observations. Meanwhile, differences in ethnicity can be identified through face shape and skin color. With these considerations, this research compares the three advertisements with four sets

of variables on the concept of family: conventional families, single-parent families, same-sex families, and ethnic minority families.

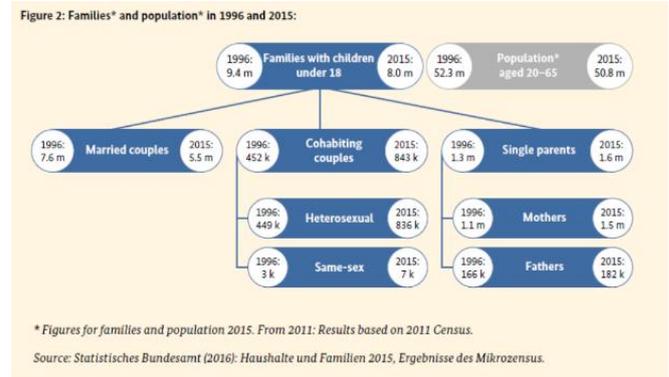


Figure 1 The first graph

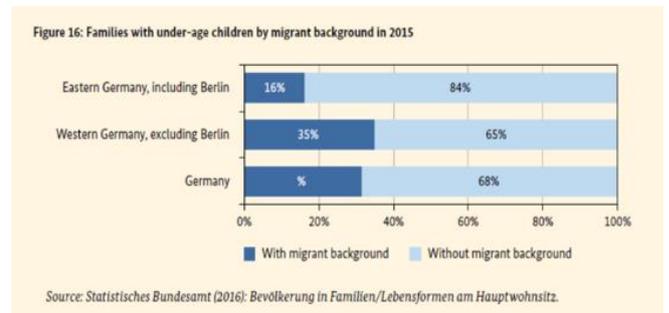


Figure 2 The second graph

McDonald’s advertisement presents the most variations in representing the concept of family as the advertisement shows all variables: conventional families, same-sex families (represented by a family with two fathers and a family with two mothers), single-parent families (represented by a single father and a single mother), and ethnic minority families (represented by eight families with different skin colors). In addition to these, the advertisement also shows other family concepts beyond the definitions of [3]. The first concept is family with transgender parent(s). The concept is represented by the picture “Familien, die sich ändern”, where the father of a family transformed into a mother, as symbolized by images of ponytails and feminine lips. The depiction of a transgender parent may be overly progressive, considering the path to recognizing trans people in Europe is still hindered by many obstacles. Reference [10] noted that gender transition procedures must be performed under existing law and with mental health diagnosis beforehand. Meanwhile, McDonald’s is an American company. According to [11] there have been numerous LGBTQ people in many US media such as film and TV shows. As acceptance is more common in McDonald’s home country, the company can be bold enough in representing trans people in their German advertisement.

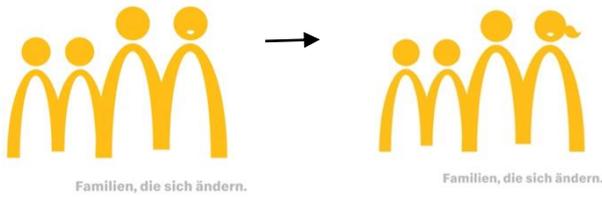


Figure 3 McDonald's Representation of Families with A Transgender Parent

Other concepts of family in German McDonald's advertisement can be found in the pictures "*Familien mit Freunden*" and "*Familien von morgen*". While the former shows a heterosexual couple with pets (a dog and a cat), the latter shows a heterosexual couple in their wedding suit and dress (signifying a newlywed couple). Both images do not depict any children as the represented families have none. Therefore, the depiction of the two families also involves a non-conventional concept of family: a family who does not have or is expecting children. These advertisements imply more inclusive definitions of family by including heterosexual couples without children.



Figure 4 McDonald's Representation of Families who are Without or Expecting Children

Meanwhile, conventional family, same-sex family, and ethnic minority family are found in Telekom's advertisement. In addition to these, there are concepts of family beyond [3]'s classification. For instance, a scene shows a heterosexual family with the father, the mother, and the children have different ethnicities. The father and three of the children are depicted as of African descendants, while the mother and two have Caucasian appearances. This family represents another new concept of family, which is a family with double ethnicity. Furthermore, the family may have been formed from two separate families, each having gone through a divorce. Supported by the presence of the children, whose age gaps seem insignificant (while having different ethnicities), this interpretation allows the representation of another concept, patchwork family.



Figure 5 The depiction of A (Possibly) Patchwork, Biracial Family with Minority Ethnic Members

Other scenes also show various groups with distinct characteristics, such as bikers, drag queens, and nudists. While parents are not present in these groups, the scenes show their similar appearances. The presence of these groups indicate that a family may be formed by the existence of not only parents and children in a particular household, but also a group of people who interact with each other in a close relationship based on their similarities. Clothing-related and unconventional attitude is also shown by groups such as drag queens (whose clothes defy heteronormativity) and nudists (who perform public nudity). While these groups' existence in the advertisement may be a mere selling point with a shock value (or even possibly a running gag), their presence is worth noting as family advertisements frequently rely on normative subjects (such as the image of an ideal family).



Figure 6 The Depiction of Bikers, Drag Queen, and Nudists

Bärenmarke's advertisement, on the other hand, shows representations of a conventional family, single-parent family, and same-sex family. Additionally, a new family concept in which the mother becomes the female breadwinner of a single-parent family can also be found. However, there is no expansion on the family definition as their advertisement's representations show families whose compositions and cultural backgrounds are commonly found in Germany. In the advertisement, diversity of family concept can be observed in their representations of several minority families, such as the single-parent family (in which the father is not present) and the same-sex family (in which a father replaces the mother).

Each advertisement's strategy in presenting a particular concept of family differs from one another. McDonald's advertisement gives space for most family

concepts, making it the advertisement with the highest effort to articulate inclusivity. Meanwhile, Bärenmarke's advertisement does not represent ethnic minority families, and Telekom does not show single-parent families. Although these two advertisements do not show more comprehensive representations, it does not necessarily mean that the two companies do not support the agenda of inclusivity or diversity, considering the non-existent criteria and standards for measuring supports for diversity inclusivity. Moreover, the fluctuating definition of a family in the realm of advertisements obstructs categorizing family concepts. In Telekom's advertisement, for instance, families are not defined solely by the presence of people who, in general, represent the existence of families (such as parents and children along with their biological relations). Other non-biological factors such as closeness, warmth, and the bond between members of a group (as shown among bikers, drag queens, and nudists) also add complexities to the family definition. The difference in advertising strategy here becomes unique signifiers that make each advertisement distinct. Such uniqueness adds the values of creativity and originality to each advertisement.

Aside from the findings described above, it is worth noting that same-sex family is the only new concept of family which appeared in all advertisements. When this finding is compared with the data from [3], same-sex families make up to 7,000 families, becoming the group with the fewest number compared to other groups. Single-parent families, for instance, have a much higher number as they constitute 1.5 million families. Meanwhile, 30% of families in Germany have migrant backgrounds. When compared to these facts, it can be concluded that the companies' choice of representation in their advertisements is not based on Germany's demography.

4. DOMESTICITY AS THE VALUE OF FAMILIARITY WITHIN FAMILY ADVERTISEMENTS

A family's activity typically cannot be detached from the domestic sphere, as families frequently gather together at their homes. It is unsurprising to see domesticity being used in the advertisements to present a sense of familiarity. Out of the three advertisements, Bärenmarke and Telekom display the most intense atmosphere of domesticity.

In Bärenmarke's advertisement, every scene takes place in a house's interior (such as a bedroom, a dining room, a kitchen, and a living room). Depictions of an ideal family can be found in scenes where the children characters appear happy and comfortable with their parents.

Appearance related to the public space is observable in a mother, who was present in a scene where a child is dancing in the kitchen. Dressed in suits, the mother possesses a more formal appearance compared to other

parents. This depiction contradicts family advertisements' typical depiction of mothers, who are frequently put in domestic space to do household chores. Therefore, this scene is a representation of a family with a mother with a non-traditional social role. The depiction of such a mother represents a form of inclusivity. Besides, as the father is also absent in the family in the advertisement, it can be inferred that the depiction represents a type of minority family, specifically single-parent families.



Figure 7 The Depiction of A Single-Parent Family, with a Mother being A Female Breadwinner

Another element of domesticity in Bärenmarke's advertisement is a happy childhood discourse as one characteristic of an ideal family. This concept also appears in the advertisements' depiction of non-conventional families such as same-sex and single-parent families. In depicting a same-sex family, a child is asleep in a father's loving embrace before the other father wrapped the child in a blanket. How the child is asleep soundly in the father's embrace indicates the child's feeling of comfort and security. These scenes may create a new perception of same-sex families (consisting of two fathers), significantly that they can take care of a child without a mother's presence. Meanwhile, another scene that represents a single-parent family shows a child happily dancing in the kitchen. Such depiction counterbalances the common prejudice of single-parent families neglecting their children's well-being and emotional needs. Therefore, in portraying the concept of childhood in the two minority families as mentioned above, Bärenmarke as a company subtly conveys a statement: that an ideal family may exist in minority families; hence, it does not exclusively belong to families with conventional variables.

Meanwhile, Telekom's advertisement shows that most families are depicted to gather in a living room, which is often associated with domestic activities. At the beginning of the advertisement, various types of families are shown one by one. In a sequence, a specific family is sitting in a living room in each shot. The presence of varying concepts of the family in the opening sequence is a form of displaying inclusivity. Most of the family members are also depicted to be related to elements of

domesticity. In terms of appearance, the theme of domesticity can be found in concepts of a conventional family, same-sex family, and patchwork family. Meanwhile, a family with an ethnic minority background is portrayed with an unbound appearance by domesticity. The family with ethnic minority is depicted with intense signifiers of Indian culture, namely the Indian clothing they wear and the Indian ornaments which decorate their living room. Although this representation is a form of inclusivity, the family's depiction is overly stereotypical that how the advertisement presents this concept of this family can be interpreted as mere tokenism.



Figure 8 Depictions of Conventional Families with Non-Domestic Appearance



Figure 9 An Intensely Stereotypical Depiction of A Family with Indian Cultural Backgrounds

McDonald's advertising does not show clear hints of domesticity. In their advertising, families are depicted in a modified McDonald's logo. Family activities, domestic setting, and domestic atmosphere are not identifiable as representations of diverse family concepts that exist in how the logo is modified. Therefore, in this advertisement, aspects of familiarity cannot be linked to domestic family life. This advertisement's familiarity is built upon a conventional family concept, which is a concept of a family widely known by people. On the other hand, the advertisement's originality also relies on the distinct characteristics that signify each type of family. Family diversity in McDonald's advertisement exists in not merely the involvement of majority or minority families, but also the aforementioned distinct characteristics written in the advertisements, such as "Die lauten"(the loud family), "Die leisen" (the , "Die verrückten" (the ,crazy' family), "Die königlichen" (the adle family), "Die fröhlichen" (the happy family), "Die

traurigen" (the sad family), "Die alten"(the old family), and "Die jungen" (the young family).

After the advertisements are compared, it is found that Bärenmarke shows the most intense theme of domesticity. As Bärenmarke moves in the food industry, its products are associated with household needs; consequently, Bärenmarke displays a common concept of family in its advertising to present a high level of familiarity. Meanwhile, despite marketing food, McDonald's advertisement does not show elements of domesticity. Maybe because while McDonald's is a family restaurant, the company does not offer household products, hence not commonly associated with domesticity elements.



Figure 10 Depiction of Domesticity for A Same-Sex Family and An Ethnic Minority Family in Telekom's Advertisement



Figure 11 Bärenmarke's Portrayal of A Same-sex and A Single-Parent Family in Domestic Contexts

5. CONCLUSION

This research observes how three German advertisements represent various family concepts to show support for inclusivity. Differences in strategy can be identified in measuring the three advertisements' comprehensiveness in representing concepts of family. McDonald's "McDonald's wünscht allen Familien einen frohen Family Day" is the only advertisement that displays all four concepts of the family (conventional, single-parent, same-sex, and ethnic minority family). Ethnic minority family does not appear in *Bärenmarke: Nichts geht über Familie*. Meanwhile, *Telekom: Für alle die Familie sind* does not provide any representations of a single-parent family.

As definitions of a family are still proliferating without any foreseeable limit, advertisers will be challenged to involve every type of existing families in Germany in their attempt at supporting agendas of inclusivity. Whether this gesture of support is well-conveyed is another issue, due to the non-existent

standard measurement on an advertisement's inclusivity level and the dynamic value of inclusivity itself. As audiences are as diverse as the types of families, every advertisement target has his/her subjectivity in interpreting whether an advertisement has adequately supported agendas of inclusivity. Consequently, the absence of representations of a particular group in an advertisement (such as the absence of ethnic minority families in *Bärenmarke: Nichts geht über Familie* or the absence of single-parent families in *Telekom: Für alle die Familie sind*) does not necessarily lower an advertisement's level of inclusivity.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Panji Pramono Aji and Lisda Liyanti. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Panji Pramono Aji. Lisda Liyanti commented on previous versions of the manuscript, read and approved the final manuscript.

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