



Gay-Friendly as an Advertising Resource

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Abstract. Gay-friendly is the resource that spreads the homosexual identity to create an inclusive culture, which reflects the values, principles of equal opportunities, and respect to diversity among the brands and the audience. This study analyses how the insertion of gay-friendly in the spot “Emotion unites us” can determine the success or the failure of the brand Movistar according to catholic parents. The study is positioned on a phenomenological paradigm. The results showed that for a brand to succeed or to fail, some factors need to be considered: the frequency of this spot, the intensity of the homosexual affection, the broadcast schedule, and finally, the quality of the service rendered. It is concluded that gay-friendly is one of the factors that may contribute to the success or failure, but it is not the only final determinant.

Keywords: Sexual Minorities · LGBT-Community · Gay-friendly · TV Advertising · Football

1 Introduction

Today’s companies want to humanize their brands by making them socially responsible and inclusive in advertising, to generate social and cultural changes [1]. Social campaigns toward the LGBT community have increased considerably, as it is a constantly-growing market searching for representation [2, 3]. The use of emotional resources lead heterosexual groups to empathize with the community to reinforce their acceptance, allowing them to express their sexual preferences with greater freedom [2–4], making it a new potentially and profitable segment [5, 6]. Therefore, the concept gay-friendly was born to encompass those companies, places, people and institutions that collaborate in charitable organizations in favor of the LGBT community, with inclusive and non-discrimination corporate policies [7, 8]. This discourse has been used for 30 years, where they present a standardized sexuality between same-sex couples both implicitly and explicitly generating good economic results and brand image [3, 4, 9]. Marketers have portrayed this market as atypically rich, educated and informed; and, involved in the various social, political and economic spheres [3, 10, 11].

The LGBT community has always wanted to be represented as “normal” in the media, but this possibility was non-existent [11, 12]. The “gay showcase advertising” made this possible to enter the media, because its strategy was to encode images with

subtexts understood by the homosexual audience [3, 4, 12]. Nowadays, the community has become noticeable because the media have contributed to shaping attitudes, developing social ideologies, and understanding gender diversity [1, 2, 13]. Despite the efforts made by the media, there are still factors that integrate inequality and rejection, such as: (a) the political ideology, which refers to the set of ideas and/or values that may influence consumers' attitudes [3, 5, 10]; and (b) the religious ideology, which contributes to the rejection, as they express disapproval and disgust toward another type of sexual orientation, because the Holy Bible so demands [14].

In Peru, few studies have analyzed the use of the gay-friendly theme, and its influence on the attitude shift of Catholic consumers toward brands that include homosexual and lesbian representations. For this reason, the question that addresses this study is: How can the insertion of the gay-friendly in the spot "Emotion unites us" determine the success or the failure of the brand Movistar according to catholic parents?

2 Methodology

This research is positioned in the phenomenological paradigm [15] because it studies human actions around a phenomenon and what happens in its context, to describe it and understand it through the intimate experiences of the participants [15, 16]. The Movistar spot "Emotion unites us" is analyzed: it shows a homosexual couple comes home where the father of one of them is watching a football match. One of them starts the conversation by saying: "He is Francisco, my boyfriend, the guy I told you about," then the plot develops, where the boyfriend and his father-in-law look a little uncomfortable [17]. Following their broadcast by open signal and cable, many parents expressed their rejection, using labels such as: "disgusting", "sickening", and "abnormal" for negatively influencing children and adolescents; only a minority applauded the inclusion, diversity, and gender equity of the commercial [18].

The sample consisted of 20 Catholic parents from Virgen del Rosario School (see Table 1), in the district of Santiago de Surco in Lima, Peru. Participants were both parents, whose ages ranged from 44 to 58 years. Purposive sampling was used as it allowed participants to be selected with specific characteristics related to the study phenomena [19]. The technique for data collection was the semi-structured interview, which consists of establishing a flexible and reliable dialog between the researcher and the participant [16]. A guide was prepared with 35 open questions grouped according to the research objectives. The interviews lasted between 33 to 83 min and were developed through the Meet virtual tool. The data collected were analyzed according to thematic analysis, a technique that allows to identify, analyze, interpret, and encode existing and new patterns [20]. Each respondent received a fact sheet detailing the purpose of the investigation, the rights of the participant, and the confidentiality of the information collected [21, 22]. To be able to record the interviews, participants were asked for their verbal consent to be recorded in audio [21]. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code (e.g. P01) to present the information and safeguard the identity of the participants [22].

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants.

Participants	Marital Status	Gender	Age	Children
P01	Married	Male	58	2 females
P02	Married	Female	44	2 males
P03	Married	Female	54	2 females and 1 male
P04	Married	Male	56	1 female and 2 males
P05	Separated	Female	55	1 female and 2 males
P06	Separated	Male	54	1 male
P07	Married	Male	48	3 males
P08	Married	Male	55	2 females
P09	Widowed	Female	48	3 females
P10	Married	Female	44	1 female and 2 males
P11	Widowed	Female	56	1 female and 3 males
P12	Married	Female	57	3 males
P13	Married	Female	55	2 females
P14	Separated	Female	50	2 males
P15	Married	Female	44	2 males
P16	Married	Male	49	1 female and 1 male
P17	Married	Male	51	2 females and 1 male
P18	Separated	Male	48	2 females
P19	Married	Male	44	1 female and 1 male
P20	Separated	Male	44	2 males

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Perception of Gay-Friendly in the Spot “Emotion Unites Us”

This spot was perceived as positive by many of the participants, as it raises awareness, normalizes, educates, and reinforces certain values (tolerance, empathy, respect). They also stated that the insertion of the gay-friendly contributes with a social problem that has been affecting a minority in society. They mention that this process of acceptance toward homosexuality is due to the experiences and influences their children have had on this subject. The social factor within contemporary advertising discourse may help achieve a more balanced, equitable, and fair society [1]. Previous studies [2, 10, 13] have shown that the positive reactions of mostly modern societies towards minority representations are related to increased acceptance, visibility, dialog, and global support.

When you become a father (...) you learn to respect people’s opinions and that happened to me because I also have male children. (P20)

Participants emphasized that the use of football as a resource allowed the message of inclusion and acceptance regarding the LGBT community not to be perceived as exaggerated or exhibitionist because it revolved around the entertainment and service offered by the Movistar brand. This campaign responds to the Maslow Pyramid theory on motivation, which explains what drives human behavior based on five needs: Physiological, security, social, recognition, and self-realization [1]. For the respondents, this content would respond to social need of belonging, because it involves integration into society through interpersonal relationships and affective development. For them, the spot is governed by an emotional factor, because it is developed in a family and entertainment environment, as through football it tries to show that there are things that unite them despite the differences and in this way gain recognition and acceptance. Advertising employs strategies (a) to invoke emotions, feelings, and experiences to achieve the success of the advertisement, product, and/or service, and (b) to meet the needs and desires of consumers through the emotive component [1, 3, 22].

What brings them together is something many like: Football. It's a combination of several things: Love for the couple, family and foot-ball; all three things fit together and complement each other. (P08)

The respondents agree that not stereotyping homosexual characters and not showing affection has contributed to their perception as positive. Homosexuality has been stereotyped as different by calling it a threat and even more so when it is represented in explicit scenes [1, 5]. These have generated controversy over the lack of consideration for the other types of viewers which has caused violent reactions to the point that clients stop following brands on their social networks [1, 2, 11]. Although, other studies [3, 23, 24] reveal that heterosexuals who have cognitively interacted with homosexual men, in a similar way to the spot, can change their consumption behaviors; bring greater retention and remembrance of the message, values, and positioning; create an attitude toward a situation/group; consolidate or change an attitude toward a brand, product and/or service.

Previously they were said to be hairdressers, engaged in prostitution (...) a little exaggerated, scandalous and exhibitionists. (P03)

On the other hand, the minority has a negative perception because they believe that it breaks moral and religious principles and tries to encourage children and young people to adopt behaviors not approved by either the Church or by conservative society. As Catholics are interdependent, they tend to subordinate themselves to their own groups with which they share principles and meanings, for religion is interwoven with the sense of belonging by which they separate groups with different beliefs [3, 14]. When a society is governed by a conservative political ideology, it tends to reject liberal sexual activities in advertising; this is due to the incongruence of values and schemes presented in relation to those of recipients, i.e. people see and respond to advertisements/products associated with their values, religious beliefs, and preferences [2, 5, 7].

We as lay people cannot accept it because God does not recognize this relationship (...) These types of couples have been developing based on fashions. (P11)

The minority is against the theme because they differ in principles, values, and religion; therefore, they are opposed to their continuity. If brands want to continue using that theme, they should try to protect the modesty and intimacy through the adoption of codes: flags, colors, rings, and symbols of the homosexual gender. This may relate to the strategy of “*gay showcase advertising*” whose purpose is (a) to sell products to homosexual consumers based on the emotional need to be accepted; and (b) transmit a pleasant image to heterosexuals who support the rights and freedom of homosexuals [6, 13, 24, 25]. They even agree with the coexistence of heterosexual and homosexual advertisements because by means of codification they could go unnoticed without generating any kind of debate. Brands essentially code-switch in an attempt to appeal to a diverse audience while expressing caution in alienating their demographics, predominantly heterosexual men and women [13, 23, 24].

Using the colors that identify them (...) that characterizes them when they want to make a protest, or when they have their marches, they always use them on their banners and on their posters. (P15)

Some men highlighted that the inclusion of a lesbian couple might generate less negative impact if the focus is on comedy, character physicality, storytelling, etc. Through this resource heterosexual men do not feel a threat to their virility, because their humorous depiction can be stimulating and erotic [10, 13]. Previous studies [3, 7, 13, 24, 26] have shown that the heterosexual group reacts unfavorably to gay content, when it is intimate, because there is a loss of their own identities. This may vary with the prevalence of lesbian relationships, which are often portrayed as playful and hot, embodying the traditional hegemonic heterosexual female gender roles and appearance [26].

It may perhaps be with women. Also, I think the effect would be less negative. It would highlight it, but it would be ... subtle. (P08)

3.2 Emotions Generated by the Spot in Catholic Parents

The emotions generated by the spot were of surprise, displeasure, impact, and happiness when the social and inclusive background of the campaign is understood. This type of initially negative emotions would occur because it was a situation that had no previous visibility and relevance. Emotions of annoyance are associated with sensitivity in line with conservative religious authoritarian ideologies, the threat to heterosexual identity, prejudice, and repugnance to contact with unpleasant people who may “pollute” [3, 5, 27].

I put myself in the position of the father who felt uncomfortable, annoyed, upset, as if to say, what do I do? What can I say? (P13)

The respondents emphasized the emotion of joy because through soccer there is union and acceptance of the father towards his son. They were also surprised by this new image of the father, who is constantly represented as someone with a strong character, who forbids and punishes. They emphasized that in this type of representation the father is no longer indifferent to family issues. Men are often shown to be more independent, authoritarian, and professional. But in the face of *dadvertising*, a type of advertising

more paternal that promotes a multifaceted representation of a man in a family role [3, 24, 26], the image of the father is emerging as someone empathic, tolerant, close, to maintain a connection with the children and to demonstrate their versatility [26].

As a mother, even a bit of joy because you see the acceptance of the father. Always the father is strict (...) the one who forbids and punishes. (P15)

Instead, the men commented that the reactions and behaviors of a mother and of a father to this situation would be different. A father would probably show immediate rejection because the *macho* pride is affected; while the mother, because of her overprotective role, would accept and support her children's decision. Mothers are condescending as they are more emotional and fear losing their children because of indifference and non-acceptance. In advertising, the male stereotype is reinforced by strength, domination, rudeness, and the distance from household chores; this is how the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is expressed [3, 28], which is given in opposition to values and characteristics understood as female or weak. Generally, women have represented decorative roles or in more family-oriented roles such as in the role of wife, affectionate mother, or obedient daughter [26, 28]. These representations are diminishing to the *femvertising* movement, which portrays women as more rational, professional, and independent persons [5, 26, 28].

If they had put the mother, there would be a greater chance of acceptance, which is not expected of the father, since as a man, his *macho* pride could not accept such behavior. (P07)

Participants of both genders agree that in such a situation it is valid to present a reaction as seen on the *spot*, for one thing is to accept that their children have a different orientation, and another is to face that fact socializing and living with their children's partner. For Northey et al. [5], the emotional response experienced by the viewers after exposure to the spot is likely to influence the evaluation not only of the advertisement, but also the perception and connection to that brand.

It's a new situation for someone who doesn't know how to act. (...) It's complex for a parent from an older generation (...) I would approach (her) to talk with affection (...) and welcome her in my house. (P09)

As for socializing and living with your children's partner, initially it would be uncomfortable, but they would not refuse to share time with him/her. This process may take some time because they were raised different. For some researchers [3, 11], heterosexuals born before 1980 know little about homosexuality and the minimal knowledge they had was due to stereotypes and prejudices transmitted by the media, which did not agree with reality. According to the respondents, there is a short exchange between the father and the boyfriend because of the effervescence, passion, euphoria caused by the soccer game and possibly in a similar situation they would act the same, although they would then look for a way to start a conversation. One of the advertising strategies is to exemplify hidden everyday situations (*insight*) so that the viewer feels emotionally represented and discover things they didn't know because they hadn't taken the time to imagine or think about them [9].

They use football that produces emotions of joy, euphoria, optimism, and many people identify themselves (...) (There) are emotions when you watch a game and even more when your team is winning. (P17)

While most parents disagree with homosexual relationships, they would eventually accept them for love and to prevent them from being socially isolated. The media and advertising have contributed to the acceptance of the new family diversity, although it is not yet seen as “normal,” participants believe that over time it can be normalized. Current advertising attempts to reflect that change of habits, since it has the function of being an instrument of progress and communication that creates, consolidates, and even removes values that are no longer congruent with reality [1, 11, 25].

It's becoming more and more commonplace, because I see it in many places, whether on television or in real life. Therefore, why would I feel admiration. (P18)

3.3 The Insertion of Gay-Friendly in the Spot as a Determinant of the Success or Failure of the Movistar Brand

The insertion of *gay-friendly* takes place through two positions, the first referring to new social policies and the second questioning the social background. Sixteen participants claim that brands such as Movistar acknowledge that their audiences appreciate added value, position on an issue, problem, and social contribution, which adds points in favor of the brand. Previous findings [2, 9, 10] have shown that consumers do not want materialistic brands, but rather brands which are socially responsible, and that as a result, brands obtain the benefits of loyalty, trust and retention from their customers [1, 11]. Four participants questioned Movistar's social background, and due to the continuity of the topic, the use of exaggerated homosexual representation, the broadcasting schedule, and the poor service, they would reconsider leaving the brand. Some advertisers do not address these issues in traditional media, as they fear a negative reaction from heterosexual consumers, which is considered the largest and most profitable market [11]. Previous studies [3, 9] have shown that moderate exposure of sexual minorities can lead to higher levels of empathy and social connection as long as this process is subtle and continual.

I have had problems with Movistar, their signal is very limited. Despite that, I used their services at home. However, after watching this, my perception toward it has not changed. (P08)

Participants acknowledge that they did not have a favorable view, as religion and machismo reinforce prejudices and certain stereotypes. Their perception changed from their role as parents and their experiences close to the community. In addition, watching *spots* and public figures that openly refer to homosexuality in different media has allowed them to understand that they are in search of acceptance and equality. A minority does not agree with the community and the use of the topic as they consider it to be sinful and aberrant. Also, they claim that the term *gay-friendly* is used for economic purposes to market products and services. Companies have found, through inclusion, a way to profit as this market is constantly expanding [10, 11, 13], so companies increase their

revenues by embracing more niche markets. In line with previous studies [1, 3, 13], private companies deal with a social cause for economic purposes, as a pretext for increasing their visibility and improving their reputation as a brand. The legalization of same-sex marriage, the acceptance and marketing of LGBT culture in the media, and the growth of the community's purchasing power have led advertisers to engage in the LGBT economy and the development of representative emotional strategies [13, 26].

Several social and economic factors are involved. There are many things behind this (...) These movements move a lot of money behind them. (P17)

4 Conclusions

The insertion of gay-friendly themes in advertising is controversial for a conservative secular Peruvian society. Notwithstanding, to determine the success or failure of a brand, the frequency of this type of representation, the intensity of the homosexual affection, the broadcast schedule, and finally, the quality of the service rendered. Then, the *gay-friendly* resource is one of the factors that may contribute to the success or failure, but it is not the only final determinant. They highlight that through the emotional theme, social values can be reinforced, and society can be educated regarding the acceptance of the community; but, just as there is a social background, they cannot deny that there is also an economic background on the brand side. In addition, managing the *gay-friendly* theme has favored its acceptance within the television environment; however, they would not be against the use of certain codes to make the theme go unnoticed and, in this way, generate a better positive evaluation. Therefore, the use of implicit representations of the community would be favorable to the brand because it would not generate any annoyance at the audience.

In line with previous findings [2–4, 6, 9, 13], the perception toward brands regarding the use of *gay-friendly* advertising messages depends on the degree of viewer's tolerance, type of representation (explicit or implicit), the use of codes and symbols, and the quality of service and/or product. Two constraints have been found in this study. The first was the COVID-19 pandemic that made it difficult to conduct interviews in-person. This prevented watching the physical reactions and gestures. The second was the resistance of Peruvian Catholic parents to the issue of homosexuality in society. In the future, it is proposed to make a comparison between lesbian and homosexual representation to analyze the different reactions. Similarly, tolerance and attitudes to different types of affections in LGBT advertising and their impact could be analyzed. Furthermore, it is recommended to study the identity and inclusion of the subcultures QUILTBAG (queer, undecided, intersex, lesbian, trans, bisexual, asexual, and gay) and their evolution in society and advertising. Finally, the possible appearance of the gay-friendly theme in *dadvertising* and *femvertising* could be evaluated.

Acknowledgments. The authors would like to thank the parents who participate in this study. This study has been supported partly by the Research Department at Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas (UPC).

Authors' Contributions. ZC-V and EG-E conceived and design the study; ZC-V performed the data collection and the data analysis. All authors reviewed the results, provided critical feedback and approved the final version of the manuscript. EG-E supervised the study.

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