p–ISSN: 2723 - 6609 e-ISSN: 2745-5254
Vol. 4, No. 11 November 2023 http://jist.publikasiindonesia.id/

ANALYSIS OF HOMOSEXUAL REPRESENTATION IN I AM GAY VIDEOS SEMIOTIKA STUDIES

Safira Siti Nadhilah Hanif
Indonesia University Depok, Indonesia
Email : safira.snh@gmail.com

*Correspondence

Keywords: homosexual; representation; YouTube; social media.

ABSTRACT

Social media is currently one of the most effective platforms for self-expression. The media currently in demand as a forum for expression is YouTube. YouTube is a social media that uses video as the primary medium for distributing content. In addition to conveying information, YouTube can be used for self-expression, one of which is in the coming out process for LGBTQ+ groups. This coming out process is found in LGBTQ+ people who have begun openly declaring that they belong to the group and accept their identity. One coming-out video that has had a considerable impact over the past few years is I Am Gay by Eugene Lee Yang. The research method used is qualitative with a descriptive type of research. Based on an interpretive study of the music video "I am Gay," uploaded by Eugene Lee Yang on The Try Guys' official YouTube channel on June 15, 2019, several conclusions can be drawn. The video, which is five minutes and nine seconds long, is a powerful visual narrative about Eugene's life journey and coming out as a homosexual.

Introduction

Currently, the use of the internet has merged into human life and has become one of the essential aspects of everyday life, especially in the life of urban communities. The use of the internet is extensive, ranging from obtaining information and education to entertainment (Al, 2023). One site that presents the things above in a complete and easy-to-reach way is YouTube. YouTube is a video-based website from the United States where users can upload and watch videos for free. In addition to functioning as an information search site, YouTube also functions as a social media because users can interact with each other and provide responses through the comments column polls. YouTube also has a feature to broadcast live; users can interact directly with creators through the message column during the broadcast (Putranto & Utoyo, 2019). The study will focus on interpreting the meaning of the music video of YouTube internet persona Eugene Lee Yang, who released a video titled I am Gay on June 15, 2019. The video is five minutes and nine seconds long and was uploaded on the official YouTube channel of The Try Guys. Eugene is one of the internet personas in this comedy group media company. This video has a silent film concept without dialogue between the characters (Agnes & Loisa, 2018). The video expresses Eugene's experience and his process for coming out as a gay person and his difficulties as an Asian (South Korean) living in the United States. The study will be written using descriptive qualitative methods. Analysis of the symbols and signs in the segment will be studied using Roland Barthes' semiotic

methods and examined the connotative, denotative, and mythical meanings formed behind the scene. This topic was taken to evaluate the representation of gay and LGBTQ+ groups in modern media and the reality that a gay person of Asian descent (South Korean) must face in living life in the United States (Rucirisyanti, Panuju, & Susilo, 2017).

Semiotika

Semiotics is one branch of science that studies signs. Where the sign works, as well as how the signs give meaning (Mathar, 2015). A sign can mean different things from one individual to another. Everything that can be observed or made observable can be called a sign. Therefore, signs are not limited to objects. Events, structures found in something, a habit can also be called a sign. The most fundamental thing in semiotics is code. Encoding means turning an idea or mindset into a message, while decoding is the opposite of changing the message created and then understanding its meanin (Piliang, 2004).

The things that will be studied in semiotics are how humans interpret things; in this case, the meaning cannot be equated with the process of communicating. Interpreting that objects not only carry information but also understand that the set of signs is structured and has a specific function (Hasbullah, 2020). Semiotics studies that systems, rules, and conventions or agreements allow these signs to have meaning or meaning. Semiotics breaks down text content into parts and relates them to broader ideas. This gives more intellectual context to the content of the text and how the signs interact and work together to produce deeper meaning.

As one of the sciences of interpretation, semiotics treats the text as text and makes it speak, even about things outside itself. Since the text cannot be understood simply by reading it through a long-established, established meaning that results from a standard convention, it must also be seen through explanatory signs outside the text.

Roland Barthes' semiotics draws on the earlier semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure by investigating the relationship of signifiers and signifiers to signs. Saussure stated that signs in the context of human communication language are arranged in two parts, namely, signifiers and signifiers. Signifier means what is said, written, or read. Signified or signified is a thought or concept (mental image). Roland Barthes' idea, known as the Two Orders of Signification, includes denotational meaning, which is the level of marking that explains the relationship between signifiers and signifiers that produce explicit, direct, definite, or accurate meaning according to the dictionary. Meanwhile, the meaning of connotation is to describe the interaction that occurs when a sign meets the feelings or emotions of the reader as well as values born from cultural and personal experiences. In addition, Barthes also developed myths that grew in society related to using the sign. Barthes' perspective on myth sets Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics apart from other semiotic analyses. The existence of this myth allows us to dig further into marking to achieve myths that work in the daily reality of society. In practice, Barthes tried to dismantle the modern myths of society through various studies seen

from a cultural point of view. Semiotic analysis can be applied to almost all media texts of TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, films, and photographs (Kurniawan, 2001).

Research Methods

Research Paradigm

The paradigm used in this study is an interpretive approach to knowing the research subject in depth. In the interpretive paradigm, the subject of research is seen as the primary source that constructs reality and helps us understand deeply what is hidden and visible only from the surface. Data analysis will depend heavily on the findings of the text and the researcher's understanding (Kraska, Brent, & Neuman, 2020).

Research Methods

The research method used is qualitative with a descriptive type of research. This method was chosen to reveal the actual reality by reality. The results of this study will be explained in the form of a systematic description of the findings and facts on the marks in the research subject.

Results and Discussion

Meaning of Connotations, Denotations, and Myths

The video is divided into segments marked with different colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. These colors symbolize the pride flag of the LGBTQ+ group.

Figure 1. Red Segment

Table 1
Red Segment

Denotation: Five adults of East Asian descent gather in one room dressed in neat black-and-white clothes, and Eugene, as the lead, wears a red dress. Eugene started playing with makeup and followed one of the women nearby, but the people around him stopped the activity.
Connotation: These four people describe the nuclear family of Eugene consisting of brother, sister, mother, and father. Eugene's siblings wore the same clothes as his father

and mother, describing that they followed a similar life path to his parents. In a red dress, Eugene depicts how he is different from the rest of his family. The scene where Eugene starts playing using makeup tools and is stopped at that time also shows that his family is trying to stop and hide the fact that Eugene, as a man, is not supposed to play using makeup tools, which incidentally are things used by women, in this context used by his mother.
Myth: In Asian families in the United States, a child is usually expected to take a life path that has been determined by his parents beforehand. In addition, each individual is expected to behave as their gender and gender; men are expected to be masculine, while women are expected to be feminine.

Figure 2. Orange Segment

Table 2
Orange Segment

Denotation: Eugene, dressed in orange clothes, dances into a church filled with people wearing grey clothes. When Eugene began dancing in the middle of the altar, someone approached and corrected his position to raise his hands, and the other people in the church began to close their eyes, ears, and eyes. Then, the men divided into two groups and occupied different seats in the church where the left side of the clothes changed to white, and they voiced protest along with the person standing in front of the pulpit. Eugene sat on the right side, and the people on that side changed the color of their clothes to black; they looked down and were silent.
Connotation: This segment represents how Eugene was raised in a family with high

religious values. The grey color is a symbol that in the church everyone is equal when in the church. The position of the hands that close the eyes, mouth, and ears shows indifference to each other and the surrounding environment. When Eugene dances, and the position of his hands is changed, it shows that the church (here, the pastor) is trying to lead Eugene to the right path by praying. White can reflect light, which is a symbol of rejection of LGBTQ+ people where. The white-clad side took part in voicing protests against it. Meanwhile, black can absorb light, which is a symbol of acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. However, they remain silent inside the church, fearing that their voices may not be heard amid a tumult of voices against LGBTQ+ people.
Myth: Some religions still cannot accept the presence of LGBTQ+ people because they are considered sinful and distance themselves from God.

Figure 3. Yellow Segment

Figure 4. Green Segment

Table 3. Yellow Segment

Denotation: Eugene, in yellow clothes, dances with women dressed in black. Then, a man in yellow clothes enters the scene, and Eugene leaves the woman and dances with her. They then dance in threesomes, where Eugene pairs up with the man, and the woman tries to follow them both. Then the woman hugged Eugene and left the background; Eugene continued to dance with the man.
Connotation: This segment describes how Eugene tried to have a loving relationship with a woman as heterosexual, but he could not lie about his own identity as a homosexual and decided to end his relationship with her.

On the other hand, this woman in black clothes portrays the color of acceptance so that even though their relationship is founders, the woman understands and acknowledges that Eugene is a homosexual and supports the best for her. She also described her position as an *ally*, meaning people who support LGBTQ+ people, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.
Myth: Some homosexuals attempt to have relationships with members of the opposite sex in order to cover up or try to deny their identity as homosexuals.

Table 4
Green Segment

Denotation: Eugene goes down the stairs and meets people wearing clothes similar to himself, and then they dance together. Then, the man dressed in white entered the setting, showed a gun-shaped hand gesture, and pointed it at the people, and one by one, the people were seen falling to the floor.
Connotation: Eugene met people who shared his interests in a nightclub and felt he was not alone. Then, the man dressed in white, who has a symbol of rejection, describes the shooting at a nightclub in Orlando in which 49 people were killed inside the Gay Bar.
Myth: Hatred against LGBTQ+ people is still prevalent in the surrounding environment in the form of verbal abuse and physical abuse that can endanger the lives of people in the LGBTQ+ group

Figure 5. Blue Segment

Table 5
Blue Segment

Denotation: Eugene, who was wearing only

jeans, was beaten by a group of people dressed in white, and then they just left him on the floor. Two men dressed in black try to help Eugene, but two men dressed in white try to stop him. Finally, Eugene lay alone, covered in wounds and blood.
Connotation: This scene depicts Eugene's lowest point in life, where he received torture and abuse from those around him and was helpless at the time. The two men in black depict Eugene's mother and brother accepting Eugene and his identity. In contrast, the two in white depict his father and sister, who still deny Eugene's identity as homosexual.
Myth: Asian culture, especially East Asia, where Eugene belongs, is still largely conservative and resists change.

Figure 7. Purple Segments

Table 6. Purple Segments

Denotation: Eugene wears purple clothes and walks in the middle of people in black and white clothes who fight each other and get physical. The group in black clothes tried to embrace her when the group in white clothes tried to knock her down. In the scene, Eugene walks until he stops but still stands upright even though the men fight behind him.
Connotation: The color purple becomes a symbol of pride. Here, Eugene shows that even though the environment in which he lives still has differences of opinion that often trigger riots, Eugene is still himself and proud of himself and his identity as a homosexual.
Myth: Many LGBTQ+ people are still hidden and dare not open up to their environment and acknowledge their identity.

Analysis of Results

This five-minute, nine-second video tells the story of the life journey and process of coming out as a homosexual Eugene Lee Yang, an internet icon from the group The Try Guys on YouTube. The video is divided into six segments, each representing one color in the pride flag of the LGBTQ+ community. The red segment depicts a family; this video begins from within Eugene's nuclear family, who are of East Asian descent living in the United States. The orange segment depicts the coaching and nurturing in which Eugene was raised and educated by his environment. At that time, Eugene grew up in a very religious family, and while searching for his identity, Eugene realized that he was different from others. The yellow segment depicts love, where Eugene tries to get into a relationship with the opposite sex, but in the end, he falls in love with a man, so from then on, he begins to understand that he is a homosexual. The green segment depicts a community or togetherness where Eugene begins to appreciate and accept himself as homosexual and in the same environment as other homosexual and LGBTQ+ groups (Suwantana, 2022). The blue segment depicts hatred; when Eugene begins to accept himself as homosexual, the surrounding environment says otherwise and continues to ostracise, insult, and even torture him both physically and verbally. Here, we can see that Eugene has reached his lowest point as a human being in living his identity as a homosexual. Finally, the purple segment means pride, where finally, despite physical and mental torture, Eugene still stands tall and proud of himself and his identity as a homosexual.

Eugene, who grew up in a family of East Asian descent, especially from South Korea in the United States, has its challenges. Most of them are still conservative and tend to resist change. This is represented in the red segment, where Eugene's entire family does not yet understand him, and he tries to establish himself as a person who conforms to their social expectations and norms. The United States has a low-context culture where most people are very forthright, prefer direct interaction with literal meaning, value individualism, and have difficulty understanding nonverbal signs and relying on logic. People from areas with low context culture tend not to care about the views of the surrounding environment and still uphold the ideas they believe openly, both in terms of agreement and opposition. Because people from low-context culture areas tend to express their opinions openly whether they like it or not, in this video, we can see that even though the United States is a country that upholds freedom, there are still many people who have not been able to accept the existence of LGBTQ+ people in their social circles. One of the most memorable incidents for LGBTQ+ people is shown in a green segment where someone wearing a white shirt points at people inside the club with a gun-shaped hand, and one by one, the people fall to the floor. This scene shows the shooting incident in Orlando, United States, in 2016 at a gay bar club. The shooting occurred at 2 a.m. local time; the gunman used an AR-15 type rifle and hand pistol to act, and at least 49 people inside the club were killed. According to a story from the perpetrator's father written on BBC News in 2016, 29-year-old Omar Mateen showed hatred and anger after seeing two men kissing each other in Miami recently. This is a

very blatant act of homophobia where someone hates the existence of homosexual groups or those who adhere to LGBTQ+ identity. Because it comes from an environment that is thick with low context culture, homophobic behavior can be carried out overtly and can lead to extreme events such as shootings. However, not only extreme rejection behavior, people who hate and reject the presence of LGBTQ+ people express themselves daily and target LGBTQ+ people in verbal and nonverbal violence, as seen in the orange segment where people in the church openly voice dislike for the existence of LGBTQ+ people, then in the blue segment where people can be seen beating and injuring someone who identifies himself as homosexual.

On the other hand, people from regions with high context culture (in this context, Eugene is from South Korea) tend to prefer indirect verbal interaction, understand the world by bringing socio-cultural understanding from various levels, more easily understand nonverbal signs, respect the principle of togetherness in the community, depending on context and feelings, avoid saying no and tend to convey messages ambiguously and visually (Creelman, 2015). Eugene is a descendant of South Korea with a family from a high-context culture. However, living in a social environment in the United States with a low-context culture makes it difficult to be yourself so far. Opposition to openly embracing his identity as a homosexual but hindered by conservative family views becomes much more difficult. However, as can be seen in the purple segment where Eugene can finally accept himself and stand up to his proud identity, Eugene is now using his personal experience through YouTube to inspire people with similar backgrounds to be confident and not to be afraid of views or social scorn because there will always be similar people who will support them. YouTube has a vast audience reach as a social media, so the messages conveyed by Eugene to people will be more accessible to be accepted and understood by the public (Irwanto, 2017).

Eugene has now established his persona and branded himself on the internet as a gay icon, and this is what sets him apart from his fellow group mates on The Try Guys. This persona is authentic and only exists in him rather than in his co-workers because only Eugene identifies as homosexual in The Try Guys. This persona is essential. In addition to being a differentiator, Eugene can also focus on spreading messages consistently to the audience (Widiyastuti, 2020).

Conclusion

Berdasarkan studi interpretatif terhadap video musik "I am Gay" yang diunggah oleh Eugene Lee Yang di kanal resmi YouTube The Try Guys pada 15 Juni 2019, dapat ditarik beberapa kesimpulan. Video tersebut, yang berdurasi lima menit sembilan detik, merupakan narasi visual yang kuat tentang perjalanan hidup dan proses coming out Eugene sebagai seorang homoseksual. Video ini menggunakan segmen warna bendera kebanggaan LGBTQ+ untuk menceritakan perjalanan hidup Eugene. Masing-masing segmen merepresentasikan aspek berbeda dari hidupnya, mulai dari keluarga, pembinaan, cinta, komunitas, hingga pengalaman kebencian.

Dengan demikian, video "I am Gay" tidak hanya merupakan narasi pribadi Eugene Lee Yang, tetapi juga mencerminkan isu-isu universal dalam proses coming out, penerimaan diri, dan pentingnya dukungan komunitas dalam menghadapi stigmatisasi. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi dalam memahami peran YouTube sebagai platform untuk menyampaikan narasi pribadi dan menyuarakan isu-isu sosial yang relevan.

Bibliography

Agnes, Ladya Lieggiana, & Loisa, Riris. (2018). Representasi Gay Melalui Penggunaan Warna (Analisis Semiotika Video Klip Color Mnek). *Koneksi*, *2*(2), 417–425.

Al, Muh David Balya. (2023). Kemajuan Teknologi Dan Pola Hidup Manusia Dalam Perspektif Sosial Budaya. *Tuturan: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi, Sosial Dan Humaniora*, *1*(3), 274–301.

Creelman, Valerie. (2015). Sheer outrage: Negotiating customer dissatisfaction and interaction in the blogosphere. In *Digital business discourse* (pp. 160–185). Springer.

Hasbullah, M. (2020). Hubungan Bahasa, Semiotika dan Pikiran dalam Berkomunikasi. *Al-Irfan: Journal of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies*, *3*(1), 106–124.

Irwanto, Irwanto. (2017). Media Sosial Penguat Eksistensi Budaya Populer. *J-IKA: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Fakultas Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas BSI Bandung*, *4*(2), 114–123. https://doi.org/10.31294/kom.v4i2.2025.g1657

Kraska, Peter, Brent, John, & Neuman, W. Lawrence. (2020). *Criminal justice and criminology research methods*. Routledge.

Mathar, Hasbullah. (2015). *Semiotika Visual (Sebuah kajian tentang ilmu tanda dalam kebudayaan kontemporer)*.

Piliang, Yasraf Amir. (2004). Semiotika teks: Sebuah pendekatan analisis teks. *Mediator: Jurnal Komunikasi*, *5*(2), 189–198.

Putranto, Algooth, & Utoyo, Arsa Widitiarsa. (2019). Simbiosis TV free to air dengan Situs Web Berbagi Video (Studi kasus TV Jakarta yang mengalihkan konten ke saluran YouTube). *Journal Visioner: Journal of Television*, 1–15.

Rucirisyanti, Lilis, Panuju, Redi, & Susilo, Daniel. (2017). REPRESENTASI HOMOSEKSUALITAS DI YOUTUBE:(Studi Semiotika pada Video Pernikahan Sam Tsui). *Profetik: Jurnal Komunikasi*, *10*(2), 13–21.

Suwantana, I. Gede. (2022). *Ekosofi: Studi Filsafat Lingkungan*. Nilacakra.

Widiyastuti, Novrita. (2020). Analisis Personal Branding Komika ‘Mongol Stres’di Televisi Tahun 2014-2018 (Penelitian Lanjutan). *J-IKA: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Fakultas Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas BSI Bandung*, *7*(2), 123–136. https://doi.org/10.31294/kom.v7i2.8749