

An Analysis of the Themes of Alcoholic Beverage Advertisements in Thailand after the Enactment of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Act of 2008

Arishai Akraudom

Abstract—The objective of this research was to study the themes of alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thailand after the enactment of the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act. Data was collected through textual analysis of 35 television and cinema advertisements for alcoholic beverage products broadcast in Thailand. Nine themes were identified, seven of which were themes that had previously been used before the new law (i.e. power, competition, friendship, Thainess, success, romance and safety) and two of which were new themes (volunteerism and conservation) that were introduced as a form of adaptation and negotiation in response to the new law.

Keywords—Alcoholic Beverage Control Act 2008, Alcohol Advertising, Analysis of Themes, Narrative Structure, Health Communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

ALCOHOLIC beverages are popular in Thai society. They are an addictive substance that is legal and is widely sold and distributed. Research has shown that advertising is influential in creating a value of acceptance of alcoholic beverages, especially among adolescents, an age group that is easily swayed by advertisements. Advertisements for alcoholic beverages tend to imply that the values adolescents admire can be obtained from alcoholic beverage products. When youths believe these advertisements, they may drink too much, which leads to numerous problems [1]. A review of the literature [2]–[7] revealed that advertising was one of the major factors that led adolescents to drink. Two forms of media that have a strong influence in encouraging people to drink alcoholic beverages are TV advertisements and cinema advertisements.

A study on advertising spending by alcoholic beverage companies and exposure to advertisements for alcoholic beverages in the USA [8] showed that on average adolescents drink one per cent more for every one advertisement they are exposed to, and adolescents in places where there are advertisements for alcoholic beverages tend to drink more. For every additional dollar spent on advertising, alcoholic beverage companies see a three per cent increase in drink sales. The themes of television advertisements are adjusted to target different age groups of consumers [9].

The Thai government is aware that alcoholic beverages are not an ordinary consumer product but a product that can have

a serious negative impact and so in the past, several governments have issued laws to control the sale and advertising of alcoholic beverages. The current law is the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act, which put a strict ban on advertisements that encourage consumption or praise the qualities of the product. In response, alcoholic beverage companies have changed their advertising strategies to communicate other messages that they hope will build a value for drinking their products. Most of them try to communicate to adolescents by signification those ties in to the consumers' past experiences [10].

As for past research into the messages of alcoholic beverage advertisements, there have been some previous studies aimed at understanding the themes of alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thailand, but they were in the period before the enactment of the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act [11]–[13]. The aim of the present research is to analyze the themes of TV and cinema advertisements for alcoholic beverage products after the enactment of the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act to see what changes occurred as a result of the new law. This study utilizes a textual analysis approach with a focus on the themes and motifs expressed in advertisements for alcoholic beverage products (mostly liquor and beer) in order to understand the communications strategies currently used by alcoholic beverage manufacturers.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective is to study the themes of television and cinema advertisements for alcoholic beverage products in Thailand after the enactment of the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The Censor Bureau, or the Committee to Inspect Motion Picture Advertisements, reported that from February 2007 to February 2011 there were 89 authorized TV or cinema advertisements for alcoholic beverages. Initial screening revealed that 35 of them—consisting of 17 advertisements for beer and 18 for liquor—were in the form of storytelling advertisements. These were selected for the study sample. Data was entered as codes in a table, using two people as data

A. Akraudom is a lecturer in School of Communication Arts, Bangkok University, Bangkok, Thailand, (e-mail: arishai.a@ bu.ac.th).

recorders. The reliability was tested using the Inter-coder Reliability Coefficient method [14].

IV. RESULT

The objective was to study the themes of the television and cinema advertisements for alcoholic beverage products after the enactment of the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act in order to understand the signification and messages that the alcoholic beverage companies used to create meaningful content aimed at their customers. They used new story telling methods because under the new law they were restricted in what they were allowed to communicate about their products to new generations of consumers. The researcher looked at which of the old forms of signification and messages previously used in advertisements for alcoholic beverages were discontinued as a result of the new law and what new signification was added. Analysis of the data showed that there were some major changes in the themes of alcoholic beverage advertisements as a result of the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act.

Nine themes were identified: power, competition, friendship, Thainess, success, romance, safety, volunteerism and conservation. The data showed that the most widely used theme was volunteerism, which was used as the main theme in 17 advertisements. Volunteerism could be subdivided into three categories: people helping people, people helping society and people helping nature. The second most widely used themes were friendship and success, each of which was the main theme of five advertisements, followed by conservation (the main theme of four advertisements), Thainess (the main theme of three advertisements) and safety, which was the main theme of one advertisement. The themes of power and romance were not used as the main theme in any of the sample advertisements.

As for the motifs that were used to embellish the main themes of the advertisements, the motif of power was used 22 times. The power motif consisted of either power over oneself or power over others. The second most commonly used motif was friendship, which appeared in 11 advertisements. Next was competition, in seven advertisements, consisting of either competition with oneself or competition against others. The motifs of romance and conservation were also used in seven advertisements each. Volunteerism was used as a motif five times, Thainess three times, success three times and safety one time.

1. Volunteerism

The most common theme of the advertisements studied was volunteerism, which means giving and helping freely and willingly without needing to be asked, even when it is not one's duty. The theme of volunteerism, giving and helping, was the main theme in 17 advertisements and a motif in five. There were three levels of volunteerism: people helping people, people helping society and people helping nature.

1.1 People helping people—the idea that people should help each other willingly without being forced to is the lowest tier within the theme of volunteerism. It is a form of volunteerism that is about helping the people near you in small ways, such as pressing the “door open” button on an elevator to wait for

another passenger, as seen the Benmore advertisement entitled “Lift,” or helping a friend finish a big pile of work, as seen in the Benmore advertisement entitled “Office.” Other examples are helping lend a friend in trouble some money, as seen in the 100 Pipers advertisement “Give Friends 100%” and helping a friend out when his vehicle runs out of gas, as seen in the 100 Pipers advertisement “Go Help the World.” Volunteerism on this level may not be so grand as to be extremely praiseworthy, but it reminds people that they should try to help the people around them in small ways. It is something you can do every day. In these advertisements the story refers to everyday life and encourages people to do good by helping people around them in simple ways.

1.2 People helping society—the second tier of volunteerism is giving and sharing in society. It is a higher level of helping than just giving assistance to one individual, but it is still something that people can do in their everyday lives. Sometimes it involves making some sacrifice for the good of society, such as in the Corporation advertisement “Smiling Sergeant,” which tells the story of Chairat Srisukkho, the “smiling sergeant” of Samut Prakarn who was the model for the Royal Police Department's police officer mannequins. Chairat Srisukkho has never really been a police officer, but he directs traffic in Samut Prakarn as a volunteer for the safety of motorists and pedestrians.

Another advertisement using this theme is Leo Beer's “You Get More Than Happiness from Doing Good,” in which a group of young people in Rom Hoop Market, Mae Klong District, Samut Songkram, help vendors gather up fallen oranges from the railroad tracks before a train comes. In Leo Beer's “Haad Saleung” advertisement a group of young people go on a trip and help preserve the natural environment, so they are helping society and having fun at the same time. This kind of volunteerism is also seen in the “Pay It Forward” and the “Giving” advertisements for Singha Beer and in the “Thai People Can Give to Each Other” advertisement for Chang Beer. They present various forms of giving, such as giving a smile, giving encouragement, giving forgiveness, or making small donations to make society better. You can see these are examples of people helping others without being forced to, which makes society a happier place.

1.3 People helping nature—this is the highest and broadest level of volunteerism. The image of people helping nature that is presented in one of the advertisements is a man who has achieved success in life and wants to help the world and the natural environment. It seems farther removed from everyday life. In the Meridian advertisement “The Little Big Thing” you see a man on a yacht out at sea. He looks like a man with no worries. He drives his boat to an island where he wants to take care of sea turtles that he is concerned about. We then hear the female star of the advertisement saying to herself that this is the kind of man she is looking for. The man is an ideal man—handsome, well off, kind, and he cares for the environment. A similar theme is presented in the Chang Beer advertisement “Thai People of the Same Heart” and in the Blend 285 advertisement “Understand How to Live Your Life.” The stars of the advertisements seem to have everything and also have lofty ideals. They dare to do what they believe in, even if it is different. This embodies the idea of high-class people who live up to their ideals without being stymied by social mores.

2. Power

The theme of power was the theme that was most often used as a secondary theme to support the main theme. The power theme was not used to represent the alcoholic beverage products directly but it was a deft connotation through innuendo. A power motif was identified in 22 of the advertisements studied. This is because power is not something that is clearly visible but it is an integral part of other concepts and it can operate secretly. There are two kinds of power theme found in the advertisements studied: power over oneself and power over others.

2.1 Power over oneself—alcoholic beverages are normally associated with loss of control, especially loss of self control. However, in their advertising strategies, alcoholic beverage manufacturers have chosen to overturn this association and have redefined their products with new signification as something that gives one the ability to control oneself. They don't give a visual image of someone drinking the products, because under the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act they are not allowed to show the product, but they present the concept of self control by presenting images of people who dare to think for themselves and don't follow what everyone else is doing. For example, in the advertisement "Thai People of the Same Heart" the brothers come from the same family but each one boldly chooses to follow his own path.

When the alcoholic beverage manufacturers try to create a new signification about power over oneself, they are negotiating with the original meaning that people who drink alcohol lose their power of self control. The new signification that they present is that people who drink alcohol have the power to choose to live their life as they want and to be different from others—they have the power to write their own destiny. They have the power to walk another path. For instance, the Chivas Regal advertisement "Live with Chivalry," is about the power to oppose the influence of money, and the Johnnie Walker advertisement "The Pact" is about the power to persevere and not get discouraged when faced with difficulty. This theme is also present in the Singha Beer advertisement "Smiling Sergeant" and the Saengsom advertisement "Guitar." The power to do something different if you think it is right is expressed in the Chang Draught Beer advertisement "New Experience," the Singha Beer advertisement "Giving," the Leo Beer advertisement "Living Life" and the Blend 285 advertisement "Understand How to Live Your Life." These are all efforts to turn alcoholic beverages into symbols of winning over oneself.

2.2 Power over others—this theme was found in 13 advertisements. Power over others means the power to conquer other people or control something outside oneself. There are two ways in which this theme was expressed.

2.2.1 First, there is the idea that the alcoholic beverage company is a powerful organization that has the ability to make dreams come true; that is, for capable and determined people such as athletes, the alcoholic beverage company can help propel them to worldwide success. This is the theme that is expressed in Chang Beer's "Everton: the First Project" advertisement and Singha Beer's "Thai Golfer" advertisement. In these two advertisements, the competing beer companies are vying for the position of being the number one sponsor of Thai athletes. Chang Beer has positioned itself as a sponsor of

football, which is a sport for the masses. Players on Thailand's national football team are the presenters. Singha Beer responded by positioning itself as a sponsor of a higher class sport, golf. They used a presenter who is a Thai golfer who achieved success in the global arena. You can see that in addition to trying to redefine the old negative image of their product, they also want to redefine the powerful image of their competitor.

2.2.2 The second meaning of power over others is the idea that people who drink alcoholic beverages have physical power and superior skills. This is expressed by the image of people who have superior ideas, are morally superior, and are in a superior position because they are the givers who do good for others.

The theme of physical power and superior skills is seen in the Chang Beer advertisement "Football 2010," which is about 3 brothers who get into a football competition against foreign visitors on Khao San Road. Before starting to play, they change into shirts with the Chang Beer logo. The match ends in friendship between the competing teams, but the obvious winners are the Thai players wearing Chang Beer shirts. Mental power is about having power over others by having better thoughts or ideas, which makes a person admirable or desirable, like the young yacht owner in the Meridian advertisement "The Little Big Thing," who is concerned about conserving sea turtles instead of just worrying about money or business. Another example of the mental power theme is the young man in the Grande advertisement "The Traveler," who travels the world seeking inspiration in order to build a community library. All his friends express their admiration of his idea.

In analyzing the meaning of giving in the messages put out by the alcoholic beverage companies it is interesting to compare Singha Beer's "Giving" advertisement with Chang Beer's "Thai People Can Give to Each Other" advertisement. You can clearly see that in their marketing strategy they have not used just one level of the concept of giving but have also incorporated a good image of the company as a giving, socially responsible organization. There is some discord between the two levels of meaning as well.

The "Thai People Can Give to Each Other" advertisement for Chang Beer gives a message of the company's social responsibility through stories about giving to society. It starts with a scene of elderly people in the woods putting blankets on each other, and of course the blankets are the same green color as the Chang Beer logo. Next are other scenes of giving, such as one footballer giving an apology to another and the other giving his forgiveness, an elephant handing fruit to a child, people donating to a school lunch fund, people donating relief goods to flood victims and people giving blood. Singha Beer responded with its "Giving" advertisement with the "Pay It Forward" theme. It shows a series of people in the city giving and helping each other. First, a man gives his seat on the metro to a woman, and then she gives up the seat for an older woman. When the older woman exits the train she gives her umbrella to a man who needs it. He later passes it to another woman who needs it and etc. These competing visions of giving to society are part of the ideological competition between the Singha and Chang brands.

3. Friendship

Friendship was the most common theme in the advertisements studied. It was combined with other motifs such as competition, giving and success.

3.1 Friendship that arises from competition—In two of the advertisements the main story was about a competition that ends in friendship. In Chang Beer's "Football 2010" advertisement three young men get in a football game against foreign visitors on Khao San Road. The Thais win in the end but both sides are friends. Singha Beer's "Music" advertisement is about a drumming competition on a beach. The competitors are very serious about besting one other, but in the end they decide that being friends is the most important. The conclusion is that even when two sides compete, friendship will ease the tension and make everything all right.

3.2 Giving and sacrifice are variables that help cement friendly relationships. A few of the advertisements, studied give the message that giving is essential for ideal friendship. The Johnnie Walker advertisement "The Pact" tells the story of four friends who are architects who help each other fight for their dreams. They stay together through thick and thin as good friends should. When the protagonist, Jason, can't raise enough funds to make a movie, his friends help him, even by selling their beloved cars. On the premier night of his movie, Jason then misses the event in order to help another of the friends. In the advertisement the friends affirm: "We promised we would not abandon each other."

Forgiving a friend you've been through good and bad times with is another form of giving. The Archa Beer advertisement "True Friendship" tells a story of friends who got in a serious disagreement and went their separate ways, but when one achieves great success the other comes back to express congratulations and they forgive each other. In the 100 Pipers advertisement "Give Friends 100%" the host of a birthday party gets pushed into the swimming pool with his fancy clothes on, but he forgives his friends and they all jump into the pool with him and have fun. This is the definition of friendship that is full of giving and sacrifice.

3.3 In another 12 advertisements, friendship appears as a motif, and it is simply friendship behavior as an end in itself. The characters behave in different ways, but their motivation or their end object is friendship in one form or another. The Leo Beer advertisement "Living Life" is about a young office worker who does things differently from most co-workers. He rides a bicycle to work instead of a car, uses the stairs instead of the lift, keeps a personal balance sheet of daily expenses, and puts potted plants around his desk. It turns out his behavior inspires other people to do the same, and friendship blossoms.

4. Competition

The theme of competition was not the central theme in any of the 35 advertisements studied, it was only a motif in seven. There were two kinds of competition observed: competition with oneself and competition against others.

4.1 Competition with oneself means trying to obtain the goals you've set for yourself. This kind of competition was observed in several advertisements, especially those featuring stories about athletes who have to train hard and overcome

hardships. The alcoholic beverage products are like an unseen hand that helps push the athletes to success.

4.2 Competing against others—this theme is expressed in win-or-lose competitions between two sides, but the final goal may not actually be victory. The competition may just be part of the story. For example, in the Chang Beer advertisement "Football 2010" in which three Thai boys play football against foreigners on Khao San Road, the scenes are primarily about fun and friendship, but still the camera angles and editing tend to draw viewers' attention to the issue of winning or losing, as if the dignity of the Thai nation were at stake in that friendly football match. This sort of competition is also seen in the McClan advertisement "Save the Nature" about diving and the Singha Beer advertisement "Music" about drumming on the beach.

5. Thainess

There are two distinct ways in which the theme of Thainess (Thai identity or Thai culture) is expressed in the advertisements studied: Thainess in form and Thainess in content.

5.1 Thainess in form is an expression of traditional Thai thinking and customs with an emphasis on the gentle, graceful, intricate beauty of Thai fine arts. This theme is expressed in a series of three advertisements for Regency: "Phrasuthana Manohra," "Wiwah Phrasamut," and "Manthapatha." These are poems from Thai literature that were composed by King Rama VI and they are widely admired and considered to be fine examples of Thai literature. The conservative nature of the advertisements is expressed in the images and words, and it implies that the product is a high class product that should be praised and conserved just like classic literature. The advertisements are an expression of Thai culture and tradition.

5.2 Thainess in content means the expression of something that is typically Thai, even if the form of the advertisement is modern rather than traditional. It can be an expression of some value of Thai society. For instance, the "Thai People Can Give to Each Other" advertisement for Chang Beer tells a message of caring and kindness as people help each other. One character passes on knowledge of Thai culture by teaching Thai dance. People give each other warm smiles, give assistance during a flood and give blood. In Chang Beer's "Thai People of the Same Heart" advertisement the three siblings have different lives but they all play the role of good children by being grateful and taking care of their parents. Chang Beer's "Football 2010" advertisement also promotes Thai pride and the value of combating reality. The advertisement aired at a time when Thailand's football team had failed to pass the preliminaries to get into the World Football Cup championship, but it tells a story of three brothers, representing Thailand, who win a friendly football match against foreign visitors. It reassures viewers that even if the national team did not make it to the World Cup, some Thai people are good at football and do have a chance to win against foreigners.

6. Success

The theme of success in life and work is still prevalent in alcoholic beverage advertising as it has been for a long time. In the present study, all the examples emphasize success as a

result of hard work and diligent practice. The content of the advertisements centers on success at sport and music as a result of practice. For example, the Singha Beer advertisement "Thai Golfer" shows how the protagonist practiced golf since he was a child, even though he had to use a stick and a ball of wadded paper instead of real equipment. When he was older he worked as a caddy but his tireless hours of practice brought him to an international career in professional golf. His success came from his perseverance, serious concentration and endurance of hardship. Another example is the Johnnie Walker advertisement "The Pact," about four architects who succeed in life because they stick together. The moral is "together they walked the path to greatness."

7. Romance

Romance appears as a motif in seven of the advertisements studied but it is not the central theme in any. It is a minor theme underlying major themes like success, volunteerism or friendship in order to make the story more complete. It shows that in the signification of the alcoholic beverage companies, the space for their products is a space of male bonding friendship and success for men. Women are only a reward for the admirable actions of the male characters. For example, happiness with a girlfriend may be a reward for a man who has helped his friends, and love is something that is secondary to friendship among male friends. Lastly, romantic love is depicted as a reward for a man's sacrifice for society or spirit of volunteerism.

8. Safety

The theme of safety is another example of the alcoholic beverage companies' attempts to introduce new signification to replace old understandings. Normally, drinking alcoholic beverages is something that is dangerous and makes people less safe. Heineken's advertisement "Let a Stranger Drive You Home" tries to re-signify this meaning by telling the story of a responsible drinker who knows he shouldn't drink and drive so he always takes a taxi home after drinking. Similarly, in Singha Beer's "Smiling Sergeant" advertisement Singha Beer extols the smiling sergeant as a "Singha Hearted Man" because he is concerned for the safety of others and sacrifices his free time to act as a volunteer traffic director.

9. Conservation

Nature conservation is part of the green marketing trend. Consumers, these days like products that are environmentally friendly or good for the planet. Alcoholic beverage makers have also followed this trend. Their messages are naturally aimed at young consumers, who are their primary target market, and try to encourage them to participate in environmental conservation. This gives a better image to the alcoholic beverage products. The theme seen most often in the advertisements studied was nature conservation, followed by energy conservation. In one advertisement the main character demonstrates that he uses energy wisely, and this encourages people around him to do the same. The least often seen form of conservation is cultural conservation, which was a theme in the Johnnie Walker advertisement "The Pact" about the four architects who refuse to allow the tide of consumerism to

destroy ancient art and culture. It is only a minor theme, but it makes the major theme of success more poignant.

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The main benefit of this research was that it clearly showed that the stories told through alcoholic beverage advertisements in Thailand still portray a patriarchal society. In every single advertisement studied, the protagonist was male. Women were only portrayed as a reward for the good actions of the male characters. This clearly follows the tradition of Thai fables in which the heroine or princess is only a sex object stereotype that is a reward for the male hero when he is successful in his quest [15], [16]. The ideal of male superiority has been reproduced continuously, and even from the point of view of consumption, the characteristics of alcoholic beverages continue to convey an image of masculinity to consumers [17]. This process of reproduction of the message and signification affirms that the world of alcoholic beverages is a male world.

When the results of the present analysis of advertising themes is compared to previous work [11]–[13], [17]. You can see that following the enactment of the 2008 Alcoholic Beverage Control Act, some themes were no longer used because they would be in violation of the law. These are the semiological themes of class and luxuriousness, relaxation, celebration, giving alcoholic beverages as a gift and consuming alcoholic beverages with food.

The old themes that continued to be used were power, competition, friendship, Thainess, success, romance and safety.

The new themes that were created as a form of negotiation with the new law were volunteerism and conservation. These themes had not been featured in alcoholic beverage advertisements before. Now they are among the main themes that alcoholic beverage producers want to connect with the image of their logos in the minds of consumers. They want to build an image of people who are do-gooders.

The adaptive strategies of the alcoholic beverage companies should be taken into account by the people who are responsible for enforcing the related laws and people who are working to reduce alcohol consumption. They may need to revise the laws in light of the response by alcoholic beverage manufacturers.

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