

Social Criticism of Families in Salmon House Family Gathering Youtube Show

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Abstract: Families often create resentment in their attempts to instill values. The strategy that families use to reprimand the younger members is like an arena to bring them down. An audio-visual broadcast of the family Gathering produced by Salmon House seems to criticize this. For this reason, researchers try to see this as a social criticism of families in YouTube shows. This research uses popular culture theory, social criticism theory, Critical Theory, and semiotics as research methods. Semiotics of Roland Barthes with three elements of analysis, namely denotation, connotation, and myth is used to analyse the data. Researchers found that the family has become a medium of discrimination, marginalization, silencing, mockery, and judgement on younger generation's life choices. The content creators have been swept away in the false consciousness of voicing criticism, but again caught up in the pillars of industrialization for commercialization.

Keywords: Family, Popular Culture, Social Criticism, Semiotics, YouTube

Introduction

Family, as the oldest institution in the society, holds an important role in the growth and development of an individual. Family should also be a mean of forming a strong identity of an individual. However, it is not uncommon for the family to be a 'medium' to repress individuals in the formation of their identity. This is an interesting phenomenon for communication products to package it.

The development of technology creates spaces of expression for creators to pour their ideas and criticisms about social phenomena, including the family phenomenon and its dynamics. However, the effort to package creative ideas into social criticism in new media spaces is also inseparable from the 'snare' of production in industrialization and commercialization dimensions alone. Family as a unit that is believed to be able to form a person's identity gets special attention from creators in New media. This is reflected in the communication products created in Salmon House's YouTube channel, Family Gathering.

A number of studies suggest that a family does have such a great 'power' in shaping the individual. Rochaningsih in her research on "The Impact of Shifting Family Roles and Functions on Adolescent Deviant Behavior" highlights the role and function of family that has shifted due to the times. Rochaningsih accused that it was family that caused the deviant behavior experienced by adolescents. This happens because of the lack of educational time provided by the family for a child (Rochaningsih, 2014).

Family with all its dynamics also appeals to Clark and Sherman who elaborate on family gatherings. In his research on "The Importance of Elders and Families in Native American Culture", both stated: "*Family gathering, identifying family roles, assets and strengths and sharing it with family members are at the heart of a family unit and of a community. Family roles and traditions when practices are the glue that holds families together in challenging times. Family members either share their own family values and roles or join in with available family. This book is about a group of young people who live in the same community as each other, and who live in the same community as each other. Men and women, who, while not elected or appointed, are widely recognized and highly respected for their wisdom and spiritual leadership. They are often known for being the kind of people who have paid attention, gaining knowledge and wisdom from life – during their childhood they watched and listened carefully to ceremonies and traditions, and as youth, they paid attention to the ways elders in their communities behaved*(Clark, 2011)".

Clark and Sherman state that family gathering is an important activity for family formation and strengthening values. It is said to be the heart of a family which can be conveyed as an adhesive that is able to bind family members together. Family gathering is also considered to be a medium of family value exchanges, where older people convey family values to younger family members. In this family meeting, it is also said to show the love and care of older people to younger family members.

On a side note, family meetings cannot always be a unifying tool and a form of attention for older family members to the younger family members. In fact, meeting a large family is often just a showcase for families showing off work, children's achievements, and even often repressing younger family members regarding economic and social status. On behalf of the family, the younger members of the family should also accept it as a form of respect for the older members of the family.

Goode wrote that the main functions of a family include: birth, physical maintenance of family members, placement of children in society, and social control (Goode, 2007). Dwiningrum states that the functions of the family are: sexual regulation, reproduction, socialization, maintenance, placement of children in society, satisfying one's needs, and social control (Dwiningrum, 2012). Both views indicate that the family should also be a medium to practice social control. In fact, both agree to include it in family functions. Meetings within the family seem to be a 'vehicle' for the family to control one's personal life, especially younger family members. This happens, because older family members feel that this is a form of responsibility, as someone who already understands life better. However, his efforts to transfer knowledge as an effort to control social, often harassing younger family members. In fact, sometimes it becomes a joke in a family gathering.

This is what is depicted in the communication product on the Salmon House channel entitled Family Gathering. The YouTube show lasting three minutes 27 seconds describes the story of a young woman named Noon. It begins with Noon bringing food to her uncle and aunt. In the early part, Noon is delivering and offering food to her uncle and aunt at a family gathering. After offering food, one of Noon's aunts asks about her weight gain, then followed by the next question from another aunt about her work which her older family members regarded as a job that only had a small income. Noon, who works as a web writer, is compared with the child of one of her aunts who is a marketing graduate from the UK with a high salary.

Not only that, her uncle also asks about how Noon get to her office. Noon who answers by using the train is then considered inferior because she has not been able to buy a car. Even the other uncle advises Noon to ask for money from her father to buy a car. In fact, Noon is also judged on her choice of not to get married sooner. Noon is harassed because of her body shape which is believed by the family members as the reason as to why she is not married yet. The questions raised by older family members with such tendency are not without reason. Each question is asked because of the concern of the older family member and worry. The next reason is because they are family, so anything can be conveyed directly based on honesty among family members.

This is what makes Noon hallucinate answering every sarcasm statement from her aunt and uncle. For example, when she answers an aunt who states that her son works as a marketer with a high salary because he graduated from England. In fact, the aunt does not know that her son is entangled in drugs and her son decides not to communicate with his parents. Noon also alludes her other aunts by raising such issues of being abandoned by their husbands, the thinning hair, unhealthy skin, or debts that her uncle made to his father but never pay it back while their lifestyle is high-maintenance.

What Noon has expressed, of course, meets with opposition from older family members. Noon is considered too honest and does not care about other's feelings. Noon then argues about how older people disregard the younger family members' feeling. However, what Noon said is only an illusion of the younger members of the family. Families who should instill values for an individual actually becomes a place that represses young people. This is then regarded as a normal and reasonable cultural pattern.

YouTube as a space of expression for the creators, of course, becomes an interesting medium for young generation to voice their opinion. Instead of taking sides with the younger generation, content creators on YouTube are stuck in an industry pattern that brings profits. The communication product entitled Family Gathering presented by Salmon House was actually only uploaded in early 2021. Eleven months after its broadcast, the video produced using the Thai language has been shared with a number of countries and watched by more than 80 thousand until November 2021.

This study attempts to highlight every scene about the family and social criticism of it. Each piece of the scene is seen as a sign and for this reason, this study uses semiotics as an element of analysis. Signs in the process of formation are always attached to the culture. Thus, this study uses semiotics from Roland Barthes with the three elements of analysis, namely denotation, connotation, and myth to look at the social criticism in this Family Gathering YouTube show. Researchers also analyse the phenomenon of social criticism of family using the Theory of Cultural Studies perspective and the efforts of social criticism is seen as a low culture that is used as a profit trigger in the eyes of industrialization and commercialization.

Theory

Popular culture (pop culture) is a set of thoughts, points of view, actions, and phenomena to culture that develops in the community. Popular culture or commonly known as mass culture comes from the community that becomes something of its own interest. The notion has often been superseded as a folk culture in the past, but it is also one of the important modern emphases (Strinati, 2007).

The term popular culture emerged at the beginning of the 19th century which was initially aimed for education and at the lower-class society with limited culture. At the beginning of its development, popular culture is more attached to the lower social class which is also used as a differentiator from the elite or upper class. Popular culture is also used as a culture that is deliberately created by the public or approved en masse.

The development of popular culture has often led to some debate. There are three themes or arguments related to the theory of popular culture. The first theme is what or who determines popular culture and where does popular culture come from. The second theme concerns with the influence of commercialization and industrialization on popular culture. The third theme is concerned with the ideological role of popular culture which questions whether popular culture is intended indoctrinate people, forcing them to accept and follow the dominant value (Strinati, 2007).

Method

Semiotics

As the research method, researchers use semiotics. Semiotics is a variant of structuralism. Structuralism assumes that text is a function of content and code, while meaning is the product of a system of relationships. Semiotics begins with observing the phenomena around through various "signs" that are seen.

Saussure's most important thought in the semiotic context is his view of the sign. Saussure places signs in the context of human communication by sorting between what is called a signifier and a signified. Signifier is a meaningful sound or meaningful snippet (material aspect), that is, what is said and what is written or read. A Signified is a mental image, that is, a thought or concept of the mental aspect of language.

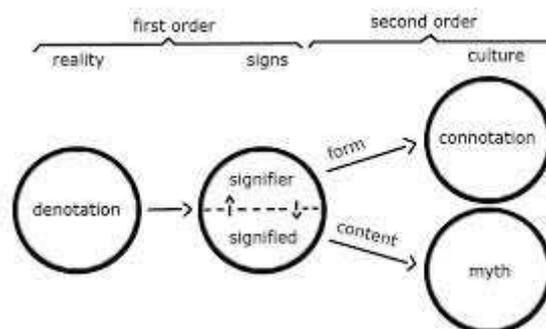
Semiology believes that reality can never be properly attached its meaning to a human being. Reality is always constructed and understood in human understanding through various culturally specific systems of meaning. Semiotics seeks to explore the nature of sign systems that move beyond the rules of grammar and syntax and that govern the meaning of complex, hidden and culturally dependent texts. This gives rise to the search on additional meaning (connotative) and the meaning of designation (denotative). It acknowledges the existence of myths and a set of valuable ideas that come from culture, and are conveyed through communication.

One of Saussure's followers, Roland Barthes is known as a structuralist thinker who practiced Saussurean linguistic and semiological models. He argued that language is a sign system that reflects the assumptions of a particular society (Sobur, 2009). Roland Barthes, made a systematic model in analyzing the meaning of signs. Barthes' focus was more on the idea of two orders of significance (Sobur, 2012).

The first stage of significance is the relationship between the signifier and the signified in a sign to external reality. Barthes calls it as denotation, that is, the most real meaning of the sign. Connotation is the term used by Barthes to indicate the significance of the second stage. This describes the interaction that occurs when the sign encounters the feelings or emotions of the reader as well as the values of their culture. Connotation has a subjective or at least inter subjective meaning. In other words, denotation is what a sign describes to an object; while connotation is how it describes it. A connotation is a sign that relates to a content through one or more functions of signs. Connotation works in a subjective level, so it is unconscious.

In the second stage of significance related to content, the sign works through myth. Myth is how a culture explains or understands some aspect of reality or natural phenomena. Myth is a product of social class that already has a dominance (Sobur, 2012). Myths are forms of popular culture, but they are much more than that. "Myth is a system of communication, that is, a message", Barthes writes, "a way of marking, a form", one of the types of speech carried out through a discourse. A myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way it expresses this message (Strinati, 2007).

Picture 1 Two Order of Signification (Sobur, 2012)



Overview of Research Object

On December 9, 2020, Salmon House released a skit video titled “Family Gathering” on YouTube. This video tells about a family gathering. At the family meeting, it begins when Noon, the main character, walks into a room and brings food on plates to his uncle and Aunt. Then one of her aunts asks about Noon’s weight that seemed to be declining. Another aunt then asks about her job but before she finishes, her aunt interrupts and judges Noon’s salary. She then talks about her son’s degree from the UK and his salary has reached 90,000 Baht or equivalent to thirty-eight million rupiah. Then Noon’s uncle also asked about how she goes to work. Noon who goes to work by train is offered to buy a car by her uncle.

In the 3-minute 26-second video, Noon talks about the script work she does. Her aunt and uncle, however, diverts the subject to other things such as the food they are eating. Then, another uncle asks if Noon will get married and give grandchildren to her parents. She does not answer, but her aunt harasses her by saying that she owns big buttocks so it will be easy for her to get someone and they laugh. Another aunt then asks Noon about the money she makes and she says she is worried about Noon. In addition, the aunt asks Noon not to be angry because they are family.

Noon then thinks, just because they are family, she could also ask the same thing to her aunts and uncles. Noon asks her aunt about her pension which is so small, while mentioning about the thinning hair to another aunt, and even about her husband’s affair to another aunt. She also talks to an aunt whose son graduates from the UK and works in Europe about her son who is using drugs out of her knowledge as he never contacts his parents. Her aunt then tells her not to be impolite to elder people and she is being unsympathetic to other’s feeling. Noon answers by showing that the elder people also are not sympathetic toward her feeling. Noon also asks about the function of the family, which should have empathy for each other. Her aunt replies by saying a family must be open and honest to each other. Noon tells the family about what she feels. Her uncle’s and aunt’s questions about job, body shape, and marriage do not make any sense. Noon also requests to stop body shaming and asking about personal questions such as salary. The whole family members are in shock. Of course, this is only in Noon’s imagination. The show is closed with a message, “Please be kind and make family gathering a happy time”.

Discussion

This research uses semiotics from Roland Barthes, so this chapter describes the analysis of advertisements based on Barthesian level of signification. At the beginning, researcher interprets each scene with the denotation and connotation level. After that, researcher analyse the findings about social criticism on the myth level.

Picture 2



Denotation level: In Picture2, there are nine people. Seven women and two men. Four people sit and talk at the dinner table, while the rest stand in the room and scatter on several sides of the room. Six people are elderly. The rest are young people. On the table, there are a lot of food on the plate. Besides, there are also some drinks and the tableware on the table: plates and bowls, spoons, ladles, and chopsticks. The shape of the dining table is square and there is a white tablecloth with blue flower and light green leaf motif on it. Three elderly people sitting on the dining table seems to be talking to each other. A man is seen talking to a woman who is much younger than him.

In the room, there is also a young woman carrying food approaching the table. Around the room, there is a variety of furniture such as cabinets with matching colors of light brown. The room also uses natural lighting that comes from a window that is left open, so that sunlight enters. In another scene, the woman who brings the food and is about to put it on the dining table. At the same time, an elderly woman asks about her weight gain.

The young woman laughs and put her hands on her belly while admitting that she gains a few kilograms. There is no back sound on this scene and the noise from the surrounding environment can be clearly heard, such as a clacking sound from the spoon and plate, and the chatter around.

Connotation level: The tradition of eating together at a family gathering is not just an ordinary activity. Kurniawan stated that the tradition of eating together in the family is an activity with a specific purpose. In this tradition, it generally serves to establish friendship between families who may rarely meet. Such moments are awaited because family members gather, exchange opinions, discuss with each other, and exchange ideas among relatives (Kurniawan, 2015).

This means that eating together at family gatherings can be a forum to reconnect relationships that are often interrupted by routines. Through family gathering activities which are also filled with eating together, it becomes a moment for family members to build relationships and strengthen brotherhood. The moment becomes a place to show love and attention. Especially from older family members to younger family members, although, it is not impossible otherwise. In addition, it is also a moment to discuss and exchange opinions. However, this is not actually seen in the scene. Noon who is a younger family member get discriminatory treatment from older family members.

Older family members ask personal questions that should not be asked in public. Even these personal matters become a joke for older family members to younger family members. Falah said that a child is a blank canvas that is always ready to be colored with anything. Every parental behaviour that the child sees and knows gives a lasting scratch on the canvas. Scraping any ink with a line will certainly complicate the formation of the next painting (Falah, 2014).

In this scene, Noon faces the 'judgment' from her extended family. Noon in the family event becomes the subject of discussion which eventually becomes a joke for the family members. The family here scrawles the wrong ink for the younger generation. This will certainly be a system of inheritance of erroneous values for a person. For Falah, educating children in the family is like carving on a stone, whatever is received will be scarred forever. When a child under the age of five is filled with the best values, they will grow into a good human being, and vice versa (Falah, 2014). Noon who becomes a joke for the older family members will forever be scarred because the family who is supposed to be a safe place gives her a deep scar. It possibly becomes a bad inheritance system for the next Noon family.

The researchers found that the family in this scene depicted an institution that oppresses younger family members. We also saw the family as the arbiter of the private lives of younger family members where they give negative attention to the other family members. The family is unable to respect someone's privacy, and even belittles the younger family members.

Myth level: The family should be the forerunner as well as the arena for social interaction and understanding human behaviors. Family's duty includes introducing the culture of the community and human nature. Family holds an important function in character formation, social relationship, and creativity of the members (Ulfiyah, 2016).

Although known as a democratic country, the family for the people of the United States turns out to have an important role for its members. The family is still considered as a means of providing appreciation, affection, protection, commitment, togetherness, spiritual well-being for family members. Even the family is also considered to have the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively (Xu, Anqi; Xie, Xiaolin; Liu, Wenli; Xia, Yan; Liu, 2007). Other studies of American families even found that American families do not talk about sensitive issues such as abortion or gay or other personal matters. American families view each family member as having their own personal rights as each generation has different problems. The American family focuses on the personal challenges faced by its members, and the family becomes a means to encourage its members to solve these personal problems (DeFrain, 2018).

In China, the family still exerts a strong influence on one's personal matters, one of them is about a life partner. Although it has been returned to a person's personal choice, in reality it is still influenced by family, society, and culture (Xu, Anqi; Xie, Xiaolin; Liu, Wenli; Xia, Yan; Liu, 2007).

Another study in India found that families in India have undergone massive transformation. This is due to mobilization, urbanization, industrialization, and modernization. Families in India still consider members to be agents who carry the family name to be known by the public. The family in India is also still a medium or means of transmitting values such as caste. However, families in India have experienced changes in acceptance of their family members as well such as the increasing number of single mothers (Sooryamoorthy, 2012).

Meanwhile, in the country where skit was created, Thailand, families are very strongly influenced by Buddhist values. This is because this religion is the most dominant in a country that has never experienced colonization. For Thais, it is very crucial to respect the family members and it will be constantly reminded to all

family members. However, Buddhism which brings the value of tolerance also provides a transformation of the values of freedom. The younger generation has freedom in choosing a partner, and most will marry even if not at a young age. Buddhism does not provide traditions regarding marriage, but its values strongly shape families in Thailand (Limanonda, 2017).

In this study, researchers found that the family in several literatures should be a pillar for family members to learn about the values of kindness. This is also found in the skit communication product 'The Family Gathering' from Salmon House. In addition, researchers also discovered that in both skit and society, a family is a means of affirming respect to older family members. In this case, it is also noticed that families often interfere in decision-making regarding life partners and marriage.

However, researchers also see a difference between a literature of family in the community and the family represented in skit. In the literature, family ideally provides freedom to the younger generation, trusts the family members to maintain the family good reputation, and becomes a safe space to appreciate, support, and love the members. However, researchers found a family dysfunction in the skit. The family has become a medium to judge, discriminate, harass, and dominate younger family members. It has become a means of silencing and making fun of the younger generation, and the family has also become a means of prosecuting younger family member.

Closing

Salmon House presents the Family Gathering on YouTube and it has become a platform for resistance, criticism, and means to break free from the shackles of old media rigor. Salmon House 'chooses' YouTube platform to criticize the family given the factors of its openness as well as its proximity to the younger generation. Salmon House seems to be a 'bridge' to convey the silence of the younger generation in family meetings.

However, the attempt of course comes with a hidden agenda. Salmon House, as a production house, is not only a platform for criticism, but also part of an industry that believes in commercialism. Criticism of family values that they bring up by showing the feelings of the younger generation is actually a strategy to gain benefit. The younger generation has been 'alienated' in their personal criticism and trapped in an escapism that is mainly for profit.

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