Revealing the Philosophy of Starbucks Logo: Semiotic Analysis

Lambok Hermanto Sihombing[1]
President University, Indonesia
lambok.president@gmail.com

Puji Lestari[2]
Indraprasta University
puji.indraprasta@gmail.com

Abstract

Starbucks is among the most recognizable coffee shops in Indonesia. People will recognize Starbucks by looking at the logo on the cup. The logo is essential in conveying the company's image and impression to customers. A brand's logo represents its identity. This study aims to analyze the idea behind the Starbucks logo. This research utilizes a qualitative approach. To assist researchers with their analysis, the Semiotics method and the Representation theory from Stuart Hall are implemented in this research. The result indicates that Starbucks logo reminds us to be good to people and the world.

Keywords: *brand; color; identity; logo; representation*

INTRODUCTION

In today's business marketplace, branding is a crucial competitiveness component that distinguishes similar goods or services offered by different organizations in customers' minds and make them more desirable (Cuong, 2020). Branding is essential for establishing a strong relationship with customers, and it will have the ability to influence client selection and loyalty. Moreover, the stronger the bond between the brand and the client, the greater the customer's preference for the brand and brand loyalty is (Bilgin, 2018). Brand loyalty refers to a buyer's reluctance to purchase and utilize goods from a competing brand in which they lack trust. When a buyer is devoted to a brand, he or she believes that the brand has the proper features and quality at a reasonable price. Even if other brands provide a lower price or higher quality, brand-loyal customers will remain loyal to their preferred brand (Natarajan & Sudha, 2016).

Starbucks Corporation is a coffeehouse in the United States. Its main office is located in Seattle, Washington. Starbucks Coffee intends to expand its operations to more than 70 countries by the beginning of 2020. Starbucks Coffee outlets offer hot and cold beverages, pastries, and snacks. Starbucks coffee was established by Zev Siegl, Jerry Baldwin, and Gordon Bowker. After moving to Milan in the 1980s, Howard Schultz operated a coffee shop. Schultz established more franchisees throughout the United States. Recently, coffee has become an integral part of people's daily lives. We can all freely visit coffee shops for coffee and desserts. In coffee shops, we could also socialize and interact with others (Pandey, et.al., 2021).

Starbucks has established a brand with significant brand loyalty (Tepper, 2013a). Starbucks is renowned for its coffee. The company took something as fundamental as coffee and added value to it. The brand is defined as much by its attitude as by its products. For Starbucks enthusiasts, the experience is more than a daily espresso infusion; it is immersion in a politically correct, cultural shelter from daily stresses (Mc Dowell, 1996, p.1).

The Starbucks reward loyalty card (My Starbucks Reward card) is a smart marketing strategy. Consumers can purchase a standard gift card, continue to use it, collect points, and ultimately receive a personalized Rewards card. The more frequently the card is used, the greater the rewards and beverages gained. The Reward member rank provided even more advantages (Starbucks Rewards, 2016). Another campaign developed by Starbucks was the treat receipt. Consumers can bring the receipt from the morning and use the coupon for another iced beverage later on the same day (Starbucks Melody, 2015).

Starbucks creates an environment where customers feel they are away from home and work, in a peaceful ambiance, with handy locations, and where everyone is welcome (Hennessey, 2012; Marshall, 2015; Niamh, 2015). In addition to the experience, seasonal offers and promotions help refresh the Starbucks brand. As a result of Starbucks' excellent customer service, people are price insensitive and willing to pay a premium for its products (Niamh, 2015; Tepper, 2013a).

Starbucks' net revenues of $4.9 billion in the third quarter of 2015 represented an increase of 18% year-over-year. The revenues can be ascribed to new digital initiatives, such as the 2009-launched My Starbucks Rewards program. Since its inception in 2009, the program has developed substantially. Customers that joined the club would receive free drinks or meals dependent on the number of earned stars. The number of active users hit 10.4 million. There were 6,2 million gold members, representing a 32% increase over the third quarter of 2014. (Harris, 2015).

Starbucks is ubiquitous, dependable, and gives customers a "homey feeling." The Starbucks brand delivers reliability, which people appreciate (Niamh, 2015). Starbucks has been able to communicate with customers and create an online community for its followers due to social networking.

Starbucks is especially popular because it created MyStarbucksIdea.com, a website where consumers can submit their ideas to the business and feel more engaged (Niamh, 2015).

From the background above, the researchers view that Starbucks brand delivers reliability, provides excellent customer service, and gives worth products. Those factors make Starbucks brand much more popular. Even though the price is expensive, the loyal brand customers do not mind about it. As a result, they prefer the brand to price. The brand itself cannot be separated with the logo. When people see the image of twin-tailed mermaid with green color, they will directly notice that it is Starbucks. From that description, the researchers see that logo plays an important role in attracting loyal-brand customers. The logo must have its meaning or philosophy. Thus, in this study, the researchers are interested in analyzing the philosophy of Starbucks logo.

To reveal the philosophy of Starbucks logo, the researchers applied Semiotic approach and the Representation theory from Stuart Hall.

In semiotics, a sign signifies anything representing something else, such as an object or a concept. As the Swiss linguist and founder of European semiology, Ferdinand De Saussure discovered a combination of sound and image as a *signifier* and the underlying concept (*content*) as a sign *(signified)*. The significance of this indicator is the shape of the information conveyed by the word, sounds, visuals, or cues. In addition, Saussure and Peirce emphasize the significance of the link between the sign and the object or the signifier and the signified. Different individuals will define this relationship in a variety of ways. Peirce leverages the existence of additional triads—icon, indexical, and symbolic—to explain the nature of the sign's relationship. All three readily explain how visual signs function so that the explanation of the link between signs is primarily visual (Smith, et.al., 2004).

Furthermore, the Saussurean semiotics focuses on the sign, the meaning of a brand's logo, whereas the Peircian semiotics examines the placement of the brand logo in advertisements, analyzing the relationship between brand identity, brand slogans, and other sign and code systems that influence communication with consumers. Therefore, the brand might become an inseparable semiotic entity, an emblem in the consumption context. Essentially, it is the transformation of symbols and brand signals into signs that transmit meaning to living persons or identities (Gaines, 2008; Manning, 2010; Mick et al., 2004; Lury, 2004).

Thus, "brand semiotics" are the fundamental components of a central meaning system in which brand symbols operate as letters or words in the language of consumption. The greater the number of brand symbols and brand language, the more difficult it will be for customers to comprehend and share (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) Brand meaning can be an alternative social structure and provide economic value. Therefore, "brand semiotics" is a socio cognitive semiotic process that links consumers to consumption systems and shared meanings (Thellefsen et al., 2007). Semiotic branding enables the

creation of a brand that is instantly recognizable and distinguishable by a simple logo, sign, or even color (Eco, 1976; Mick & Buhl, 1992; Mick et al., 2004; Mick et al., 2004).

Representation studies describe, symbolize, or represent an entity or process (Oscario, 2013). According to Hall, representation is a significant cultural practice. This culture is covered in the concept of "shared experience," which is quite broad. Share the same experience, the same programming language, and the same concept to describe how the depiction is. A working language with three representation theories is required for operation. First is the method that acts as a mirror to conceal the underlying significance of everything captured by the human senses. Second is the purposeful approach, which humans utilize as a communication tool from someone's point of view. The third approach is constructionist, which holds that individuals construct meaning through their use of language (Hall, 1997).

Hall also describes representation as "the process of establishing meaning through the incorporation of language in the development of the desired meaning." Thus, discourse analysis, the study of ideology, and the study of representation are intricately linked. To put it another way, the meaning obtained from the depiction of a certain thing exists due to its ideology. Stuart argues that ideas are established and evolved through representations, with events occurring not only verbally but also visually. Not only do individual concepts exist in the representation system, but there are also methods for organizing, adding, and grouping ideas or concepts, as well as varied degrees of relationship complexity (Supandi, 2017).

METHODS

This research analyzed the philosophy of Starbucks logo. The Semiotics approach and theory of Representation from Stuart Hall were used for this study. To figure out how the philosophy of Starbucks logo is, the authors did several steps in this research. First, the author analyzed and found out the meaning of the logo and color using Semiotic approach that includes signifier and signified. Second, the authors connected the Semiotic analysis of Starbuck logo with the Representation theory from Stuart Hall. The last, the authors concluded the whole observation.

FINDINGS

In order to fully understand the result of this research, firstly, the authors observed the elements of Starbucks image that includes logo and color using Semiotic approach. This observation would be beneficial as it could help the authors know the meanings of its logo and color. In this study, the Starbucks logo changes will be analyzed from the very beginning up to now.

In the Starbucks logo, we will always see the image of siren. The siren image has existed since 1971 as seen in Figure (1).

Figure 1. A siren image
Source : https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2016/who-is-starbucks-siren/

According to Steve Murray, a creative director in the Starbucks Global Creative Studio cited in Flandreau (2016), "Siren is not a real person, but we kind of think of her as one. She's the biggest symbol of our brand, really, other than our partners (employees). She's the face of it". The siren resembles a superb mermaid. Frequently, a siren is represented with two tails. She may seem like an odd pick for a coffee company's spokesperson. The history of how and why the siren came to be is quite intriguing (Flandreau, 2020).

DISCUSSSION

In a closer observation, the researchers analyzed deeply about the logo changes in Starbucks started in 1971 until now. In Figure 2, we can see the Starbucks logo used in 1971.

Figure 2. Strabucks logo in 1971
Source : https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2016/who-is-starbucks-siren/

According to Cicilia (2016), she stated that Terry Heckled designed and implemented the above logo as the company's first trademark. The logo has an image of a siren, specifically a mermaid. The logo still contains STARBUCKS, COFFEE, TEA, and SPICES because Starbucks has just begun its career. The logo still includes STARBUCKS, COFFEE, TEA, and SPICES because Starbucks has only recently begun its professional career. They are in the public domain. Therefore they continue to provide the company's name and indicate that they offer coffee and tea. This original logo's visual semiotics is dominated by the color brown, which signifies strength and comfort. Since brown is similar to gold, it is also associated with an opulent and luxurious impression. White is a neutral color that may be combined with any color, and the white writing creates a minimalist style. The logo's disadvantage is that the Siren picture is misspelled because it displays the original image. As it depicts a naked image of the Siren, this first logo generates considerable controversy from the larger community. Therefore, Starbucks altered its emblem for the first time to avoid controversy and adverse perceptions that could ultimately lead to the company's demise. This initial one has also incorporated a round sign for excellence, which means that Starbucks always expects perfection. This circular

visual depiction is also included in the logos for the following modifications (Cicilia, 2016).

In 1971, the founders chose the name Starbucks after being inspired by Moby Dick. Next up: logo creation. During a search through some old marine literature, something stood out. A siren-like, strange maritime figure called to them. Steve stated, "They adored the design and believed it reflected what Starbucks stood for." "Therefore, we drew inspiration from that and designed the logo accordingly. Moreover, she turned into the siren." There are two significant ties between Starbucks and the maritime community. Seattle, our hometown, is a port city. Due to their proximity to Puget Sound, they feel a profound connection to the water. 2) Coffee frequently travels large distances over water to reach them. Even today, large container ships transport the cargo to the port. They have redesigned their siren several times throughout time. Steve said, "We saw a lot of her in the beginning." The menu was first updated in 1987 when handcrafted espresso beverages were added. At that time, the logo went from brown to green (Flandreau, 2020) that can be seen in Figure (3).

Figure 3. Strabucks logo in 1987
Source : https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2016/who-is-starbucks-siren/

In 1987, following the alteration of the design in response to criticism, a second logo was produced. This alteration significantly impacts their appearance, since their semiotics shift from brown to green, black, and white. The new dark green logo represents future Starbucks firm development, distinctiveness, freshness, and wealth. This inner circle's dark hue indicates strength and creates an appearance of exclusivity for the organization. Adding a gleaming star to the new Starbucks emblem symbolizes the company's aspiration to become an industry leader in the coffee and tea industry. Starbucks still provides white writing and has not been altered; however, Tea and Spices have been eliminated, leaving simply "Starbucks Coffee." However, Siren's body is still clearly visible in the emblem, this modification

controversial. This issue caused Starbucks to alter its logo once more. Two stars denote brightness in visual semiotics; hence, Starbucks should be bright and dazzling (Varlina, et.al., 2021).

The following logo changes can be seen below (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Strabucks logo in 1992
Source : https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2016/who-is-starbucks-siren/

According to Flandreau (2020), he stated that they became a publicly traded firm in 1992. We further modified the logo by magnifying the siren. Starbucks redesigned their logo in 1992, decreasing the location of the Siren image so that it is more prominent from a distance. Since Siren's navel is no longer depicted, the contentious element has been eliminated. The old logo retains the same arrangement of visual semiotics in colors and stars (Utami, 2018).

There are still two stars in the logo, and the color scheme of green, white, and black remains unchanged. This company's third image update is sufficient to defuse criticism. This time, due to its logo, Starbucks gained acceptance and can join the foreign market without issues around its logo (Varlina, et.al., 2021).

The last logo changes can be seen in 2011 until now (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Strabucks logo in 2011 until now
Source : https://stories.starbucks.com/stories/2016/who-is-starbucks-siren/

In a closer observation, in 2011, Starbucks Corporation began removing the words "Starbucks" and "coffee" from the company's and its corporate entities' names. A logo that reinforces the company's mark while preserving its identity. The name of the female mermaid is Siren. In the concept of visual semiotics, Siren is portrayed as a seductive man whose attractiveness might entice sailors. Then, in the explanation of its visual representation, the Siren Image on the logo is compared to a company's aim, establishing a brand worth billions of dollars and more that can be accessed globally through its cafe network. This use of the siren image in the emblem is already a departure from the previous, obscene siren picture. Last, on the usage of visual cognition, they still retain the color green, but green is employed at a higher resolution, so it seems brighter than previously; yet, this does not alter the message (Cicilia, 2016; Utami, 2018).

The name "Starbucks" should be removed from the logo, as the corporation has successfully built brand recognition in the neighborhood. Only a market-recognized brand is capable of engaging in this type of activity. The removal of the term "Coffee" in the Starbucks logo can be explained by the fact that the company is well-known for its coffee business. As a result, the public already knows what they will receive when they visit the store without needing

further writing. In addition, this modification could lead to confusion about Apple Inc.'s logo, leading to market expansion. With the brand's position on the market, there is even the chance of a lifestyle shift. Even though the images and colors have not changed, Starbucks has also modernized its company internally (Cicilia, 2016; Utami, 2018).

Steve Murray, a creative director in the Starbucks Global Creative Studio cited in Flandreau (2016) stated,

> *"We really refreshed the logo and took the words Starbucks Coffee off of it. We went back in and did…we call a little bit of work on her. Gave her a little bit of more modern hair, did a little face work on her and just cleaned her up a little bit".*
>
> *"I hope when people see the siren on their cup, of course it's going to stand for what they're going to get from Starbucks," Steve said. "If the siren is on that cup of coffee, it's going to be awesome." "It's definitely about coffee but it's about a lot more than coffee. It's about…being good to people, being good to the world," Steve said. "That's definitely something that we do in the way that we source our coffee and that we help farmers, the way we treat our customers and the way we treat our partners. I think it's about being good citizens of the planet and taking care of each other in that way and standing up for what we believe in"* (Flandreau, 2016).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

To conclude, Starbucks' logo has undergone three iterations until they discovered one that conveyed the brand's essence while retaining its integrity. Due to the controversy that arose in society, the logo change was delayed, but other features can be captured, including its aesthetic impacts. While Starbucks is now deleting letters from its design, the logo may alter in the future to reflect the notion that it will be continually updated. Consequently, the visual effects like colors, designs, and letters will have a significant impact on the future development of a brand.

In the process of analysis, the study observed the changes to the Starbucks logo in order to determine what their logo represents. However, it will be lot more exploratory and intriguing when subsequent researchers add more specifics about how the logo influences customer preferences. Extensive studies might include the percentage of devoted customers and the location of the Starbucks coffee shop.

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