



CONFRONTING CONSUMER GOODS ADVERTISEMENTS IN POST-TRUTH ERA WITH SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING

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Abstract : This paper highlights the framework obtained from numerous researches in Social Studies Learning in junior high school especially on the concept of production, distribution, and consumption. The concepts employ Critical Theory to investigate the presence of ideology power in this Neoliberalism era that considers customers as an object. As a part of society, students are unaware of the adverse effect of consumer goods advertisement that may manipulate people's mind. In this digital era, advertisements of consumer goods often belief customers' expectation. Therefore, based on the classroom action research in some junior high schools in Bandung, the study seeks to develop students' ability in thinking critically about such advertisement.

Keywords : post truth, consumer goods, critical thinking, social studies learning

BACKGROUND

The study gives an account of students who practice excessive consumption lifestyle as the primary issue. The students were driven by their desire instead of their necessity. This, indeed, presents a bigger problem as such purchase will hurt parents' economy. The problem of consuming goods excessively is not investigated under the umbrella of macro economy that reflects the higher the consumption rate, the higher the economic growth (Ojeili, 2006). In Social Studies perspective, the higher the consumption rate of students, the bigger the demand for their allowance. The study observed that consumption rate must match productivity scale. Students' productivity in academic sphere must be assessed in learning motivation, result, and critical thinking ability toward the consumer goods advertised in mass media. After all, productivity, creativity, and innovation are the skills that students must possess in 21st century (Trilling and Fadel, 2009).

Previous studies of excessive consumption on students revealed that the students often purchased new sets of stationery albeit having no trouble with the old ones. The students often could not resist the temptation to buy the latest style of shoes and clothes. In addition, most students spend their leisure time in shopping mall with their family instead of visiting educational sites like museum or natural attraction places such as mountains and beach. The appeal of fast food consumption drives them to switch their homemade diet. Instant food has been replacing homecooked meals as students' lunch menu. When asked, students claim that they were affected by the current trend. Furthermore, goods advertised in television and online media have presented a big appeal for students. Not to mention, that parents allows students to bring their cellular phone, in spite of prohibition in their school, have generated more problems. Unfortunately, students might see the advertisements through their mobile device. This presents a challenge for Social Studies Learning to confront consumer goods advertisement and to prevent 'false consumer' phenomenon (Baudrillard, 1998).



In *Prosa dari Praha, Narasi Historis Masyarakat Konsumen Era Kapitalisme Global*, Supriatna (2018) states that students' as consumer society phenomenon as:

Digital world has contributed to the rise of pedagogical value that teaches students, as a part of consumer society, consumerism (Martens, 2015). In capitalism era, children toys can be a potential market. The concept of market is not only defined as a place of seller-buyer transaction as often described in Social Studies Learning in junior high school. Market also serves as an imaginary world where massive exchange, trade, and transaction occurs and it often dictates how consumers use their goods. In imaginary market dressed as advertisings in printed, electronic and online media, a wide range of consumer goods is commonly endorsed to meet not only primary needs but also secondary and tertiary ones.

Likewise, the frequently appeared commercials in television has shifted family pedagogy. Parents gradually replace their regular diets that consist of nutritious meals because of advertisements. Many families no longer have homecooked meals as their daily meals. Those urban and busy families claim there is no time to spare to prepare their lunch and dinner. Children nowadays enjoy branded, extravagant food and order their instant food in fast food restaurant in shopping malls and city center. Their parents keep feeding them with instant and unhealthy food. Children no longer adapt a nutritious eating habit thus they develop no interest in eating healthy food. Due to the attraction of the advertisement, children prefer foods that are often advertised on television and they slowly neglect their healthy diet. The impression created from commercials and the habit of eating fast food have been responsible for students' degrading interest on healthy diet. Eventually, fast food consumption changes children's regular diet because of the everlasting impact of advertisement (Supriatna, 2018b: 210-211).

Digital world belongs to millennial including junior high school students. Technology advancements has two different sides. First, the breakthrough can enhance students learning output to boost their competence. Second, digital world can overpower, manipulate, and lead students to lose their autonomy. As an illustration, beauty product commercials, inevitably, construct 'beauty' concept that is identical with having fair complexion. Consequently, this compels Indonesian customer, who mostly have tan complexion, to purchase the products that are not environmentally friendly. A large portion of whitening lotion ingredients is extracted from crude palm oil, which are taken through deforestation. Millions hectare of forest are greatly reduced in order to meet demands of consumer goods (Zuckerman, 2017).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The creation of consumer society, including students who use goods irrespective of their primary needs because of their mere desire and the brand reputation, can be studied with Post-Truth Paradigm (Baudrillard, 1998). The researcher defines post truth as a paradigm similar to post-modernism or post-positivism. Oxford Dictionary (2016) defines the term as a situation, when facts have less power in shaping public opinion compared to emotions and personal beliefs. The



researcher further characterizes post truth as unverified information, which keeps being distributed, repeated, and reproduced, thus, gradually, it is considered true. When a company advertises a certain product, the information provided is not always true. Most importantly, Indonesian's concept of beauty is synonymous with fair complexion, slim body, straight or dyed hair. Not to mention, fast food companies do not inform the potential customer about its MSG substances, preservatives or any harmful elements. Customers are only told about its artificial delicacy and social status elevation once they start consuming the food (Sandlin, 2010)

Social Studies learning must empower students to think critically especially on comprehending information. Digital literacy is pivotal to maintain students' critical thinking thus they are not easily persuaded by unverified information. Baudrillard (1998) identifies marketing as an imperialistic knowledge. It continuously produces image, symbols, or signs that shape consumer's lifestyle. Companies usually utilize post-truth to produce information as if it were true. Such impression is reproduced thus it can surpass reality. This phenomenon is known as hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1998, Supriatna, 2018a, 2018b).

In Social Studies learning context, post truth is considered as a propaganda that will mislead students if they do not possess critical thinking. Unverified facts may deceive audience thus advertisements in media should be faced wisely. Zarzalejos (201) states that critical thinking may aid people to confront misleading facts. Companies often misuse public emotion therefore the value of data and facts are no longer considered important (Medran, 2017). In developing critical thinking, data and facts should always become the primary supports of someone's claim (Enis, 1996).

Referring to study conducted by Enis (1996) and Fisher (2009), Supriatna (2018a) characterizes critical thinking as

High-order thinking that includes the ability of questioning, identifying problems, assuming, using logic, and being skeptical. Teacher can accommodate students' questioning ability by providing brainstorming questions like: why should we eat imported food if the same commodities are produced locally? How do we empower local farmer to produce crops that are more nutritious? Next, is it a thing that we need to buy? If we do not, why bother buying it? Teachers should accommodate these kinds of question in Social Studies learning. In facing various offers in advertisements, students must acquire digital literacy in processing any information and deciding whether to buy or not to in accordance to their allowance

THE STUDY

The researcher employed classroom action research to develop students' critical thinking in facing consumer goods through advertisements. The study set out to establish students' competence in thinking critically toward information they have grasped. To achieve such competence, the learning process utilized traditional method such as lecturing, providing tasks that demand students to watch television with their family, interviewing parents, reporting, and discussing the findings along with evaluating the learning in the classroom.



The researcher collaborated closely with a teacher in Bandung. Both investigated and reviewed curriculum framework and including relevant competence with local context namely the competence to face hoax or advertisements that attract Indonesians to overspend their money. The researchers studied the phenomenon in this city as Bandung has one of the fastest-growing consumer society in Indonesia. The emergence of shopping malls and the ease of online shopping have contributed to growth of consumer society in this city. The phenomenon often leads into trouble if students practice consumerism like their parents.

To promote better understanding of the underlying concept of production, distribution, and consumption, teachers might illustrate the framework comprehensively. The lecture approach can help teachers to define the importance of primary, secondary, and tertiary needs. Teachers can use learning media like video about green consumer or smart shopping to introduce the concepts. The researchers carried out the activity for several times until the students completely understood the materials.

The study also included parents' participation. The researchers informed parents the importance of guiding their children while watching television. When watching cartoon, parents were asked to jot down every commercial that attracted their kids' attention. Parents were also demanded to explain that the content of those advertisement is unreal and it is only a gesture for promoting a product. Not every product advertised belongs to our primary needs. The researchers simplified the notion of post truth as news or advertisement that provides insufficient information for consumer. For instance, some might opine that the advertisements of motor cycle often misrepresents the danger of high-speed motor riding in heavily congested areas. Not to mention, snack wrapped in plastic also raises controversy as there is no explanation how the wrap is processed or thrown upon finishing.

Students also had to interview their own parents. They had to investigate their parents' job and their monthly salary. They had to question the way their parents earn money to meet primary and secondary needs. The interview activity could boost students' critical thinking that one could buy things from the money she or he gets from working religiously. Lastly, the researchers expect that students will be more considerate when asking something from their parents.

Finally, the researchers conducted evaluation in the end of action research cycle. The students must report their observation of watching television and interview with their parents. Each class had discussion and question-and-answer session. By running this activity, students could reflect on their experience. To end the activity, students must write their final thoughts about the importance of being a smart buyer, choosing goods based on their needs rather than mere desire, or considering goods' usability instead of brands. For instance, students can assess their own decision whenever buying something. Teachers should emphasize that proper spending, eco-friendly products, and critical thinking can lead students to healthy lifestyle. After all, students' self-evaluation can enhance their critical thinking and decision-making skill.

CONCLUSION



The study aims to propose a new alternative in Social Studies learning which has relied greatly on conceptual understanding. The notion of production, distribution, and consumption can be successful in learning Social Studies once every student can characterize these three concepts well. The issue of consumer goods advertisement can broaden the learning scope as students face commercials every single time. In addition, students not only comprehend the concept but also realize the importance of being economical. Critical thinking might assist students to perceive misleading information on the advertisements. Students have to be able to distinguish their needs or desire toward consumer goods. Primary needs are tangible and one must fulfill his or hers while brands are the products of social construct formed by advertising company. Through this study, students can think critically about consumer goods that they probably do not need to begin with.

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