

Audience Reception in Digital Spaces: Interpreting Domestic Gender Roles in the “Suami Sejati Masak” YouTube Campaign

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Abstract

Advertising increasingly functions not only as a commercial tool but also as a cultural text through which social values are communicated and negotiated. One emerging theme in contemporary campaigns is gender equality, particularly in the representation of domestic roles. This study examines how audiences interpret gender equality messages in the “Suami Sejati Masak” campaign by Heinz ABC Indonesia, focusing on user-generated comments on YouTube. Adopting a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm, this research applies reception analysis, based on Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding framework, to 25 selected comments posted between March 2020 and July 2021. The findings reveal a range of audience interpretations, categorized as dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. Dominant readings indicate acceptance and reinforcement of shared domestic roles, while negotiated readings reflect ambivalence shaped by practical considerations and everyday constraints. Oppositional readings highlight resistance grounded in traditional gender norms and perceptions of realism. Rather than demonstrating a uniform response, the study shows that audience interpretations are diverse and shaped by cultural values, lived experiences, and digital participation. These findings suggest that gender equality messages in advertising function as sites of cultural negotiation rather than straightforward drivers of social change. The study contributes to media and communication research by extending reception analysis into digital space and demonstrating the analytical value of YouTube comments as a form of audience discourse.

Keywords: advertising, audience reception, brand campaign, digital spaces, gender equality, YouTube

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is increasingly understood not only as a commercial practice but also as a cultural arena where social meanings and identities are represented and negotiated. Gender representation remains one of the most visible aspects of this process, as advertisements often depict women in domestic roles and men in public or authoritative positions. Although some recent campaigns promote more inclusive portrayals, studies continue to show that stereotypical gender representations persist across advertising contexts.

In Asian contexts, including Indonesia, these representations are further embedded within socio-cultural and normative frameworks that sustain traditional gender expectations. A recent cross-national study across seven Asian countries confirms that both visual and linguistic elements in advertising continue to reinforce gendered divisions, even when campaigns attempt to incorporate progressive themes (Gupta, et al., 2024). This indicates that shifts toward gender-inclusive representation are neither linear nor uniform but occur within a field of tension between tradition and change. As a result, advertising becomes a contested space in which competing meanings of gender are articulated and negotiated.

Simultaneously, brands have increasingly implemented value-driven communication strategies that address social issues such as gender equality. These initiatives, often described as brand activism, aim to align corporate identity with broader societal values to enhance credibility and consumer engagement (Moorman, 2020). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these strategies remains uncertain. Recent studies indicate that consumers are highly sensitive to perceived authenticity in socially oriented campaigns and may respond negatively when messages are perceived as inconsistent or performative (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020). Research on femvertising similarly demonstrates that, while such campaigns can foster positive attitudes, they frequently elicit ambivalent interpretations when audiences perceive a disconnect between the message and reality (Sobande, 2019). As a result, the meaning of gender equality in advertising is not fixed but is subject to ongoing interpretation, negotiation, and contestation.

In the Indonesian context, the “Suami Sejati Masak” (A Real Husband Cooks) campaign by Heinz ABC Indonesia represents a prominent example of such value-driven advertising. Launched in 2018, the campaign challenges conventional assumptions about domestic labor by portraying men as active participants in cooking and household responsibilities. Its flagship advertisement, “Super Bunda,” narrates the transformation of a father who, inspired by his child’s admiration for the mother’s dual role, begins to share domestic duties. Through this narrative, the campaign constructs an alternative form of masculinity that incorporates care, emotional engagement, and domestic participation, traits that have traditionally been associated with femininity in Indonesian society.

However, the significance of such representations cannot be fully understood without examining the audience interpretations. Reception-oriented research increasingly emphasizes that media meanings are not passively received but actively constructed by audiences in context-dependent ways. Recent studies highlight that audience readings are mediated by everyday experiences, cultural norms, and social positioning, leading to diverse and sometimes conflicting readings of the same content. This interpretive

variability is particularly relevant in the context of gender-related campaigns, where messages intersect with deeply embedded beliefs and practices.

The importance of reception analysis is further amplified in the context of digital media environments. The expansion of platforms such as YouTube has transformed audiences into active participants who publicly articulate their interpretations through comments and other forms of engagement. This participatory culture not only increases the visibility of audience voices but also creates a dynamic space of interaction where meanings are continuously negotiated. In this sense, YouTube comments can be understood as sites where cultural meanings are not only expressed but also contested.

The relevance of the “Suami Sejati Masak” campaign was further amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly altered domestic arrangements and intensified discussions about household labour. In Indonesia, work-from-home policies increased the visibility of unpaid domestic work and highlighted existing gender inequalities in the distribution of household responsibilities. Reports from UN Women indicate that the pandemic disproportionately increased women’s caregiving burdens while also prompting public discourse on the need for more equitable domestic roles (UN Women, 2020). In this context, advertising messages that promote shared household responsibilities intersect with lived experiences, potentially shaping how audiences interpret and evaluate such narratives.

Despite the growing relevance of these dynamics, existing research on gender and advertising in Indonesia has largely focused on textual or semiotic analysis of media content (Pratiwi & Wiyanti, 2017). More recent evidence confirms that inequality remains uneven across regions, with some provinces experiencing significantly higher gender gaps than others (Muthmaina, 2024). The “*Suami Sejati Masak*” campaign has been analyzed using semiotic analysis and argued that it constructed a modern masculine identity compatible with household work (Kertanegara, 2019). Also, audience responses have been examined to the same campaign but limited their focus to explicit and implicit reactions, without systematically applying Hall’s encoding/decoding model (Nasucha & Kertanegara, 2020). While such approaches provide important insights into representation, they offer a limited understanding of how audiences interpret these messages. Moreover, there remains a lack of studies that systematically analyse user-generated content from digital platforms as empirical data for reception research.

This study addresses this gap by applying reception theory to analyse audience interpretations of the “Suami Sejati Masak” campaign as expressed in YouTube comments. By focusing on user-generated responses, the research captures how meanings are actively constructed and negotiated in a digital environment. Rather than making broad claims about gender inequality at the macro level, this study adopts a focused approach in how a specific media text is interpreted within a particular socio-cultural context.

The central research question guiding this study is: How do online audiences interpret the gender equality message in the “Suami Sejati Masak” campaign on YouTube? In addressing this question, the study contributes to the literature in two key ways. First, it extends reception analysis into digital media contexts by demonstrating the analytical value of YouTube comments as a source of audience insight. Second, it provides empirically grounded evidence of how gender equality narratives in advertising are received, highlighting patterns of acceptance, negotiation, and resistance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reception Studies and Cultural Studies

Reception studies originate from the cultural studies tradition, which challenges the assumption that media audiences are passive recipients of information. Instead, audiences are viewed as active participants who interpret and negotiate meaning based on their personal and social contexts. The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies emphasized the importance of everyday experiences, cultural background, and social position in shaping how individuals interpret media texts. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model is particularly influential in this field.

According to Hall, media producers encode preferred meanings into texts, aiming to guide audience interpretation. However, audiences may not always decode messages as intended. Hall distinguishes three positions: (1) dominant-hegemonic reading, where audiences align with the intended meaning; (2) negotiated reading, where audiences partly accept but adapt the meaning to their context; and (3) oppositional reading, where audiences reject and reinterpret the meaning (Barker & Jane, 2016). This framework allows researchers to explore how social power, ideology, and resistance play out in the media consumption.

Reception studies have been applied in diverse contexts, from television programs to news media. However, most research relied on interviews or focus groups to capture audience meaning-making. On digital platforms, audience engagement becomes even more visible, as viewers articulate their interpretations through comment sections. The way audiences negotiate femvertising campaigns, often blending acceptance, skepticism, and resistance, resonates with findings that consumers demand authenticity from brands that advocate social causes (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020). This highlights the complexity of online reception, where cultural factors such as religion and humor interact with broader expectations of brand responsibility. This transition opens opportunities to extend reception analysis into online environments, making it relevant for contemporary cultural studies.

Gender Equality and the Social Construction of Roles

Gender equality is defined as the condition in which men and women have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities across social, political, and economic **life** (United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2020). Historically, the division of labor between men and women has been framed in binary terms: men as public actors and women as domestic caretakers. In Indonesia, these roles are reinforced by cultural traditions and patriarchal norms. The Indonesian language itself reflects this bias, with "sex" and "gender" often conflated in popular discourse, leading to the naturalization of women's domestic roles.

Contemporary gender studies, however, distinguish between sex as a biological difference and gender as a socially constructed role (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019). Gender roles, therefore, are not fixed but subject to cultural negotiation. The shifting of these roles has been documented globally, with increasing participation of women in the workforce and men's involvement in domestic tasks (Connell, 2020). In Indonesia, while progress has been made, persistent stereotypes still frame men as breadwinners and women as homemakers.

Religious interpretations further complicate the discourse. Conservative perspectives often reinforce male authority in the household, while moderate interpretations emphasize cooperation and equality in domestic responsibilities (Leavitt, Allsop, Price, Marks, & Dollahite, 2021). This duality creates a contested space where new gender practices emerge while old ideologies persist.

Advertising and Brand Campaigns as Carriers of Social Values

Advertising has long been criticized for reinforcing stereotypes, particularly in its portrayal of gender roles. Numerous studies highlight how women are often represented as housewives or sexualized figures, while men are depicted as powerful decision-makers (Grau & Zotos, 2016). While some campaigns have attempted to challenge traditional portrayals, stereotypes remain prevalent, particularly in Asian contexts. A review notes that gender roles in advertising continue to follow predictable patterns, despite shifts toward inclusivity (Eisend, 2019). Similarly, research on femvertising highlights that such campaigns often reproduce partial or limited visions of empowerment, failing to address deeper inequalities (Sobande, 2019).

Advertising also has the potential to shape public perceptions and cultural values through the dissemination of socially meaningful messages. Recent studies have argued that advertising not only reflects social norms but can also participate in public conversations around social issues and collective values (Livias, 2020). When brands integrate progressive values into their campaigns, they can influence public discourse and position themselves as socially engaged actors (Moorman, 2020). This practice, sometimes referred to as "brand activism" (Sarkar & Kotler, 2021), positions companies as advocates for social issues.

By embedding narratives of equality, diversity, or sustainability, brands attempt to establish themselves as socially responsible actors. Relatedly, research on the integration of gender equality with other social values, such as environmental sustainability, shows that Indonesian stakeholders are increasingly attentive to campaigns that combine activism with cultural sensitivity (Rahmania, Kertamuda, Wulandari, & Marfu, 2025). Such findings highlight the potential and risk of value-driven campaigns in emerging markets, where audiences may be receptive yet divided.

Audience Engagement in Digital Platforms

The rise of digital media, particularly platforms such as YouTube, Twitter (X), and TikTok, has significantly transformed the dynamics of media consumption. Audiences are no longer passive viewers but active participants who can comment, share, remix, and challenge content in publicly visible spaces. Recent scholarship highlights that this shift toward participatory digital environments enables more interactive and dialogic relationships between brands and audiences, where feedback is immediate, networked, and socially amplified (Voorveld, 2019). In this context, user engagement is not merely reactive but constitutive of meaning-making processes, as audiences actively shape how media messages are interpreted and circulated.

On YouTube, the comment section serves as a public arena for expressing interpretations (Nasrullah, et al., 2026). Unlike private interviews, these comments are organic, spontaneous, and shaped by the platform's social dynamics. Audiences express

dominant readings by praising messages they agree with, negotiated readings by highlighting aspects they find unrealistic, and oppositional readings by rejecting or criticizing the campaign altogether. Such interactions illustrate how cultural negotiation occurs in real-time, often revealing underlying tensions in society.

Studies on online audience engagement show that digital platforms provide greater visibility to diverse audience voices and allow users to publicly negotiate meaning through comments, reactions, and discussions (Yoon & Lee, 2023). However, these platforms can also reproduce existing social hierarchies, as dominant cultural values continue to shape online interactions and public debates. In the context of gender-related campaigns, online engagement can reflect both support for more egalitarian domestic roles and resistance rooted in patriarchal expectations.

METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative research design with a content analysis approach, situated within the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist perspective assumes that reality is socially constructed, and thus audience interpretations of media texts are shaped by their cultural, religious, and personal experiences (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002). This paradigm is particularly appropriate for reception studies, as it positions the audience not as passive recipients but as active agents in decoding media messages.

The study employed reception analysis, following Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework. This analytical framework is suitable for identifying how audiences in Indonesia interpret the gender equality message embedded in the *"Suami Sejati Masak"* campaign. Reception analysis has traditionally relied on interviews or focus groups (Mathieu, 2025). However, this research adapts the approach to online platforms, specifically YouTube, by analyzing audience comments. This innovation allows researchers to access organic, unsolicited interpretations that reflect spontaneous public reactions, particularly relevant in the digital age.

The object of study is the advertisement video *"Suami Sejati Masak"*, uploaded on Heinz ABC Indonesia's official YouTube channel on October 8, 2018. While the campaign was initially launched in 2018, the analysis focuses on comments posted during the COVID-19 pandemic, from March 2020 to July 2021. This time frame was selected for two reasons. First, the pandemic heightened domestic labor negotiations due to government-mandated work-from-home policies, making the campaign's message especially relevant. Second, the extended circulation of the advertisement during this period ensured that comments reflected ongoing public engagement beyond the campaign's original release.

Data were collected using purposeful sampling. YouTube displayed 228 comments on the campaign video as of July 2021. From these, 25 comments were selected for analysis. The selection was based on the following criteria: (1) The comment explicitly or implicitly referenced gender roles, household responsibilities, or reactions to the campaign message; (2) The comment contained sufficient textual information to enable interpretation (single-word comments such as "good" or emoticons were excluded); (3) The comment was original (not a duplicate or repetitive phrase).

Although the sample size may seem limited, qualitative research prioritizes interpretive depth over statistical breadth (Patton, 2015). The selection of 25 comments was guided by the principle of thematic saturation, understood as the point at which

additional data no longer yields analytical insights or substantially new interpretive categories. During the coding process, patterns consistent with Hall's dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings began to recur consistently across the dataset. After repeated coding and comparison of comments, the newly examined responses largely reflected variations on existing interpretive patterns rather than introducing new categories of meaning. This recurrence suggests that the dataset was sufficient to capture the range of audience interpretations relevant to the research questions within the specific context of the campaign.

Furthermore, in the context of digital advertising research, where user-generated comments often exhibit high redundancy in meaning and expression, smaller but carefully selected samples can provide analytically robust insights (Kozinets, 2020). By focusing on comments that explicitly engaged with gender roles and the campaign message, this study ensures depth and relevance of analysis rather than superficial coverage. Therefore, the sample size is considered adequate for exploring audience interpretation within a bounded case study of a specific advertising campaign.

Following (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, & Ranfagni, 2023), thematic units involve identifying the main topic or idea expressed in a text. Each comment was first read in its entirety, then coded into one of Hall's three reading positions. The coding process involved three stages. First, open coding was conducted to identify initial patterns of meaning, with each comment categorized into dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings. Second, axial coding was used to group comments into subthemes based on recurring interpretive patterns. At this stage, particular attention was given to how audiences drew upon specific interpretive resources in articulating their responses. Comments were coded as "humorous" when they employed irony, jokes, or playful language that engaged with the campaign message without fully endorsing or rejecting it. Meanwhile, comments were categorized under "religious" when they explicitly referenced religious values, teachings, or norms to justify either support for or opposition to the campaign. These categories were not treated as mutually exclusive ideological positions, but as discursive strategies through which audiences negotiated meaning.

Finally, selective coding was applied to identify broader patterns and relationships between reading positions and subthemes. This step enabled the analysis to move beyond surface categorization and examine how humor and religion functioned as culturally embedded interpretive resources within audience reception. To enhance transparency and consistency, coding decisions were documented and reviewed in a second cycle of analysis, during which categorizations were refined through discussion with a peer researcher.

To enhance reliability, coding was conducted in two cycles. First, the researcher coded all 25 comments independently. The selected comments were not intended to represent the entire population of viewers, but to capture a range of interpretive positions relevant to the research question. The purposive sampling strategy ensured that only comments directly engaging with gender roles and the campaign message were included, thereby prioritizing analytical relevance over numerical representativeness. Second, the coding was reviewed by a peer researcher familiar with communication studies. Any discrepancies in categorization were discussed until consensus was reached. This peer debriefing process ensured greater consistency and credibility of the findings.

Comments were sorted into the three reading codes. Subcategories were created to capture nuanced interpretations within each code. The frequency and distribution of readings were compared to assess dominant tendencies and areas of contestation. Then, findings were interpreted in light of Indonesian cultural norms, gender roles, and the socio-political context of the pandemic. Quantification was also used in a limited sense, such as reporting the number of comments in each reading category (dominant, negotiated, oppositional). However, the primary emphasis was on qualitative interpretation of the meanings conveyed.

To enhance transparency, Table 1 presents the coding scheme used in this study. The table outlines how audience comments were categorized into reading positions and subthemes, along with their operational definitions and coding indicators. This scheme ensures consistency in identifying how interpretive resources, such as humor and religion, were used by audiences in constructing meaning.

Table 1. Coding scheme for audience reception analysis

Reading Codes	Sub categories	Operational definition	Coding Indicators
Dominant	Practical	The audience fully accepts the campaign message and relates it to real-life experiences.	Mentions personal/family experience supporting shared domestic roles.
	Religious	The audience uses religious values to justify or support gender equality.	References to religious teachings emphasizing partnership, cooperation, or mutual help.
	Aspirational	Audience expresses hope or future-oriented acceptance of the message.	Statements about future generations or ideal family roles.
Negotiated	Practical	Partial acceptance but adjusted to real-life constraints.	Acknowledges the message but questions the feasibility (time, lifestyle, habits).
	Humorous	Engagement through humor, irony, or playful tone without full commitment.	Jokes, sarcasm, and light teasing about men cooking.
Oppositional	Realistic	Rejects the message based on perceived impracticality or unrealistic portrayal.	The claims scenario is unrealistic or not applicable in real life.
	Religious	Uses religious arguments to oppose shared domestic roles.	References to divine order, gendered duties.
	Patriarchal	Explicit rejection based on traditional gender norms.	Strong statements reinforcing fixed gender roles.

Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness and analytical rigor of the findings. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing the audience interpretations identified in this study with findings from previous research on gender representation and audience reception in Indonesian advertising contexts. For instance, Nasucha and Kertanegara (2020) found that audience responses to gender-related advertising involved both acceptance and reservation toward changing domestic roles (Nasucha & Kertanegara, 2020).

Although YouTube comments are publicly accessible, ethical concerns arise in using them for research. To protect anonymity, usernames of commenters are replaced with pseudonyms or initials when cited. Only comments relevant to the research question were included, avoiding unnecessary exposure of personal opinions unrelated to the campaign's message. This approach aligns with ethical guidelines for internet research, which emphasize balancing public availability of data with respect for user privacy (The British Psychological Society, 2021).

The chosen methodology has limitations. The reliance on a small sample of 25 comments restricts the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, the absence of demographic data on commenters prevents analysis of how factors such as age, gender, or socioeconomic status influenced reception. Additionally, online anonymity may encourage exaggerated or unrepresentative opinions. Nonetheless, the method provides valuable insights into spontaneous audience interpretations and demonstrates the feasibility of applying reception analysis to digital platforms.

RESULTS

Gender Equality Message in the ABC Brand Video Campaign

'Suami Sejati Masak' is a campaign from Heinz ABC's Brand at the end of 2018. This campaign represents the message that domestic work, such as cooking, can also be done by men, in this case, husbands. The 'Super Bunda' advertisement is the first in the 'Suami Sejati Masak' campaign aired on television and YouTube on October 8, 2018. The narration of this ad is about a child who draws his mother as Super Mother because she is still cooking after work. The father, who listened to his daughter's argument, became aware of the unequal domestic burden and then helped cook. In the end, they enjoy dinner together. Then the daughter added an existing picture of Super Daddy with Super Mother.

Figure 1 Storyboard of the Campaign Suami Sejati Masak
(Source: Author's documentation)



Distribution of Audience Readings

The coding of 25 YouTube comments reveals a slightly different distribution of audience interpretations compared to the initial categorization. Of these, 11 comments (44%) represented dominant-hegemonic readings, 5 comments (20%) reflected negotiated readings, and 9 comments (36%) expressed oppositional readings. This adjustment highlights that resistance to the campaign's gender equality message is more substantial than initially expected.

Table 2. Distribution of Audience Readings

Reading Position	Frequency	Percentage
Dominant	11	44%
Negotiated	5	20%
Oppositional	9	36%

This distribution suggests that while a plurality of viewers accepted the campaign's message, resistance and ambivalence remained strong. To provide a nuanced picture, comments were further organized into subthemes.

Dominant Readings

Audiences expressing dominant readings aligned closely with the encoded message of gender equality promoted by Heinz ABC. Three main subthemes emerged, which are dominant-practical, dominant-religious, and dominant-aspirational.

Dominant–Practical

Several viewers validated the campaign by referring to personal or family experiences. For instance, one comment stated: *"My father always cooked for us when my mother was busy. It never made him less of a man."* Such testimonials normalize male participation in domestic work as a lived reality rather than a mere aspiration.

Dominant–Religious

Some audiences employed Islamic values to endorse equality. One comment observed: *"In Islam, husband and wife are partners. Helping in the kitchen is part of love."* By invoking religion to support the campaign, these readings illustrate how faith can serve as a progressive foundation for redefining gender roles.

Dominant–Aspirational

A smaller set of comments linked the campaign to hopes for future generations. For example: *"I hope my son grows up knowing that cooking is not just a woman's job."* These aspirational readings project the campaign's relevance beyond present practices toward broader social change.

Together, dominant readings illustrate not only acceptance but also active reinforcement of the campaign through everyday experiences, religious justification, and future-oriented aspirations.

Negotiated Readings

Negotiated readings combined partial acceptance with skepticism or contextual adaptation. Two subthemes were prominent, which are negotiated-practical and negotiated-humorous.

Negotiated–Practical

Some viewers acknowledged the value of shared domestic labor but questioned its applicability. A typical comment was: *“This is good, but in reality, most families rely on food delivery. Not many husbands suddenly start cooking.”* Such responses underscore the gap between the campaign’s idealized vision and everyday practices.

Negotiated–Humorous

Other comments conveyed support in a playful or joking manner. For instance: *“Sure, husbands can cook—but only if they don’t burn the kitchen!”* Humor functioned as a strategy to reconcile meaning without directly contesting the message. It illustrates how audiences can engage critically while still affirming the campaign’s intent. Negotiated readings thus reflect ambivalence: audiences recognize the legitimacy of gender equality but adapt the message to the practicalities of daily life or express it through humor.

Oppositional Readings

Oppositional readings directly rejected the campaign’s intended message. Three main subthemes were identified, which are oppositional-realistic, oppositional-conservative religious, and oppositional-patriarchal.

Oppositional–Realistic

Some viewers dismissed the campaign as unrealistic or illogical. Examples include: *“The wife in this ad is just a fantasy, who really lives like this?”* or *“If the husband cooks, what happens to the children’s meals?”* These responses reflect skepticism grounded in perceived everyday realities rather than ideology alone.

Oppositional–Conservative Religious

Conservative interpretations of religion were mobilized to resist the campaign. One comment asserted: *“God designed men to work and women to cook. Don’t confuse these roles.”* This indicates how religious discourse can function as a resource for maintaining patriarchal norms.

Oppositional–Patriarchal

The strongest rejection came from explicitly patriarchal positions. Comments such as *“Cooking is a wife’s duty, not a husband’s”* directly contradicted the encoded message. These messages reveal entrenched cultural beliefs that continue to resist alternative representations of masculinity.

DISCUSSION

The findings offer important insights into how brand campaigns operate as contested cultural texts. By categorizing audience readings into dominant, negotiated, and oppositional positions with subthemes, the analysis demonstrates the complexity of meaning-making in Indonesian society.

Dominant Readings: Emerging Acceptance of Alternative Gender Norms

The prevalence of dominant readings (44%) indicates a notable degree of audience acceptance toward the campaign’s gender equality message. Rather than merely reflecting

agreement with the advertisement, these responses suggest that alternative representations of masculinity, particularly those involving domestic participation, are increasingly recognized as socially legitimate. This finding aligns with recent research on value-driven advertising, which suggests that audiences are more likely to embrace progressive messages when they resonate with evolving social realities and lived experiences rather than abstract ideals (Elhajjar & Itani, 2025).

The presence of practical subthemes, where audiences refer to personal or familial experiences, reinforces this point. These responses indicate that shared domestic roles are not entirely aspirational but already exist in certain contexts, thereby enhancing the campaign perceived authenticity. In addition, the emergence of religiously framed support highlights the flexibility of interpretive frameworks. Rather than functioning solely as a conservative force, religion is mobilized by some audiences as a resource to legitimize gender equality. This observation resonates with recent scholarship emphasizing that audience interpretations are shaped by context-specific cultural resources, which may be reinterpreted in both progressive and conservative ways (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2020).

Aspirational readings further demonstrate the forward-looking dimension of audience engagement. By projecting the campaign's message onto future generations, these responses suggest that advertising could shape long-term social imaginaries. However, such interpretations should not be taken as evidence of widespread transformation, but rather as indicators of shifting attitudes within specific audience segments. This supports the argument that advertising can play a symbolic role in social change, even when its material impact remains limited.

Negotiated Readings: Ambivalence and Everyday Constraints

Negotiated readings (20%) reveal a more ambivalent mode of engagement, where audiences neither fully accept nor reject the campaign's message. Instead, they reinterpret it in relation to practical constraints and everyday realities. This reflects a key insight from reception-oriented research: Audience interpretations are shaped not only by ideological alignment but also by lived experiences and situational contexts (Schrøder, 2019).

The practical subtheme highlights perceived gaps between the campaign's representation and real-life conditions. Comments emphasizing reliance on food delivery or time constraints suggest that audiences evaluate the message in terms of feasibility rather than principle. This indicates that acceptance of gender equality does not automatically translate into behavioural change, particularly when structural or habitual factors remain unchanged. Such findings are consistent with research showing that consumer responses to socially oriented campaigns often involve a negotiation between ideals and everyday practices (Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020).

The humorous subtheme represents another important form of negotiation. Humor allows audiences to engage with the message while maintaining a degree of distance from its ideological implications. Rather than outright resistance, humor functions as a softening mechanism that enables partial acceptance without full commitment. This finding aligns with studies of digital participation, which highlight how playful or ironic engagement serves as a strategy for navigating contested or sensitive issues in online environments (Dynel, 2020).

Taken together, negotiated readings illustrate that audience acceptance of progressive messages is conditional and mediated by everyday practices. They reveal the limits of advertising as a tool for social change, highlighting the gap between symbolic representation and lived reality.

Oppositional Readings: Persistence of Patriarchal Norms

The relatively high proportion of oppositional readings (36%) indicates that resistance to the campaign's message remains substantial. These responses demonstrate that gender equality narratives in advertising are interpreted within a broader socio-cultural context where traditional norms continue to exert strong influence.

Oppositional–realistic responses reflect scepticism grounded in perceptions of everyday life. Rather than explicitly rejecting gender equality, these comments question the plausibility of the campaign's narrative. This suggests that resistance is not always ideological but can also emerge from perceived inconsistencies between representation and reality. Such responses align with findings that audiences may reject advertising messages when they are perceived as unrealistic or disconnected from lived experience (Eisend, 2019).

More explicit forms of resistance are evident in the religious and patriarchal subthemes. In these cases, audiences draw upon normative frameworks to justify traditional divisions of labour, positioning domestic work as inherently feminine. This highlights how cultural and ideological beliefs shape the decoding process, reinforcing existing power structures. Research on gender representation in advertising similarly shows that deeply embedded stereotypes continue to influence audience interpretations, even in the presence of progressive narratives (Åkestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017).

Importantly, the coexistence of both progressive and conservative religious interpretations within the dataset underscores the contested nature of religion as an interpretive resource. This duality reflects broader patterns in audience reception, where cultural values are actively negotiated rather than uniformly applied. As such, resistance should not be viewed simply as rejection, but as part of an ongoing process of meaning-making.

Synthesis: Advertising as a Site of Cultural Negotiation

The findings demonstrate that audience reception of the “Suami Sejati Masak” campaign is characterized by a dynamic interplay between acceptance, ambivalence, and resistance. This distribution confirms that advertising messages do not operate in a linear or deterministic manner but are subject to diverse interpretations shaped by cultural context, everyday practices, and ideological beliefs. Such interpretive variability is widely recognized in contemporary media research, particularly in digital environments where audience voices are highly visible and diverse.

Importantly, the results highlight that gender equality in advertising is not simply accepted or rejected, but actively negotiated by audiences. Dominant readings reflect openness to change, negotiated readings reveal practical and symbolic constraints, and oppositional readings underscore the persistence of traditional norms. This pattern illustrates that advertising functions not as a unilateral agent of social change, but as part of an ongoing process of meaning-making in which audiences play an active role.

In the Indonesian context, this process is particularly complex due to the coexistence of progressive aspirations and entrenched cultural values. The findings suggest that while there is growing recognition of alternative gender roles, this recognition is uneven and contested. As such, the impact of value-driven campaigns depends not only on their message but also on their ability to resonate with the socio-cultural realities of their audiences. This reinforces the argument that the effectiveness of brand activism is contingent upon audience interpretation, rather than solely on message intention.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this research demonstrates the enduring relevance of Hall's encoding/decoding model in the digital era. Unlike traditional reception studies that rely on interviews or focus groups, this study applied the framework to user-generated comments on YouTube, showing how digital platforms serve as arenas of cultural negotiation. The results affirm that audiences actively interpret, adapt, or resist brand messages, reinforcing the consumers active role in meaning-making processes.

Additionally, the study highlights the centrality of religion in shaping media reception in Indonesia. While previous literature on reception theory emphasizes ideology and class, this research illustrates how religious discourse functions as both a progressive and conservative interpretive lens. Some audiences drew on Islamic principles to justify gender equality, aligning with the campaign, while others used religion to defend traditional gender hierarchies. This dual role of religion expands the theoretical application of reception studies in contexts where faith is deeply embedded in everyday life.

Moreover, the identification of humor and religion as interpretive strategies expands the scope of reception theory. Humor functions as a middle ground between acceptance and resistance, while religion operates as both a progressive and conservative justification. These dynamics illustrate how audiences actively appropriate cultural resources to negotiate media texts.

This study extends Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework by demonstrating how religion and humor function as culturally embedded interpretive resources in the reception of gender equality advertising. While Hall's model conceptualizes dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings as ideological positions, the findings of this study show that these positions are not merely abstract categories but are actively articulated through locally meaningful discourses. In the Indonesian context, religion operates as a double-edged interpretive framework, enabling both progressive acceptance of gender equality and conservative reinforcement of patriarchal norms. Humor, meanwhile, serves as a mediating strategy that allows audiences to engage with the campaign while simultaneously distancing themselves from its ideological implications. By foregrounding these cultural resources, this study contributes to reception theory by highlighting how meaning-making in digital environments is shaped by socio-cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western settings. This underscores the importance of situating reception analysis within local cultural logics rather than treating audience interpretations as universally structured.

Practical Implications

For brand practitioners, the findings provide several important insights. First, campaigns that integrate progressive social values, such as gender equality, can resonate with significant segments of audiences, enhancing brand reputation and fostering loyalty. The positive reception of the “*Suami Sejati Masak*” campaign demonstrates that Indonesian audiences are receptive to alternative portrayals of masculinity that emphasize care and domestic involvement.

Second, the presence of negotiated and oppositional readings signals potential challenges. While dominant audiences reward brands for taking a progressive stance, conservative segments may reject or criticize the message. Brands must therefore carefully navigate cultural sensitivities. One strategy, as suggested by this study, is to align progressive values with local traditions and religious justifications. By framing gender equality as consistent with shared cultural and religious values, brands may reduce resistance and broaden acceptance.

Third, the study underscores the importance of online platforms as feedback mechanisms. YouTube comments provide brands with real-time insights into audience reception, allowing adaptive strategies in communication and engagement. Monitoring these responses can help brands anticipate potential backlash while amplifying supportive voices.

Social Implications

Beyond branding, this research demonstrates how advertising can serve as a cultural intervention. The “*Suami Sejati Masak*” campaign illustrates how corporations could challenge entrenched gender stereotypes and promote more egalitarian norms. In societies such as Indonesia, where patriarchal values remain strong, campaigns like this play a dual role: selling products and participating in social change.

The study also reveals the contested nature of gender equality discourses. While many audiences embrace progressive ideas, others resist them. This tension highlights the need for continued cultural dialogue. Advertising, by reaching mass audiences, can catalyze such dialogue, bridging gaps between modern aspirations and traditional norms.

CONCLUSION

Rather than positioning advertising as a direct driver of social change, the findings suggest that its role in this study is more appropriately understood as an arena for cultural negotiation within a specific digital context. Audience responses to the “*Suami Sejati Masak*” campaign on YouTube demonstrate a range of interpretations of shared domestic responsibilities, ranging from acceptance to negotiation and rejection. These differences reflect how viewers interpret the advertising message through their own practical experiences and existing domestic expectations. Thus, this study does not aim to generalize the broader state of gender equality in Indonesia, but rather to examine how audiences interpret and negotiate gender-related messages within a specific online media environment.

In line with the study’s more focused scope, the contribution of this research lies not in making broad claims about gender equality at the societal level, but in demonstrating how such issues are interpreted within a specific media environment. By analysing YouTube

comments as a form of naturally occurring audience discourse, this study extends reception analysis into the domain of digital platforms, where audience voices are visible, immediate, and diverse. This approach underscores the relevance of examining user-generated content as a means of understanding how media messages circulate and acquire meaning in contemporary communication landscapes.

The findings also highlight the importance of contextual sensitivity in value-driven advertising. Campaigns that promote social issues, such as gender equality, do not operate in isolation but interact with existing cultural frameworks that may support, reinterpret, or challenge their messages. As such, the effectiveness of these campaigns depends not only on how messages are constructed but also on how they resonate with the lived realities and interpretive frameworks of audiences.

Future studies could address these limitations by expanding the dataset to include a larger number of comments or cross-platform analysis. Combining online comment analysis with interviews or surveys would also enable richer triangulation of findings. Moreover, exploring demographic variables could provide deeper insights into how different social groups interpret progressive brand messages.

Generative AI Disclosure Statement

The author declares the limited and responsible use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools, including but not limited to ChatGPT (version 4.5), in the preparation of this manuscript. These tools were used only for language editing, grammar checking, paraphrasing, and improving clarity. All substantive ideas, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions are the independent work of the author, who assumes full responsibility for the manuscript's content and integrity.

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