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LGBT Representation In You Need To Calm Down-Taylor Swift Music Video

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ABSTRACT

Music videos have become a popular medium for conveying social messages. This research analyzes the representation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) messages in Taylor Swift's music video "You Need To Calm Down" using a semiotic approach. An in-depth analysis of the visual symbols, music, and lyrics in the video aims to uncover the hidden meanings related to LGBT issues. The results of this study show the existence of visual codes that represent the LGBT community, such as the use of bright colors, eye-catching costumes, and scenes suggesting same-sex relationships, using John Fiske's semiotic analysis. This research makes a significant contribution to understanding how music videos can be used as a tool to campaign for social issues. The findings of this research can be a reference for other researchers interested in studies on gender, sexuality, and identity representation in popular media.

Keywords: music video, representation, LGBT, John Fiske, Taylor Swift

INTRODUCTION

Music videos serve as a significant form of mass media widely consumed by audiences worldwide. These videos consist of visual sequences, enhanced with specific effects, designed to align with the rhythm and narrative of a song performed by a band or singer (Septiana, 2020). Vernallis (as cited in Fitri et al., 2024) argues that music videos are constructed in unique formats to convey specific messages to viewers. In contemporary media landscapes, music videos frequently embed visual elements and symbolic codes with underlying meanings, which can

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influence audience perceptions. Viewers often consume these videos based on their preferences, which include content addressing social themes such as gender identity and sexual orientation.

One prevalent theme in recent music videos is the representation of LGBT content. Such representations are often embedded subtly, presented through visual codes and symbols that convey deeper messages. A notable example is Taylor Swift's You Need To Calm Down, a music video that has drawn attention for its depiction of LGBT narratives. This aligns with Swift's public support for the LGBT movement, demonstrated through advocacy and financial contributions (Septiana, 2020).

Media literacy plays a pivotal role in interpreting social messages conveyed through digital platforms like YouTube. As an accessible medium for diverse demographics, including children and adolescents, YouTube content varies widely in its suitability for consumption. Not all videos, particularly those containing adult themes or sensitive issues like LGBT representation, are appropriate for younger audiences. Research indicates that children, especially during the formative golden age, are highly impressionable and prone to imitate content they observe in media (Fauziah, 2023). In You Need To Calm Down, LGBT messages are conveyed through visual and narrative elements, such as rainbow-colored imagery, vibrant costumes, and portrayals of same-sex relationships.

Semiotic analysis conducted by Septiana (2020) identifies three levels of meaning within the video using John Fiske's theoretical framework: the reality level, where visual elements like costumes and makeup reflect gender and identity constructs; the representation level, encompassing cinematographic techniques, lighting, and sound to amplify thematic messages; and the ideological level, which promotes liberal values of freedom and equality for the LGBT community. This video, released as part of Swift's Lover album in 2019, not only achieved commercial success but also sparked cultural conversations around gender inclusivity and acceptance.

Despite existing studies examining You Need To Calm Down, previous research presents differing interpretations and lacks a comprehensive analysis of its representation of LGBT themes on YouTube. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the representation of LGBT messages in

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Taylor Swift's You Need To Calm Down music video using John Fiske's semiotic analysis. By deconstructing the video's visual codes and ideological messages, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how media representations shape perceptions of gender identity and inclusivity in contemporary society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using John Fiske's semiotic analysis method to examine LGBT messages in Taylor Swift's You Need To Calm Down music video. Fiske's semiotic framework focuses on three levels of analysis—reality, representation, and ideology—which enable an in-depth understanding of visual symbols, representational techniques, and ideological meanings embedded in the music video. This approach is chosen because it effectively uncovers hidden meanings behind visual elements that explicitly or implicitly represent the LGBT community.

Data collection is conducted using purposive sampling, where specific scenes are selected based on their relevance to the research focus—LGBT representation. Samples are drawn from various scenes in the music video, without time restrictions, but based on the presence of LGBT symbols such as rainbow colors, vibrant costumes, and depictions of same-sex relationships. Primary data consists of direct observations of the music video, while secondary data is obtained from literature, scholarly articles, and other relevant references.

The analysis is carried out by interpreting visual elements at three levels. The reality level involves observations of appearances, costumes, makeup, and the behavior of the characters. The representation level highlights cinematographic techniques, such as shot types, lighting, and music, which reinforce the narrative. Meanwhile, the ideology level examines how the video's messages reflect liberal values, advocating for individual freedom and social equality.

Through this approach, the study seeks to understand how visual elements within the music video construct a narrative supporting the LGBT community and to critically assess its potential influence on younger generations.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

LGBT Representation in Taylor Swift's Music Video You Need To Calm Down Using John Fiske's Semiotic Analysis

This study examines the results of John Fiske's semiotic analysis of Taylor Swift's You Need To Calm Down music video, which is divided into three levels: reality, representation, and ideology. The findings reveal the presence of LGBT messages within the music video. These LGBT messages are constructed through visual elements, cinematographic techniques, and ideological representations.

Table 1 John Fiske's Semiotic Analysis Results

Level of Analysis	Aspects	Scenes	Interpretation
Reality	Appearance	0:52-0:55	The rainbow-colored trailer resembles the LGBT pride flag symbol.
	Clothing and Makeup	1:11-1:18	Lockhart wears a pink outfit with feminine makeup; other men wear bright clothing and bold makeup.
	Environment	0:52-0:55	The trailer park setting symbolizes the U-Haul concept, which is popularly associated with lesbian culture.
	Communication Style		A man wears feminine clothing with distinct hand gestures; a tomboy woman lifts heavy objects (2:01-2:03).

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Level of Analysis	Aspects	Scenes	Interpretation
		1:19-1:21	
Representation	Camera Techniques	2:17-2:37	Long shots depict the overall atmosphere of the beauty contest. Medium shots highlight dominant actions, such as Lockhart falling in love.
	Lighting	1:11-1:18	Butterfly lighting emphasizes the beauty of the subjects; high-key lighting creates a bright and natural ambiance.
	Music	Whole video	The song *You Need To Calm Down* supports themes of equality and LGBT rights.
Ideology	Individual Freedom	1:11-1:18	The freedom to dress as one pleases, such as Lockhart wearing transparent clothing, symbolizes liberalism.
	Social reaction	2:04-2:16	The relaxed reactions of trailer park residents to protests outside their community.
	Message	whole video	Messages of equality and criticism of homophobia reflect liberal ideology and social acceptance.

Source: Primary Data (2024)

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Discussion

Analysis of the You Need To Calm Down music video using John Fiske's semiotic theory shows three levels of representation: reality, representation, and ideology.

At the level of reality, the visual elements displayed in the video reflect typical LGBT symbols. For example, in scenes 0:52-0:55, the rainbow-colored trailer housing resembles the LGBT flag, providing a symbol of inclusivity. The appearance of the characters also emphasizes LGBT identity through clothing, makeup, and expressions. Lockhart, as one of the main characters, appears in all pink clothes and striking makeup in scenes 1:11-1:18, which explicitly displays the feminine side. In addition, other men wear colorful women's clothing in scenes 1:19-1:21, and women with a tomboy style are shown in scenes 2:01-2:03, providing an illustration of the diversity of gender identities. All of these elements display typical LGBT characteristics that are packaged aesthetically and are relevant to the main theme of the video. This video displays visual elements that explicitly support LGBT identity, such as the striking clothing and makeup worn by the cast. For example, in scenes 0:52-0:55, the rainbow-colored trailer reflects the LGBT flag symbol, which promotes inclusivity. Media literacy helps viewers recognize how these symbols reflect the values of the LGBT community. Furthermore, Lockhart's appearance in pink in scenes 1:11-1:18, as well as the presence of a tomboy woman in scenes 2:01-2:03, illustrates gender and sex diversity that is often not covered in mainstream media.

At the representation level, the video uses cinematography techniques that support the narrative and messages conveyed. The Long Shot technique in scenes 2:17-2:37, for example, shows the atmosphere of a beauty competition with participants wearing feminine clothing. This technique allows viewers to understand the social context more broadly. In contrast, the Medium Shot in scenes 1:11-1:18 focuses on Lockhart's emotional expression when falling in love, showing dramatic makeup details and body gestures. In addition, High Key Lighting creates a bright and soft atmosphere in almost all scenes, giving a positive and natural impression. The Butterfly Lighting technique in scenes 1:11-1:18 is used to highlight the details of the facial characters, such as Lockhart's beauty, emphasizing the feminine elements. The background music You Need To Calm Down adds an emotional dimension and strengthens the message of support for the LGBT

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community with lyrics that fight homophobia. The cinematography technique used in this video strengthens the social message it wants to convey. The Long Shot technique in scenes 2:17-2:37 displays the overall atmosphere of the beauty contest involving participants with diverse gender identities. In the context of media literacy, this technique allows the audience to understand the overall narrative of inclusivity. Meanwhile, the Medium Shot in scenes 1:11-1:18 focuses on the emotions of the characters, such as Lockhart falling in love, highlighting deep emotional expressions. High Key Lighting gives a bright, natural, and positive impression, thus supporting the narrative about social acceptance of LGBT.

At the ideological level, this video reflects the view of liberalism. Individual freedom is seen in scenes of white and dark-skinned men wearing transparent or revealing clothing, such as in scenes 1:11-1:18 and 1:19-1:21. Other scenes, such as the trailer residents casually reflecting outside (2:04-2:16), show their belief in personal rights and freedoms. Throughout the video, the main message conveyed is support for the LGBT community and criticism of discrimination, stressing the importance of social income and equality. This video clearly reflects the views of liberalism, which emphasizes individual freedom. In scenes 1:11-1:18 and 1:19-1:21, the male and female characters express freedom of dress, even though it is considered controversial by some in society. The scene of the trailer residents remaining casual when faced with a curse in front of their house in scenes 2:04-2:16 shows a belief in the right to freedom and the belief that their sexual orientation is not something wrong. Throughout the video, the message conveyed is support for LGBT human rights, criticism of discrimination, and promotion of social acceptance. This reflects an ideology that emphasizes equality and freedom of expression without judgment.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Taylor Swift's You Need To Calm Down music video represents LGBT messages through visual elements, cinematography techniques, and ideologies built into the video's narrative. Semiotic analysis using John Fiske's approach shows three levels of representation. At the level of reality, the video displays LGBT symbols, such as the use of rainbow

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colors, flashy clothing, and makeup that support the theme of freedom of expression. The level of representation shows the use of cinematography techniques such as Long Shot, Medium Shot, and High Key Lighting to strengthen the narrative of inclusivity and deep emotions. At the level of ideology, the video reflects a liberal view that emphasizes individual freedom and social equality, with criticism of discrimination and homophobia. The overall analysis shows that media literacy is essential to understanding this kind of content. The younger generation exposed to the messages in this video needs to be equipped with the ability to assess and respond to the content critically. Thus, this study not only provides insight into how music videos are used as a social campaign tool, but also serves as a warning for society to pay more attention to the impact of media content on cultural and social values.

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