



How visible is the rainbow flag? LGBT Representation in Philippine TV Commercials and Online Advertisements

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Abstract

This study analyzed the representation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders (LGBT) in 15 Philippine TV commercials and online advertisements using a qualitative research design. Drawing from the framework on the nature of gender portrayals, the study examined the setting, degrees of dress, voiceover, and product category of LGBT-themed ads. It was found that most of these ads were set indoors, with the characters portrayed as fully and suggestively dressed. The majority of the ads do not have voiceovers and are associated with varied product categories. A content analysis using queer coding was further conducted to explore LGBT media representation based on queer signifiers such as clothing, dialogue, behavior, jokes, and secondary characters. Thematic coding was used to determine the similarities in LGBT representation based on the mentioned queer signifiers. Inter coding was done to establish accuracy and consistency in data coding. The findings revealed that queer signifiers reinforce and undermine the LGBT characters' queer identities. They were portrayed wearing clothes that can and cannot be associated with their queer identities, while some LGBT characters' representation remains to be heteronormative. Dialogue and behavior were used to express the characters' emotions and queer identities. Jokes were used in the ads to add humor, hide emotions, and show intimacy. However, they were also found to hinder the characters' expression of their sexuality. Secondary characters were either supportive of the LGBT community or reinforce their heteronormativity. It follows from this that a deconstruction of such limited and heteronormative representation should be considered.

Keywords: representation, queer identity, queer signifier, content analysis, queer coding

1. Introduction

LGBT stands for ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender’ and is used to describe a person’s sexual orientation (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation [GLAAD], 2023). GLAAD, a non-profit organization founded in 1985 that focuses on LGBT advocacy and cultural change, defines each of these sexual orientations in its media reference guide. A lesbian is a woman who is physically and/or emotionally attracted to other women, while a gay refers to a person who is physically and/or emotionally attracted to people of the same sex. Moreover, bisexual or bi is used to describe a person who has the potential to be physically and/or emotionally attracted to people whose sexual orientations may be the same as or different from one’s own gender. Transgender, on the other hand, is used to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. For many years, members of the LGBT community have been fighting against discrimination, violence, and other negative consequences as a result of differing attitudes and beliefs by people surrounding them. Margate (2019) further asserted that the LGBT community in the Philippines faces many forms of discrimination and even underrepresentation, among other issues occurring in educational and religious institutions, the government, and even the media.

The level of acceptance felt by LGBTs is tied to the extent of understanding and rejection they experience. Low levels of acceptance can result in physical and mental health problems, discrimination in housing, health, and jobs, and denial of family rights and recognition (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law (2022) conducted a study on the social acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people in 175 countries, including the Philippines, using an advanced statistical model. Acceptance is the extent to which they are seen in positive and inclusive ways. The average level of acceptance has increased globally from 1981 to 2020.

The increasing social acceptance has resulted in many studies on LGBT media representation. Cook (2018) revealed that since 2001, LGBT characters have been portrayed as making more displays of affection in broadcast and streaming television. Moreover, Kenix and Bandopadhyaya (2021) examined the media representation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, and queer (LGBTQ) community in New Zealand from 1960 to the 1970s. It was found that during the said period, the media rarely used LGBTQ-related terminologies. Thus, representation relied on stereotypes.

In the Philippines, De Leon and Jintalan (2018) explored homosexuality and media by analyzing audience reactions to YouTube videos of noon-time shows with hosts as homosexual artists. Despite the global increase in social acceptance and a shift in public opinion on LGBT, the acceptance of homosexuality in the country was found to be superficial. Moreover, Margate (2019) found that there was underreporting of topics related to the LGBT community in local newspapers in Baguio City, Northern Philippines. LGBT-related news reports published in community papers were few, episodic, and were given limited space.

Aside from television shows and print media, LGBT representation is also analyzed through advertisements. For instance, Nölke (2018) revealed a lack of diversity in advertisements, which shows the assimilationist power of media portrayals that can disadvantage a range of identities, including LGBTs.

While a considerable amount of research has investigated LGBT media representation (Cook, 2018; De Leon & Jintalan, 2018; Kenix & Bandopadhyaya, 2021; Nölke, 2018; Margate, 2019), few studies have considered how the portrayal and representation of members of the LGBT community in TV commercials and online advertisements shed light on the country's gender views and understandings. It can be noted that previous studies found that there is a lack of diversity in LGBT representation in advertisements (Nölke, 2018) and that they rely on stereotypes (Kenix & Bandopadhyaya, 2021). Considering the ubiquity of TV commercials and online ads in today's society, they do not merely influence people to purchase products and services but also shape public opinion and lifestyles. Hence, the representation of LGBTs in various contexts can directly or indirectly reflect societal expectations at home, school, or workplace. Additionally, a stereotypical representation of LGBTs as individuals who are either masculine females or feminine males and those who have cross-gendered beliefs and attitudes may be accepted as a social reality. In this sense, commercials and ads may contribute to naturalizing and proliferating stereotypes and shaping a reality of gender roles.

This study was carried out to critically analyze LGBT-themed TV commercials and ads in the Philippines by examining the nature of gender portrayals and taking into account how queer signifiers such as clothing, dialogue, behavior, jokes, and secondary characters reinforce and/or undermine queer identities. Analyzing these elements allowed for a more nuanced discussion and interpretation of LGBT media representation. The goal of the study stems from the need to see how the LGBT community is represented in TV commercials and ads in a seemingly gay-friendly country like the Philippines (De Guzman, 2023). This study intends to answer the following research questions:

- a. What is the nature of LGBT portrayals in Philippine TV commercials and online advertisements?
- b. How are LGBT characters represented in the commercials and advertisements based on several queer signifiers?

1.1 Framework of the Study

Prieler and Centeno (2013) analyzed primetime Philippine television advertisements for differences in gender representation. The analysis considered setting, degrees of dress, voiceover, and product category to compare the nature of gender portrayals among men and women. Table 1 shows the categories that were used to describe gender portrayals. The present study used the same framework to analyze how the LGBT characters in the commercials and advertisements are portrayed based on these variables.

Table 1
Nature of Gender Portrayals in Television Advertisements (Prieler & Centeno, 2013)

Variables	Categories	Definition
Setting	(1) workplace (inside), (2) home (inside residential space), (3) other indoor settings (e.g., store, restaurant, car, bus, train), (4) outdoors, and (5) other (e.g., artificial).	The setting is the place where the primary character appears in the commercial (Mastro & Stern, 2003). If several settings appeared, then the dominant setting was coded. The setting was coded from the perspective of the chosen primary character.
Degrees of Dress	(1) fully dressed, (2) suggestively dressed, (3) partially dressed, and (4) nude.	<p>Fully dressed: everyday dress, such as walking shorts but excluding short shorts and underwear</p> <p>Suggestively dressed: clothing that partially exposed the body, such as sleeveless or tight shirts, unbuttoned or open blouses, short shorts/mini-skirts, muscle shirts, open shirts, tight clothing that enhanced the figure, or clothing that exposed the cleavage or chest area</p> <p>Partially dressed: clothing such as under-apparel, lingerie, bikinis, and briefs. Clothing showing bare backs, muscular shoulders, abs, thighs, and midribs was also coded as partially dressed.</p> <p>Nude: bare bodies or those wearing translucent under-apparel or lingerie, male models wearing only a towel, including actual nudity or suggested nudity, such as holding a towel or linen to conceal genitals (Ibroscheva, 2007; Nelson & Paek, 2008)</p>
Voiceover	(1) none, (2) male, (3) female, and (4) both (male and female)	Voiceovers were the voices of people who could not be seen. Voiceovers did not include the following: (a) voices that were only heard singing or (b) children's voices.
Product Category	(1) cosmetics/toiletries, (2) pharmaceuticals/health products, (3) cleaning products/kitchenware, (4) non-alcoholic drinks, (5) alcoholic drinks, (6) foods/snacks, (7) restaurants/retail outlets, (8) communications/information, and (9) other	On the basis of the results from a pilot test of 20 different product categories, these nine categories were selected for the study.

Furthermore, Perea (2018) analyzed two Disney films from different eras and examined their similarities in artistic styling and narrative representation of queer identities. Through queer coding, both verbal and visual markers of queer identity were documented. These include, but are not limited to, dialogue, behaviors, images, songs, clothing, jokes, background design, secondary characters, and friendship dynamics (Perea, 2018). In this study, content analysis on queer signifiers such as clothing, dialogue, behavior, jokes, and secondary characters was conducted to explore how LGBT characters are represented in Philippine TV commercials and online advertisements.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to analyze how lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders are represented in Philippine TV commercials and online advertisements. Drawing from the concepts of gender portrayals in television (Prieler & Centeno, 2013) and queer coding (Perea, 2018), the researchers examined 15 TV commercials and online advertisements released from 2016 to 2023. The analysis focused on how LGBT characters are portrayed based on specific variables observed in the corpus, including setting, degrees of dress, voiceover, and product category. Next, the researchers manually transcribed the ads, and a content analysis was conducted to explore queer signifiers such as clothing, dialogue, behavior, jokes, and secondary characters using the frameworks mentioned. Lastly, the researchers did a thematic coding to present the similarities for each queer signifier as presented in the advertisements. To establish accuracy and consistency in data coding, the researchers individually coded and analyzed the corpus based on the frameworks of the study, namely gender portrayals and queer coding. After the individual coding, the researchers discussed discrepancies and agreed on the corrected results. The following selection criteria were used to determine the corpus in this study: (1) lead characters represent some members of the LGBT community; (2) must have been released in 2016 to 2023; (3) must have been released in the Philippines; and (4) does not exceed five minutes airtime. It is important to note that the TV commercials and ads included in the corpus are overtly LGBT-themed, as shown by the depiction of same-sex attraction and relationships, cross-dressing, and social acceptance issues such as 'coming out' to family and friends. Due to this progressive stance on promoting LGBT rights, these TV commercials and ads have obtained millions of views on YouTube and gained many positive comments from netizens. Additionally, it appears that only a limited number of LGBT-themed ads are available online. Table 2 shows the 15 TV commercials and online ads used in the study.

Table 2
Philippine TV commercials and online advertisements used in the study

	Title	Release date	Duration
1.	Smart Communications- Break down barriers and welcome change!	July 2, 2016	1:02 minutes
2.	Globe- #ThisIsWhyIROam in Bangkok	December 15, 2016	1:03 minutes
3.	Minola Premium Cooking Oil- Ngayong buwan ng pag-ibig, let us celebrate all kinds of love	February 6, 2017	0:30 seconds
4.	Uber- Kilig	April 21, 2017	2:00 minutes
5.	Alaska Milk- Alaska Créma-Asada 2-in-1 Sweetened Thick Creamer	October 15, 2017	0:30 seconds
6.	Bench- How long can you keep a secret?	February 19, 2018	2:14 minutes
7.	Pantene Philippines- Strength knows no gender	November 27, 2018	1:52 minutes
8.	Closeup Philippines- P.S. I Love You, Bro.	August 30, 2019	3:21 minutes
9.	Lazada Philippines- Be PROUD. Be YOU.	June 19, 2021	1:36 minutes
10.	Pantene Philippines- Hair has no gender	July 20, 2022	0:52 seconds
11.	IKEA- Hapag	December 12, 2022	3:16 minutes
12.	McDo Philippines- Sweet moments with McFloat.	January 9, 2023	0:30 seconds
13.	BENCH Philippines- #YourOwnKindOfBeautiful	January 14, 2023	0:58 seconds
14.	McDo Philippines- You're my happy place.	May 29, 2023	0:56 seconds
15.	McDo Philippines- McShare the Love	November 27, 2023	1:15 minutes

In this study, the unit of analysis consists of the primary characters in TV commercials and online advertisements. A set of criteria was adopted from Nassif and Gunter (2008), who described primary characters as the character/s who (1) were central to the story, (2) appeared in close-ups for the longest period, (3) appeared for the longest time, (4) provided substantial information about the advertised product or service, (5) used or held the product, and/or (6) had the more extensive speaking part (in this particular order of decision criteria). Only the primary characters were considered in the coding to answer the first research question on the nature of LGBT portrayals in the corpus.

3. Findings and Discussion

In this study, LGBT representation was analyzed based on how LGBT characters are portrayed and how queer signifiers reinforce and/or undermine their queer identities in TV commercials and online advertisements. To answer the first research question, the framework by Prieler and Centeno (2013) was employed. The analysis considered setting, degrees of dress, voiceover, and product category to determine the nature of LGBT portrayals in the ads. Moreover, content analysis using queer signifiers identified by Perea (2018), such as clothing, dialogue, behavior, jokes, and secondary characters, was also conducted for a better understanding of LGBT representation in TV commercials and online ads.

3.1 Nature of LGBT Portrayals in Philippine TV Commercials and Online Advertisements

As presented in Table 3, several variables like setting, degrees of dress, voiceover, and product category were considered in analyzing the nature of LGBT portrayals in the 15 TV commercials and online advertisements released in the country.

The setting refers to the place where the primary character appears in the commercial (Mastro & Stern, 2003). If several settings appeared, then the dominant setting was coded. The setting was coded from the perspective of the chosen primary character. In these LGBT-themed advertisements, the setting consisted of indoors, outdoors, and home or residential spaces. Among these different settings, the most frequent was indoors, appearing eight times in the ads. Indoor settings include stores, restaurants, and cars. This was followed by outdoor settings, which were used four times. Lastly, home or residential space appeared to be the setting in three instances.

The setting can be one indicator that provides insight into how gender is portrayed in advertisements (Prieler & Centeno, 2013). Hence, the portrayal of LGBT characters appearing mostly indoors, such as stores, restaurants, and cars, may imply the community's restrictive representation. While stores and restaurants are also considered public places, they can only accommodate limited numbers of people, which means fewer opportunities for LGBT characters to interact with others freely.

Aside from indoor settings, the primary characters are also portrayed at home or in their respective residential spaces. This reinforces the restrictive and limited representation of LGBT characters in the advertisements. In contrast to the observation that the Philippines is one of the most LGBT-friendly countries in Asia (De Guzman, 2022), these findings may imply that members of the LGBT community still experience fear of social acceptance, as shown by their portrayals in enclosed and essentially restrictive settings. While there were also instances when they were portrayed outdoors, these were found to be rare. Hence, the preference towards indoor settings for LGBT characters in the ads may reflect the underlying social struggles experienced by this gender minority.

Table 3
Nature of LGBT Portrayals in Philippine TV Commercials and Online Advertisements

	Frequency	Percentage
Setting		
Other indoor settings	8	53.33
Outdoors	4	26.67
Home (inside residential space)	3	20.00
Total	15	100.00
Degrees of Dress		
Fully dressed	10	66.67
Suggestively dressed	5	33.33
Total	15	100.00
Voiceover		
None	8	53.33
Male	6	40.00
Female	1	6.67
Total	15	100.00
Product Category		
Cosmetics/toiletries	4	26.67
Others (transportation, e-commerce platform, furniture retail and home services, and clothing)	4	26.67
Restaurants/retail outlets	3	20.00
Communications/information	2	13.33
Food/Snacks	2	13.33
Total	15	100.00

In terms of degrees of dress, LGBT characters in the advertisements appeared fully and suggestively dressed. Fully dressed means they were seen wearing everyday dress such as shirts, shorts, pants and corporate attire like blazers and skirts. Suggestively dressed refers to clothing that partially exposed the body, such as sleeveless or tight shirts, unbuttoned or open blouses, short shorts/mini-skirts, muscle shirts, loose shirts, tight clothing that enhanced the figure, or clothing that exposed the cleavage or chest areas. As shown in the table, there were 10 instances when primary characters appeared fully dressed. However, there were also five cases when they appeared suggestively dressed. These findings show that LGBT characters are mostly portrayed wearing neutral clothing. This means that they appear fully dressed and decent-looking. However, there were also five instances when LGBT characters were seen as suggestively dressed, wearing tight clothing, sleeveless gowns, and cropped tops. The Ad Standards Council (ASC), the country's advertising body that regulates all advertising materials, including TV commercials and digital or online advertisements, specifically states in their Advertising Guidebook (2019) that advertisements are not allowed when the model/s is/are: (a) partially nude; (b) attired in indecent skimpy clothing; (c) attired in transparent material or when presented in a haze to circumvent the prohibition on nudity; (d) attired in clothing that shows excessive voluptuousness, i.e., indecent breast exposures, buttocks, and bulging crotch; and (e) in a suggestive sexual/physical contact with each other. This provision on the models' clothing in Philippine TV commercials and online advertisements means that there are guidelines to follow concerning how LGBT characters appear on screen. This further justifies why the majority of them are fully dressed.

Moreover, voiceover was also considered in the analysis. It was found that eight of the advertisements do not have any voiceover, six use male voiceovers, and only one uses a female voiceover. This implies that the creators might be encouraging the audience to focus on the dialogue of the characters and interpret their interaction without relying on a voiceover to tell them what is happening in the advertisement. Additionally, the preference for male voiceovers reinforces the perception that males are still considered to hold greater authority than females (Prieler & Centeno, 2013). Rodero et al. (2012) found that a male voiceover is preferred in advertising because it is often associated with the belief that the male voice sounds more convincing. Along with product categories, these LGBT-themed advertisements are associated with cosmetics/toiletries; transportation, e-commerce platform, and furniture retail and home services; restaurants/retail outlets; and communications/information. This wide array of product categories, which are promoted by LGBT characters, conveys a desirable perception towards this gender minority. This further suggests that these LGBT depictions reflect a less restrictive business viewpoint concerning products advertised by LGBT community members.

These portrayals of LGBT characters in TV commercials and online ads represent common beliefs and social conventions about the community as a whole. Due to the wide reach of television and online advertising, they have the power to shape societal ideologies (Aljuaythin, 2020). What is depicted in the advertisements eventually becomes naturalized and is accepted as normal. Hence, this representation of LGBT characters in the ads influences the audience's perception of this gender minority. It is then important to ensure that these ads

represent the members of the LGBT community in such a way that they are empowered to go beyond societal expectations and pursue what they want while expressing their queer identities.

3.2 LGBT Representation Based on Queer Signifiers

To further explore the LGBT representation in advertising media, a content analysis of the 15 TV commercials and online ads was conducted. The analysis was anchored on queer coding by Perea (2018), which involves identifying markers of queer identity using the verbal and visual elements in the advertisements. These are called queer signifiers, which include clothing, dialogue, behavior, jokes, and secondary characters. These were examined to better understand LGBT representation in Philippine TV commercials and ads. Themes are presented for each queer signifier, along with extracts from the advertisements. These occurrences of queer signifiers are identified by the ads' time code for reference.

3.2.1 Clothing

Based on the analysis of the advertisements, it was found that LGBT characters are portrayed wearing clothes that can and cannot be associated with their queer identities. There were LGBT characters whose clothing style did not give hints of their queer identities, but there were also characters who were dressed in a way that strongly reinforced their queer identities. It was also noted that the representation of some LGBT characters remains to be heteronormative based on clothing.

Image 1 shows the character of Kevin wearing clothes that cannot be associated with his queer identity. Kevin is seen wearing long sleeves and polo shirts in both the outdoor and home settings of the advertisement. His neat and smart clothing style adds to his character's personality. He was not seen in the workplace, but his appearance gave a professional atmosphere.



Image 1. Kevin in Smart Communications- Break down barriers and welcome change! ad

Similarly, viewers cannot immediately tell that the primary character in the *Minola Premium Cooking Oil* ad is queer because of his clothing. This ad features a man walking home from work wearing typical work clothes for men, such as a black coat and a printed long-sleeve shirt underneath (0:01). Hence, his appearance does not give any hint of queerness as it is common for men to be seen wearing such clothing style. His queer identity was revealed towards the end of the ad when his romantic relationship with another male character was shown.



Image 2. The primary character in *Minola Premium Cooking Oil - Ngayong buwan ng pag-ibig, let us celebrate all kinds of love* ad

On the contrary, there are also LGBT characters who are dressed in a way that gives the viewers the idea that they are queer. For example, JR from *Bench- How long can you keep a secret?* ad is seen with both feminine and masculine clothing and appearance. Whenever at home or with their father, JR often wore a zipped jacket or a wrinkled T-shirt and a cap. Interestingly, the cap was always worn backward. This appearance can then be easily associated with masculinity. However, JR would change this clothing style at school to appear more feminine. JR's switching of clothing and appearance depending on the setting and social context strongly reinforces a queer identity.



Image 3. JR in *Bench- How long can you keep a secret?* ad

The same contrast in masculine and feminine appearance was observed in the *Alaska Créma-Asada* ad featuring the Filipino comedian, Vice Ganda. The character in this ad, played by Vice Ganda, is seen wearing contrasting costumes at the same time (0:12), as shown in Image 4. One is feminine, as indicated by the red shawl collar, while the other appears masculine, as shown by the classic black collar. The hair on the feminine side is put up like a bun, while the hair on the masculine side is brushed down. The make-up and nails all look feminine, as shown by the use of dark eyeshadow, bright red lipstick, and clean white pressed nails (0:21). The contrast in the character's clothing, in addition to the hair and make-up, reinforces queer identity.



Image 4. Vice Ganda in Alaska Milk- Alaska Créma-Asada ad

Moreover, there are advertisements that feature transgender women like those in *Pantene Philippines- Hair has no gender* ad, as presented in Image 5. In this ad, four transgender women are seen with nicely done hair, formal dresses, make-up, and accessories. They are seen having a photo shoot in a studio. At the beginning of the ad, they were also holding a rainbow flag (0:03), which is a symbol of LGBT pride and movement (Lowe, 2023). Their clothing style, together with their holding a rainbow or pride flag, reinforces their queer identities.



Image 5. Pantene Philippines - Hair Has No Gender ad

Another interesting ad is made by Bench that showcases the creativity of Filipino LGBT youth. As shown in Image 6, the characters show off their dresses made of bedsheets, blankets, towels, and curtains. Their accessories are loofahs, clothespins, chain, basin, pails, and toiletries basket. The ad is titled *Be your own kind of beautiful* which the characters embody by celebrating their sense of style and fashion while using anything available at home. The characters' clothing strongly reinforces their queer identities.



Image 6. Bench- *Be your own kind of beautiful* ad

Interestingly, when it comes to lesbian characters, the representation is heteronormative. This means that lesbians are portrayed as wearing masculine clothes and giving off hints of masculinity in style and appearance. For example, Image 7 shows Dante's character in *Lazada Philippines- Be PROUD. Be YOU* ad is seen wearing an unbuttoned polo shirt with a T-shirt inside. His clothing style resembles that of a man, but a close-up shot (0:10) of his face shows his soft facial features, predominantly associated with a woman. When the barista sees him and reads his name on the cup, a subtle confusion is seen on her face (0:07). While Dante's clothing style gives the viewers the idea that he is identifying himself as a man, this masculinity in terms of clothes and appearance resembles a heteronormative representation. Seif (2017) noted the same observation when it comes to lesbian characters in television. Such stereotypical and heteronormative portrayal includes having short hair and wearing baggy clothes.



Image 7. Dante in *Lazada Philippines- Be PROUD. Be YOU*. ad

Image 8 shows another advertisement by *McDo Philippines- You're my happy place*, where a girl is featured wearing a helmet, cropped top, denim shorts, mid-calf socks, and sneakers (0:07). Despite the seemingly feminine clothing style, they appeared to be boyish because they are seen skateboarding at the restaurant's drive-thru lane. Riding a skateboard is predominantly male-associated because it is considered a "rough" sport and may not be welcoming for girls (William, 2023). In this advertisement, it is observed that the character crosses that boundary to prove that girls can skateboard, too. They then appear to be associated with both the feminine and masculine sides, which reinforces the character's queer identity.

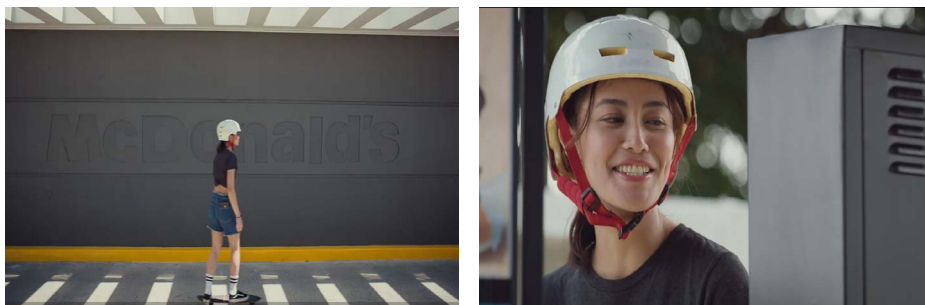


Image 8. *McDo Philippines- You're my happy place ad*

This representation of LGBT characters in TV commercials and online ads based on clothing alone reveals that clothing style and appearance are either overtly representative of queer identities or subtly heteronormative. The characters appear to be either queer or not at all based on their clothes. In the case of gay characters, Adhitya and Adhitya (2022) found that there was a shift in gay fashion when they analyzed how gay protagonists in the 2000s gay-themed American TV series were portrayed. It was revealed that gay protagonists are now seen as masculine, which can be interpreted as refusing the feminine stereotype. There are also specific clothing styles and appearances found to be associated with each member of the LGBT community.

3.2.2 Dialogue

In these advertisements, the dialogues of LGBT characters were also analyzed as signifiers of their queer identities. The dialogues are found to reinforce the LGBT characters' queer identities as they are used to express several emotions, including fear of social acceptance, understanding of queer identities, and attraction towards another character in the ad.

The community's fear of social acceptance is expressed by the characters' lines. Anxiety and hesitation to "come out" and express their true identities are evident. *The Lazada Philippines- Be PROUD. Be YOU.* ad features three different characters representing the LGBT community. Each of these characters is seen in a different setting. The challenges

each experiences to gain social acceptance are illustrated in their respective parts of the advertisements. The repetition of “*sorry*” emphasizes how they feel about being who they are. This also indicates how difficult it is for them to be accepted in their respective environments. This is later explained in the voiceover, which cited that over 60% of Filipinos who are members of the LGBT community have apologized for who they are.

In the advertisement by *Bench- How long can you keep a secret?*, the character of JR is also portrayed as queer who is not yet “out” to his family, or to their father for that matter. This advertisement begins with this dialogue between father and son. The father was always seen dropping his son off at school every day, which implies a positive relationship between them. The fist bump also highlights their closeness and bond (0:03). The sudden transition in appearance and personality whenever they come home reveals their queer identity to the viewers. JR’s transition to how they looked in the morning while their father dropped them off informs the viewers of their situation. This does not just reinforce their queer identity but also represents other members of the LGBT community who have not yet discussed their sexuality with their parents.

In the *Closeup Philippines- P.S. I Love You, Bro* ad, Raffy’s love interest, who is also a guy, is portrayed as someone who is having difficulties with embracing his queer identity. A scene shows him in front of a mirror while brushing his teeth. He was talking to himself as he reflected on his feelings towards Raffy and the possible consequences. This guy’s dilemma also represents the situation of other members of the LGBT community who find it difficult to express their queer identities because they fear that their family and friends may not accept them. Barsigian et al. (2020) revealed that individuals with genderqueer identities feel that their gender nonconformity increases their risk of experiencing discrimination and victimization. The ads present a realistic depiction of the struggle and difficulty experienced by some members of the LGBT community when it comes to their fear of being accepted. The study further suggested creating more inclusive environments that deemphasize the gender binary.

Moreover, there were also several instances where the characters’ dialogues express positive reactions and acceptance of queer identities. For instance, when Kevin’s dad from the Smart Communications ad asked him why he did not respond to his Facebook friend request, Kevin did not answer and was passive about it. He looked at him and the rest of their family as if he was weighing things out. When Kevin decided to accept his dad’s friend request, the exchange of messages between them was shown on screen (0:51) with Kevin’s message being “*Dad inaccept na kita / Dad, I accepted you*” and his dad’s response was “*Anak ako din / Son, me too*”. The Dad’s message can be described as a subtle acceptance of Kevin’s sexuality.

There were also scenes toward the end of the Lazada ad that would support the LGBT community. For instance, the character who approached the transgender woman in the restroom said “*No, I’m so sorry for staring. Ang ganda kasi ng lipstick mo. Where’d you find it? / No, I’m sorry for staring. Your lipstick looks nice. Where’d you find it?*”. The barista also said “*Ay sir, ako po ang dapat mag-sorry. Nakalimutan ko po ‘yung pastry n’yo. Wait lang po, ah / Sir, I should be the one to say sorry. I forgot your pastry. Wait for a moment*”.

Lastly, the guy's mom said "*Kahit sino ka pa, I love you, anak / Whoever you are, I love you son*". These lines clearly express their understanding and support for the transgender woman, Dante, who identifies as a lesbian, and the gay son. Apologizing to them (as in the case of the barista and the woman in the restroom) also indicates that they are treating these LGBT characters with respect regardless of gender. Provided that media forms such as television and film play an active role in shaping and defining gender norms and understanding (Seif, 2017; Thomson, 2021), these dialogues in the ads that show support to the LGBT characters encourage social acceptance.

Aside from expressing anxiety and acceptance for LGBT characters, the dialogues in these ads were also found to express attraction towards another character in the ad. This also reinforces the portrayal of queer identities. For instance, Raffy from the *Closeup* ad expresses their thoughts about the guy they see in the milk tea shop.

Raffy: *Infer kay Kuya, cutie. / To be fair, he's cute.*

Raffy: *He's here again. Wow, shoulders, perfect to lean on.* (Camera shows a close up shot of the guy's shoulders)

Raffy: *OMG. Ang cute ng smile niya / OMG. His smile is so cute.*

These lines indicate their thoughts about the guy, saying he is cute, has perfect shoulders, is sweet, and smiles nicely. These confirm their queer identity because of their evident attraction to the guy.

In another advertisement by *Uber*, AJ is portrayed as one who gets to be with his long-time crush in a carpool ride. He tweets his thoughts while sitting beside the guy.

Yung kasabay mo yung long time crush mo sa uberPOOL. Di ako makahinga guys! 😍 #NotYetUber / In an uberPOOL with a long time crush. I can't breathe!

This tweet or line indicates AJ's attraction to the guy who, according to him, was his long-time crush. This also reinforced his queer identity.

Lastly, the dialogues between the girls in the *McDo* ad also show that the girl on the skateboard repeatedly went to the drive-thru for their short interactions.

Customer: *Hi! Isang medium fries please. / One medium fries please*

Customer: *Large iced coffee original please*

Customer: *Nauhaw ako e. / I got thirsty.*

They did not get any verbal response from the staff besides a smile. The next scenes confirm their mutual attraction. The girl on the skateboard is seen seated on the steps of the restaurant while waiting for someone. The staff appeared and gave them a cup of sundae while smiling. Her lines saying "*Ma'am, dessert niyo po. / Ma'am here's your dessert*" and "*Baka matunaw / translation provided on screen: Like your Sundae Cone, I might melt with your stare*" reinforce the girls' queer identities.

Dialogue as a queer signifier in these TV commercials and online advertisements reinforces queer identities. They are found to be useful in expressing the characters' emotions. It can be noted that the majority of these advertisements do not have voiceovers, so dialogues are important in conveying the messages.

3.2.3 Behavior

Behavior is emphasized in these commercials and advertisements through non-verbal communication, which reinforces LGBT characters' queer identities. This is evident in their facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and other body movements.

For example, in the *Lazada* ad, the look of hurt (0:10) on Dante's face was shown when he noticed the barista's confusion about his name written on the cup and his physical features. Also, the guy's shaking hands were seen on screen as he anticipated his mother's reaction to his sexuality (0:16). The transgender woman also looked bothered when the two women who were supposed to enter the restroom suddenly stopped talking and stared at her (0:28). When the secondary characters turned out to be supportive of their queer identities, their behavior also changed positively. The woman was seen smiling (1:05), Dante did the same and even said "Thank you" to the barista (1:13), and the guy looked so grateful to his mother (1:20). Non-verbal communication is highlighted in this ad due to lack of dialogues between characters. Using proxemics, eye contact, and facial expressions, their behavior is emphasized. In the *IKEA* ad featuring Luis and his father, Luis' facial expressions show his disappointment every time he calls his father's attention but fails to talk to them about his sexuality. This was evident when his father answered a call (0:16) or just left the house (0:42) when all he was thinking was telling them that he is gay and has a boyfriend. This does not just reinforce his queer identity but also represents the difficulty being experienced by members of the LGBT community who find it difficult to talk to their parents about their sexuality. In contrast to Luis' overt queer behavior, the sudden change in the father's character was surprising for the viewers. The advertisement had always featured their character as a typical father who was always busy with work. The scene where a red feather was seen sticking out of their luggage may have given the viewers a hint (0:39), but it was confirmed during the scene where they were featured as a drag queen (2:26). This may not be enough to confirm their queer identity, but this scene portrays them as a supportive father who accepts their son's sexuality.

Eye contact suggesting attraction and intimacy between characters is also evident in several advertisements. For instance, in the *McDo- You're my happy place* ad, the persistence of the girl to see and have brief interactions with their girlfriend who was at work is also emphasized. Non-verbal cues such as eye contact and facial expression made by the two characters during these interactions are also suggestive of their intimate relationship and queer identities. This is confirmed when the girls are seen laughing and holding each other's hands while sharing the sundae (0:52). These intimate gestures are commonly observed among couples.

Gestures and other body movements also reinforce the queer identities of LGBT characters in TV commercials and online ads. In the *McDo-Sweet Moments with McFloat* ad, two guys who seem to be having a lovers' quarrel are featured. One of the guys placed the tissue, straw, and spoon on the table beside the glass and sipped his own drink. This was when Guy 1 decided to look at him (0:12), but Guy 2 looked the other way. This indicates their hesitation to interact, which gives the viewers an idea about their relationship to one another. Guy 1 picked up his drink and looked at Guy 2 again. This time, the latter stared back at him, and he gave his arm a nudge (0:22). They are now seen seated side by side with their shoulders touching. They then start giggling. Moreover, their intimate distance towards the end of the ad, where their shoulders are seen touching (0:24), reinforces the characters' queer identities. The voiceover in this ad says, "*Double Coke McFloat na may dobleng lambing. 69 pesos lang on the McDo app / Double Coke Mcfloat with double sweetness. 69 pesos only on the McDo app*". This voiceover said that the drinks are marked down when ordered for two and used the word "*lambing*" (showing one's love or affection towards another) to convey the presupposition that they are a good deal for couples. This reinforces the queer identities of the characters.

The LGBT characters' behavior, as shown in their non-verbal cues, reinforces their queer identities and suggests intimacy and attraction toward another character in the ad. Given the short duration of the ads, which lasts from 30 seconds to more than three minutes, the characters' facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and other body movements are found useful in understanding the underlying meanings between their brief interactions. Gillig and Murphy (2016) found that these gender-nonconforming behaviors and physical displays of affection among gay characters in a TV series evoked hope and positive attitudes among LGBTQ youth viewers, allowing them to understand their identities. However, watching the same intimate portrayals of LGBT characters on TV caused discomfort among heterosexual or cisgender youth, which led them to feel disgust toward LGBTQ individuals. This illustrates the continuing presence of stereotypes and homophobia in society.

3.2.4 Jokes

Another queer signifier analyzed in the ads are jokes. The same with clothing, dialogue, and behavior, jokes can also reinforce and/or undermine the LGBT characters' queer identities. For instance, in the *Globe communications* ad, the scene where the guy overheard Lorenzo's friends saying, "*So kilig!*" (0:33) made him ask what "*kilig*" is because he does not speak Filipino. Lorenzo decided to lie and told him it meant "*happy*." Although this was not intended to be a joke from Lorenzo based on the context of the advertisement, this is humorous to the viewers. This also shows Lorenzo's hesitation to admit the true meaning of the word and have the guy associate it with his sexuality. The unintended joke continues until the end of the ad with the guy's message for Lorenzo. Similarly, in the *McDo You're my happy place* ad, the scene where the staff handed the girl a cup of sundae while smiling (0:42) confirms their intimate relationship. Additionally, when the girl from the drive-thru said, "*Baka matunaw / translation provided on screen: Like your Sundae Cone, I might melt with your stare*" (0:46),

they both started laughing because they either found it funny or a bit romantic. It can be noted that the English translation provided in the advertisement is not literal. Instead, it provides additional information as to the characters' relationship with one another. Saying that the girl's stare may cause the other one to melt is highly suggestive of their queer identities and intimate relationship. Moreover, the jokes made by Raffy and the guy about each other in the *Closeup* ad reinforced their queer identities because it was through these lines that they expressed their attraction toward one another. Raffy's jokes like "*Infer kay Kuya, cutie. / To be fair, he's cute*" and "*Look at those lips! Sana straw na lang ako. / Look at those lips! I wish I was that straw*" show their admiration for the guy. Moreover, the guy's statements like "*Hmm..pinipicturan niya ba ko? Makapag pose nga. / Hmm..is he taking a photo of me? Guess I'll take a pose*" and "*Hindi naman siya masyadong obvious, no? / Can't he be any more obvious?*" also indicate his interest towards Raffy. While these jokes were not delivered directly to either of them, they revealed the characters' queer identities.

On the contrary, the jokes made by JR's father in the *Bench* ad undermine their queer identity. The father's statements such as "*Amoy chicks ang anak ko a. / Smells like you have a girl*" and "*Ano girlfriend mo na? / So, is she your girlfriend yet?*" may have only been about him teasing his son about having a girlfriend but these jokes reinforce JR's struggle to make their father happy and also to express oneself freely. JR also appeared uncomfortable during these interactions as shown in their awkward laugh.

While jokes may not be evident in several advertisements, some lines are found to either reinforce or undermine the LGBT characters' queer identities. The characters use jokes not just to add humor but also to hide their true emotions, including attraction towards another character in the advertisement. Jokes are also suggestive of their queer identities and intimate relationships. Jokes undermine queer identity when they are found to hinder the character's expression of their sexuality. Chavez and Del Prado (2023), in their discourse analysis of online gender humor, found that the LGBT community is also a target of jokes among netizens. The jokes are commonly about their lesser rights compared to other genders, being weak and being easy topics for funny conversations. Indeed, jokes do not just add humor during conversations but also carry underlying meanings that may be offensive to certain individuals, including members of the LGBT community.

3.2.5 Secondary characters

Secondary characters refer to other characters present in the advertisements who may or may not have directly interacted with the primary characters but are still important to the delivery of media messages. They also play a critical role in either reinforcing or undermining the LGBT characters' queer identities. Secondary characters are found to be either supportive of the LGBT community or reinforce the characters' heteronormativity, like being masculine or feminine.

In the *Smart Communications* ad, the secondary characters include Kevin's Dad, his boyfriend, and the family members. The character of the dad is described as the type of parent who reaches out and would like to be actively involved in his child's life as much as possible.

His positive reaction towards his son's sexuality is highlighted during their exchange of text messages. Kevin's boyfriend is first seen at the beginning of the advertisement when they were having coffee outdoors. The scene where Kevin informed him that his dad sent a friend request (0:5), confirms his relationship with Kevin. Later in the ad, photos of him and Kevin while back hugging and holding hands were shown in the latter's Facebook timeline (0:22). In the *Globe Communications* ad, Lorenzo's friends, who were heard over the phone laughing and being all excited for him and the guy, are identified as secondary characters. Their role as supportive friends to Lorenzo indicates their positive attitude towards his queer identity. Their excitement while saying, "So kilig!" (0:31) when the guy said "Well then, I'm your man" further reinforces this identity. The *Lazada* ad also shows how secondary characters can reinforce queer identities and behaviors. The barista's confused look because of Dante's clothing style and appearance (0:05) and the women's act of suddenly stopping and looking at each other when they saw a transgender woman in the restroom (0:24) indicates possible gender discrimination. However, this was clarified in the succeeding scenes, where they expressed support and acceptance of the LGBT characters. It can be noted that in recent years, restrooms have been one of the common places where members of the LGBT community are discriminated against. Pride at Work (2023), a US-based nonprofit organization that represents the LGBT community, emphasizes that transgender and non-binary people should have access to safe restrooms that correspond to their gender identity. Similarly, in the *IKEA* ad, the secondary characters, including Luis' boyfriend and the father's friends, who are drag queens, reinforce Luis' and his father's queer identities. For instance, Luis' boyfriend was portrayed as a partner who stayed with him until he was able to tell his father about his sexuality. He also held Luis' hand as he introduced him to his father (1:15). Moreover, the drag queens being the father's friends, were also seen supporting Luis' and possibly his father's queer identities. Drag queens present themselves in exaggeratedly feminine ways as part of their performance (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2017). Their presence in the ad signifies support to the LGBT community.

There were also instances in the ads where secondary characters were shown to undermine LGBT characters' queer identities. For example, in the *Closeup* ad, the guy's friends are considered the secondary characters. During his interaction with them, his masculine character was more prominent. For instance, his friend addressed him as "bro" like in the statements "Uy bro! / Hey!" and "Hey, bro!". Calling someone "bro", "man" and "dude" is a common habit among male friends to signify their connection and bond. The guy is also seen shaking his friend's hand firmly when they see each other in the milk tea shop (0:29). This gesture is again common to male friends. The guy's behavior during his brief interactions with his friends contrasts with how he smiles and stares at Raffy. The secondary characters may have undermined his queer identity, but they also made the guy realize his feelings towards Raffy. This later led him to go for it and embrace his queer identity. Moreover, the Bench ad shows a contrast in the behavior between the secondary characters. JR's love interest appeared friendly in the advertisement, which may have caused them to assume he likes them, too. The guy's comments about how good JR smelled, as suggested in his statements like "Hi, JR! Bango mo a / You smell good" and "Mas mabango

ka. / You smell better” also added to their growing feelings for him. The guy encouraged JR’s queer identity by paying attention to them and showing interest. Their father, however, made JR assume another identity. JR appeared to be masculine whenever they came home or talked with him. This contrast further highlighted their queer identity.

Secondary characters in the advertisements represent the people surrounding members of the LGBT community. Indeed, this gender minority, as presented in the ads, experiences different levels of social acceptance from their family, friends, and others whom they do not even know. As a queer signifier, secondary characters’ interactions with LGBT characters are found to either reinforce or undermine queer identities.

3.2.6 Implications of LGBT Representation in Philippine TV Commercials and Online Advertisements

In line with the findings, the results show that LGBT representation in Philippine TV commercials and online advertisements remains to be limited and heteronormative. Such representation may affect the viewers’ gender views and understanding of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders.

First, an analysis of both the nature of LGBT portrayals and queer coding emphasized that there seems to be a lack of diversity in LGBT representation in the ads. Most gay characters are portrayed as feminine, while lesbian characters are seen as masculine. These are observed in the characters’ clothing, dialogue, and behavior. Such heteronormative and stereotypical portrayals of the LGBT community may imply that the country still has a superficial understanding of diverse gender identities and may contribute to the proliferation of stereotypes that are mostly inaccurate and offensive.

Second, some of the advertisements imply restrictions for LGBT characters. They were mainly portrayed in private spaces than in public spaces. This may mean that LGBTs do not feel safe expressing their queer identities openly. The struggle to ‘come out’ to their love interests, friends, and even family members was also captured by most of the ads, which reinforced the LGBT community’s fear of social acceptance.

Third, some secondary characters in the ads directly assume the gender identities of LGBT characters. This was observed in jokes intended for LGBT characters, which prevent them from expressing their true identities. It is also worth noting that these secondary characters are mostly friends and family members. This may be a realistic portrayal of people assuming someone’s gender and expecting them to conform to the norms and societal expectations for such gender identity. This may imply that the country still has to promote gender awareness to encourage a more respectful, just, and inclusive society for all.

In this respect, these advertisements support the limited and heteronormative representation of LGBT characters, which may influence the viewers’ understanding of gender identities. TV and online ads may shape public opinion, so they may be considered powerful tools to educate viewers on critical topics such as gender and sexuality. Hence, a deconstruction of such a continuous limited representation of LGBTs in TV commercials and online ads should be considered before they are regarded as normal by society.

4. Conclusion

Overall, this study analyzed the representation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders in Philippine TV commercials and online ads by examining the nature of LGBT portrayals and conducting queer coding. It was found out that LGBT characters appear mostly indoors while being portrayed as fully and suggestively dressed. Product categories promoted by the LGBT-themed advertisements vary, ranging from cosmetics, communications, and restaurants, among others. Generally, the advertisements did not make use of voiceover.

Moreover, queer coding focused on clothing, dialogue, behavior, jokes, and secondary characters for a better understanding of LGBT representation in advertisements. The content analysis revealed that queer signifiers either reinforce or undermine queer identities. LGBT characters are portrayed wearing clothes that can and cannot be associated with their queer identities. There were LGBT characters whose clothing style strongly reinforced their queer identities, but there were also those whose representation remained to be heteronormative. Dialogues were found to reinforce the characters' queer identities. They are useful in expressing the characters' emotions. Similarly, behavior was also emphasized in the ads, which was evident in the characters' facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and other body movements. They are found useful in understanding the underlying meanings between their brief interactions. Jokes further reinforce or undermine LGBT characters' queer identities. The characters use jokes to add humor and hide their true emotions, including attraction towards another character in the advertisements. They use jokes to indicate their queer identities and express intimacy. Jokes, however, undermine queer identity when they are found to hinder the character's expression of their sexuality. Lastly, secondary characters are found to be either supportive of the LGBT community or reinforce the characters' heteronormativity, like being masculine or feminine.

This representation of LGBT characters in TV commercials and online advertisements reflects the country's gender views and understandings. Due to their wide audience reach, these advertisements are critical in shaping public opinions regarding LGBT. This study does not claim any generalizations. It aimed to provide an in-depth analysis of LGBT representation by using several queer signifiers. However, more studies should be conducted using a larger sample of advertisements to examine the situation more extensively. Additionally, cross-cultural studies of LGBT media representation may also be helpful to uncover similar or different ways of reinforcing or undermining queer identities. This will be instrumental in deconstructing the limited and heteronormative representation of the LGBT community.

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Appendices

The following are the TV commercials analyzed in the study:

1. Smart Communications- Break down barriers and welcome change!
Smart Communications. (2016, July 2). *Break down barriers and welcome change!* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHp-9aSQrk0>
2. Globe- #ThisIsWhyIROam in Bangkok
Globe. (2016, December 15). *#ThisIsWhyIROam in Bangkok* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPGw5mvQmKc>
3. Minola Premium Cooking Oil
Minola Premium Coconut Oil. (2017, February 6). *Ngayong buwan ng pag-ibig, let us celebrate all kinds of love* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ps_eBIerZ5M
4. Uber- Kilig
Uber. (2017, April 21). *Kilig | #UBERSTORIES | Uber* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pulhiIECzFE>
5. Alaska Milk
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6. Bench- How long can you keep a secret?
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7. Pantene Philippines
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8. Closeup Philippines- P.S. I Love You, Bro.
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9. Lazada Philippines- Be PROUD. Be YOU.
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10. Pantene Philippines- Hair has no gender
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11. IKEA- Hapag
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12. McDo Philippines- Sweet moments with McFloat.
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13. BENCH Philippines
BENCH/. (2023, January 14). *BENCH/ #YourOwnKindOfBeautiful* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7aQk-_yJLw
14. McDo Philippines- You're my happy place.
McDo Philippines. (2023b, May 29). *You're my happy place. . .* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ha3ld_wQ_dI
15. McDo Philippines- McShare The Love
McDo Philippines. (2023c, November 27). *McShare the Love* 🎁 [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jL66_52Ow8

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