

Abstract

The thesis attempts to understand the relationship between a man and commodities in the context of sign communication and identity formation in Thai Consumerism Culture. Because of its wide varieties of social meaning and value provided through advertising, Starbucks Coffee House is chosen and considered as an example of identity commodity. On the other hand, the clients themselves create their own sign perception concerning the coffeehouse, as they would like it to be as well.

This thesis starts with the history of coffee in general and in Thai society. It shows that coffee drinking had been a part of elite culture before passing to the middle class people and spread all over the population finally. In the past, most of the coffeehouses in Thailand were located at the center of community where people usually meet such as markets. The way people gather together socially and drink coffee in the morning leads to the word “Sa Pa Ka Fae” (the morning café group).

Recently, there are many ‘Premium’ coffeehouses rapidly grown up in Thai society. The coffeehouses, Starbucks which is one of them, furnished themselves with varieties of social meaning and value. They did its mission through the most advanced and complicated advertising and public relation processes. Starbucks owns its identities in this way just like all other commodities in Consumerism culture. Moreover, its meaning is very complicated but at the same time ‘instant’, thus ready for consumers to pick up.

Most of Starbucks customers are middle class well-educated people. The use of English in advertising and the adoption of American ‘standard’ for its goods and services thus fit with the taste of its customers. Starbucks is, therefore, like a ritual space for members to share certain social value, recognized as a ‘group identity’. However even with in that context individuals could enjoy this freedom to certain degree to choose or adopt any social value provided within the meaning sphere of Starbucks just to create their ‘own identity’.

In conclusion , I found that ,in consumerism culture, a man and commodities are related through signs containing social value and meanings. The middle class people consume the sign value from the Starbucks, to emphasize both their personal and their social identities.