

## **Semiotic Analysis of Sampoerna a Mild Image Creation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis mainly deals with the process of signification in order to find out what images are being built, how those images are represented, and what messages delivered in Sampoerna A Mild billboard advertisements through the use of semiotic resources. The focus of the writers' analysis is the advertisements themselves, as the writer uses the process of signification that involves denotation, connotation, and myth. Those theories help the writers in analyzing the meaning of the advertisement first, and then figure out how meaning is created by the advertisement. Meaning in this research is an integrated form consisting the meaning from three level of signification process: denotative level, connotative level, and myth. This research uses qualitative content analysis method to describe the meaning of qualitative materials in a systematic way. At the end, those denotative meaning and connotative meaning build an image and create myth which naturalizes the image itself.

Key Words: billboard advertisements, sampoerna a mild, semiotics, process of signification, connotation, denotation

### **INTRODUCTION**

Advertisements, as an integral part of marketing, is any type of public announcement intensifying Epicurean themes in order to promote its product or services. In creating an impactful advertisement, advertising relies on two factors. One of those factors is the medium used for disseminating advertisement (Berger, 2015, p. 62). There are a number of media used for delivering messages in the advertisement. One of them is billboard advertisement. One form of billboard advertising is a poster panel (Shimp & Andrews, 2013, p. 663) which is large outdoor advertising created to catch the attention of the street passer. In this study, we choose to analyze billboard because it is the ideal place for long-term messaging. It has a broad reach and high-frequency level since it can reach all segments of the population and get high exposure, especially when signs are strategically located in heavy traffic areas (Shimp & Andrews, 2013, p. 667). Billboard advertisements are designed to catch a person's attention and create a memorable impression very quickly, leaving the reader thinking about the advertisement after they have driven past it. For these reasons, many companies still use billboard as their marketing promotion tools; one of them is cigarette company.

Besides media, another factor that makes advertisement impactful is the technique of image-creation. Danesi writes that creating an image for a product inheres in constructing a "personality" for it so that a particular type of product can be positioned for specific market populations. Image of a brand is very important because it gives personal feeling to influence the aimed customer's preference to choose the brand over other brands.

However, because of the huge effects of advertisements, advertisement becomes an issue of debate and a target of legislation across the world. In Indonesia, cigarette, which considered as an addictive substance, is also restricted in advertising its product. This thing is constituted in Government Law (PP) 109/2012 (Begini Aturan Iklan Rokok, 2015). It is even a must to write a warning, that cigarette kills you or in Indonesia "rokok membunuhmu" in the packaging and

every advertisement of the product. Therefore, cigarette companies are pushed to be creative in creating image of its product. They have to create a strong image without stressing the product, but the social or mythic meanings that may be expected to materialize from its purchase.

One company who is known as a successful cigarette company who actively advertise their brands is PT. HM Sampoerna Tbk., a leading cigarette company in Indonesia in terms of market power (Azanella, 2018). In this paper, we choose to analyze Sampoerna A Mild, one of several brands under PT. HM Sampoerna Tbk., since it is the pioneer of Low Tar Low Nicotine (LTLW) cigarette which takes youngsters as its target market. We also specifically choose Sampoerna A Mild over other PT. HM Sampoerna Tbk's brands because this brand can consistently gain revenue although other brands have to reduce their productivity volume (Pasopati, 2016). Besides of its specialty, this brand is chosen because its billboard advertisement can be easily found up until now compared to other brands under PT. HM Sampoerna Tbk Company. We decide to analyze cigarette advertisement because we recognize that there are interesting strategies in creating a social lubricant that compels its value higher than the bad effects of smoking. At a practical informational level, every aspect in an advertisement of a product surely has a denotative and connotative function allowing consumers to identify what product people want to purchase.

Therefore, in this research we aim to analyze the image constructed in Sampoerna A Mild advertisements. By using Semiotics theory, we want to analyze what images are being built by their advertisements and how those images are represented. We also aim to reveal what messages are delivered by these advertisement to appeal the viewers to buy their product although they do not show the product in the advertisements by using semiotics and the process of signification which involves myth, denotation, and connotation

## **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this study, we use Semiotics and process of signification theories. Semiotics or semiology, is known as a science of signs developed by Ferdinand de Saussure. It pursues to analyze any structure of signs in whatever the forms, substances and limits: like images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and so on. Semiotics also provides a proficient framework if we are seeking or questioning the meaning behind signs. This framework involves a semiotic process, which is a process of signification, including denotation and connotation. We use the process of signification for identifying signs used in the advertisement and finding out the meaning behind those signs.

Jakobson (Jakobson, 1984b, p. 67) said that sign is the results of the association of the signifier and the signified. Signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, actions, events, objects, and so on. However, those have no intrinsic meaning if no one invests meaning on them. They only become signs when people invest them with meaning. Anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as 'signifying' something. It is the meaningful use of signs that is at the heart of the concerns of semiotics. Traditionally, there are two schools of thought in Semiotics: Peircean and Saussurean Semiotic. Since this study does not focus on analyzing the function of cognitive sign and differentiate icon, index, and symbol, this study takes Saussurean Semiotic as the theory applied in this study. Saussurean Semiotic is dyadic model of sign, signifier and signified, which analyze the systematic structure of language and other sign systems.

## Saussurean Semiotic

Ferdinand de Saussure, who is known as the founder of modern linguistics, said that language is a system of signs, and linguistic signs make sense only as part of a language's sign system. He is known for his claim that said a sign has two aspects: a signifier and a signified. This is a relationship which like two sides of a piece of paper. Both the signifier and the signified are purely psychological, united in the mind by an associative link. He claimed that meaning is always the social product of the language system.

In semiotics, marketing covers a good example of this idea of differential relations, since what matters in 'positioning' a product in the market and in relation to its rivals are not the relationship of advertising signs to real-world referents, but the differentiation of each sign from the others to which it is related (Leymore 1975, Oswald 2012). The logos, slogans, color, fonts, packaging, campaigns, and individual advertisements of rival brands need to be understood within a system of relationships. These are often represented in brand positioning grids with key dimensions, such as low price–high price, or traditional–modern, against high quality–low quality on the horizontal and vertical axes.

## Process of Signification

In Saussure's Semiotic theory, Roland Barthes has an important role because Barthes offers an important dimension of meaning of Saussure's model of the sign which focused on denotation, connotation, and myth. He also adopted a claim from Louis Hjelmslev that says there are different *orders of signification* in a semiology notion (Barthes 1957; Hjelmslev 1961, p. 114). The *first order of signification* is denotation. Denotation is sign where there is a sign consisting of a signifier and a signified. His theory explains that denotation could be described as the definitional, 'literal', 'obvious' or 'commonsense' meaning of a sign. In the case of linguistic signs, the denotative meaning is what people can find in dictionary. While, connotation is a *second-order of signification* which derives from the signifier of a denotative sign. The term 'connotation' is used to refer to the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations, such as ideology, emotion, etc., of the sign. These are typically related to the interpreter's class, age, gender, ethnicity and so on. Signs are more polysemic, or in other words more open to interpretation, in their connotations than their denotations.

Then, Barthes argues that denotation and connotation combine to produce myth which described as a third order of signification (Fiske & Hartley 1978, p. 43; O'Sullivan *et al.* 1994, p. 287). Popular usage of the term 'myth' suggests that it refers to beliefs which are demonstrably false, but the semiotic use of the term does not necessarily suggest this. Myths help us to make sense of our experiences within a culture (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 185-6). For Barthes, myths serve the ideological function of *naturalization* (Barthes 1977, p. 45-46). Their function is to naturalize the cultural - in other words, to make dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs seem entirely 'natural', 'normal', self-evident, timeless, obvious 'commonsense' - and thus objective and 'true' reflections of 'the way things are'.

## METHOD

This research is conducted using qualitative content analysis method by Schreier (Schreier, 2012) because we want to discover the image creation strategy of cigarette company in society by using the process of signification. The used of qualitative method is effective, specifically for this research because the data were merely text and pictures, not numerical data.

The source of data for this research is A Mild billboard advertisement, “*nanti juga lo paham*”. We use content analysis to analyze the Semiotic resources. According to O’Halloran, semiotic resources refer to ‘the resources’ (e.g. language, image, music, gesture, and architecture), which integrate across sensory modalities (e.g. visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic) in multimodal text, discourses and events (2011, p.121). Janowitz. M. (1968) also said that content analysis can be used for making inferences from content back to the communicator, in which case the analyst is concerned with understanding the intentions, strategy, and goals of the communicator. It can be identified that content analysis is almost purely descriptive. It is descriptive in the sense that it is engaged in comparing one type of content with another type of content and involved the application of historical, cultural, psychological, and legal frames of reference with various levels of meaning, subtleties, and efforts at explication of ambiguities.

In this research, we limit the semiotic resources into two resources. The first is written text which are seen as the slogan of the advertisement. Thus, language, in this sense, cannot be separated from the sociocultural context when it is used. The second is visual text which are the moment depict as the picture of the advertisements. In this case, their facial expression and tone of color in the advertisement.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In our analysis, we follow Chandler’s definition on advertisement. He writes that advertisements are “texts that require reading” (Chandler, 2017, p. 7). As a “text”, an advertisement employs semiotic resources to create meanings. Quoting Halliday, Hyland and Paltridge define semiotic resources as “system[s] of meanings that constitute the ‘reality’ of the culture” (2011, p. 121). It means that semiotic resources such as sound, words and images work as “sets of interrelated systems and structures” in a culture-dependent context (Hyland and Paltridge, 2011, p.122). We analyze the semiotic resources in some A Mild advertisements in order to find out the images built and represented.



The semiotic resources of this billboard are image and word. The words written are “go ahead” and followed by a slogan “*nanti juga lo paham*”. According to *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia daring* (online official dictionary issued by Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, an agency under the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture), the word *nanti* is defined as *waktu yang tidak lama dari sekarang; waktu kemudian*; In English, *nanti* can be translated as “later”. While *paham* as a verb is “understand” in English. Therefore, “*nanti juga lo paham*” can be literally translated to English as “you will understand later”.

According to dictionary.com, later means “after the usual or proper time, or after delay”, and understanding means “to perceive what is meant; grasp the information conveyed”. Therefore, the slogan “*nanti juga lo paham*” can be understood as *lo* or you (interlocutor), now, do not

understand what I am doing. However, you will understand what I (the speaker) am doing right now after this (near in the future).

The attitude in the slogan “*nanti juga lo paham*” also represents confidence because usually people who feel inferior will not stand against comments and scorns towards them. They will “play safe” in order to avoid bad comments or even to receive compliments. However, these people keep doing what they are doing without any care about what people might say. Moreover, in the phrase “*nanti juga lo paham*”, *lo* word signifies a meaning that it is not the doer who attempts to make others understand them, but it is others who will understand them later. Therefore, it shows an image of confidence since they do not try to get any acceptance from the society, and they do not care what others might say. This image is strengthened by the position of the words. Those words serve as the main point that the producer wants to deliver, since it is located in the center of the billboard. Kress and Van Leeuwen claimed that something which presented in the center is the nucleus for the message (2006, p. 196).

What is important in “*nanti juga lo paham*” is the choice of the word “*lo*”, instead of the standard Indonesian “*kau*” or “*kamu*”. The nuance of being cool that is built in this billboard is also shown in this billboard by the usage of the word “*lo*”. The word “*lo*” is often associated with Jakarta dialects of Indonesian. This association with Jakarta gives a connotation of being coolly cosmopolitan since Jakarta is the capital of Indonesia and the center of youth pop culture. It also creates an impression of being *gaul*. According to Smith-Hefner, “*gaul* means someone who is self-assured and good at adapting socially. A kid who can talk to older people or to people from the village or to city people or modern people is a *gaul* kid. They’re ‘up-to-date’ (*tidak ketinggalan jaman*), developed, and ‘advanced’ (*maju*). *Gaul* is modern.” (2012, p. 65). Therefore, by using the word *lo*, this advertisement wants to create an image of modern and up-to-date. Thus, the word *lo* implies the meaning of being cool or trendy. So, it is expected that the user of this word adopts the characteristics of being cool and trendy because according to Janssens and Steyaert, language is a “social practice” and speakers are “social actors” (2014, p. 624). In other words, language reflects the social factor of its users. In the case of this advertisement, the word “*lo*”, which is a Jakarta dialect, is employed “to articulate an attitude of casual ease and cool cosmopolitanism” (Smith-Hefner, 2012, p. 64). Based on Smith-Hefner idea, we identify the word “*lo*” as a sign of trendy and cool. Thus, this fact supports the image that Sampoerna A Mild wants to build, which is a cool nuances.

In addition, as far as the product is concern, this slogan could be interpreted as if it is the condition of the actor. The actors pictured in this advertisement show unique gimmicks. The hand gesture of these men, the right hand of the men wearing red shirt and the men wearing blue shirt show hand gesture bringing a cigarette. In addition, there are some bubbles that seem like intentionally added to create an illusion as if they were cigarette’s smoke. However, they must not smoke at the time this picture is made because they are underwater. The creator encodes these illusional signs so that the viewer can unconsciously remind about the product, which is cigarette since Grafton and Linstead say that the relationship among signs in advertisements is “necessarily ambiguous” (1989, p. 205). The picture actually wants to show two men enjoying cigarette together with their activity, however they cannot smoke because they are underwater. Therefore, the slogan “*nanti juga lo paham*” is like saying to the readers that you do not know the pleasure of smoking right now, however you will understand how good it is later. This occurs not only to remind the viewers about the product, but also to relate the image of cool in the slogan “*nanti juga lo paham*” to the activity of smoking.

The image of this billboard is also emphasized by its visual text. The image of being cool is also delivered through the activity depicted in the billboard. This billboard shows two men playing card underwater with beach trendy outfit. The fashionable outfit worn by these actors represents the word “*gaul*” because characteristic of *gaul* can also be identified by how fashionable

someone is. Fashion that is influenced by Western and East Asian pattern also considered as youth culture that considered as *gaul* or trendy (Smith-Hefner, 2012, p. 74). The actors in this billboard are wearing a lot of Western fashion items, such as denim, pants, and flip slops. Thus, the fashion style of these actor represents trendy and cool image. However, instead of playing card in the beach, they play under the water. In addition, playing card underwater is not only weird, but it is incomprehensible. It seems like they do not know how to do it. It makes people quizzical and ask “what are you actually doing?”. However, they look so relax and relished together. They do not bother with people’s opinion with them. Therefore, it represents the image of being cool, which means being “socially desirable” and “youthfulness” (Dar-Nimrod et al, 2012, p. 176). The way they keep playing cards also represents confidence. They are confident because they believe that they are socially desirable.

The position of the logo and a tagline “go ahead” in the left, followed by the slogan “*nanti juga lo paham*” also construct a meaning. Kress writes that the position of a sign in the left will lead the eyes to read the sign on the right orderly (2010, p. 180). As it is stated in the previous analysis, online Cambridge Dictionary explain “go ahead” as “to start to do something” and “in informal situation, it is said to someone in order to give them permission to start to do something”. Therefore, if the phrase go ahead and *nanti juga lo paham* are combined together, they create an approval, or even an encouragement, to keep doing what we want to and ignore what people might say because they will understand it later. Or in other words, a message for being confident to express ourselves and nonchalant with people’s opinion.

Therefore in the denotative level, we might interpret this advertisement as two men playing card underwater with a slogan “*nanti juga lo paham*”. However, in the connotative level, we can see those signs construct meanings that build an image. The two men playing cards underwater signify an irrational action of us that usually make people question us or maybe throw shame and scorn on us. However, it builds the image of confidence and cool, which Dar-Nimrod defines as socially desirable and youthfulness, through the slogan “*nanti juga lo paham*” (2012, p. 176).

### Messages Delivered in These Advertisements

Based on the analysis, we know that Sampoerna A Mild builds an image of confidence nonchalant, and cool. These images are emphasized in many ways in the previous sub-chapter. However, through the same image, Sampoerna A Mild delivers a lot of messages in each advertisement. Like what we have discussed earlier, the slogan such as “*nanti juga lo paham*” sound as negative taglines. It sounds like giving an encouragement for people to be ignorant of its surrounding. However, since the target market of Sampoerna A Mild is youngster, we can see that this brand consistently construct the image of being *gaul*, which Hefner interprets, as “cool” (2012, p. 64) and, Dar Nimrod interprets, as “socially desirable” and “youthfulness” (2012, p. 176).

In the age of being youngsters, we have a lot of ways to achieve our dreams or to simply express ourselves. It is also the stage when it seems like people around us do not believe in us and stand against our ways. Because of this reason, Sampoerna A always entices the youngster to be confident in themselves and coolly unconcerned with others’ opinion toward us. The usage of the word “lo” implies a close relation between Sampoerna A Mild and its viewer. This advertisement delivers a message of being confident in expressing ourselves, although sometimes our actions will make people puzzled of what we are doing. Sampoerna A Mild appears as a close friend who encourages us to keep calm towards people’s reactions and comment, and keep doing what we want to do in order to be happy.

From those words, images, and sounds, messages are constructed from the connotations meaning of these advertisements. When the denotation and connotation meanings of these advertisements are combined and repeatedly shown to the public, those meaning will naturalize the word “cool” and “confident” with the attitudes projected in this advertisement. As of those creation of myth are consistently repeated, they naturalize the image of the brand, or in other words called myth. The myth that Sampoerna A Mild builds in these advertisements is a belief that Sampoerna A Mild is a brand for cool and trendy youngster. This thing could also create a myth for elderly buyer to feel young again when they buy Sampoerna A Mild. Confident, nonchalant, calm, and cool youngsters are the consumer’s characteristics of this brand who will appear without any interpretation since those value have become the myth of this brand. I conclude this opinion by analyzing the signs that the producer encodes to these advertisements, such as the words, the word choice, the activity pictured, facial expressions, colors, and even fashion.

Kelly, Lawlor, & O'Donohoe stated that signs are constructed within advertisement to construct “cultural ideologies” and “values for a consumer good” (2005, p. 512). Encoding also enables advertisement to creatively select what social worlds and cultural values are reflected from this advertisement (Kelly, Lawlor, & O'Donohoe, 2005, p. 507). Besides the sign encoded, the multilingual mix in advertising is used as “social and cultural expression”. Since English is the global language and Indonesian is a local language, the mixing of those languages will appeal the regional market to see this brand has a sense of global and international image (Wu & Chan, 2007, p. 313). Because of this, the value of trendy and cool are added to this brand. Not only creating values, the multilingual mix in advertising is also used to attract the target market. García, Chelminski & Hernández say that the usage of mixed language is also “one of the communication approaches in marketing strategies” (2013, p. 78). In advertising, language has a great role to “connect the personality of the brand and the identity of the consumers” (2013, p. 90).

Therefore, within these billboards, Sampoerna A Mild shapes the images of confidence and nonchalant as a cool character of youngster, which also reflect the character of the consumer of this brand. These images are meanings constructed from the signs that encoded in the advertisement. These images are the signifiers which have denotation and connotation meaning and, at the end, create an association to the brand and the consumers.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis shows that advertisement is used as a form that is encoded with a lot of signs by its producer in order to construct some images. Those signs takes form as semiotic resources, such as sound, image, and words. In this case, the written and visual text supports each other to strengthen meanings and create images. All of these signs are constructed in order to appeal to specific consumer types.

We find out that these billboards do not only use the form of words and images to deliver meaning, but also rhyming sound. By analyzing all of the signs encoded to this advertisement, we eventually find the images constructed in this advertisement and also the message that the producer wants to deliver to the viewers.

The analysis shows that Sampoerna A Mild wants to construct images of confidence, nonchalant, cool, and youthfulness in their billboard advertisements. We need to disregard all discouraging comments of others and be free. The producer also use *gaul* word such us the “*lo*” word and mixing language in order to emphasize the image constructed. At the end, this images create a natural association to the brand and the consumers, or in other words myth. It creates a

myth that Sampoerna A Mild is a youth cigarette brand, and people who buy Sampoerna A Mild have certain characteristics such as cool, nonchalant, and confident.

Based on the analysis of the advertisements, we find that Sampoerna A Mild constructs images as the characteristics of its brand. They try to sell the image of youthfulness, confident, nonchalant, and cool brand, instead of promoting the products. These images are shown by the confident, cool, youthfulness, and nonchalant attitude always pictured in these billboards. Thus, those images are naturalized through the Semiotic resources used in the billboard. In short, Sampoerna A Mild wants to be pictured as a close friend that always encourages people to be free expressing themselves. In their billboard advertisements, it repeatedly encourages the viewers to be confident and coolly unconcerned with others' opinion toward us.

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