

## *Masa Lalu Masalah Lu: A Semiotic Study in the Myths Hidden within Cigarette Billboard Ads in Indonesia*

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### ABSTRACT

The Indonesian government has brought in strict regulations to stop cigarette advertisements, so cigarette companies have become very creative at creating subliminal messaging to promote their products. Our descriptive study discusses a semiotic analysis of billboard advertisements for brands of cigarettes in Indonesia. In particular, we focus on the signs' function, how they deliver a message, and the implications or assurance for relieving daily societal problems. We also highlight the myths that these billboards deliver and their promises. Accordingly, 4 out of 52 large cigarette billboard ads on the streets around Banda Aceh, Indonesia, were selected based on specific considerations, namely brand popularity and frequency. The analysis of the ads draws on Chandler's model of semiotic analysis covering the ads' contextual background, description, interpretation, and explanation. The analysis shows that each ad uses various communicative functions to create a sense of motivation, pleasure, agitation, or conservatism. The ads also aim at rejecting Indonesians' unawareness of problems, the boringness of routines, fantasy, and economic struggles. Each ad uses similar delivery ways in the colors, situation, and potential market target. As for the implication, the meanings represented by particular symbols in the ads are a way of life challenge and breaking boundaries despite the cigarette companies' intention to persuade potential consumers to try their products.

**Keywords:** *Cigarette advertisements, myths, semiotic analysis, semiotic resources, signs.*

### INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the consumption of cigarettes is so massive. As cited by Kartika and Thariq (2019), the Center of Excellence of Tobacco and Long Health lists Indonesia as the fourth globally ranked tobacco consumption per capita. In Southeast Asia, World Health Organization (2020) records that 70% of Indonesian and Burmese male adults actively consume cigarettes, followed by 66% of the same age group in East Timor. The massive advertisements contribute to the ease of people buying tobacco products in Indonesia, which threatens the health of the Indonesian people. Kosen (2018) informs that the annual cost of smoking to the Indonesian government is more than 600 trillion Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) (about USD 40 billion) due to the negative health impacts of tobacco. This negative trend is

conscious; the proactive promotion of cigarettes influences it through advertisements as those wild signs to attract people's attention for the product promotion.

The government is indeed aware of this problem. A regulation issued by the Indonesian Government, No. 109 of 2002 about tobacco products, outlaws massive tobacco advertisements to reduce adverse health impacts. The law clearly states that tobacco ads cannot show the products. However, following this, the manufacturers of tobacco products have become even more creative in designing ads, especially billboard ads. Here, the role of signs in advertisements is vital. These signs are used creatively to influence consumers and build an idea for their product. The use of signs within advertisements also affects the strategic consumers buying products. The concept of the product may represent the ideal condition of life.

According to Barthes (1977), the idea of a product representing the good life is a myth that promises a solution to a societal problem (Chapman & Egger, 1984). When we relate advertisements by cigarette companies with myths or unfounded notions, the people, explicitly existing and potential smokers in Indonesia, are likely to go down a slippery path; that leads to a life-threatening habit. Thus, understanding the meanings and messages behind the signs is crucial. Studying such signs is part of semiotics (Deledalle, 2000).

This is when the process of 'receiving' the values advocated in such advertising comes into play since people absorb these indirect messages as the companies want them to. The advertising should not put the consumers in a worse position. This article shows how the textual and visual codes in these ads reflect the local culture, which is what the designers of these marketing materials no doubt intended them to do. We also examine the myths included in these marketing signs to understand better how these signs aim to influence consumers. Thus, we provide a new perspective on semiotic studies by comparing the solutions offered in cigarette advertisements with those found in local myths (current daily life, governmental rules, and others).

To be specific, this study tries to answer the following questions.

1. What are the intended functions of these billboard ads?
2. How are the messages in these ads delivered?
3. What are the implications of these messages in the local context?
4. What are the similarities of delivering myths?

## LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND

### *Semiotics and Signs*

Semiotics and semiology come from the Greek word *semeion*, which means signs (Saussure, 1959). The science of semiology was introduced by Saussure, who focused on the usefulness of various signs in the community (Saussure, 1959). Meanwhile, the word semiotics was first used by John Locke in 1690 and was re-introduced by Charles Sanders Peirce (Danesi, 2004; Sebeok, 2001). Based on Peirce's studies, semiotics concentrates on how a sign has meaning through a logical process (Chandler, 2007). Although the two terms are initially used to refer to the same field, the experts now use semiology to refer to a branch of semiotics as a study that emphasizes the messages found in signs (Danesi, 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020).

### *The Theoretical Framework of a Semiotic Approach*

In their study of semiotics, Barthes (1977) and Chandler (2007) illustrate two essential elements of signs: form and content. The former is delivered through various media, such as photography, printed materials, and recordings, which are physically observable. Meanwhile,

the latter is in the interpretation of the message in the sign. Another distinction is denotative and connotative signs, proposed by Barthes (1977) and Chandler (2007). Denotative signs contain two simple elements – a signified bookmark and a signified alert. Connotative signs indicate another sign. As an indirect sign, it leads to another sign, which requires a process for a definition from others.

To comprehend the messages within signs, we need to understand the nature of signs. Peirce describes three types of signs: icon, index, and symbol signs (Danesi, 2004). The icon type of sign is designed to resemble the shape it represents. Images, photos, and onomatopoeic sounds are iconic signs often observed in everyday life, like newspapers (Sanawi, 2014). Next, an index sign means an indirect reference. Danesi (2004) proposes three indexes: spatial indexes that refer to objects, temporal indexes that refer to time, and personal indexes, which replace the human dimension. Finally, the symbol refers to a sign between its representation and a reference with an arbitrary relationship. This connection means that there is no connection between the two. Even so, there are conventions that make the two relate.

The use of signs within advertisements is obvious – to attract consumers. As explained by Dyer (2009), it is the purpose of advertising to draw attention. Ad information has a similar aim (Durrant & Lambrou, 2009). Hence, advertisements do convey not only promotion but also hidden meanings. These meanings are chosen to influence the existing or potential consumer. Concerning this, Williamson (1983) has stated that ads try to build a relationship between the prospective consumers and the products offered. However, our study suggests that tobacco industry advertisements contain indications whose sole purpose is to establish a rapport between the brand and its customers.

### *Signs and Myths in Advertisements*

By integrating signs, advertisements urge people to shift their perspectives on a particular thing. Williamson (1983) states that an ad attempts to correlate the idea within the ad to reality. Consequently, people will try to pursue some ideal conditions shown in the advertisement. Some even borrow other sources to attract people (Al-Momani et al., 2016; Ojong, 2019), while others are influenced by past experiences (Ghandeharion & Badrlou, 2018).

One great example of decoding the meaning and message in an advertisement is modeled by Barthes (1977). He decodes the message in an Italian pasta advertisement, Panzani. Barthes classifies the signs used into three categories - linguistic message, coded iconic message, and non-coded iconic message. The linguistic message refers to the language used within the advertisement. The coded iconic message refers to the use of signs which represent specific meanings in the ad. Lastly, the non-coded iconic message reflects the apparent representation of the product within the advertisements. Besides, he identifies three major commercial problems: connotative meaning, denotative meaning, and the presence of an anchor. Denotative meaning refers to obvious meaning, which delivers thoroughly using the clear presence of the product. Connotative meaning refers to a hidden message provided by signs, usually icons or symbols, requiring further analysis to decode. Then, the most significant issue is the existence of anchors; particular signs direct the entire meaning of the advertisement.

In the context of cigarette ads, a study by Chapman and Egger (1984) exposes that signs in some ads in Australia were intended to encourage people to disobey the government health campaign. In some cases, cigarette companies may violate the advertising code by depicting smoking as a sexual attraction (Arnett, 2005). Also, the use of color in the cigarette packaging can invite consumers to buy the product, as in Korea (Dewhirst & Lee, 2012), as the colors used can have a particular meaning (Taft, 1997), even to promote health (Flora et al., 2018). Cigarette marketing even increases during special events like New Year (Basil et al., 2000). In Indonesia, ads are delivered on television (Bambang et al., 2019) and billboards (Ananda et al., 2019) to influence people about the cigarette companies and their products, emphasizing the verbalized signs to promote desirable features that the company wants to be associated with.

Meanwhile, when decoding the meanings and messages delivered in an advertisement, Bignell (2002) proposes stages to analyze it. Those stages are sign classification, meaning interpretation, myth, and idea interpretation. The steps may reveal the myth. As mentioned earlier, the myth refers to a promise built by a product as a solution to daily problems faced by people. It is conveyed within the signs used in the advertisement of the product. The ad also delivers ideas that can sometimes shift people's perspectives on a particular notion. Here, Williamson (1983) states that an advertisement tries to correlate the idea within the ad to reality. This is the point at which the product is connected to the consumers who buy it. The greater the availability of overt, memorable cues, the stronger the relationship is. Finally, they get a chance to try and achieve the fabled conditions promised by the advertising. Consequently, it is necessary to elucidate how signs are communicated and myths are implied in commercial products to meet the everyday setting.

### *Semiotics and the Local Context*

In semiotics, people seeing the ads do not realize their meanings. Semiotics aid them in interpreting the various means' functions, the connections between the standards, and their social links. This study analyses the purposes of the verbal and non-verbal signs within the ads while exploring the functional interpretations. Nevertheless, verbal and non-verbal language use may suggest a broader assumption. Therefore, a semiotic approach determines the signs represented by particular elements and characterizes the local context. We followed a framework of semiotic analysis by Chandler (1994) below to connect the signs and the local context.

- Detecting the text and the signs (e.g., textual codes, social codes, or so the like, based on the terms of Bex (1993) and Simpson (2001))
- Detecting paradigm sets (e.g., shot sizes)
- Detecting the structural connections between various signifiers
- Analyzing the ideological functions of the signs within the text
- Relating the social functions of the signs (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003)

## METHODOLOGY

### *Data Collection*

Our study applied a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The research location was in Banda Aceh, the capital of the Sharia-based province in Indonesia (Abbas & Murziqin, 2021; Manan et al., 2023). We selected it considering its special Sharia regulation and autonomous status, making it strict in promoting cigarette billboard ads as some *ulama* (Islamic scholars) encourage people to quit smoking.

We selected fifty-two ads with cigarette company brands put up, during the year 2020-2021, on various billboards around the city. We noted that the billboard ads were changed every three to four months, which made this frequency our year-observation. Some ads were not cigarettes but other commercials like beauty products, city events, or governmental regulations. For sampling purposes, we designated four ads to represent typical interpretations within the rest of the ads. To add representativeness, we categorized the selection based on the cigarette's popularity and advertisement consistency. The former was based on popular brands among smokers, particularly male youths, as we noticed the number of ads displayed. The latter was retrievable from the frequent appearance of the ads. The selected ads we considered representative are produced by the high reputation and repeated consistency of the ad promotion, not to mention the initial representative interpretation of the ads.

Further, we collected the data and coded them into categories to answer the first research question. We then took the four representative ads for the analysis to answer the second one. For the third question, we interpreted the ads' meanings by associating those with the local context of Indonesia. The government regulation on smoking cigarettes on advertisement billboards is excluded from the analysis. Lastly, for the fourth question, we associated the myths promised in the ads with the relevant studies based on documentation.

#### *Data Analysis*

We adopted the semiotic approach of Barthes (1977) by interpreting the signs in denotative and connotative meanings. A study by Ullah (2022) using Barthes' approach (1977) found that content attraction, colors, eye-catching fashion, and catchy phrases influence customers to buy products. Table 1 illustrates the analysis in three phases – description, interpretation, and explanation. The first phase depicted the content of the ads covering verbal and non-verbal signs. Then, in the second phase, we explored the verbal and visual signs in delivering the envisioned meaning. Finally, we underlined the links between the ads' semiotic fundamentals and the locals' predominant context.

Further, we modified a simplified analytical framework by Chandler's (2007) semiotic analysis model to tie this study's related elements.

Table 1: Chandler's model of semiotic analysis

<b>Description</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
What signs are constructed in the ad?	How do the codes contained connect?	What links do the signs have to the local context?
What other verbal/non-verbal signs applied?	What connections do the text search for to construct with the audience?	To whom would these codes be most acquainted?
How are these signs arranged in the text?		What seems to be the favored interpretation?

Our study is distinctive as it employs the framework for the unfulfilled promises made by cigarette companies in the analysis. Meanwhile, a previous study by Al-Momani et al. (2016) adopted a similar framework to focus on intergeneric borrowing of advertisements in top Jordanian newspapers. The borrowings are derived from five sources – everyday circumstances, trending culture, religion, cultural memory, and scientific discourse. In this regard, a study by Spence and Van Doorn (2022) highlights that more research is needed to

establish causal relationships between specific packaging design aspects and specific attributes when applying Chandler's framework (2007).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We found four main communicative functions: portraying (1) a move-on action, (2) an enjoyable feeling, (3) a luxury atmosphere, and (4) a virile profile. In addition to attracting potential consumers, all those functions are integrated to shape specific characteristics cigarette producers promote.

### 1) *Portraying A Move-On Action*

#### a. *Description*



Figure 1: A cigarette ad portraying a move-on action

This ad contains different semiotic elements to attract people through two verbal and two non-verbal signs, as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: The description of the first advertisement

Verbal signs	Non-verbal signs
Go Ahead	Three men
<i>Masa Lalu Masalah Lu</i> (Your past is yours)	A view of the building's top

#### b. *Interpretation*

In Figure 1, the caption at the top right, Go Ahead, in black capital letters in English, clearly clarifies the function of the signs, i.e., making a move-forward action. Then, a giant red logo of the company brand, A, shadows the first caption. Then, the second caption, *Masa Lalu Masalah Lu*, complements the verbal sign's communicative function. This caption is located in the middle of the ad as a front-page copy with a larger font, distinguishing other elements. The rhyme of *Masa Lalu* and *Masalah Lu* makes the caption attractive and catchy. Following the regulation, no verbal or non-verbal signs directly refer to cigarettes. However, the smoke and the warning about smoking at the bottom are a direct link to cigarettes.

Furthermore, the three men on the bridge convey a visual image of certainty and move forward to emphasize the verbal message in the captions. Those figures also include the social code identified from their body language – closing of the eyes, ears, and mouths on each model, signifying ignorance of the surrounding. Interestingly these acts are akin to the three wise monkeys from Japan symbolizing ‘See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil,’ a famous tenet in Confucian thought. This tenet urges people not to do evil deeds using their body parts.

*c. Explanation*

Using the verbal signs – clear caption and attractive rhyme – and the non-verbal signs – the famous proverbial and the landscape of modern life – have social implications. The meaning presented in the first ad is that indifference is a key to dealing with life. The signs aim for youths and adults facing issues and problems in life. Based on the analyzed codes, it exudes that the best way to meet the difficulties of modern life is to be unaware. The notion of unawareness is tied to the consumption of the product.

Nevertheless, in the local context, such an attitude is dangerous considering the Indonesian life value and the negative effect of cigarettes. Unawareness is contrary to Indonesian people’s life values, where the people commonly, in some instances, help each other and live under the principle of collective work in facing problems. Then, promoting the consumption of cigarettes as a way to be unaware and free of daily modern life problems is perilous considering the health risk caused by it. We summarised the explanation in Table 3.

Table 3: Intersemiotic complementary in a motivation-signed cigarette advertisement

Verbal element	Non-verbal element	Connotation	Social implication
Catchy, rhymed caption	Three men posturing three wise monkeys	Creating a solid motivation	Indonesians are unaware of modern life problems
	View of a building’s top	Driving viewers to move on	Indonesians are directed to consume cigarettes.

*II) The portrayal of Enjoyable Experiences*

*a. Description*



Figure 2: A cigarette ad portraying an enjoyable feeling

The advertisement includes verbal and non-verbal signs, as set out in Table 4.

Table 4: The description of the second advertisement

Verbal signs	Non-verbal signs
Nuu Mild	A man sitting in a relaxed posture
<i>Ini Baru Asik</i> (This is the real enjoyment)	A view of a beach
	A view of an office room

*b. Interpretation*

In Figure 2, verbally, at the top left, the first big linguistic caption, NuU Mild, represents the cigarette brand. The second one, lower left, *Ini Baru Asik*, is the anchor for the ad. Using contrasting colors between the first-third and second words highlights the caption so people may notice it quickly. The bold, capital font also highlights the message.

Furthermore, the non-verbal signs are manifested in three forms—the office room where the man enjoyably sits is transformed into the beach. As Taft (1997) said, the color contrast within the signs also suggests an interpretation. The office room depicts a boring working atmosphere, marked by the reflective colors of white and grey. On the contrary, the beach is joyful through the symbolic usage of bright colors. By combining verbal and non-verbal signs, the advertisement promotes smoking as a means of enjoyment.

*c. Explanation*

The advertisement includes two verbal signs and various non-verbal signs. The different signs in the ad combine to imply that smoking brings enjoyment. The tedious scene is one that many men can relate to. In addition, the image reminds people that they need to have their break time. To this, relaxing at the beach manifests positive vibes that may decrease boredom, in contrast to the image of workers who are bored with their routines. The connotation of the signs may suggest a myth of rebellion against the existing system. Similar to the first ad, the interpretation of the second ad is also dangerous to Indonesian values; it promotes the consumption of cigarettes, improving Indonesian people’s health risks. A semiotic explanation for this ad is in Table 5.

Table 5: Intersemiotic complementary in an agitation-signed cigarette advertisement

Verbal element	Non-verbal element	Connotation	Social implication
Simple jargon of enjoyment	A relaxing man Beach	Creating an enjoyable feeling in working places	Indonesians experience boredom at their workplace. Indonesians are encouraged to contend with the existing system.

III) *Portrayal of a Luxurious Atmosphere*

*a. Description*

The advertisement includes various non-verbal and two-verbal signs, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: The description of the third advertisement

Verbal signs	Non-verbal signs
Magnum Blue	A yacht
Rp 13.500 (IDR 13,500)	A view of the sea





Figure 3: A cigarette ad portraying a luxurious atmosphere

*b. Interpretation*

Figure 3 shows the placement of the simple components in the third ad that appeals to the audience with only one noticeable object to highlight the links proposed. The image of a yacht is executed to symbolize luxury. The verbal signs – the cigarette brand and price – are placed at the yacht’s position, sailing in the open sea with a line of waves. The dominant colors within the ad are blue and a bit of white to signify the extravagant vibe (Taft, 1997), complementing the image of the yacht at the center of the poster. The same color codes also apply to cigarette packs to ensure the consistency of visuals. The sea background, the brand logo, and the color are set strikingly, emphasizing the ocean cruising in the center of the ad, moving from left to right. Indirectly, we perceived that the advertisement purposely transferred the idea of luxury and the product it promotes.

*c. Explanation*

The advertisement includes two verbal signs and various non-verbal signs. The ad is designed to persuade people who dream of luxurious life, and this is facilitated by smoking cigarettes from this brand. The selection of a yacht to represent luxury might be due to Indonesia’s geographical location at the biggest archipelago in the world. A cruising yacht is the epitome of a life of luxury that only a few people in Indonesia can afford. Above all, the cigarette company leads the local context by consuming the cigarette to a myth of hedonism: a message delivered that pleasure is the main thing that has to be achieved in life. These connections are summarized in Table 7 as follows.

Table 7: Intersemiotic complementary in a pleasure-signed cigarette advertisement

Verbal element	Non-verbal element	Connotation	Social implication
Simple brand’s name and price	Yacht A view of the sea	Creating a luxurious life	Indonesian people dream of having a deluxe thing in their life.

IV) Portrayal of a Virile Profile

a. Description



Figure 4: A cigarette ad portraying a virile profile

Figure 4 is an advertisement that includes various verbal and non-verbal signs set out in Table 8 describing the following signs.

Table 8: The description of the fourth advertisement

Verbal signs	Non-verbal signs
Welcome to the bold new world	A man is posturing something
L.A. Bold	A black background
20 Batang (20 sticks)	

b. Interpretation

The fourth advertisement in Figure 4 displays a man with dominant colors of red, white, and black, with the product's slogan prominently displayed. The man wears gallant clothing in retro style but is hidden with the huge typography due to the regulation. The captions also include 'Welcome to the BOLD New World.' In this advertisement, the manufacturer is trying to convey that they always honor the past. The past represented in this advertisement refers to the previous condition where smoking was applicable anytime, anywhere. This advertisement clearly states it by showing the figure of a smoking man wearing old-fashioned style clothes. The existence of an anchor, the slogan in this advertisement, directs the whole meaning of these signs. While referring to the signs showing the glorious past, it is contrary to the slogan. However, it is understandable that the company wants to bring its glorious time again by making innovation that preserves and develops its legacy. In addition, this slogan also invites people to be brave, even though it contradicts the social state, as the word 'bold' in bold, large capital letters is depicted.

c. Explanation

Commonly, on the notion of cigarette advertisements, to maximize acceptance by potential consumers, the current issues, including social, political, and economic, are inserted to establish their gains and trust (Feng & Zhou, 2016; Timke, 2021), which are recently offered in the form of digital promotion (Collins et al., 2019). Based on the database of the World

Bank, Indonesia has been upgraded to an upper-middle-income country. However, it lasts only one year (Jiao & Sihombing, 2021), which means the economic sector still struggles. The social condition forces Indonesians to work hard, particularly those of the low-middle-income class. This type of class becomes the specific target of the codes contained in the ad. By assuming to use this product, smoking may build a sense of masculinity to keep doing what was done in the past, which may turn into a better condition. Conservatism is the fundamental meaning that is delivered by this ad. It is built through the existence of the primary sign in this ad: the figure of a neatly dressed man posturing smoking as Indonesians are directed to conserve what they have done in the past and embrace the new situation in a thoughtful, gentle way, which in this case, consuming cigarettes of this product as abridged in Table 9.

Table 9: Intersemiotic complementary in a conservation-signed cigarette advertisement

Verbal element	Non-verbal element	Connotation	Social implication
Bold world	A steady man smoking a cigarette vaguely A pitch background	Creating a virile personality	Indonesians struggle with economic conditions. Indonesians are invited to conserve the past and embrace the new condition.

#### *Similarities in Ways of Delivering Myths*

The broad images the cigarette advertisers have built show that they want to lead the consumers' perception of smoking cigarettes. The producers of each cigarette promote that their products offer a better way of life for the people. It is so severe that it may increase the number of Indonesian smokers; people in the community can seek to achieve the conditions promised via cigarette advertisements.

Even though different companies produce each product, they have similarities. The most notable similarity is the dominant color used in each of them. Most advertisements use red, representing aggressiveness, dynamic, fun, and energy toward their product (Taft, 1997). It matches the character of young people, who become their target market. Another dominant color is white, which amplifies the meaning of red, as white denotes calmness (Taft, 1997). Both colors also represent the Indonesian people, as the Indonesian flag is red and white. These colors strengthen the fact that their product targets Indonesian people.

Another similar visual representation used within those advertisements is the figure of adult men. Three out of four ad samples display figures of grown-up men. As explained by (Williamson, 1983, p.20), each producer tries to build a correlation between products and consumers. There are three steps involved in developing the relationship above through advertising, as Salleh and Rahim (1995) outlined: the purchase, acceptance, and use of the advertised product. That women are more likely to trust a product marketed to them is mirrored in the ubiquitous commercial imagery of women doing makeup (Mohd Jafar et al., 2022). Hence, cigarette producers intend to create an image of adult men according to their idea. All adult figures in the advertisement show a posture of enjoying their lives as they are social actors here (Kress, 2019; Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003). This posture represents that adult men can enjoy life by consuming cigarettes.

Furthermore, the producers also attempt to construct the image of prosperity since the adult men are portrayed in a luxurious lifestyle, as demonstrated in the third sample, the yacht display. It signifies a luxurious life as only millionaires can afford it. This pattern is similar

to the previous reason – connecting producers to the targeted market. It is a promise of the producers stating that people could accomplish a lavish lifestyle by consuming their product. Williamson (1983, p.31) asserts that people are valued for what they consume, not produce. Hence, smoking these ‘luxurious’ cigarettes, at the same time, pushes the promotion and consumption of the product. Cosmetics commercials use the same strategy of presenting the product as desirable to encourage brand recognition (Mohd Jafar et al., 2022).

Two ad samples display the modern lifestyle represented by spatial indexes, the skyscraper, office room, and yacht, which characterize contemporary society. Through these indexes, the producers want to build the understanding that smoking is a part of modern life. They urge people to smoke to blend in and develop relationships in urban society. Similarly, the producers also want to bring the image of problems in modern life. For instance, in the second ad, a spatial index of contemporary life is represented by the office room colored in monochromatic colors. The color makes sense of boredom, which embodies problems people face in modern life. Then, the producers offer a way to solve the issue of contemporary life: consuming cigarettes. The first ad also provides such a solution, where the men pose to ignore obstacles in their surroundings.

Another similarity we noted in the advertisements found in our article is the opposition to, or rather the breaching of, the existing regulations. These cigarette advertisements oppose the intent of Regulation No. 109 of 2002. Precisely, it violates rule 24, which regulates product promotion. Under this rule, it asserts that the manufacturers are prohibited from using the names ‘light,’ ‘ultralight,’ ‘mild,’ ‘extra mild,’ ‘low tar,’ ‘full flavor,’ ‘slim,’ ‘premium,’ as well as various other words that indicate high quality, a favorable image or a sense of security. In fact, all brands promote their product using such terms. Moreover, contrary to the government’s regulation, most producers even put such words as their brands in the first and second ads.

Although each product has its myth, they deliver similar rebels to the government warning about the danger of smoking. This denial can also be considered resistance by cigarette producers and advertisers to government regulations, which narrow the producers’ chances to promote their products in various ways. The result will be apparent, namely an increase in cancer, bronchitis, and other chronic disease sufferers. Chapman and Egger (1984, p.195) find a similar result in unobvious ways. It will undoubtedly be detrimental to the government due to the burden of the treatment costs charged through the Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial (BPJS, Indonesian Office for Health Insurance), which eventually leads to the government’s charge. Too, the community’s productivity will undoubtedly be reduced due to the diseases people suffer from.

The concept of a good life promoted by cigarette ads also contrasts the idea of life based on the culture of Indonesian society. As reflected in Pancasila (Five Principles of Indonesian), their life values are social justice and helping each other. Here, we note that the Indonesian people’s life is based on mutual welfare and prosperity, not a personal exaggeration. As offered by the third ad, hedonism contrasts the values in normal Indonesian society. Hedonism teases people about enjoying life in any way possible. Such ideology, emphasized by the myth, is dangerous to Indonesian people since they may disobey the rule and dishonor others for personal joy. Indonesian values teach that togetherness and communal benefit are above personal interests. Thus, such ideology is contrary to native Indonesian social values.

The first and second ads show indifference and resistance to good law and order. The manufacturer thought problems should be ignored in the first ad, while the second one invites consumers to fight existing rules. Such myths are also dangerous since they persuade people to disobey the law directly and bravely. In this case, cigarette producers urge people to keep smoking despite regulating this act. Thus, we can see people smoking in public areas where it is banned in actual conditions. Again, such a habit has latent health and social life dangers for people.

Then, in the fourth advertisement, the manufacturer promotes conservatism, which rejects changes, including change for a better life. This ideology, encouraged by the myth here, is also dangerous for the Indonesian people. Further, the producer tries to keep the old condition when smoking is done freely within society. The ad attempts to repromote the habit of smoking; it brings a negative impact on the community indeed.

The discussion of meaning and myth conveyed within the cigarette ads reveals that those contain subliminal consumer messages. Unfortunately, each of them delivers terrible influences on society. Each advertisement promotes myths with values unsuitable for the Indonesian native values of life. Furthermore, some even encourage rebellion, which is considered a negative influence. In addition, they promote smoking as a way of life. Such a habit, as discussed before, actually brings significant loss to the people of Indonesia. Moreover, they even add that smoking is a part of modern social life and a solution to everyday problems. It makes people think that consuming cigarettes is a way to get rid of every situation, which increases the addiction to smoking.

The massive and ferocious way of advertising tobacco products still promotes smoking as a part of life despite the rule preventing people from smoking. Hence, the government must consider the regulation of cigarette advertisements again.

#### *Myths: The Promised Solution for Contemporary Life Problems*

Regarding the myth within cigarette advertisements, the significant issue is the ads' power to attract buyers. This notion aligns with Al-Momani et al. (2016), who imply the power of advertisement in persuading people to consume the products. Its influence can convince people to consume the products by linking the ads' content to social status, desirability, and pleasure (Feng & Zhou, 2016). Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (2016) and Perdani (2016) also legitimize the power to persuade people to consume tobacco products, which states that more than 60 percent of Indonesian males over 15 years old are active smokers. Moreover, such a condition, indeed, brings loss for the government. The government has to spend USD 1,2 million to cover the expenses due to tobacco-related illnesses (Goodchild et al., 2018).

With severe adverse health effects from cigarette smoking, smoking is a noticeable loss for the government. Then, the rise in consumption of tobacco products cannot be separated from the advertisements, which persuade people to consume it. This notion is noted by Triristina (2012), who explains how semiotic symbolism influences people to consume tobacco products. Then, in this article, we discussed the symbolism which attracts people to buy cigarettes. Here, clear messages are delivered to the people, which endure them to consume the products.

Beyond every advertisement, the company inserts messages conveying specific meanings to attract people. In line with this, Chapman and Egger (1984) note that myths play essential roles in perceiving consumers' minds. The myths are promises offered by companies

to solve people's problems. The interesting fact is that similarities to myths are chiseled behind every advertisement.

First, each advertisement makes up the modern society's problems through symbols used within the advertisements. The issues are a factual condition of contemporary society cases faced by the people; crowded and chaotic environment, boring daily routines, competitions among people, and confined society. Here, the most notable notion is the congruity of these problems with the facts faced by the people. Hence, people are deceived by these facts; they feel that the ads understand what they experience as they capture their problems with explicit imagery. It becomes a gateway for advertisements to catch people's attention for their products.

The following is how each product is offered to overcome the problem, which has exciting perspectives to overwhelm modern-life problems. They are unaware, escaping the usual, luxurious way of life, breaking the limit, being bold, reaching glory, and achieving freedom, respectively. As persuaded by each advertisement, the way to overcome the problems contains subliminal messages that oppose society's order. These myths, which deliver in covert ways within the advertisements, reflect the opposition toward the values existing within Indonesian society.

#### *The Implications of Strategic Promotion of Cigarette Advertisements*

This study provides a novel interpretation of the role of signs in cigarette marketing, especially concerning outdoor billboards. It must be typical for tobacco firms to reach their target audience and meet smokers' expectations in the local market. Because of the rule restricting cigarette advertising, businesses cannot freely express themselves. Therefore, they require effective methods to deal with the difficulties they face. One tactic they use is appealing to consumers' need for independence without removing any of that freedom (Arnett, 2005; Chapman & Egger, 1984).

Nonetheless, the 'lure' cannot border the proper consumers for smoking. Teenagers, even elementary school students, may smoke because of distinct possibilities – surroundings, the lack of parental control, and the free distribution of cigarettes (Wibowo et al., 2019). Promoting cigarette ads through physical or digital forms can also encompass specific promises (Al-Momani et al., 2016; Barnard, 2017; Ojong, 2019). To this end, the Government of Indonesia needs to issue stricter regulations for cigarette distribution as the promises offered in cigarette advertisements strategically cannot be more limited, as this study reveals.

#### CONCLUSION

This study has explored the meanings of signs in Indonesian cigarette ads in the form of billboards through a semiotic framework. Communicatively, the verbal and non-verbal signs are complementarily delivered to create motivations, pleasures, agitates, and conservatism. Each producer of cigarettes is trying to build their motives. These then promise to use these cigarettes to deliver a message that smoking will provide an escape from problems men face in the community.

Nevertheless, this study cannot cover all functions of such ads due to limited sources. The variation of ads from each cigarette brand may vary in specific regions and periods. More research into a broader range of topics, such as intergeneric borrowings, linguistic features, systematic reviews, and comparative assessments of each cigarette commercial, could potentially improve the outcomes of this study.

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