

A Semiotic Analysis Of Grabbike Advertisement Using Roland Barthes' Theory

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Abstract

Advertising functions not only as a promotional medium but also as a cultural text that conveys ideological meanings through visual and verbal signs. This study aims to analyze the meanings embedded in a GrabBike advertisement featuring the Indonesian comedian and actor Mas Adam (Inul Daratista's husband) by employing Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The study applies a qualitative descriptive method focusing on Barthes' two orders of signification: denotation and connotation, as well as myth. The findings reveal that the advertisement constructs meanings beyond its literal promotional message. At the denotative level, the advertisement presents a GrabBike rider identified as Mas Adam, accompanied by promotional text highlighting affordable daily transportation costs. At the connotative level, the visual and verbal elements signify affordability, reliability, and familiarity, while the use of a well-known public figure reinforces trust and cultural proximity with Indonesian consumers. At the mythological level, the advertisement naturalizes the ideology that digital transportation services are economical, accessible, and constitute an integral part of everyday urban life. The study demonstrates that advertising not only sells services but also shapes social perceptions and consumer lifestyles.

Keywords: Advertisement, Connotation, Denotation, Grabbike, Myth, Roland Barthes.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising has become one of the most influential forms of communication in contemporary society. Through visual and verbal signs, advertising not only promotes products and services but also communicates values, lifestyles, and cultural meanings. In the digital age,

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companies are increasingly using creative advertising strategies to attract consumers and strengthen brand identity. Therefore, advertising can be understood as a system of signs that generates meaning beyond its explicit promotional objectives.

Semiotics provides a useful framework for examining how these words are constructed and interpreted. Roland Barthes's semiotic theory explains that signs operate on three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to a sign's literal meaning, connotation refers to its associated cultural meaning, and myth reflects a broader ideological message embedded in a social context. Barthes's framework has been widely used to uncover hidden meanings in advertisements and media texts.

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Barthes's semiotic approach in analyzing advertisements. Kurniawan et.al., (2024), Citra advertisement represented Indonesian beauty ideals through denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. Halim et.al., (2024), Wall's Ice Cream advertisement used verbal and visual cues to construct an emotional and cultural narrative. Pramitha et.al., (2025), analysed a Yamaha Fazzio advertisement and revealed how visual and verbal elements were used to create an image of modernity and innovation. Asdah (2025) digital advertisements often contain ideological meanings conveyed through symbolic representations and cultural signs.

One well-known digital advertisement is the GrabBike campaign featuring Mas Adam. The advertisement featured the slogan "Affordability lasts as long as Mas Adam's mustache") along with the promotional statement "Every day 7 RB" ("Every day only 7 thousand rupiah"). The advertisement explicitly promotes affordable transportation services, its visual and verbal cues can also convey deeper meanings related to consistency, reliability, affordability, and consumer trust.

Although previous studies have explored beauty products, food products, motorcycle brands, and various digital advertisements using Barthes's semiotic theory, attention has been paid to online transportation service advertisements, particularly GrabBike's promotional campaign, which has been limited. The symbolic meanings embedded in the slogan "Cheap as long as Mas Adam's mustache" have not been widely studied through the concepts of denotation, connotation, and mythology. This study aims to analyze the visual and verbal signs in GrabBike advertisements using Roland Barthes's semiotic theory to uncover the layers of meaning and cultural representation embedded in the advertisements and explain the answers to the following research questions: How are denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings represented in GrabBike advertisements?





Picture 1. Advertisment GrabBike

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis method to examine the meaning contained in the GrabBike advertisement. This qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to understand and interpret the meaning constructed through visual and verbal signs in the advertisement, not to test hypotheses or statistically measure relationships between variables. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), qualitative research is an approach that aims to explore and understand the meanings given by individuals or groups to a social or cultural phenomenon. This approach is considered appropriate for uncovering communication messages contained in advertising media (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

The research method used is Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis. Barthes developed the concept of semiotics, explaining that signs have two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation, which then form myth as a second-level meaning system. Denotative meaning is the literal or directly apparent meaning of a sign, while connotative meaning is the meaning formed through experience, culture, values, and ideology of a society. Myths are understood as a naturalization of an ideology, allowing certain meanings to be accepted as normal in social life (Barthes, 2021). Through these three stages, this study aims to uncover the explicit and implicit messages contained in GrabBike advertisements.

The object of this research is GrabBike advertisements published through digital media and Grab Indonesia's official platform. These advertisements were chosen because they contain various visual communication elements that represent the company's image, service quality, and the relationship between drivers and customers. The unit of analysis in this study includes all visual and verbal elements contained in the advertisements, such as colour, typography, slogans,



character expressions, clothing, vehicles, setting, image composition, gestures, and other supporting symbols. Signs have meaning and can be analysed using a semiotic approach (Chandler, 2022).

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data is the GrabBike advertisement, which is the main object of the study, while secondary data was obtained through a literature review including books, scientific journal articles, proceedings, and previous research on Roland Barthes's semiotics, visual communication, advertising media, and digital marketing. The references used were prioritized from scientific publications from 2021–2026 to align with the latest academic developments. Secondary data served as a theoretical foundation and comparison in the interpretation of research results (Aspers & Corte, 2021).

Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation and literature review. The documentation study involved collecting GrabBike advertisements in the form of official images and videos, then repeatedly observing each scene to identify emerging visual and verbal signs. Next, all elements found were documented and grouped into categories consistent with Roland Barthes's semiotic concepts. Meanwhile, the literature review was conducted by reviewing various scientific references related to semiotic theory, visual communication, and previous research to strengthen the analysis and increase the validity of the interpretation (Bowen, 2021).

The data analysis technique followed Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis stages. The first stage was denotative meaning analysis, which objectively described all signs visible in the advertisement without providing interpretation. In this stage, researchers identified the dominant colours, characters, facial expressions, clothing, vehicles, Grab logo, slogan, and background used in the advertisement. The second stage was a connotative meaning analysis, which interpreted the meaning behind these signs based on cultural, social, and marketing communication contexts. For example, the use of green in Grab attributes is interpreted as a symbol of safety, freshness, and corporate identity, while the driver's smile represents friendly and professional service. The third stage was a myth analysis, which revealed the ideology or cultural values constructed through the advertisement. In this study, the myths presented included Grab's representation as a modern mobility solution, a symbol of digital technological progress, and the image of drivers as professional, trustworthy partners who are always ready to help the community (Barthes, 2021).

To enhance the validity of the research findings, the researcher applied theoretical triangulation by comparing the interpretations using Roland Barthes' theory with various previous studies on advertising semiotics and visual communication. This step aims to ensure



that the analysis results are not solely based on the researcher's subjectivity but also have a strong academic foundation. This research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings contained in the GrabBike advertisement and contribute to the development of semiotic studies in the fields of visual communication and digital advertising (Danesi, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A semiotic analysis of the GrabBike advertisement was conducted to uncover the meaning behind the visual and verbal elements displayed in the advertisement. From Roland Barthes' perspective, advertising is understood not only as a promotional medium conveying information about a product or service but also as a cultural text rich with signs, symbols, and ideologies. Barthes (2021) argues that every sign has two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation, which then develop into myth as a second-level system of meaning. The analysis of the GrabBike advertisement focuses not only on the explicit message but also on the implicit meanings constructed through the relationship between images, colours, text, and cultural context (Barthes, 2021).

In the study of visual communication, advertising is seen as a medium that deliberately designs various visual elements to influence consumer thinking and behavior. According to Chandler (2022), visual signs in advertising work through a process of representation, thereby constructing certain perceptions of a brand or product. The use of corporate colours, public figures, slogans, and typography are not merely aesthetic elements, but rather communication strategies designed to create a positive image in the minds of audiences (Chandler, 2022). GrabBike advertisements can be understood as a form of persuasive communication that utilizes a system of signs to strengthen brand identity while building an emotional connection with consumers.

Based on observations of GrabBike advertisements, it was found that the advertisements utilize a combination of verbal and visual elements to emphasize the message of affordable transportation fares. The presence of Mas Adam as the main character, the use of Grab's signature green colour, the promotional slogan, and the prominence of the number "7 RB" are elements that visually attract the audience's attention. According to Danesi (2023), the combination of text and images in advertisements forms a semiotic system that allows commercial messages to be conveyed more effectively because audiences not only read the information but also interpret the meaning behind the visual representation (Danesi, 2023).

Using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach, the results of this study are divided into three

levels of analysis: denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and mythological meaning. This analysis aims to explain how GrabBike advertisements not only convey promotional fares but also build the company's image as a trusted, affordable, and relevant digital transportation service for Indonesians. The first stage analysed is denotative meaning, the first level of significance, which describes the literal meaning of each sign in the advertisement.

Denotative Meaning

According to Barthes (2021), denotative meaning is the first level in the signification process, referring to objective meaning or meaning that is directly apparent without being influenced by cultural or ideological interpretations. At this stage, researchers simply describe what is seen in the advertisement as it is. Denotative analysis aims to identify the visual and verbal elements that form the primary constituents of the advertising message (Barthes, 2021).

The analysis shows that the GrabBike advertisement displays several key signs that explicitly convey information to the audience. The background of the advertisement is dominated by green, which is Grab's official visual identity. In the center of the advertisement is the character Mas Adam, wearing a helmet with the GrabBike logo and displaying a relaxed and friendly facial expression. The character's distinctive feature is a thick mustache, which later became the main element of the promotional slogan. The text "Muranya kumis basah Mas Adam" is prominently placed as the advertisement's main message. Below the slogan, the number "Every Day 7 RB" is displayed in a larger font size to attract the audience's attention. The GrabBike logo is also prominently placed as the company's identity, offering online transportation services.

All these elements convey the information that GrabBike is offering a promotional fare of IDR 7,000 per day. The large number "7 RB" serves to draw potential customers' attention to the economic benefits offered. The use of the Mas Adam character aims to strengthen the promotional message through a figure that is easily recognized by the public. According to Lester (2022), in visual communication, text size, colour, and object position are important factors in determining the audience's focus on the main information in an advertisement (Lester, 2022).

At the denotative level, no symbolic or ideological meaning is found because all signs function directly to convey information. The combination of the colour green, the Mas Adam character, the promotional slogan, the fare figures, and the GrabBike logo form a simple message: introducing GrabBike services with affordable and easily accessible prices. The denotative meaning of this advertisement serves as the basis for the formation of connotative and mythological meanings, which will be analysed in the following section. Barthes (2021)

states that denotative meaning is the initial foundation that enables the emergence of more complex meaning-making processes at the connotative and mythological levels.

Connotative Meaning

According to Barthes (2021), connotation is the second level of significance that emerges when a sign is no longer understood literally, but rather through cultural associations, social experiences, emotions, and values that develop within a society. Connotative meaning is deeper because it is influenced by the social and cultural context in which the sign is produced and received by the audience (Barthes, 2021).

Based on the analysis, the phrase "Murahnya kumis basah Mas Adam" is one of the most prominent connotative elements in the GrabBike advertisement. Literally, the phrase links the physical characteristic of the mustache with the promotional price. At the connotative level, the use of this phrase introduces an element of humor that aims to create a familiar and memorable impression. Humor is an effective communication strategy because it can increase audience attention and build emotional closeness with the brand. According to Danesi (2023), humor in advertising functions as a semiotic strategy that strengthens consumers' memory of the promotional message through pleasant associations. The slogan not only informs about low fares but also builds the perception that GrabBike is a service close to people's lives.

The presence of Mas Adam as the main character also has strong connotative meaning. As a public figure widely recognized by the Indonesian public, Mas Adam represents a humble, friendly, and authentic person. This character selection demonstrates Grab's efforts to build an image as a company that is close to people from all social strata. From a marketing communications perspective, using a figure with a high level of recognition can increase the credibility of the message and strengthen consumer trust in the advertised product. Chandler (2022) notes that characters in advertisements serve not only as visual support but also as representations of certain values the brand wishes to associate with.

This connotative meaning is also evident in the dominant color green in Grab's visual identity. In addition to its function as a corporate color, green is culturally associated with security, tranquility, growth, and sustainability. In the GrabBike advertisement, green builds the perception that the transportation service offered is safe, comfortable, and trustworthy. The consistent use of color in the logo, driver attributes, and background strengthens the brand's identity, making it easily recognizable. Lester (2022) notes that color in visual communication has symbolic power that can influence consumers' emotional responses and strengthen a brand's identity.



In addition to color, the typography highlighting the number "7 RB" also conveys a connotative meaning of economic affordability. The large size and contrasting color of the number direct the audience's attention to the key benefits offered by GrabBike. The number "7 RB" is not only interpreted as price information but also as a symbol of efficiency and economic solutions for the community. Grab strives to build an image as a transportation service provider capable of meeting mobility needs at a low cost. Rose (2022) argues that layout, font size, and visual hierarchy are crucial in shaping meaning because they determine the audience's focus on the main message in an advertisement (Rose, 2022).

The connotative meaning in the GrabBike advertisement constructs the company's image as a digital transportation service that is affordable, reliable, friendly, and close to the lives of Indonesians. All visual and verbal elements work together to build an emotional connection with consumers, so the advertisement not only offers a product but also provides a symbolic experience that strengthens brand loyalty.

Mythological Meaning

According to Barthes (2021), myth is a third-level system of meaning that serves to naturalize ideology, so that a value or belief is seen as something normal in society. At this stage, signs no longer merely convey connotative meaning but also shape society's perspective on social reality. In the GrabBike advertisement, various visual and verbal elements construct myths about digital transportation, consumption behavior, and the lifestyle of modern society (Barthes, 2021).

The first myth constructed is that digital transportation is a daily necessity. The advertisement depicts using GrabBike as a normal activity and part of people's routines. The presence of online transportation applications is no longer positioned as a new innovation, but rather as an inherent necessity of urban life. This representation demonstrates how digital technology is naturalized as the primary solution for people's mobility. According to Hall (2021), the media plays a crucial role in shaping social representations, so that certain practices are accepted as norms and considered natural by society (Hall, 2021).

The second myth is that low prices symbolize intelligent consumption. The emphasis on the Rp7,000 fare builds the ideology that choosing GrabBike is a rational and economical decision. Consumers are led to view individuals who can afford quality service at a low price as wise consumers. From a consumer culture perspective, advertising not only sells products but also sells a particular identity and lifestyle. Storey (2021) notes that popular culture often shapes social meaning through consumption, so that product choices become part of an individual's



identity.

The next myth is Grab as a daily life partner. The use of humor, the figure of Mas Adam, and light-hearted language builds the image that Grab is not just a transportation company, but a friend who is always there to help people carry out their daily activities. This strategy strengthens the emotional connection between the company and consumers, making the brand perceived as closer, more human, and more trustworthy. This myth demonstrates how advertising constructs social relationships between corporations and consumers through personal representations.

Aspers and Corte (2021) argue that meaning in qualitative research is constructed through interpretation of social and cultural contexts, not solely based on visual appearance. Chandler (2022) defines advertising as a system of signs deliberately designed to shape perceptions, brand images, and consumption ideologies through various visual representations.

Danesi (2023) argues that modern advertising not only informs consumers of product benefits but also constructs symbolic meanings related to consumer identity, social status, and lifestyle. In GrabBike, low fares are understood not only as an economic advantage but also as a symbol of intelligent consumption decision-making. The color green, the character Mas Adam, and the promotional slogan serve not only as design elements but also as semiotic devices that build trust, emotional closeness, and legitimacy for digital transportation services.

Mythological analysis shows that GrabBike advertising successfully naturalizes the use of app-based transportation as part of the modern Indonesian lifestyle. Through a visual communication strategy that combines humor, brand identity, cultural symbols, and economic narratives, Grab not only promotes transportation services but also constructs an ideology of practical mobility, rational consumption, and the harmonious relationship between digital technology and everyday life. This finding shows that Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is still very relevant in revealing the ideological meanings hidden behind contemporary marketing communication practices.

Implications

This research, which analyzes the semiotics of GrabBike advertisements using Roland Barthes' theory, provides theoretical, practical, and academic implications. Theoretically, this research strengthens the relevance of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory in analyzing visual communication media, particularly digital advertising. The results show that the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth can reveal meanings that are not only explicit, but also implicit and ideological. Through these three levels of meaning, this research proves that



advertisements are not simply a medium for conveying information about products or services, but also a cultural text that shapes society's perspectives on brands, lifestyles, and consumption behavior. This research enriches the study of semiotics in the fields of communication, advertising, and popular culture and supports Barthes's view that mass media plays a role in naturalizing social values through sign systems.

Practically, the results of this research provide input for Grab Indonesia, advertising practitioners, visual communication designers, and creative industry players regarding the importance of utilizing semiotic elements in developing marketing communication strategies. The use of corporate colors, public figures like Mas Adam, humorous slogans, and an emphasis on promotional rates have proven effective in building a positive brand image while fostering an emotional connection with consumers. Companies can continue to develop communication strategies that are not solely focused on conveying information but also consider cultural values, social symbols, and consumer experiences, making advertising messages more effective, persuasive, and memorable.

This research demonstrates that selecting visual and verbal elements that are appropriate to local culture can increase public trust in a brand. Advertisers are expected to pay more attention to the Indonesian cultural context when designing marketing messages to ensure their communications are more relevant to the characteristics of their target audience.

Academically, this research is expected to serve as a reference for students, lecturers, and researchers studying semiotics, visual communication, digital media, and advertising. This research demonstrates that Roland Barthes's theory remains highly relevant for analyzing various forms of visual communication in the digital age, including advertising on social media, digital platforms, and other audiovisual media.

This research opens up opportunities for further research to develop semiotic studies by combining Roland Barthes's theory with other approaches, such as Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, critical discourse analysis, multimodal analysis, or Stuart Hall's representation theory. Future research can also compare the visual communication strategies used by various digital transportation companies, such as Grab, Gojek, or Maxim, thereby producing a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of meaning, ideology, and consumption behavior in the application-based transportation industry.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a semiotic analysis using Roland Barthes' theory, it can be concluded that the GrabBike advertisement functions not only as a promotional medium for





online transportation services but also as a communication medium containing multiple layers of meaning. At the denotative level, the advertisement explicitly conveys information about the GrabBike promotional fare of IDR 7,000 per day, a form of economic offer to the public. This information is communicated through the use of text, visuals of drivers, vehicles, and the easily recognizable Grab brand identity.

At the connotative level, the advertisement builds deeper meaning through a combination of visual and verbal elements. The green colour, Grab's identity, symbolizes safety, trust, and concern for customers, while the friendly expressions of drivers, interactions with users, and the app's appearance convey a fast, accessible service that is close to people's daily lives. All of these elements reinforce GrabBike's image as a transportation service that is not only affordable but also reliable in meeting the mobility needs of modern society.

At the mythical level, the advertisement represents digital transportation as an integral part of the urban lifestyle. GrabBike is constructed as a symbol of technological progress, efficiency, and practical mobility solutions. Affordable fares are mythologized as a manifestation of the company's concern for the community's economic needs, thus viewing digital transportation services as a reasonable, smart choice, and in line with the demands of modern life.

This research shows that GrabBike advertisements not only convey commercial messages about price promotions but also shape consumption ideologies through a complex process of interpretation. The advertisements successfully construct values such as convenience, affordability, trust, and modernity as part of Grab's brand identity. GrabBike advertisements can be understood as cultural texts that not only influence consumers' decisions to use online transportation services but also shape how society views digital technology as a primary need in everyday life.

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