

NORMALIZATION OF DIFFICULT LOAN PAYMENTS: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF LOAN SERVICE ADVERTISEMENT IN POST PANDEMIC ERA

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Abstract: This study focuses on semiotic analysis of Kredivo's commercial video entitled "Life as flexible as it can be". The purpose of this research is to find the hidden meaning behind the sign used in the commercial. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to seek a deeper understanding of the meaning contained in the commercial. The theory used in this study is the semiotic analysis of Roland Barthes. The results of this study indicate that there are some hidden meanings that are made vague by only showing certain messages in a clear and straightforward manner so that the purpose of this Kredivo commercial is achieved. However, the hidden meaning can still be revealed and stated in the results of this study. The conclusion of this study is that Kredivo uses the slogan "Flexible" to build image that its users have the freedom to use their loan services. In addition, through this commercial, Kredivo also wants to instill an understanding that the comforts and difficulties in life are normal. To normalize the difficulty faced by its users after taking their loan service. As it can be normal, users do not need to worry and exaggerate it.

Keywords: *semiotic; advertisement; post-pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

The Covid pandemic that has emerged since 2019 has had a major impact on human life, including the people of Indonesia. Not only has a significant impact on health problems, Covid-19 also impacts the economic aspect of society (UNICEF, UNDP, Prospera, & SMERU, 2021). A survey by the Ministry of Manpower stated that 88% of companies in Indonesia had been affected by the pandemic and most of them suffered losses and even had to go out of business (Badan Perencanaan Pengembangan Ketenagakerjaan, 2020). To tackle the spread of Covid-19, Indonesian government enforced a social distancing policy called PSBB (Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar or Large-Scale Social Restriction). The physical distancing policy taken by the government greatly affects the sustainability of the company's business. The division of work shifts from what was originally Work From Office (WFO) to Work From Home (WFH)

has an effect on reducing the amount of their income. Even the policy of Termination of Employment (PHK) was finally taken by most companies. The income of the community (workers) decreases and even stops, but they must continue to provide for their families. In the midst of a health crisis, they also have to experience an economic crisis.

People need a quick solution to survive. In connection with the declining economic conditions of the community, more and more online financing platforms have emerged. People consider this a practical solution without difficult requirements so they flock to these financing platforms to provide for their needs. One of the fastest growing online financing platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic is Kredivo.

Kredivo was founded in April 2016 and is headquartered in Singapore. Kredivo was awarded as the 100 most innovative financial technology (fintech) company in the World, the only one in Southeast Asia to receive this award (Sulaiman, 2018). The Kredivo financing platform can be accessed through the website www.kredivo.id and can also be downloaded on Google Play and the App Store. This convenience makes Kredivo's development skyrocket. Until the middle of 2022, Kredivo's active users reached five million people (Yunianto, 2022). From this number, the majority of users are the lower middle class. They are mostly the majority of people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is around 59% (Dihni, 2022). It is also mentioned by the local newspaper that in the last ten months, the increase of Kredivo users has doubled. This shows that the public considers an online financing platform like Kredivo as a practical solution that is easily accessible.

The significant increase in the number of users was caused by several things. Apart from the economic situation during the Covid-19 pandemic, one of the factors that caused the Kredivo platform to grow rapidly is the use of advertisements. Advertisement is used as a tool to introduce its products, so that information about Kredivo services reaches the public. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused the use of gadgets and the internet to increase. Therefore, kredivo also takes advantage of the community's new habit by maximizing their advertisements about their products/services.

Kredivo commercials are not only broadcasted on national TV channels but also on social media platforms such as Youtube. Youtube was chosen as an advertising medium because the number of users in Indonesia reached 139 million in 2022. The number reaches half of the total population of Indonesia. Based on survey data, Youtube is the most widely used social media platform in Indonesia (Kemp, 2022). Therefore, Kredivo chose Youtube as one of the platforms to advertise.

Kredivo produces commercial series with the hashtag #sefleksibelitu (as flexible as it can be). Each video of these commercial series gets more than seven million views. Recently, Kredivo launched its newest commercial series with the title *Hidup #Sefleksibelitu* on May 9th, 2022. Since the commercial was uploaded on Youtube until August 2022, it has been watched 29 million times. Compared to the other commercial series with hashtag #Sefleksibelitu released by Kredivo, this particular commercial has the highest number of views that attract the researchers to analyze the content of the commercial. This 55-second commercial displays many symbols, such as the various types of professions that are represented by the appearance of cats and cockroaches. Researchers are interested in revealing what meanings are presented through these symbols and the messages they contain by using semiotic analysis. Barthes (1967) explains that signs can be understood through 3 levels of signification, which are denotation, connotation and myth. To reveal the hidden message in a Kredivo commercial with the title "*Hidup #Sefleksibelitu*" which aired on Youtube on May 9th 2022 by using semiotic analysis, the researchers use this particular commercial as the object of research.

METHOD

This study aims to analyze the semiotics in the Kredivo commercial. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative method. Qualitative research aims to understand some aspects of social life and the data used in qualitative research is mostly words rather than numerical data (Patton & Cohran, 2002). This method supports and is suitable for this study to give a more profound understanding of describing the hidden message in Kredivo commercial. Semiotic analysis is frequently used in research that reveals certain intentions or meanings contained in commercials (Handayani, 2019; Lubis, et al., 2019; Marsheilo & Tamburian, 2022; Sugiharti, 2018). Related to that, this study will use semiotic resources to interpret the substantial messages contained in the commercials.

Barthes (1967) explains that there are two orders of signification, which are denotation and connotation. The denotation and connotation refer to the first and second meanings of a sign. Moreover, he (1967) defines denotation as the literal meaning of a sign. It means that denotation shows the meaning of an object objectively. It can be directly observed, recognized or identified. For example, an image of a bird denotes a bird or a type of bird. On the other hand, connotation contains meanings that are dependent on the denotative level (Barthes, 1967). It can be classified as the symbolic level or the level above denotation. Then, a sign is interpreted by a viewer connotatively when the interpretation goes beyond the denotative level

interpretation and goes through the context-dependent message (Barthes, 1967). For example, a bird as a symbol can be interpreted differently based on the context. In some contexts, a bird can be seen as the connotation of a country, can also be seen as the identity of a football club, or can be seen as a sign to forbid people from feeding the birds.

The data analysis is conducted in two steps. The first step is to find out which scene in the commercial might contain hidden messages and classify them as the research data. This is done by watching the commercial several times and taking notes of what certain scenes might have certain messages. The next step is to analyze the research data that are in the form of some scenes to reveal the hidden messages by using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Barthes (1967) stated that the viewers of signs can understand these two levels (denotative & connotative) only by making reference to their background knowledge of the culturally based codes and various associative meanings; the system of connotation is dependent on this background knowledge for its existence. To be more detailed, the viewer needs to understand the first level or the denotative meaning of an object to be the signifier of the second level or the connotative meaning. From the example of 'a bird' above, a bird is the signified in denotation level which can become the signifier at a higher level that is also followed by other signified. Barthes (1967) said that the connotation is identical to the ideological operation which is also known as myth. A myth serves to reveal and provide justification for dominant values that prevail in a certain period in society (Sobur, 2004).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Binary Opposition of Lifestyle

In this discussion, we analyze the Kredivo commercial entitled "*Hidup #sefleksibleitu*" by using the three semiotic levels which are denotative, connotative, and myth by Barthes.

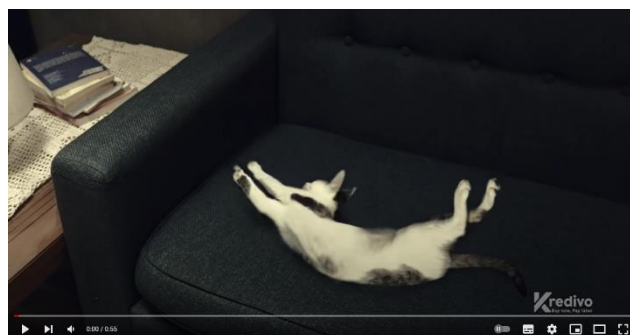




Figure 1: Scene 1 of the Kredivo commercial

Two pictures above are snipped from the beginning of the Kredivo “*Hidup #Seleksibelitu*” commercial. At the opening of the commercial, two different cats are shown in different places. The first cat is presented sleeping on a nice black sofa while the second cat is presented sleeping on a simple table located outside the room. It looks like the two cats sleep comfortably even though they are in different places. The opening of the commercial features a cat accompanied by the narration "Life as flexible as it can be". The narration shows that two sleeping cats are living a flexible life which is presented by their flexibility to be able to sleep comfortably in two different places, the sofa and table.

The first thing that the researchers discuss is the ‘sofa’ and ‘table’ where the two cats are sleeping. The sofa, as the signifier in the first picture, is covered in black fabric. The signified shows that the sofa is a soft and comfortable seat that is often found in living rooms at home, offices, and other public places. In general, a sofa is made of foam and upholstery which has arms and a backrest. By design, sofas are made for comfort. Furthermore, the table, as a signifier in the second picture, is made of wood, hard textured, small in size, and black in color. The signified shows a table with that characteristic is usually placed on the terrace or outdoors. From the material, the table is made of wood which is very hard and not comfortable to use for sleeping. The sofa and table, both have opposite properties, where the sofa is a comfortable place to sit in a protected room while the table is placed outside the room such as on a terrace. Therefore, the scene of a cat sleeping on the sofa and table can be interpreted as a cat is flexible that can sleep anywhere comfortably whether it is on a soft surface or a hard surface base. The cat’s flexibility is associated with the Kredivo advertising slogan, ‘Life as flexible as it can be’. The explanation above is the denotation level of the first scene in Kredivo's commercial. As Barthes (1967) definition of denotation, it refers to the literal meaning of a sign which can be directly observed, recognized, or identified. The sofa and the table are considered as the denotation of the commercial’s first scene.

The next level of signification is connotative meaning, Barthes (1967) defines it as the symbolic level which can be interpreted by the viewer based on the context. Related to the scenes above, cats are presented to replace humans. In other words, the connotative meaning that appears in that scene is that humans "instinctively" can sleep in comfortable places such as indoor sofas and also in less comfortable places such as outdoor tables. This is in accordance with the title of Kredivo's commercial "Life as flexible as it can be" where humans can experience and handle two situations, comfortable and uncomfortable. A comfortable situation refers to when the users of Kredivo use their service to get a loan to fulfill the comfort aspect of their life. However, at other times the users of Kredivo have to repay their loans which will cause an uncomfortable situation. Connected to what Barthes (1967) said that the connotation is identical to the ideological operation which is also known as myth, the ideological operation in the first scene of this commercial is related to human flexibility in experiencing two different conditions.

The myth presented through the commercial is that online financing, the main service/product from Kredivo, is normal in society. Some people also consider that it gives solutions to society. Individuals who want to get "comfort" easily can use the Kredivo service, online financing. In other words, any individual who experiences difficulties or discomfort after taking online financing is also normal and reasonable. Fintech commercials are often less transparent in providing information related to the risks that consumers will undergo and showing more about the convenience and benefits that they will receive. When consumers apply for online financing, they have no idea what risks they will face if they are late paying bills. It could be that if the risk is presented in the commercial, potential customers will think twice before applying for an online loan.

In the context of Kredivo commercials, that form of discomfort is presented in a refined manner. This is intentionally delivered to cover up the fact to the public that many users of online financing products must face difficulties or discomfort. The problem arises when the user cannot pay the bill due. they have to deal with debt collectors who sometimes chase them in uncomfortable ways. This might cause trauma, stress, depression, anxiety, unable to focus on work, loss of self-confidence, and even suicide. and even depression (Arvante, 2022). The slogan "flexible" is presented to "normalize" the difficulties experienced by users of online financing services. The difficulties or inconveniences faced by online financing users are constructed as a natural thing. Therefore, individuals who face those difficulties will not seek defense or justice because it is their choice and is considered "normal".



Figure 2: Scene 2 of the Kredivo commercial

Similar situation can be found in the next pictures taken from the commercial. The two pictures above tell about a male office worker who is given two choices, the first is to go home by an old public bus, second is to go home by a nice car. The video is followed by a narration “Kadang kiri, kadang kanan” which is translated as sometimes left, sometimes right. The narration refers to choices between the old public bus on the left and the nice car on the right. In the previous discussion, the researchers discuss the sofa and table, while in this part the researchers talk about the old public bus and the nice car. The bus as a signifier in the first picture is a red-blue painted old public bus with a driver’s assistant on the door. The signified of the bus shown in the first picture is Jakarta public transportation called *metromini*. The bus provides 20-30 seating but is often overcrowded. Not only overcrowded, *metromini* received many complaints such as speeding, not being roadworthy, and even sexual harassment was frequently reported (Kussanti & Hardian, 2020). From the explanation, the bus pictured in the commercial is a signified inconvenient public transportation. The opposite situation is shown in the next picture, which is the car. The car as a signified is an automobile used for transportation with a capacity of 2 to 6 people. In the commercial captured in the second picture, the car as a signifier is nice private transportation. The car looks new and clean which provides comfort and luxury. Therefore, the researchers consider the explanation of the old

public bus and nice car as the denotation meaning, that the car and the old bus are in binary opposition.

After finding out the denotation meaning, researchers discuss the second layer meaning which is the connotative meaning. To find the myth that operates in the commercial, the researchers connect the denotative meaning explained in the previous paragraph with the narration “Sometimes left, sometimes right”. The narration shows that the male worker is given the right to choose between inconvenient public transportation which is the bus on the left and convenient and luxurious transportation which is the car on the right. Those two options refer to two different lifestyles. The bus indicates an inconvenient lifestyle and the car attributes a convenient lifestyle. Now, the researchers relate those arguments to Kredivo as a fintech enterprise that aims to get many customers through the commercial. The commercial suggests that every person has the right to choose their lifestyle and Kredivo offers to give a convenient lifestyle to customers through their online financing product. The commercial shows how Kredivo highlights that they can instantly elevate people’s lifestyles without complicated effort. Again, this shows how they disguise the series of risks when a customer violates the agreement with convenience and flexibility that they offer. The commercial tends to eliminate the many consequences which in extreme cases cause people to lose jobs because of contact terror from the debt collector to co-workers and even the boss (Faisal, Wiradimadja, Ajra, Adhitama, & Ramadhan, 2022). There are also cases where it causes depression and even the worst leads to suicide (Faisal et al., 2022).

The myth of the second scene is people are free to choose their lifestyle regardless of their financial condition. If they are in a condition of lacking the financial aspect, Kredivo will help them to fulfill it for them. For these reasons, most of the users are attracted to the loan services that Kredivo offer. However, the risk or consequences are not shown in the video. The scene only shows what customer can do instead of their usual habit. For example, workers at the end of the month will save more expenses. This is very common in society. However, they construct the society that with Kredivo's financing service, they can solve this problem and still be able to choose for their life.

Which Society is the Commercial Segmented to?

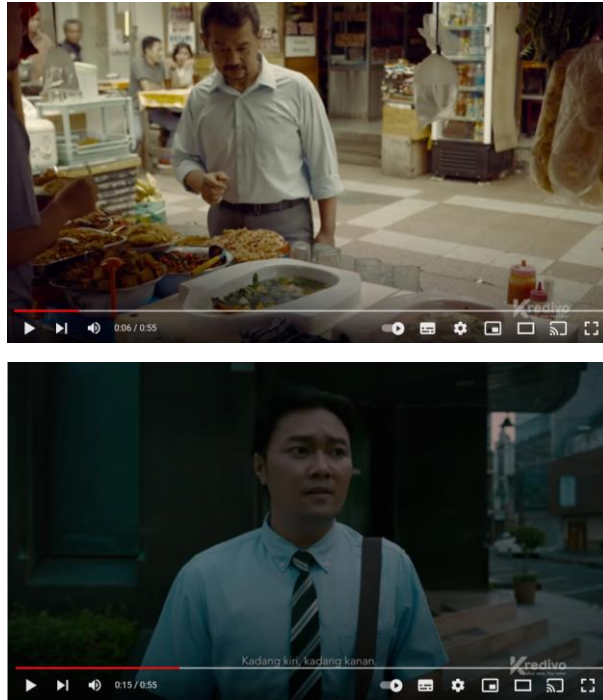


Figure 3: Scenes showing profession in the Kredivo commercial

In this part, the researchers focus on the ad target by analyzing the series of professions presented in the ad video. The first profession that appears in the ad is an office worker. There are two pictures snipped from the ad. The first picture tells about a middle aged man about to eat in a food stall. While the second picture is a young man being confused choosing between taking a bus or a car. The first man wears white long-sleeved shirt with gray trousers and a black belt. The description of the man's style signified the fashion style that is usually worn by office workers. A similar situation can be found in the second picture. The man wears a short sleeve shirt with a blue striped tie, and dark trousers. That look also signified the office worker style. At this level, it can be stated that the denotative meaning of the two men's professions in the ad is office workers.

Moving to the next level of analysis which has a connotative meaning, the researchers will relate the denotative meaning explained in the previous paragraph to social class issues. In order to get the connotative meaning, the researchers will relate the men in the snipped commercial video to the environment surrounding them. The first man pictured was in a roadside food stall which in Indonesia refers to "warung pinggir jalan". The roadside food stall, also known as Warung Tegal (warteg), was originally a business initiated by the urban community that originated from Tegal to provide cheap food to meet the needs of low-income suburban urban communities. Warteg has become the identity of a small community eatery in Indonesia (Asytuti, 2015). The price range of meal in warteg is not expensive, therefore it

becomes the best alternative for office workers to have lunch. Usually, it offers the wide array of pre-cooked dishes which are also depicted in the commercial when the middle-aged man is confused in deciding his meal menu. The roadside food stalls in Indonesia usually have a simple impression which can be seen from the chairs, tables, and cutleries. That simple impression and cheap food indicate that it is meant for the low to middle social class. The situation fits with the man who appears in the first picture. The way the men dressed show that he is from low to middle social class. The statement about social class is supported by the way he rolled the sleeves and his untidy shirt. Besides the look, his surroundings, which is the roadside food stall also support which social class he belongs to.

Similar to the first picture, the second picture also indicates a low to middle class environment. The man in the second picture was in the middle of a complex shop which in bahasa Indonesia refers to “komplek pertokoan/ ruko”. There are many types of complex shops in Indonesia, from the luxurious to simple. The one shown in the ad video is the simple one. It is supported by old architecture style and a gloomy atmosphere. Therefore, it can be stated that the second man in the ad video is in a low to middle-class environment. If that environment is related to the man figure which was discussed in the previous paragraph, the researchers state he is classified as a low to middle-class office worker. This is also supported by the emergence of "metromini" or old bus and a car driven by his coworker. That scene shows that the man does not have a car and usually takes the bus as daily transportation, which promotes the argument that he is categorized as a low to middle-class office worker.

Why The Family of Cockroach?



Figure 4: Part 4 of Kredivo commercial

At the end of Kredivo commercial entitled “Hidup #sefleksibleitu” appeared a group of cockroaches that dressed as humans in a living room. The narration of that scene is "fleksibel tenornya" which is translated as a flexible tenor. This scene bothers the researchers, therefore this part will discuss the relation of cockroaches to Kredivo's market target. Before discussing the relation, the denotative meaning of the environment, the cockroach and its costume, and

the narration along the final scene of the ad will be examined first.

The commercial shows a scene where the cockroaches appeared from the first generation to the next generation. The first and second generations are shown by five cockroaches which are presented as a cockroach family consisting of grandparents as the first generation and the parents as the second generation. After that, the number of the cockroach family increased by two until it finally increased to eight. The eight new cockroaches are presented as the children of the cockroach family. The presented cockroach family is presented with a different costume to show that each cockroach has a specific role in the family. The life journey of a cockroach family that develops until the third generation is shown in the video is the denotative meaning of the scene.

By using a cockroach as a model which is paired with the narration “have flexible tenor”, this commercial wants to show several layers of meaning in this scene. First, with a narration of “have flexible tenor” and the choice of 1 month, 3 months, 6 months and 12 months shows up in the scene, the viewers are constructed to believe that Kredivo has flexible rules regarding the payment tenor. These choices are given to build understanding that the audience is given a freedom to choose the payment period. The existence of an element of freedom that can still be maintained by the audience is what Kredivo wants to emphasize. However, the cockroach was chosen as the model to accompany the narration. Of the many animals and other symbols, cockroach is chosen. This must have meaning of its own. Cockroaches are animals whose life cycle is relatively fast. Thus, the flexibility of time and the relatively fast life cycle of the cockroach is presented in one scene. It shows that there is a limit to this flexibility which may not be clearly visible to the viewers.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the observation and identification result above, the message that Kredivo wants to deliver is how convenient to use their financing service. Kredivo instills many things the audience can do if they want to use their services. The slogan "flexible" is heavily presented in most of the scenes to construct viewers understanding that Kredivo can give them freedom compared to other platforms. The slogan flexible is also heavily repeated so that the word is embedded in the minds of the viewers. It can make them think that if they need a loan with flexible repayments, they will remember Kredivo. Kredivo's commercial is also made to give some messages to the viewers, which are comforts and difficulties are normal in life, so if the customers are facing difficulties after using their comforting financing services, it is normal

and natural; People especially in the middle to lower class are not bound to frugal culture. They need to have some fun in their life and Kredivo could help them by proving that life style easily and flexibly. The last point is, this commercial is intentionally delivered to middle to low social classes which is shown by the profession in most of the scenes. It also brings some characteristics of those social class, which are their lifestyle and their environments.

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