

Poverty Commodification of kitabisa.com Crowdfunding Ads in Post Pandemic: A Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose. The objective of this study is to examine how poverty is represented in the advertising videos of Kitabisa.com and to identify the forms of commodification of poverty portrayed in these advertisements..

Methodology: This study utilizes a qualitative approach, employing semiotic analysis based on Roland Barthes' theory. *Results*: The findings reveal that Kitabisa.com advertisements commodify poverty by portraying dramatic circumstances through the use of shabby appearances, children and elderly people working, and limited access to education and healthcare. These depictions are designed to elicit sympathy from the audience and encourage them to donate through the platform. *Applications/Originality/Value*: The analysis further identifies several forms of commodification, including the commodification of content through editing before dissemination and the commodification of audiences by inducing their curiosity and empathy towards the characters, thereby prompting them to donate to the cause. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into how poverty is portrayed and commodified in advertising and sheds light on the broader implications of such representations.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2019-2021 has had a significant impact on Indonesia's economy, as demonstrated by data from the Central Statistics Agency (accessed on September 25, 2022). According to the agency, as of September 2020, there was a 27.55 million increase in the number of impoverished individuals in Indonesia. This represents an additional 1.13 million people since March 2020 and 2.76 million people since September 2019. The data indicates an increase in Indonesia's poverty rate following the pandemic. This rise in poverty presents an opportunity for certain parties to gain public sympathy to achieve their goals. The advent of communication technology has made the mass media a crucial element in the public's perception. According to Donohue et al., the mass media plays a role in social control in the communication process, particularly in feedback and distribution control. In distribution control, the media can select which information to provide to the public (DONOHUE et al., 1986)

The impact of mass media on the decision-making process in society cannot be underestimated. The ubiquitous nature of mass media ensures that exposure to its content is a constant phenomenon, which consequently affects individuals' perception, cognition, behavior, and everyday activities. Of particular significance is the prevalence of advertising content on social media platforms that exploit social issues to elicit public sympathy and shape the public's conduct in line with the message's objectives. This paper seeks to explore the impact of mass media on decision-making in society, with a particular focus on the use of social media advertising content to shape social behavior.

The dissemination of information through advertising seeks to captivate the public with a range of original and compelling ideas, encouraging consumers to act on behalf of the advertiser's intentions. (Jefkins, 1992) posits that advertising functions as a conduit of mass communication that not only influences but also educates and informs the public. Its persuasive power renders it a potent tool in the marketer's arsenal.

The demand for information and entertainment among the public has provided a fertile ground for advertising producers to craft a plethora of attention-grabbing advertisements that have the potential to sway the viewers' actions in line with the message conveyed. The pursuit of economic interests is intrinsic to the

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production of media content in a highly competitive environment, and crowdfunding advertising has emerged as a popular avenue to raise the necessary funds. However, the preponderance of economic motives in the creation of media content poses a potential predicament that warrants closer scrutiny.

Crowdfunding is a contemporary activity that is facilitated by the Internet and is aimed at mobilizing financial resources for a particular cause. It involves an open call for donations, which can either be in the form of a reward or without any form of compensation. According to Hemer (2011) Crowdfunding is a dynamic fundraising platform that leverages mass media advertising techniques to evoke emotions and influence the target audience's decision to donate. Typically, Crowdfunding advertisements utilize textual and audiovisual elements to create a persuasive appeal that motivates the audience to donate. In this paper, we seek to explore the use of Crowdfunding in the media industry and its impact on the target audience's emotions and donation behavior.

In recent times, the mass media has been inundated with copious content on poverty. The portrayal of poverty often involves showcasing a family grappling with an array of constraints, including but not limited to inadequate housing, basic amenities, and restricted access to healthcare, resulting in a paucity of food supplies (Arya et al., 2013). Such depictions are often accompanied by narratives or advertisements that emphasize the resilience and fortitude of the subject in the face of daunting challenges, a tactic employed to evoke an emotional response from the audience.

Advertising shows have the ability to influence audience behavior and are designed to be relevant to a given situation. The use of interesting stories is a common technique used in advertisements, including those produced by the Kitabisa.com platform. These stories often commodify poverty in a way that elicits feelings of sadness and sympathy in the audience, and have become a sought-after commodity for platform and channel owners to attract a wide viewership. While there are certainly benefits to this approach, including the potential to raise funds and awareness for impoverished communities, it is also important to recognize that ad producers stand to benefit from the sale of their story. This paper explores the ethics and implications of commodifying poverty in advertising, and the potential consequences for both the advertisers and the communities they seek to serve.

Poverty in society arises from diverse factors, including political, economic, and social conditions, rather than mere indolence. Nevertheless, media content often perpetuates the exploitation of poverty, both overtly and covertly, despite the community members affected by it being unaware of such exploitation. As Arya et al. (2013) noted, poverty is often sensationalized and turned into a spectacle, which constitutes one form of poverty exploitation. This paper aims to examine the ways in which poverty is portrayed and exploited in media content and explore its implications for individuals and society at large.

The impact of media on the commodification of poverty is a topic of great relevance in contemporary society. Gerrard and Farugia's findings suggest that the media exerts considerable power in shaping public perceptions of poverty through its visual representations in various media products, including advertisements (Gerrard & Farrugia, 2015). Within the media landscape, advertisers strive to elicit public empathy and achieve specific objectives such as persuasion, mobilization, and information dissemination. To this end, media producers employ a variety of techniques such as decontextualization, dramatization, and trivialization, as identified by Wasburn, to effectively package and present their products to the consumer (Wasburn, 1995). This paper aims to critically evaluate the role of media in the commodification of poverty and its implications for society.

Kitabisa.com is an online crowdfunding platform that offers services for individuals and organizations to raise funds. The platform's strategy is to engage potential donors, referred to as "Good People," to support fundraisers listed on the website. A noteworthy aspect of the platform's model is that it collects 5% of the total funds raised, which is allocated for operational costs. However, this fact is not widely known among donors who contribute without this knowledge. To convey their message effectively, Kitabisa.com utilizes storytelling and creates compelling audio-visual content that inspires and motivates the audience to donate or initiate fundraising activities.

The study of commodification in advertisements presented on Kitabisa.com offers an intriguing opportunity to comprehend the methods and practices involved in portraying societal conditions through media, specifically advertising. The process of transforming messages through the usage of verbal and non-

verbal symbols for commercial purposes is an essential aspect of this investigation. The research question that arises from this context is concerned with exploring the representation and form of commodification of poverty portrayed in Kitabisa.com Crowdfunding Ads. This study aims to delve into the intricate mechanisms and techniques that underlie the commercialization of messages that are intended to bring attention to the issue of poverty, while simultaneously being marketed to the public. Drawing from the background, the research question is "How is the re representation and form of commodification of poverty in Kitabisa.com Crowdfunding Ads?

Literature Review

Commodification of Poverty in Advertising

According to Mosco's definition in 1996, commodification refers to the transformation of a product's value from its use value to its selling value in the media market (Mosco, 1996). In the realm of political economy of communication, communication is considered as a social interaction process that involves the exchange of social meaning. This process can be facilitated through a range of media, including mass media such as advertisements, films, graphics, and other forms of communication.

In the realm of advertising, the intertwined relationship between capitalist ideology and the growth of information and communication technology is undeniable. As elucidated by Mosco (1996), the deployment of capitalist practices in the media undergoes three pivotal stages, namely commodification, spatialization, and structuralization. The proliferation of various media platforms enables the commodification of diverse products and services, facilitating their dissemination to a larger consumer base, thereby influencing their decision-making processes.

The dissemination and influence of various objects through commodification is an increasingly prevalent phenomenon in modern media. This process is typically characterized by a two-stage approach: first, the creation of a product or media program, followed by the utilization of media advertising to foster economic commodification. Specifically, commodification is a byproduct of the communication process, wherein the transformation of an item or circumstance into a marketable commodity occurs (Mosco, 1996). This paper aims to explore the intricacies of media commodification, specifically with regards to its effects on society and the broader implications for contemporary communication practices.

According to Mosco (1996), communication is subject to three forms of commodification: content commodification, audience commodification, and worker commodification. The first refers to the process of transforming a message that was originally just data into a marketable product. The second involves producing audiences that can be sold to third parties, enabling media owners to profit from the audience itself or from other parties. Finally, the commodification of labor is carried out by media companies on their workers. This paper will examine each of these forms of commodification in communication, exploring their implications and consequences for the media industry and society at large.

The phenomenon of poverty can be comprehended as the lack of fundamental resources, such as money, adequate nourishment, housing, and appropriate clothing, which generates a distressing socioeconomic state for the individuals experiencing it (Pm et al., 2019). Poverty can be categorized into two distinct types, namely absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to the state in which deprived individuals strive to satisfy their necessities by meeting basic requirements, such as clothing, food, and shelter, at a minimal level. Conversely, relative poverty pertains to the situation where a person has met the fundamental needs of life, but due to variations in affluence among groups, they are labeled as poor by the community (Hendra, 2010).

According to Kustanto (2015), there exist several distinguishing features that serve as indicators for poverty classification. First and foremost, individuals living in poverty lack their own production factors and are unable to acquire production assets due to economic constraints that render them incapable of working independently. This is further exacerbated by the absence of capital, which makes it challenging for them to secure adequate means of livelihood. Another critical characteristic of poverty is a low level of education, which is primarily driven by financial limitations. Those living in poverty often face the challenge of striking a balance between meeting their basic needs and dedicating time to learning. Furthermore, individuals in poverty generally engage in labor-

intensive work or run their own businesses, but their low production capacity hinders their ability to earn a decent income and perpetuates economic challenges.

Commodification in advertising refers to the process of transforming a valuable story or circumstance into a marketable product for public consumption, through the addition of text, audio, music, and images. Numerous studies have explored the concept of commodification in the media, such as the research conducted by Sumaerah Hasan in 2018. The study revealed that the Reality Show Mikrofon Pelunas Hutang Indosiar used four audio and visual markers to create a representation of poverty, which was further divided into denotation and connotation meanings. The depiction of poverty through minimal income jobs, unkempt living conditions, plain attire, and physical limitations of the show's participants, was subsequently commodified into Video Tapes (VTs). This paper delves into the concept of commodification in advertising and analyzes its impact on audience perception and behavior.

In 2013, a study was undertaken by Nosakros, Cangara, and Alimuddin, which examined the commodification of poverty in two television programs, "Jika Aku Menjadi" and "Bedah Rumah". The research indicated that the representation of poverty commodification was characterized by dramatic moments and the perspective of media political economy. Furthermore, the reality shows demonstrated various forms of commodification, including the commodification of workers, audiences, and content, as identified by Moscow. The findings of this study shed light on the significance of poverty commodification in the media industry and its potential implications.

Semiotic Theory in Examining Commodification in Advertising

The theory of semiotics, as conceptualized by Roland Barthes, elucidates the multifaceted nature of signs and their varied levels of significance. The first level pertains to the denotation of a sign, which is the original and commonly understood meaning that emerges from the relationship between the signifier and the signified. As an instance, in a picture of a tree, the color green is denoted. The second level, on the other hand, encompasses the connotation of a sign, wherein the amalgamation of emotions and feelings serves to offer a comprehensive interpretation of the denotation. Finally, Barthes posits the notion of Myth, which alludes to the pre-existing cultural meanings and associations that a sign can evoke. This paper seeks to delve deeper into the intricacies of these semiotic levels, thereby highlighting their significance and applicability in various contexts.

In conformity with Dhevie's (2020) assertions, the subjectivity or intersubjectivity of connotation is contingent upon the individual's comprehension of a sign. Denotation is concerned with what a sign communicates or reveals about an object, whereas connotation pertains to the manner in which it is communicated. Furthermore, it is posited that signs are inextricably linked with myths as they function via myths. This paper aims to delve into the interrelationship between signs and myths and their impact on human cognition and communication.

Myths are significant elements in the functioning of signs. With the swift evolution of technology, communication media has become a realm for commodification practices. The media concept has elucidated the crucial relationship between mass media, audiences, and advertising. McQuail's perspective asserts that the mass media industry comprises three interrelated components: media, advertisers, and audiences. The market for media can be bifurcated into two domains, catering to audiences and serving advertisers (Khumairoh, 2021).

The media's presentation of content invariably carries a message intended for its audience by the content producer. When poverty ceases to be merely a news item and becomes the central theme of a television program, it begs the question of what could have prompted such an occurrence. The discipline of semiotics plays a pivotal role in uncovering the underlying "commodification" of poverty as an object, thereby revealing its significance.

During the course of semiotic analysis, an essential first step is to examine the structural components of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. Such an investigation lays the groundwork for any subsequent interpretation of ideology and messages conveyed through media. In this context, denotation refers to the straightforward, literal meaning of signs, while connotation involves the more nuanced and culturally-specific associations and implications that accompany a sign. Myth, meanwhile, is the outcome of a synthesis of these two meanings, which can lead to the formation of an overarching, often unexamined, belief system. As

such, an understanding of the various stages of meaning construction is crucial to any comprehensive semiotic analysis.

Results

Poverty as Seen Through the Clothes and Appearance of Characters in Advertisements

The primary function of an advertisement is to convey informative messages to a targeted audience, which can potentially impact their decision-making processes. Specifically, kitabisa.com adverts employ dramatic depictions of different social conditions to elicit audience empathy and, ultimately, sway their decisions. Through careful attention to emotive storytelling, these producers effectively shape audience perceptions and attitudes, thus ensuring the persuasive power of their adverts.

In the context of poverty, Kitabisa.com adverts endeavor to portray the poverty prevalent among individuals in Indonesia. This is achieved through the use of symbols that depict the value of poverty. Notably, the appearance and clothing of the characters in the advertisements are one of the forms of poverty depiction in Kitabisa.com adverts. Roland Barthes' system of significance includes denotation and connotation, which are essential in analyzing the meaning embedded in adverts. In the case of Kitabisa.com adverts, the denotative signs are represented by clothing, defined by Barthes as the original meaning of an object. The characters in the advert wear simple clothing, depicting their status as odd-job workers. Therefore, the appearance symbols in these adverts function connotatively as a depiction of the character's identity as simple, low-income earners.

Semiotic theory posits that there exists a complex system of significance that goes beyond mere signs and symbols. One of these significant systems is known as myth, which often plays a significant role in shaping our societal beliefs and values. In the context of this paper, we analyze a Kitabisa.com advertisement that effectively highlights the long-standing connotation that clothing is closely linked to the conditions experienced by an individual. Jumarianta (2010) ta asserts that individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds typically do not distinguish between clothing for home and work, and that society generally judges one's success based on their appearance at home and work. The advertisement effectively showcases the normalization of wearing the same clothes in both settings, which challenges the traditional beliefs and norms surrounding clothing and social class. The advertisement subtly hints at how clothing can be used as a reflection of one's social status, where affluent individuals typically dress elegantly, whereas the less privileged may wear clothes that appear worn-out and neglected. This paper delves deeper into the semiotics of this advertisement, exploring the various ways in which it subverts established social norms and values.



Figure 1: Appearance of characters in Kitabisa.com advertisements

Poverty shown through Livelihoods

The present study explores the representation of poverty in Kitabisa.com advertisements, with a particular focus on the denotation markers that signify poverty through the portrayal of characters' work. The characters in these advertisements are typically engaged in low-paying jobs such as clowning, selling snacks, driving motorcycle taxis, selling tissues, and providing massages, which are commonly associated with the lower

social class. These denotation markers not only reveal the characters' economic situation but also depict their daily struggle to make ends meet, as their hard work fails to yield adequate income to support their families. Consequently, the denotation of poverty in these advertisements generates a connotation that associates the characters' work with their limited education and knowledge, further reinforcing the image of poverty. This paper aims to critically analyze the representation of poverty in Kitabisa.com advertisements and shed light on its implications for social discourse and cultural identity.

The scene depicts a prevalent myth in the community that, as noted by Supriatna in Tantoro's (2014) research, characterizes poverty as the absence of alternative livelihoods beyond individuals' customary occupations. The characters' limited abilities and knowledge leave them with no choice but to rely solely on their existing skills to make ends meet. Kitabisa.com aptly showcases this phenomenon by portraying the characters in various work settings.

Kitabisa.com's advertisements feature characters with jobs that include traveling salesmen, clowns, motorcycle taxi drivers, and masseurs. These jobs offer a more accessible alternative for those from lower economic classes, as they do not require specialized skills and require only a relatively small amount of capital. Although the income generated from these jobs may be limited, with a restricted customer base and limited geographic range, they are often the only viable options for those with less education and few opportunities in the formal job sector. This reality is a defining characteristic of the lower class, who often struggle with both limited resources and insufficient training. In this context, Kitabisa.com's advertisement serves as a representation of the various jobs performed by lower-class individuals, including wage laborers, street vendors, and children helping their parents with work.



Figure 2. Job as a clown in Kitabisa.com Advertisement

Poverty Demonstrated through Difficulty in Accessing Education

Education is essential for achieving a better life, as it provides individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in the competitive workforce. Consequently, parents often strive to provide their children with education in hopes of improving their living and economic conditions. Nevertheless, unfortunately, not all children have easy access to education, and some may be forced to drop out due to economic hardships. This is exemplified in an advertisement produced by Kitabisa.com, which portrays two child characters struggling to meet their families' needs despite being of school age.

In this advertisement, the denotative sign is the depiction of poverty through the text which highlights the struggles of various characters in accessing education. Two characters, Aidil and Nabila, are portrayed to exemplify the difficulties faced by school-age children in fulfilling their educational needs. Aidil, a 13-year-old student, experiences challenges in obtaining basic school necessities such as uniforms, shoes, and other equipment. Meanwhile, Nabila, a 7-year-old girl depicted in picture 3, is unable to pursue education due to financial constraints in her family. The connotative message of the scene is to illustrate how these children must sacrifice their learning time to work and support their family's living expenses in light of their poverty-stricken circumstances.

The advertisement in question perpetuates a myth that associates poverty with low levels of education.

Kustanto (2015) asserts that one of the indicators of poverty is the lack of educational attainment, which may be caused by economic constraints.



Figure 3. Child labor in Kitabisa.com advertisements

Poverty Shown Through Child and Elderly Labor

In Kitabisa.com advertisements, poverty is exemplified by individuals who are either children or elderly workers, as depicted in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Forms of elderly work in Kitabisa.com advertisements

The Kitabisa.com advertisement features a scene that explains the age of each character. Those characterized as poor include children, parents, and the elderly. This scene serves as a system of significance in denoting the existing reality. Additionally, it creates a connotation that implies the characters are compelled to work despite their advanced age or youth due to their circumstances.

The age of children is typically considered as a period in which they are not yet ready for the workforce. However, some children are forced to work due to challenging economic circumstances, with the aim of contributing to their family's financial situation. Wahyuni (2017) explained that poverty is a significant factor that drives children into the labor market. Additionally, the presence of other factors such as social, cultural, demographic, or psychosocial aspects can also contribute to the prevalence of child labor.

This scene contains a myth which suggests that the characters are not of working age. According to TNP2K, 80 percent of the elderly population live in poverty, which is relatively higher than other age groups (Kidd, 2018). The parents in Kitabisa.com advertisements are usually the main characters, as they are believed to have significant responsibilities within the family, including meeting the daily needs such as clothing, food,

and shelter.

Discussion

The advertisements on Kitabisa.com utilize various symbols of poverty, including clothing, occupation, and age, to gain an advantage. The community's prevailing myths about poverty reinforce the notion that the characters depicted are in dire need of assistance. In certain Kitabisa.com advertisements, clothing is employed to represent poverty, evoking feelings of pity in the audience, as the media draws attention to the impoverished conditions of the characters by emphasizing their attire. This aligns with Damayanti et al.'s (2016) argument that the perception of poverty is often shaped by the state of one's clothing, which may appear dirty, worn out, torn, or ragged.

The advertisement for Kitabisa.com not only commodifies clothing but also work, which is symbolized by the characters who are portrayed as traveling sellers, clowns, motorcycle taxis, and masseurs. This is done to elicit sympathy from the audience. Furthermore, the advertisement emphasizes the education of the characters, some of whom are forced to give up their education to earn money. Kitabisa.com utilizes this fact to attract donors who sympathize with the characters. Another symbol of poverty highlighted in the advertisement is the age of the characters. Although they are not of working age, economic pressure forces them to work. According to TNP2K, 80 percent of the elderly live in poverty, which is higher compared to other age groups (Kidd, 2018). The advertisement primarily focuses on parents, who are considered responsible for meeting the daily needs of the family, including clothing, food, and shelter. By commodifying the symbol of poverty, Kitabisa.com aims to encourage viewers to donate to their cause.

Vincent Mosco's theory of commodification highlights three forms of commodification, namely, the commodification of content, audiences, and workers (Mosco, 1996). In the context of Kitabisa.com advertisements, two forms of commodification are evident - the commodification of content and audiences. Producers of Kitabisa.com advertisements edit the content to fit their desired message, which often involves exaggerating the sadness associated with poverty and the struggles of characters in the advertisement to attract the attention of the audience. Additionally, the producers add text and music to enhance the emotional impact of the scenes, leading the audience to believe that the struggles depicted are real. Thus, the producers commodify the content and the audience's emotions to fulfill their objectives.

Kitabisa.com's advertisements demonstrate two forms of commodification: the commodification of content and the commodification of audiences. The latter occurs during the content editing process when the advertisement is tailored to evoke sympathy and curiosity in viewers, encouraging them to watch the entire video and feel compelled to help the characters. Kitabisa.com then takes advantage of this desire by directing viewers to make donations through their platform, which is conveniently linked at the end of each advertisement. This aligns with Mosco's theory of commodification and underscores the extent to which Kitabisa.com employs these practices in their advertising strategy.

The advertisements on Kitabisa.com explore poverty through the portrayal of poverty-stricken objects and the daily struggles of characters who face various limitations while trying to survive on an uncertain income. This study highlights how media power is closely linked to the creation of public perceptions of poverty in mass media. The media plays a vital role in shaping societal understanding of poverty by constructing social norms and perpetuating stereotypes. Hess et al. (2001) argue that media owners are influential in constructing these stereotypes and shaping public opinion about poverty. These stories of poverty are utilized by media owners to attract audiences and encourage them to donate money through their platforms, thereby generating profits.

The process of media commodification emphasizes the production and management of poverty as a marketing tool to attract audience sympathy and motivate them to fulfill the advertiser's expectations. Advertisements portraying poverty often use symbols such as shabby appearances, early work experiences, limited access to education and healthcare, and elderly characters to create an emotional appeal. Such advertisements not only expose the poverty experienced by the characters but also compete to attract donations through various platforms, which benefits organizations such as Kitabisa.com by allocating 5% of the funds for their operations. Media owners have the power to manage and control the content of their

shows to make them profitable, which in this context benefits Kitabisa.com.

Conclusions

Manipulation is a common occurrence in various forms of media products, as highlighted in the preceding discussion on the commodification of poverty. In the case of advertisements, media outlets often manipulate and exaggerate the reality of poverty to evoke public sympathy, which ultimately benefits both the characters in need and the media owners themselves.

This commercialization of poverty takes the form of soliciting donations from the audience, with the pretense of aiding the characters, but ultimately benefits the media owners.

The commodification of content is evident in Kitabisa.com's advertisements, where the editing process involves heightening the emotional impact of the characters' situation and their poverty, to engage and retain the audience's attention. The audience's sympathy and curiosity towards the characters are then leveraged by Kitabisa.com to direct them towards making donations through their platform.

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