

# THE COMMODIFICATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN PRINT ADVERTISEMENT

Listia Natadjaja

Visual Communication Design, Faculty of Art and Design  
Petra Christian University, Surabaya

## Abstract

The advertisement of Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI) with their tagline “*Melayani dengan Sepenuh Hati*” is published on a full-page of *Kompas* newspaper. The advertisement describes a man wearing a tie and a formal uniform fitted with the identity of BRI banking staff. He teaches a man from Papua on how to swipe a card. It is very interesting to look at the image of interaction between these two men in the print advertisement. In a glance, this advertisement seems neutral. At least it tries to be neutral and objective, but I believe that every text always has potential to be read critically. The aims of this analysis are to read the message conveyed through the image and text of the advertisement, which cannot be read as taken for granted, and to uncover its ideology. The research uses Barthes’ semiotics to analyze the visual aspects that consist of image and text and also the connection between them. The analysis gives us description that BRI is keen to target indigenous people in Papua as a means of "selling" modern technology. Banking with modern technology has penetrated our lives, even in the most primitive societies. With their slogan “*Terus memBRI kemudahan di seluruh wilayah nusantara*” BRI tries to convince their audience that they can be easily found in all regions of Indonesia, including in remote areas. The combination of the photograph, tagline, slogan and body copy determine a powerful message. The Papua man in this advertisement becomes the object that facilitates communication between producers and readers. His position is so strong that the message will be different if his position is replaced with other indigenous people. This print advertisement contains the ideology of capitalism; there is a commodification of indigenous people in the selling of modernity. Furthermore, this advertisement seems to deconstruct a mindset of Indonesian people. The banking advertisement is used to introduce a culture of “saving”, but BRI advertisement informs that modern technologies make it easy to earn money or pay without cash. The consequence of this message is when the reception is not appropriate there will be a new problem that is the culture of “debt”.

Keywords: Commodification, Indigenous, Print Advertisement.

## INTRODUCTION

The advertisement of Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI) with their slogan “*Melayani dengan Sepenuh Hati*” is published on a full-page of *Kompas* newspaper. This advertisement is eye-catching and different because of the huge size of photograph and the displayed image. The scene on the photograph seems to transmit a message naturally, but I believe that every



## **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

There is no widely accepted definition of indigenous peoples. The World Bank's states that "because of the varied and changing contexts in which indigenous peoples live and because there is no universally accepted definition of indigenous peoples, this policy does not define the term. Indigenous peoples may be referred to in different countries by such terms as 'indigenous ethnic minorities,' 'aboriginals,' 'hill tribes,' 'minority nationalities,' 'scheduled tribes,' or 'tribal groups' (Operational Directive 4.10)." Papua original societies are in the category of indigenous people. These days, Papua indigenous people live in the condition of being apprehensive either in economic life, culture, or politic. (Selangkah, 2011: 154). The number of entrants to Papua who dominate the political economic life enlarges the feeling of marginalization of Papua people in their territory (Chauvel, 2005 & Widjojo, dkk., 2009: 9). Economic potency continue to be exploited by economic capitalism through many power that constructed by capitalist (Gadaby, 2011: 33). In Papua context, most of the economic sector is controlled by immigrant or non-Papua (Wayar, 2011: 207). Economic reality of Papua is still in the category of poor and underdeveloped (Degei, 2011: 193). Their "life" sustainability begins to be threatened by global investors that destroy Papua in the form of sawit/palm plantation, shopping malls, hotels through the entry of entrepreneurs and other large investors (Suryawan, 2011: 225). Layered discrimination is also occurred because Papua not only geographically distant, as an eastern area of Indonesia, but also "distant" culturally (Suryawan, 2011: vi). Papua always becomes the battle place between modernity and conservatism of tradition (Fatubun, 2011: 112).

The information about Papua indigenous' life condition gives us description that their life is far from wealthy and it means the life of Papua indigenous communities is far from modernity. The modern civilization demands efficiency and affectivity (Masri, 2010:27). I believe that the content of this advertisement does not only present the image of interaction

between these two men using a card on Electronic Data Capture (EDC) machine in front of Papua's traditional house, but there is an ideology behind them. As we know users of the card like debit card or credit card are mostly urban communities with a modern life style. In today's situation, most of Papua's indigenous communities know about barter transaction. Some of them do not use money to buy things, but exchange something to get something they need. It means that looking at the condition of indigenous people; it would be a great leap for them to use this kind of technology. There is a huge gap between reality and representation of reality in this print advertisement. The image is not the reality but at least it is perfect *analogon* and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph (Barthes, 1977: 17).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses Barthes' semiotics to analyze image and text in this advertisement that consist of photograph, tagline, slogan and bodycopy. Semiotics helps us not to take representations for granted as reflections of reality; enabling us to take them apart and consider whose reality they represent (Chandler, 2007: 82). In semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects. Contemporary semioticians study how meanings are made and how reality is represented (Chandler, 2007).

There are two linked operations that are required to complete the representation process by which meaning are produced. First, we need a basic code which links a particular piece of material which is cut and sewn in a particular way (signifier) to our mental concept of it (signified). Second, a wider level, which links these signs to broader, cultural themes, concepts or meanings. Barthes called the first, descriptive level of denotation. The second level, that of connotation. Denotation is the simple, basic, descriptive level, where consensus is wide and most people would agree on the meaning. At the second level, connotation, wider

meaning is no longer a descriptive level of obvious interpretation. Connotations are not purely personal meanings; they are determined by the codes to which the interpreter has access. Connotation and denotation are often described in terms of level of meaning. This second level of signification, Barthes suggest, is more 'general, global and diffuse...' It deals with 'fragments of ideology (Barthes, 1977, Barthes, 1981; Barthes 1983). Ideology propounded by Barthes mostly operates at the level of connotative (Procter. 2004: 66).

The photograph in this print ad has the strongest impression than the other visual elements. The analysis of this advertisement began with the photograph, then text which includes tagline, slogan and bodycopy. It is also important to analyze the relation between image and text. The photograph doesn't stand alone. The 'meaning' of a photograph, does not lie exclusively in the image, but in the conjunction of image and text. Two discourses, the discourse of written language and the discourse of photography are required to produce and 'fix' the meaning (Hall, 1972). Reading a photograph also depends closely on the reader's culture, knowledge of the world, and ethical and ideological stances (Barthes, 1961: 29). Barthes adds that 'the viewer receives at one and the same time the perceptual message and the cultural message' (Barthes, 1964: 36). Photography 'seems to found in nature the signs of culture, masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given meaning' (Barthes, 1964: 45-46). John Tagg argues that 'the camera is never neutral. The representation produces is highly coded' (Tagg, 1988, 63-63; cf. 187).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Analysis of Image**

Putting aside the textual message, we are left with the pure image. This image straightaway provides a series of discontinuous signs. The series collections of different objects transmit the idea of banking services. At first glance, I find that there is a binary

opposition in this advertisement between the banking staff and the Papua man. Their appearances, clothes and attributes determine the image of urban and rural people, digital and conventional, modern and traditional. This advertisement describes banking with modern technology that has penetrated our lives, even in the most primitive societies. Papua, which is considered the most primitive, can master modern technology, thus even more so for other people in remote areas. The banking staff is willing to come to the house of indigenous people. The banking staff is an active person, meanwhile the indigenous person is described as passive person who waits for modernity to come into his life. This condition can be understood because one of the biggest problems in Papua is always distance and transportation. Rural areas are very difficult to reach because it is remote and there are very limited transportation available (Suryawan, 2011: 224).

At the first level, to get any meaning, I need to decode each of the signifiers in the image into their appropriate concepts: e.g. banking staff, uniform, Papua man, koteka, EDC, card (debit card or credit card), traditional Papua house (Honai). These yield a set of signs with a simple, literal message of meaning: how a banking staff teaches a Papua man to use technology in front of Honai (denotation). I believe that this image also has a wider cultural meaning. If we ask, ‘What is BRI telling us by using this picture of how a banking staff teaches a Papua man to use technology in front of Honai?’, I suggest that we may come up with the message: ‘that BRI has a wide service, and that all the societies including the rural area can be served and there is no better answer to make people wealthy than capitalism (connotation). The essence of capitalism is economic freedom that individuals have the right to pursue their financial goals without the government getting involved.

The idea that we have in the scene represented is the financial transaction, specifically card payment process. This activity needs a technology called debit card or credit card and EDC machine. There is an activity to withdraw money without the need to see the actual

physical form. A signified which itself implies two values: that we don't need money (conventional) to pay but we need a card (digital). Its signifier is the card. To read this sign requires knowledge which is as part of the habits of a widespread culture where 'paid by money' is opposed to 'paid by card (plastic)' which is considered more practical. Second, it is not necessary to pay in cash but credit. Its signifier is the EDC machine. By swiping a debit card on EDC machine, the bank can detect our data so we can pay from our savings account and when we use a credit card we don't need to pay immediately but can be indebted in our credit account. To read this sign also requires knowledge where 'paid by cash' is opposed to 'paid by credit' where we may owe. This card payment is convenient but unfortunately it also makes people more consumptive. A study about credit cards and spending habits found that subjects paid more when they were instructed to use a credit card rather than cash (Folgate, 2012). Here, everybody is asked to make a transaction, which means using money to consume. The increase of life commodification by giant corporations transforms society of rational citizens into consumers, among many others, non rational goods offered on advertisements and public relations industry (Barker, 2009: 159).

### **Analysis of Text**

In this advertisement, besides the image, there is a strong message in its tagline and slogan. Tagline and slogan are similar, but they are not one and the same. A tagline is a brief phrase that will help the corporation be well known in its industry for years to come or the long-term identifiers. The main purpose of taglines is to help the organization market its products or services to a certain demographic. It defines the brand's benefit within the marketplace, and becomes a consistent touchstone which the audience automatically associates with the product. Tagline also briefly states what the organization's goals are for the product. Slogan is only used in certain advertising and marketing campaigns that an

organization decides to take part in. The slogan changes all the time so that the slogan can be current and resonate well with consumers. Slogans are used to identify a brand's current advertising campaign, and to make it stand out in an unforgettable and creative way. Slogans will change regularly to best augment a particular campaign (King, 2010; Mr.3, 2012). By using the tagline "*Melayani Dengan Setulus Hati*" the reader are directed to see that by visiting Papua man's house and sitting on the ground with him, this banking staff sincerely serves Papua man. The slogan "*Terus memBRI kemudahan di seluruh wilayah nusantara*" direct us to look further about BRI mission. The words "*memBRI*" is to reinforce the impression that the BRI bank is the only one who could provide convenience service. Here are the contents of bodycopy:

Hari ini kami mengukuhkan komitmen kami untuk mengembangkan dan memperluas bisnis mikro BANK BRI demi menggali potensi masyarakat di seluruh wilayah nusantara, dengan konsep dari desa ke kota. Dengan teknologi terkini kami mengedukasi masyarakat untuk mendapatkan kemudahan layanan perbankan.

Hari ini komitmen kami menjadi bank yang tersebar dan terbesar di Indonesia, kami lengkapi menjadi lebih dari 8.300 jaringan kantor dan lebih dari 10.300 ATM *real time on line* (di luar jaringan ATM bersama) hingga ujung nusantara.

Mari bergabung & manfaatkan layanan e-channel kami (ATM, CDM, Kios, EDC, SMS Banking, Phone Banking, Mobile Banking, dan Internet Banking).

The first paragraph in the bodycopy mentions that "*Komitmen bank BRI adalah: mengembangkan dan memperluas bisnis mikro BANK BRI dengan cara menggali potensi masyarakat dengan konsep dari desa sampai ke kota*" is very interesting because the concept is from village to city not the opposite. There is emphasis to explore the potential of rural communities. This concept is keen to see that the village market is still wide open. There are a lot of citizens that are unreachable by public banks because of administrative terms and geographically difficult (Prasetiantono, 2012). The bodycopy also mentions that BRI's target market is micro businesses, so this explanation opposes the interpretation about consumption



process. Furthermore, BRI bank also mentions that *"Dengan teknologi terkini kami mengedukasi masyarakat untuk mendapatkan kemudahan layanan perbankan"*. It explains that with technology, BRI educates the public to have easy banking services. The word "educate" in this text shows that BRI has a noble contribution to society. In the first and second paragraph of the body copy, the words *"hari ini"* and *"komitmen"* seem important because they are repeated twice in the beginning of sentences. The words *"wilayah nusantara"* that has been mentioned in the tagline is also mentioned in the bodycopy twice. They mean that time and place are their big concern and there is no limitation for them to serve.

In the second paragraph, BRI completes their statement with the current data in the field of the number of offices and ATM networks. Throughout the whole advertisement, the word ATM is mentioned three times. Here, BRI proves that they are also excellent in quantity, that the amount of their facilities can cover all areas of Indonesia including rural areas. The phrase *"real time online"* that prints in italic type emphasizes that their services are evenly distributed throughout the country.

The third paragraph is about an invitation to join and utilize the services. The content of the text is not directly related to the card and EDC as described on the image but wider, including: ATM, CDM, Kios, EDC, SMS Banking, Phone Banking, Mobile Banking, dan Internet Banking. All those facilities refer to digital technologies that are easily used for transactions. In this paragraph, there is implicit inducement to consume.

This advertisement signifies rather than represent. It does so with primary reference to codes rather than to reality. The image in this advertisement is polysemy; but tagline, slogan and bodycopy are able to direct the reader to the intended meaning which is particularly about the excellence of BRI Bank. Text in the bodycopy can obscure the connotative

meaning of the image. Text has powerful message that covers the ideology in making the image seem natural and taken for granted.

### **The Commodification of the Indigenous people**

Overall, in this advertisement the image of Papua man is the strongest signifier. Most of Indonesian societies know that Papua is where the most “isolated” indigenous people live. Papua is the most distant place for the people of Indonesia. Papua is not only far in terms of geography, but also most of us only know Papua in terms of “primitivism”. Despite its limitation, the Papua man in this advertising is perfect to represent something distant in geographic, demographic, economic, social and political. Papua man in this print advertisement becomes the object that facilitates communication between producers and readers. His position is so strong that the message will be different if his position is replaced with other indigenous people. Although there is an image of inequality in this advertisement, it still makes BRI bank more prominent, especially when BRI bank can penetrate the most distant places. It means that other places are accessible.

The Papua man becomes a commodity to sell the excellence of BRI bank. Commodity is no longer object with the use value but commodity is a sign. Baudrillard argues that objects in consumer society are no longer purchased for use values, but rather as commodity-signs in a society. The exchange of symbolic meaning plays the role in commodity (Barker, 2009: 115). Commodity is something that is available for sale on the market and commodification is a process associated with capitalism, where the object, the quality and the sign transformed into a commodity (Barker, 2009: 14). The ideology reflected in this advertisement is ideology of capitalism. It describes how capitalism has penetrated through to the area which is often considered primitive. In this advertisement, there is a commodification of indigenous people in the selling of modernity.

Furthermore, this advertisement seems to deconstruct a mindset of Indonesian people. In my opinion, Papua indigenous people still have to learn to use money and how to save them. The banking advertisement is used to introduce a culture of “saving”, but BRI advertisement informs that modern technologies make it easy to earn money or pay without cash. This kind of message is imposed to the indigenous people who in fact are not yet ready for drastic change from conventional to digital and traditional to modern. The consequence of this message is when the reception is not appropriate there will be a new problem that is the culture of “debt”. Advertising are ideological in order to obscure economic inequality in production level with the image about consumption that is free and equal (Williamson, 1978).

## **CONCLUSION**

The photograph is a decisive force in the process of presenting information. In a denotative level, it describes how a banking staff teaches a Papua man to use technology in front of Honai. In a connotative level lies ideology of capitalism which is illustrated as the economic freedom that individuals have the right to pursue their financial goals without the government getting involved. This advertisement could make their readers believe that capitalism can make indigenous people wealthy. The idea of representing the activity of card payment process contains an implicit message of consuming.

In this advertisement, the text *directs* the readers through the signified of the image, causing them to avoid some and receive others. Text serves as anchorage and helps perceive correctly about the excellence of BRI bank. The tagline, slogan and bodycopy can lead readers to look at the positive image of BRI Bank. The text is powerful to cover the ideology, so the reader reads this advertisement as natural.

The commodification of signs using indigenous people to “sell” the banking product has shown that ideology of capitalism has penetrated subtly. The image of the advertisement

should be addressed judiciously because it can lead to multi-perception. Advertisements must avoid offending certain parties because of inequality in its images, especially concerning certain ethnic and race that are illustrated clearly and legibly.

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