

THE ONLINE TRANSPORTATION MYTH BUILT BY GRAB'S SLOGAN 'FORWARD TOGETHER': A SEMIOTIC STUDY

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Abstract

Advertisements have a huge impact on people's thoughts and habits without realizing it. In the context of Indonesia, in recent years, one of the advertisements that frequently appears is Grab, one of the online transportation providers in Indonesia. In its ad, Grab uses its slogan in introducing its services. This research aim is to find out the myth instilled in Grab's slogan 'forward together' from the semiotic perspective. The data of this study is a Grab's ad written as 'forward together', downloaded from <https://www.grab.com/sg/business/ads/>. In analyzing the slogan, the researchers carry out two steps, namely (i) analyzing the slogan and the images using Barthes's semiotics theory to find out the denotative and connotative meanings, and (ii) analyzing the myth instilled in the slogan. After analyzing the data, the researchers found out that the myth instilled on Grab's online transportation slogan 'forward together' is moving to better transportation. The slogan used by Grab company has tried to lead to people's minds and ideologies about how to get better transportation. The result of this research is then hoped to give a contribution to a practical significance especially helping those who are creating and arranging slogans for their companies' products or services.

Keywords: connotation, denotation, Grab's ad, myth, slogan.

Abstrak

Iklan memiliki dampak yang sangat besar terhadap pemikiran dan kebiasaan orang tanpa disadari. Dalam konteks Indonesia, dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, salah satu iklan yang sering muncul adalah Grab, salah satu penyedia transportasi online di Indonesia. Dalam iklannya, Grab menggunakan slogannya dalam memperkenalkan layanannya. Selanjutnya, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui mitos yang ditanamkan dalam slogan Grab 'forward together' dari perspektif semiotik. Adapun data dari penelitian ini adalah iklan Grab yang slogannya bertuliskan 'forward together' yang diunduh dari laman <https://www.grab.com/sg/business/ads/>. Dalam menganalisis slogan, para peneliti melakukan dua langkah, yaitu (i) menganalisis slogan dan gambar menggunakan teori semiotika Barthes untuk mengetahui makna denotatif dan konotatifnya, dan (ii) menganalisis mitos yang ditanamkan dalam slogannya. Setelah menganalisis data, para peneliti menemukan bahwa mitos yang ditanamkan pada slogan transportasi online Grab 'forward together' adalah pindah ke transportasi yang lebih baik. Slogan yang digunakan oleh Grab telah mencoba mengarahkan pikiran dan ideologi masyarakat tentang bagaimana mendapatkan transportasi yang lebih baik. Hasil penelitian ini kemudian diharapkan dapat

memberikan kontribusi praktis yang signifikan terutama membantu pihak-pihak yang membuat dan menyusun slogan-slogan untuk produk atau jasa perusahaan mereka.

Kata kunci: konotasi, denotasi, iklan Grab, mitos, slogan

1. Introduction

Advertisements have indeed a huge impact on people's thoughts and habits without realizing it. They can unconsciously influence people to buy their products or services due to the benefits offered to people's lives and the frequency of advertising that people always see in public spaces, both in the online media (internet) and in offline media such as shopping malls and cafes. Furthermore, advertisements are also considered as a religion that spreads promises, hopes, and solutions that can evoke emotion and the mind to believe it because they create a system of meaningful signs (Williamson, 1978: 12).

In the context of Indonesia, in recent years, one of the advertisements that frequently appears in online and offline media is an online transportation system provided by some companies. One of them is Grab. Grab is one of the online transportation providers in Indonesia. In advertising the ads, Grab uses its slogans in introducing its services. In Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2008), a slogan can be defined as an easily-remembered phrase. In the advertisement, the slogan can play an important role such as spreading messages to influence customers' thoughts about the brand and its product. Furthermore, according to Asidiky (2016), a slogan has a very important function to reveal the identity of someone or something and establish the public's point of view.

From the perspective of semiotics, Denton (1980) consider slogans as significant symbols of society and define them as well-arranged crafted phrases or expressions that suggest actions, evoke emotional responses, and perform persuasive functions. They also see slogans as a function to simplify complicated ideas, express group ideology, and goals, create identification, provoke violent confrontations, and fulfill hopes for the future. In this sense, slogans can be considered as a particular form of public discourse aiming to unify public thoughts and agitate public actions and reactions.

From the explanation above, in this study, the researchers aim to find out the meaning of Grab's Slogan in one of its advertisements and discover its myth. Based on the aims, the research questions of this study can be formulated as follow:

- a. What are the denotations and the connotations of Grab online transportation's slogan '*forward together*'?

- b. What are the online transportation myth built in Grab's online transportation's slogan '*forward together*'?

The researchers believe that the results of this research can give a contribution in a practical significance, especially helping those who are creating and arranging slogans for their companies' products or services.

2. Data and Methods

There is a datum used in this research. It was downloaded from Grab's Company website <https://www.grab.com/sg/business/ads/>. The datum was an image that was broadcasted in early 2019 entitled *Iklan Grab Edisi Step Forward*. Furthermore, the researchers use a qualitative method in analyzing the datum. Sugiyono (2013: 8) states that this method is often called natural research because it is conducted in a natural setting. Moreover, Bhattacharjee (2012: 113) says that the emphasis in qualitative analysis is to understand a phenomenon, rather than predicting or explaining.

In analyzing the datum, the researchers carry out the following steps:

- a. Firstly, the researchers analyze the slogan and the image using Barthes's semiotics theory to find out the denotative and connotative meanings. The denotative meaning is then analyzed and described into signifier and signified. Meanwhile, the connotative meaning and the message are described deeply and systematically,
- b. Secondly, after analyzing the connotative meanings, the researchers analyze the myths built in the meanings.

3. Literature Review

a. Semiotics

Semiotics is a study applied to analyze the structure of sign systems concerning the way it conveys meaning. According to O'Neill (2008: 67), semiotics is defined as a study of signs. Meanwhile, Chandler (2002) states that semiotics is concerned with meaning-making and representation in many forms, perhaps most obviously in the form of text and media. The text can exist in any medium and may be verbal, non-verbal, or both, despite the logocentric bias of this distinction. The text that can be observed is considered by signs (such as words, images, sounds, and/or gestures) constructed (and interpreted) concerning the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication.

In semiotic perspectives, the information or meaning in any text is not directly transmitted, which means there is no way of understanding anything except through signs

and the codes into which they are organized whether in cultures or habits. Through the study of semiotics, the signs can be normally explored and interpreted transparently.

b. Myth

Allen (2003) defines a myth as a fiction because it is associated with the gods or supernatural forces. Allen then states that Barthes's use of the word *myth* is therefore particularly telling in that what he designates by the term presents itself as natural and even timeless but is, in fact, an expression of a historically specific ideological vision of the world. Historically speaking, myth is a model developed from Saussurean's dyadic model and develops semiotics into a discipline of human culture analysis. Barthes states that this developed sign model of Saussurean is found to explain society's lives dominated by connotation. Berger stated that it will transform into a myth or so-called ideology. When the connotation is assumed as something natural, myth is assigned to make a natural rationalization of a particular belief so that such belief could not be confronted (Berger, 2010).

Myth sees meaning at a deeper rate yet much more conventional. In other words, the myth helps make sense of people's experiences within a culture (Piliang, 2003). The myth expresses and serves as the ideological function of naturalization. The function is to make dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes, and beliefs seem entirely natural, normal, self-evident, timeless, obvious common-sense - and thus objective and true reflections of the way things are (Chandler, 2007, 145).

In the semiotic perspective, the myth is formed through the process of signification markers or signs. The significance of the process occurs at two levels. The first level is called the linguistic system (language). The second level is called a myth. As a second-level system, the myth takes the first-rate system as the foundation in creating new meanings. Myth is a metalanguage which means a second-order language that acts on a first-order language, a language that generates meaning out of already existent meaning (Allen, 2003). Simply saying, the myth is a dual system consisting of the system and the system of linguistic and semiology (mythic). Furthermore, Barthes uses the term expression (E) for the signifier and contain (C) for signified and relation (R) which connects between the E and, thus forming meaning. R serves as a shaper and distinguishing meaning (Barthes, 1977, 89-90).

On the other hand, Chandler (2007) states that myth is another term used by Barthes for ideology. This myth is the highest level in the research of a text and is a series that live in a culture. The myth is important because it not only serves as a statement for the group

that states but are the key to how the human mind is placed in the culture. This myth is not understood as the classical sense, but rather placed on this process of tagging itself, that is, the myth is in its semiological discourse.

According to Barthes, myth is at the second level of marking, so after the sign-marker-marker system is established, it will become a new marker which then has a second marker and a new sign. The first marking construction is the language, while the second marking construction is a myth, and this second level marking construction is understood by Barthes as metalanguage. Barthes's perspective on this myth became one of his semi-specialist features that opened up a new realm of semiology, that is, further excavations of marking to achieve myths that work in the daily reality of society (Kurniawan, 2001: 22-23).

Furthermore, in the second stage of significance relating to content, the sign works through myth. Myth is how culture explains or understands some aspects of reality or natural phenomena. Myth is a social class product of life and death, human and god, and so on. While the myths of today such as femininity, masculinity, science, and success (Sobur, 2001: 128).

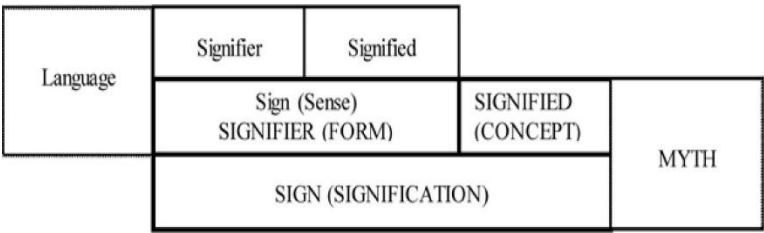


Image 1. Barthes’ concept of myth.

According to Barthes, in the level of denotation, the existing social codes are explicit, meaning that the significance of codes is seen on its surface based on the relationship of the signified and the signifier. On the other hand, in the level of connotation, the codes are implicit and hidden. Mythology or myth sees meaning at a deeper rate yet much more conventional. In his viewpoint, myths help us to make sense of our experiences within a culture. They express and serve the ideological function of naturalization. Their function is to make dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes, and beliefs seem entirely natural, normal, self-evident, timeless, obvious common-sense, and thus objective and true reflections of the way things are (Chandler, 2002: 145). Barthes proposes that myth is second-order in the semiotic system which is built on the principle of connotation. It is applied to naturalize the messages at the denotation level as a vehicle for connotation

meaning. Further, he suggested that myth is a way of coding the meaning and social value (which is essentially arbitrary or connotative) as something natural.

c. Denotation (the first order of signification)

Barthes analyzes things/signs from the signification system which is divided into first and second order of signification. The first order of signification is called denotative meaning which describes the relationship between the signifier and signified. The first stage of identification is a relationship between signifier and signified which focuses on a sign to external reality. Simply saying, a denotative meaning is defined as the first-order statement that concerns the literal meaning of the words that make up that statement (Graham Allen, 2003: 50). ‘Denotation’ tends to be described as the definitional, literal, obvious, or common-sense meaning of a sign. In the case of linguistic signs, the denotative meaning is what the dictionary attempts to provide (Chandler, 2003: 137).

d. Connotation (the second order of signification)

Sobur (2001: 128) states that connotation is a term used by Barthes to show the significance of the second stage. The stage is focused on the interactions that occur when a sign meets the feelings or emotions of the reader as well as the values of his culture. The second order of signification is the connotative meaning which describes the relation of the sign related to the users’ feelings or emotions and the values of their culture.

4. Results and Discussion

a. The denotations and connotations of Grab online transportation slogan ‘*forward together*’

The slogan used by Grab to agitate public actions and reactions is a clause ‘*forward together*’. As its motto, ‘*your problem is my problem*’, Grab used the slogan to invite the public to be their partner. The ‘*forward together*’ is a convincing clause because it seems not to have the benefit for the company itself but all drivers and passengers. Specifically speaking, the word ‘*forward*’ has particularly a denotative meaning as moving to the front. From the perspective of denotation, the word ‘*forward*’ is usually positive better than its opposition word, ‘*back*’. People intend to motivate others by saying the word ‘*forward*’. It seems that the word is used by them to encourage others to have a better future. There are some denotative meanings of ‘*forward*’ taken from the Oxford dictionary (2010). They are *move towards the direction that is in front of you, towards the future, used in expressions*

related to progress and forward motion/movement. The first meaning of '*forward*' is the movement to the front or describe something that has progressed.

Meanwhile, the word '*together*' in the clause '*forward together*' means the company invites many people to join. In Cambridge Dictionary (2008), '*together*' means '*each other*'. The word '*together*' could also mean '*we give each other*', *we share things*, *we communicate each other*, and so on. In the Thesaurus dictionary '*together*' means being organized, being confident of your abilities, and being able to use them to achieve what you want. So, *forward together* has a denotative meaning as moving confidently with being organized to achieve what everyone wants. The following is a part of the picture where the slogan '*forward together*' is written in Grab's ad.



Image 2. The Grab's written slogan '*Forward Together*'.

From the denotation meaning analysis, Grab is seen to convince that the drivers can get better finances with their vehicles, earn a lot of money as long as they work hard to get it, and obey the rules. Not only for drivers, but the slogan also addresses to costumers to offer better transportation and achieve what they want without worrying about coming late, waiting too long, getting stuck in the traffic jam, paying too expensive and getting parking area for their vehicle. Here, the company seems to wish to develop the market using people outside the company and gives them facilities to connect drivers and passengers, so it must be organized well to have some trust.

On the other hand, the connotative meaning of the clause '*forward together*' must be carried out more deeply using the cultural perspective, background, and ideology of the company. As the result, the clause '*forward together*' has a connotation of an invitation to be successful together with Grab company, its drivers, and customers to achieve what people want. With the slogan, Grab tries to ask customers to move or be open-minded to see that the transportation can be better and reliable because it is well organized like shown in its provided application.

Moreover, the application provided makes many changes in how people use online transportation, that is faster, cheaper, safer, and more comfortable. The company also tries to convince people to believe in Grab that it won't make them disappointed. Historically speaking, Grab has already been in Indonesia for years and it has proved that the

application can change the way Indonesian use public transportation. The company saw the ideology of modernity in Indonesian people's minds that they need a faster, cheaper, more comfortable, and trusted transportation to use to their home, office, mall, and relative's home, and so on. Grab has also started with online transportation used in smartphones and Indonesia has a big smartphone user. Grab, along with the slogan '*forward together*', seems to facilitate the Customer-to-Customer method, so it is possible to spread it in a short time. The company doesn't need to provide the transportations and the drivers. The following is the Grab's ad '*forward together*' shown with the picture of stepping feet.

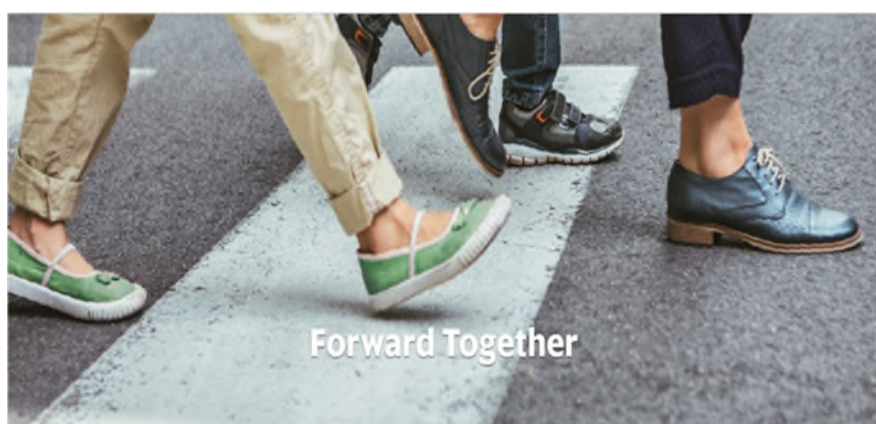


Image 3. The Grab's Slogan '*Forward Together*' shown in a complete picture

The slogan itself was originally shown in the image above. Visually speaking, there are about three pairs of people's legs and their feet are wearing different shoes crossing a zebra cross. The first person is wearing black shoes and black trousers. He looks like an adult man since he has an official outfit and seems like going to work. The second one is a female with green sneakers and brown pants. She looks like a teenager since she has a casual outfit like a girl going to a campus or going to hang out. The third one is a boy wearing black trainers and blue jeans. He looks like a boy since he has small legs and feet. The road is clean and no vehicle is seen in the picture.

Semiotically speaking, it can be assumed that the walking people represented in the image have different ages. Here, the represented people try to convey that the customers can be of different ages. The facilities are very appropriate for children, teenagers and also adults. Besides, Grab has also made an application that is very safe for customers, it can be tracked by parents when they order for their children. It has customer services for 24 hours to complain and the costumers give score to the drivers for their services.

Furthermore, stepping feet on the zebra cross in the slogan means the denotation of the sign that people see. The stepping feet can mean that Grab invites people to take a step. The step means the progress to a new better way. The progress itself as if to change the habit of using offline transportation to online transportation. Here, the researchers take the analogy that the steps mean people are asked to take any actions for changes to take place. Meanwhile, the road is connoted as a way of transportation around them. Grab tries to convince us that we must take an action for a better life. For partners/drivers, Grab will give a better income. For passengers, Grab provides a better way to transport. In addition, the zebra cross means they are crossing the right and better way.

b. The Myth of Grab's Slogan '*Forward Together*'

After analyzing the connotative meaning of the slogan, the researchers could finally find Grab's myth instilled. Mythologically speaking, the slogan used by Grab company tries to lead to people's minds and ideologies about how to get better transportation. The slogan is as if saying that Grab will solve any problems of transportation in this modern era, bring people to a better life, always innovate to the better future, and solve all the transportation problems by providing many choices of services. Nowadays, Grab Company has many partners such as drivers in Southeast Asian (ASEAN) countries, and has taken over its rival, Uber Company.

Moreover, the myth instilled in the ads also seems to succeed to grab people's minds and culture. Meanwhile, the slogan itself has contributed to constructing a new culture and leading to strengthening the myth construction that Grab is a new, better transportation for all people to get success. Critically speaking, the myth in this Grab's ad is only the simulacrum in the media, living in a world of imagination, but the meaning of the myth in advertising has come into the minds of viewers and their beliefs amid the community as a form of public knowledge or general awareness or general views. Generally speaking, in this context, the myth instilled in Grab's ad '*forward together*' is seen as a construction of simulacrum in advertisements that is seen as a natural reality or even the meaning of reality that contains ambivalence.

5. Conclusions

From the perspective of denotative meaning, Grab's slogan '*forward together*' shared on the internet and in many public areas is used by Grab to construct the meaning of new better transportation for all people to get success. Meanwhile, the connotation of

the slogan mainly indicates that customers are asked to join Grab in creating a brighter future. Semiotically speaking, the shoes, the clothes, the road, the rhyme, and the situation has constructed the myth of the slogan. The meanings of the shoes used in the picture show us that they are of different ages, social, economic, and occupation. The different shoes also inform us that Grab Company intends to grab all people in many aspects to be their customers because most people need transportation. Workers need to have faster, more comfortable, safe, and reliable transportation to take them to the office, hotel, workplace, and many places they want to go.

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