

# The Instant President and the Extemporaneous Disruption of Today's Indonesia: A Socio-semiotic Reading of Digital Advertisement: Shopee - Sepedanya Mana?

Andreas Akun<sup>1</sup>, Retnowati<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta Indonesia

Keywords: Digital Advertisement, Social Semiotics, Indonesian President.

Abstract: Indonesia is inevitably entering the era of digital disruption with its transforming impacts on economy, politics and culture. The digital technology advances too fast just to show a yawning gap of readiness between the disruptor aggressive invasion and the incumbent dawdling coping with it. This article provides textual analysis of the online shopping advertisement video through socio-semiotic approach. It also analyses the multimodal significations of the ad and meaning making of it from university students' perspective. The result of the study shows that the ad signifies the contesting ideologies of modern and instant life culture and its non-urgent traditional culture.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In his book, *Isaac Asimov's Book of Science and Nature Questions* (1990), the Russian American science fiction author Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) stated, "The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom" (Moore, R., Lopes, 1999). This is undeniably true especially for today's digital disruption era. Now, almost everything is digitalized, thus it is easy, instant and superficial. The advancement in digital technology has led to the use of internet in many ways, such as for entertainment, information, business, social network, education, politic, and many more. In education, for instance, UNESCO, as stated by Pais and Costa, "recently posited *Global Citizenship Education (GCE)*" (Smith, 1998). where education and its involved people as the source of wisdom are now globally required to belong to a global citizenship, and at the same time, challenged to redefine their national identity in this global belongingness. Internet technology has made it easy for virtual and global membership, but not the fostering of national wisdom.

Regarding people's activeness in the internet and global community communication, the number of Indonesian people's use of internet may reflect this global ecosystem membership. According to

*Kompas* online newspaper (Asimov, I., & Shulman, 1990) there are 143.26 million people (54.68% of 262 million Indonesian total population) who actively use internet in 2017. According to Detikinet online newspaper (Pais, A., & Costa, 2017), the top 5 and mostly visited Indonesian e-commerce companies in 2017 are respectively Lazada, Tokopedia, Bukalapak, Shopee, and Blibli. In the business, they have utilized the three biggest social media: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In 2018, Aseanup business website (Setiawan, 2017) has similarly listed Top 10 successful e-commerce websites in Indonesia: Lazada, Tokopedia, Bukalapak, Blibli, Shopee, JD.id, Elevenia, Bhinneka, Zalora, and Qoo10. With Lazada's monthly traffic estimate (March 2018) of 118,500,000 visitors (Tokopedia: 111,000,000, Bukalapak: 100,000,000, Blibli: 45,900,000 and Shopee: 39,100,000), it is clear that the new culture of online shopping has progressively dominated Indonesian society, simultaneously disrupting its stability.

According to Valenduc and Vendramin "disruption" is buzzword intensively used today to signify "the new digital technologies, the increasing digitalization of the economy and its estimated impacts on work and employment" (Detikinet, 2017). There is no way of rejecting these digital technologies and consequently, for instance, most

people have been absorbed by communication technologies in their so called digital social life. In education for instance Selwyn has explored university students' negative engagements with digital technology, emphasizing how digital technology has annoyed and even diminished students' scholarship and study. He suggested that we should cautiously consider the digital downsides behind the helpfulness of digital innovation due to "unsatisfactory realities of students' encounters with digital technology" (Aseanup, 2018). Celik and Odaci have studied the relationship between problematic use of internet and interpersonal cognitive distortions and life satisfaction in university students, concluding that "males exhibit more problematic internet use than females, which subjects with a pessimistic perception of events have a higher level of problematic internet use than those with an optimistic perception and that subjects who always feel lonely exhibit greater problematic internet use than those who never or only sometimes experience feelings of loneliness (Valenduc, G., & Vendramin, 2017). Generally, Marron stated that digital technology has disrupted human beings in such a way, forcing them to be prepared and stay balanced. "Nothing but Disruption" and "To say that we are in an age of disruption is an understatement" (Selwyn, 2016). Optimistically, OECD Council (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) had a ministerial meeting in Paris, 7-8 June 2017, to convince the world with the topic of "Going Digital: Making the Transformation Work for Growth and Well-Being" by proposing strategies in coping with the digital disruption.

Sinofsky stressed the point that disruption is inevitable because "Disruption is a critical element of the evolution of technology — from the positive and negative aspects of disruption a typical pattern emerges, as new technologies come to market and subsequently take hold" (Celik, C. B., & Odaci, 2013). He proposed four stages of disruption: Disruption of incumbent, rapid and linear evolution, appealing convergence, and complete re-imagination. In the first stage, a moment of disruption begins to take place against the incumbent (a [non] digital technology currently in use or holding position), e.g. the disruption of conventional "ojek" (Indonesian ride-hailing provider by motorcycle) by online ojek transport services in 2010, pioneered by Go-Jek with its mobile application, followed by Grab bike and others. In the second stage, "once an innovative product or technology begins rapid adoption, the focus becomes 'filling out' the product". Go-Jek, for example, got

its popularity only in 2015, 5 years after its launching on 13 October 2010 when people warmly adopted this new culture of riding and commuting. In the third stage, Appealing Convergence, the disruptive technology proceeds to undergo redefinition as the market indirectly demands the replacement of the incumbent technology with a new one. As for Go-Jek case, following the controversy and partial refusal from the conventional *ojek*, the market gets absorbed in the new technology, especially through big promotional discounts, and calls for replacement of the old conventional *ojek* technology. Finally, in the fourth stage, Complete Re-imagination, Sinofsky metaphorically labels the stage as "Things are just wildly better", the previous technology seems irrelevant, with huge difference in cost, performance, reliability, service and features and some refer to this as "the innovator's curse".

## 2 SOCIO SEMIOTICS AND DIGITAL ADVERTISEMENT

The goal of this study is to elaborate a digital advertisement on online shopping entitled *Shopee: Sepedanya Mana?* (Shopee: Where's the bike?) using socio-semiotics. The study attempts to address the conflicting ideological significations produced by the ad and its possible meanings resulted from a textual analysis and from university students' perspective. Socio-semiotics is a critical sign study of everyday life from social perspective. According to Gottdiener and Lagopoulos, socio-semiotics is a "materialistic analysis of ideology in everyday life...the analysis of connotative signification connected with ideological systems" (Marron, 2016). It is a hybrid discipline derived from various human sciences, such as (psycho/socio-) linguistics, semiology, cultural semiotics, sociology, cultural anthropology, social psychology, Marxism, and pragmatism (Marron, 2016). Colby and Randviir highlighted further that the methods of socio-semiotics accommodate "the methods of all disciplines that allow the study of the different levels of sign production and exchange as presented by Saussure...These levels include psychological, physiological, and physical processes" (Marron, 2016). These various contributing disciplines allow the rich studies of sign even from a simple representation of life through digital business advertisement as studied here. Danesi emphasized that "ambiguity is a fundamental characteristic of advertising textuality...(that's) why advertising is so semiotically powerful. Advertising textuality can be

defined simply as the construction of advertisements and commercials on the basis of the specific signification systems built intentionally into products" (Sinofsky, 2014). The hybrid nature of socio-semiotics also relates to its multimodality, where media texts are always thought of as multimodal with different semiotic channels considered as modes to be analyzed. Jewitt mentioned three interconnected theoretical assumptions on multimodality: "first, multimodality assumes that representation and communication always draw on multiplicity of modes, all of which contribute to meaning...second, multimodality assumes that resources are socially shaped over time to become meaning making resources that articulate the (social, individual/affective) meanings demanded by the requirements of different communities...third, people orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes, foregrounding the significance of the interaction between modes" (Colby, P., & Randviir, 2009). What is text? Gunther Kress defined text as follows, "Text, in MMDA (Multimodal Discourse Analysis), is a multimodal semiotic entity in two, three or four dimensions: as when students in a science classroom make a 3D model of a plant cell, or when they perform a play scripted by them in a literature classroom" (Danesi, 2002). An advertisement is absolutely a text in this sense and it can to some extent be a agent of disruption.

Kress highlighted that "Mode is a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning. *Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack and 3D objects are examples of modes in representation and communication*" (Jewitt, 2012). The modes are perceived through our (five) senses. In socio-semiotics, meaning is socially and culturally constructed, and defined by the chosen modes of expression. Sign (a fusion of form and meaning, of signified and signifier) is motivated in socio-semiotics because it is created, not just utilized, by the sign-creator in making meaning through resource selections in line with the creator's interest. Kress then stated that "In the process of *representation* sign-makers remake concepts and 'knowledge' in a constant new shaping of the cultural resources for dealing with the social world" (Gee, J. P., & Handford, 2011). So, remaking and reshaping of meaning will never stop because cultural resources keep changing, just as the process of gathering knowledge and wisdom. Barthes proposed the third level of signification as myth or ideology to naturalize the dominant beliefs, values, cultures and

attitudes, making them totally seem natural or normal (Gee, J. P., & Handford, 2011).

Indonesian people have unquestionably belonged to the virtual global digitalized community. The question is how local and national wisdoms are fostered/weakened by this global ecosystem citizenship? This article will socio-semiotically read "the sign".

### 3 DISCUSSION

*Shopee: Sepedanya mana?* advertisement shows an incident during the president's routine of giving away a bike as a popular prize to an elementary school student correctly answering the quiz in his visit. But the promised prize is suddenly reported as missing. A brief state of panic is shown throughout the nation through a live broadcast of the event, but soon ends as the president takes out his gadget, opens the Shopee application and instantly orders the bike online, and the bike is finally ready there. All are relieved and happy at the end because they also get their expected stuff just as fast as the president.

#### 3.1 The Instant President

Joko Widodo (Jokowi) is the 7<sup>th</sup> individual elected as Indonesian president since 20 October 2014, after serving as Surakarta/Solo mayor (28 July 2005 – 1 October 2012) and DKI Jakarta governor (15 October 2012 – 16 October 2014). His down-to-earth, pragmatic and informal leadership style with *blusukan* (directly and quickly visit and interact with people all over the country) has disrupted the previous formal and protocolar leadership, especially through his choice of modest and plain attire, exceptional hobbies, such as riding chopper and listening to rock music, and his habit of giving quizzes in his visits to many parts of the country with a bike as the prize. This makes it possible for the ad makers to safely and democratically use Jokowi's image in their advertisements. Moreover, the real Jokowi has several times become the real endorsement of a certain product due to his unique lifestyle, e.g. his bomber jacket.

The ad takes just this image of Jokowi and starts with the quiz to an elementary school student wearing his Boy Scout uniform: "Sebutkan ibukota Sumatera Utara" (name the capital of North Sumatera). The student answered "Medan", which is eagerly commented "betul" (correct) by the president. This take represents a ritual consciously

done by Mr. President to seemingly foster closeness and casualness to people from all walks of life, at the same time enforcing the citizen's sense of nationalism. The common questions in the quiz reflect this ideological intention, e.g. mentioning of the names of Indonesian ethnic groups, islands, provinces, ministers, or reciting of the Pancasila (Five Principles of Indonesian National Ideology) or just mentioning of the names of fishes and the President's own complete name. Most of the time, the quiz is light, humorous and fun. The ad however twists the plot by presenting the missing prize, but soon overcome by Mr President using his online shopping application, which instantly and hyperbolically delivers the bike to the winning boy, plus other people's needs from different professions and social positions. At this point, the instantness in the President's action, the resulting solution and the cheery responses from the society suggest that everyone is ready to face the digital disruption by accommodating the online shopping or e-commerce culture, especially when taking into consideration that the president is the representation of the nation. The real President Jokowi himself shows his full support toward innovation in online commerce. Many times, he even gives an example of how he usually orders *gado-gado* (mixed food or hodgepodge of cooked vegetables) or *sate* (satay) using Go-Food application from his office and it is ready 30 minutes later, indicating that he is already into it and it is impossible to reject the digital economy. In this context, the president belongs to the instant generation (Gen-Y) where digital technology is an everyday culture.

On the other hand, the ad also depicts the traditional way of life in the remote areas where farming or fishing is the dominant culture. People are pictured as joyful to have the new way of shopping, charmed by its instant nature. By only touching his gadget the President can instantly buy the bike, his phenomenal bomber jacket as well, and others can do the same. People seem to forget that earning the money is much more difficult and slower today than spending it. There is no depiction of industrious or prosperous district, but modest canteen, un-crowded street vendor stall, un-full fishermen's basket, yet their consuming culture is made so easy. The omission has signaled the hard time in the village, while the temptation to spend the earning is so big. This is also signified through their being absorbed in the "entertaining" news (of the missing bike) through digital technology than doing their traditional work. The street vendor, fisherman, and stall, for example, signify the modest and

struggling life of urban and rural people, in contradiction with the main idea of digital commerce glorification.

### 3.2 The Contesting Ideologies: Disruptive Digital Commerce versus Eco-friendly Slow Bike

Semiotically, further what do the quiz, bike, and the crying boy signify? On the surface, the quiz signifies the President's communication way to the people to encourage their sense of nationalism as proven by his asking of simple questions around the names of Indonesian ethnic groups, islands, provinces, capital cities, ministers, etc. On a deeper semiotic level, the quiz signifies (that there is still) the question of Indonesian nationalism itself after more than 70 years of independence because the questions are supposed to be taken for granted (if there were no question about the people's nationalism). This is proven by the fact that in many cases the president patiently helps or guides the quiz takers in answering the questions; sometimes he even asks them to slowly repeat the answers just to convince the public and relieve himself that they can answer the quiz, that there is no problem in their sense of nationalism. In the ad, this is aurally signaled by the slow and low tone of the president and his patient and informal accent. His cheery tone of response on the correct answer also psychologically strengthens this relief. But again, the very idea of the quiz itself reflects the cheerless fact that Indonesian nationalism is still being questioned even by the president, and thus needs to be reinforced again. Further question, how can this sense of nationalism be fostered in this global economy where people for instance can cheerfully buy imported products in just a click of their gadget? This is a challenge that will be described by the following two signs: the bike and the crying boy.

The next important sign is the bike. Traditionally, even Albert Einstein, using the famous simile, philosophically stated that "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving". Some significations may be drawn from this idea, such as biking is a metaphor of balanced life that requires moving (physically, thus healthier), simple and un-digital technology, nature-friendly, therefore it is cheaper, natural and classless (most can afford it). It is slower as well because it is man-driven vehicle, and biking is always slowly going forward, not backward, possibly signifying the movement of a developing country. Biking, according to Walsh, also signifies freedom of

movement and awareness of speed limitation (Kress, 2010). Wisdom is what the bike is all about when it is taken as a symbolic token of appreciation. Bicycle is absolutely not a random quiz prize. It inevitably brings along the significations above. It is in itself selected and symbolic. In reality, this bike prize is unproblematically given to anyone, not only children in villages, but also adults from the cities. The popularity of the quiz and the bike prize has ever since its first use triggered the request from the public in any president's public appearance and speech of this particular prize.

We also asked 40 university students in our English Department of Binus University Jakarta, about the popularity of biking, their opinion on the bike prize, and why Jokowi image is chosen. Only 47.5% students have a bike of their own and more than the half others don't, but 77.5% claim to like riding a bike. Regarding the biking culture, most of them (95%) agree that they still need to develop a biking culture mostly for the reasons of health and environmentally friendly culture. Then regarding the bike signification, the result is quite diverse. 27.5% agree that it signifies common people's vehicle (cheap, eco-friendly, classless). 17.5% state that it is an appreciation/award. 15% agree that bike is a symbol of simplicity and usefulness. 12.5% say that it is really the people's need for transportation. 10% think that it is kids' culture because children love riding a bike. Another 10% agree that biking signifies modesty, independence and freedom. The rest 7.5% philosophically state that it is a platform or transportation toward a goal. Finally, regarding why Jokowi image is taken into the ad, 35% say that it is due to his fame and powerful figure as the first gentleman of the country and 27.5% due to his wisdom, role model leader, or his direct contact/closeness to people. Then 22.5% state that it is due to Jokowi's popular habit of giving the quiz, and other 10% agree that it due to his controversial/eye-catching/unique attraction. The rest 5% state that it is merely chosen based on reality about the president's routine activities.

However, regarding the ad setting, when the quiz and bike are given in the context of endorsing online shopping, there is indeed a problem. Why? Because two contesting ideologies are at work. The quiz signifies the president's closeness to his people, with nationalism concerns at hand. Then, the bike symbolizes the dominant people's modest needs, mostly people with modest living in rural areas, signed by slowness and natural living way. On the other hand, Jokowi's image signifies fastness, instant welcome and readiness for the online

shopping disruption. Further, the online shopping has offered the tempting (hedonistic) consumerism culture, signified by the instant buying of not necessarily important and affordable stuffs such as a new and more expensive TV set in the village stall, new clothes, bags, toys, tools, and on, as if they were as free as gifts.

The question of nationalism and the disruption of digital commerce are also contesting because nationalism is slow in the process while digital commerce is disrupting so fast. The bike is a good metaphor of nationalism and *Shopee* is the right metaphor of digital shopping, potentially creating shopaholic culture. The slow reinforcement of nationalism is also challenged by the impatient and instant generation as signified by the crying boy. The winning boy is depicted as crying as he is impatient for his bike prize. This sign seems to be trivial, but significant against the nationalism ideology and readiness for digital economy revolution promoted by the president character because the instant generation may go against the nationalism ideology. The impatient crying boy signifies the spoiled, whining, and unready generation. Even when the boy has won the prize he is still tearfully impatient, signifying further of instant gain. The quiz and its joining itself signifies an instant way of gaining. The whole idea of gaining it fast is there by the help of digital technology but building the anticipating patience of not getting it right away is totally missing. There is no depiction of our famously known wisdom as "*sabar subur*" (you'll be prosperous if you're patient), but impatience of getting an instant result and sniveling of not. Actually, the empty look of the president as he takes out his gadget in solving the situation (missing bike) signifies the ambiguous attitude toward this disruptive new way of digitalized living, remembering the fact that there are still so many people are concerned with the negative impacts of it. Even many people are totally illiterate of digital technology but forced to face the huge impacts of it.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

The fact that we are all entering the digitalized world ecosystem is universally undeniable. Online shopping is only one channel of many digital cultures where people are engaged in digital ecosystem in modern virtual communities. This online culture has significantly disrupted the way Indonesian people shop and live. The *Shopee* ad as the representation of this new culture dynamism

reflects the two opposing ideologies, where the modern fast and instant hedonistic consumerism is contesting against the traditional and slow enforcement of nationalism ideology.

The socio-semiotic reading of the ad has shown the extemporaneity and un-readiness of today's Indonesia in facing the global and digitalized community demands beyond the splendid life easiness offered by the disruptive digital technologies. The president as a sign with his instant "work-work-work" slogan and "blusukan" culture has to some extent signified the readiness of Indonesia for the digital disruption, while the symbolic bike, the rural traditional way of living, and the crying boy all have signified the slow and mental un-readiness of the country to face the unstoppable disruption of digital technology, especially its e-commerce consumerism ideology

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors wish to acknowledge encouragement from RTTO (Research and Technology Transfer Office) of Bina Nusantara University, Faculty of Humanities, and English Department. Special thanks go to IC2L2C Conference under ICSSLAH Conference and Binus Big Join Conference for assisting and providing the medium for knowledge and research result sharing.

## REFERENCES

- Aseanup (2018) *Top 10 e-commerce sites in Indonesia 2018*, Online. Available at: <https://aseanup.com/top-e-commerce-sites-indonesia>.
- Asimov, I., & Shulman, J. A. (1990) *Isaac Asimov's Book of Science and Nature Questions*. New York: Grove Pr.
- Celik, C. B., & Odaci, H. (2013) 'The relationship between problematic internet use and interpersonal cognitive distortions and life satisfaction in university students', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, pp. 505–508.
- Colby, P., & Randviir, A. (2009) 'Introduction: What is sociosemiotics?', *Semiotica*, 173–1(4), pp. 1–39.
- Danesi, M. (2002) *Understanding Media Semiotics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Detikinet (2017) *Persaingan e-Commerce Indonesia di 2017, Siapa Terpopuler?*, Online. Available at: <https://inet.detik.com/cyberlife/d-3793019/persaingan-e-commerce-indonesia-di-2017-siapa-terpopuler>.
- Gee, J. P., & Handford, M. (2011) *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Jewitt, C. (2012) *MODE Glossary of multimodal terms*, Online. Available at: <https://multimodalityglossary.wordpress.com/multimodality/>.
- Kress, G. (2010) *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Marron, M. B. (2016) 'Nothing but disruption', *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 71(2), pp. 131–132.
- Moore, R., Lopes, J. (1999) 'Paper templates', in *In TEMPLATE'06, 1st International Conference on Template Production*. SCITEPRESS.
- Pais, A., & Costa, M. (2017) *An ideology critique of global citizenship education*, *Critical Studies in Education* Online. doi: 10.1080/17508487.2017.1318772.
- Selwyn, N. (2016) 'Digital downsides: Exploring university students' negative Engagements with digital technology', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 21, pp. 1–16.
- Setiawan, S. R. D. (2017) *Pengguna Internet di Indonesia Mencapai 143,26 Juta Orang*, Online. Available at: <https://ekonomi.kompas.com/read/2018/02/19/161115126/tahun-2017-pengguna-internet-di-indonesia-mencapai-14326-juta-orang>.
- Sinofsky, S. (2014) *The Four Stages of Disruption*, Online. Available at: <https://www.recode.net/2014/1/6/11622000/the-four-stages-of-disruption-2>.
- Smith, J. (1998) *The book, The publishing company*. 2nd editio. London.
- Valenduc, G., & Vendramin, P. (2017) 'Digitalisation, between disruption and evolution', *Transfer*, 23(2), pp. 121–34.