

# Representation of Working Mother in Social Media (Semiotics Analysis of Bukalapak's Advertisement (Mother's Day version) in Youtube)

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**Abstract.** How media represents a mother have shaped the society's standard about "good mother" which in turn shapes the way women regards their worth as mother. The idea of "good mother" and gender roles is closely related. Gender roles have placed women to be in charge in domestic sphere and men in public sphere. And so is what happened with mothers. Working mothers are welcome, but their true place is in domestic area. From its tagline researcher noticed that Bukalapak's Mother's Day advertisement has the spirit to promote that the love of working mother is no less than stay at home's. Researcher is interested to analyze this advertisement by using Roland Barthes semiotics method through qualitative approach and using Stuart Hall's Representation theory. The interesting finding from this research is, this advertisement apparently still favors the idea that working mother is less lovable than stay-at-home-mother. It was shown from most of the scenes that the child seems to favor his nanny (who represents the stay-at-home figure) better than his own (working) mother. Meanwhile, working mother who is great at domestic work (nanny figure) is still being favored nonetheless by her child back at village.

**Keywords:** Advertisement, Gender Role, Motherhood, Stuart Halls'Representation, Roland Barthes' Semiotics

## 1 Introduction

The society seems to accept the fact that today's women especially mothers are eligible to take part in working force. However another interesting finding from the survey conducted by McKinsey Indonesia titled "Unleashing Women Leadership" in 2013[1] reported that women's career tend to stuck when they reach middle management and above. From the first time entering workforce there was about 47%, and then reduced to only 20% in the middle management level and later got even smaller to 6% in direction level and finally only 5% left in CEO level. Various factors are behind this phenomenon. Internally, it is the mental burden that women carried because besides having to pursue their career outside home, women also hold the main responsibility of domestic issue.

Women with children and career, most often than not, are facing dilemma: whether they want to continue working or start being a housewife so they can fully take care of their children. This kind of dilemma leaves women to feel guilty either way. The stay at home mothers said they felt guilty because their parents have sent them to university but they gave up their career to be the main caretaker. While the working mothers said that they feel guilty to leave their children to be with the nanny most of the time. [2] Not every mother would go attack those with

different choice, yet some of them choose to do so especially on social media. If we type the words “Ibu Rumah Tangga Vs Ibu Berkarir” there will be over million results of article discussing this very main topic.

This phenomenon brings women to the so called “mommy wars” among them. It first started in late 1980s in USA, Washington Post published an article called “Mothers Against Mothers”. In that article J. Berg addressed the issue between housewife and working mother as part of social and political problem. In the end of her article she expressed her personal view that said “Most ironic, however, is that women must cope with living in a society that accepts, but does not completely support, either choice”[3].

Some brands with products associated with mothers take this momentum of “mommy wars” as opportunity for their promotional campaign. “Dove” brand just recently used the digital campaign #realmom to advertise and promote their new “Dove for Baby” products, or Indonesian Frisian Flag that released their campaign #KitaSemuaMama (We are all Moms) in 2016 to promote their new product: milk for expecting mothers. Each product captured the moment of “mommy wars” to encourage women to embrace their role without judging other women who might have different choice in life.[4] The newest one comes from Bukalapak in 2017 which also released the a like advertisement to commemorate “Mother’s Day” on 22 December.[5] Bukalapak is Indonesian e-commerce company started in 2011. It sells various products starts from household, fashion, food, electronic, to automotive products. Bukalapak also supports the local Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to place their products on their website. On its “Mother’s Day”: Thank You Mom” version advertisement, Bukalapak also promotes its SMEs while encouraging the audience to acknowledge that both working mother who works either in public or domestic sphere have their own way to show their love. Bukalapak uses the tagline “Hangatnya Cinta Hadir dalam Bentuk yang Berbeda”. This Bukalapak “Mother’s Day” advertisement was placed on YouTube and watched by 310,000 viewers.

Culture has intervened the ideology of ideal motherhood. Started from the pre-historical period up to the current millennium in Europe and America, it was noted that one of the most significant period was when the industrial revolution took place. That was the first time the dividing concept of public and domestic defines the role of mothers in family. Fathers are the ones who have to be the breadwinner, thus the main responsibility of childbearing and household duties belong solely to mothers. Later on concepts like Victorian mothers, scientific mothers were known in the 1500-1900. In 1970-1980, the intensive mothering ideology occurred, but then more women started to join workforce and they wanted to have it all: career and family. That was when the “mommy wars” issue started to rise [6].

The idea of “good mother” and gender roles is closely related. There are some specific gender roles addressed to women. First, they should be feminine, soft-spoken, obedient. These feminine attributes make women suits best to be placed at domestic area. More importantly when they become mothers, they should be the primary person in charge of nurturing and caring for their children [7].

The media also helped to shape the concepts of “good mothers” among society through the representation they display. Stuart Hall noted that through representation, human can understand the concept inside the people’s thought. Representation is connection between concept and language.. It enables human to refer to the real world or imagination. For example, representation is what happens when glass as an object (made of glass and filled with water) on the table will incur the concept of glass inside people’s mind. Even at the unavailable state of the glass, in people’s mind the concept of glass will still remain [8].

Advertisement is media of representation. It is said so because visual picture or writings, in the form of caption or words on the advertisement are sign and thus they became the representation from the real object in the real world. For example, advertisement that displays natural scenery is representation of nature in the world outside of advertisement. Therefore, it will be common when the audience value that as symbol of peace and harmony, because sign is arbitrary which means that there are no fixed agreements between the user and those who value the signs. More often the meaning produced by the viewers is different than the meaning created by the advertisement creators and producer [8]. Therefore, the researcher would like to find out how is the concept of working mother being represented in advertisement at social media. Because somehow what is being represented on media will eventually be perceived as truth by the society.

Researcher is interested to analyse this advertisement because researcher found that despite its spirit to promote “the equality of love” between working mothers either who work in public or domestic sphere, this advertisement still implies that one is better than the other. Those particular background has led the researcher to answer the following research question: How is the representation of working mother in social media?

## **2 Method**

This research uses the qualitative method with the semiotics analysis by Roland Barthes. Barthes has differed two meaning of signification they are denotation and connotation. Denotation is the descriptive level and a literal meaning that is being approved by the whole society member. At connotation level, meaning is produced by the connection between signifiers and culture that is widely include belief, attitude, frame of work and ideology from a social formation. According to Barthes, meaning is about the association of symbols with other cultural meaning codes. Connotation brings the expression values emerge from the accumulative sequence (syntagmatically), or by the comparison of the absence of alternative (paradigmatically). Once connotation becomes natural as hegemony, accepted as normal, then it will act as the conceptual meaning that will create meaning about world. [9]

Data analysis in this research involves these following steps: (1) Interpreting the Bukalapak Mother’s Day advertisement by identifying symbols on the advertisement then elaborating based on denotative and connotative meaning; (2) Researching associations or symbols, exploring the research object; (3) Interpreting the meaning of those symbols by combining the supporting data gathered from literature study and observation ; (4) Data presentation, data are being arranged so that it is possible to take conclusion.[10]

## **3 Result and Discussion**

Bukalapak Mother’s Day advertisement tells the story about relationship between a mother, her only son and his nanny that shows in their daily interaction. Besides promoting the Mother’s Day, this advertisement also promotes the product they sell and the spirit of Bukalapak to support the Small Medium Enterprise.

At the first scene, denotation says about morning activity where mother is busy talking on the phone with her colleague at work discussing about meeting plan. The nanny also seems to be busy preparing the breakfast and help the boy to get dressed to get ready for school. The

connotation says that the busy working mother who is trying to juggle between office work and her duty as mother. She hired a nanny to assist her in doing the domestic works. There is a narration “pergi sekolah sama mama” (“I go to school with mom”).

On the second scene, denotation says about afternoon situation in which the boy goes back from school with his nanny. The scenes show that he and his nanny play together and talk to each other a lot. The boy said in the narration “kalau pulang sama bibik, padahal yang lebih banyak cerita kan pas pulang sekolah” (Nanny is the one who pick me up from school, actually this is the time when I have a lot of stories to tell). From this second scene we can see that, the boy seems happy and enjoy his time together with his nanny although from his narration it seems that he wished it was his mom who were there when he went back from school.

The next scene shows night situation after mother come home from work. The boy has been hiding in her closet to surprise his mother. They enjoy sometimes to play together before nanny calls mother to let her know that dinner is ready. Nanny put the boy to bed afterward. The boys say in narration “Andai aku punya waktu main lebih lama sama mama” (I wish I could spend more times with mother). The connotation from these scenes are working mother only has limited time to spend with her son and how the son misses his mother.

On the fourth scene, it is another morning situation but during weekend because nobody goes to school or work. Mother is trying to feed the boy, but he refuses. Only when his nanny came with her special sambel pecel (peanut sauce) he eats eagerly (being fed by his mother). The connotation from this scene is about how well the nanny knows about the boy. Nanny wins two things here: she knows what the mother does not know, and she can make the boy’s favorite dish while his mother can’t.

The fifth scene shows another morning situation, boy is having breakfast but then noticing something different: nanny is not around. At first, he seems happy because his mother is taking her day off but at noon after school he starts missing his nanny. He looks at his nanny picture on her room and he (again) refuses to be fed by his mother. Mother then asks if he wants to visit his nanny at her village. From this scene the researcher learns that nanny’s existence means so much for the boy and mother would do anything to keep her son happy. It seems that he gets so accustomed by his nanny company rather than by his own mother’s company.

On the next scene, as the boy and mother go to nanny’s village, he learns that nanny is a mother too, in fact she is home because her son has his arm broken. Boy plays ball with nanny’s son. The four of them have meals together. Mother asks if nanny loves her idea to help nanny sell her sambel pecel online (Bukalapak specialty). Nanny agrees the mother’s idea. Next day, mother and son return home. This scene tells us the boy has got the insight that his nanny is working mother too and realizes that some women really have to work yet they still care for their son. It was shown that while nanny is also working woman who lives far away from her son, she never experiences any single rejections from her son.

The seventh scene tells about what happen when the boy and mother back at home. The boy checks on his calendar and notices that Mother’s Day is coming. He has idea to buy a lot of his nanny’s sambel pecel online and makes it a Mother’s Day present for his nanny. He opens his piggy bank and comes to his mother to ask her to help him make online purchase. His mother seems happy and proud of her son’s idea. This is the climax of the story which strengthens the researcher’s assumption that all this time, nanny represents the mother figure in the boy’s life. The figure of stay-at-home mother is being rewarded more, is more loveable. Even on Mother’s Day, he only gives the present to his nanny instead of his own mother.

The last scene displays the note that says “ Hangatnya Cinta Hadir dalam Berbagai Rupa (The warmth of love has different kind of faces) and then “Terima Kasih Ibu” (Thank you Mother). These writings seem given the fact that it is the nanny’s love that is appreciated more

by the child. It is the domestic work that is being rewarded more. Below are the tables explaining the scene 1 until scene 7 from the advertisement[5]:

Table 1. Denotation and Connotation in scene 1





				
Scene	Frame	Denotation	Connotation	
1	1-4	Morning situation: breakfast before going to school and work.	Working woman tries to juggle between career and family.	

Table 2. Denotation and Connotation in scene 2




				
Scene	Frame	Denotation	Connotation	
2	1-4	After school situation: nanny is picking up the boy.	Nanny is the person who has always been there for the boy.	

Table 3. Denotation and Connotation in scene 3




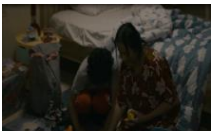
				
Scene	Frame	Denotation	Connotation	
3	1-4	Night situation when mother come home after work and spend time to play with his son.	Despite being tired and busy working mother still make time for her son (yet son thinks it is not enough).	

Table 4. Denotation and Connotation in scene 4


				
Scene	Frame	Denotation	Connotation	
4	1-4	When boy refuses to eat, nanny comes and gives his favourite dish.	Nanny understands the boy better than his mother.	

Table 5. Denotation and Connotation in scene 5

			
Scene	Frame	Denotation	Connotation
5	1-4	Nanny is not around, mother takes a day off but the son misses his nanny.	Nanny is so important for the boy.

Table 6. Denotation and Connotation in scene 6


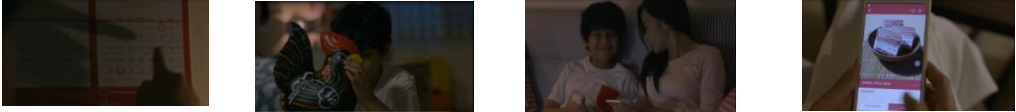
			
Scene	Frame	Denotation	Connotation
6	1-4	Mother took her son to his nanny's village boy, he get to meet with his nanny's son. Mother offers nanny to sell her sambel pecel online.	The boy started to understand that nanny is working woman too

Table 7. Denotation and Connotation in scene 7

			
Scene	Frame	Denotation	Connotation
7	1-4	Boy realised that Mother's Day is coming soon so he decided to buy a lot of nanny's sambel pecel as Mother's Day gift.	The real mother figure in the boy's life has always been his nanny.

## 5 Conclusion

This advertisement tells about motherhood life of two working women. Mother is represented as someone with more knowledge and economically more powerful while also maintain to be loving and caring for her son. On the other side, there is Nanny, who works for the mother as the caretaker of the boy. Nanny is being represented as loving and caring as well as great at doing domestic work. Despite the spirit to promote "equality" of love between mothers with different work status, this advertisement still represents that women with ability to do the domestic work will be more affectionately rewarded. It reaffirmed the attributes of gender roles for women, that the place for them is indeed domestic sphere. This could be

jeopardy because once women believe that it is the domestic work that matters more (or most) for them, they would find it difficult to explore and unleash their full potential.

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