

## **"Unveiling the Semiotics of Cigarette Advertising: Analyzing Propaganda Strategies"**

Andreas Tano<sup>1</sup>, Immanuel Sheva Simanjuntak<sup>2</sup>

*English Linguistic Criticism, Boanerges: Makarios Education Journal*

Email: [andreas.tano@yahoo.com](mailto:andreas.tano@yahoo.com), [immanuel.sheva.simanjuntak@gmail.com](mailto:immanuel.sheva.simanjuntak@gmail.com)

*"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit,  
who is in you, whom you have received from God?  
You are not your own; you were bought at a price.  
Therefore honor God with your bodies."  
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims at demonstrating how prolonged exposure to media, particularly in cigarette ads, can shape individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and values. The cultivation theory by Gerbner, G. (1998) was applied in the analysis to show the mentioned issues. Besides, the study also investigated the role of cinematography, specifically cameraworks, and employed a semiotic approach to explore signs and symbols in the ads. Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) "*signifier*" and "*signified*" framework was used to illustrate how visual elements construct narratives, shedding light on how cigarette ads subtly influence perceptions of smoking and its lifestyle implications. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that: **1)** It is revealed that extensive exposure to media, including cigarette ads, distorts perceptions of smoking's prevalence and harm, potentially influencing initiation or continuation of smoking behaviors. **2)** *Cinematography*, analyzed through semiotics, unveils how visual elements in cigarette ads construct intricate narratives. The interplay of "*signifier*" and "*signified*," rooted in Saussure's framework, showcases how camera techniques convey nuanced implicit and explicit meanings. **3)** Cigarette ads employ a dual-layered approach, blending explicit messages of courage with implicit motives of empowerment. Regular media consumers are more inclined to perceive these messages as reflective of reality. The examination illustrates the interrelated aspects of cinematography, and semiotics, discussed by using cultivation theory in molding the complex issues of cigarette advertisements. The interaction among these components impacts how viewers perceive, shape stories, and nurture distinct convictions and viewpoints.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Advertisements have been in use widely to promote products and services; they try to create a wonderful image of what the advertising company is selling by using persuasive elements such as: signs, symbols, slogans, images, and texts. These ads are frequently found everywhere that without realizing it, people are consumed with this media unconsciously that makes them eagerly purchase what they desire but not what is necessarily needed. In addition, cigarettes are also considered taboo due to its effects and

addictive substances that bind some people for a lifetime. In this analysis, three cigarette brands, *L.A Bold*, *Djarum L.A Bold* and *Djarum Super*, which are under the same company named *P.T. Djarum, Tbk* were analyzed based on the different themes shown in their cigarette ads. According to Kompas news (Hardoko, E, 2018), *this company is listed in the third most successful cigarette company in Indonesia that sold nearly 59 billion cigarettes in 2017*. Without a doubt, the ads go massively in almost all media from papers to electronics. Based on the above issue, this analysis will reveal the propaganda message hidden in the advertisements.

## METHOD

This analysis uses the *cultivation theory*, developed by George Gerbner (1998) and his colleagues, proposes that extended exposure to media content can shape an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and values regarding the world. It suggests that people who regularly consume substantial amounts of media, like television and print ads, are more prone to interpreting the messages presented in the media as an accurate reflection of reality. In the case of cigarette advertisements, the cultivation theory suggests that individuals who frequently encounter tobacco advertising may develop the perception that smoking is more widespread, socially acceptable, and less harmful than it genuinely is. As a result, this could increase the likelihood of people either starting to smoke or continuing the habit. In this analysis, the cinematography (cameraworks) is discussed and the elements of the ads are analyzed by using a *semiotic* approach. Semiotics is a field of study that examines signs and symbols, the concepts of "*signifier*" and "*signified*" were introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916). The signifier refers to the physical form or representation of a sign, such as a word, image, or sound. It is the tangible aspect that we perceive through our senses. On the other hand, the signified is the conceptual or mental meaning associated with the signifier. It is the abstract idea, emotion, or concept that the signifier represents.

**Chart of Cultivation Theory:**

<b>Aspect of Cultivation Theory</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Theory Description	Long-term exposure to media shapes individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and values about the world.
Media Types	Television, print ads, and other forms of media contribute to the cultivation effect.
Cultivation Effect	Regular media exposure leads individuals to perceive media messages as reality.
Perception of Reality	People who consume more media are more likely to view the media's portrayal as the actual world.
Impact on Attitudes and Behavior	Media messages can influence attitudes and behaviors based on the perceived reality.

## DISCUSSION

### Sports Theme (*L.A Bold*)

This *L.A Bold* cigarette advertisement shows a man practicing boxing with a punching bag in a *mise-en-scene*; meanwhile, the camera shoots a medium shot with dim lighting but still focuses on the man to be the center of the highlight, doing boxing in a series of actions. In the scene, it emphasizes his passion in boxing as well as to show his manly physic. The cigarette advertisement picks a sports theme



to show the audience the positive image, eluding the idea that sports can go together with cigarettes and it will be fine by reshaping the bad opinions in society about smoking that can be dangerous, such as: lung cancer, addiction, breathing problems and many more. George Gerbner (1998) argued, "*continuous exposure to particular patterns of media messages can influence viewers' beliefs, attitudes, and values*

*over time.*" In this scene, a phrase states, "*Find Your Fire*" follows with the slogan, "*Live Bold*" gives a message of *'finding your curiosity with your passion'*. Fire can be interpreted as spirit, desire, passion, and intensity. This message has dual effects: a veiled suggestion to do a positive thing, yet it cleverly hides the motive of persuasion to taste the product. Then, the slogan "*Live Bold*" is shown brighter to implicitly tell, "*don't be afraid to take a risk.*" All of this suggestion and slogan is a way to avoid implication towards the health issue associated with cigarettes. In this case, the advertisement is viewed widespread upon the screens of millions of families over and over again. With repetitive exposure to this advertisement, it gets more and more acceptance in society, changing the perspective and behavior of the audience.

In the following scene, the camera changes its position to a close-up shot while the man is reminiscing about his boxing practice. The lighting spotlights the man's face to show the expression of concentration, meanwhile the background is blurred. This technique is used as a hook to focus on one or more objects that are being highlighted to distract the viewers' attention from the tiny text below. For a split second, a mandatory sign appears below the screen, written in a tiny font that says,

**"PERINGATAN KARENA MEROKOK SAYA TERKENA KANKER TENGGOROKAN.  
LAYANAN BERHENTI MEROKOK (0800-177-6565),  
"WARNING DUE TO SMOKING I HAVE CONTRACTED THROAT CANCER.  
QUIT SMOKING HELPLINE (0800-177-6565)"**

This message is shown in bold and straightforward language; however, the scene that is being displayed shows bravery, and strong determination. The contradictory displays: implicit and explicit messages have a covert agenda, giving the idea to be brave and not afraid to do challenges no matter the risks. *"Advertisements serve as subtle architects of cultural reality, shaping perceptions and beliefs in ways that often go unnoticed."* (Gerbner, 1998, p. 143). Aligned with cultivation theory's framework, which Gerbner developed, media, including advertisements, contribute to the construction of our perceptions and beliefs about the world. Advertisements often work subtly beyond the surface to express their motives, influencing our understanding of various aspects of life, values, and norms. In this context, the quote suggests that cigarette advertisements have a behind-the-scenes purpose to let people see it as not a taboo thing and it is just a passing label that is not necessarily considered a serious thing but just a mandatory label for this product. While they may appear to be straightforward messages promoting products, they are also designed to convey underlying messages that can shape our viewpoints, ideals, and conduct. These hidden motives are not immediately obvious and may operate at a subconscious level, making them more challenging to detect. Gerbner's cultivation theory suggests that Extended exposure to particular messages, including those present in advertisements, has the potential to foster the development of specific perceptions and convictions that mirror the content of the conveyed messages that resonate *'cigarettes are socially acceptable'*. Therefore, the quote underscores the idea that advertisements have a powerful influence on our cultural reality, often influencing us in ways that we might not fully recognize.



### **Adventure Theme (*Djarum Super*)**

This short duration of *Djarum Super* cigarette advertisement mainly uses *aerial shot* camerawork to show the audience the entire features of the landscape related to adventure in nature. It shifts from ocean to forestry mountain and from the middle to the end part, it focuses on the characters who are doing sports: off road motorbike, jeep, paragliding and surfboarding to emphasize the adventurous stunts. As the music upbeat the actions, the singing in the background vocalizes, *"Ride of our lives. Take you where you ride. C'mon now. Chase the feeling inside. Ride of our lives."* Again in this advertisement, the image of bravery, adventurous, sporty, thrill, supported by the lyric seems to be motivational, nevertheless, the



underlying message lies beneath the actions and the motivational lyric that suggests the audience to have freedom of choice as soon as possible to fulfill the desire to try new things. *“Television is a medium of the socialization of most people into standardized roles and behaviors. Its function is, in a word, enculturation.”* (Gerbner, 1972, p. 44). It indicates that

television plays a role in molding individuals' perceptions and behaviors by subjecting them to repetitive and coherent messages and visuals that mold their cultural outlook. In your discourse, one can employ this idea to make clear how the portrayal of courage, adventure, athleticism, and excitement, along with accompanying lyrics in the media under examination, stems from television's or social media's process of cultural adaptation. Furthermore, one could contend that this portrayal might entail a concealed directive, urging the audience to adopt a particular way of life or belief system advocated by the media.

The ending part of the advertisement shows a big red flashing sign covering most of the screen with two words, **“I DARE.”** The word I Dare, explicitly signifies a challenge, an invitation for individuals to engage in a bold, adventurous behavior, implying a sense of excitement in the surface meanings. Meanwhile, the color red symbolizes bravery,



passion and love, power and strength, transformation and change. In this cigarette advertising context, it refers to the extreme sports displayed in the video, but in reality, it is an implicit message that is considered controversial to strongly suggest the audience *“be brave to try smoking.”* Also, it tempts the audience that if they dare, why not try, making the idea that smoking is a test of courage.

### **Executive Theme (*L.A Bold Better*)**

In this part of the scene, the camera operates in a medium shot to emphasize the executive theme, showing a man who is sitting at his desk in front of his office computer where all the other components in the office are blurred. It is to show the nuance of a better career he has at the moment. The man at the office desk is a signifier that represents an ideal career growth, a position that people pursue and dream in life. Furthermore, the narrator adds, *“We always want Better things in life, **Better Career, Better Style,***



*Better Love, Better Toys; for those who always want **Better Things In Life.** L.A Bold. WELCOME TO THE **BOLD NEW WORLD,**" along with all the positive images that the cigarette advertisement offers. Certain parts of the scene are emphasized with the bold capital words like 'Better Career' that signifies progressed career prospects.*

The cigarette ad implicitly tells the audience that even a smoking individual can also have a better career. 'Better Style' expresses polished stylistic quality, enhanced with a man dressed in a neat office style. It shows the audience impliedly that the stylistic attire worn by a cigarette consumer looks better and cool. In addition, the setting in the office looks like a workspace of a higher ranking position and also spaciouly modern. On the surface meaning, it resonates with professionalism, efficiency, and modernity; however, the implied meanings can be interpreted as a symbol of success, aspiration of lifestyle, personal fulfillment, cultural identity, emotional escape. Weighing both aspects of positive and negative meanings, the ad gives the idea that the lifestyle of nicotine consumers is portrayed superior, more comfortable and flexible to do work as an executive. Gerbner, G. (1998) suggested, "television and media reinforce dominant ideologies and values that serve the interests of the media industry and the powerful groups in society." It highlights that media content tends to present and promote certain worldviews, norms, and beliefs that are in line with the agenda of the media industry itself and the influential segments of society for profit matters but neglecting the implications or consequences. This can occur through various means, including the portrayal of specific social roles, stereotypes, and lifestyles. Viewers can gradually adopt and incorporate these viewpoints into their own worldview through continuous exposure to such content.

As the scene moves to another and the transition fades out, the camera turns from *medium shot* to *close-up shot* one after another to show the interaction between two adult individuals romanticism and the sensuality of the woman that draws the audience's attention more than the shown warning that appears on the bottom that says, "PERINGATAN: MEROKOK MEMBUNUHMU," "WARNING: SMOKING KILLS YOU," along with the



words, *“Better Love.”* The ‘two adults tacitly’ tells the freedom of choice in life, meanwhile the *close-up* woman signifies a partner who matches the smoking executive’s lifestyle. It is the depiction of better love shown in the advertisement. In contrast, the warning related to the shown scene implies that having this smoking habit and culture can bring more excitement, enjoyment, and addiction similar to the words, ‘better love’. On the other hand, a picture of a man smoking a cigarette with skulls in the background and a symbol of **18+** in a circle are shown small on both the left and the right bottom of the advertisement. All of the three elements: the warning, the smoking man, and the symbol of **18+** are just complementary to obey the laws that are a compulsory matter. In the next scene, the camera shoots a glamorous red shiny car in a *long shot* to show the full features of it and slowly turns to the man in a *close-up shot* to show the personal traits of the actor that is calm and authoritative. Along with the scene, the words *“Better Toys”* appears to emphasize the image of exclusiveness of the nicotine enthusiast. All of the aspects of wealth, exclusivity, and love symbolize the portrayal of the ideal life in which smoking goes hand in hand with. Gerbner, G. (1998) claimed, *“television and media promote a “happy violence” that sanitizes and normalizes violence as a form of entertainment or problem-solving, while ignoring the human suffering and social costs of violence.”* In the context of business, cigarette companies gain profits from unhealthy products by disguising it in advertisements on television, including social media: *YouTube* platforms that clearly contribute to the propagation of what he termed *“happy violence.”* This concept refers to a phenomenon where violence is depicted in a manner that sanitizes and normalizes it, presenting it as a source of entertainment or a solution to problems, while overlooking the real human suffering and societal consequences associated with violent actions. In this case, the cigarette advertisements on *YouTube* is a media that can be watched by people of all ages if parents do not really pay attention to this matter and set the appropriate age for their children’s account. Gerbner's claim emphasizes that television and media often present violence in a way that downplays its negative aspects, such as its psychological and physical impact on individuals and communities, as well as the broader social costs. Instead, violence is often portrayed in a sensationalized or glamorized manner, potentially desensitizing audiences to its real-world implications.

In the end of the scene, the camera takes a *Point-of-View Shot* with the man half body shown looking at the view of the nite city skyscrapers to show the audience the footage style, creating the sense of executive and having the audience experience the moment. The logo of cigarette products appears shiny in a black background with silver lining and the shiny silver letters, **L.A** looks bigger with the emphasis **BOLD** in a red rectangular shape. It reflects the executive theme of the advertisement. Meanwhile, the word **Bold** is shown in contrast silver in the logo and red in the phrase *‘WELCOME TO THE **BOLD** NEW WORLD’* to strongly suggest to the audience that someone needs to take action. Gerbner, G. (1998) stated, *“advertisements are a part of the mainstreaming process, which entails the*



*ability of the television influence to overcome differences in perceptions typically attributed to individuals' backgrounds."* In the context of cigarette advertising, this concept implies that advertisements have the ability to convey, provoke or even propaganda messages and images that resonate with a broad audience's acceptance, regardless of their cultural,

social, or personal differences. Advertisements can contribute to shaping a collective view or interpretation of certain values, lifestyles, or products that cuts across the diversity of viewers' backgrounds. *"Television and media use implicit messages, such as images, symbols, and narratives, to convey their intended meanings and persuade viewers to buy their products or services"* Gerbner, G. (1998). Gerbner's statement emphasizes that media content, including television programs and advertisements on various social media, often goes beyond explicit language to communicate messages. Instead, it relies on visual cues, symbols, and narrative structures to create associations and connections in viewers' minds. These implicit elements can evoke emotions, spark associations, and influence viewers' perceptions and decisions. The use of implicit messages is a strategic approach employed by media to engage audiences on a subconscious level. By weaving these messages into the content, television and media creators aim to persuade viewers to develop positive attitudes towards their products or services and to ultimately make purchasing decisions. This aligns with the broader field of advertising and marketing, where subtle persuasion techniques are used to create a desired consumer response.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis of the *L.A. Bold* cigarette advertisement reveals a complex interplay of implicit and explicit messages aimed at shaping perceptions and influencing behaviors. Through meticulous *mise-en-scène* and camera techniques, the advertisement strategically constructs a narrative that portrays themes of courage, success, adventure, and romance. By utilizing visual symbolism, lyrical accompaniments, and highlighted slogans, the advertisement aims to foster a positive association between smoking and desirable qualities. The scenes featuring a man practicing boxing and engaging in extreme sports emphasize themes of bravery and adventure. These images are intertwined with the message that smoking is a testament to one's audacity and willingness to take risks. By presenting smoking as a symbol



of daring and vitality, the advertisement encourages viewers to perceive it as an embodiment of personal empowerment and freedom. Furthermore, the inclusion of explicit warnings and health-related information juxtaposed with scenes of vigor and excitement creates a paradoxical dynamic. This interplay between the explicit dangers of smoking and the implicit allure of a bold lifestyle serves as a thought-provoking mechanism. The advertisement strategically positions smoking as a lifestyle choice that transcends societal norms and conventions. George Gerbner's insights into the media's role in reinforcing ideologies and values find resonance in this analysis. The advertisement acts as a subtle architect of cultural reality, using implicit messages to mold perceptions and beliefs. The cultivation theory, as articulated by Gerbner, highlights the idea that repeated exposure to specific messages can influence individuals' attitudes and values over time. The advertisement's skillful integration of implicit messages aims to cultivate a perception that aligns with its intended narrative.

All in all, the *L.A. Bold* cigarette advertisement employs a skillful fusion of visual techniques, lyrical elements, and juxtaposition to convey a multifaceted message. It invites viewers to associate smoking with traits such as courage, adventure, success, and love, all while navigating the fine line between the explicit dangers and implicit allure. Gerbner's theories illuminate the underlying power of media messages to subtly shape cultural realities, emphasizing the need for critical analysis and awareness of the intricate dynamics at play in such advertisements.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Djarum Super - Foil Surfboard*. (2019, April 9). YouTube. Retrieved August 10, 2023, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJ\\_ZmPBFY1o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJ_ZmPBFY1o)
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1986). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 36(2), 172-194.
- Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication & Society*, 1(3-4), 175-194.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., Signorielli, N., & Shanahan, J. (2002). Growing up with television: Cultivation processes. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (2nd ed., pp. 43-67). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hardoko, E. (2018, May 31). *Inilah 4 produsen rokok terbesar di Indonesia*. KOMPAS.com. Retrieved on 27 July 2023  
<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/05/31/17281561/inilah-4-produsen-rokok-terbesar-di-indonesia>
- LA Bold - Better Life*. (2016, January 16). YouTube. Retrieved August 10, 2023, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLLPPVkzA\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLLPPVkzA_M)
- LA Bold - Find Your Fire (Boxing)*. (2021, December 10). YouTube. Retrieved August 10, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRoD3rLVY0o>
- Saussure, F. de. (1916). *Course in General Linguistics (Cours de linguistique générale)*. Payot.