

Myths in “Rokok Jablai”: Men’s Taste?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of masculinity that forms a myth or perception about the phrase 'Esse rokok jablai' (cigarettes for prostitutes) in Indonesia. Aspects of masculinity that build these perceptions will be examined through texts and utterances circulating on Twitter using Roland Barthes' [1]; Barthes in Hoed, [2]) semiotic model approach and Deborah and Brannon's theory of masculinity (in Levine and Kimmel [3]). The data were collected from 50 tweets uploaded on Twitter with the keywords “rokok jablay” and “Esse cigarette jablay” during June—January 2021. The results show that the myth of 'jablai' in Esse Berry Pop cigarettes was caused by the fruity flavour variant found in Esse Berry Pop cigarettes. The fruity taste has previously undergone a semiological process through the media for a certain period so that it is finally believed to be a taste that is identical to children and women. This is following the statement that 'the ideal man does not have female characteristics in him'. Thus, the perception of the taste of fruits forms the public perceptions of Esse Berry Pop cigarettes 'rokok jablai' as a new myth, because the fruity taste is considered contrary to the value of masculinity that has previously grown in Indonesian society.

Keywords: Semiotics, myth, masculinity, Barthes, cigarettes.

1. INTRODUCTION

If we search on Twitter for the term "rokok jablai", we will get some tweets from netizens arguing about the phrase "rokok jablai" which refers to Esse Berry Pop variant. There is an opinion that Esse Berry Pop cigarettes are labelled as 'rokok jablai'¹ due to their sweet taste and mild flavour, and Gudang Garam as 'rokok kuli' or cigarettes for labourers due to their aroma and their heavy dose of nicotine. As a result, the terms "rokok jablai" and "rokok kuli" became myths in the form of societal values, which are regarded to be connected with masculinity.

Many studies have looked at how masculinity is depicted in various cigarette advertisements [4]; [5]; [6]. They believe that masculinity in cigarette advertising is portrayed in a variety of ways, based on their research. Masculine individuals are described as sharp and forceful, rugged, unyielding, aggressive, adventurous, and outlandish in these studies. There is also research into the production of masculinity through the consumption of urban adolescent popular culture [7].

¹ Jablai is an abbreviation for "rarely caressed", and usually refers to prostitute women. Titi Kamal popularized this term with her song Jablai, which was released in 2006. The term *jablai* or *jablay* refers to prostitutes or people (usually women) who "want to be invited anywhere" because they rarely receive a lover's caresses.

They discovered that subconscious signal delivery causes a temporal fluidity between the identity of the ideal figure and teenagers, leading them to imagine themselves as what they are getting from media [7], resulting in values masculinity being reinforced through their imagination.

2. OBJECTIVES

Although several studies have looked at masculinity and cigarette advertising, no one has looked into the societal attitudes or myths surrounding the stereotype of the cigarettes that are used in Indonesia. Thus, how does the meaning of the expression "rokok jablai" develops as a result of the signification related to the value of masculinity? This paper aims to identify the notion of masculinity that impacts perceptions of "rokok jablai" in Indonesian society.

3. METHODOLOGY

As a research design, the author uses Roland Barthes' semiotic study of myths [1]. Barthes uses the term "myth" to describe how culture signifies meaning in "Myth as a Semiological System." Everything, according to Barthes, has the potential to become "myths," depending on how the message or symbol is

communicated. To put it another way, myth is a "cultured meaning" (Barthes, [1]; Hoed, [2]). The authors began their investigation by mapping the notion of "rokok jablai" by looking at tweets containing the keywords "rokok jablai" that were collected qualitatively². The writer then goes on a search for more information regarding Esse cigarettes and the theory of masculinity [3].

The following table shows the order of significance that follows Barthes' connotation model in Hoed (2014, p. 57).

Myth: Esse Berry Pop cigarettes= "rokok jablai"		Myth	
E	C		2nd order: Connotation
E: Esse Berry Pop cigarettes	C		

Table 1 Barthes' Connotation Model in Hoed [2]

4. ANALYSIS

Esse is an imported cigarette brand manufactured by Tommorrow & Global Corporation, a Korean corporation. In 2016, Esse was introduced to the Indonesian cigarette market and produced by PT Mandiri Maha Mulia. (Review Rokok (Cigarette Review) [9]; [8]. Esse Berry Pop variants feature a low tar dosage (15 milligrams) and nicotine (0.9 milligrams) in standard, slim, and super slim size versions [8].

Esse cigarettes are known for having a wide range of flavours. Change Applemint, Menthol, Mild, Maxx, Berry Pop, Shuffle Pop, and Honey Pop variations were released by Esse for 2020. The Berry Pop variation will be the focus of this investigation because it is frequently cited in netizens' tweets, along with the claim that Esse cigarettes are "rokok jablai" (34/50 tweets). The description of the Berry Pop variants of Esse cigarettes can be placed in the denotation order as the first order of the signification process based on this description. More information can be seen on the table below:

Myth: Esse Berry Pop Cigarettes = "rokok jablai" (cigarettes for prostitute women)	
Cigarettes	Associated as a product that is not good for health, juvenile delinquency
Fruity flavor	Associated with women
Low nicotine dosage	Associated with a person who has just started smoking → weak
Esse Berry Pop cigarettes descriptions: sweet and fruity flavour, low nicotine dosage (light)	

Table 2. Signification Process of Esse Berry Pop Cigarettes

From the table above, it can be said that on the first level, in comparison to Indonesian cigarettes, which usually tend to have a strong aromatic flavour of spices, Esse Berry Pop cigarettes are described to have a fruity taste and aroma Esse Berry Pop cigarettes offer a sweet, blueberry flavour, similar to fruit-flavoured Mentos with a low mint intensity (Review Rokok (Cigarette Review) blog site, [9]). Esse Berry Pop cigarettes are also low in tar and nicotine, making them "light," and are frequently suggested for first-time smokers.

Hoed [2] proposes that the meaning of denotation flows through a semiological process towards expressions or markers in the setting of connotation order. Following humans as meaning bearers, a connotative meaning can alter at any time [2]. Connotation can be defined as an order that describes the meaning of signals that are intimately associated with social phenomena such as social class, gender, and ethnicity.

Therefore, the notion that Esse cigarettes are "rokok jablai" or cigarettes for prostitute women stems from two factors: **(1) the sweet and fruity flavour of Esse Berry Pop cigarettes**, which is typically linked with "jablai," and is perceived to be less "macho," and **(2) the low nicotine dosage**, which qualifies Esse cigarettes as "light" cigarettes. Low nicotine amounts were also linked to a 'mild' flavour, suggesting that Esse Berry Pop consumers were either new to smoking or 'weak' smokers.

² Between June and January 2021, 50 tweet statements with the keywords "esse "rokok jablai"" and "rokok jablai" were obtained for this study.

5. *PRIA PUNYA SELERA* (MEN HAVE TASTE)? MASCULINITY ASPECTS OF FRUITY FLAVOR

Men, as well as women, also have societal ideals, demands, and expectations, as well as what society's "ideal" male image looks like. If a man does not possess one of the manly values listed above, he is deemed "weak". This value rises as a result of the media's and audience's temporal fluidity (for example, cigarette commercials), and the concept of 'taste' becomes a connotation and a myth in society. The output itself can be seen in masculine values that are circulated in society.

Deborah and Brannon (in Levine and Kimmel, [3] divide masculinity values into four categories in the hopes of explaining why people believe that the perfect man is a manly, mighty, brave, agile, robust, and powerful individual. These four points are considered able to clarify the concept of masculinity which is the ideal image how men should look like in society: **(1) No Sissy Stuff:** men should not have the behaviour or characteristics associated with women; **(2) Be the Big Wheel:** men must have wealth, fame, and macho status in the eyes of society; **(3) Be a Strong Oak:** A man should not show his emotions out loud and should always be calm and collected. This point is closely related to rationality, power, and independence; **(4) Give 'em Hell:** Men must be bold and aggressive (in this case, fear and passivity are considered taboo in an ideal man).

As a result, it can be said that the connotation that stems from Esse cigarettes' fruity flavour and low nicotine dosage is at odds with the masculine values of **Sturdy Oak** and **no Sissy Stuff**. Low nicotine dosage—which is associated with 'weakness'—is incompatible with the male notion of Sturdy Oak. Furthermore, the fruity taste opposes the idea of no Sissy things. In this case, fruity flavour is typically linked to female features³.

Then, based on findings on the Review Rokok (Cigarette Review), [10], most of the promoted cigarette products ('masculine' cigarettes such as Gudang Garam Filter, Djarum Super, and Sampoerna Mild) have a strong spice flavour, despite the flavour that is considered 'sweet.' If it's linked to the tagline "*Pria Punya Selera*" (men have taste), then perhaps this is what 'male taste' means in terms of masculinity's value: powerfully fragrant flavour from cloves and spices.

Although Djarum and Gudang Garam cigarettes have some products with a variety of fruit tastes, the spice flavour still dominates.

6. CONCLUSION

The term "*rokok jablai*" about Esse Berry Pop is a myth. The fruity taste, nicotine dosage, and access to the purchase of cigarettes owned by the cigarette brand went through a semiological process related to the masculinity values that have grown and processed in society in a form of connotation meaning. According to the findings of the study, the ideal man is pictured as someone who smokes cigarettes with higher levels of cloves and nicotine, as depicted in the advertisement slogan of Gudang Garam—*Pria Punya Selera* (men have tasted). As a result, the term '*rokok jablai*' itself became connected with Esse Berry Pop, mixed with another emerging notion that the ideal woman is a nonsmoker.

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³ Darwin's (2017) study of beer taste segmentation in America and its association to gender showed a similar tendency. Darwin discovered that beer with a fruity flavor was seen as an "inferior" beverage that was better suited to women. Male beer ideally has a bitter flavor and is generally connected with a strong flavor (Darwin, 2017, p. 8).

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