



# Representation of Ageism and Gen-Z Exploitation Issues in E-commerce Advertising Design in Indonesia

Joni Agung Sudarmanto<sup>1</sup>(✉) and Adzrool Idzwan bin Ismail<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia  
joniagung.fs@um.ac.id

<sup>2</sup> Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Malaysia

**Abstract.** The *Internet of Thing* discourse and the emergence of digital natives are forcing significant behavioural changes, especially with Gen-Z discourse as the primary commodity in this era. The rise of Gen-Z visualization as an e-commerce advertising design model in Indonesia is not only to introduce services and products but also brings the issue of ageism. This study describes why e-commerce advertising design in Indonesia has become a media ageism and Gen-Z exploitation issue. Furthermore, it also discusses how the mechanism of visual exploitation occurs in the design of e-commerce advertisements in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach with close textual analysis, which investigates the visual exploitation of advertisements explicitly broadcast on the YouTube platform, namely SHOPEE Indonesia. This research involves a postmodernism approach, limited to aesthetic idioms in the form of deconstruction, hyperreality, simulation, intertextuality, kitsch, and pastiche. The analysis process starts from observing audio-visual advertisements, followed by elaboration by taking several elements, namely images, text, and audio in the specified time position, and also the discourse of Gen-Z in Indonesia. The data in this study were collected by audience studies from YouTube and interviews. The study's results found indications of ageism and the issue of universal exploitation that was received positively by the audience in Indonesia. The presence of visual codes and Gen-Z social images in SHOPEE Indonesia ads emphasizes ageism and the issue of Gen-Z exploitation through aesthetic idioms, which create contradictions and paradoxes related to these issues.

**Keywords:** representation · ageism · gen-z exploitation · postmodern · e-commerce advertising design

## 1 Introduction

When shopping, in addition to price and needs, how ads are displayed is another indicator for buyers to make transactions. In addition to being persuasive, advertising design can be a principal message deliberately designed to influence consumer tastes [1]. Advertising designs are famous for their attractive visual properties that can attract the attention of

any audience, starting with the appearance of various print media to television and radio. Even some advertising products are designed to construct certain standards of behaviour and lifestyle so that they become a trend. Since the 2000s, people have been able to place their posters and video advertisements on various internet sites [2, 3]. Even to make these advertisements, in Web 2.0, producers can take advantage of internet users' data for monetary needs [4]. This phenomenon is interesting because any data recorded since entering the internet makes it easier to access in searching, information, education, and entertainment. But on the other hand, this convenience also invites controversy, especially for children and people who are still not wise in using the media. Moreover, in the Internet of Things era, which also carries hoaxes, the vulnerability and stuttering of access to advertisements are separate issues that are dangerous for things in the context of their environment.

In Indonesia, cases related to exploitation due to stuttering in advertising design are also concerned [5]. Especially about how the advertisements seem to "only" target the audience of young people [6]. Furthermore, gender issues are also a concern when there is a tendency for non-binary and non-equal gender to appear in advertisements. The issue is considered mentally dangerous because it can be subliminally constructed amid high internet access by young people. Furthermore, it is possible that exploitation for market needs can also threaten internet users' privacy and mental health, especially Generation Z, who depend on the media.

In the discourse of internet 2.0, all participatory forms of internet users are also seen as participatory forms of commercialization [7]. Whatever action on the internet has become a monetary necessity, that is what happens in particular for age and gender exploitation on the internet. The monetary need can be in the form of product design or advertising. This phenomenon is a form of exploitation since the process of commodifying internet user data and being produced or sold to advertising clients [8]. Advertisements are designed to construct standards of behaviour and lifestyle, so in new media, this can be reversed. In other words, the advertisement is not only an example but exists as a reflection of the lifestyle of the consumers in the media.

This phenomenon reminds researchers of the foundations of exploitation theory, namely 'active' and 'reactive', where there are active parties who offer a form of creativity to other parties, and when there are parties who accept creativity, they will become reactive [8, 9]. Through exploited data, advertising design producers create a form of creativity that can make the audience helpless to the idealistic charms of advertisements taken from their environment.

The ad design that needs attention is the e-commerce ad design. In Indonesia, there has been a significant increase in the use of e-commerce in the needs of buying and selling transactions of its people. From 2013 to mid-2022, the surge in e-commerce usage has become even more significant [10, 11]. E-commerce became increasingly successful when the Covid-19 pandemic caused large-scale restrictions for people to shop at shopping places directly [12, 13]. This "forces" people to get acquainted and familiar with e-commerce [14]. Therefore, the design of the advertisement was made massive to attract the interest of potential consumers further.

E-commerce is intended for all levels of age, education, and cultural background in all regions. But uniquely, e-commerce advertising designs in Indonesia are almost always

starred by young public figures [15]. No matter what advertisements are displayed, regardless of the product, young people will always be present to star in playing the design of the e-commerce advertisement. This is related to how Generation Z is considered digital natives who have the nature to be familiar with the world of digital technology. Generation Z is a group that experiences all types of technology in their lives. In 2011, only 57% of Generation Y owned a computer, while in the same year, the majority of Generation Z used devices such as computers and smartphones simultaneously [16–18]. The gap between the two generations indicates that Generation Z has a wider experience in enjoying digital technology than the previous generation. Even the general experience in the digital world can affect their self-esteem. Therefore, the ads displayed are always “young” and “up-to-date”. Thus, e-commerce advertisements seem to be exploiting them to become agents of e-commerce to older people [19]. This raises issues related to ageism which is often displayed in e-commerce advertising designs in Indonesia.

The *Internet of Thing* discourse and the emergence of digital natives are forcing significant behavioural changes, especially with Gen-Z discourse as the primary commodity in this era. The rise of Gen-Z visualization as an e-commerce advertising design model in Indonesia is not only to introduce services and products but also brings the issue of ageism. This study describes why e-commerce advertising design in Indonesia has become a media ageism and Gen-Z exploitation issue. Furthermore, it also discusses how the mechanism of visual exploitation occurs in the design of e-commerce advertisements in Indonesia.

## 2 Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with textual analysis, which investigates the visual exploitation of advertisements explicitly broadcast on the YouTube platform, namely SHOPEE Indonesia. The data for this research is the video “Promo Spesial Setiap Bulan di Shopee Mantul Sale Tanggal 25–27 Agustus” which was released on August 27, 2022 ([youtube.com/watch?v = ej4hseSndBQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=ej4hseSndBQ)), “Belanja Sepuasnya di Shopee 9.9 Super Shopping Day” which was released on August 26, 2022 ([youtube.com/watch?v = AEldSnLiNaA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=AEldSnLiNaA)), and “Shopee Mantul Sale” which was released on August 25, 2022 ([youtube.com/watch?v = O4Tnv-8Ghj4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=O4Tnv-8Ghj4)). Collecting data from audience studies were made so that the research was able to dissect as a whole and selectively between one image and another in the three SHOPEE Indonesia YouTube ads, with the hope of finding elements that have an intrinsic image of the identity of Gen Z by doing a screen capture of advertising images, and as well as writing references related to research variables related to the two advertisements above, articles, reports, research on the culture and social life of Gen Z youth, so that they can support research to be more reliable and not inventive. This research involves a postmodernism approach, limited to aesthetic idioms in the form of deconstruction, hyperreality, simulation, intertextuality, kitsch, and pastiche [20–23]. The analysis process starts from observing audio-visual advertisements, followed by elaboration by taking several elements, namely images, text, and audio in the specified time position, and also the discourse of Gen Z in Indonesia [24–26]. The data in this study were collected by audience studies from YouTube and interviews [27].

### 3 Findings and Discussion

Shopee is one of the e-commerce sites that are present in Indonesia after Bukalapak and Tokopedia [10]. Launched in 2015, Shopee is an e-commerce company under the auspices of SEA Limited, an internet company from Singapore led by Forrest Li [28]. As an online buying and selling medium, SEA Limited ensures that Shopee is always present as a place for online shopping that is easy, safe, fast, and provides a positive experience [28]. Through payment methods integrated both overseas and domestically, the products offered vary, ranging from clothing, automotive, electronics, furniture, home needs, food, and many more, including primary and secondary products.

Shopee is famous for its promos delivered through advertisements on various internet and television social media. Some known promos are Birthday Sale, Ramadhan Sale, Mid-Year Sale, mid-month promo, Flash Sale, and Men Sale. In Indonesia, apart from moving in the network, of course, there is a Shopee head office physically located at Pacific Century Place Tower Tower Lt. 26 SCBD (Sudirman Central Business District) Lot 10, Jl. General Sudirman No. 52–53, RT.5/RW.3, Senayan, South Jakarta City, DKI Jakarta 12190. Since its arrival in Jakarta, Shopee can be downloaded via Google Play for Android and the App Store for IOS users. Furthermore, along with the arrival of branch offices in several cities, such as Semarang and Yogyakarta, Shopee has continued to develop its network since 2015 to become the number 1 online store in Indonesia in 2019. In addition to offering use-and-use products, since May 2021, Shopee has pioneered messaging services between foods, namely Shopee Food, so that Shopee is no longer behind the scenes but spreads out of the network through partners in big cities in Indonesia.

Being an online market amid the plurality of Indonesian society requires clear and consistent indicators so that the target market can react with buying and selling offers. Especially for young people, Shopee observes that they tend to have specific goals when looking for their needs when shopping online. Therefore, in order to carry out smart shopping according to their needs and tastes, there is the Shopee Mantul Sale campaign, released in August 2022 and is specifically for young people. Although lately, Shopee is very popular among women, a survey conducted by Katadata.co.id that out of a total of 54% of female respondents, 52% chose Shopee as the choice of online transaction media, while out of 46% of total respondents, men only 16% chose Shopee as a transaction medium [10]. The high access of women in Shopee media is influenced by unique jingles, promos, and free shipping [28–30]. Men's access is still very little compared to other online store media. However, from the point of view of age, as many as 85% who use Shopee are people aged 15–25. With the release time that follows the youth payday and the promos it offers, consumers will get all-inclusive offers that indirectly give young people symbolic violence to shop. Starting from “Pasti Gratis Ongkir”, where consumers are freed from shipping costs, this effort is an effort to expand the network of consumers, especially young people who are always looking for “profits” in their buying and selling transactions.

The representation of ageism has appeared in Shopee advertisements since 2019. It has become one of the advertisements that have left an impression on domestic audiences since becoming one of the most popular advertisements in Indonesia in 2019 through YouTube Broadcast with Google. The ad was watched by over 7 million YouTube users



**Fig. 1.** Belanja Sepuasnya di Shopee 9.9 Super Shopping Day. (Source: [youtube.com/watch?v=AEldSnLiNaA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEldSnLiNaA))

and previously aired as a TVC (Television Commercial) or advertisement on television as the opening of the Shopee campaign. Since then, through YouTube, Shopee has consistently presented a variety of content exclusively to attract the attention of YouTube consumers by presenting special advertisements that are not shown on television, as well as some snippets of the manufacturing process. This is very interesting because it provides an experience of young people's participation in Shopee advertisements. The character of young people who always want to know Shopee has accommodated the creative process [31, 32] (Fig. 1).

Shopee—*through the three videos that became the object of this research*—represents what ageism is a form of discrimination. Discrimination or treatment of injustice or inequality makes ageism visible in actors or advertising artists who are young people who are too dominant [33, 34]. There are three types of discrimination to be identified in “Promo Spesial Setiap Bulan di Shopee Mantul Sale Tanggal 25–27 Agustus”, “Belanja Sepuasnya di Shopee 9.9 Super Shopping Day”, and “Shopee Mantul Sale”, including (a) Reverse discrimination: Reverse discrimination is a discriminatory practice that benefits groups that have previously been the target of discrimination but because of certain stereotypes [9, 22]. Like discounts for the elderly, price discrimination such as discounts for the elderly is considered “fair” because it is per social norms compared to other discounts (e.g. based on gender). After all, the elderly is considered “deserve” to get special treatment. Then it will seem natural in the future when those who are young and then grow old are entitled to special and different treatment; (b) Unintentional discrimination is unintentional age discrimination that exists and goes beyond awareness, intention, and control [23, 35]. Like the style of speaking to the elderly, communicators covertly treat the elderly like children who cannot take care of themselves or understand their surroundings without help from others (Fig. 2).

On the other hand, the relationship between old age and health is often perceived as weak and needing help. In the three Shopee advertisements, it is not the elderly, but the elderly figures are only given a few seconds of scenes and are not the main concern; (c) Institutional age discrimination leads to social institutions or groups [36, 37]. The existence of age restrictions in certain social groups in society, to having prejudices about the retirement lifestyle, which is identical to just sitting around or acting more passively than others, and that is represented in the three Shopee advertisements that are the object



**Fig. 2.** Shopee Mantul Sale. (Source: [youtube.com/watch?v = O4Trv-8Ghj4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=O4Trv-8Ghj4))



**Fig. 3.** Belanja Sepuasnya di Shopee 9.9 Super Shopping Day. (Source: [youtube.com/watch?v = AEIdSnLiNaA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=AEIdSnLiNaA))

of this research. Thus, there has always been a representation of personal ageism as prejudice, attitudes, beliefs and practices by individuals biased against a person or group based on older age (Fig. 3).

The issue of ageism is followed by visual exploitation, which departs from the phrase “*information as a politics of exploitation and liberation is now central to the twenty-first century*” [38]. All information functions as a politics of exploitation and freedom are the centre of the 21st century and the era of the Internet of Things; every piece of information that is present around society is no longer just a message sent by the communicant to the recipient [7, 39]. Moreover, advertising design as a communication tool has become a means of political exploitation in the 21st century. In the world of technology, Google can provide recommendations for its users by repeating them periodically through previously collected information data. Maybe some people already know this feature; for example, when researching vacation destinations, then Google will periodically provide advertisements related to vacation destinations that we have accessed, but facing this phenomenon, Google users do not mind and are even helped by these conditions. This phenomenon must be traced back to the force and dynamic understanding of inequality between groups, Gen-Z and Boomers, in this study.



Fig. 4. Shopee Mantul Sale. (Source: [youtube.com/watch?v = O4Tnw-8Ghj4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4Tnw-8Ghj4))

Humans will not develop from a system of war and war until they find a universal system of reciprocity or can be accepted by both parties gracefully. This is a discourse since humans are naturally accustomed to responding to violence with violence, so to stop the system, a new power or term is needed to dominate these systems [40]. Domination is very close to power; if there is domination, there is power and vice versa. Tracing power and domination will guide the understanding of exploitation theory, finding political antagonists who use power and how other powers accept domination voluntarily [41, 42]. Tracing those forces must then offer insight into the nature of political antagonism, and such tracing should map some of the abstract relationships that constitute exploitation theory. In understanding Shopee's advertising design, two active sides are dominant and the dominant side, namely reactive [22, 43]. Reactive are those who accept voluntarily obey the domination of the active party. Thus, it is not entirely that the reactive party is dominated, but there is still room for them to be active simultaneously. Certain parties will only be said to be active because they know when to generate creativity and generate profits, while reactive is a role for those who consciously limit their abilities, either avoiding or hiding them in order to feel the actions of others (Fig. 4).

This Shopee ad on YouTube has a special intention towards Gen-Z, which is known in several articles specifically for business and marketing; it has indeed become a very calculated group, where this generation has the potential to become a tight potential consumer in the future. Through the three SHOPEE Indonesia advertisements, researchers found that there were elements of the Gen-Z experience which were mostly accommodated by actors, property, makeup & clothing, although today, the Generation X and Y groups are still active in shopping. Records like this seem to have been established in Shopee's target market even though many of these groups still do not have money and secure jobs. With the Gen-Z reality style approach, the three advertisements found scenes that constructively extracted the real values of young people, especially in the Gen-Z discourse, starting from sports experiences, hobbies, fashion styles, and influential figures for Gen-Z represented through actors, property, and clothing, and the three elements are quite intensive in representing Gen-Z in "Promo Spesial Setiap Bulan di Shopee Mantul Sale Tanggal 25–27 Agustus", "Belanja Sepuasnya di Shopee 9.9 Super

Shopping Day”, and “Shopee Mantul Sale”. The exploitation of value-extraction is represented in the three videos where values in the form of experiences and behaviours of Gen-Z are recorded through the elements of the ad design [44].

The audience’s reaction on YouTube is a witness to the success of the creative actions of producers in processing Gen-Z values into an advertising product. Starting from the setting or set, with the realistic approach, almost all of the properties placed have a good function in presenting a particular room and participating as supporters of the Gen-Z context. The application of costumes and makeup is unique, especially in the “Promo Spesial Setiap Bulan di Shopee Mantul Sale Tanggal 25–27 Agustus”, “Belanja Sepuasnya di Shopee 9.9 Super Shopping Day”, and “Shopee Mantul Sale” advertisement, where there are actors who wear casual uniforms typical of young executives to add to the reality of Shopee’s ‘successful Gen-Z product’. Even this application does not escape the connection of Gen-Z’s virtual experience in watching entertainment with actors who are currently hitting, namely Thoriq Halilintar and Fujianti Utami. Even so, all the scenes in the three advertisements apply this uniqueness. Each scene displayed has a bright light scheme to illuminate objects and subjects. A practical lamp is considered to help researchers in analyzing visual advertisements. The lighting in these advertisements does not directly contribute to Gen-Z but indirectly helps the eye to see certain objects or subjects.

The three Shopee advertisements have harmony in positioning actors; both main and supporting characters are always placed in the middle position, especially actors with a digital footprint or public figures. The public figures are never placed on the left or right side; even in an asymmetrical position, they are still positioned in the middle of the frame. This application makes it easier for the viewer’s eye to capture information because it does not require complicated efforts so that the audience can see it. This scheme is not in vain because with the public figures placed in the middle so that the audience can see them easily, the property and clothing are not; they are positioned constructively with the help of lighting, supporting properties, and contrasting colours [45, 46]. Thus, the researchers found that through a realist ad design approach, this ad has the intention of presenting Gen-Z values in every element from setting or set, clothing & makeup, lighting, and actors’ performances, positioned constructively to create space and time in harmony with the logic of the audience’s reality. Within the set design, cultural codes emerge that can be traced and proven real, that there is a connection between what is presented in the scene and Gen-Z’s digital behaviour and experience.

The digital native community, Gen-Z, has chosen the digital world as a common vehicle for expression. Many things have been done through the intermediary of internet technology and have been recorded in digital footprints ranging from children, teenagers, to adults when calculating age from birth in 1995–2010 and growing until 2021. Since toddlers, they have been introduced to personal computer technology, then at the age of children, they began to recognize mobile phones, the internet, and social media, and when they were teenagers, there were smartphones. Then the communication network becomes very wide, and sharing experiences through the internet has become their culture daily. While Generations X and Y spend much time outdoors and can only watch television and movies as their main entertainment as teenagers, Gen-Z has an alternative to the digital world as their new entertainment, uploading their daily activities, socializing

through social media and looking for a partner through social media, dating sites, have become commonplace. Influencers such as Selebgram, YouTuber, and TikToker, are their representative figures and have become a new professional activity so that they can influence Generation Z's lifestyle, both in career and lifestyle.

## 4 Conclusion

The exploitation in this article borrows discourse about 'active' and 'reactive', where there is an exploitation theory based on an active party scheme that offers a form of creativity (Shopee) to other parties (YouTube users), and when there are parties who accept that creativity will be reactive (Gen-Z). Thus, advertising as a social symbol can be said to be an act of exploitation when people voluntarily receive or view the advertisement. Furthermore, given that YouTube is a converged medium, a medium that allows each user to contribute to an upload, reactive responses in the discourse of ageism and Gen-Z can be found in the Shopee campaign on YouTube, where there are viewers who leave 'like' responses and 'comments' on the Shopee campaign impression after seeing the contents of the ad design. Thus, researchers can ensure that through the complexity of its elements, Shopee, as the owner of capital, has exploited the digital experiences of Gen-Z. The latter's experiences are represented by objects and subjects presented to evoke or ignite an emotional bond between consumers and companies. Through the activity, phenomenon, or image of the subject who becomes the intermediary for producers and potential consumers, in this case, the intermediaries are public figures, property, costumes, and make-up, it is known that there are elements that have close experience with the audience to create an emotional bond through Shopee YouTube ads.

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