

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Communication is an essential thing for humans as social beings. People exchange their emotions, ideas, and information through words, symbols, and images. Paxson (2010) mentions that “communication includes decoding the information [such as sounds, symbol, and actions] and interpreting it to give it meaning.”

There are two kinds of communication, namely interpersonal and mass communication. According to Paxson (2010), interpersonal communication occurs in one-on-one situations or within a few participants whereas mass communication is a form of entertainment and communication involving a myriad of people. Interpersonal communication has an immediate feedback or feedbacks in comparison with mass communication as the latter is designed to reach a larger number of people at one time (Paxson, 2010).

There are various media of mass communication, one of which is magazine. Magazine has evolved from being a print publication to a digital form. However,

regardless of its forms, magazine as a communication tool always consists of contents and covers, of which the cover holds an essential part. A magazine cover can impact and influence society as it is the element that most people talk about (Keung, 2020). A magazine cover has to be visually appealing and present information of its content effectively as it has a purpose to attract the readers. It is made to evoke people's curiosity and impel them to buy the magazine (Nikola, 2014).

There are two Indonesian magazines that have thought-provoking cover as their distinct feature: *Tempo Magazine* and *Tempo English*. These two magazines, which are weekly magazines covering national political news, are owned by Tempo Media Group and published by Tempo Inti Media. *Tempo Magazine* is written in Indonesian and targeted for middle to upper class consumer in age range of 20s to 50s. On the other hand, *Tempo English* is written in English as the name suggests and targeted for expatriate. As a subsidiary product, about 30-35% articles in *Tempo English* are produced by their own editorial team and the rest of the articles are taken from *Tempo Magazine*.

Established in March 1971 by Goenawan Mohamad and Yusril Djalinus, these *Tempo* magazines has been banned and sparked debates several times due to their active criticism towards the government. In the New Order regime, for example, all of *Tempo* products were banned in 1982 and 1994 for posing a threat to the national stability, although they were able to be officially recirculated in 1998 after the regime collapsed (Tempo, 2018). However, even in the Reformation era at the present time, *Tempo* remains vocal with regards to events occurring in Indonesia.

My thesis specifically takes the data source from *Tempo Magazine* cover of May 9th, 2020 and *Tempo English* cover of May 12th, 2020 issues, which both address a warning of unreliable COVID-19 rapid test kits in Indonesia. As cited from World Health

Organization, coronavirus disease (often referred to as COVID-19) is a disease caused by a newly discovered infectious coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2 (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.b). The first few cases of the disease were reported from Wuhan, China back in December 2019 (WHO, n.d.b). The COVID-19 test has been run for the last several months.

These magazine covers are interesting to analyse since the topic of COVID-19 is relatively new and the virus has affected a great number of countries globally, including Indonesia. *Tempo*, along with Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, finds that the rapid test kits showing false results of being infected with coronavirus are already distributed and used in Indonesia (Belford et al., 2020; Tempo, 2020).

In the first wave of the pandemic, having a COVID-19 test is vital to determine the effective strategy to prevent the spread of the virus. However, there are groups trying to defraud those who need the test kit during this difficult time. A test kit sold by a Dutch company under the name Biozek Medical is believed to have made false claims to sell their product worldwide. In both *Tempo Magazine* May 9th and *Tempo English* May 12th of 2020 issue *Tempo* (2020) reports that “it subsequently came to light that these [Biozek Medical’s COVID-19 test kits] had not been manufactured in Europe and they were of questionable accuracy.” Several other rapid test kits from different brands also show inaccurate test results in some places in Indonesia, one of which is in Sukabumi, West Java, where 300 police officers were claimed to be positive although it turned out that only 82 of them were actually indicated to be COVID-19 positive (Tempo, 2020). Due to this phenomenon, these magazine covers become worth analysing.

The analysis itself is conducted using semiotics, which refers to the study of sign meaning-making process. A sign may take the form of images, words, body language,

odours, flavours, objects, and sounds (Chandler, 2017, p. 11). This thesis specifically applies the theory of a Swiss semiotician named Ferdinand de Saussure. In his theory, Saussure notes that a sign is made up of the arbitrary and inseparable signifier (*signifiant*) and signified (*signifié*). The theory is called Saussure's dyadic model.

The significance of my thesis is to make people aware that a cover is not merely a cover. A magazine cover can be utilized as an effective tool to attract the readers and conveying a lot sharper and brief message, which in this case is to warn people about the inaccurate COVID-19 test kit that is being used in Indonesia.

(891 words)

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study is conducted to answer the following problems:

1. What are the signifiers and the signifieds found in *Tempo Magazine* cover of May 9th, 2020 and *Tempo English* cover of May 12th, 2020 edition?
2. How do the signifieds reveal a warning of the unreliable COVID-19 test kits in Indonesia?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems above, the purposes of this study are:

1. to show the signifiers and the signifieds found in *Tempo Magazine* cover of May 9th, 2020 and *Tempo English* cover of May 12th, 2020 edition;
2. to find out how the signifieds reveal a warning message of the unreliable COVID-19 test kits in Indonesia.

1.4 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One presents Introduction, which contains Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two presents Literature Review, which is concerned with Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of semiotics and the discussion of a previous study. Chapter Three presents Methods of Research, which comprises Research Design, Data Collection Technique, Framework for Analysis, and a sample of Data Analysis. Chapter Four deals with the findings of a warning message of the unreliable COVID-19 test kits as visually depicted in *Tempo Magazine* cover of May 9th, 2020 and *Tempo English* cover of May 12th, 2020. Lastly, Chapter Five presents the conclusion of the thesis, followed by References and Appendices.

