

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MORAL VALUES IN THE #STOPCHILDMARRIAGE CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENT: A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF PKBI MESSAGES ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION

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Abstract. Child marriage is a complex social issue that remains a reality in various regions of Indonesia. This phenomenon is driven by multiple factors, including poverty, low levels of education, and strong cultural and social norms. Social campaigns through advertising media have become an important strategy for changing public perceptions regarding child marriage. This study focuses on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of the PKBI #StopChildMarriage campaign advertisement, aiming to reveal how moral values are constructed through systems of signs to deconstruct myths and ideologies underlying the practice of early marriage. Barthes distinguishes three levels of meaning: denotative (literal meaning), connotative (cultural meaning), and myth (ideological meaning). This research employs a qualitative approach, drawing on Barthes' semiotic analysis. Data were collected by documenting PKBI campaign advertisements and subsequently analyzed to identify the sign structures and the moral messages conveyed. The findings indicate that PKBI's advertisements not only deliver informative messages but also construct a discourse of resistance against patriarchal values that legitimize child marriage. Through visual and narrative representations, the advertisements aim to raise collective public awareness and normalize new perspectives that support the protection of children's rights. In conclusion, media campaigns that employ Barthes' semiotic approach can serve as effective communication tools for conveying moral messages and shaping public opinion on social issues, particularly child marriage.

Keywords: Child Marriage, Social Advertising, Semiotics, Roland Barthes, Domestic Violence, Moral Values

INTRODUCTION

Child marriage remains a recurring reality within society, including in Indonesia. Marriage occurring at an unusually young age has become a phenomenon that requires serious attention. Marriage is an event in an individual's life that significantly affects their legal status. It creates legal relationships between husband and wife, and when children are born from the marriage, legal relationships between parents and children are also established (Elisabeth, 2021).

Among various issues related to marriage, one phenomenon that has attracted particular attention is early marriage. Early marriage refers to marriages conducted by individuals who are still very young, typically ages 10-19. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescents are individuals aged 10 to 19 years, while Indonesia's National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) defines adolescence as the age range from 10 to 24 years. Thus, WHO classifies adolescents as those aged 10-19 years, whereas BKKBN extends this category to individuals aged 10-24 years.

In the era of technological development, various forms of content romanticizing early marriage are widely accessible to audiences of all ages, raising significant concerns. Films, novels, and even public figures who marry young often present early marriage as an idealized lifestyle, portraying it as a beautiful, desirable choice. According to Sarwono (2011, cited in Dessy Paramitha), adolescents generally experience puberty without adequate knowledge about sexuality. This situation occurs because many parents consider discussions about sexuality to be taboo. Furthermore, emotional distance between parents and children often leads adolescents to seek information from alternative sources that are not always reliable. Therefore, educational approaches are necessary to emphasize that child marriage should no longer be tolerated in contemporary society. Such approaches can be implemented not only through direct socialization but also through engaging content that attracts public attention, such as advertising.

The question then arises: how can advertisements be designed to incorporate moral values as tools for social campaigns? The phenomenon of child marriage in Indonesia remains a complex issue

requiring serious attention. According to UNICEF data, Indonesia ranks fourth globally, with approximately 25.53 million women married before the age of 18. This figure demonstrates that Indonesia still faces significant challenges in achieving a “Child-Friendly Indonesia” by 2030. These statistics are not merely numerical data but reflect a social reality that threatens the future of younger generations, particularly girls.

Poverty is one of the main factors driving child marriage. Many families perceive early marriage as a survival strategy, assuming that marrying off their children will reduce the family’s economic burden. This condition is further reinforced by cultural and social norms that still regard early marriage as acceptable, and even as a solution to prevent premarital relationships or to preserve family honor. In many rural areas, economically disadvantaged families often view marriage as a way to ease financial hardship. Marrying daughters at a young age is sometimes believed to provide dowry benefits or financial assistance from the husband’s family (Amanda, 2024).

Educational factors also play a crucial role in this phenomenon. Limited access to education, high school dropout rates, and restricted opportunities for girls to obtain quality education significantly contribute to the prevalence of child marriage. Various studies indicate that children who marry at an early age face serious consequences, including reproductive health problems, disrupted access to education, and increased risks of domestic violence. These conditions also perpetuate intergenerational cycles of poverty, as children born into early marriages often grow up in environments that do not adequately support education and well-being (Fujiana et al., 2023).

Regulatory frameworks and law enforcement also continue to show weaknesses in preventing child marriage practices. Although efforts have been made to set minimum marriage age limits, marriage dispensations remain relatively easy to obtain. Inconsistent implementation of child protection regulations further complicates prevention efforts. This situation demonstrates that social intervention cannot rely solely on regulation but must also involve comprehensive approaches that address public awareness.

Within this context, social campaigns through advertising media become a strategic approach to changing public perceptions. Reducing early marriage rates can begin with effective education and outreach targeting adolescents. Social media, as one of the most widely used platforms among young people, can serve as an effective medium for disseminating information about the dangers of early marriage (Henny, 2024). The construction of appropriate moral messages can function as an effective instrument to dismantle myths surrounding child marriage, educate the public, and encourage attitudinal change.

This study aims to examine how moral values can be utilized as persuasive tools in transforming societal paradigms regarding child marriage practices in Indonesia. The research focuses on Roland Barthes’ analysis of early marriage and its relationship to domestic violence as implied in the PKBI #StopChildMarriage campaign advertisement. Roland Barthes interprets signs through systems of meaning consisting of denotation, connotation, and myth. A sign is something that represents something else for someone (Asrofah, 2014). The topic of this research seeks to capture the moral messages embedded in the campaign, which are highly relevant to social conditions across various regions of Indonesia, where children—particularly girls—remain victims of child marriage practices that often lead to violence and inequality within households.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child Marriage. Child marriage is defined as a marital union involving individuals under the age of 18, whether female or male. This practice often compromises children’s rights to education, health, and protection from violence and exploitation. According to Law Number 16 of 2019, which amends Law Number 1 of 1974 on Marriage, the minimum legal age for marriage in Indonesia has been raised to 19 years for both men and women to protect children.

Child marriage commonly occurs due to various factors, including cultural traditions, poverty, low levels of education, and strong social control over girls’ sexuality. According to the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), child marriage increases the risks of maternal and infant mortality and raises the likelihood of domestic violence. In addition, women who marry at an early age tend to have lower participation in family decision-making processes and are more vulnerable to economic pressures.

Social Stigma and Cultural Pressure. Social stigma toward women who reject early marriage or choose higher education pathways frequently emerges in patriarchal societies. Women are often perceived as deviant if they do not conform to traditional norms, such as marrying at a young age and becoming obedient wives. This stigma manifests as negative labeling, such as “old maid,” “undesirable,” or “improper.” Stigmatization related to delaying marriage may include assumptions that a woman is overly selective, unattractive to potential partners, or even labeled as lesbian, ultimately resulting in the term *perawan tua* (“old maid”). Such stigma reflects the construction of societal values and norms that view delaying marriage as inappropriate or socially deviant (Sekarsari, 2025).

Cultural pressure within Javanese society plays a strong role in shaping perceptions of women. In traditional communities, women are still often viewed as individuals whose primary roles are managing the household, becoming wives, and bearing children. Those who reject child marriage are frequently perceived as opposing cultural traditions or failing to respect their parents. Women who choose education over early marriage are often seen as challenging social norms or as demonstrating a lack of filial respect (Fitria, Olivia, & Nurvarindra, 2022).

Representation of Women and Campaign Media. The media plays an important role in shaping public opinion and in reinforcing or challenging social norms. The representation of women in media is often divided between two extreme poles: as sexual objects or as symbols of traditional morality. In the context of social campaigns, women’s representation must be handled carefully to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or blaming victims. Mass media can provide positive representations of women in public spaces, including politics. This is important because positive representation can help change public perceptions of women; through balanced coverage, mass media can encourage recognition of women’s contributions in politics and accelerate more inclusive social change (Yoteni, Nurlatifah, & Pramana, 2023).

The #StopChildMarriage campaign media, for example, highlights real stories of women who reject child marriage as symbols of courage and social change. This represents a form of positive representation that emphasizes women’s empowerment.

According to Stuart Hall, representation does not merely reproduce reality but also shapes how society perceives an issue. In this context, campaign media portraying female figures as agents of change contributes to dismantling stigma and expanding the discourse of emancipation. The presentation of inspirational stories through campaign videos, infographics, or online discussion forums can serve as counter-narratives to norms that justify child marriage.

Roland Barthes’ Semiotic Theory. To understand how moral messages are constructed within media campaigns, this study employs Roland Barthes’ semiotic approach. Barthes divides meaning into three layers: denotation (literal meaning), connotation (cultural or emotional meaning), and myth (ideological meaning). According to Barthes, myth is not a falsehood but a form of communication that naturalizes dominant ideology as unquestionable.

In the context of the #StopChildMarriage campaign, visual elements such as a young girl playing, the sound of a creaking bed, and the narrative text “close your eyes” function as signs that carry not only literal meanings but also connotative and mythological meanings. Scenes depicting children’s innocence are juxtaposed with ambiguous sounds to create emotional tension. At the denotative level, viewers see a child playing. At the connotative level, associations with sexual activity emerge, and at the mythological level, the advertisement critiques societal perceptions that normalize child marriage as legitimate and ordinary.

Barthes argues that myth functions to naturalize ideology; in other words, it transforms social constructions into something that appears natural. Therefore, social campaigns such as this aim to dismantle cultural myths embedded within society—such as the belief that marrying off children for the sake of family honor represents an act of love—when, at a deeper ideological level, it constitutes a form of violence against children’s rights.

Through Barthes’ theory, media campaigns are understood not merely as tools for conveying moral messages but also as forms of ideological struggle aimed at shaping new perspectives on child marriage. This approach helps explain how media can function as an instrument to challenge patriarchal ideology and strengthen values of equality and child protection.

METHOD

This study employs a constructivist paradigm and a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the construction of moral messages in the #StopChildMarriage advertising campaign. The method used is Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, which examines denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings derived from visual elements such as symbols, colors, gestures, and narratives within the advertisement.

The research data consist of digital advertisement documentation produced by PKBI, analyzed during January–March 2025. This study is non-field research, focusing primarily on visual content. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, by comparing advertising data with relevant scientific literature, as well as internal validation through repeated readings to maintain consistency of meaning.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This research used a qualitative method, commonly known as the documentation method. To examine meanings embedded within the social campaign advertisement video, Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis was applied. The research object consisted of advertisements released by PKBI over a five-year period, uploaded on YouTube and further disseminated through the Instagram account @fyifact.

In collecting data, the researcher conducted observation and documentation techniques by gathering relevant advertising videos and examining the campaign broadcast on the YouTube channel via the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MPXkaw2R1M>, while also monitoring a series of social media posts that reinforced the campaign narrative through the @fyifact account.

More specifically, the research process involved several stages:

1. Determining the research object, namely the social campaign video #StopChildMarriage, published by PKBI.
2. Conducting observations of the video content and public responses appearing in social media posts.
3. Tracing, documenting, and downloading data, including campaign videos and screenshots of visual materials presented in the campaign.

After data collection, the researcher processed the data by closely examining scenes within the campaign advertisement video and analyzing them using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach.

The advertisement released by PKBI titled “#StopChildMarriage” was analyzed by selecting several key scenes, which were then interpreted at the denotative, connotative, and mythological levels. Through Barthes' framework, the analysis began at the levels of denotation and connotation and proceeded to identify the underlying myths embedded in the campaign message.



Figure 1. Scene 1 of the PKBI Campaign Advertisement Titled “#StopChildMarriage”

Source: <https://youtu.be/0MPXkaw2R1M>, Timecode: 00:00:00

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of Scene 1

Denotation	Connotation	Myth
A young girl wearing pink pajamas is jumping up and down on a bed.	Playing on the bed reflects the cheerfulness and innocence typical of children; however, the bed's creaking creates ambiguity.	The social assumption that the sound is associated with sexual activity—when in fact it results from an innocent action—deconstructs the myth that child marriage is normal or socially acceptable.

The image above represents the opening scene of a social campaign advertisement titled “#StopChildMarriage” produced by PKBI. This scene shows a young girl joyfully jumping on a bed. There is no narration or explanatory text—only the sound of the creaking bed and the child’s breathing.

The visual signifier in this opening scene is a young girl happily jumping on a canopy bed. This activity reflects the innocence, joy, and freedom characteristic of childhood. The bed with a canopy—typically associated with an adult private space—strengthens the contrast of meaning within the context of this advertisement. The creaking sound of the bed as the child jumps creates ambiguity of meaning if heard without the accompanying visuals.

The myth conveyed in this scene is that child marriage, which has long been considered normal or acceptable by some segments of society, is in fact a form of violence against children’s rights and childhood itself.



Figure 2. Scene 2 of the PKBI Campaign Advertisement Titled “#StopChildMarriage”
Source: <https://youtu.be/0MPXkaw2R1M>, Timecode: 00:00:05

Table 2. Semiotic Analysis of Scene 2

Denotation	Connotation	Myth
A young girl is jumping on a bed while breathing heavily. The text “Now, close your eyes” appears	The scene depicts the child’s physical exhaustion while playing; however, the instructional text “close your eyes” directs	This reflects how society often fails to recognize that discomfort arising from ambiguous sounds mirrors the reality of child marriage, which is

on the screen	viewers to listen only to the sound, without seeing the visuals.	frequently justified or concealed through cultural or religious rationalizations.
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The visual signifier in Scene 2 depicts a young child, exhausted, jumping on a bed, accompanied by the creaking of the mattress and heavy breathing. Suddenly, the text “Now, close your eyes” appears, directing viewers to rely solely on their sense of hearing. Without visuals providing contextual explanation, the sounds create an ambiguous impression that may even lead to sexual associations. However, when the visuals reappear, viewers realize the sounds come from an innocent child’s play.

The myth being challenged is that discomfort caused merely by hearing such sounds is already an indication that something inappropriate may be occurring, especially if it were to happen within the context of child marriage. This advertisement questions societal perceptions that have long normalized such practices, even though, ethically and humanely, they deeply harm children’s futures.



Figure 3. Scene 3 of the PKBI Campaign Advertisement Titled “#StopChildMarriage”
 Source: <https://youtu.be/0MPXkaw2R1M>, Timecode: 00:00:17

Table 3. Semiotic Analysis of Scene 3

Denotation	Connotation	Myth
A young girl is still seen jumping on the bed while a narration in the background states, “More than 3 million children are forced to become adults before the age of 15.” This is followed by the text: “Stop closing your eyes.”	The child’s play activity continues to be shown to emphasize the innocence of childhood, yet it is juxtaposed with highly serious statistical data, creating a strong emotional contrast. The text “stop closing your eyes” implies a call for awareness—not only toward the advertisement itself, but also	Society tends to normalize the practice of child marriage under the pretext of tradition or ignorance. This advertisement dismantles that myth and calls attention to the fact that silence or indifference constitutes a form of complicity in injustice.

	toward the social reality that is often ignored.	
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This scene serves as the climax of the entire campaign narrative. The visual of the child continuing to jump on the bed still represents a world that should be filled with laughter and joy. However, the narration that follows delivers a shocking fact: “More than 3 million children are forced to become adults before the age of 15.” This statement not only presents data but also serves as a wake-up call, highlighting a social crisis. The text “Stop closing your eyes” then appears as a moral appeal, urging society to stop pretending not to know, stop justifying, and stop being indifferent toward the practice of child marriage.

The myth deconstructed in this scene highlights how silence and tolerance toward such practices are often shielded by cultural norms, yet in reality constitute a betrayal of children’s rights. This campaign invites the public to stop closing their eyes and instead awaken collective awareness of the importance of protecting the future of younger generations

CONCLUSION

The #StopChildMarriage campaign advertisement produced by PKBI represents a powerful and strategic form of visual communication in raising awareness about the social issue of child marriage. Through Roland Barthes’ semiotic approach, the advertisement successfully deconstructs myths that have long normalized the practice of early marriage, particularly affecting girls. By juxtaposing ambiguous sounds with innocent visuals, the campaign evokes the audience’s emotional awareness, encouraging recognition of the social inequalities that persist within society.

The analysis of each scene demonstrates that the moral messages, subtly yet firmly constructed, can transform perceptions and encourage public engagement in efforts to protect children. This advertisement demonstrates that visual media not only conveys information but also serves as an effective tool of persuasion and social reflection, shaping public opinion and attitudes.

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