



Myths of Masculine Identity and Local Traditions in Wadimor Sarong Advertisements: A Semiotic Analysis Based on Roland Barthes

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ABSTRACT

Studies on the construction of masculine identity myths rooted in local tradition within Indonesian cultural product advertisements remain scarce. This study aims to analyze the construction of masculine identity myths and the representation of local tradition in the 2021 Sarung Wadimor advertisement using Roland Barthes' three-level semiotic framework denotation, connotation, and myth. A descriptive qualitative method was employed through textual observation and documentation of six advertisement scenes as units of analysis. The findings reveal three systematically operating myths: (1) a tradition-based masculinity myth that naturalizes the ideal Indonesian man as one deeply rooted in cultural heritage, (2) a religious masculinity myth that positions spiritual piety as a mandatory public component of Muslim masculine identity, and (3) a social nationalist masculinity myth that interpellates Indonesian men to perceive the choice of local products as a declaration of national pride. These three myths form a coherent ideological system through Barthes' naturalization mechanism, transforming sarung from a mere textile product into an active medium for constructing masculine identity. This research demonstrates that advertisements not only promote products but also shape society's perceptions of masculine identity, expanding the study of masculinity in Indonesian advertising by incorporating cultural and religious perspectives

Keywords: myth of masculinity, local tradition, advertisement, cultural identity, semiotic analysis

Mitos Identitas Maskulin dan Tradisi Lokal dalam Iklan Sarung Wadimor: Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes

ABSTRAK

Kajian tentang konstruksi mitos identitas maskulin berbasis tradisi lokal dalam iklan produk budaya Indonesia masih sangat terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konstruksi mitos identitas maskulin dan representasi tradisi lokal dalam iklan Sarung Wadimor edisi 2021 menggunakan semiotika tiga tataran Roland Barthes: denotasi, konotasi, dan mitos. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik observasi teks dan dokumentasi terhadap enam scene iklan sebagai unit analisis. Hasil penelitian menemukan tiga mitos yang bekerja secara sistematis: (1) mitos maskulinitas berbasis tradisi lokal yang menaturalisasikan identitas laki-laki Indonesia ideal sebagai sosok yang berakar pada warisan budaya; (2) mitos maskulinitas religius yang menempatkan ketakwaan spiritual sebagai komponen publik wajib identitas maskulin Muslim; dan (3) mitos maskulinitas sosial-nasionalis yang menginterpolasi laki-laki Indonesia untuk memaknai pilihan produk lokal sebagai pernyataan kebanggaan nasional. Ketiga mitos tersebut membentuk sistem ideologis yang koheren melalui mekanisme naturalisasi Barthes, menjadikan sarung bukan sekadar produk tekstil melainkan medium aktif konstruksi identitas maskulin. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa iklan tidak hanya mempromosikan produk, tetapi juga ikut membentuk cara pandang masyarakat terhadap identitas maskulin, serta memperluas kajian maskulinitas dalam iklan Indonesia dengan menghadirkan perspektif budaya dan agama.

Keywords: mitos identitas maskulinitas, tradisi lokal, iklan sarung, analisis semiotika

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INTRODUCTION

The development of the advertising industry in Indonesia has positioned advertising not merely as a promotional medium, but as a space for cultural representation and social values, operating through a system of signs (Williamson, 1978). Within this framework, advertising shapes social reality through symbols made to appear natural to consumers (Barthes, 1972). One increasingly dominant strategy in Indonesian advertising is the use of elements of local tradition and culture as instruments for constructing meaning to build emotional closeness with audiences (Musliadi et al., 2025).

The representation of masculine identity in advertising is a complex and evolving process of meaning-making. Several studies have shown that advertisements for men's products in Indonesia tend to portray modern masculinity, focusing on contemporary lifestyles, self-confidence, and contemporary appearance (Utari et al., 2024; Madani & Ambarwati, 2023). This formation operates at the level of myth, a second-order meaning system that makes ideology appear natural and unquestionable (Barthes, 1972). According to Connell (1995), the dominant myth of masculinity in advertising reflects the form of masculinity considered most ideal and widely accepted in society within a particular social context.

The 2021 Sarung Wadimor advertisement presents a distinct phenomenon worthy of in-depth study. This advertisement explicitly combines traditional performing arts, sacred spaces, and masculine figures appearing elegantly clad in locally patterned sarongs. Unlike typical men's product advertisements, which emphasize modernity-based masculinity, this advertisement places local traditions as the primary foundation for constructing a masculine image. This makes the Sarung Wadimor advertisement a cultural text rich in sign systems and relevant for study using a semiotic approach.

Based on the above background, the research questions are formulated as follows: (1) How do the denotative and connotative sign systems

operate in the 2021 Sarung Wadimor advertisement according to Roland Barthes's semiotics? (2) What myths of masculinity are formed in the 2021 Sarung Wadimor advertisement? (3) How does the 2021 Sarung Wadimor advertisement naturalize the values of local tradition, religiosity, and nationalism as part of Indonesian masculine identity?

The objectives of this study are: (1) to analyze the denotative and connotative sign systems in the 2021 Sarung Wadimor advertisement according to Roland Barthes' semiotics; (2) to identify the myths of masculinity formed in the 2021 Sarung Wadimor advertisement; and (3) to describe how the 2021 Sarung Wadimor advertisement naturalizes the values of local tradition, religiosity, and nationalism as part of Indonesian masculine identity.

This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of cultural semiotic studies, particularly in analyzing the representation of masculinity based on local traditions in Indonesian advertising texts. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for academics, advertising practitioners, and creative industry players in understanding how local cultural values are constructed and communicated through visual media.

This study focuses on two main variables: Roland Barthes's semiotics and the representation of masculinity. Barthes's semiotics (1972) operates at two levels of meaning: the first is denotation, the literal or factual meaning of a sign, and the second is connotation, the meaning formed from cultural values, ideology, and social context. From connotations that settle and are accepted as general truths, myths are born (Barthes, 1972), namely the way culture naturalizes something that is actually historical and ideological. Meanwhile, masculinity, from Connell's perspective (1995), is understood not as an innate biological trait, but as a social construct shaped through cultural practices, including media and advertising. The combination of these two theoretical frameworks allows for an



in-depth reading of how advertising naturalizes masculine identity through visual and verbal sign systems.

Several previous studies have examined myths of masculinity and local traditions in advertising using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach. Utari et al. (2024) found a shift in masculinity toward a more inclusive orientation in Kahf advertisements, but still focused on modern self-care. Taqdir et al. (2025) examined cigarette advertisements and found myths of socio-economic dominance, but did not link them to local traditions. Siregar (2021) points to the strong cultural representation in the advertisement "The Light of Aceh," but does not yet connect it to gender identity. Meanwhile, Sutarya et al. (2025) state that masculinity based on local traditions, particularly those related to sarongs, is rarely studied. This suggests that previous research tends to discuss masculinity, local traditions, or cultural identity separately, so studies that integrate all three within a single advertising text are still needed.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a Roland Barthes semiotic approach. Qualitative methods were chosen because this research aims to interpret cultural and ideological systems of signs and meanings in depth, rather than measuring variables numerically (Moleong, 2017, Razak, 2017). The underlying paradigm is constructivism, which views social reality, including images of masculinity in advertising, as a construction formed through language, symbols, and cultural practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The data source for this research is a 30-second Sarung Wadimor advertisement uploaded to Wadimor's official YouTube channel in 2021 and publicly accessible. The advertisement was purposively selected because it explicitly displays a combination of masculine identity representation and elements of local tradition within a single advertisement, making it relevant as an object of cultural semiotics study. Primary data consisted

of screenshots (frame captures) of key scenes containing semiotically significant visual, verbal, and auditory signs.

Data were collected using two techniques: text observation and documentation. Text observation was conducted by repeatedly and systematically watching the advertisement to identify all the sign elements in each scene. Documentation was conducted by taking screenshots of scenes containing the strongest sign content according to the research focus. The unit of analysis in this study was the scene, which was divided into six temporal segments based on significant changes in visual and narrative context.

Data analysis was conducted using Roland Barthes' three-level semiotic framework in a step-by-step and systematic manner. The first stage was denotative analysis, which described the literal meaning of each sign appearing in the scene. The second stage is connotation analysis, which interprets the cultural and ideological meanings that emerge from the interaction between signs and the socio-cultural context. The third stage is myth analysis, which identifies the second-level signification system that works to naturalize masculine identity ideology and local traditions, making them appear natural and universal (Barthes, 1972). Data validity is ensured through diligent observation and source triangulation by referring to relevant previous semiotic studies.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis of six scenes in the 2021 edition of the Sarung Wadimor advertisement. The analysis is conducted through three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. The primary emphasis is on the myth level as the second-level signification system that works to naturalize masculine identity ideology and local traditions. Based on this analysis, three main myths are identified that operate systematically in this advertisement.

1. The Myth of Masculinity Based on Local Traditions (Scene 1 and Scene 2)

Scene 1 (00:00–00:05) features drummers and dancers in traditional attire in a traditional performance setting (Figure-1). Denotatively, this scene depicts artists performing traditional Indonesian art in full costume, accompanied by drum accompaniment. Connotatively, local traditions are presented as living, authentic, and something to be proud of; the traditional performances serve as tangible and relatable symbols of cultural richness. Mythically, Scene 1 naturalizes the idea that true Indonesian men are those rooted in local culture. Tradition is presented as a given masculine identity that cannot be questioned.



Figure 1
Screenshot of Wadimor Sarong Advertisement
Scene 1 (00:00–00:05) Cultural Opening

Scene 2 (00:06–00:10) depicts an adult man walking confidently in a patterned sarong suit, greeted by applause from the audience (Figure-2). Denotatively, the man strides confidently in a formal sarong-patterned suit, receiving public appreciation. Connotatively, the sarong transforms into a symbol of masculine elegance in modern public spaces; the applause signifies social recognition of the identity displayed. Mythically, Scene 2 constructs an image of modern-traditional masculinity, namely the ideal man who is able to harmoniously combine tradition and modernity, making the choice to wear a sarong appear as a natural expression of identity.



Gambar-2
Tangkapan Layar Iklan Sarong Wadimor
Scene 2 (00:06–00:10) Pria Modern Berkelas

2. The Myth of Religious Masculinity (Scene 3 and Scene 4)

Scene 3 (00:11–00:15) depicts the sarong in three different contexts: artistic expression by the dancer, domestic life, and a semi-formal public space as the man climbs stairs (Figure-3). Denotatively, this scene demonstrates the sarong's versatility as clothing. At the connotative level, the sarong is interpreted as clothing that transcends the boundaries of space and social function, signifying an adaptive and consistent masculine identity. At the mythical level, Scene 3 establishes the myth of holistic masculinity: the ideal man is one who is able to consistently display his cultural identity across all spheres of life, so that the sarong is no longer simply a contextual clothing choice, but a permanent marker of masculine identity.



Figure 3
Screenshot of Wadimor Sarong Advertisement
Scene 3 (00:11–00:15) Product Versatility

Scene 4 (00:16–00:20) is the most hegemonic scene in the entire advertisement. A masculine figure stands in a magnificent mosque-like

building, wearing a red-brown patterned sarong under dramatic lighting (Figure-4). At the denotative level, the sarong-wearing man is seen in a sacred architectural space with magnificent lighting. At the connotative level, the masculine body placed in a sacred space connotes piety and spiritual perfection; the sarong signifies the connection between tradition and the divine dimension. At the mythical level, Scene 4 constructs the myth of religious masculinity, stating that the ideal Muslim man is someone who can simultaneously combine elegant appearance and spiritual piety. The religious dimension is presented not as a private personal choice, but as a mandatory public component that must be visible and acknowledged.



Figure 4
Screenshot of Wadimor Sarong Advertisement
Scene 4 (00:16–00:20) Spiritual Dimension

3. The Myth of Socio-Nationalist Masculinity (Scene 5 and Scene 6)

Scene 5 (00:21–00:25) depicts a man giving or receiving a gift box containing a Wadimor sarong in a warm family or community gathering (Figure-5). At the denotative level, masculine figures engage in the ritual of giving sarongs within the family or community. At the connotative level, sarongs are codified as a medium for binding social relations; the act of giving sarongs is an expression of appreciation and recognition of meaningful social ties. At the mythical level, Scene 5 constructs the myth of socially responsive masculinity: the ideal man maintains his social network through cultural practices, while the commercial interests of producers are hidden behind a narrative of cultural sincerity.



Figure 5
Screenshot of Wadimor Sarong Advertisement
Scene 5 (00:21–00:25) Symbol of Togetherness

Scene 6 (00:26–00:30) dynamically displays various sarong motifs, followed by the official Wadimor logo and the slogan "Of course, it's Our Sarong" (Figure-6). At the denotative level, various sarong motifs appear quickly and conclude with the brand identity and the claim of Indonesian choice. At the connotative level, the diversity of motifs constructs inclusivity, while the slogan "Of course our sarong" builds a sense of shared ownership of local products. At the mythical level, Scene 6 operates the myth of masculine nationalism through the pronoun "we," which calls on Indonesian men to identify themselves as part of a national community that defines itself through its choice of local products.



Figure 6
Wadimor Sarong Advertisement Screenshot
Scene 6 (00:26–00:30) Closing & Slogan

DISCUSSION

Based on a semiotic analysis of six scenes in the 2021 Sarong Wadimor advertisement, three main myths were identified that are interconnected and form a coherent ideological system about the ideal Indonesian male identity. These three

myths—local tradition-based masculinity, religious masculinity, and socio-nationalist masculinity—operate in a hierarchical and coherent manner through Roland Barthes's mechanism of naturalization. The following discussion outlines how each myth operates and its implications for the construction of masculine identity in the context of Indonesian advertising.

The first myth, local tradition-based masculinity, operates predominantly through Scenes 1 and 2. Barthes (1972) explained that myths operate by taking signs with a specific history and social context and then emptying that history to make the signs appear natural and universal. This mechanism is most evident in Scene 1: the traditional drum and dance performances, cultural products of a particular community with its own history, are presented as if they represent a universal representation of Indonesianness, the right and property of all Indonesian men without exception. In Scene 2, the myth mechanism shifts to a more personal dimension: the sarong, historically a contextual garment for religious observances and traditional activities, is represented as a symbol of masculine authority in modern public spaces. This naturalization process renders the choice to wear a sarong less a debatable cultural decision than a given expression of masculine identity. This finding aligns with Siregar's (2021) argument that elements of local tradition in advertising function as an active sign system, but expands on that study by demonstrating that in the Wadimor advertisement, local tradition specifically functions as a primary signifier of masculinity—a dimension not explicitly examined by Siregar (2021).

The second myth, religious masculinity, emerges most strongly in Scene 4 and is the most hegemonic myth in the entire advertisement. From Barthes' (1972) perspective, the most effective myths are those that successfully connect signs to transcendent and morally undeniable values. The placement of a sarong-clad masculine body in a sacred architectural space resembling a mosque is not merely an aesthetic choice, but rather a semiotic

operation that links masculine identity with the spiritual-religious dimension, which in the context of Indonesian Muslim society holds the highest moral authority. Through the mechanism of myth, the sarong is mythologized as a sign of the perfection of Muslim masculine identity: a man is only considered whole and perfect if he is able to combine physical beauty, elegant appearance, and spiritual piety simultaneously. This religious dimension is not represented as a private personal choice, but as a public component of ideal masculinity that must be displayed and recognized socially. If Utari et al. (2024) found a shift in the myth of masculinity towards a more inclusive form in the Kahf advertisement, then the Wadimor advertisement actually constructs a myth that is far more normative and hegemonic in Connell's (1995) sense, because it places the spiritual dimension as the highest hierarchy of masculine identity that is non-negotiable.

The third myth, socio-nationalist masculinity, is formed through Scenes 5 and 6, and serves as a final mythic layer that consolidates the entire narrative of the advertisement. In Scene 5, the sarong gift-giving scene operates the myth in a very subtle way: the producer's commercial interests are hidden behind a cultural narrative of a man's social responsibility and sincerity. Barthes (1972) asserted that myths always function to naturalize certain ideological interests so that they appear as pure and sincere expressions of cultural values. In Scene 6, the slogan "Of course our sarongs" functions as the most explicit verbal sign in operating the myth of masculine nationalism. The pronoun "we" functions as an interpellation mechanism that calls each male viewer to identify himself as part of a national community that defines itself through the choice of local products (Hall, 1997). Thus, choosing Wadimor is no longer read as an individual consumption decision, but rather as a meaningful statement of national identity. This finding deepens the argument of Taqdir et al. (2025) argue that the myth of masculinity is always tied to the dominant ideology of its time, specifically demonstrating how cultural



nationalism functions as an ideological pillar in the construction of contemporary Indonesian masculinity.

Overall, the 2021 edition of the Sarung Wadimor advertisement operates as a layered and coherent myth system. Unlike studies of masculinity in urban men's product advertisements, such as the Kahf advertisement (Utari et al., 2024), MS Glow for Men (Sutarya et al., 2025), and coffee advertisements (Madani & Ambarwati, 2023), which define masculinity within the framework of modernity and contemporary lifestyles, the Wadimor advertisement constructs a myth of masculinity that uniquely integrates three dimensions simultaneously: local tradition, Islamic religiosity, and socio-nationalist responsibility. Through Barthes's myth mechanism, these three dimensions are not presented as ideological constructs to be criticized, but rather naturalized as the essence of authentic Indonesian male identity—an ideological operation that works subtly yet highly effective in shaping consumer perceptions of ideal masculinity. The strength of this research lies in the depth of its three-level analysis, which uncovers the layers of myth hidden behind the advertisement's visual and verbal representations, and in its ability to integrate cultural, religious, and nationalist dimensions within a coherent analytical framework. The limitations of this research lie in the scope of the analysis, which focuses on the advertising text as a semiotic object without empirically examining audience reception, and in the use of a single advertisement as the sole data source.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the 2021 edition of the Sarung Wadimor advertisement forms three myths of masculine identity through a process of naturalization, according to Roland Barthes: masculinity based on local tradition, religious tradition, and socio-nationalist tradition. Local tradition masculinity depicts the ideal man as rooted in culture and tradition. Religious tradition

masculinity emphasizes piety as an essential part of Indonesian Muslim male identity. Socio-nationalist masculinity encourages men to interpret the use of local products as a form of national pride. These three myths are interconnected and form an ideological system, in which tradition, religiosity, and nationalism are considered natural parts of Indonesian masculine identity.

Theoretically, this research has two important implications. First, it expands the study of masculinity in Indonesian advertising, which has been dominated by an urban-modern perspective, by demonstrating that the cultural-religious dimension is an equally powerful and hegemonic axis of masculinity construction in the context of Indonesian Muslim society. Second, this research emphasizes the relevance of Roland Barthes's three-level semiotics as an analytical framework capable of uncovering the deepest layers of ideology in cultural advertising texts, particularly in revealing how commercial interests are naturalized into seemingly sincere and given expressions of cultural values. Practically, these findings can provide critical reflection for consumers and communication researchers in understanding how masculinity ideology operates in Indonesian advertising texts.

This research is limited by its analytical scope, which focuses on advertising texts as semiotic objects without empirically examining audience reception. Further research is recommended using an audience reception approach to understand the extent to which these myths are accepted, negotiated, or rejected by consumers, particularly the younger generation of Indonesian Muslims. A comparative study of sarong advertisements from various local brands also has the potential to produce a more comprehensive map of the construction of masculinity ideology in the traditional Indonesian textile industry.

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