

# How Advertising Enforces Local Cultural Identity Through Fashion in *Timun Mas* TV Ads

Rina Wahyu Winarni

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI, Jakarta, Indonesia  
Email: rinawinarni2019@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

Timun Mas ads are a series of advertising to promote Marjan Syrup product which aired in Indonesia in 2019 during the month of Ramadhan. Broadcasted in national televisions and youtube, the ads were inspired by the folklore of Timun Mas as an artifact of Indonesian culture. Timun Mas ads featured Timun Mas, a young woman with an attractive appearance, as the main character. Though the folklore originated from the Central Java area of Indonesia, the clothing worn by Timun Mas in ads is different from those worn by the typical Javanese women. Thus, it is interesting to analyze the fashion worn by Timun Mas in the Timun Mas ad series of Marjan Syrup through the cultural identity perspective. Using qualitative methodology with a semiotics approach, this research aimed to better understand the local cultural identity the creator of these adverts tried to enforce through the fashion worn by Timun Mas in this ad series. The result shows that the fashion worn by Timun Mas is an ensemble created by mixing different local cultures found in Indonesia. By mixing clothing items from different local cultures and urban apparel, Timun Mas ads tried to enforce not the identity of Central Javanese women but that of nowadays Indonesian women which are depicted as stylish and attractive with a tough persona but gentle.

**Keywords:** Advertising, fashion, folklore, local cultural identity, Timun mas

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a form of non-personal communication that has its influence over the culture in which the ads circulated (Hamelink, 1989). This notion specifies the relationships between communication and cultural development. Therefore, the creative concept behind the ads can be used to further develop the regional culture. The development of regional culture here refers to how cultural identity can be developed and popularized within society. By this assumption, the creative concept behind the ads could create a locking power of a product in the minds of its consumers, and by its extension, creating the image of its consumers.

In principle, advertising tried to communicate a message most effectively to its target audience. Thus, the formula was laid down as  $A = C + C$  which translates into Advertising equals Communication plus Culture. Fritz further argued that advertising works by reflecting a distinct culture to its consumers. Therefore, the product will not be presented as it is. The product must become a part of the cultural narrative within society.

The formula presented above gives a possibility for the creative team to incorporate cultural themes and symbols as a big idea in the creative concept behind the ads. A cultural theme in advertising was usually delivered through the use of symbols in text, image, sound, and music designed by the creative team as a means of persuasion. Visual persuasion in advertising was defined as a “process or an effort to change and modify the promised values that correlate with the factual situation in reality” (Harsanto, 2016, p. 13). The role of image in advertising is to urge the consumer to act, effectively making them buy the product, by targeting the emotional response of its target audience. Persuasion is a process tried to change, modify, or replace the distinct feature, consciously or unconsciously, that stands out from the values, beliefs, and actions within the society. An effective ad will always be persuasive.

One of the cultural symbols that can be incorporated as a big idea in the creative concept as a means to persuade the audience is folklore. According to Barkah (2014), folklore is “the essence of culture preserved by the means of oral tradition” (p. 29). To this day, folklore

is still regarded as a model of humanity and a guide on humane behavior by society. Folklores around the world tend to have a similar structure laden with morals imbued within the story. Thus, by incorporating folklore into the creative concept behind the ads, advertising could become a medium to retell the folklore, instilling the morals and values contained within its target audience.

One of the ads that incorporate cultural themes and symbols through the use of folklore in Indonesia is the ads for Marjan Boudoin syrup through the ad series of Timun Mas, incorporating Timun Mas folklore. Timun Mas ad series aired on Indonesian national televisions and YouTube channels throughout the month of Ramadhan 1440H in 2019. Timun Mas folklore which originated in Central Java told the story about a young girl named Timun Mas which is running from the pursuit of a giant named Buto Ijo. Timun Mas' mother promised Buto Ijo to give her daughter, Timun Mas, when she reached adulthood to be his meal. However, the promise got broken and Timun Mas tried to escape from Buto Ijo. She was able to escape from the pursuit because of the heirloom in the form of *Terasi* (shrimp paste) that turns into living mud when thrown to the ground. This living mud drowned and killed Buto Ijo in the end, freeing Timun Mas from his pursuit. The moral of the story contained in Timun Mas is a lesson to persevere under the rule of evil. The story of Timun Mas was inherited through generations by means of oral tradition and it is not clearly known who invented the story. Thus, the story of Timun Mas developed according to the storyteller's improvisation. Thus, the visual depiction of Timun Mas has also been improvised by the illustrator and designer. These improvisations on the visual of Timun Mas can be seen from many media depicting the story of Timun Mas such as an illustrated book, children's book, animation, short films, soap operas and performance arts.



Figure 1 The many visuals of “Timun Mas” in media.

Figure 1 shows us the many visual depictions of Timun Mas which is done through improvisation by the illustrator and designer. It can be concluded that Timun Mas's clothes have a tendency to use Javanese clothing for women in the form of *Kebaya*. *Kebaya* has become a symbol of the values expected of a Javanese woman that is adaptable, flexible, gentle, patient, and independent in looking after herself. *Kebaya* clothing is not only worn among noble Javanese women, but also among ordinary people. Wearing *Kebaya* with *Jarik* cloth (long undergarment cloth) is a symbol of women's graceful

appearance and personality. The tight fabric of *Jarik* and *Kebaya* will make it difficult for women to move freely so it forces them to move in smooth and gentle gestures. This is the culmination of Javanese philosophy where a woman must be soft in speech and gentle in movement. Thus, by depicting Timun Mas in this outfit, it can be concluded that the figure of Timun Mas represents a Javanese woman who embodies this Javanese philosophy.

However, the clothes worn by Timun Mas in the Marjan syrup ad series differ greatly from the clothing presented in the media as shown in figure 1 which depicts Timun Mas wearing *Kebaya* and *Jarik* cloth. Therefore, this paper will study this visual difference in depicting Timun Mas. This study is done because clothing is one of the nonverbal messages in the form of artefactual communication which tries to convey messages through appearances, fashion, and cosmetics (Rakhmat, 2007). This artefactual communication is closely related to the forming of image and identity through one owns the body. Therefore, since "Clothes deliver messages", nonverbal communication codes in the form of clothing, as well as accessories and settings, can convey messages to the public about one's social class, profession, or educational background. This raised the problem in this paper: what kind of image and cultural identity is conveyed through the visuals of Timun Mas, especially by the difference in her clothing, in the Marjan syrup ad series?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Timun Mas is one of the Indonesian folklores. Folklore and language (Supriyanto, 2019) are aspects of culture that automatically become part of the daily life in their community. One of the best-known forms of storytelling is a myth. Myth has to do with the belief system, something that people believed to exist. Every culture, every community, and every region has its own myth. According to Bascom (in Supriyanto, 2019), myth is a folktale/prose of the people who are considered to actually occur and are considered sacred by the owner of the story. In general, myths tell the story of characters that do not exist in real life, such as gods, saints, and powerful entities. Segal (Supriyanto, 2019) explained that folklorists interpreted myths as stories about the making of the world. However, the story in myths could have a time set in the past, present, or future.

In addition to myths in traditional societies, there are also exist myths of modern societies. In Barthes' perspective, myth is not defined as the object of the message, but from the way the message is delivered or conveyed. In regards to advertising, Nöth explained that advertising works by simplifying the message and that advertising appears as a degenerate form of myth (Nöth, 1995). By this explanation alone, this paper argued that Timun Mas ad series plays a role in defining the cultural

identity of the community. Furthermore, by the explanation provided regarding fashion, it can be seen that fashion in advertising work as a crucial element in forming this new form of myth, which plays a role in forming a modern sense of cultural identity in the community.

### 3. METHODS

This paper focuses the study on how the visual of Timun Mas, especially the fashion system, is built into Marjan syrup ad series and what kind of identity it is trying to convey. To answer this problem, the research uses qualitative methodology by approaching the data through visual analysis as a broader expression of the field of cultural studies and visual culture. Bogdan & Biklen (2007) defined qualitative research as the research procedures that produces descriptive data in the form of speech or writing and the behavior of people who are observed in a particular context which is studied from a holistic and comprehensive perspective (Hamzah, 2019). This study also uses visual analysis with a semiotics approach to understand the signs within the advertising and to better understand the way local identity was enforced within the advertising, especially in Timun Mas ads.

According to Feldman (in Harsanto, 2016), visual analysis can be divided into fundamental stages, namely: a) Description, by parsing out what appears to be quite valuable in a work, with objective judgment, without accompanied by opinions or interpretations; b) Analysis, by supporting a theoretical basis relating to the discussion of problems. In this analysis comes the thought about what is meant or what is behind a work that is motivated by theory; c) Assessment, is an opinion or determination of what values have been seen and what has been described, analysed, and interpreted, and; d) Conclusion, is the final stage that contains information based on facts and reasons for the results of discussing an object of research.

The semiotics approach will be used to help the visual analysis done in analysing the fashion of Timun Mas in Marjan Syrup ad series. Nöth (1995) argued that the semiotic of advertising “offers interdisciplinary perspectives on the study of sign exchange and research in the commodity exchange” (p. 476). Nöth also argues that despite the multiplicity of semiotic means and strategies, advertisements remain a text genre with a rather invariant semantic and pragmatic core. In the semiotics of advertising, communication aspects such as messages are the main element of advertising. Advertising always contains many elements, such as the form of the object (product) that is advertised, the context in the form of environment, people or other creatures that give meaning to objects, as well as the text that reinforces meaning, even though the latter is

not always present in advertisements (Piliang in Christomy, 2010).

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. *Timun Mas’ fashion as a language*

The creative strategy behind the message in advertisement becomes capital for creative people in the field of advertising works to produce messages that attract attention and convince the audience so that it ultimately leads to the intended actions in accordance with the message received. In the creative advertising strategy, after the big idea has been found, it is necessary to think about how it will be applied, so that the contents of the message can be received appropriately by the target audience and are able to achieve the intended communication goals. In this case, the creative concept of choosing Timun Mas folklore as the big idea in the Marjan syrup advertisement is a step taken by the Marjan syrup campaign team through brainstorming involving clients, copywriters, art directors, creative directors, and advertising directors. The strategy behind the costume of the actors, settings, props, lighting and others relating to shooting in the commercial certainly involves many crew members and supporting staffs so that the message can be perceived and received as expected by the client and advertising agency that executes the ad.

Clothing worn by actors or characters in advertisements falls to the creative fashion concept executed by costume designers and directors because the clothes will determine the image of the characters within the commercial. This fashion concept can also be seen as a symbol of identity for the character wearing the costume. In an effort to effectively convey the message to the target audience, it is expected that the characters in the commercial to cause an impression on those who see the ad. Listiani (2016) argued that fashion is an expression of identity because when costume designers and directors choose the ensemble for their actors, they define and describe the image of their characters.

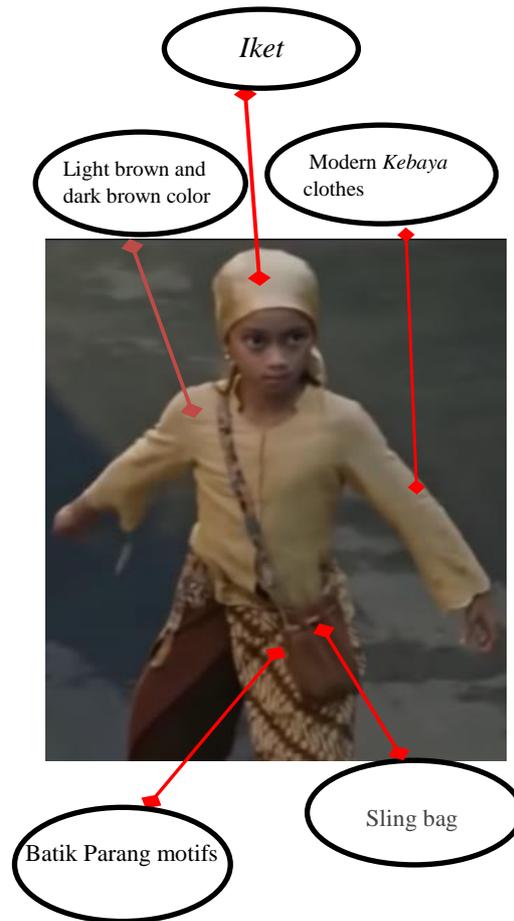
This paper studied fashion as a visual element that appears in Timun Mas ad series by Marjan Syrup by looking at cultural identity built in the commercials aired in 2019. In the description, the fashion chosen by the costume designer and ad director in the Marjan Syrup commercial can be said to depict the character of Timun Mas along with the story played as a plot scripted in the commercial. This brings an interesting point of argument since, according to Listiani (2016), fashion contains "grammatical sense" that is used universally which is the basis for certain clothes in carrying a single message with a certain meaning. Piliang (2003) also argued that fashion is a form of language; a visual language. Harsanto (2016) stated that

“fashion cannot be separated from human figures or characters in advertisements” (p. 75). It symbolizes something for the target audience as human markers which function as a substitute for the marketed product. Therefore, the selection of fashion and characters in advertising plays a big role for the ad creators and the creative team behind the commercials.

According to the interview (9 April 2020) with Haris Budi Pranoto *Creative & Art Director Tim Campangin syrup Marjan BBDO Komunika Jakarta Indonesia*, the reason behind choosing Timun Mas as a big idea in advertising Marjan syrup product is because Timun Mas is a traditional mythical figure who has an unyielding spirit in the struggle to achieve happiness, This reason is also closely linked with modern myths that exist in Indonesian society surrounding the Marjan syrup products in which the product is viewed as a chosen treat to break the fast in the month of Ramadan and in celebrating Eid al-Fitr. The figure of Timun mas who earnestly overcome the obstacles (giants) is used to further enhance the image of Marjan syrup products as a modern myth, "as if" Marjan syrup embodies the unyielding nature of Timun Mas in the form of syrup so that those who drink it will find themselves to be able to overcome the obstacles (demons) that tempted the humans during the fasting month of Ramadan and achieve happiness on Eid al-Fitr.

The many explanations stated above show that the fashion embedded in the Timun Mas character in Marjan Syrup ad series is constructed as a visual language that is deemed as acceptable to the target audience. This implies a strong consensus between the creative team and the director along with the supporting staff in the advertising process about the function of fashion chosen within the commercial. Through the appearance of the characters designed by the creative team, the commercial will provide information to the audience about the image of the character. This means that the audience can find out about the gender, age, social level, or economic level of the said character (Listiani, 2016). By seeing the appearance through the fashion worn, without the help of explanatory narration or dialogue, the characters can provide a lot of information about their stories. Thus, it is interesting to understand the intentions and perceptions behind the motivation to showcase certain clothes and to analyse through visual interpretation on how fashion, especially the one used in Timun Mas ad series, convey messages and build identity.

#### 4.2. Cultural Identity in Timun Mas Fashion in Marjan Syrup Ad Series



**Figure 2** The fashion of Timun Mas in Marjan Syrup TV commercial.

The fashion worn by Timun Mas in Marjan syrup commercial as seen in figure 2 can be regarded as an attempt to characterize Timun Mas's image performed by the costume designers and ad directors based on story lines and story boards created by copywriters and art directors as well as directives from creative directors. The focus of the study is to find out the cultural identity in the fashion of Timun Mas formed in the Marjan syrup commercial.

There are five types of visual elements that exist in the fashion worn by the actor playing as Timun Mas in Marjan syrup commercial. These five elements will be broken down to understand the significance of their role in determining the image built into Timun Mas' fashion as follows:

### 1. *Iket*

*Iket* originated in the West Java region which spread across the entire Java island and Bali island. *Iket* contains the symbolic meaning of etiquette for Javanese people which symbolizes that humans need to think fast, are not easily swayed, and do things with careful consideration. *Iket* implies that humans must have steadfast principles in living their life so that they will live in determination (Saputri, 2012)

### 2. Modern *Kebaya* Cloth

*Kebaya* Is traditional clothing for the Javanese female. However, the modern version depicted in this commercial is a variation of *Kebaya Encim*, the variation of *Kebaya* cloth originated from Jakarta. This is because one of the traits of this *Kebaya Encim* is that it is extremely flexible and can be combined more freely in accordance with the needs of the wearer. The arms and collars have experienced a lot of innovation to allow it to be used in both formal and casual situations and can be tailored to the needs of its users.

### 3. Batik Parang Motifs

As mentioned before, the Batik Parang motif is one of the many traditional Batik motifs found in Indonesia. The motif originated from the Keraton Mataram Kartasura era located in present-day Solo in Central Java. The symbolic language contained in the Batik Parang motif is a message that humans should never give up in navigating life and live just as the waves braving the ocean, always moving without ever getting tired.

### 4. The brown color combination

Brown is a color that is easily found in nature. Many Javanese traditional clothes use brown as a color since it is easily obtained from tree barks. Brown symbolizes friendship, peace, hard work, and sacrifice. In this context, the sacrifice is one that is made to maintain relationships and be done with mutual respect.

### 5. Sling bag

Sling bags are used with the straps crossed from the left shoulder to the right hip (or vice versa). This bag is influenced by Western influence, especially modern casual fashion wear for the youth.

Based on the five elements found in the fashion worn by Timun Mas in Marjan syrup commercial, there are several differences shown in the visualization of Timun Mas in this commercial compared to the clothes found in other media such as animation, illustrated books, and short films. Timun Mas is depicted wearing *kebaya* cloth, specifically the *Kebaya Kutubaru* variant which originated from Central Java. Meanwhile, the commercial one is depicted wearing *Kebaya Encim* from Jakarta. Furthermore, In the other media, Timun Mas is depicted wearing *Jarik* cloth with various motifs while the one in Marjan syrup commercial wears dark

brown trousers laid by Batik cloth in Batik Parang motifs. There is also a Western element present in Timun Mas' fashion in Marjan syrup commercial which is not found in any other media in the form of a sling bag.

Timun Mas character is primarily depicted as a young woman wearing *Kebaya* clothes. Therefore, *Kebaya* becomes the defining identity in the fashion of Timun Mas. The existence of *Kebaya* in Indonesia (Fitria & Wahyuningsih, 2019) in a traditional sense of Javanese community, has more meaning and function than just merely a type of clothing. Its simple form can be said as a form of the simplicity of the community. It is also a form of obedience, subtlety, and women's behavior in Javanese society which puts an emphasis on the gentle nature of Javanese women. Thus, although Timun Mas is similarly depicted wearing *Kebaya* clothes both in the Marjan syrup commercial and the media presented in table 1, the differences exist which changed the image of Timun Mas greatly in Marjan Syrup commercial depiction. This is because *Kebaya Encim* worn by Timun Mas in Marjan syrup commercial has an image of flexibility and adaptable which contradicts the traditional values found in Javanese women. Therefore, this commercial tried to bring a more modern image of women by depicting Timun Mas in such fashion.

Modern cultural identity that adheres to local wisdom is built in the fashion of Timun Mas in Marjan syrup commercial. This modern cultural identity is achieved through the fashion worn by Timun Mas in Marjan syrup commercial by mixing different local cultures found in Indonesia, such as *Iket* which was originated from West Java, *Kebaya Encim* which was originated from Jakarta, Batik Parang which was originated from Central Java, and modern urban apparel influenced by Western casual fashion in the form of a brown sling bag. The fashion which consists of different elements combined tried to bring the image of traditional Timun Mas into a more modern image of Indonesian women. This ensemble of elements thus formed a distinct image of Timun Mas presented in Marjan syrup commercial: a brave fashionable young girl which is adaptable and flexible while still adhering to the local wisdom where women should be gentle in nature.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The story of Timun Mas as a folklore has a certain function for the community and is able to become an identity in that society. This was used intelligently by the Marjan syrup creative team who took advantage of the myth of Timun Mas as a traditional myth and bring the story into the modern realm as a modern myth as a form of persuasion in Marjan syrup commercial. The use of fashion worn by Timun Mas in the Marjan syrup

commercial was done carefully by costume designers and directors who handled the execution of Marjan syrup advertisements. The fashion is constructed as modern cultural identities through embedding an ensemble of elements in Timun Mas character. By mixing clothing items from different local cultures and urban apparel influenced by Western casual fashion, Timun Mas ads tried to enforce not the identity of Central Javanese women but that of nowadays Indonesian women which is depicted as stylish and attractive with a tough persona but gentle in nature.

As a significant element in the whole creative concept of advertising, the fashion worn by Timun Mas has clear significance in building the image of Timun Mas character in Marjan syrup commercial. The use of traditional Indonesian culture such as folklore as a big idea in an advertising campaign can be an impactful choice if it was actualized cleverly by producers in advertising their products. This is evidenced by the Timun Mas version of Marjan syrup commercial that has been able to provide stopping power to the audience towards the existence of Marjan syrup as a product amidst the never-ending campaign of other product's advertisements.

## REFERENCES

- Barkah, L. (2014) Analisis motifeme pola cerita irui-kon dalam cerita rakyat Jepang [Analysis of motifeme irui-kon story patterns in Japanese folklore]. *Japanology*, 2(1).
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Research for education: An introduction to theories and methods (5th ed.)*. Boston: Pearson.
- Christomy.T. Yuwono U, (2010) *Semiotika budaya, pusat penelitian kemasyarakatan dan budaya [Cultural semiotics, community and cultural research center]*. Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya Universitas Indonesia, Depok [Faculty of Cultural Sciences University of Indonesia, Depok].
- Fitria, F., & Wahyuningsih, N. (2019). Kebaya kontemporer sebagai pengikat antara tradisi dan gaya hidup masa kini. *ATRAT: Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 7(2), 128-138.
- Hamelink, C. (1989). The Relationship Between Culture Identity and Modes of Communication. *Journal Annal of the International Communication Association*, 12(1), 417-426. DOI 10.1080/23808985.1989.11678729, ISSN 2380-8985
- Hamzah, A, (2019). *Metode penelitian kualitatif literasi [Qualitative research methods in literacy]*. Malang: Nusantara.
- Harsanto, P. W, (2016). *Retorika visual fotografis dalam iklan koran [Photographic visual rhetoric in newspaper ads]*. Yogyakarta: PT. Kanisius.
- Listiani, W. (2016). *Genesitas desain visual: Sintesa struktur, dinamika tanda dan kode film [Visual design genesity: Synesc structure, sign dynamics and film code]*. Bandung: Sunan Ambu Press.
- Nöth, W. (1995). *Handbook of semiotics*. Indiana United States of America: University Press.
- Piliang, Y. A. (2003) *Hipersemiotika, tafsir cultural studies atas matinya makna [Hypersemiotics, cultural studies interpretation of the death of meaning]*. Yogyakarta: Jalasutra.
- Rakhmat, J. (2007). *Psikologi komunikasi (Edisi revisi) [Communication psychology (Revised edition)]*. Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Supriyanto, H. (2019). *Panji pahlawan nusantara [The banner of the hero of the archipelago]*. Komunitas Seni, Jawa Timur [Art Community, East Java].