

## Cultural Semiotics and Visual Mythmaking: The Role of Javanese Symbols in Modern Media Narratives

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### Abstract

*This study explores the semiotic representation of Javanese myth in the Marjan 3-Episode advertisement series, which centers on the figure of Dewi Sri, the Javanese goddess of rice and fertility. Using Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics, the research analyzes selected scenes to uncover how visual signs operate on denotative, connotative, and mythological levels. The findings reveal that Dewi Sri is represented not only through traditional symbols such as rice fields, green costumes, and natural settings but also recontextualized within a modern cinematic advertisement format. This reflects a fusion between cultural heritage and contemporary marketing strategies. The advertisement transforms myth into a media narrative, presenting it as both spiritual and commercial symbolism during the Ramadan season. The study concludes that myth can still function ideologically in modern media, shaping consumer perception through layered meanings. This research contributes to the broader discussion on cultural identity in advertising and the role of semiotics in interpreting localized narratives in digital media.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of new media, advertising is no longer merely a commercial instrument intended to sell products; it has evolved into a narrative medium that represents values, identities, and culture. The advancement of digital technology and the shift in media consumption patterns have encouraged the emergence of advertisements with high cinematic quality and complex storytelling. One such example is the Marjan 3-Episode advertisement series featuring Dewi Sri, a mythological figure from Javanese culture, as the central element of its narrative.

This advertisement is not only a promotional visual but also a cultural artifact that showcases symbols, values, and myths deeply rooted in Javanese society. In cultural studies, mass media such as advertisements serve as spaces for producing social meaning, where ideological messages, collective identities, and historical narratives are reproduced through various forms of signs (Siregar, 2023). Therefore, analyzing such an advertisement also involves re-reading how culture is constructed, negotiated, and represented in contemporary contexts.

Dewi Sri, the central figure in this advertisement, is recognized in Javanese mythology as the goddess of fertility and guardian of rice. Her presence in agrarian community rituals such as sedekah bumi and wiwitan reflects the essential role of myth in binding the relationship between humans, nature, and spirituality (Sutrisno & Wahyudi, 2020). Within

the context of the Marjan advertisement, Dewi Sri is portrayed not only as a symbol of the past but also as a modernized cultural icon through sophisticated cinematography and storytelling resembling a superhero film.

The visual approach in this advertisement is highly impactful. The narrative is developed through dramatic plotlines, heroic characterizations, and grand visual effects. Costume design, color choices, cinematography, and musical scores all contribute to conveying emotional and symbolic messages. For instance, the use of gold and green is not merely aesthetic, but symbolizes wealth, prosperity, and life (Mulyani, 2021). This aesthetic is in line with the notion that cultural representation in media is never neutral, but inherently carries ideological interests (Primadi, 2022).

Interestingly, Marjan has consistently featured folklore in its Ramadan advertisements over recent years. Characters such as Timun Mas, Buto Ijo, Purbasari, and Singa Barong have been presented in a three-episode epic format. This pattern indicates that the company is not merely selling a product, but also constructing brand storytelling grounded in locality and the cultural wisdom of the archipelago. It becomes a powerful branding strategy amid the dominance of global narratives that often overlook local contexts (Hartanto, 2023).

In this regard, the Marjan advertisement functions not only as a marketing tool but also as a medium for cultural preservation. When local myths are elevated to modern mass media platforms such as television and YouTube, they are not merely reproduced but transformed. This transformation is crucial to examine as it illustrates how traditional meanings are renegotiated within the frameworks of capitalism and modern markets (Sari & Wibowo, 2021).

Moreover, the selection of YouTube as the primary distribution channel allows for the presentation of longer and more nuanced storytelling compared to conventional 30-second television ads. The platform provides creative space for advertisers to deliver layered narratives and foster emotional resonance with increasingly selective digital audiences. This aligns with current media consumption trends, where audiences prefer content that integrates entertainment, culture, and identity (Yulianto, 2022).

From an analytical perspective, this advertisement is highly compelling to examine using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, particularly because it operates on multiple levels of meaning—denotative (what is seen), connotative (cultural meaning), and mythological (ideological construction). Barthes argues that myth in modern society functions as a communication system that conceals ideology beneath everyday appearances (Barthes in Pilliang, 2019). In the context of the Marjan advertisement, the Dewi Sri myth is not only present as a cultural symbol but is reinterpreted as a personification of modern values such as strength, grace, and spirituality, all of which are associated with the product image.

Through this semiotic approach, it becomes possible to dissect how advertisements shape social and cultural realities through visual signs. Each element—costume, gesture, music, lighting, and dialogue—functions as part of a sign system that constructs the overall meaning. This approach enables us to understand how advertisements influence public perceptions of their own culture within the commercial framework (Siregar, 2023; Primadi, 2022).

Based on this context, the present study aims to analyze the representation of Javanese myth in the Marjan 3-Episode advertisement featuring Dewi Sri, through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. This study is not only important for understanding the dynamics of cultural representation in media, but also for examining how local wisdom is mobilized in strategic communication and creative industry practices.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a semiotic analysis design. The qualitative approach is appropriate given the objective of this research, which is to explore the meaning of Javanese myth representation in the Marjan 3-Episode advertisement featuring Dewi Sri. Qualitative research allows the researcher to interpret symbolic and cultural meanings embedded in a media text by considering the social and cultural contexts in which it is situated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this regard, the advertisement is viewed not merely as a promotional tool but as a cultural artifact that conveys values, myths, and ideological messages (Hall, 1997).

The unit of analysis in this study is the Marjan Ramadan advertisement series, consisting of three interconnected episodes that center on Dewi Sri as the main character. The selection of this unit of analysis is based on the consideration that the advertisement both explicitly and implicitly presents Javanese cultural elements, such as traditional rituals, rice field imagery, and mythological figures recontextualized within a modern visual framework. This advertisement is rich in visual signs that are highly relevant for in-depth semiotic interpretation.

The analysis applies Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, which distinguishes between two levels of meaning—denotation and connotation—while also introducing the concept of myth as a form of ideological communication (Barthes, 2019). Barthes views myth as a cultural mechanism that transforms connotative meaning into something perceived as natural and self-evident. In this context, the Javanese myth of fertility represented by Dewi Sri functions not only as a traditional narrative but also as a visual myth that conveys modern ideological values such as serenity, abundance, and spiritual fulfillment during Ramadan.

Technically, this study uses visual analysis methods developed by Rose (2022), focusing on how visual elements in the advertisement are constructed and arranged to produce specific meanings. This approach emphasizes the significance of visual structures such as framing, lighting, color composition, and cultural symbolism. Additionally, a multimodal approach as developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) is employed to interpret visual layout as a kind of grammar that simultaneously communicates social and cultural messages.

The analysis process begins with repeated viewings of the advertisement to identify key visual signs. These signs are then classified into two levels of meaning: denotative meaning, referring to literal representation, and connotative meaning, referring to the cultural or ideological values embedded within those signs. At this stage, it is essential to recognize how the representation of characters and cultural symbols in the advertisement helps construct a modern myth of Javanese identity that aligns with religious values and contemporary market logic (Sobur, 2019).

To ensure analytical validity, the study incorporates triangulation of theoretical references and consultation with experts in semiotics and cultural studies. These discussions help refine interpretations of the signs and reduce potential biases during the analytical process (Berger, 2019). Cultural sensitivity is also emphasized as a key principle, particularly in analyzing advertisements that incorporate elements of local tradition.

Through this approach, the study aims to reveal how a modern advertisement can reconstruct traditional myths into a narrative of religious consumption within the realm of popular culture. By closely examining the visual signs and the underlying ideology, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on visual communication and cultural representation in media.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION


This study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to examine a series of scenes featured in the Marjan 3-Episode advertisement. The selection of scenes is based on their relevance to the research objective, namely identifying how Javanese myth is represented through the visual and narrative elements of the advertisement. A scene is defined as a setting or location where an event within a narrative takes place (Latief, 2021). Through an in-depth analysis of these scenes, the study identifies visual signs that symbolically represent Javanese mythology within the context of visual communication.

The following section presents the findings from the semiotic analysis of the Marjan 3-Episode advertisement series featuring Dewi Sri.

### 3.1. Results


The data below presents the analysis results of Marjan Advertisement – Episode 1:

**Table 1 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 1 at 00:01**

Scene	Image	
1	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 1 – <i>Marjan, Bangkitkan Harapan</i> (Marjan, Awakening Hope) Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Mountain	Shaped like a <i>wayang</i> (Javanese puppet) backdrop	The beginning of a story to be told
Village	Houses between rice fields, lake, and forest	Reflection of a traditional community with an economy based on raw materials
Houses and rice granary	Several houses and a large granary building	Community life exists; the granary stores harvest produce
Colorful flags	Many flags in various colors between the houses	Indicates a lively community event or celebration
<b>Myth :</b> The scene depicts a village behind the mountains, with houses and a granary, and many colorful flags. This suggests a vibrant rural community preparing for a festive event—marking the beginning of the story.		

**Table 2 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 1 at 00:09**

Scene	Image
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2			Marjan Ad Episode 1 – <i>Marjan, Bangkitkan Harapan</i> (Marjan, Awakening Hope Source: YouTube
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation	
A figure above the house	Dewi Sri flying over rooftops	Dewi Sri possesses supernatural powers, aiding villagers	
Rope and flags	Held by Dewi Sri while hovering above	She assists in event preparations by magically stringing decorations between houses	
<b>Myth :</b> Dewi Sri is depicted as a divine feminine figure legitimized by her supernatural abilities.			

**Table 3 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 1 at 00:14**


Table 3 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 1 at 00:11		
Scene	Image	
3		
	Marjan Ad Episode 1 – <i>Marjan, Bangkitkan Harapan</i> (Marjan, Awakening Hope Source: YouTube	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Villagers and dried rice	Smiling villagers hanging dried rice stalks	Signifies happiness and agricultural abundance
<b>Myth :</b> Dewi Sri is symbolically linked to rice and agricultural protection, reinforcing her identity as the rice goddess.		

**Table 4 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 1 at 00:26**

Scene	Image
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4	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 1 – <i>Marjan, Bangkitkan Harapan</i> (Marjan, Awakening Hope) Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Children	Children happily lifted by Dewi Sri	Symbol of joy and harmony; maternal energy from Dewi Sri
<b>Myth :</b> Dewi Sri embodies maternal femininity, evoking the figure of a nurturing mother.		

**Table 5 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 1 at 00:47**

Scene	Image	
5	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 1 – <i>Marjan, Bangkitkan Harapan</i> (Marjan, Awakening Hope) Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Holding up hut roof	Dewi Sri holding up a collapsing hut roof	She protects villagers from falling debris
Villagers running	Villagers running to the back	Represents fear and urgency to seek protection from threat ahead
<b>Myth :</b> Dewi Sri is believed to be a protective goddess for the community.		

**Table 6 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 1 at 00:52**

Scene	Image
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6	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 1 – <i>Marjan, Bangkitkan Harapan</i> (Marjan, Awakening Hope) Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Vehicle	Brown car and skull resembling a cow's head	Brown symbolizes earth; the skull implies loss or danger
Bird masks	Kala Wereng troops wearing bird masks	Represents pests harmful to rice; birds are common rice field pests
Adult male	Kala Wereng holding a weapon	Threatening the village; signifies real agricultural dangers
Weapon	Three-pronged circular weapon	Designed like insect legs used to destroy crops
<b>Myth</b> : Kala Wereng and bird-masked troops are symbolic representations of agricultural pests threatening harvests.		

Table 7 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 1 at 01:00

Scene	Image	
7	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 1 – <i>Marjan, Bangkitkan Harapan</i> (Marjan, Awakening Hope) Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Villagers' gaze	All villagers looking at Dewi Sri	The people of the "Magical Valley" place hope in Dewi Sri to protect them from threats
<b>Myth</b> : Dewi Sri is revered as the rice goddess believed to safeguard the fields.		

The data below presents the analysis results of Marjan Advertisement – Episode 2:

**Table 8 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 2 at 00:06**

Scene	Image	
1,2 & 3	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 2 – <i>Marjan, Berbuka Penuh Harapan</i> ("Marjan, Break the Fast with Full Hope") Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Bird-human figure	Humans wearing bird costumes and masks as Kala Wereng's troops	These three bird figures represent pests that damage farmers' rice harvests
<b>Myth :</b> The myth in this scene is that birds are considered rice pests because they steal and eat grains in the fields. Common rice-eating birds include sparrows, starlings, and munias.		

**Table 9 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 2 at 00:19 and 00:24**

Scene	Image
4& 5	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 2 – <i>Marjan, Berbuka Penuh Harapan</i> ("Marjan, Break the Fast with Full Hope") Source: YouTube</p>



Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Scarecrow	A scarecrow accompanied by glowing yellow and orange lights	Confuses Kala Wereng's bird troops; empowered by Dewi Sri's magic, the scarecrow appears to come alive
<b>Myth</b> : The myth in this scene is that scarecrows are used to frighten birds or other pests from damaging crops. Dewi Sri's power as the rice goddess includes protecting the harvest from threats.		

**Table 10 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 2 at 00:47**

Scene	Image	
6	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 2 – <i>Marjan, Berbuka Penuh Harapan</i> ("Marjan, Break the Fast with Full Hope") Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Caping	Dewi Sri holds a <i>caping</i> (traditional hat) in a glowing cave with rice and <i>wayang</i> motifs	Dewi Sri's <i>caping</i> is full of hope and symbolizes her role in protecting the harvest
<b>Myth</b> : The <i>caping</i> is part of Javanese culture and resembles a miniature mountain. It symbolizes life that exists beneath it, with its pointed tip representing cosmic or spiritual orientation.		

The data below presents the analysis results of Marjan Advertisement – Episode 3:

**Table 11 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 3 at 00:15, 00:16, and 00:35**

Scene	Image
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1,2, dan 3	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 3 – <i>Marjan, Rayakan Kemenangan</i> ("Marjan, Celebrate the winning") Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Weapons	Dewi Sri's weapons transform from a <i>caping</i> , staff, and fan	<i>Caping</i> for long-range attack, staff for close-range, and fan to summon wind for defense
<b>Myth</b> : All of Dewi Sri's attributes are gold-colored, symbolizing purity, divinity, and power in Javanese mythology.		

Table 12 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 3 at 00:25

Scene	Image	
4	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 3 – <i>Marjan, Rayakan Kemenangan</i> ("Marjan, Celebrate the winning") Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Aircraft	A brown aircraft with four legs and wings	A menacing machine resembling a brown planthopper (pest) capable of destroying rice crops
<b>Myth</b> : The brown planthopper ( <i>Nilaparvata lugens</i> ) is one of the most dangerous and damaging rice pests.		

Table 13 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 3 at 00:58


Scene	Image	
5	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 3 – <i>Marjan, Rayakan Kemenangan</i> ("Marjan, Celebrate the winning") Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Wind attack	A gust of wind generated by Dewi Sri's sacred weapon	Used to repel <i>wereng</i> pests in aircraft form, symbolizing the use of natural power
<b>Myth</b> : Tiny insects such as planthoppers are influenced by wind currents and can be carried far by the wind—symbolizing the ecological role of nature in pest control.		

Table 14 Scene from Marjan Advertisement Episode 3 at 01:04

Scene	Image	
6	 <p>Marjan Ad Episode 3 – <i>Marjan, Rayakan Kemenangan</i> ("Marjan, Celebrate the winning") Source: YouTube</p>	
Symbol	Denotation	Connotation
Villagers of the Magical Valley	Villagers rejoice as Dewi Sri stands above the rice granary	Symbolizes hope and happiness, as Dewi Sri defeats Kala Wereng's troops threatening the harvest
<b>Myth</b> : The villagers' joyful smiles express the myth that Dewi Sri brings blessings, protection, and renewed hope to the agrarian community.		

### 3.2. Discussion

In accordance with the title of this study, the focus of the analysis is directed toward Roland Barthes' semiotic reading of the moral messages embedded in the Marjan three-episode advertisement series featuring Dewi Sri, which was broadcast through the YouTube platform. Although the advertisement was also aired on conventional media such as television, the researcher chose digital media—specifically YouTube—

as the object of analysis. As part of new media, YouTube, being an internet-based communication platform, offers broader reach and dissemination power, making it a strategic medium for delivering messages through advertising (Ilham, 2023).

The Marjan syrup advertisement can be categorized as a socio-commercial advertisement. On one hand, it serves a commercial purpose—promoting Marjan syrup as a product. On the other hand, it carries a social value in the form of concern for preserving Indonesian folklore. In this case, the advertisement revives the story of Dewi Sri, a character from Javanese mythology, which is increasingly forgotten, particularly by younger generations. This effort reflects how the company combines marketing strategies with local cultural values.

Barthes' semiotic theory is employed to identify and interpret the signs that appear in the advertisement at three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal or explicit meaning of signs, while connotation relates to meanings constructed through cultural and emotional associations. At the mythological level, signs represent ideological or cultural narratives. Barthes (Sari & Wibowo, 2021) emphasized that myth is not merely a concept, but a form of discourse that articulates a collective worldview about reality.

All three episodes of the Marjan advertisement are analyzed to uncover the representation of Javanese mythology, particularly the character of Dewi Sri. Traditionally known as the rice goddess and guardian of agriculture, Dewi Sri is portrayed as a local hero figure with strong symbolic and visual presence. In the first episode, titled Marjan, Bangkitkan Harapan ("Marjan, Awaken Hope"), Javanese myth is represented through the use of visual elements such as wayang mountains and rice barns, which symbolically anchor the narrative in Javanese agrarian culture.

Furthermore, the character of Dewi Sri is depicted with feminine and maternal characteristics. She is shown flying, interacting with children, and protecting the villagers from threats. These scenes suggest that Dewi Sri is not only the protector of harvests but also the guardian of social harmony within the village. This representation is consistent with Javanese mythology, which positions Dewi Sri as a central figure in agrarian life.

In the semiotic analysis, Dewi Sri's power is visualized through heirloom-like objects such as a traditional farmer's conical hat (caping) and a staff made from rice plants—strengthening the association between her character and the agricultural world. Another scene portrays Dewi Sri summoning scarecrows to repel birds disturbing the harvest and using a magical fan to defeat anthropomorphic pest enemies.

The antagonists presented in the advertisement are also closely related to the agricultural context. These include pests depicted as human-bird hybrids and insect-shaped aircraft, with Kala Wereng as the enemy leader—a metaphor for real threats within the farming ecosystem. Thus, the advertisement's narrative not only conveys moral and cultural messages but also constructs a symbolic conflict between good (Dewi Sri) and environmental destruction (pests).

Dewi Sri's powers in the advertisement are also associated with natural elements such as wind. Her magical fan, which blows strong gusts of wind to repel flying enemies, represents nature's strength in harmony with farmers' lives. The choice of wind as a symbolic element holds ecological meaning, as wind naturally affects insect movement, making it an effective metaphor for resistance against agricultural pests.

The overall narrative of the Marjan advertisement across all three episodes demonstrates a visual and symbolic strategy that revives the myth of Dewi Sri in a contemporary context. The advertisement utilizes a semiotic approach to construct a

complex cultural representation, in which local mythology is elevated as a heroic narrative and packaged through visual aesthetics resembling popular films, such as those from the Marvel universe. This strategy not only strengthens the cultural message but also positions local myth as a relevant medium for conveying moral values while simultaneously promoting a product.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the representation of Javanese myth in the Marjan 3-Episode advertisement series featuring Dewi Sri, using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Based on the conducted analysis, it was found that the advertisement constructs a narrative that functions not only as a marketing strategy but also as a medium for preserving and transforming local culture within the context of modern digital media.

The visual signs presented in each scene—through characters, color symbolism, props, and storyline—carry strong denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. Dewi Sri is represented as a guardian figure, a symbol of fertility, and a protector of communal harmony, in alignment with the myth that lives within Javanese agrarian traditions. The myth is cinematically packaged across three Ramadan-themed episodes, illustrating how the Marjan brand seeks to build emotional and cultural connections with the audience through a deep visual storytelling approach.

The analysis demonstrates coherence between the research objectives stated in the introduction and the analytical findings presented in the discussion. The representation of Dewi Sri's myth is successfully articulated through multilayered visual signs, and its interpretation reveals the ideological dimension embedded in contemporary advertising media.

The findings of this study open up broad prospects for further research, particularly in the development of visual communication studies grounded in local wisdom. Future studies may explore audience reception of cultural representations in advertisements or compare models of myth representation across various media and platforms. These insights can also be applied in strategic marketing communication practices to strengthen cultural identity within the branding of local products competing in global markets.

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