

Babystagram Phenomenon Among Indonesia Celebrities Instagram Accounts: Semiotic Analysis on Photographs at Babystagram Account

Lidya Novitasari Saragi Turnip¹, Roro Retno Wulan², Ruth Mei Ulina Malau³

*Prodi Ilmu Komunikasi, Fakultas Komunikasi dan Bisnis, Universitas Telkom,
Jl. Telekomunikasi no. 1, Terusan Buah Batu, Bandung*

¹halolidya@gmail.com, ²rorowoelan28@gmail.com, ³ruthmeimalau@gmail.com

Abstract

Instagram is one of social media that has been widely used by society nowadays. Instagram brings back the use of the hashtag written in the caption form. The purpose of this study is the increasing posts of children's photos on Instagram that using a lot of babystagram hashtag #babystagram and this phenomenon called babystagram. This phenomena followed by the case of profiteering of children photos from some celebrities of Indonesia, those are uploaded on their babystagram account. This research is focused on finding the meaning in the posts of children photos on babystagram account. The purpose of this research is to know the meaning of the photo on the account babystagram that being posted and to know whether uploading children photos in Instagram can be one of the causes of child exploitation indication. The analysis method for the data research is using qualitative descriptive. The data are analyzed by Semiotic method of Roland Barthes. The conclusion showed the meaning of denotation from photos on babystagram account is for many purposes like pleasure, entertainment shows compassion, and the form of pride. Whereas the meaning of the connotation is for showing off, a popularity, satisfy self-obsession, for economic interests such as get many endorsement, advertising offers, movies, brand ambassador, model, and result with the main goal is for economic interests or money. The myth from the research showed a luxurious lifestyle that culminated in the formation of the ideology; narcissism, hedonism, consumerism that caused the emergence of commodification content in photos on babystagram account. From the entire meaning is an indication of child exploitation can be truly occur on the posts of the celebrity children photos on Instagram.

Keywords: Babystagram, semiotics, Instagram, photograph, child-exploitation

1. Introduction

The world is now on the phase of technology, supported by fast developing internet. The internet stands as a network that links every computer in the world, and forms a virtual community known as "global village". Worldwide development of the internet has created a new media called the social media. According to Van Dijk in Nasrullah (2015:11), social media is a media platform focuses on users existence and facilitates them in activities or collaborations.

Therefore, social media can be seen as an online medium (facilitator) which strengthen the

relations between users, and also forms a social bonding. In this research, writers took a study on one of social media which is used worldwide, called Instagram. Instagram was created by Kevin Systrom (23 yeras old), a student of Satvford University, USA, together with a programmer named Mike Krienger. Instagram derives from the term "instant" and "telegram". It means that Instagram can be an application to send, upload, or share pictures in a fast and easy way. On its web page, Instagram defines itself as: "is a free and simple way to share your life and keep up with other people – Take a picture or video, then customized it with filters and creative tools. Post it

on Instagram and share instantly on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and more – or send it directly as a private message. Find people to follow based on things you're into, and be part of an inspirational community.”(<http://www.instagram.com/faq/> accessed on 15 Oktober 2015 at 12.00 pm WIB).

From the description, it can be assumed that Instagram is a media that works in visual field, which makes it possible for users to edit photos or videos the way they want them, and then share them to others. Instagram is also connected to other social medias such as facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.

Instagram has been advanced and now there is a trend called “Babystagram”. Babystagram was initially only a hashtag (#) used by Instagram users when uploading photos or videos of babies and kids. The hashtag then became more popular so that now it is not only a hashtag, but then it is used to refer to phenomenon of Instagram accounts which mostly display photos and videos of babies in various poses, actions, and cute outfits. There are two categories of Babystagram; the account which belongs to the kids’ parents, and accounts with the kids’ real names (we can assume that the parents are behind these accounts, as well). The fast growing phenomenon of babystagram has made the hashtag #babystagram became widely used, as per 16 October 2013 at 16.11 WIB, there were already 89.163 posts using #babystagram. This implied that there were 89.613 posts on babies on Instagram.

Photograph is a part of a sign, a sign that has meanings to people who see it, including photos and videos uploaded on Babystagram accounts. In communication study, signs are described in details in semiotic section. Signs are part of Semiotica, Sobur (2009:15) explains that semiotic is a study or analysis method to examine signs. Littlejohn in Sobur also explains that signs are the basis of all communication.

With the trend of Babystagram phenomenon, as there were also violations in Instagram using, it is important to understand semiotics or signs on babystagram photos. This can show the motive of account’s existence. Whether it is made to support the existence of public figure parents which in the end it usually leads to economical reasons such as endorsement (body

promo) or to fulfill parents’ joyfulness or narcissistic ego, and how semiotics or signs formed by society’s opinion towards babystagram trend. People have different perceptions about a phenomenon or an event; especially if it happens on a media. Social media which is regarded as a new kind of media may be considered to have two sides of a coin, given that all of its meanings and intentions can not be defined clearly by only one meaning.

This research focused on: 1. What meaning that the babystagram photo has? 2. Does the babystagram phenomenon have impacts on the indication of child exploitation?

2. Method

Paradigm used in this research is critical paradigm. This paradigm stressed on power constellation happening in production process and reproduction of meaning. This perspective sees the society as one class system. They are seen as domination system, and media is one part of the domination systems (Ardianto & Bambang, 2014: 175). Writers used this paradigm to find the meaning behind studied object and how celebrities as part of upper class society dominate with help of the media.

Descriptive qualitative method is used in this research. Descriptive qualitative method according to Patton (in Ahmad, 2014:5-6) is a method used to understand natural phenomenon in natural conditions. According to Purwanto, descriptive qualitative method is a research method which tries to reveal the facts of an event, object, activity, process, and human “as the way it is” in present time or in a time frame that is still possible in respondent’s memory. There are no treatments or manipulations towards the research objects, as in experiment method (Prastowo, 2011: 203). Descriptive Qualitative method then can be concluded as a method aims to depict or describe situation systematically by facts, with precise interpretations and connected datas and not only in search for the absolut truth but actually to find observative comprehension. The objects of the research were photos uploaded on babystagram Instagram account. Writers took five babystagram accounts and two photos of each account as objects of research. In this research, analysis unit used are photos and captions of babystagram accounts which will be revealed through connotation, first stage in imitation effect, attitude or pose, and

object, while the second stage was photogenia, aesthetisme, and syntaxis (Barthes, 2019:7-11).

Research data which gained directly by writers were photos of babystagram accounts on Instagram which are public and open. While secondary data were compiled by collecting information from related or relevant datas from books, online articles, journals, writings, and interview with many persons as effective supporters of this research. Data validation technique which will be used is data resource triangulation as explained by Moleong (2013:330), data resource triangulation is to dig the truth of certain information through various methods and data resources.

3. Result

Photo uploading on the Instagram is no longer an action for entertainment or just for fun like its initial denotative meaning, but more likely to be created to become a tool that get into commodification. Due to narcissistic ideology followed by hedonism and consumerism embedded in celebrities as explained in lifestyle *myth* in myth conclusion, then commodification is extremely possible. To create exclusive image and to fulfill desire of fancy lifestyle, it is possible for celebrities to do anything.

Commodification refers to process of functional value transformation into exchange value. In this research, commodifications used by writers are substance commodification or content. According to Mosco (2009:145-161), substance commodification happens through media content transformation into marketable products. This is related to how all contents uploaded on the babystagram account; photos, captions, comments and likes, are turned into economically valuable tools. Functional value of photo which initially was meant for fun and entertainment only, then commodified into exchange value to produce values of economical interests. The photos on the babystagram account change. These photos become commercial tools for products they use.

Testimony which is one of the commercial tools then used as caption to draw consumer's interests to buy those promoted products. On the babystagram account, celebrities' kids are used as a tool to perform commodification. They have to pose wearing a product which content then commodified. This could be an indication of child's exploitation, when kids are used to produce something related to economical interest.

The process of komodifikasi started when the user of the media, including social media, change the message through technology towards meaningful interpretation system, to become a

message which has the purpose to influence the society, especially people who have instagram accounts and follow that babystagram account, to follow the purpose of the message the way they want them to. Komodifikasi process going on the photo on the instagram account are neatly packaged so that when people just take a glimpse without observing any further, they may not get the real meaning of the commodified content and then believe and follow what commodification agents want. Nevertheless, there is a theory that allow the society to think more critically and smarter in evaluating various contents displayed on social media, especially on babystagram accounts. The theory is called media literacy.

Baran and Dennis (in Tamburaka, 2013:8) sees media literacy as a series of media awareness movements; which is designed to raise individual control towards the media they use to send and receive messages. We are not aware of the media in all situations, all the time and to all media, but what important in media literacy is to identify media content and there are several process to identify it; it involves cognitive, emotion, aesthetics, and moral. In the cognitive aspect, people think critically about mass media content. In emotional or feeling aspect, people try to be sensitive to what they undergo and feel towards the media content with what others feel as well. From the aesthetics aspect, people are capable to see media content as creative art by media content maker to attract people's interest. From moral aspect, people can see media content as a meaning made by message makers, which there are good or bad moral values given (Tamburaka, 2013:13-14). On the context of photos on babystagram account, society is demanded to be aware of any information and content on the babystagram account. Starting from the cognitive aspect, people have to think critically about the content. They have to evaluate given information, whether the information has hidden purposes or merely just for fun. They need to observe how displayed sentences are packed with meanings connected with economical purposes. This has to be treated in critical way, do not just accept what the accounts feature.

From aesthetics aspect, society should not only see a photo on a babystagram account as a good or bad picture, but deeper than that. The photo can be good, what element and beauty the photo potrays, should there be a part that stands out more. As from the moral aspect, society is demanded to be more observe in seeing a photo on babystagram account, whether that certain pose is suitable to be shown on public media, whether all the contents in the photo contain good or bad morality for the society and whether it will not derive negative effects on the society, such as the

effects on pedophiles, effects on haters, effects on criminals, etc.

4. Conclusion

Based on analysis result on the photos on babystagram accounts using Roland Barthes's Semiotics, it is concluded that implied meanings of the photos are two aspects. First, comprehending photos on babystagram account. Denotative meanings created from the photos on the babystagram account showed proud feelings of the celebrities on everything done by their offsprings which is usually entertaining. Taking pictures of each step of the kids' life is also one denotative meaning emerged from the photo on the babystagram account. Denotative meaning also portrays how the celebrities show their love and affections to their kids by always giving them top quality goods.

In comprehending denotative meaning, it was found that there was an implicit meaning shown on the photos of research object which displays a feeling of showing off and narcissistic attitude of the parents of the babystagramers. The parents seem so eager in showing their kids' lifestyle and their popularity to the public. Moreover, those photos on babystagram accounts also show economical purposes since the photos are uploaded to fulfill the need of endorsement, to attract talent hunters for commercials, movie, etc. They also target the society to talk about them and make them be invited to events. All is centered to gain economical advantages. Still relevant to previous interest, writers found that there was an indication of child exploitation, as the majority of the photos display endorsed goods and promote their parents' brand, and the last thing to make it sure was that some means which was only tend to use the kids as commodities to gain economical values.

Seen from myth meaning of the photos, then myth emerged from the research object's photos was about the lifestyle of celebrities which is identical with fancy lifestyle resulting in narcissism and hedonism ideology. These were the cause of content commodity of the babystagram photos to earn money or needs related to economical values. All of the functional values of the photos of the kids were turned into exchange values for the parents' and third party's interests.

Second, indication of child exploitation on babystagram accounts. Concluded from connotative and myth meanings of the photos of babystagram accounts, it was true that uploading child pictures on the social media Instagram may be one of the causes that the indication of child exploitation occurs, furthermore it may turn into criminal act. Photos which are now public consumption may be used as tools in criminal actions. Moreover, there are no specific written or unwritten rules on communication flow and message exchange on the internet, especially on social media including Instagram.

Indication of child exploitation showed from how the celebrities' kids are used for economical interests. As in second stage meaning or connotation, it is explained that photos uploaded on babystagram accounts are not merely intended to picture the everyday life of the kids, but also used as promotion media. Since the kids are gaining more popularity due to their intensive photo displays on Instagram, they are now used as tools to promote goods or services owned by their attention of the society to make buying and give economical advantages to the celebrities or third party who collaborate with them. Content commodification of the photos on the Instagram accounts happen as the content turned into exchange values to gain profit. Photographs which are supposed to be a lifestory that keeps someone's memorable moments were turned into money maker tool which has led to child exploitation by the use of Instagram.

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