

## Design Sociology Analysis in LA Bold Billboard Advertisements

**Pritha Fitria Natasha Bkti**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, West Java, Indonesia

**Ria Fathya Luqman**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, West Java, Indonesia

**Adua Angelita Prianingsih**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, West Java, Indonesia

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the design of the LA Bold billboard advertisement, released in 2025, as a form of social practice. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a sociology of design approach. Data are analyzed through key visual elements, including composition, color, typography, slogan, and visual representation. The results show that the LA Bold billboard represents a construction of masculinity, courage, and a modern lifestyle that targets young middle class urban men. Furthermore, the findings show that the design operates not only as a promotional media but also as a cultural product that shaped by social structures, particularly class stratification and consumer culture such as the upper, middle and lower classes. This design also reflects the complex relationship between consumer culture, the economic power of the cigarette industry, political regulations, and societal values that have evolved over time. Thus, design acts as a social intermediary that influences the perspectives and behavior of society. In conclusion, LA Bold's billboard design functions as a social intermediary that both reflects and constructs social identity and meaning. The impact of this research underscores the role of visual design in shaping public perception and behavior, as well as the contribution to understanding design as part of broader sociocultural and economic practices.

**Keywords:** *Sociology of Design, Billboard Advertising, Representation, Construction, Consumer Culture, Masculinity*

### INTRODUCTION

Billboards represent a dominant form of outdoor advertising designed to capture public attention through large-scale visual displays and strategic placement in urban transit areas. According to Kusuma & Erdiansyah (2025), these media have evolved from simple wooden boards into high-tech digital videotrons, yet their core function remains the delivery of impactful, concise messages to a diverse audience. In the context of the LA Bold advertisements in Bandung, Indonesia, the visual design transcends mere product promotion. By utilizing sophisticated imagery rather than direct product placement, these billboards function as a visual communication design medium that constructs specific social narratives, particularly regarding modern masculine identity and lifestyle choices within the public sphere.

The significance of outdoor media has been extensively documented in previous scholarship, yet perspectives vary across disciplines. Santosa (2009) emphasizes the reach of outdoor media in public spaces, while Rahmaniar et al. (2023) highlight the strategic role of location in targeting diverse demographics. Sugiharto (2013) explores how design constructs social reality, and Tinarbuko (2013) views visual communication as a tool for improving quality of life through cultural semiotics. Furthermore, Sachari (2002) establishes the framework for design sociology, noting that design is never neutral but is a product of social construction. While these studies provide a foundation, a significant research gap remains: prior research often focuses on either the technical efficacy of billboards or the general semiotics of cigarette ads, failing to synthesize the intersection of design sociology with the specific cultural, political, and religious nuances of contemporary Indonesian society. This study extends previous work by moving beyond simple visual analysis to explore how LA Bold billboards actively "disrupt" and reshape social consciousness.

The academic novelty of this research lies in its integrated design sociology approach, which analyzes the object not just as a marketing tool, but as a site of ideological struggle. Practically, this study contributes to the field of Visual Communication Design by providing a critical framework for designers and regulators to understand the social impact of "hidden" cigarette advertising. By examining the tension between economic interests, public health regulations, and cultural norms, this research offers a new perspective on how commercial visuals influence the formation of social identity in a rapidly modernizing urban environment like Bandung.

The purpose of this research is to analyze how the LA Bold billboard designs represent and construct social, cultural, economic, political, and religious values within the Indonesian context. To achieve this, the study employs a qualitative descriptive method grounded in the theory of Social Construction of Reality by Luckmann & Berger (1991) and Sachari's (2002) design sociology. Through visual analysis and contextual observation, the research deconstructs the layers of meaning behind the masculine imagery used by LA Bold to understand its role in shaping contemporary social narratives.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Studies on cigarette advertising from a Visual Communication Design (VCD) perspective have been dominated by two main theoretical pillars: semiotic analysis and the representation of gender identity. Previous research, such as that conducted by Sari (2023) on the "A Mild" billboard campaign, extensively utilized Roland Barthes's semiotic framework to unravel the denotative and connotative meanings behind symbols of freedom and self-expression. Similarly, Demartoto (2010) explored how advertisements visualize idealized male images encompassing strength, independence, and dominance—a form of social construction of masculinity. While these studies successfully mapped the internal mechanics of advertising visuals, their focus tended to be limited to visual texts as static objects that merely reflect existing cultural values.

A significant research gap exists in that the existing literature has not yet addressed the aspect of advertising as a social practice within the framework of design sociology. So far, available research has been able to identify what is represented (masculinity) and how the message is encoded visually (semiotics), but has failed to connect these visual artifacts to broader social relations, ideologies, and power structures. There has been no in-depth analysis that examines how cigarette advertising design, such as the LA Bold billboard, functions as a non-neutral instrument used by the industry to navigate economic interests amidst strict political regulations and religious norms in Indonesia.

This research aims to fill this gap by synthesizing visual analysis and the sociology of design perspective. Unlike previous descriptive-textual approaches, this study positions advertising design not merely as a promotional medium, but as a product of social construction influenced by certain power interests. Drawing on the ideas of Sachari (2002) and Luckmann & Berger (1991), the novelty of this research lies in its ability to reveal how visual design actively constructs new social realities and "disturbs" public consciousness through narratives of modern masculinity. Thus, the contribution of this research is to shift the academic focus from merely interpreting signs to understanding the role of design in more complex social structures.

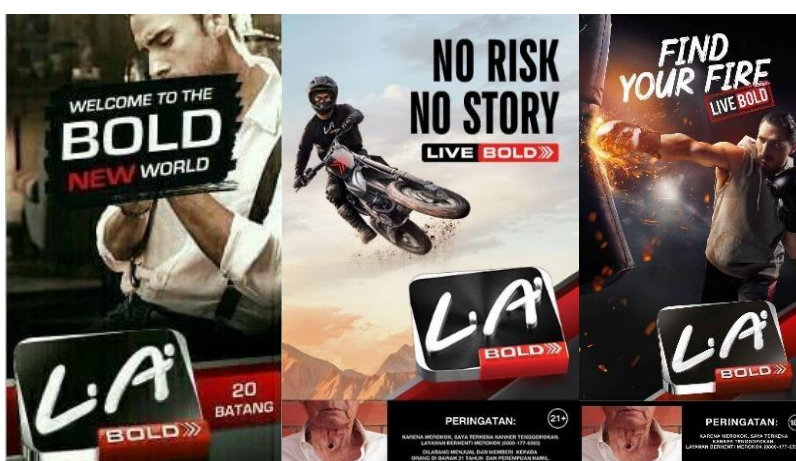
## METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on phenomenological principles. This method is relevant because the primary focus of the study is to explore the phenomenon of visual communication design as a complex social construct, not simply statistical data. According to Fiantika (2022), a qualitative approach allows researchers to understand phenomena in depth, which in this context is used to analyze how LA Bold advertisements not only sell products but also construct urban masculinity identities. The resulting data is discursive, encompassing visual interpretations and sociological narratives that cannot be measured mathematically (Pawito, 2007).

The objects of this research are three LA Bold cigarette advertising billboards produced in 2025, located in strategic locations in Bandung. The selection of these three billboards was based on a sampling technique with the following selection criteria:

1. Thematic Representation: Billboards which is specifically display visual elements of a masculine lifestyle without physically displaying cigarette products.
2. Visual Variation: explaining different visual compositions but still within the same branding campaign line.
3. Contextual: The billboard that Installed in areas with high public mobility that reflect the social interactions of urban communities.

This limitation was made to focus the analysis on the depth of visual and sociological representation, rather than on brand comparisons or marketing effectiveness. To avoid generalizations, the data analysis procedure was carried out through four systematic stages referring to the Sociology of Design framework. Visual Identification will inventory visual elements in the design such as composition, color palette (black and red), typography, and visual metaphors (vehicles, action, or urban settings). Through Socio Cultural Categorization, visual elements will be grouped into sociological value categories, such as economic value (branding), political value (advertising regulatory compliance), and cultural value (masculinity). The credibility of this research was maintained through triangulation of sources and theories. Data validity was strengthened by comparing direct visual observation data in the field with official digital documents from the social media account @lazone.id and related agencies (Alkaline). Furthermore, data interpretation was validated by comparing field findings with scientific journal literature and design sociology materials to ensure that the researcher's interpretive analysis remained within accountable academic boundaries. Through this approach, design is understood not as a neutral entity, but as an ideological phenomenon fraught with social and economic interests (Kusuma, Wahyudi, & Arifianto, 2023).



**Figure 1.** LA Bold Cigarette Advertising Billboard Released in 2025

Source: Documentation @disini\_pkl, 2025 (left); @lazone.id, 2025 (center); Alkaline, 2025 (right)

The Data collection was conducted through direct visual observation of billboards, documentation in the form of photographs of research objects, and literature studies. Visual observation was carried out to observe the design elements that used in advertisements, such as composition, color, typography, slogans, and visual representations. Photographic documentation was used as the main visual data for analysis, while literature studies were conducted through reviews of literature, scientific journals, and lecture materials related to design sociology, advertising, masculinity, and consumer culture.

The collected data was then analyzed interpretively through visual analysis to read the visual signs on LA Bold billboard advertisements using design sociology studies. The focus of the analysis was directed at how the LA Bold billboard design constructed an image of masculinity as a branding strategy, as well as how the design was related to social, cultural, economic, political, and religious aspects of society. The theoretical framework used in this study included the concept of design as a social practice, representation theory, and an understanding of masculinity in the context of visual culture. This approach is used to understand the role of advertising design as a social medium that contributes to shaping perspectives, identities, and social constructions in society. Through this method, design is understood as a phenomenon that is ideological in nature, laden with values, ideologies, and social interests that play a role in shaping perspectives and the formation of social strata in society.

## **DISCUSSION**

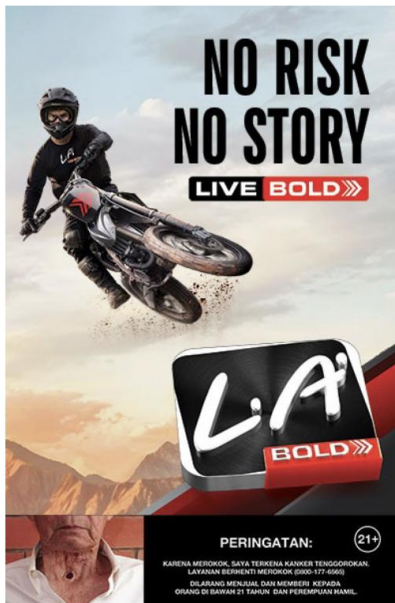
The analysis of this LA Bold cigarette billboard advertisement was conducted using the theory of design sociology. Design sociology is a field of study that examines the behavior of individuals, groups of people, or communities that are influenced by design works, or conversely, design works that create certain social situations using comprehensive approaches. Whether for social analysis or input to designers as a basic analysis for problem solving, or efforts to find solutions through new design approaches or new social policies (Sachari, 2002). Design sociology is related to behavioral change in a positive direction and emphasizes the importance of ethics in the design and production process (Handriyotopo, 2023).

Design can be observed as a phenomenon of lifestyle and social behavior of society, and can be used as an indicator of the level and interest of consumption of society towards a particular product or group of products (Sachari, 2002). Design plays a role in shaping the consumption decisions of society, which are not only based on economic rationality but are also influenced by cultural, social, economic, and political dynamics. In the study of design sociology, there are three main elements that influence each other, namely humans, objects, and value systems. Value systems are a collection of interrelated values that are organized and function as guidelines for individuals or groups of people in a particular place. With the existence of value systems, people tend to choose products that are related to the values that exist in society.

The meaning of design in social activities, broadly speaking, is a manifestation of efforts to solve human physical problems. However, it also creates new social problems for other people (Sachari, 2002). Basically, design exists to answer all of humanity's practical needs, such as simplifying activities, increasing comfort, improving efficiency, and providing solutions to physical and environmental limitations. Design exists as a problem-solving process centered on humans and their surrounding environment. In terms of communication, design can communicate various things, either as an expression of a particular community related to its lifestyle, an exploration of a nation's culture, or as practical non-verbal communication. Meanwhile, from an economic perspective, design can play a role in boosting the economy (Sachari, 2002). When viewed from a sociological perspective, design humanizes objects and technology by creating feasibility, ease of use, and comprehensibility, so that technology can be accepted, understood, and integrated into the social practices of everyday life.

Several LA Bold advertising billboards were used as case studies in this research, including:

**Table 1.** Data on LA Bold Cigarette Advertising Billboards in 2025

| <div>    </div> <div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> </div> |                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Product Name                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Product Data Description                                       |
| Type                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Djarum LA Bold                                                 |
| Manufacturer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Sigaret Kretek Mesin (SKM) Filter, PT Djarum, Kudus, Indonesia |
| Launch Year                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 2025, as part of the LA Lights family                          |
| Contents per Pack                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Available in 12, 16, and 20 sticks                             |
| Tar and Nicotine Levels                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 15 mg tar and 1.0 mg nicotine per cigarette                    |

|                          |                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Price</b>             | 12 sticks: Rp25,000, 16 sticks: Rp30,200, 20 sticks: Rp39,900                                         |
| <b>Packaging</b>         | Modern design with dominant black and dark red colors, using special aluminum foil to preserve flavor |
| <b>Target Market</b>     | Young adult men (18–35 years old) who like bold yet smooth cigarettes. Especially the middle class.   |
| <b>Slogan</b>            | "Live Bold"                                                                                           |
| <b>Promotional Media</b> | Billboards, banners, sponsorship of music and extreme sports events                                   |

Source: Author's Work.

### 1) Representation of Masculinity in Cigarette Billboard Advertisements

Based on observations of LA Bold cigarette billboard advertisements (Table 1), it appears that the visual strategy and message conveyed in these advertisements are very strong in representing masculinity as a core value. The advertisement does not explicitly display the product, but rather emphasizes the image of men with certain characteristics, such as being brave, free, tough, and independent. This is in line with cigarette advertising regulations in Indonesia, which restrict the direct display of products, so cigarette manufacturers shift the focus of their advertisements to image and identity building.

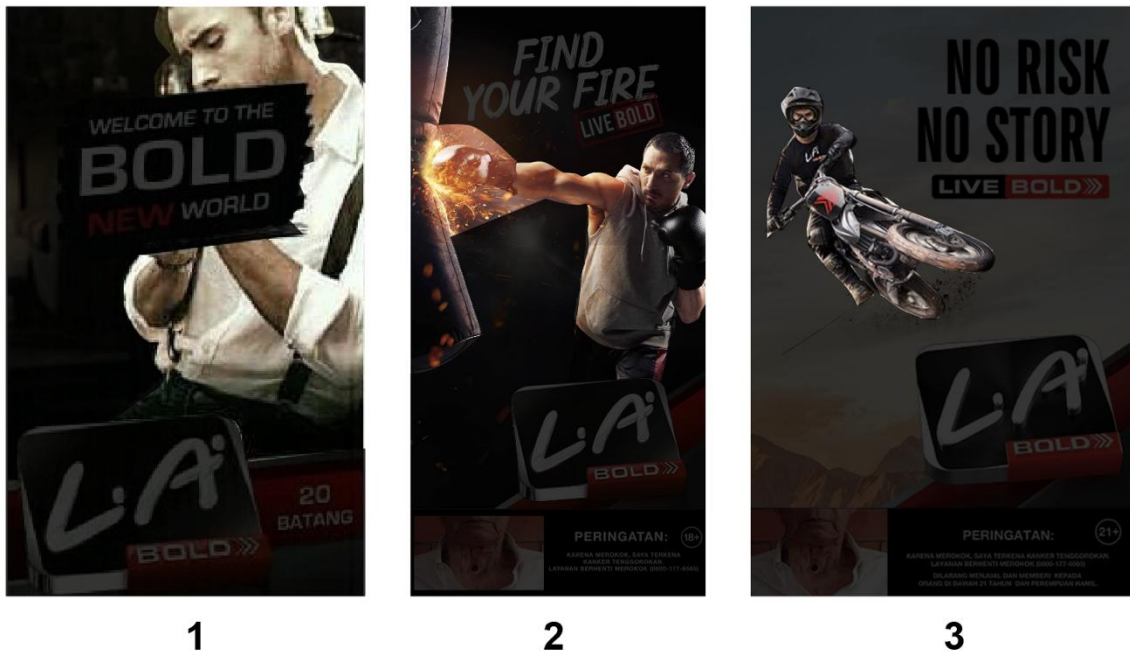


Figure 2. Masculine Image on LA Bold Cigarette Advertising Billboard Released in 2025

An identity is usually constructed by the community itself. According to Piliang (2011), a world dominated by consumerism ideology and popular culture produces inauthentic culture, due to the fundamental nature of consumerism itself and popular culture, which is the command of the masses from a group of elites, creating the

masses as a silent majority, in the sense that their identities are shaped by discourses outside themselves (consumerism and popular culture), in which they have minimal role in defining and controlling the discourse itself. Consumerism itself is a lifestyle in which people tend to buy goods based on current trends (Piliang, 2011). Ultimately, smoking is a consumerist lifestyle in Indonesian society, to show the masculine nature of men according to the construction and definition that exists in society.

According to Piliang (2011), consumerism culture is a system of endless self-production of desires, which are fulfilled through the world of commodities. It creates a sense of eternal dissatisfaction with the appearance, function, and image of commodity objects by creating needs that are not essential, but artificial (Piliang, 2011). Consumerism and the smoking lifestyle are deeply rooted in Indonesian society, where ultimately the community has constructed a definition of the nature and character of men who must appear masculine. This smoking lifestyle has become part of Indonesian culture itself and has constructed the social value of the formation of representations of masculine men, especially in Indonesia.

The visuals displayed on the billboard show male figures depicted in active and dominant situations, whether through body language, facial expressions, or the surrounding environment. The choice of colors that tend to be dark and strong, such as black, brown, or dark red, also reinforces the masculine impression. In the world of fashion, black is associated with elegance and seriousness; in some other definitions, black is also associated with strength and self-control. Overall, black serves as a visual marker that constructs the standard of masculinity that should be present in society. Color is an element that cannot be separated from daily life, technological development, and progress, as well as additive elements (additive), such as light colors called spectrum, and subtractive (subtractive) as material colors called pigments or colors found in materials. Color also has philosophy, symbols, and emotions related to the interpretation of meaning with certain colors as a form of color psychology. (Paksi, 2021). According to Piliang (2011), consumerism culture is a system of endless self-production of desires, which are fulfilled through the world of commodities. It creates a sense of eternal dissatisfaction with the appearance, function, and image of commodity objects by creating needs that are not essential but artificial (Piliang, 2011). Consumerism and the smoking lifestyle are deeply rooted in Indonesian society, where ultimately the community has constructed a definition of the nature and character of men who must appear masculine. This smoking lifestyle has become part of Indonesian culture itself and has constructed the social value of the formation of representations of masculine men, especially in Indonesia.

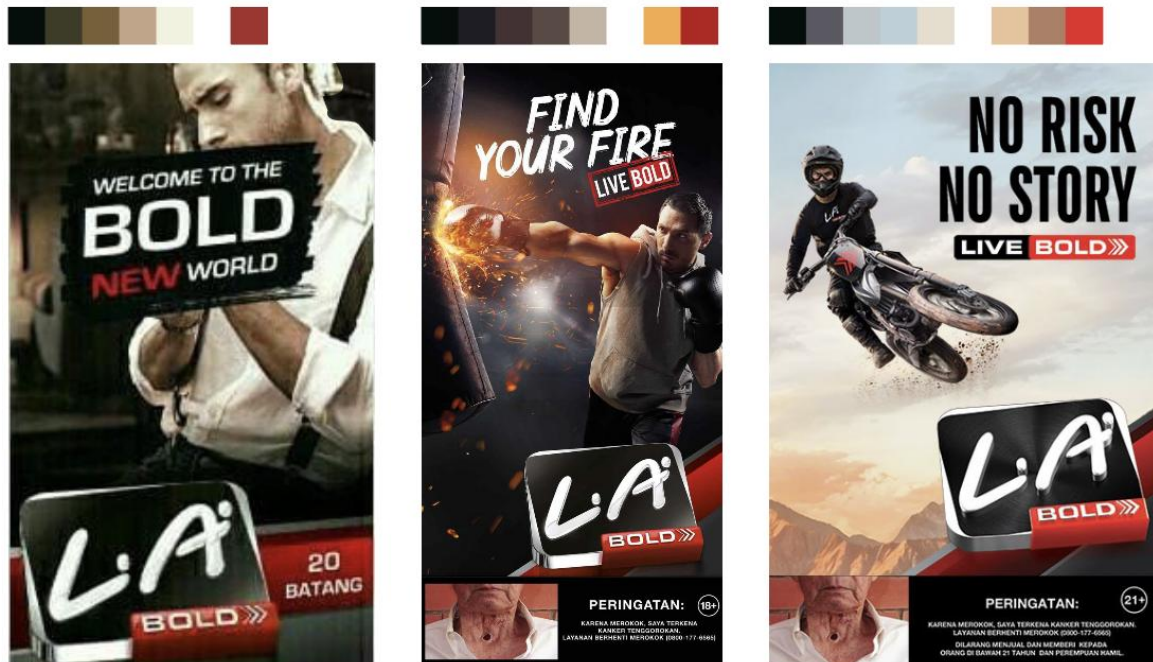


Figure 3. Color Scheme on the LA Bold Cigarette Advertising Billboard, Released in 2025

Typography is a technique for processing and arranging text so that it looks more attractive and is easier to read. Therefore, in this design, it is necessary to select fonts that can represent the impression and message of the information (Rizqi & Albar, 2023). Strong and simple typographic elements also support the narrative of masculinity that the designer wants to build. Overall, this advertisement not only functions as a promotional medium but also as a tool for constructing social meaning about what an “ideal man” is.

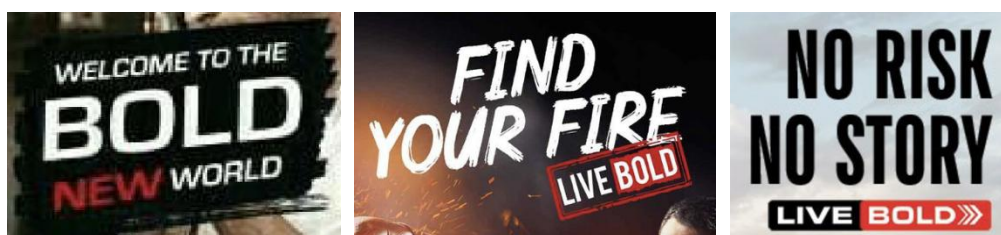


Figure 4. Typography on LA Bold Cigarette Billboard Advertising Released in 2025

According to Valentina and Tanumohardjo (2021, in Luqman, 2025), layout is a process carried out to arrange visual assets in a design. The goal is for the public to be able to grasp the message that the designer wants to convey (Luqman, 2025). Based on this understanding, layout is not only understood as a technical aspect of arranging visual elements, but also as a visual communication strategy that determines how a message is ultimately constructed and received by the audience. Therefore, layout plays an important role in directing the audience's attention to certain visual elements, such as the dominant placement of male figures, the use of visual space that emphasizes an exclusive impression, and the arrangement of text and black color that reinforces masculine characteristics. Through this visual arrangement, the layout not only functions as an aesthetic structure but also as a representation strategy that deliberately constructs a representation of the ideal man as a strong, confident, and powerful figure.

## **2) Cigarettes as a Social Identity of Masculinity**

In the context of today's society, cigarettes have undergone a shift in meaning from being merely a consumer product to a symbol of identity, particularly masculine identity. According to Piliang (2011:241), identity explains the chain linking the past with the present, socially, politically, economically, and culturally. Not only is there a synchronic relationship between individuals in the present, but also a diachronic relationship with their past heritage. Masculine identity is formed due to the construction of past and present cultures, in which urban communities construct and redefine the ideal masculine man.

The LA Bold billboard advertisement, which is the subject of this study, represents cigarettes as part of the lifestyle of strong and powerful adult men. Through this representation, cigarettes are no longer positioned as ordinary consumer goods, but rather as markers of social status and individual identity. The masculinity constructed in this advertisement is ideological in nature, placing men as dominant subjects who are active, willing to take risks, and in control of themselves and their environment. These values are then normalized through advertising visuals that are constantly present in public spaces. According to Sari et al (2019), masculinity is a concept of social roles, behaviors, and certain meanings attached to men at a given time. This means that masculinity is not static and can undergo changes in meaning according to the surrounding conditions and circumstances (Sari, Effendy, & Wartiningih, 2019). Basically, the definition of masculinity is due to the patriarchal culture that emerged due to the influence of Western culture. Western culture here is associated with cultures that originated in Europe, America, and Australia.

According to Demartoto (2010), traditional masculinity generally values strength, power, fortitude, action, control, independence, self-satisfaction, male camaraderie, and work (Demartoto, 2010). If we re-examine this, masculinity is also present in Eastern culture, shaping the identity of men as heads of families and leaders in society. In urban communities, in recent decades, a person has been categorized as a man if they engage in activities that indicate they are male. According to data from the WHO, 34.5% of adults, or 70.2 million people, actively use tobacco, with almost all of them being men. Masculinity in Indonesia is still closely associated with men who smoke. Thus, society unconsciously accepts and reinforces the understanding that ideal masculinity is closely related to the habit of smoking.

## **3) Connection with Social and Cultural Aspects**

Culture is essentially a custom that exists in society and is passed down from generation to generation. According to E.B. Tylor in Putri et al (2025), culture is a complex whole that encompasses various elements such as knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, law, customs, as well as skills and habits acquired by individuals as part of a community. Meanwhile, according to Robert H. Lowie in Putri et al (2025), culture is everything that individuals receive from fellow citizens, including beliefs, customs, ethics, eating traditions, and competencies (Putri, Ayu, Br Ginting, Saidah, & Nasution, 2025).

Based on the above definitions, we can analyze that the LA BOLD billboard advertisement contributes to shaping and reinforcing masculinity norms in society. Cigarettes are positioned as a symbol of maturity and social acceptance, especially in male circles. In certain cultures, smoking is often associated with moments of togetherness, solidarity, and collective masculinity, such as in social gatherings or work activities. In some areas, cigarettes have become part of Indonesian culture, dating back to colonial times. These advertisements take advantage of this cultural construct by presenting visuals that are easily recognizable and relevant to people's social experiences. By portraying masculinity as something "natural" and ideal, cigarette advertisements play a role in maintaining existing social gender images. This shows that advertisements are subjective and not neutral, but rather actively involved in the process of producing and reproducing cultural meanings that are linked to social realities in society.

## **4) Relationship with Economic and Political Aspects**

From an economic perspective, cigarette billboard advertisements are part of the tobacco industry's strategy to maintain its market share amid various regulatory restrictions. By emphasizing masculine branding, the tobacco industry seeks to create consumer loyalty based on identity rather than mere necessity. Masculinity is commodified as a high-value selling point because it attracts male consumers from various social strata.

Politically, the presence of cigarette billboard advertisements in public spaces indicates a negotiation between industry interests and government policy. Despite regulations restricting cigarette advertising, public visual space is

still used to convey symbolic messages. This shows how economic power can influence the visual social space of cities and shape the visual experiences of communities in their daily lives.

### **5) Connection with Moral and Religious Values**

In the context of religion and morality, cigarette advertisements present an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, religious values generally emphasize the importance of maintaining health and avoiding behaviors that are harmful to oneself. On the other hand, cigarette advertisements wrap products that are risky to health in positive images such as strength, freedom, and courage.

Through a symbolic approach, these advertisements attempt to neutralize or even obscure the negative effects of smoking by replacing them with values of masculinity that are considered noble. Thus, there is a shift in focus from health and moral issues to issues of identity and lifestyle. This shows how advertisements can influence the way society views a product, even when that product has clear ethical and health consequences.

### **6) Discussion from a Design Sociology Perspective**

From a design sociology perspective, cigarette billboard advertisements can be understood as visual artifacts that represent power relations, ideologies, and social values. Design functions not only aesthetically, but also ideologically. The visual choices, narratives, and symbols in these advertisements show how design is used as a tool to shape social consciousness and gender identity.

The masculinity portrayed is not a neutral representation, but rather the result of social construction that is produced and disseminated through visual media. Thus, cigarette billboard advertisements serve as a medium that bridges the economic interests of the industry with the social and cultural structures of society. The results of this study show that advertising design plays a significant role in shaping social meaning and cannot be separated from the social context that surrounds it.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This research shows that LA billboard advertising designs function not only as promotional media but also as social practices that shape and reproduce the meaning of masculinity in public spaces. Through a sociology of design approach, cigarette billboard advertisements can be understood as visual constructions that represent social, cultural, economic, and political values, even intersecting with religious norms, thus positioning cigarettes as a symbol of masculine identity in society. These findings confirm that visual communication design has a significant ideological role and is not objective, as it can influence perspectives and shape social perceptions on an ongoing basis. This research is expected to enrich the study of visual communication design, particularly in understanding advertising as a social practice, and encourage further research to examine other advertising media, comparisons between brands, or the general public's response to representations of masculinity in advertising in public spaces. Through the perspective of sociology of design, it is very clear that the LA Bold billboard has succeeded in creating a standard of "ideal man" based on commodity ownership, thus changing the public's perception of products that are contrary to health into a matter of social status and popular culture.

Based on the results of this study, several operational suggestions are proposed both academically and practically, especially for Further Researchers, that for future studies it is recommended to conduct comparative research using audience studies to test whether the narrative of masculinity constructed by designers can be accepted linearly or instead deconstructed by people with different cultural backgrounds. For the next direction of Further Research, it can be limited to outdoor media (billboards) and it is suggested to have an analysis of digital branding activities on social media platforms to see how the narrative of masculinity is transformed in a more personal interactive space. Through Design and Industrial Practitioners, visual communication designers are expected to have a critical awareness and professional ethics in creating visual assets in public spaces. The industry needs to consider the long term impact of the social constructions that created, so that they do not only pursue economic value but also pay attention to the moral responsibility for the formation of social values in society. The results of this study can provide input for the government in refining outdoor advertising regulations, so that supervision is not only focused on prohibiting the physical form of the product, but also on monitoring symbolic and ideological messages that have the potential to bias

health risks through lifestyle idealization.

Overall, the interconnectedness of social, cultural, economic, political, and religious aspects in the LA Bold billboard design demonstrates that design is not an objective practice. Design functions as a sign system that represents, negotiates, and reproduces certain values within society. In this context, the LA Bold billboard demonstrates how visual communication can become a medium for constructing ideological meanings that are interconnected with market interests, popular culture, and power structures in public spaces.

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Pritha Fitria Natasha Bekt, M.Sn., e-mail: [pritha@email.unikom.ac.id](mailto:pritha@email.unikom.ac.id)

**Pritha Fitria Natasha Bekt, M.Sn.** is a Lecturer of Visual Communication Design at Universitas Komputer Indonesia in Bandung. She teaches Nirmana, Creative Studies, and Illustration.

Ria Fathya Luqman, M.Ds., email: [ria.fathya@email.unikom.ac.id](mailto:ria.fathya@email.unikom.ac.id)

**Ria Fathya Luqman, M.Ds.** is a Lecturer of Visual Communication Design at Universitas Komputer Indonesia in Bandung. She teaches Layout Computer Application, Print Technique, Communication Process, and Design and Technology.

Adua Angelita Priarningsih, email: [adua.5192244@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id](mailto:adua.5192244@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id)

**Adua Angelita Priarningsih**, is a student of Visual Communication Design at Universitas Komputer Indonesia in Bandung.