

# PIERCE'S SEMIOTICS ANALYSIS ON BENNY'S CARTOONS RELATED TO COVID 19 ISSUES

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## **Abstract**

*This journal article focuses to analyze signs contained in Kartun Benny regarding to issues of coronavirus happened these days in Indonesia and many countries in the world. Kartun Benny is cartoon which is published in online portal media, Kontan.co.id. Kartun Benny is published regarding to the current issues happened in Indonesia. The aim is to find the meaning contained Kartun Benny regarding to the coronavirus issues. To analyze the cartoon, Pierce's theory of semantic is used. From the three levels of trichotomy, only one level which is the second level is used to find the meanings. Qualitative method is used in conducting the research. After analyzing the meaning of the Kartun Benny on the 3 editions, which are 18<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, the result shows: Kartun Benny is categorized as a humorous cartoon. The function of the release of this cartoon is a sense of humor to the citizen, not to give critic or satire to the government, to picture the condition of how the people live in the situation of the spreading of coronavirus, and after knowing every policies and instruction given by the Government. In addition, Kartun Benny shows the condition and the respond of the society regarding the issues, the news, and the policies given by the government about the spreading of coronavirus.*

**Keywords:** *Cartoon, Corona virus, Semiotics*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cartoons are portrayals in the form of paintings or caricatures about people, ideas, or situations designed to influence people/society. According to Sanaky (2013:100) cartoons are a form of graphic media that contains interpretive images that use symbols to convey message quickly and concisely or a message of attitude towards certain people, situations or events (Priyatmi, 2007). Cartoons are visual works coming as representative forms to convey messages which is in the context of media, cartoons can be divided into 2 categories, namely political

cartoons and humorous cartoons. A humorous cartoon is a cartoon that 'job' is conveying humor without any political content. This cartoon is also commonly called gag cartoon, and the main purpose it to bring laughter to the reader/viewer. This cartoon raised humor that was generally understood by the public (Nuriarta, 2019). Humorous cartoon is usually presented in the mass media with a simple and lightweight appearance.

Kontan.co.id is an online news portal under the company of PT Grahana Mediatama, which is about financial data news. Besides providing financial data news,

Kontan.co.id is also presenting humorous cartoons by the name 'Kartun Benny'. *Kartun Benny* provides pictures of the actual news, current events, hot issues in the community related to the latest topic which is nowadays the current issue is about coronavirus and the effects. Each cartoon presented in Kontan.co.id, it must have meaning or message to be conveyed to the citizens.

In order to be able to understand of the meaning of *Kartun Benny* presented in online portal media Kontan.co.id, the analysis of text and image is needed. Semiotics is the study of sign, and the sign conveys information. As stated in Fiske 1990, that semiotics is the study of signs and meanings of signs, how the meanings are constructed in the media texts or the study of how signs of any types of work in society who need meanings (Fiske, 1990). Pierce, in his book states that semiotics itself is the concept of the sign where the sign is not just a language and communication system composed by signs, but the world itself goes so far related to the whole human mind consists of signs, because otherwise humans cannot do it with reality (Sobur, 2013).

News and issues regarding corona virus called Covid 19 becomes popular in various mass media, not including radio, television and online media in the last few weeks since the first positive case was announced on 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2020 by the President. Until today the amount positive case for this virus has reached more than four

thousand patients. As stated in the official document posted in the Indonesian Ministry of Health website, coronavirus is a large family of viruses that causes diseases ranging from mild to severe symptoms. At least there are two types of corona virus known to cause diseases with severe symptoms such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) (<https://www.kemkes.go.id/>). There are various ways used by mass media to convey information, news update of the amount of the patients, the area of virus spread, information about things to prevent, etc. The various ways use such as using text articles, video animation/moving picture, caricatures and cartoons so that the messages conveyed can be received by the public.

The writer is interested to conduct this research because usually analyzing cartoon in mass media only takes political cartoon as the object of the research such as the research conducted by I Wayan Nuriarta which was published in MUDRA Journal article in 2019 by the title "*Tanda dan Makna Kartun Politik Jawa Pos tahun 2019*" (Nuriarta, 2019). In his research, he analyzed political cartoon in Jawa Pos Newspaper in order to give critic the candidate of President and Vice President. The research conducted in 2019 which is the year when the general election of President and Vice President was held. Another research that used cartoon as the object is the research conducted by Setiawan with the title "*Pemaknaan Gambar*

*Kartun CLEKIT pada Harian Koran Jawa Pos (Studi Semiotika Gambar Kartun CLEKIT pada harian Jawa Pos 19 November 2016*” (R. Dimas F. Setiawan, 2017). Based on the background, the writer is interested in conducting the analysis of *Kartun Benny* related to the corona virus issues in Indonesia. Kontan.co.id released the serial of *Kartun Benny* related to corona virus issues since March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020. *Kartun Benny* can be download in kontan.co.id/kartun\_benny page. Different from those two research which used the cartoon from newspaper and used political cartoon as the object. To observe the meaning from the cartoon, the writer uses the Triadic concept of Pierce where according to him signs relate to the objects that resemble them, their existences have causality with the signs or because of the conventional bonds with those signs.

## **METHODS**

The purpose of this research is to find the meaning of text and symbol of *Kartun Benny* in the online portal media Kontan.co.id related to the current issues of coronavirus. The writer uses qualitative method to conduct the research in collecting and analyzing data as stated by Cresswell that qualitative research examines the meaning emerged from the data and often presented in words. The aim of qualitative research is to find the patterns that emerge after the observation, documentation, and analysis of

research topic (Cresswell, 2007).

In analyzing the meaning of text and picture in *Kartun Benny*, the writer uses the cartoon that was published on March 21<sup>st</sup> and March 29<sup>th</sup> 2020. The series of *Kartun Benny* regarding to the coronavirus issues was first published since March 18<sup>th</sup> 2020. The research focuses on analyzing the meaning of the text and image, and symbol in *Kartun Benny* using the Triadic concept of Peirce. Pierce’s theory of semiotics is known as triadic concept (triangle meaning semiotics), and the trichotomy concept which consist of representamen, object, and interpretant. Representamen or sign is something representing something else in some capacity or respect. Object is something represented by a loading representative by reference or something translated on the sign. While interpretant is the understanding comes to mind of recipient of the sign about the object being referred to a sign. Interpretant will appears when a sign is captured and understood as a ‘meaning’ (Peirce, 1994).

The Pierce’s triangle model shows each point is connected by a line in two directions, means that every term can be understood only in relationship one another. Pierce uses different terms to explain the sign function, which for him is a conceptual process, in ongoing and unlimited, he calls it “the infinite semiosis”, the chain of meaning-decision by new signs interpreting the previous signs or a set of signs.

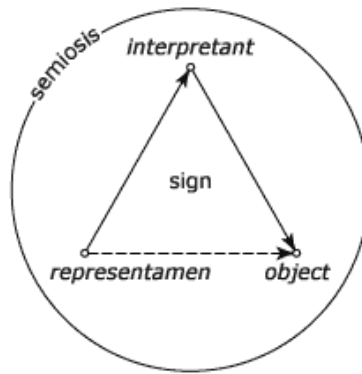


Figure 1: Triadic Semiosis Model  
Source: Peirce, C.S (1994)

### Peirce's Classification of Sign

The main point of Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of semiotics is a trichotomy that consists of three levels and nine sub-types of signs. The first level trichotomy, representamen consists of qualisigns, sinsigns, and legisigns. The second level trichotomy is object which consists of icon, index, and symbol which are the classification of signs based on the project. Icon is the sign which resembles the shape of the original object. The relationship between sign on the object is similar. Index is a sign which has causality, and symbol is a sign shows the natural relationship between the sign and its marker and it is arbitrary, the relation is based on the agreement. The last level trichotomy is interpretant, and it consists of rheme, dicent sign, and argument.

Before conducting the research, the writer made observations on humorous cartoons on online media which relate to the issues of coronavirus. Some media, such as Tempo publishes cartoons related to coronavirus, but they are political cartoons which

mostly contains critics to the government or the policies made by the government. The documentation method is applied by reading a number of writings related to cartoons, the semiotics theory in textbooks, journals, and even mass media. The cartoon which is analyzed uses the second trichotomy of Peirce's theory that is based on the object including icon, index and symbol.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After being analyzed by using semiotics theory of Peirce, *Kartun Benny* which is published in online portal media shows that this cartoon is categorized as humorous cartoon, not a political cartoon. It shows that there is no satire or critics to the government regarding to coronavirus issues. The purpose of this cartoon released is to respond the government instruction, to respond the news about coronavirus and the effect in mass media. To give sense of humor to the citizen related the serious news mostly published in many mass media, therefore the citizen will not only consume serious news

about the corona virus.

In this research, *Kartun Benny* which has been downloaded from online portal media of [Kontan.co.id](http://Kontan.co.id). The cartoon then is

analyzed by using the semiotics theory of Peirce based on the second trichotomy which is the object that includes icon, index and symbol.



Figure 2. picture of *Kartun Benny* edition 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2020

First, the picture seen from the icon showed in the cartoon. According to Peirce, Icon is the sign which resembles the shape of the original object (Peirce, 1994). The first icon from the cartoon picture above is a family consist of father, mother, and a son. The father is wearing a shirt with a tie. He wants to work, it can be seen from the writing '*Terpaksa bekerja di rumah*'. The second icon is the amount of small balls surrounding with a lot of antenna. The small balls are flying in the air. They are spreading. This small balls are the descriptions of coronavirus. The expressions of their face show the disappointment.

Index is a sign which has causality (Peirce, 1994). The index from the cartoon picture is the picture of the amount of small balls surrounded by antenna outside the house. They are flying in the air. These small

balls are the interpretation or the description of coronavirus. Because of these flying ball described as coronavirus, the family must stay at home. They must do their activities at home, such as work from home, study from home, pray from home, etc.

Symbol is a sign shows the natural relationship between the sign and its marker and it is arbitrary, the relation is based on the agreement (Peirce, 1994). The expressions from each family members as shown in the writings are a symbol which because of the spreading of coronavirus, they are forced to stay at home. The father must work from home, the son must study at home, and the mother is forced to cook.

### Interpretation

The title of the cartoon picture above is "*Gara-gara Virus Corona*". On the cartoon

picture above there are: (1) a family member consists of a father, a mother, and a son looking out of the window. Their face expressions do not show happiness. (2) The writings which shows their expressions of mind. (3) The amount of small balls which surrounded by antennas are flying in the air outside the house. The small balls flying in the air outside the house are shape of coronavirus. Because they are spreading, the family should stay at home. They should do their activities at home. It is a must for them to stay at home as the Government has appealed the instruction. But seeing from their face expressions, they seem not happy for this instruction. This is also evidenced the writing.

*Kartun Benny* published this cartoon on 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. Indonesian Government published the instruction to stay at home, work from home, study at home since 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. From this cartoon, there is no sense of against the government, or give critic to the government. The cartoon shows only how the society now do their usual activities after the spreading of coronavirus, after the instruction from the government. This cartoon is also a humorous cartoon, seeing from how *Kartun Benny* describe the shape of the virus, how the expressions of the family members, and the writing, especially the writing from the mother, that she must learn how to cook in this condition.



Figure 3. picture of *Kartun Benny* edition 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2020

First, the picture seen from the icon showed in the cartoon. There are two men on the cartoon picture, one of the man is wearing a mask, a shirt, and carrying a shoulder bag. The other man is not wearing a mask, and he is wearing a t-shirt. There are three parts of

the cartoon picture. the man who seems more tidy by wearing a shirt, carrying a shoulder bag can be described as a worker or employee, a person having a job. While the other man who is wearing only a t-shirt, can be described he has no job or works at non-

formal sector. The next icon is *meterean* (wood meter) brought by the man who is wearing a mask.

Second is index. Index is a sign which has causality (Peirce, 1994). On the cartoon picture, on the first part, there are two men that seeing from the picture, they are friends who have not met for some time. The first man start to greet his friend. The distance between the two looks quite close. Then on the second part of the picture, the man who is wearing mask seems want to take something out from his bag. And on the last part, as we can see, he take *meteran* (wood meter) to measure the distance between he and his friend who doesn't wear mask. The wood meter (*meteran*) is an index. Index according to Pierce's theory is a sign which causes casualty. The man wearing a mask take out his wood meter to measure the distance because he does not want to take a risk of the contagion of coronavirus, so he should keep the distance at least 1 meter. Besides the man which is his friend do not wear a mask. The second index is a mask. Because if the man does not wear a mask, he will have the risk of contracting the coronavirus. So that he wear a mask.

Symbol is a sign shows the natural relationship between the sign and its marker and it is arbitrary, the relation is based on the agreement (Peirce, 1994). When one of the man take the wood meter out and measure the distance, he said to this friends "*Jarak aman 2 meter... Tapi 1 meter masih oke lah!*" (the

safe distance is 2 meters... but 1 meter is still okay!). The wood meter is a symbol of the writing that shows in the cartoon. The wood meter is a tool to measure the length. In this picture it is used to measure the distance between the two man. And one of the man believe by keeping the phisical distance will decrease the risk of contracting coronavirus.

### **Interpretation**

The title of the cartoon picture above is "*Awas Covid 19, Jaga Jarak*" (Beware of Covid 19, Keep distance). This cartoon picture was released on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2020. Before the cartoon picture is released, the Government made intruction to keep phisical distance. Phisical distance is a must to do when a person is doing activities outside minimally 1 meter, in public transportain, workplace, and everywhere. After the Government instruction of this appeal, many mass media release this news, this information. And Kontan.co.id create this Kartun Benny as one of the respond of the government instruction. This cartoon is categorized as humorous cartoon, because there is no description of critics or satire to the government. But Kartun Benny seems support the government isntruction which is to keep phisical distance, by creating this cartoon edition. The sign which makes this cartoon is categorized as humorous cartoon is when one of the man on the picture spread the woodmeter to measure the distance between him and his friends.



Figure 4. picture of *Kartun Benny* edition March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020

First, the picture seen from the icon showed in the cartoon. A woman (mom) and a boy (son) are seen in the picture, while the woman is operating a smartphone. The son is pointing to the smartphone hold by his mom while talking to his mom, he seems happy. On the picture, the outfits of the woman are *kain or jarik and kebaya*. Those outfit is usually wearing by traditional woman, or a person who comes from middle class living in an area for lower class in a city. The boy is wearing a t-shirt. It means that his daily life outfit is a casual or simple. From those outfits, wearing by the mother and the son, it can be seen that they are not coming from rich family, they are one of the people who affected by the spreading of coronavirus.

Second is index. Index is a sign which has causality (Peirce, 1994). On the cartoon, the mother seems is operating the smartphone. It can be seen that there are pictures of vegetables and a fish which as if they come out from the smartphone. The point of these vegetables which come out

from the smartphone, to show the readers/the viewers that the women on the picture is operating the smartphone and is searching for vegetables and fish on the smartphone. Seeing his mom is searching for some vegetables on smartphone, on e-commerce, the boy then comment to his mom “*Waaah... Emak! Sekarang udah canggih, yaaa?! Belanja ke pasar tradisional onle!*” He comment his mom, that his mom now is becomes modern for she now shopping for buying vegetables from smartphone, by online shopping. The mother answers “*Musim corona gini, ke pasar beneran serem juga, Tong...*” from the writings on the picture, it can be seen that there is a casualty of what makes the woman now using smartphone for shopping, the activity she never did before. The woman is forced by the condition of the spreading of coronavirus that makes her cannot do her daily activity which is going to traditional market for buying daily need such as vegetables.

The symbols of the cartoon above are smartphone which is showing the pictures of



vegetables and fish, and the mask that the woman is wearing. By the condition where the spreading of coronavirus, makes everyone whether they are from rich background or low class society, they nowadays do their activities by using smartphone, and one of them is shopping for daily needs. The mask, is a thing that everyone must wear these days to prevent the spreading of the virus.

### **Interpretation**

This cartoon was published on 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. The government has appealed to all people, society to do their activities at home, such as working from home, studying from home, and praying from home. They are appealed to decrease the outdoor activities which they used to do before coronavirus. This cartoon shows us that the call to stay at home applies to all class of society. The cartoon shows us that these days, the people's behaviors that they are not only working from home, or studying from home, but they are also shopping from home by using smartphone. Therefore *Kartun Benny* creates this cartoon as one of the respond from the government appeal. It shows us the condition and situation happened to the people regarding to the coronavirus issues. This cartoon is categorized as humorous cartoon because there is no satire or critics for the government. Besides it becomes humorous cartoon from the writing. The language used in the picture such as the words '*Emak, onlen, Tong...*' are usually used by people

who live on the edge of Jakarta. The using of those words make the cartoon has sense of humor.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research shows that there are two kinds of cartoon, political cartoon and humorous cartoon. After being analysis by using the Pierce's theory of semiotics, *Kartun Benny* is categorized as humorous cartoon. It functions to give sense of humor to the citizen who are worried of this coronavirus issues. It can be seen whether from the first cartoon, second or third cartoon. In the first cartoon, which is entitled "*Gara-gara Corona Virus*", the cartoon shows how a family should act in the condition of coronavirus pandemic. By showing the shape of coronavirus flying in the air, the family must stay at home in order not to get infected. The second picture, the title is "*Awas Covid 19, Jaga Jarak*". On the picture one of the men bring wood meter to measure the distance. He tries to keep physical distance by bringing the wood meter. On the second picture, a son and his mother who is trying to shop the daily needs by using smartphone and the son comment to his mother. By the conversation, the using of the word "*Emak, Onlen, and Tong*", it has a sense of humor from the cartoon.

Besides, there are various mass media which only present the news about coronavirus, the effects of coronavirus, the number of patients, and so on. From the

levels of trichotomy of Pierce theory, only the second level, namely object is used to analysis the cartoon. From the three objects analyzed. After interpret the cartoon, it shows that *Kartun Benny* is create and publish after there is a new information or a new update regarding the coronavirus issues. In addition, *Kartun Benny* is published to respond to the news update and government instruction about coronavirus, not to give critic the government.

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