VISITING TAMAN SAFARI PRIGEN:
IS IT ONLY ABOUT SAVING THE NATURE?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the commodification of tourism in Taman Safari brochure. The study applies qualitative research of textual analysis by using Roland Barthes’s semiotics as the tool of analysis and the findings are interpreted using Jean Baudrillard’s concept in commodification. Four sets of images that showing humans and animals interactions are chosen as the object of analysis and it is found that the brochure offers a sense of ‘responsibility’ that can be done by visiting Taman Safari Prigen. At the same time, it implies that the wildlife is powerless and the safest place is when they are under humans’ supervision. Therefore, we can say that through their brochures, Taman Safari Prigen commodifies tourism by offering an opportunity to be close, ‘coming back and responsible to the nature and this memorable experience is only available for those who are able to afford the ticket – deriving an idea that ‘coming back’ to nature in an occasional and festive event is also a statement of class distinction, differing them from sordid and agricultural lifestyle that commonly belongs to the lower class societies.

Keywords: Theme Park; Tourism; Brochure; Semiotics; Commodification

1. Introduction

At its very basic level, consumption began with human’s intention to fulfill their needs in order to produce something else. The connection between need and consumption moves in circular process, which means that whatever we consume, we do it with the intention to produce something else – or in the other words, we only consume the things that we need. Marx defines this idea with “productive consumption” which assumes that all forms of consumptions are done logically and purely motivated by “need” (as quoted in Patterson 2006, p. 89). This ‘need’ is related to the value a commodity has that called the use-value. Use value lies on the utility and accompanying this use-value, a commodity also has an exchange-value, the money or the commodities it can be traded with. However, the definitions of ‘need’ and ‘logic’ can be various and this shows us that there is something else beyond use-value and exchange-value that underlies people’s consumption behavior. To fill in this gap, Jean Baudrillard finds out human beings are not only attracted by utility and price, but also by symbols. To define this, Baudrillard proposes the concept of “sign-value”. Sign value refers to the social status a commodity confers on its owner (Tyson 2006, p. 62). A commodity is no longer purchased for its utility and price, but also for its ‘symbol’. Sign-value underlines differences and that is the root of identity construction in the postmodern era, one of the products from meanings-signs firm connection.

Hence we can tell that consumption for use-value and exchange-value has been replaced by consumption of sign-value. Entailing the shift from use-value and exchange-value oriented to sign-value oriented, Baudrillard adds the concept of commodification. If commodity can be briefly defined as “something that is sold in order to make a profit” then commodification can be defined as a process that objects, whether it is physical either non-physical such as experience, can be traded as long as it is profitable (Allan 2011, p. 305). This is possible because commodification is rooted from sign-value oriented and because people pursue the ‘symbol’, anything can be traded – be it a glass of milkshake or the experience of drinking a milkshake in Eiffel tower.

The sign-value and commodification also makes it possible to trade non-physical things, such as experience. Pine and Gilmore in Experience Economy shows how experience economy can also be as real as commodity economy. They find out that the core issue in experience economy is that experiences are fundamentally personal and nobody can have the similar impact after having an experience. When physical commodities are possibly run out, the sensation and memories people get from an experience stay in the back of the consumers’ minds – therefore, “memorable” is the keyword in experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1996, p. 98). That makes experience become valuable. In tourism, the meaning of experience can be explained with John Urry’s idea of ‘tourist gaze’ where he exposes that the rudimentary
reason why people do tourism is to find something different from what they routinely see (Urry 2002, p. 1).

There are many ways to evoke the sense of difference and since tourism, just like other experience economy, expands significantly, companies should find some other updated ways in creating the sense of difference. One of the most popular ways in creating difference in order to give a memorable experience is through theming. Theming is “the application of a narrative to institutions or locations” which “provides a layer of meaning and symbolism to the objects to which it is applied” (Bryman 2004, p. 15) and as the theme is applied simultaneously, while they are in the themed environment, the consumers can really feel the different from what they routinely see. The example of the expression of theming in experience economy is the theme parks, theme hotels and theme restaurants.

In marketing theme park, the producers can also relate the valuable experience with other values, especially sign-value. This study finds that the trend of green tourism that emerged in Indonesia is also connected with experience economy. In definition, green tourism is a tourism movement that rooted from sustainably tourism which “meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future” (Nilson-Anderson 2012, p. 12). It focuses on keeping the sustainability of a tourism spot, especially ecotourism. The connection between nature, tourism and experience economy can also found in SeaWorld where Susan Davis finds out the the visualization of nature. It refers on the the visualization the business attitude and give us idea that the nature “back to us” (Davis cited in Patterson 2006). It seems that the idea of ‘gathering with the nature’ is an appeal that underlies the nature tourism. Cloke and Perkins (2002) and Nayar (2006) observe this idea by analyzing tourism brochures. Cloke and Perkins in New Zealand focuses on adventurous tourism as a way to re-embrace the nature, however, the adventure is actually a staged tourism spot, a pack of bogus originality and creating ‘simulated’ adventurers. In India, by investigating the tourism brochure issued by Indian Ministry of Tourism he finds the idea of ‘exoticization’ – an act of making strange or highlights the difference that has been mentioned earlier as the underlying aspect of tourism. Exoticization takes form in three types, which are the exoticization of distance (getaway tourism), time (historical tourism), and difference. The last form is about making the visitors to see a sense of ‘other’ that generated through staging, be it in situ (ecotourism), out-of situ (circus) and in-fake-situ (nature-based theme park) (cited in Nayar 2006, p. 206). Every section of exoticization aims into creating a memorable experience, therefore we can say that tourism, nature and experience economy are closely related each and other, especially when tourism is added by the idea of ‘saving the nature’. It is more likely the combination of our responsibility to the environment and awareness that doing this responsibility can be advantageous – and for some tourism spot, this ‘responsibility’ can be a sign-value to be sold. Green tourism itself can take part in ecotourism and the nearest example in this kind of tourism is the nature-based tourism spot.

One of the most popular nature-based tourism spot in East Java is Taman Safari Prigen. Taman Safari Prigen is basically a combination of an ex-situ conservation area and a theme park; therefore it can be categorized as nature-based theme park. Its main feature is the safari area and it also has a waterpark, restaurants, rides and other entertainment areas that take up to 350 hectares. With their features, approximately in 2012, Taman Safari Prigen can gain 6000 to 7000 visitors in weekdays and increases significantly in weekend, grows up to 9000 to 10.000 visitors (Yahoo!News 2012). This shows that Taman Safari Prigen is somehow advantaged by the trend of green tourism; therefore it becomes interesting to examine how Taman Safari Prigen gains the visitors’ attention.

When we question about how Taman Safari Prigen gains the attention, we should take a look at the marketing. Promotional tools become important in marketing because it is the initial point in creating visitors’ expectation in an experience economy. In this point, the visitors are directed to imagine what kind of experience they are going to have and here is where the ways and objects of seeing is constructed. Taman Safari uses three main promotional tools to market their place, the first is the billboards that placed along the road to Taman Safari Prigen that also direct the visitors and passengers to the site. The second promotional tool is the website and the last one is the brochure. From the three options, the study selected brochure as the essential one. Instead of website, Taman Safari Prigen’s brochure is provided in travel agents’ desk in East Java therefore, people will not take them if they are not serious want to know the details about the place. Moreover, because it takes more cost and time to update the content of a brochure,
so the brochure should contain all important details about Taman Safari Prigen. With this reason, we can tell that brochures are made to be available for a relatively long time.

Instead of other theme parks like Batu Night Spectacular or Jatim Park, Taman Safari Prigen is more consistent and simultaneous in applying the theme. From the name “Safari” we can understand that this place contains animals and nature theme, and from the brochure we can see that they totally applies the theme be it in the color used in the brochure and displayed features, because they want to apply the theme as a way to confer the difference from other amusement parks. In a further level, the brochure even speaks louder than just offering a sense of difference from daily routine and other amusement parks, but it also speaks about the ‘usage’ of visiting their place instead of others. I mentioned ‘usage’ because in the cover of the brochure is stated that visiting Taman Safari Prigen is also a charity act, therefore I will argue that this brochure attempts to commodify tourism because they add a sign-value within the experience the visitors will have.

The issue appears here is corresponding to Jean Baudrillard’s idea that already mentioned earlier. Experience economy and theming is another example how commodities are displayed as ‘individual’, ‘different’ and ‘autonomous’ and therefore they can be commodified just like other physical commodities. And the sense of ‘individuality’, ‘different’ and ‘autonomous’ is displayed through advertisements, here, the advertisement takes form in a brochure. Taman Safari Prigen issued two brochures; however, one of them is no longer distributed through the travel agents therefore the writer chose the one that still widely published. The selected brochure contains eight pages; however, there are merely three sets of images selected to be analyzed. Those images are selected because they display humans and animals interactions – which means that humans and animals are displayed touching or seeing each other, showing ‘closeness’ and put together in the same frame. These images are later on analyzed using Roland Barthes’ semiotics because it is necessary to find the myth of the image and afterwards, after the myth is found; the myth or ideological level can be interpreted using Baudrillard’s idea.

2. Taman Safari Prigen: Exposing ‘Care for Nature’, Concealing Class Distinction

There are three sets of images that chosen to be analyzed. All of these sets are analyzed by classifying the linguistic (anchorage and relay) and non-linguistic items (coded-iconic and non-coded iconic message) that each of them is broken down into denotative and connotative level. Later on, we can find the myth and link the myth with Baudrillard’s theory.

The first set is the cover of because it is the initial and pivotal point of the brochure. The anchorage tells It’s so exciting to spend holiday in the biggest and most complete Safari Park in Asia. The sentence directs the reader to think of an adventure in a nature-based theme park where people can find the sense of thrill, excitement, while the relay calls the reader to come and save the ‘rare animals’ and saving the animals is displayed as an ‘easy’ and ‘fun’ thing because they can do it while they are having a holiday. In the end of the relay, an additional statement comes out telling that Taman Safari Prigen is ‘one of the biggest conservation area in Asia’ in order to tell the reader that this place is managed professionally and assuring the holiday spent in Taman Safari Prigen is not merely having fun, but also ‘meaningful’ because the readers can also save the wildlife.

The non-linguistic messages cover the non-coded iconic and coded-iconic messages. The non-coded iconic message is the icon of Taman Safari Prigen, represented by the image of a Javanese rhinoceros(Rhinoceros sondaicus) that indicated by its singular thorn, with green background and yellow line shaped in a circle. In the denotative level, rhinoceros is chosen because Javanese rhinoceros is one of the endemic species in Java that is close to extinction that reported only left 51 rhinos in 2013 (as cited in Tempo.co, 2013). Green background after the image of a rhinoceros is sign that the rhino naturally live in the forest. According to Lichtenfeld et al., etymologically “green” is rooted from the word “grow” and “tangibly growing things” (Hutchings as cited in Lichtenfeld et al., 2011, p. 785). In contemporary times, “many languages link green to vegetation and
the environment and ‘going green’ means becoming more environmentally aware, and ‘greener pastures’ are (perceived as) a new and better place” (Lichtenfeld et al., 2011, p. 785) and also fertility however, when this green is circled by yellow lining, we may imply that there is no way to save the species from extinction without protecting it. On the other hand, yellow is generally known as the sign of “warning”, in colour indexes yellow is located between greens and reds, and as red is generally known as “danger”, yellow is the way to express “almost in danger”, as cited in Kandinsky that yellow “has a disturbing influence and reveals an insistent, aggressive character ... it may be paralleled, in human nature, with madness, violent, raving lunacy” (as cited in Krees and Van Leuween 2002, p. 353). Associated with the colour references according to Kandinsky, the yellow circle line around the rhino is also the way to express “protection” and “involvement” of human beings – or a sign of “project” as seen in yellow of police line in crime scenes. As human’s population grows, more rooms are needed and less room are provided for wildlife animals; therefore the involvement of human beings is necessary to keep their existences.

The coded-iconic message that contains an ideological aspect is represented by the image of a Sumatran tiger’s head portrayed from the right side whose eyes are not looking at the readers. A tiger is the symbol of carnivorous predator, the ‘king’ of the jungle to substitute lions that are not Indonesian endemic species. Lions are from “Africa, east across southern Asia into India, and north into south-east Europe” (Riggio 2011, p. 1) and directing the reader to think of wilderness, beasts, danger and the sense of “other”. Compared to herbivorous species or other wild animals like crocodile, the symbolism of tiger has a longer and wider cultural meanings, as a symbol of “power and strength and can also be a power of destruction and violence” (Animal-symbol.com). Tiger is not merely able to give a sense of wild, but also a stronger sense of thrill, at the same time telling the readers that they will meet the tiger in the Safari Park, which is corresponding to the message of the word “serunya” in the anchorage. In the ideological level, the brochure is trying to challenge the visitors’ awareness about the recently popular go-green issue – as they are directed to acknowledge that the tickets they are paying are donated for the animals’ welfare. They are offering the experience to spend a holiday with the wildlife and act as their savior and these activities can be done in an amusing way.

The second set contains three images. The first image is the animal trainer’s interaction with the kids and the owl. The second image is the car line in the safari area. And the last image is the boy with the cubs. The anchorage of this image is It’s so fun to spend holiday, study and play in Taman Safari Indonesia 2 Prigen. The sentence invites the readers by telling that in Taman Safari Prigen, they can also get some education about the wildlife. Furthermore, the education is not merely from reading books or watching films, but the visitors can learn directly by interacting with the animals. This makes the education different from what they may obtain outside Taman Safari Prigen. When this sentence is combined with the image of the animal trainer and the kids, the message of ‘extraordinary education’ is highlighted – it is not only informative, it is also safe and entertaining.

On the second image, the message of ‘adventurous’ that exposed in the cover is once again articulated. The different between ‘safe’ and ‘dangerous’ is only separated by their car window’s glass. This image shows that in Safari Area, the ‘object of gaze’ is not only the animals, but also the visitors. As the tiger stands facing the cars, the image creates a message that visitors do not only gaze but also become the object of gaze. The third image shows a boy smiles as he is cuddling with two cubs. It shows the reader a sense of ‘friendship’ and when animals from Felidae genus “roll over and offer their belly… show they are not contesting the dominance. They are telling you that they submit to your dominance” (Pets and Animals, 2013). The kid’s smile and the cub’s showing belly are usually the
signs of comfort and safe feelings expressed by the human and the animal. In the connotative level, the image tries to express that “friendship” could happen between humans and wild animals like lions, such a simple way to express that friendship between kids and cubs are as simple as kids with cats. Well of course, this image is also trying to tell us that all animals in this facility are already tamed and visitors no need to worry about being attacked while having a “friendship” with these animals.

In the myth level, this set shows that by coming to Taman Safari Prigen, the visitors can get the opportunity to be close and learn directly from the wildlife. It reflects that the animals are touchable, as if we can “touch” the nature and “embrace” them. Similar to Susan Davis’ remarks on SeaWorld’s commercials, this image is an example of “a way of mediating human–nature relations, selling representations of nature as benign, friendly, within reach, to vast audiences” (Davis as cited in Patterson 2000, p. 127). What is interesting in this image is, the animals become the objects of recreation, as written by Franklin “making them at once recreation on the part of the zoo-visiting public, and also part of a larger educational concern with conservation and the preservation of species” however, this approach treats animals as to appreciate animals “as animals and not as surrogate humans” (Franklin, as cited in Patterson 2006, p. 116). Patterson explains that this representation of nature is a way to give a promise that is actually “the fantasy of a nature within reach, that like the children in the advertisement, you can have actual contact with nature, being nose to nose with a benign animal – that you can ‘touch the magic’” (Patterson 2000, p. 128). The visitors can get opportunity to enjoy such experience distinct the visitors from others who cannot afford such experience. And to touch the magic, the visitors have to pay the ticket. That makes Taman Safari Prigen different from usual zoos that relatively cheaper than Taman Safari. The issue of class distinction is also raised here, and that becomes the main idea of commodification.

The third set talks about the Tiger Cave Restaurant that serves European Cuisine where the visitors can have lunch accompanied by three white Indian tigers. There are the images of a woman and a man having lunch ‘accompanied’ by two white tigers that stare at them. The woman’s young, with fairy skin and long, straight and black hair – a popular type of Indonesian woman while the man is young too, with muscular body that expresses masculinity. Though his body is covered by his white collar shirt, with a single glance we can imply that this man is ‘well-fed’. On the dining table, there are four wine glasses that two of them are filled by wine-like drink, and these people are eating using spoon and fork – as explained in the relay, this Tiger Cave Restaurant sells European Cuisine. The items on the table are meant to obey a set of table manners. They look happy relaxed but still formal (signified by smiling faces and straight back pose).

The meetings between humans and animals in this image can be explained by setting some binary opposition between them. At the front side of the image, the upper class couple – heterosexual couple, signified by man and woman – looks happy on their dinner table, waits for their European cuisine to be dished and enjoyed with table manner cutleries – while the tigers or the “wild” are trapped behind the glass. The glass makes the opposition established as in this image the glass’ role is as the boundaries. Without the existence of the glass, this situation will never happen. The glass also signified human’s ability and success to tame the wild – just a thin and transparent thing can protect us from danger and turn the danger into an entertaining thing. Instead of hunting for preys in the wild, they are looking at humans having lunch and become interesting objects to be gazed at.

The traditional concept that tiger is a strong and dangerous carnivore and humans are their prey is turned down and replaced by the new reality this animal can be tamed and accompany their prey eating lunch. In fact, from the binary opposition it also can be inferred that the image connotes a message of “responsibility” and also a sense of “victory over the wild”, as the visitors are portrayed as the “civilized”,

![Image](image_url)
the tigers are portrayed as the objects of our responsibility because they are now “helpless” and hunted. If they are in the wild, worse things can possibly happen to them – they can be killed and skinned – but here, we can do our ‘good deeds’ and donate some of our money to them. Their existence is now highly determined by our responsibility. This idea shows a sign of modernity, an era when nature is defeated by inventions and technology.

The image also brings up the concept of class by displaying the image of ‘appropriate’ lunch – this is used as a path to confer the ‘ideal’ human beings who are the ‘civilized, helping and dominant’ party, while the caged tigers are now the ‘Other, helpless and dominated’ party. However, the sensation that the ad is trying to offer is actually a combination between a sense of victory over the harmful wildlife, and as the impact of civilization, the visitors can do their “responsibility”. The experience of having lunch gazed by tigers is preferred for the upper class society and offers a symbolic value of “being different”, as mentioned by Baudrillard that “the sign object is neither given nor exchanged: it is appropriated, withheld and manipulated by individual subjects as a sign, that is, as coded difference. Here lies the object of consumption” (Baudrillard 1981, p. 65). In other words that excellently quoted from Lane, “I might decide to wear a designer suit not to fulfil a need, but to express a difference from other people who surround me” (Lane 2000, p. 75). As “symbolic exchange reveals concrete and transparent interpersonal relationships”, this session offers the readers an additional value, which is not only helping the wildlife but also a luxurious and ‘classy’ way to help the environment.

The analysis on the brochure shows that human beings start to lose connection to the wildlife. The only connection we have with this world is merely through the textual references, by symbols and signs, by deferred meanings that create new meanings in every experience we have. The wildlife is pictured as the “Others”, and the act of Othering that we can find in the brochure generates the textual connections we have with the wildlife.

This, as explained by Baudrillard, is only based on the textual reference of the sign, not more (Baudrillard 1988, p. 88). In further level, sign value comes up to sign fetish or “signifier fetishism - an analysis of the sign form in its relation to the commodity form.” (Baudrillard 1988, p.63), where signs are produced and keep reproduced without producing material. This is also called as the “simulation of meaning”.

Here, once again, the wildlife’s position steps back to the object, as Patterson writes, “the powerless are subject to the gaze of the powerful” (Patterson 2006, p. 117). Modernity has created distance that separates people from other species, from the natural world. In staging animals into spectacles, they “are turned into spectacle, in zoos and theme parks, and because they are made both passive and captive, this underlines the marginalisation of nature from human post-industrial everyday experience” (Patterson 2006, p. 129). And because we live distantly from wildlife, Taman Safari Prigen brings up the distance and makes it into an experience that they can ‘sell’. Only certain classes, those who can afford the ticket can enjoy the experience to feel, learn and be close with the wildlife. Furthermore, the brochure tries to confer the message that we have the responsibility to take care of the wildlife. The responsibility that comes out as the result as modernity and human civilizations are articulated by the brochure, in the same time, implies that the wildlife is powerless. The idea that wildlife is powerless is also exaggerated and commodified by persuading the readers that by coming there, the visitors can ‘help’ them and in turn, the readers feel that their responsibility as a part of ecology is accomplished.

### 3. Conclusion

To sum up, the Taman Safari Prigen’s brochure offers a place where human interaction and relationship that established during the trip, education and reservation can happen in the same place. These activities are actually masking the actual value they are offering: a feeling that by visiting Taman Safari Prigen and doing those activities, the visitors feel like they have already done their responsibility to the nature. This phenomenon best explained by Baudrillard’s concept that human beings are symbolic creature which basically motivated by symbolic meanings, including in consumption (Baudrillard 1988, p. 49).

The meaning of being “responsible” is merely simulated. This statement does not mean that Taman Safari Prigen does not give any contribution to the wildlife; however, the agenda of wildlife conservation can be, for sure, wider and longer than merely visiting a nature-based theme park. An interesting fact, is
that the nowadays tourists are mostly the post-tourists that have “no problem about the inauthentic. It is merely another game to be played at, another pastiched surface feature of post-modern experience”, explains Urry (Urry as cited in Patterson 2006, p. 137). Moreover, the simulation of meaning is appropriate with Taman Safari II’s model as an ex situ conservation that “stores or propagates the collected material outside its native habitat” (Heywood and Iriondo cited in Volis and Bletcher 2011) which means Taman Safari II is actually staging the nature as if the animals are in their real habitat.

Finally, the finding illuminates the issue of class distinction that elaborated by the images of human and animals interactions. Being close to the nature can be achieved by being able to afford what it takes to be close to the nature – which in this context, is money. Therefore, we can say that through their brochures, Taman Safari Prigen commodifies tourism by offering an opportunity to be close, ‘coming back and responsible to the nature and this memorable experience is only available for those who are able to afford the ticket – deriving an idea that ‘coming back’ to nature in an occasional and festive event is also a statement of class distinction, differing them from sordid and agricultural lifestyle that commonly belongs to the lower class societies.

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