Representation of Murals and Branded Outdoor Advertising: Critical Implications for Sustainable Geographical Public Spaces

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the war of visual display in geographical public spaces between murals and branded outdoor advertising in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia, concerning space representation and representational spaces. Using Lefebvre's perspective on space as representation, we dissect the space discourse and the texts on murals and branded spaces by borrowing a social semiotic analysis knife. The three space materials that we studied show the battles between murals and branded space, both in position, size, layout, and shape of space material. The representation carried out in every space material also has implications for social discourse, both in terms of the field, tenor, and discourse mode. We conclude that amid the spread of brand messages in the public spaces, the mural sought to take a position as an oasis of social criticism, the guardian of culture and symbols of public heroes through a guerrilla space medium. The mural shows us that something is missing (and maybe trying to be removed) in urban public spaces: the discourse on manners and customs, etiquette, and traditional narratives and wisdom. This study gives insights that a city needs a fresh breath of public discourse through more spacious spaces to not drown by the repressing branded spaces.

Introduction

The rise of outdoor advertising (OA) in public spaces forms the branded spaces, namely communication spaces with brand messages that are displayed persuasively, attractively, and sometimes aggressively (B. S. Wijaya, 2021). Research on OA generally leads to criticism of advertisers' dominance of the city government which causes visual pollution of city displays. Iveson (2012) advised the city government that OA's visual layout is not just a matter of billboard location that generates regional income through taxes but also overall urban governance management that is closely related to the city's aesthetics. City government revenues from OA taxes are indeed very significant, as examined by Astuti (2020) which states that Surakarta city government revenues from advertisement tax increased throughout the year and increased rapidly in the 2014-2015 period. In line with that, Iannilli (2020) found OA was still the media that advertisers relied on. They are competing to place the most interesting advertising material. For this reason, the city government needs to work with the community and the city curator council so that OA does not fall apart and disrupt the beauty of the city. OA is ideally in the same size and the distance of ad placement must be maintained to be sustainable with each other.

The chaotic arrangement of OAs has become commonplace in major cities in Indonesia. The layout of OA needs immediate handling so that it is organized and neat does not make the city increasingly chaotic and slum. The problem of the chaos of the OA layout is still exacerbated by the proliferation of empty billboards that are stalled and seem to be neglected (Gebreselassie & Bougie, 2019). Unfortunately, the law enforcement against fraud is still very weak. Amid this visual chaos, murals and wall paintings have sprung up in several corners of the city, including in Surakarta.The existence of murals in Surakarta was examined by Grodach (2011) who focused on the activities of a street art group in Surakarta with all the limitations of facilities but were able to carry out the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of art that were widely accepted by the public. Street art is proven to be able to provide an alternative space that is simple, independent, and easily accessible without having to spend a lot of money. Mural as communal art has its own process of production and art management. Mural is a public art media that requires careful handling –as in general the media should pay attention to their social responsibilities (B. Wijaya, Eddyono, Kania, & Kurnia, 2020) so as not to cause public noise and environmental pollution. Mural artists need to be in touch with the city government and the local community.

Case studies of murals in Surakarta and Yogyakarta need to consider cultural aspects that have strong roots in society (Mohammed, 2021). Murals in Surakarta are also used as a means of promoting city facilities, as studied by Aryanti, Nasucha, and Al-Ma'Ruf (2020). However, the representation of murals amid the dominance of OA in Surakarta has not been studied by the researchers. Therefore, this article elaborates: 1) how the representations of space in Surakarta are defined through the dominance of branded OA spaces that marginalizes mural spaces, 2) how the spaces of representation in Surakarta are identified through discourses in the text of the mural spaces in dealing with the discourses on branded OA spaces. Sequentially, this article presents a literature review on Levebvre's theory of space as a representation and concept of branded outdoor advertising, research methodological descriptions, findings, and discussions on geographic analysis of mapping the position of branded OA in Surakarta, contestation of public space between murals and branded OA, both in terms of representation of space and space of representation and ends with the conclusions and limitations of the study.

Literature Review

Space as Representation

According to Lafebvre (1991), space is produced and producing. It means, space can represent a certain concept (produced to strengthen power, for example), it can also represent discourses and communication that form or produce (the lives of) society. Therefore, Levebvre introduces the concept of representations of space and spaces of representation. Representations of space are conceptual spaces, deliberately produced by certain authorities (government, architects, contractors, etc.), to control, and therefore there are ideologies, power, order. Branded OA or Billboard for example, there are various concepts, ranging from business concepts, visual communication rules, exposure politics, and so on. Because this is a capital, state, and bourgeois

space, the representations of space present a "substantial role and specific influence in the production of space" (Lafebvre, 1991).

In contrast to the spaces of representation, this is living space, everyday experience space. Because it is not bound by concepts, rules and restraining power, the spaces of representation are more 'speakable' (expressive), "because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic" (Lafebvre, 1991). Spaces of representation may be related to the side of underground life and do not comply with the rules of consistency or integration.

Outdoor Advertising and Branded Spaces

The term outdoor advertising (OA) refers to the notion of various forms of marketing communication placed in a large area such as an urban area. Types of OA include street furniture, transit ads, and billboards (Fill, 2009). In a later development there is ambient media, a type of OA that blends with the surroundings in which the message is attached (Cronin, 2006; Rosengren, Modig, & Dahlén, 2015). Advertising designers are trying to find new mediums to spread the message. The history of the advertising industry noted that OA was able to metamorphose and adapt to the environment into new mediums (McFall, 2004). However, the growing OA is being criticized as a cause of visual pollution that requires regulation and control (Gannon & Lawson, 2010).Visual pollution means the destruction of the environment through the installation of visual materials. This can be in the form of commercial and non-commercial advertising spaces, although in many cases the commercial creative predominates. Commercial advertising can dominate the environment because every party involved can profit from the installation (Azeema & Nazuk, 2016). OA is an important element of the contemporary street scene and local authorities must be able to manage between the commercial interests and features of the city and its cultural history. Thus, the installation of OA must comply with regulations that protect the visual quality and historical character of a place while promoting the commercial image of the historic city center in a positive way (Portella, 2016).

Research on OA in Indonesia is also filled with findings that show the destruction of the face of the city due to visual pollution. Industrialization makes the country lose the direction of culture, including in maintaining the history of the city's face. The complexity of life due to urbanization, economic pressures, diversity of lifestyles, social and educational inequalities, plurality and hybridity of values and norms, various environmental pollutions, have become the characteristics and bad image of cities in Indonesia. Especially now that there are more and more branded places that provide new consumption sites for urban youth (B. S. Wijaya, 2021). Without proper arrangement, the city will be increasingly crowded, difficult to breathe, and dying. The city loses its allure because its beauty is covered with commercial messages that clash uncontrollably.

OA that is scattered without ecological considerations becomes visual waste that sacrifices social spaces that should belong to the public (Ahmed, Islam, Tuba, Mahdy, & Sujauddin, 2019). Visual pollution has disrupted green open spaces and damaged the value of the city's beauty. The government's lack of firmness towards this situation has led many activists of visual advertising to criticize the government for being more concerned about this phenomenon. It is time for the government to be bolder in eliminating outdoor billboards, as well as revising the master plan to suit the times (Kostan & Salendu, 2020).

Methodology

We collected data materials by observing directly in the field and documenting the murals that were located adjacent to the branded OA space in three locations as samples. These three locations were chosen because of their strategic position showing the display of murals and branded OA in one frame of landscape. These three locations are Manahan flyover, Slamet Riyadi-Gatot Soebroto intersection, and Manahan stadium (see Figure 1). After observing and documenting the research objects, we then analyzed the comparison of representations of visual display space both, including shapes, positions, sizes, and layouts. The next analysis focuses on the discourse content in visual and verbal texts using social semiotics. According to Hall and Open (1997), representation can be studied using various approaches such as semiotic, discourse and narrative analysis. Halliday and Hasan (1989) stated, "The text ... is an instance of the process and product of social meaning in a particular context of situation", while the context of the situation is

unfolded "through a systemic relationship between the social environment on the one hand, and the functional organization of language on the other" (Halliday & Hasan, 1989).

There are at least 3 tools of analysis in social semiotics (Halliday & Hasan, 1989), namely: 1) field of the discourse that refers to what is discursively constructed in the text, 2) tenor of the discourse refers to who/ what is involved in the discourse, 3) mode of the discourse refers to how the discourse is built. In short, field focuses on the issue of discourse, tenor on discourse actors, and mode on discourse strategy.

Figure 1. The war of murals and branded OAs on three different locations: Manahan flyover (mural-1 & branded OA-1), Slamet Riyadi-Gatot Soebroto intersection (mural-2 & branded OA-2), and Manahan stadium (mural-3 & branded OA-3) (source: Research doc.).

Findings and Discussion

The murals and branded OA found are of two kinds, licensed and not licensed. Licensed OA usually uses permanent construction, while unlicensed ones are installed carelessly. Licensed murals are found in the city center and are generally giant. Meanwhile, unlicensed murals (often called graffiti), are made secretly by individuals or groups, found on many roadside walls and shop doors.Of the three locations sampled, we analyzed 6 data materials: 1) mural found on the Manahan flyover wall with a child's visual using *blankon* –traditional hat (Mural-1), 2) branded billboard containing SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta ad (Branded OA-1) , 3) mural found at the Slamet Riyadi-Gatot Soebroto intersection illustrated a *wayang* figure (Mural-2), 4) branded shop signage with the Panasonic ad (Branded OA-2), 5) mural found near the Manahan stadium themed sport competition (Mural- 3), and 6) branded billboard displaying "3" ad, a telco provider brand (branded OA-3).

Geographical and Spatial Analysis of the OA in Surakarta

Before discussing mural representational space and OA in Surakarta, we did a geographic mapping of the location of OA based on data that has been verified with taxpayer data, so we found 145 billboards installed along city streets. The number presented does not include smaller wild advertisements around commercial buildings and shops as well as advertisements attached

to city walls and street furniture. The official number of OA is compared with the length of the road section and the density mapping can be checked in figures 2 and 3.
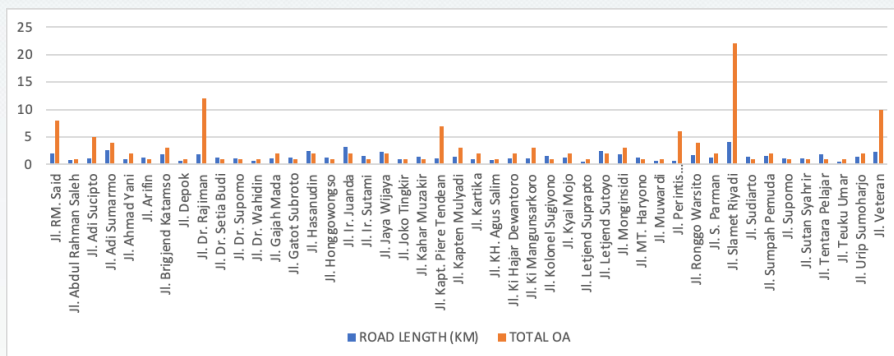

Figure 2. The length of roads and the number of OA in Surakarta (source: Authors' analysis)

The density of OA in Surakarta is related to city governance policies which are considered less considering good urban planning. The Association of Companies and Advertising Practitioners in this city has long criticized the policy and questioned the arrangement of OA so that it is not chaotic and becomes a billboard forest. OA should not only aim to increase local revenue but should be able to beautify the face of the city (Saputra, Hananto, & Herawati, 2021).The lack of contribution is due to the fact that the management of billboards in the city of Surakarta leaves various problems, including (1) the management of billboards is still carried out by 2 SKPD (Local Government Work Units), thus making management ineffective and inefficient, (2) the number of billboards that are not licensed and installed incorrectly, causing losses to the state and poor urban spatial planning, (3) monitoring of billboard managers is weak due to limited human resources, (4) manual tender process and lack of detailed information regarding billboard point descriptions, thus causing users or enthusiasts to be reluctant to take part in the auction (Hernández-Ávila, Tirado-Ramírez, Santos-Luna, & Reynales-Shigematsu, 2007).

Figure 3. Visualization of OA density in Surakarta (source: Authors' analysis)

From the geographical and spatial analysis of OA in Surakarta, it appears that the denser the traffic, the more OA will be installed. The main road does tend to be full of OA installations. Like 21 OA installed on Jl. Slamet Riyadi which divides in the middle of the city. However, there are trade areas with narrower roads but denser OA installations, such as in the Klewer Market Area around Veteran and Yos Sudarso roads.

In addition, companies such as banks and shopping malls install OA in their building areas. This makes the cost cheaper because there is no need to pay land rent. Another problem that disturbs the geographical public space of the city is OAs that are extra large in size and OAs whose shape contrasts with the surrounding environment. This visually indeed managed to attract attention, but the composition became a visual disharmony with the surrounding atmosphere.

Representations of Space: Highbrow vs. Lowbrow

Mural-1 vs. Branded OA-1.

The 6x9m mural is located on the lower wall of the flyover and on the edge of the railway line. This dimly-tended area is used by street vendors, especially angkringan (traditional street vendor). In contrast, flyover is brightly lit with street lights and the installation of lights from lining-up branded billboards dominating the space.

Mural-2 vs. Branded OA-2.

Murals in the heart of the city are like traversing among the crowd of landscapes filled with giant billboards. Most murals in this area visualize the nostalgia and romanticism of the past. While the branded giant billboards stood on it, controlling the atmosphere of the city by inviting shopping for goods sold at the commercial center.

Mural-3 vs. Branded OA-3.

The area in front of the Manahan stadium is like the situation on the railway line under Manahan flyover. The difference is that the mural is painted longer following the wall towards the flyover. The mural depicts the spirit of sports messages with images of elderly people and local male athletes. While on the other side of the wall, towered a branded billboard that stole attention because of its high position and was among several empty billboards.

Table 1.
The comparison of murals and branded OA spaces (Authors' analysis)

Object	Shape	Size	Position	Layout
Mural-1	Wall painting with traditional dressed child figure waving, with a friendly expression.	6x9m	On the flyover buffer wall facing the Surabaya-Solo-Jakarta railway line.	Horizontally follow the flyover buffer wall with static balance through large images and writing.
Branded OA-1	Billboard promotion of boarding school programs one of the junior high schools in Surakarta. At the bottom there is a message and contact the advertising agency.	5x10m	Iron-constructed billboard as high as the flyover bridge, facing the driver passing over the crossing flyover Hasanudin and Dr. Moewardi streets	Full of picture and writing messages with a static formal composition.
Mural-2	Three paintings about the story of the *wayang* (traditional puppet) character Bima who fought a dragon snake in the ocean.	18x4m	Painted on the door of a shop house in the business centre at the intersection of Slamet Riyadi and Gatot Soebroto streets	Three-panel composition with long-continuous image.
Branded OA-2	Electronic product promotion billboard with	18x12m	Construction above the shop	Using the Mondrian panel

			house that dominates the space. Facing directly to the intersection of two of the city's main roads.	layout, it contains photos of products along with descriptions in large writing titles.
	a price message that is insanely cheap when buying in this store.			
Mural-3	Wall painting Gesang, an elderly local public figure who was rowing a Rajamala boat (a typical Surakarta palace boat) with several local male athletes and Srikandi figure depicted like Wonder Woman holding a PON torch (a national sport competition event).	6x30m	Painted along the wall towards the flyover in front of the Manahan stadium.	The elongated image composition with balanced placement spreads in the horizontal plane.
Branded OA-3	Promotion billboard of a telecommunication product with message about local youth who have successfully become national idols	5x10m	The position of the billboard faces the driver passing on the flyover.	The static composition utilizes an elevated billboard space with contrasting writing and image colours.

The representations of space as stated by Lafebvre (1991) that space is produced by (and to confirm) the power, is represented by the power of position, composition, and size of dominating branded spaces. While the murals are under representation, occupying the 'less representative' spaces. This shows that the mural is a marginalized medium and tends to be developed underground in guerrilla way, but alive. Indeed, research on the existence of murals and other street arts cannot be separated from the discourse of fighting the meaning in which subordinate groups try to oppose the interests of the dominant group. Yan, Xu, Sun, and Xu (2019) stated that the resistance of street art is not anarchic but symbolic which is an expression of disenchantment in the people who dominate the public. Street art is a tool of criticism responding to the problems of social change in society. This art can be a medium of representation of disappointment, disgust and disillusionment with the situation that develops around them.

Space of Representation: Guardian of the Culture vs. Capitalist Machine

Most of Murals represent the voices of community (public), with the styles/ strategies/ modes of discourse that exposes local character and socio-cultural wisdom. Mural on the Manahan flyover wall for example, the discourse of hospitality and friendliness is delivered in a casual and even humorous manner through traditional greetings to train passengers who pass through the mural. This is different from the surrounding branded OA such as the SMP Muhammadiyah billboard that displays the message and impression of a rigid and formal school, it is too guarding and selling the burdening image as the best school. Likewise, with the mural at the shop house door that showcase the heroism of Bima, the *wayang* character, which is narrated is fighting a dragon in the ocean, as a symbol of battle against life's challenge. This kind of metaphoric traditional narrative not only displays interesting aesthetic impression, but also 'subtle way' in conveying the message of life to the public. This 'subtle way' is of course a contrast to the 'rough way' which is a typical characteristic of persuasive communication in capitalistic society, as exemplified by a giant billboard attached to the front side of shop house with hard sell messages from a brand of electronic products. Another example is the mural at Manahan stadium which displays intergenerational collaboration in upholding sportsmanship. Not only displays characters from

different generations, but also combines traditional symbols and discourses of modern life. As shown in table 2, both the field, tenor, and mode of discourse from the mural teach the public about the meaning of wisdom, where differences and distance of the age do not have to clash, but instead can work together.

Discourses on manners, customs, and social etiquette in this kind of public space, by Lafebvre (1991) are referred to as spaces of representation. The community produces space through discourses, through communication and interaction, through symbols used to represent their lives. Thus, the meaning of space is a representation of the 'language' of the community, not the authorities. The mural spaces, as the spaces of representation, also take on the role of 'language' of the community in representing the feelings, voices, and aspirations of the community.

Table 2.
The field, tenor and mode of discourse of murals and branded OAs (Authors' analysis)

Object	Field of Discourse	Tenor of Discourse	Mode of Discourse
Mural-1	Typical traditional hospitality and local friendliness	The character of local children	Humanist painting with a traditional look, local greeting language
Branded OA-1	The best boarding school with free zonation system	Student, teacher, SMP Muhammadiyah 5 Surakarta logo	Documentation photograph of a graduation moment
Mural-2	Fighting against life's challenges	Wayang (traditional puppet) figure: Bima	Bima's heroic narrative against the dragon (as a symbol of challenge) in the ocean (as a symbol of life)
Branded OA-2	The best shop to get cheap electronic goods	Electronic products, Panasonic logo	Catalogue style
Mural-3	Consistent like old (man), persistent like young (man)	Old man, young man, woman, boat, torch	Combining traditional narratives with current issues in carrying out the spirit of sportsmanship
Branded OA-3	Success together with (and by using) a telecommunication brand	Young local idol, "3" telecommunication brand logo	Selling a telecommunication provider brand by highlighting the success of local youth as national idols

Currently the murals have been well received by the community, given the emergence of good awareness and collaboration between mural artists and people from diverse backgrounds. Mural as an effective communication medium can build togetherness, respect others, manage public space as part of a form of democracy, and aesthetic space for a harmonious life order (Edwards Jr, DeMatthews, Spear, & Hartley, 2020). Agreeing with this, Hanindharputri (2021) concluded that murals are capable of realizing social space while adopting elements of resistance, and being a medium of expression for art and social criticism in the midst of the impropriety of mainstream media (B. S. Wijaya, 2019). The existence of murals as a practice of power struggle according to Li and Alkathir (2021) will gain legitimacy by increasing the existence of works, expanding influence or networks, and expanding the media.

Conclusion

The existence of murals in Surakarta is struggling to face the rampant power of branded commercial messages that fill public spaces. In this situation, the mural sought to take a position as an oasis of social criticism, the guardian of culture and symbols of public heroes through a guerrilla space medium. Mural shows us that something is missing (and maybe trying to be removed) in urban public spaces, that is the discourse on manners and customs, etiquette, and traditional narratives and heroism. These discourses play an important role in changing the characters of urban societies, which are now tending to be capitalistic, characterized by increasing competition which implies on the formation of crude characters, unruly, greedy, justifies all means, and is very pragmatic in social relations (as transactional relationships). Mural tries to

soften these capitalistic characters through traditional discourses with friendly and sincerely socio-cultural messages, so that people do not get lost in the wilderness of modern capitalism which is marked by the spread of branded messages that control urban public space.

Limitations and Future Studies

This research is very useful as a reflection material for local government and society in viewing murals as a medium of public expression, both functionally and artistically. However, this study has methodological limitations because it only observes murals and branded OA textually and geographically. The next research can explore in terms of public reception of messages on mural media and of media ethics or brand social responsibility in the moral intersection between aesthetics, function, economy, and politics of media, both mural and branded outdoor advertising.

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