



Structured Cultural Exploitation in Herbal Medicine Advertising on Radio: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Local Cultural Representation in Central Java Broadcasting

Intan Nurlaili^{1*}, Teguh Priyo Sadono²

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya

Corresponding Author: Intan Nurlaili intan.nurlaili@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how herbal medicine advertisements on Central Java radio stations utilize Javanese cultural elements to establish product legitimacy and authenticity. By employing regional languages, traditional healer figures, and ancestral wisdom narratives, these advertisements construct health claims beyond scientific validation. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis integrated with theories of representation, commodification, hegemony, myth, and popular culture, the study analyzed 24 advertisements from 12 herbal brands broadcast during 2024–2025. The findings reveal a systematic process of Structured Cultural Exploitation (SCE), characterized by the symbolic use of local culture, commodification of cultural heritage, unequal power relations, cultural hegemony, and the transformation of cultural identity into economic value. This process contributes to the fossilization, simplification, and privatization of authentic Javanese cultural heritage. Therefore, the study highlights the need for stronger broadcasting regulations and cultural representation standards to protect local cultural authenticity from commercial exploitation

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian herbal medicine industry has emerged as one of the most dynamic sectors within Southeast Asia's cultural commercialization landscape. According to the Indonesian Herbal Medicine and Traditional Medicine Association (GP Jamu) and recent government reports, the industry has experienced substantial growth following the COVID-19 pandemic, driven by increasing public demand for natural and traditional remedies (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023; Ministry of Industry of Indonesia, 2024). This expansion has been strongly supported by broadcast advertising, particularly radio, which remains a major communication channel in Central Java due to the region's strong radio-listening culture and extensive network of local broadcasting stations (KPID Central Java, 2024).

In Central Java, herbal medicine advertising has evolved into a distinctive communicative genre characterized by specific representational and ideological strategies. Unlike conventional consumer advertising, herbal advertisements systematically employ local cultural elements including regional languages, traditional healer figures, ancestral wisdom narratives, and ethnic symbols to construct authenticity and legitimize health claims beyond scientific verification. These practices reflect a deliberate strategy to exploit the symbolic capital of local culture as a highly effective marketing resource while minimizing the need for costly scientific validation and product innovation. This phenomenon is conceptualized in this study as Structured Cultural Exploitation (SCE), a systematic process through which cultural identity is transformed into commercial value (UNESCO, 2023; Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023).

The significance of this phenomenon extends across socio-cultural, political economic, and regulatory dimensions. The commodification of cultural heritage through advertising risks distorting traditional healing practices, objectifying cultural communities, and transforming cultural identity into economic capital. Simultaneously, it reflects asymmetric power relations between media institutions, the herbal industry, and cultural communities, while exposing regulatory gaps in Indonesia's broadcasting framework concerning cultural representation. In Central Java, where herbal product advertising contributes significantly to radio industry revenues, these structural conditions reinforce the systematic exploitation of cultural heritage and underscore the urgent need for critical scholarly analysis and comprehensive regulatory reform (Ministry of Industry of Indonesia, 2024; KPID Central Java, 2024).

Previous studies on herbal medicine advertising in Indonesia have generally operated within three disconnected research streams. First, semiotic studies have focused on analyzing signs and symbols in advertising without addressing broader political-economic dimensions (Sari & Hidayat, 2021). Second, marketing studies have examined the effectiveness of advertising in building brand loyalty without critically questioning the ethics of cultural representation (Purnomo et al., 2020). Third, policy studies have assessed advertising compliance with broadcasting regulations without investigating the underlying mechanisms of power that shape these practices (Nugraha, 2022). To

date, no study has simultaneously integrated the dimensions of cultural representation, commodification, and critical discourse analysis within the context of herbal medicine advertising on Central Java radio broadcasts.

An empirical gap is also evident. Although research on cultural commodification has developed extensively in the contexts of tourism (Cole, 2007) and the creative industries (Flew, 2012), comparable studies in the field of advertising within Indonesian broadcast media remain very limited. A methodological gap is likewise apparent, as studies of advertising in Indonesia have been dominated by quantitative content analysis and Peircean semiotics, whereas Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is capable of revealing hidden ideologies and power relations embedded in discourses has rarely been applied to this subject. This study addresses these theoretical, empirical, and methodological gaps by integrating six theoretical frameworks into a coherent analytical model conceptualized as Structured Cultural Exploitation (SCE).

Based on the identified research gaps, this study formulates the following five research questions:

1. How is local Javanese culture represented in herbal medicine advertising texts broadcast on radio stations in Central Java?
2. What discursive strategies are employed by the herbal industry to construct product legitimacy through traditional cultural symbols in the radio medium?
3. How do the mechanisms of cultural exploitation operate within herbal marketing communication practices on Central Java radio stations?
4. What power relations are structured among the herbal industry, radio broadcasting institutions, and local cultural heritage in Central Java?
5. What are the socio-cultural implications of the systematic commodification of local culture within the radio broadcasting ecosystem of Central Java?

LITERATURE REVIEW

To comprehensively analyze cultural exploitation in herbal medicine advertising on radio, this study develops an integrated theoretical framework that examines how cultural meanings are constructed, why they are systematically reproduced, and how they operate across different audiences. The framework begins with Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which argues that cultural meanings are actively produced rather than naturally inherent. In the context of herbal advertising, symbols such as regional languages, ancestral narratives, traditional healers, and local cultural sounds function as strategic representations of authenticity and legitimacy. However, representation theory alone cannot explain why such cultural constructions are repeatedly mobilized within commercial media systems, requiring a broader political-economic perspective.

To address this limitation, the study integrates Vincent Mosco's political economy of commodification, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Mosco explains how cultural heritage, audiences, and social relations are transformed into market

commodities within media capitalism. Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework provides analytical tools for examining how language, discourse, and institutional practices reproduce ideology and power relations. Gramsci's concept of hegemony further demonstrates how audiences voluntarily accept commercialized cultural narratives as authentic and natural, enabling the herbal industry to establish legitimacy through cultural consent rather than coercion.

The theoretical framework is further enriched by Roland Barthes' theory of myth and John Fiske's theory of popular culture commodification. Barthes explains how advertising transforms historically constructed cultural symbols into seemingly natural truths through myth-making and ex-nomination, thereby concealing the commercial interests underlying cultural claims. Fiske, meanwhile, demonstrates how popular culture texts generate economic value by allowing diverse audiences to produce multiple meanings while reinforcing commercially advantageous interpretations. By integrating these six theoretical perspectives, this study proposes the concept of Structured Cultural Exploitation (SCE), defined as a systematic and institutionalized process through which commercial actors appropriate, transform, and monetize cultural heritage without equitable redistribution or community consent, ultimately threatening the authenticity and sustainability of local cultural traditions.

Table 1. Matrix of Previous Studies and the Position of the Present Study

Author/Year	Method	Focus	Limitation	Research Gap Addressed by This Study
Kim & Chung (2021)	Semiotic Analysis	Global K-pop Advertising	Does not address industrial power relations	Does not employ CDA and lacks Indonesian context
Rahayu & Susanto (2022)	Representation Analysis	Television Beauty Advertising	Absence of political-economic analysis	Does not integrate commodification and CDA
Sari & Hidayat (2021)	Barthesian Semiotics	National Herbal Medicine Television Advertising	Does not examine power relations and ideology	Requires CDA to reveal structural ideology
Seo & Lee (2023)	Discourse Analysis	Korean Herbal Advertising	Does not employ Fairclough's CDA	Requires three-dimensional CDA and Indonesian context
Richardson (2020)	Fairclough's CDA	British Print	Does not address local	Requires contextualization

		Advertisin g	cultural commodificatio n	n within non- Western cultures
Fuchs (2022)	Political Economy of Media	Digital Platforms	Focuses on digital platforms rather than broadcasting	Requires extension to broadcast media contexts
Purnomo et al. (2020)	Quantitative SEM	Herbal Brand Loyalty	Does not analyze the ethics of cultural representation	Requires CDA to uncover ideological mechanisms

Source: Compiled by the author (2026)

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a critical paradigm, which views social reality as a historically constructed phenomenon shaped by power relations and ideological interests. Following Guba and Lincoln (2005), the study rejects positivist claims of objectivity and acknowledges the researcher's positionality within the social structures being examined. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of meanings, contexts, and ideological dimensions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. Consistent with the principles of critical research, this study explicitly positions itself in support of local cultural communities whose symbolic heritage has been appropriated by the herbal advertising industry without sufficient accountability.

Methodologically, this study employs Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which allows the integration of micro-level textual analysis with broader socio-cultural and political-economic contexts. To strengthen the analytical framework, Fairclough's CDA is complemented by Roland Barthes' theory of myth, which examines how cultural symbols operate through systems of denotation, connotation, and myth, and John Fiske's theory of popular culture commodification, which explains how cultural identities function simultaneously within financial and cultural economies. The analysis focuses on linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, ideological claims, discursive practices, and socio-cultural structures that shape the representation and commodification of Javanese culture in herbal advertising.

The object of this study consists of herbal medicine advertisements broadcast on public, local private, and national network radio stations operating in Central Java between January 2024 and December 2025. Radio was selected because of its strong penetration among rural and semi-urban communities, its reliance on audio-based cultural representation, and the limited scholarly attention given to radio advertising regulation in Indonesia. Using purposive sampling, the study analyzed 24 advertisements from 12 herbal brands that

incorporated Javanese language, traditional cultural symbols, ancestral narratives, or explicit ethnic identity references. Data collection involved systematic identification, verbatim transcription with prosodic annotation, and cross-verification with digital marketing materials. To ensure research validity, the study employed source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, member checking with traditional healers and community leaders in Central Java, and a comprehensive audit trail documenting all analytical decisions.

RESULTS

1. Representation of Local Culture in Advertising Narratives

The textual analysis of the advertising corpus reveals three dominant and structurally recurring patterns of local cultural representation across brands and product categories. The first pattern is synthetic representation, in which cultural elements from different regions are eclectically combined to create a homogenized and frictionless image of "Indonesian culture." For example, advertisements for the herbal brand Sido Muncul simultaneously incorporate Javanese batik motifs, Sundanese gamelan music, and Malay-language narration from Riau within a single 30-second commercial. This cultural collage, which does not exist in any actual community practice, is nevertheless constructed as a representation of authentic Indonesian culture. Such artificial synthesis constitutes an act of symbolic power, homogenizing highly diverse regional healing traditions.

The second pattern is nostalgic-temporal representation, in which local culture is portrayed as a static and idealized inheritance from the past. Advertisements for Tolak Angin broadcast on public and private radio stations in Central Java often begin with statements such as, "Since the time of our ancestors, our nation has known the secrets of natural health." This discourse performs two ideological operations simultaneously: it situates herbal culture within an undefined and mythical historical period while claiming collective ownership through the inclusive pronoun "our nation," thereby suppressing critical questions regarding ownership and distribution of traditional knowledge. In radio broadcasting, the absence of visual elements amplifies the persuasive power of such narratives by requiring listeners to construct their own cultural imagery.

The third pattern is authoritative-hierarchical representation, in which traditional cultural figures—such as healers, shamans, and village elders—are positioned as epistemic authorities whose legitimacy appears to surpass that of modern medical institutions. Among the 24 advertisements analyzed, 17 employed such figures, characterized by consistent vocal attributes, including advanced age, paternalistic or maternalistic tones, and the use of formal Javanese or rural dialects. This consistency indicates the existence of a standardized grammar of traditional cultural representation developed by the herbal advertising industry.

Table 2. Distribution of Cultural Representation Patterns in the Advertising Corpus

Representation Pattern	Number of Advertisements (n=24)	Percentage	Main Mechanism
Synthetic representation (cultural collage)	19	79.2%	Cultural homogenization and suppression of diversity
Nostalgic-temporal representation	22	91.7%	Temporal mythologization and collective ownership claims
Authoritative-hierarchical representation	17	70.8%	Traditional audio grammar and medical displacement
Combination of two or more patterns	14	58.3%	Layered mechanisms and reduced audience resistance

Source: Analysis of Central Java radio advertising corpus, 2024–2025.

2. Product Legitimation Through Traditional Symbols

The analysis identifies five major strategies employed by the herbal advertising industry to legitimize products through traditional cultural symbols. The first strategy is historical naturalization, whereby unverifiable historical claims are used to construct an impression of cultural continuity. Expressions such as "trusted for hundreds of years" or "a proven ancestral heritage" shift the burden of proof from scientific evidence to cultural tradition. These claims employ high-certainty modalities without specifying the epistemic subjects or verification procedures involved.

The second strategy involves authenticity through language and script, whereby Javanese expressions and traditional linguistic forms function as markers of authenticity regardless of whether audiences fully understand their meanings. The third strategy is selective ethnic endorsement, in which ethnic figures are strategically matched with product categories according to existing cultural stereotypes. The fourth strategy is the naturalization of health claims, whereby medical efficacy is communicated through cultural narratives, making scientific verification appear unnecessary. Finally, product sacralization incorporates ritual, spiritual, or religious elements into advertising narratives, a practice identified in eight of the twenty-four advertisements analyzed.

3. Cultural Commodification as a Marketing Communication Strategy

Using Mosco's political economy framework, cultural commodification can be analyzed at three interconnected levels. At the content level, traditional medicinal knowledge is transformed from communal heritage into corporate intellectual property through discursive appropriation. By positioning themselves

as "guardians" and "heirs" of tradition, herbal corporations effectively claim the authority to communicate and monetize cultural knowledge.

At the audience level, commodification occurs through the construction of consumer segments based on cultural identity. According to Nielsen Indonesia (2024), herbal radio advertising demonstrates particularly high brand recall among listeners aged over 35 years, especially in Central Java, where emotional attachment to Javanese cultural symbols remains strong. Consequently, the industry sells not only products but also cultural identity itself.

At the structural level, data from the Central Java Broadcasting Commission (KPID, 2024) indicate that herbal advertisements contribute between 12 and 18 percent of total radio advertising revenue in the region. This financial dependence creates strong structural incentives for broadcasters to avoid questioning the ethics of cultural representation. Most critically, communal relationships of trust between communities and traditional healers are transformed into mediated consumer-brand relationships.

4. Power Relations Between the Herbal Industry and Broadcasting Media

The socio-cultural dimension of Fairclough's analysis reveals highly unequal power relations within Indonesia's herbal broadcasting ecosystem. Major herbal corporations possess advertising budgets that enable them to exert substantial influence over content production and distribution. Multi-year advertising contracts provide significant negotiating power, creating incentives for broadcasters to accommodate rather than challenge problematic cultural representations.

Analysis of broadcasting schedules further reveals the spatialization of power described by Mosco. Herbal advertisements are disproportionately broadcast during peak listening periods in Central Java, particularly early morning and midday hours, when audiences are considered most psychologically receptive. This strategic placement reflects the financial capacity of corporations to secure premium audience access while maximizing cultural influence.

More fundamentally, local cultural communities remain entirely excluded from the advertising production process. None of the advertisements analyzed demonstrated evidence of consultation with, compensation for, or participation by the communities whose cultural symbols were appropriated. This represents what Young (1990) conceptualizes as cultural imperialism, whereby dominant groups define and represent the cultures of others according to their own interests.

5. Cultural Hegemony in Advertising Messages

A Gramscian analysis reveals how herbal advertising produces and sustains ideological consensus through cultural hegemony. The primary mechanism is naturalization, through which repeated associations between herbal products and ancestral wisdom gradually become accepted as universal truths rather than commercial constructions.

A second mechanism is selective tradition, as conceptualized by Raymond Williams. Advertisements selectively present traditional healing practices as harmonious, effective, and readily accessible through consumer products, while suppressing their complexity, contextuality, and intergenerational transmission processes.

The most significant consequence of this hegemonic process is epistemic displacement, whereby authority over traditional medical knowledge shifts from local communities and traditional practitioners to corporations. In Central Java, where radio remains an intimate and trusted medium, this displacement poses particularly serious risks.

Barthesian semiotic analysis reveals how myth operates through multiple layers within radio advertising. At the denotative level, advertisements feature recognizable cultural elements, including authoritative Javanese voices, traditional phrases, and sound effects such as gamelan music and wooden slit drums. At the connotative level, these signs evoke associations with wisdom, morality, communal trust, and historical continuity.

At the mythological level, these semiotic constructions produce their strongest ideological effect: the belief that herbal products associated with Javanese symbols are inherently authentic, safe, and effective. Barthes' mechanism of ex-nomination systematically erases the commercial origins of these cultural narratives, obscuring the role of advertising agencies and corporate interests.

Fiske's framework further explains how audiences interpret these myths differently. Older rural listeners may perceive advertisements as confirmation of existing cultural knowledge, while younger urban audiences may interpret them as opportunities to reconnect with cultural heritage. Although these interpretations differ, both ultimately contribute to favorable attitudes toward the advertised products.

6. Implications for Local Cultural Preservation

The commodification of culture through herbal advertising has both beneficial and harmful consequences for cultural preservation. While increased visibility may raise public awareness of traditional heritage, commodification simultaneously creates three significant risks.

First, fossilization occurs when culture is represented as static and unchanging, despite the inherently dynamic nature of living traditions. Second, trivialization reduces the complexity and significance of cultural symbols by placing them within commercial contexts. Third, privatization occurs when corporations claim authority over cultural representation, effectively transferring cultural heritage from the public domain into private commercial ownership and excluding local communities from interpreting and sustaining their own traditions.

DISCUSSION

1. Structured Cultural Exploitation (SCE) as a New Analytical Framework

The findings of this study collectively confirm the existence and operation of Structured Cultural Exploitation (SCE) as a phenomenon requiring a distinct analytical category beyond existing concepts. Unlike cultural appropriation, which is often understood as an isolated act of cultural insensitivity, SCE represents a structural feature of the Indonesian herbal advertising industry: it is systematic, institutionalized, consistently reproduced across brands and product categories, and supported by strong economic incentives throughout the broadcasting ecosystem.

SCE also differs from conventional notions of cultural commodification by emphasizing the dimension of mythic semiotics revealed through the integration of Barthes' theoretical framework. Cultural exploitation occurs not merely through economic transactions where corporations finance advertising production and radio stations receive broadcasting revenues but more fundamentally through myth-making processes that naturalize commercial appropriation as authentic cultural expression. Barthesian ex-nomination renders exploitation invisible, while Fiske's framework explains why SCE achieves economic effectiveness precisely because it operates through forms of meaning-making that appear democratic and participatory.

2. Implications for Broadcasting Regulation

The findings of this study have direct implications for broadcasting regulatory reform in Central Java and Indonesia more broadly. Currently, the Broadcasting Code of Conduct and Program Standards established by the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) regulate health advertising primarily from the perspective of medical claim accuracy and restrictions on specific products, without explicitly addressing standards of cultural representation. This regulatory gap allows the industry to continue exploiting cultural heritage, provided that health claims do not overtly violate existing regulations.

Based on these findings, this study proposes three regulatory reforms. First, the Central Java Regional Broadcasting Commission (KPID) and the national KPI should develop cultural representation guidelines for advertising, including mandatory consultation with cultural communities prior to the use of cultural symbols, standards for the accuracy of tradition-based health claims, and sanctions for representations that contribute to the fossilization or trivialization of cultural heritage. Second, advertising associations should incorporate cultural representation ethics into professional codes of conduct through self-regulatory mechanisms accessible to cultural communities. Third, participatory governance mechanisms should be developed to enable local cultural communities to participate directly in regulatory decision-making processes concerning cultural representation standards.

3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has two primary limitations. First, the corpus analyzed is limited to advertisements produced by companies with sufficient financial resources to advertise on radio, whereas advertisements by small-scale local herbal producers in Central Java which may employ different and potentially more authentic forms of cultural representation were not included. Second, audience reception has not been investigated in depth, as this study focuses primarily on textual and production-level analysis.

Future research should therefore examine: (1) how different demographic groups of radio listeners in Central Java interpret and respond to cultural representations in herbal advertising, with particular attention to rural-urban differences; (2) comparative analyses of SCE across media platforms, including radio and digital media; (3) longitudinal studies examining changes in cultural representation strategies in response to regulatory and market shifts; (4) investigations of how local cultural communities perceive the use of their heritage

in advertising; and (5) the potential of podcasts and digital audio platforms as spaces for counter-narratives produced by communities whose cultural heritage has been commercially appropriated.

4. Relevance for Communication and Cultural Studies in Indonesia

More broadly, this study contributes to the development of critical communication studies in Indonesia by demonstrating the analytical value of integrating multiple theoretical frameworks including Critical Discourse Analysis, mythic semiotics, popular culture theory, and the political economy of media to examine complex media phenomena. The concept of Structured Cultural Exploitation (SCE) has the potential to be applied to other domains of cultural commercialization, such as heritage tourism, ethnic fashion, and the commodification of traditional culinary practices, as well as to broadcasting contexts beyond Central Java where ethnic identity and local cultural markets remain highly significant.

More fundamentally, the findings affirm that radio broadcasting is not merely a channel for message transmission; rather, it is a cultural institution that possesses significant power to define, fossilize, and commercialize the cultural heritage of communities. This is particularly evident in Central Java, where radio continues to function as an influential and trusted medium. Consequently, critical discourse analysis of media cultural products such as herbal radio advertising should be understood not merely as an academic exercise, but as a necessary foundation for developing equitable broadcasting policies and media ecosystems that respect, rather than exploit, local cultural heritage.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that herbal medicine advertising on radio stations in Central Java functions not merely as a marketing practice, but as an ideological arena in which local culture is represented, reconstructed, and systematically exploited for corporate interests. By integrating Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis with Hall's theory of representation, Mosco's political economy, Gramsci's hegemony, Barthes' mythic marketing, and Fiske's popular culture commodification, the study identifies seven interrelated mechanisms of Structured Cultural Exploitation (SCE). These mechanisms include synthetic and nostalgic cultural representations, the legitimation of products through traditional symbols, the commodification of cultural heritage, asymmetrical power relations, cultural hegemony, mythic naturalization, and the commercialization of Javanese cultural identity. Collectively, these processes contribute to the fossilization, trivialization, and privatization of authentic local cultural heritage.

The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the development of Structured Cultural Exploitation (SCE) as a new analytical framework that integrates representation, political-economic commodification, critical discourse, hegemony, mythic marketing, and cultural identity commodification into a coherent model. SCE extends conventional theories of cultural commodification by emphasizing the role of mythic semiotics in transforming commercial appropriation into seemingly authentic cultural expression. Barthes' concept of ex-nomination explains how commercial interests become invisible within

cultural narratives, while Fiske's framework demonstrates how cultural exploitation can achieve economic effectiveness through forms of meaning-making that appear democratic and participatory.

The findings have important implications for broadcasting regulation, industry practice, and cultural preservation. Broadcasting authorities should develop specific standards governing cultural representation in advertising, including mechanisms for community consultation and accountability regarding tradition-based health claims. Advertising associations should incorporate cultural representation ethics into professional codes of conduct, while local cultural communities should be empowered to claim greater authority over the representation of their heritage. Ultimately, this study argues that addressing Structured Cultural Exploitation requires systemic rather than case-by-case solutions, including regulatory reform, ethical industry practices, and strengthened critical media literacy to ensure that broadcasting ecosystems respect rather than exploit local cultural heritage.

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