

THE MYTH OF CONSUMPTION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF SOLITUDE IN INDONESIAN URBAN POPULAR MUSIC

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Abstract

*This study investigates how solitude is signified in the lyrics of *Orgasme dengan Sepeda* by TheKick through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Specifically, it maps signs that represent health, hedonism, and social recognition; explains the syntagmatic–paradigmatic relations that generate irony; and interprets the cultural implications of these representations. The method applies Barthes' three layers of meaning—denotation, connotation, and myth—to lyric data. The findings indicate that solitude does not appear literally but emerges as a paradox between a healthy image and consumptive practice. The sign “bicycle” shifts from a symbol of fitness to a representation of social status and self-performance in digital media. Interrelations among signs produce the irony that efforts to appear healthy and trendy in fact intensify existential loneliness. The study concludes that solitude in Indonesian popular culture arises from consumerist orientations and the pursuit of social validation, rather than from physical separation. These results extend cultural semiotics by showing that the myth of consumption also operates through performative lifestyle activities and musical expression.*

Keywords: Roland Barthes' semiotics; solitude; popular culture; lifestyle; consumption myth.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary music industry is strongly shaped by streaming platforms and digital media culture, which have transformed music discovery, consumption patterns, and business models, thereby creating a new semiotic ecology of music-making and identity practices (Song, 2024). Music functions as a medium of communication and social discourse that channels emotions, values, and social relations across communities and spaces; accordingly, song lyrics merit reading as cultural texts (Bannan & Harvey, 2025). At the same time, cycling has undergone “normalization” as an urban lifestyle, intertwined with mobility resources, competencies, and cognitive appropriation that render the bicycle a signifier of health, status, and lifestyle (Balkmar et al., 2025). In this context, the lyrics of *Orgasme dengan Sepeda* by TheKick are noteworthy because they juxtapose healthy, eco-friendly imagery with the irony of instant hedonism and social recognition, making them pertinent to examining contemporary urban relations among music–consumption–identity.

Recent scholarship positions lyric analysis as a fertile site for examining representations of identity and ideology through semiotic methods, including Saussure's signifier–signified framework (Fadila & Nisa, 2024). Large-scale studies of popular lyrics likewise confirm that textual measurements can be combined with qualitative close reading to map patterns of meaning

and style, thereby strengthening the validity of semiotic interpretation (Rosebaugh & Shamir, 2022). At the same time, newer semiotic literature emphasizes an expansion toward “semiotic technology,” namely how social media and digital platforms mediate the production and circulation of signs, shaping how we construct meaning in today’s popular lyrics (Yaumi et al., 2024). These studies situate this article within a research landscape that integrates classical semiotics (Saussure) with the platformization of music culture.

Although many studies of popular lyrics foreground issues of gender, emotion, or motivation (Kaulika & Sakinah, 2025; Nurchaerani et al., 2025), there remains limited work that explicitly reads the irony of health and the fit lifestyle as a critique of consumerist culture via the metaphor of cycling, particularly within contemporary Indonesian contexts and platform ecologies (Yuliantari et al., 2025). While the literature on cycling culture does unpack *tribes*, values, and the aesthetics of cycling practices, few studies connect the bicycle as a symbol within lyric texts to the performativity of urban middle-class identity and the attention economy (Masucci & Falcous, 2025). Moreover, recent bibliometric discourse on music–identity has largely focused on mapping macro-themes, leaving underexplored micro-readings of the contradiction between a healthy self-image and hedonic practice at the level of lyric language (Luque et al., 2025). This article advances a novel contribution by operationalizing Saussure’s signifier–signified relations and the syntagmatic–paradigmatic axes to show how the sign “bicycle” functions as a metaphor for hedonism, social recognition, and symbolic consumption in the lyrics of *Orgasme dengan Sepeda*.

This article tackles a central problem: how the lyrics of *Orgasme dengan Sepeda* construct the irony of a “healthy lifestyle” as a critique of consumerism and identity-seeking through cycling-related signs. It pursues three aims: (1) to map key signifier–signified pairs that represent health, hedonism, and social recognition; (2) to explain the syntagmatic–paradigmatic relations that generate ironic effects; and (3) to interpret the cultural implications of these findings. The research questions are: RQ1: Which cycling-related signs are activated in the lyrics, and how do signifier–signified relations produce irony? RQ2: How does the syntagmatic–paradigmatic axis contrast a healthy self-image with consumptive/hedonic practices? RQ3: What are the implications of the findings for understanding consumerism and identity formation in contemporary Indonesian popular music culture?

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to (1) map key signifier–signified pairs that represent health, hedonism, and social recognition; (2) explain the syntagmatic–paradigmatic relations that generate ironic effects; and (3) interpret the cultural implications in the lyrics of *Orgasme dengan Sepeda* by

TheKick through a semiotic approach. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the research unpacks the signs (signifiers) and meanings (signifieds) present in the lyrics. A semiotic analysis is chosen because it enables inquiry beyond the literal sense of words and clarifies how song lyrics represent broader social and cultural phenomena. The principal focus is the identification and interpretation of symbols, metaphors, and connotations contained in the text. Through semiotic analysis, the study reveals latent meanings that may not be immediately visible at the surface level. In addition, the analysis connects these meanings to relevant sociocultural contexts, such as consumerism, healthy-lifestyle discourse, and the use of social media.

The primary data for this research are the lyrics of *Orgasme dengan Sepeda* themselves. The analysis proceeds line by line to identify words and phrases with potential polysemy or connotative force. A supporting literature review on semiotic theory, lyric analysis, and popular culture studies strengthens the interpretations. The data analysis follows three stages: (1) identifying signs, (2) interpreting meanings, and (3) linking those meanings to sociocultural contexts. Findings are presented narratively, supported by lyric excerpts and relevant semiotic theory.

This research is expected to contribute to studies of popular culture and semiotic analysis. Its results can deepen our understanding of how popular music, particularly song lyrics, reflects societal values, aspirations, and sociocultural dynamics. The study may also serve as a reference for future research interested in the semiotic analysis of song lyrics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The Meaning of Solitude in the Lyrics of “*Orgasme dengan Sepeda*”

The object of this study is the song “*Orgasme dengan Sepeda*,” featured on TheKick’s album *Rangsang*. The lyrics are analyzed using Barthes’ semiotic framework, denotation, connotation, and myth—to identify how the song articulates the meaning of solitude.

Denotative Meaning

Following Barthes, denotation, or the literal meaning of a word, can be ascertained through definitions provided in dictionaries. Accordingly, to determine the denotative meanings of the words found in the lyrics of “*Orgasme dengan Sepeda*,” this study refers to the explicit senses recorded in *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)*. *KBBI* is used as a reference because the words employed in the lyrics belong to Indonesian vocabulary, making it highly likely that clear explanations of their meanings can be obtained.

Table 1. Research Findings

Lyric	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
<i>Pagi, sore, rajin menepi</i>	The activity is carried out in the morning and evening with frequent stop-offs.	A routine habit that signals awareness of the need to rest or step back from daily routines.	A healthy life with morning–evening routines is considered ideal.
<i>Dari soliter di kantor ini</i>	A condition of being alone at the office.	Feelings of loneliness at work, a symbol of the pressures of modernity.	The myth that office life is synonymous with loneliness or tedium.
<i>Ingin healthy, namun tetap trendi</i>	A desire to be healthy while still following trends.	The duality between a healthy lifestyle and social pressure to appear modern.	A healthy lifestyle is often linked to social status.
<i>Kukayuh sepeda outfit terkini</i>	Pedaling a bicycle while wearing fashionable clothing.	Cycling becomes a symbol of lifestyle and social status.	The bicycle as a marker of an urban lifestyle that is both healthy and fashionable.
<i>Tanpa ragu, kurawat selalu</i>	A firm commitment to regularly maintain the bicycle.	Dedication to the bicycle as a prestigious asset.	Maintaining the bicycle is a symbol of commitment to a healthy lifestyle.
<i>Sering lupa kantong meloyor</i>	Money often runs out on cycling-related activities or purchases.	A satire on excessive spending for a hobby.	The myth that the cycling hobby typically entails substantial costs.
<i>Bilang bakar kalori, namun makan sana-sini</i>	Claiming to burn calories yet eating indiscriminately.	A contradiction within the healthy-lifestyle narrative, often mere rhetoric without consistent action.	A healthy lifestyle sometimes functions primarily as self-presentation.
<i>Bilang pelan, namun kebut-kebutan</i>	Claiming to ride leisurely but actually speeding.	A critique of inconsistency or hypocrisy.	The myth that cycling is inherently safe, even though actual practice can be risky.
<i>Orgasme dengan Sepeda</i>	Intense happiness or pleasure felt while cycling.	An emotional experience that reaches personal euphoria through a seemingly simple activity.	The belief that fulfillment can be achieved through particular physical activities, such as cycling.
<i>Merangsang diri tak bertepi</i>	Continuously seeking gratifying experiences through cycling.	An attachment—bordering on addiction—to a lifestyle that promises satisfaction.	Extreme lifestyles are seen as routes to the highest happiness.
<i>Upgrade sepeda yang lebih catchy</i>	Purchasing a new, more attractive bicycle.	Pressure to keep up with trends and look better in others' eyes.	Consumerism within hobbies is normal—even necessary.
<i>Lebih pede di Instastory</i>	Feeling more confident by sharing moments on social media.	Self-validation tethered to recognition on social media.	Happiness must be acknowledged and seen by others to be considered “real.”
<i>Agar semua terpaksa iri</i>	Deliberately trying to make others feel jealous of what one has or does.	A critique of narcissistic behaviors that use social media as a showcase.	A happy life is measured by how many people envy us.
<i>Beli lagi</i>	An impulse to keep buying something new.	A satire of endless, open-ended consumption.	Buying new things is believed to always bring greater happiness.

Within the lyrics of “*Orgasme dengan Sepeda*,” several words, phrases, or sentences warrant clarification at the denotative level; for instance, the line “*Ingin healthy, namun tetap*

trendi.” In *KBBI*, the denotative meaning of *healthy* is “desire to live healthily,” while *trendi* denotes following current trends or fashion; being up-to-date or stylish. Interpreted literally, the line reads: a desire “to live a healthy life while still following current trends or fashion; being up-to-date or stylish.”

Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning refers to culturally or emotionally inflected senses that are subjective and operate alongside a word’s basic, commonly accepted meaning. The connotative reading of the lyrics of “*Orgasme dengan Sepeda*” proceeds through an interpretation of the lines that structure the song. Taken as a whole, and in light of the relations among the lines, the lyrics can be read as expressing an intense fascination with the bicycle, positioning the songwriter as one who satirizes those who excessively idolize it. At the same time, the songwriter also portrays a cyclist’s sense of freedom in carrying out everyday activities. The lyrics suggest that cycling permeates daily life without distance or separation, which in turn generates a sense of fatigue toward people who might be described as *trendi* in their cycling practices, people who appear detached from the cyclist’s authentic feelings for the bicycle because everything is done together, leaving no room or time for solitude. The songwriter also seeks to convey to listeners that cycling is enjoyable and healthy, especially when balanced with elements that are *trendi* and contemporary.

Mythic Meaning

Having analyzed the lyrics of “*Orgasme dengan Sepeda*” by TheKick in their entirety, the connotative meanings identified above intersect with a broader myth at work in the text. The myth that emerges is that following what is *trendi* is not inherently as negative as some claim; however, it can become problematic when one forces contemporary styles without regard to one’s own economic means. The songwriter’s message, therefore, is to style oneself in line with what one has, and to avoid overreaching.

Discussion

The main findings of the semiotic analysis of the lyrics of *Orgasme dengan Sepeda* by TheKick indicate that solitude does not appear merely as the physical condition of being alone in a room, but rather as a consequence of a consumerist–performative orientation toward the cycling lifestyle. Hypothetically, when individuals engage in cycling with the primary aim of displaying status, trends, or public-facing visuals (“kukayuh sepeda outfit terkini,” “lebih pede di *Instastory* agar semua terpaksa iri”), an activity that is denotatively social or physical (pedaling a bicycle) is transformed into a field of individualization that intensifies feelings of solitude.

The denotation–connotation–myth analysis reveals a consistent pattern: phrases such as “Dari soliter di kantor ini” denotatively signal a condition of being alone in the workplace; connotatively they symbolize alienation within modern routines; and at the mythic level they narrate that “office life is synonymous with loneliness or tedium.” Likewise, the line “Ingin *healthy*, namun tetap *trendi*” is denotatively a desire to live healthily while keeping up with trends; connotatively it reflects the duality of a healthy lifestyle coupled with social pressure to appear contemporary; and mythically it asserts that “healthy living is often tied to social status.” From these patterns emerges a synthesis: activities that appear modern, trendy, and “collective” (e.g., cycling) can in fact generate spaces of solitude when the primary motivation is not connection but social performance. In the context of these lyrics, the strategy of “becoming *trendi* through cycling” seems more effective than “using the bicycle as a vehicle for social connection”; yet because the orientation is performative rather than participatory, the individual becomes trapped in a loop of consumption/display that reinforces solitude.

The present findings bear several connections to recent literature. First, research on “consumer loneliness” has shown that solitude may arise through consumption patterns oriented toward substituting for social participation—for example, when goods or experiences are consumed as stand-ins for intersubjective connection. Wang et al. (2021) demonstrate that consumers who feel lonely tend to use consumption to fill an affective void; however, this does not always alleviate loneliness and may even intensify it. Second, the digital-culture literature indicates that uses of social media or visibility-driven activities (showing oneself “lebih pede di *Instastory* agar semua terpaksa iri”) can heighten alienation and loneliness, especially when the activity is oriented toward “performance” rather than “relationship” (d’Hombres & Gentile, 2024). Accordingly, your findings extend this literature by showing that not only the consumption of goods or social media use but also physically active lifestyle practices (cycling with *outfit trendy*)—when propelled by a performative logic—can likewise become sources of loneliness.

There is, however, a countervailing strand of literature: cycling communities or joint activities can strengthen social connection and reduce loneliness when their primary orientation is participation and togetherness (rather than status). In this respect, your findings challenge the common assumption that “shared social activity = an antidote to loneliness.” Your analysis underscores that the effectiveness of such strategies hinges on the motivation underpinning the activity: if the main motivation is visibility/showing off, the activity is ineffective at reducing loneliness and may, in fact, exacerbate it. Contextually, social media culture and prestige consumption are crucial conditions that make lifestyle performance more dominant than social connection.

Theoretically, this study proposes that models of loneliness in modern culture should be expanded to include the semiotic mechanisms of active lifestyle consumption (physical activities exposed as status symbols), not merely the consumption of goods or passive social-media use. Thus, these findings contribute to the development of a conceptual model in which modern loneliness can emerge from social activities exploited as performative symbols rather than cultivated as spaces of interpersonal connection.

Practically, the implication for lifestyle-community practitioners, cycling-activity marketers, and public-health programming is this: when designing group-cycling or healthy-lifestyle initiatives that include an element of “looking cool,” it is essential to ensure that the cultivated motivations extend beyond status/showing off to genuine social connection; otherwise, cycling may still permit or even induce loneliness.

In sum, this research—with a high degree of confidence—shows that the loneliness depicted in the lyrics of *Orgasme dengan Sepeda* does not stem from a lack of physical or social activity per se, but from the orientation of that activity toward lifestyle performance and prestige consumption rather than toward human connection. Therefore, in addressing the study’s aim of uncovering the meaning of loneliness through a semiotic reading of the lyrics, we can conclude: a consumerist–performative orientation in cycling practices constitutes a new arena for the emergence of existential solitude in modern culture.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the discussion of the findings, we argue that the lyrics of *Orgasme dengan Sepeda* construct the meaning of solitude through a semiotic contradiction between the imagery of “health and freedom” and the practices of “hedonism and the pursuit of social recognition.” Signs such as “kukayuh sepeda *outfit* terkini,” “lebih pede di *Instastory* agar semua terpaksa iri,” and “beli lagi” reveal syntagmatic–paradigmatic relations that activate irony: while the bicycle paradigmatically represents a healthy, ecological lifestyle, along the syntagmatic axis it is linked to consumptive and performative signs that generate existential solitude. The central claim, therefore, is that in Indonesia’s urban popular culture, activities that appear healthy and social can become vehicles for individualistic self-representation and loneliness, given the internalization of consumerist values and social visibility.

This argument directly addresses the study’s aims: (1) mapping key signifier–signified pairs that represent health, hedonism, and social recognition; (2) explaining the syntagmatic–paradigmatic relations that produce ironic effects; and (3) interpreting the cultural implications of these findings. Empirical evidence from the denotation–connotation–myth analysis shows that the “bicycle” functions not merely as a mode of transport or a health symbol, but as a mythic construction that reinforces the logic of consumption and status. Accordingly, the research

questions are answered as follows: (RQ1) the signs activated by the lyrics revolve around oppositions such as “healthy” vs. “trendi,” “free” vs. “imprisoned by style”; (RQ2) syntagmatic–paradigmatic relations juxtapose a healthy image with hedonic practices through the irony of everyday signs; and (RQ3) these findings imply a new understanding of how consumerism and identity formation in Indonesian popular music operate through aesthetic strategies and irony. Conceptually, the study contributes to cultural semiotics by demonstrating that the myth of consumption attaches not only to material commodities but also to lifestyle activities and musical expression, which negotiate the meaning of solitude within a performative urban society.

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