

AMAZONE INDONESIA: UNDERSTANDING HYPERREALITY IN A FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT ARENA

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Kata Kunci

Amazone Indonesia,
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Abstrak

Amazone Indonesia merupakan destinasi hiburan keluarga terbesar di Indonesia dengan area yang luas dan pilihan permainan yang lengkap. Artikel ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana mitos mengenai hutan Amazon di Brazil dikelola dalam bentuk taman bermain keluarga yang modern di sebuah Mall, Aeon. Paper ini mengkaji bagaimana Amazone Indonesia memanfaatkan mitos hutan Amazon dikonstruksi dengan teknologi sebagai taman bermain keluarga dengan tujuan yang diharapkan untuk itu. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode semiotik Roland Barthes untuk melihat mitos yang dibangun melalui teknologi yang dihadirkan dalam beragam bentuk permainan di Amazone Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan teori Hyperreality dari Baudrillard, paper ini mencoba mengkaji secara kritis bagaimana Amazone menggunakan mitos hutan Amazon untuk melakukan “normalisasi” alam yang ada di hutan menjadi gambaran taman hiburan yang seru, mengasyikkan, dan menghibur bagi anak-anak. Secara keseluruhan, hasil studi ini merefleksikan simulasi yang terbangun dari penggunaan teknologi dalam permainan di arena hiburan dapat mempromosikan cara penjajahan untuk mengetahui yang memperkuat jarak manusia sebagai subjek dan alam sebagai objek yang “digali” sebagai tempat bermain.

Keywords

Amazone Indonesia,
amazon forest,
hyperreality, simulation,
family entertainment
arena.

Abstract

Amazone Indonesia (Amazone) is the largest family entertainment destination in Indonesia, with a large area and a complete selection of games. This article explores how myths about the Amazon forest in Brazil are managed in the form of a modern family playground in a mall, Aeon. This paper examines how Amazone exploits the myth that the Amazon forest was constructed with technology as a family playground with the intended purpose. This study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic method to look at myths that are built through technology and presented in various forms of entertainment vehicles and games in Amazone. By using Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, this paper tries to critically examine how Amazone uses the myth of the forest to "normalize" nature in the jungle to become an image of an amusement park that is fun, exciting, and entertaining for children. Overall, the results of this study reflect a simulation site that is built from the use of

technology in games in amusement parks that can promote colonial ways of knowing that strengthen the distance between humans as subjects and nature as objects that are "excavated" as a playground.

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INTRODUCTION

Amazone Indonesia (Amazone) is a family entertainment arena located in a shopping center or mall. Amazone is a family entertainment place that has the largest area and the largest collection of games throughout Indonesia. Since its establishment in August 2001, Amazone has had around 72 outlets spread across almost all major cities in Indonesia (Sanusi, 2014), which are spread throughout Indonesia from Banda Aceh to Jayapura. Amazone is part of PT. Fantasy Erestama Cemerlang, together with the Amazing, Amazonia, Battle Zone, Jumping Zone, and Builder Zone brands. The entertainment offered by Amazone and Amazonia is similar, but the target market differs. Amazone targets the lower middle-class visitors, while Amazonia is aimed at the upper middle-class visitors (Curcol, 2019). Both entertainment arenas offer a fun and entertaining playing experience for visitors who want to spend time with family or friends. Amazone Indonesia provides various kinds of rides and games that visitors can play, such as arcade games, simulations, excavators, merry-go-rounds, and so on. Figure 1 shows an outline of the condition of Amazone at Aeon Mall, Sentul, Bogor. This paper further discusses the Amazone entertainment arena with a variety of entertainment technology devices that can be played.



Figure 1.
Amazone Indonesia in AEON Mall, Sentul City

Furthermore, this paper highlights the simulation built on Amazone. This is because the arena of this game presents a different experience from reality in the outside world. Through the technology used, Amazone is able to create a world that is fictitious but feels real to visitors. This makes visitors feel as if they are in a world of fun and fantasy. However, even though Amazone provides a fun and entertaining experience for visitors, there is a problem with the concept of hyperreality that can be explored. The hyperreality experience provided by Amazone can trigger an unrealistic view of life and distract from

reality. Research on hyperreality in Amazone entertainment arena needs to be carried out to examine the reality that is built from the concept of hyperreality that is presented.

Baudrillard (1994) argues that hyperrealism is a mode that distinguishes social and cultural life in post-modern conditions. Roberts and Ponting (2020) says that the term hyperreality is closely related to Baudrillard (1994), who argues that the world can be viewed as a construction through simulations and simulacra (simulation places). He describes four stages of the evolution of reality and experience; the first is engaging in direct experience of reality, the second is working with experiences and representations of reality, the third is consuming images of reality, and the fourth is accepting images themselves as reality. The fourth phase is called hyperreality or the era of simulacra. According to Baudrillard, consumption consists of the exchange of signs and images. Signs and images overcome materiality and value in their use, and functionality is treated as a sign (Edvardsson et al., 2005).

The causes of deep anxiety are related to how humans know and act in the world today with the emergence of mediated and commercialized cultures. The proliferation of television screens, computer networks, entertainment arenas, and shopping centers, as well as the saturation of everyday life with spectacular images that are so mediated and processed that any connection with the "real world" seems lost, creates a simulated world (Giddings, 2007). Within the realm of hyperreality, the distinction between reality and simulation is said to have collapsed (M. Roberts & Ponting, 2020). Hyperreality is a condition in which what is artificial is perceived as real (Giddings, 2007).

We experience hyperreality frequently in everyday life, where experiences and settings are designed to allow consumers to experience a place, time, or other reality through an intermediary, creating experiences that are more immersive than the reality we are familiar with, or hyperreality. Hyperreality allows us to create our own reality and can have a huge impact on individuals, even if signs and symbols are not real. Hyperreality suggests that "as human beings, we create our own reality, and this reality is the product of our imagination, ingenuity, fantasy, and pragmatic needs" (Edvardsson et al., 2005).

According to Buchmann et al. ((2010; Rittichainuwat et al., 2018), hyperreality is a feature of an ahistorical consumerist society and involves a strong focus on the spectacular and the "unusual". Furthermore, the attempt to represent reality in a medium based on falsehood makes hyperrealism the proper term (Pallant, 2010). Perhaps hyperreality is best read not as a hypothesis or a concept but when treated as a tool. The function of this tool is not only to create a pleasant and memorable customer service experience, but also to be realistic (Edvardsson et al., 2005).

Virtual reality technology itself will enable people to experience nature in a simulated environment (Levi & Kocher, 1999). The use of technology creates hyperreality, namely, a condition in which the boundaries between reality and the "real" world are increasingly blurred and difficult to distinguish. In the context of the entertainment arena, hyperreality can encourage visitors to feel too involved in the experience provided, so that it is difficult to distinguish between reality and the "real".

Several studies on the technology that creates hyperreality in a simulation site have been carried out. Altrudi (2021) addresses the tensions that mobile apps like the iNaturalist community face in generating interest in the natural environment while also describing and normalizing "nature" and a specific epistemology for the natural sciences through technology. Lovel (2020) shows that some elements of myths are negotiable, and simulating the authenticity of borderline myths can cast doubt on their veracity. Edvardsson et al. (2005) uses the concept of hyperreality to show how organizations can create value with customers through simulated experiences. Meanwhile, Roberts' (2020) article discusses the impact of advanced technology on surfer culture, with artificial wave pools replacing ocean waves as the main reference for surfing culture and the implications of the possibility of discovering waves that are too perfect for authenticity in the world of surfing.

Exposure from previous research on hyperreality and simulation shows that technology has a major influence on the way we understand and experience the world around us, including nature, services, and culture. While technology can provide extraordinary benefits and experiences, it can also influence how we perceive and value the authenticity of these experiences. Therefore, caution is needed in applying technology so as not to damage the important values and uniqueness of existing experiences. In this context, the experience of hyperreality in providing different experiences in a simulation site can cause psychological impacts such as the inability to distinguish between reality and imagination, anxiety, and a loss of curiosity and creativity. Therefore, it is important to understand more deeply about hyperreality in the entertainment arena and how to overcome its potential negative impacts.

In the context of the research conducted, research on hyperreality in the entertainment arena can make an important contribution to developing our understanding of the influence of technology on the formation of perception and reality. This research tries to raise previously taken-for-granted issues for Amazone visitors, namely the presence of technology and the built environment. This research considers some of the technological issues involved in simulating the experience of visitors while playing at the Amazone Indonesia entertainment arena, Aeon Mall, Sentul City, Bogor, Indonesia. Further discussion uses hyperreality theory to be associated with the experience of consuming "space" in a simulated space. In a broader context, research on the entertainment arena in Amazone, can help understand the phenomenon of the entertainment vehicles and gaming arena industry in general in a mall. This research can also contribute to the visitor experience of seeing critically the entertainment arena of Amazone Indonesia, as well as enrich the academic literature on the entertainment and gaming arena industry in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study uses a semiotic method for viewing signs that are built through technological devices and designs that exist in Amazone Indonesia. This research tries to explore the meaning of the signs taken, that's why we use the semiotic method. In simple terms, denotation and connotation refer to the first and second levels of meaning in a sign, respectively.

Roland Barthes explains these concepts in *Elements of Semiology*, where he states that "the first system (denotation) becomes the field of expression or signifiers of the second system (connotation)... connotative signifiers... consist of signs (signifier and signified) unified) of the denoted system" (Sobur, 2018, p. 70). Connotation is related to myth as an ideological operation in the formation of the meaning of a sign (Sobur, 2008). Myth contains an ideology that shapes the way people think in understanding and creating meaning based on the cultural context (Prasetya, 2019, p. 23).

The researchers applied data collection technique, namely, direct observations by taking documentation in the form of photos from the scenery at Amazone at Aeon Mall, Sentul City, Bogor, Indonesia. Some of the photos that have been taken are then selected to be analyzed using the semiotic method of Roland Barthes. Finally, the researcher examines the myths that are built from the results of the analysis carried out and studied using the concept of hyperreality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Connotating the nature

In this section, we will present the results of the analysis using Barthes semiotics to translate the signs of the built formulations. In this study, we analyzed several signs in the entertainment arena, namely toy car signs, Amazone ticket signs, crocodile seating signs, fish fishing simulation signs, and excavator toy signs. In analyzing these images, we use

the concept of semiotics from Barthes, which divides signs into two types, namely signifier and signified. The signifier is the physical form of the sign, while the signified is the meaning explicitly contained in the sign. In conclusion, semiotic analysis can provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of visual signs that are seen in everyday life and unconsciously become taken-for-granted images.

Sign



Denotation

In Figure 1, there is a car swing toy object with a forest background that says Amazon. The toy is seen being climbed by two children. The car game is operated with static movements, namely forward and backward. Even with these static movements, children get pleasure from the experience of playing with toy cars.

Connotation

Figure 1 represents a car that is used for adventure in a forest. The car has a modern sports car design. The selection of car objects can show the social class of a driver (Piff & Robinson, 2017: 7). The selection of a sports car as a representation of a car used for adventures in the forest gives the impression that the driver has a high social status. In addition, the toy car sign conveys the meaning of joy and freedom, which can be seen from the image of a toy car gliding over a bright background. Thus, the children who become the drivers of these toy cars seem to be given a feel of luxury in the adventures they are carrying out.

Adventures in the jungle presented by the Amazon give a pleasant impression on children. For some children feel pleasure when playing and being in the forest (Hammarsten et al., 2019: 233). This is a special offer for people who live in cities, as it presents a forest simulation in a game. Thus, the existence of a forest simulation becomes a commodity that can be sold to consumers who miss the natural atmosphere by going on an adventure using a sports car.

Figure 1.
 Toy Car sign

Sign



Denotation	Connotation
<p>Figure 2 shows that there are three Amazon ticket objects that are still connected. The ticket is a reward that game players can earn on Amazon and exchange for prizes at the cash register later. Depending on the outcome of a particular game, each player can receive the ticket. The more scores you get, the more tickets that come out of the game machine. In addition, when players play the game repeatedly, their chances of getting tickets also increase.</p>	<p>A reward that consumers get after successfully completing the game offered. This reward is also a representation of forest exploitation. Rewards were successfully obtained by visitors when they were considered able to pass the obstacles presented in the game on Amazon.</p> <p>Giving a reward to someone can increase their motivation to carry out activities, whether working, playing, and so on. Appreciation is an effort to increase motivation while at the same time being able to communicate an acknowledgment given to others (Landry et al., 2017: 235). With the recognition given to amazon consumers through these tickets, they will be even more motivated to continue playing existing games.</p> <p>A reward given to consumers can bring positive value to that person. The existence of a reward can satisfy a person's desires in their activities (Wu, 2019: 5). In this case, the Amazon ticket reward is able to provide its own satisfaction for consumers, so they have the desire to get as many tickets as possible. They even have a target number of tickets so they can be exchanged for the prizes they want. As if to illustrate that after the users of the entertainment arena 'conquer' the nature, they get a reward for what they have done.</p>

Figure 2.
 Amazon Ticket sign

Sign



Denotation	Connotation
<p>In Figure 3, it shows that there is a sitting object with a black and white patterned green alligator design. The crocodile is designed as if it were above a wooden object. The crocodile object serves as a seat for consumers visiting Amazone, thereby building an atmosphere of being in a forest. The position of the crocodile object on the wood is beside the game, so that it can be used by consumers to wait their turn to play or take a short break.</p>	<p>Crocodile is a wild animal that can live in water and on land. The presence of crocodiles as seats in this playground builds a message that crocodiles can be tamed easily. The fear of crocodiles as wild animals will eventually disappear. This is further emphasized by the funny designed crocodile-shaped seats.</p> <p>Efforts to present crocodile objects on Amazon are seen as a form of hunting that is simulated in the game arena. The hunting of wild animals by humans today can be seen as a form of hunting for consumption (Mörner & Olausson, 2017: 26). This at the same time makes hunting a privilege possessed by humans. The Amazon game industry does not only present a forest setting as a place to play, but also presents objects of wild animals which are now consumed as objects of entertainment. This causes the essence of the crocodile as a wild animal to disappear, and it becomes subdued by sitting on top of the crocodile's body without any fear.</p>

Figure 3.
 Crocodile Seating Sign

Sign



Denotation	Connotation
<p>In Figure 4, there is a fishing simulation game on the river. It</p>	<p>Fishing game simulations that present the concept of the forest can also provide knowledge</p>

can be seen that there are four fishing simulation tools located on each side of the screen that resemble a river. There are shadows of several fish which represent that there are various fish in the fishing simulation game in the river. The background of the river in blue and green also shows that the river being simulated is still clear like a river in the middle of a forest that has not been contaminated with chemicals or industrial waste.

for children. Simulation has the capacity to reveal how a system works (Ameerbakhsh et al., 2019, p. 181), in this case fishing simulation can teach something complex in aquatic ecology. Fishing simulation activities can teach children about how the ecology of life in waters should have been before they were contaminated with factory wastes in urban areas. In this case the beauty of the waters also becomes a commodity sold by Amazone.

The fishing game simulation can be seen as a gamification practice that is carried out by combining the physical activity of fishing with digital water screens. Although in practice this is a form of commodification of nature, this simulation also develops children's skills and knowledge (Despeisse, 2018, p. 9), especially in fishing. The fishing game simulation ultimately provides an experience to consumers that this activity is fun. But the forest setting that is presented at the same time creates the impression that fishing in a wild forest is no longer scary. This fishing simulation provides the experience that fishing activities in the forest allow anglers to find various types of small fish and wild fish.

Figure 4.
Fish Fishing Simulation Signs

Sign



Denotation

In Figure 5, there are four yellow excavator toys. This excavator toy has a background like in the middle of a forest. Apart from that, there are sand and wooden objects which are mining commodities, as if describing the condition of the forest where there are no more trees.

Connotation

Through excavator toy, consumers gain experience using heavy equipment. The presence of the excavator also builds an interpretation of the exploitation that occurs in the forest. The game represents that exploitation and deforestation can and is easy to do. This is also a representation of the diminishing forest due to these exploitation actions.

The presence of an excavator game from the playground with a forest background indirectly builds an impression regarding the exploitation of nature that occurs. The virtual nature that is presented in the form of a game makes it seem as if people are trampling nature and builds a message that the destruction does not cause any impact (Levi & Kocher, 1999, p. 223).

From the positive side, children are given experience to carry out a profession in work related to heavy equipment. But on the other hand, it raises the view that the destruction of nature with heavy equipment can be done. From this, the essence of the existence of nature which should be protected becomes eroded.

Figure 5.
 Excavator toy sign

Mythic about Amazone and the nature

Forests are not only seen as part of the natural wealth on earth that must be protected. By using the name Amazon, which literally refers to a forest in Brazil, South America, namely the Amazon Forest, it is nicknamed "the Green Hell" because of its dense grove of trees. This forest is also dangerous because there are many dangerous animal species, such as piranhas, arapaima, and electric eels. However, the Amazon Forest also has an important role as the world's main lung, with a capacity to absorb carbon dioxide reaching 140 billion tons. This figure is very important in restoring oxygen production for human survival (LindungiHutan, 2022). In this context, some elements of the myths about the Amazon jungle seem to have persisted but are negotiable (Lovell & Hitchmough, 2020).

The presence of a playground that utilizes a forest setting is created through technology at Amazone. This makes it possible to simulate a forest in a limited space as a

representation of a very broad forest. The efforts made by the game entertainment industry are representational practices by utilizing signs in a social system. The representation that is presented makes the loss of something real, because the reality that should be present is realized in the form of hyperreality. (Baudrillard, 1983; Giddings, 2007: 419). But on the other hand, the use of technology to construct artificial nature in a game is also an effort to create a strong relationship between humans and forest ecology, starting from the plants and animals that are there (Altrudi, 2021: 138).

The transformation carried out by the Amazon by utilizing nature as a playground resulted in a devaluation of nature. The presence of technology has replaced nature, which was previously known as a place full of plants, trees, rivers, and even animals. This makes it seem as if humans can feel their presence in the vast universe, even though they are actually trapped in a simulation space that is packaged in the form of a playground. Amazone offers a connection that connects humans with nature through game design, setting the background of the playground, and objects that also support the wild atmosphere with technology. The efforts made by Amazon have become a hyperreality practice that is built through simulation and simulacra. Baudrillard (1994; Edvardsson et al., 2005, p. 151) explains that there are four phases in the evolution of reality and experience. The four phases start with the involvement of direct experience of reality, experience and representation of reality, consumption of reality images, and acceptance of the image itself as reality.

The presence of a playground that is packaged in the image of an Amazone makes consumers, especially the target market's children, have a sense and emotion of playing in nature. The use of nature as a playground has implications for people's experience, appreciation, and evaluation of nature itself. One of the potential impacts of using a virtual reality system is that it can cause people to despise ordinary natural landscapes (Levi & Kocher, 1999: 206). This can happen because consumers will have a pleasant natural experience. Simulated nature can give rise to the experience that nature is no longer related to the environment. Rather, it relates to games with a natural setting that can be enjoyed using technology.

Emotions that arise from feeling happy and relaxed in Amazone have the potential to ignore the intrinsic value of nature. This could not escape Latimer and Miele's views (2013; Altrudi, 2021: 126) which mentions the issue of western discourse on binary dichotomies, especially on human (cultural) and nature issues. This dichotomy shows that there is a resistance between humans and nature, where nature is ultimately seen as an object that can be utilized.

Furthermore, Haraway (1991: 198; Altrudi, 2021: 126) also asserts that nature is only the raw material of culture which is appropriated, preserved, enslaved, ennobled, or made flexible to be discarded by culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism. It is then seen by Altrudi (2021: 126) as 'turns everything into a resource for appropriation'. The existence of amazon as a play space that utilizes simulations of natural reality is ultimately seen as a place for entertainment. This phenomenon makes the culture of play more important than the intrinsic value of nature. Nature becomes an object that is used to fulfill human needs in the aspect of entertainment.

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The practice of commodifying nature into a play space creates a difference between what is real and what is simulated. In view of hyperrealism, the distinction between the real and the simulated is said to have exploded. Like the practice of natural technology simulation presented by Amazone. In Kelly Slater's opinion (dalam Roberts & Ponting, 2018: 8), this phenomenon is inseparable from the creation efforts made by engineers to

make products derived from the planned model. This applies to all companies that make simulated waves today.

Reflecting the Hyperreality

This devaluing effect is likely to increase as new virtual reality technologies become commercially available. In addition, reliance on simulated environments for our experiences of nature poses a danger because we do not know what we may be missing from our experiences of nature that we do not gain in the real world (Levi, 1999). The problem is not whether the real world can satisfy the human desire to experience nature; the problem is that by using simulation to satisfy our psychological desires, we will become less aware of what we humans do to our environment (Levi, 1999). Instead, we must interrogate these technologies that claim to make users 'connect' with an authoritatively defined 'nature' when apparently, they are instead promoting colonized ways of knowing that reinforce the distance between humans as subjects and nature as objects, rather than more intimate ways of knowing, feeling, or interacting that recognize other non-humans as subjects with whom we share and compose the space where we live (Altrudi, 2021).

The technology produced mediates an understanding of the Amazon Forest, both as a suitable place for adventure and as a negotiation between visitors and their environment. This can make visitors, especially children, fall in love with the simulacra world they enter. When we become less aware of changes in our local natural environment, we may not perceive the health-threatening changes in air or water quality that are occurring in the environment. Failure to conserve the local natural environment can have far-reaching impacts on the viability of natural ecosystems. (Levi, 1999). Indeed, it is as if the natural setting of the Amazon jungle had been represented through the constructed scenery and the technology presented but was produced as an external effect of the simulacrum. The likeness and similarity now have the essence of only the conditions being simulated, that is, expressing the operation of the simulacrum' (Deleuze, 1983: 53 in Giddings 2007).

The simulation of a playground with the backdrop of the Amazon Forest at the end creates the impression of a fun and exciting play activity. This can be realized through the construction of a playground by utilizing technology to build an atmosphere in the middle of the forest. Technology-presented reality not only makes visitors happy, but it also unintentionally develops into a sector of the entertainment industry that can overpower other environments.

CONCLUSION

Amazone Indonesia (Amazone) can indeed be an alternative arena for family entertainment, but the results of the discussion raise several problems. The presence of a technological playground in Amazone that utilizes a forest setting has negative impacts, such as the devaluation of nature and the neglect of nature's intrinsic value. The representation of the Amazon Forest in the form of a playground contains hyperreality practices, which can lead to the view that nature can be ignored and only seen as an object that can be "exploited". Therefore, the recommendations that can be submitted are important to increase awareness of the importance of protecting and caring for the Amazon Forest, while still considering the impact of using technology in utilizing the forest setting for entertainment purposes.

Nonetheless, a broad conclusion can be drawn, namely that the use of simulation technology such as virtual reality to interact with nature can cause some problems. First, the use of simulations can make humans less aware of what they are doing to the real environment, and this can cause damage to natural ecosystems as a whole. Second, the use of simulation technology can strengthen the distance between humans and nature as objects, rather than more intimate ways of knowing, feeling, or interacting that recognize non-humans as subjects with whom we share and compose the space in which we live.

Third, simulation technologies such as virtual reality can create nostalgia for nature that is diminishing in the real world, but they can also submerge other environments and become a field of the entertainment business. Thus, it is important for us to consider the impact that the use of simulation technologies such as virtual reality has on the natural environment and how we interact with it.

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