

Embracing the Un-Normal

Webinar 2:
*How Indonesian Consumers Create
Meaning through Foods and
Beverages during the Pandemic*

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The global pandemic has affected how people think and behave in their daily lives - within a short period of time, a lot of things have changed

At Illuminate Asia, we wanted to understand how people are coping and adapting. We wanted to help our clients make sense of it all

The Covid 19 pandemic has created a major shift in many countries, as the majority of people have to isolate themselves for months to prevent the transmission of the virus.

This self-isolation resulted in a massive change of behaviour as human needs to adapt quickly in order to cope and survive. They need to change their social structure and norms, and food culture is one of the most impacted.

Food and beverage brands need to be able to anticipate these changes to remain relevant with this un-normal condition.



The burning questions...

What is the underlying cultural shifts in food & beverage consumption in Indonesia during pandemics?

How can foods & beverage brands apply semiotic thinking to develop solutions and communicate to consumers in the right manner during the pandemics?



Methodology – Semiotic Analysis

Semiotics is the study of the meaning of cultural signs and symbols

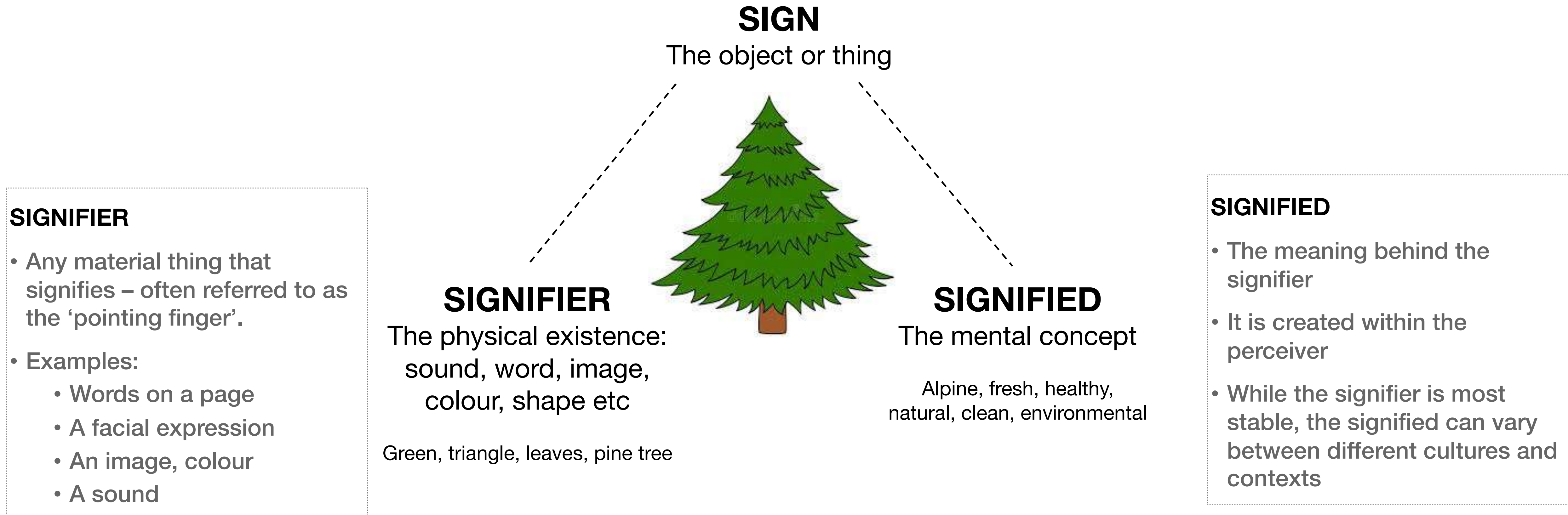
Why is it important for brands & marketers?

- Unlike regular market research, semiotics offers an outside-in approach
 - We analyse the signs that consumers are exposed to, which in turns helps to create shared meaning
 - Semioticians consciously see the brand in the same way that consumers unconsciously see it!
- Semiotics uncovers the fundamental drivers behind the consumer behaviour – the culture



SEMIOTIC THINKING - Being mindful and realizing that the brand consists of signs and symbols that deliver meaning to the consumer; and that consumers buy things because of the meanings attached to those things.

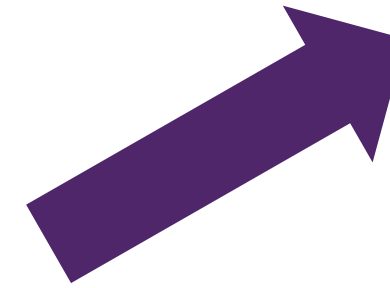
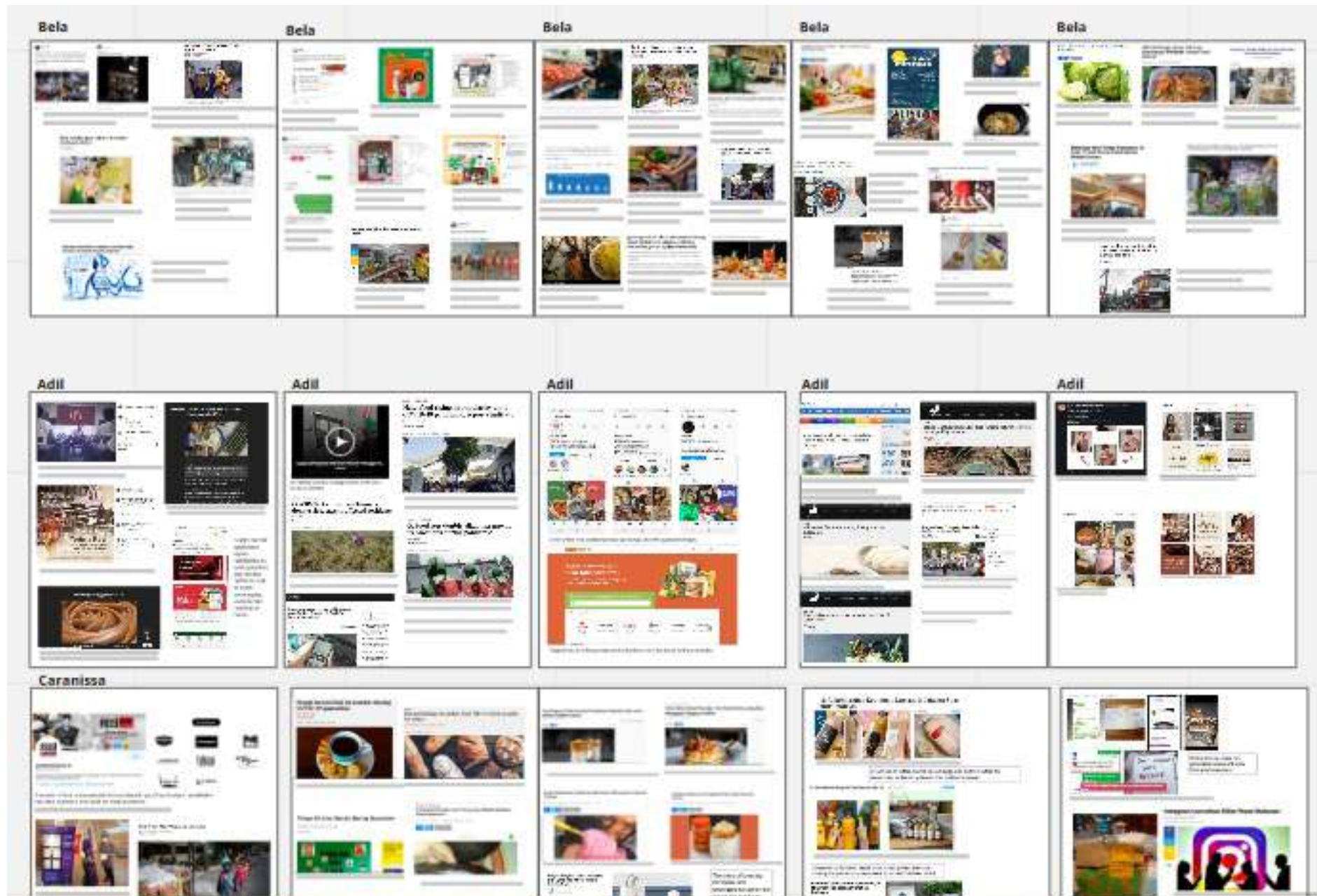
Core elements of semiotic thinking



We Use the Discipline of Semiotics to Understand the Shifts in Consumer Culture

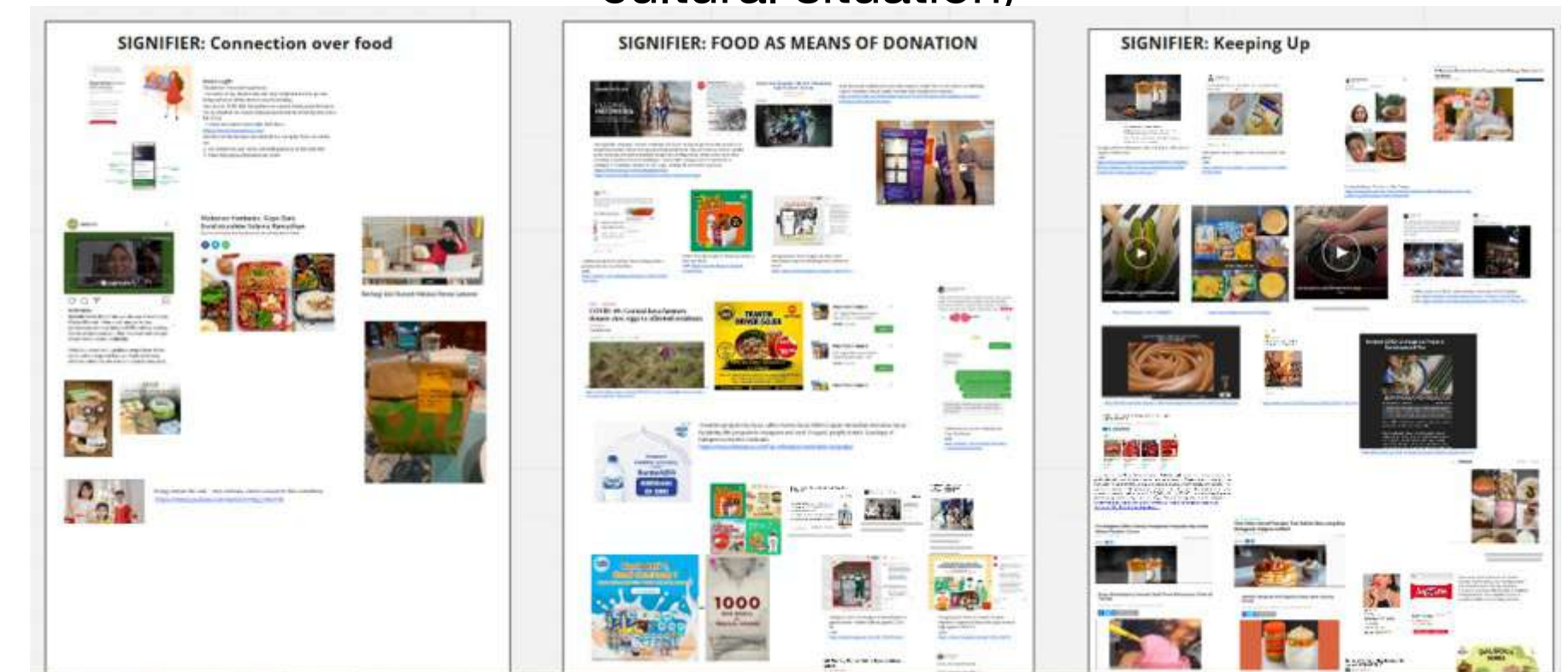
1. COLLECTING SIGNS:

We collected data from social media, news sites, blogs, YouTube videos, advertising, etc.



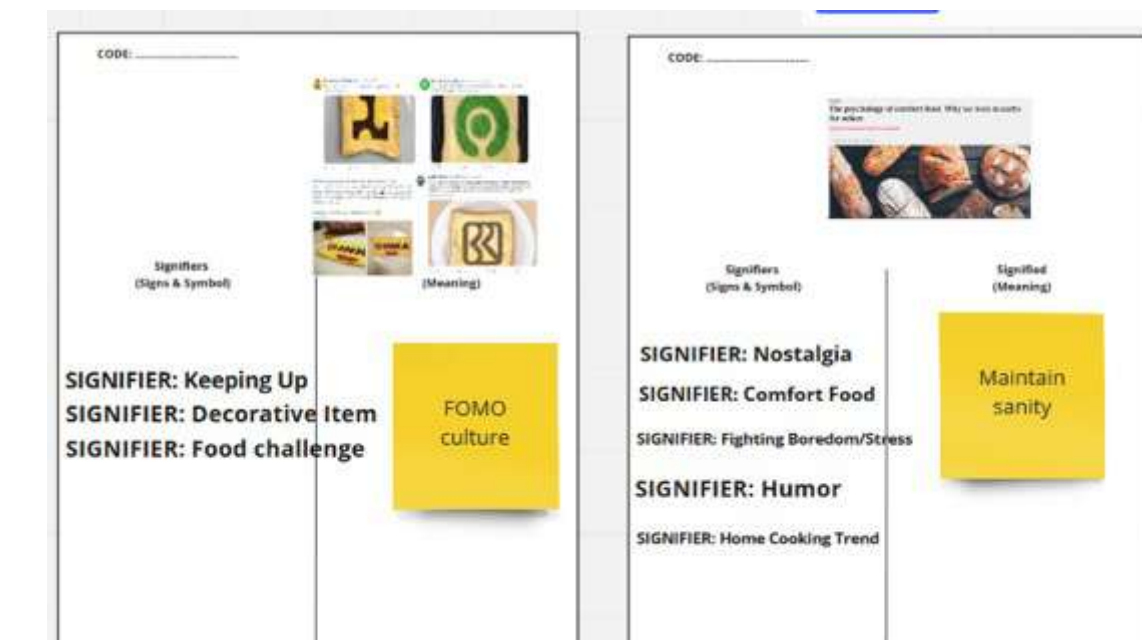
2. INTERPRET THE MEANING:

The data will act as a semiotic “SIGN”, of which we analyze by understanding the meaning (“SIGNIFIED”) behind each SIGNS via bottom-up analysis (dissecting the components) and top-down analysis (making the relation with the current socio-cultural situation)

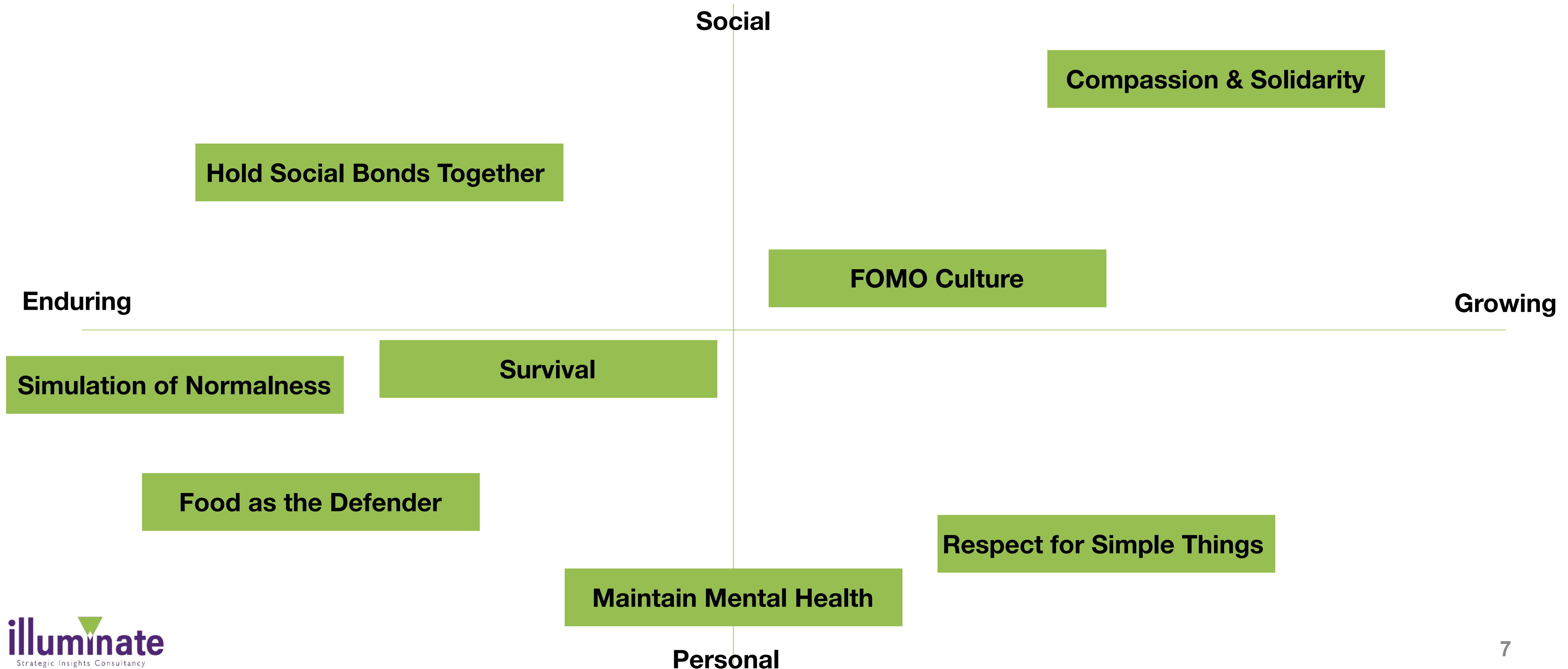


2. DEVELOP CULTURAL CODES:

We group the SIGNS into CODES, to understand the underlying cultural change



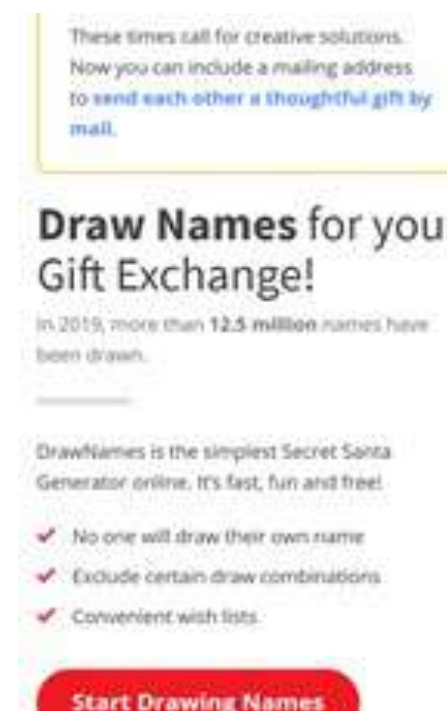
Code Mapping – We found eight Cultural Codes that have emerged during the pandemic in Indonesia



Hold Social Bonds Together

Function: Connections with others are very important for Indonesians; so food forms a way to keep social connections via gifts and as a way to share experiences

- **Gifting foods** to friends and family (via delivery of hampers or food parcels) shows love and caring and develops a level of closeness amongst the social groups, even when physically distanced
- **Remote buka puasa bersama** (breaking the fast together) **amongst friends, often with Zoom** – usually fun and light hearted, as a way to stay connected and feel close



Berbagi dari Rumah Melalui Parsel Lebaran



Burger King held 'Bukber Terbesar dengan Whopper', where they send 2,000 Whopper Buggers to their consumers and let them to share their pictures – the purpose is to stay connected with their consumers

Makanan Hantaran, Gaya Baru Bersilaturahmi Selama Ramadhan

Rep: Gumanli Awaliyah/ Red: Reiny Dwinanda Sabtu 09 May 2020 03:46 WIB



Food as a gift to friends and loved ones when physically separated - delivery of hampers / packets to send to others during Ramadan

Compassion & Solidarity

Function: A desire to help others and show solidarity with those facing adversity

- **Food as a means of donation** – Those financially able recognise their duty to supporting others via donations of food and free meals for the needy
 - Brands facilitating their customers to be able to easily help
 - Some businesses also handing their own helping hand by direct donations of food and products
- **Supporting local businesses** – to help sustain local communities through SME businesses and taking initiatives to champion local businesses
- **Appreciating frontline workers** – by giving donations of food; as a way to acknowledge the effort and sacrifice to keep the country safe



Grab Indonesia facilitates users who want to donate food for its drivers



Zomato is helping FoodCycle Indonesia with initiatives to ensure families avoid hoarding. They also provide food donations for under-privileged



Warteg serving free meal to those in needs



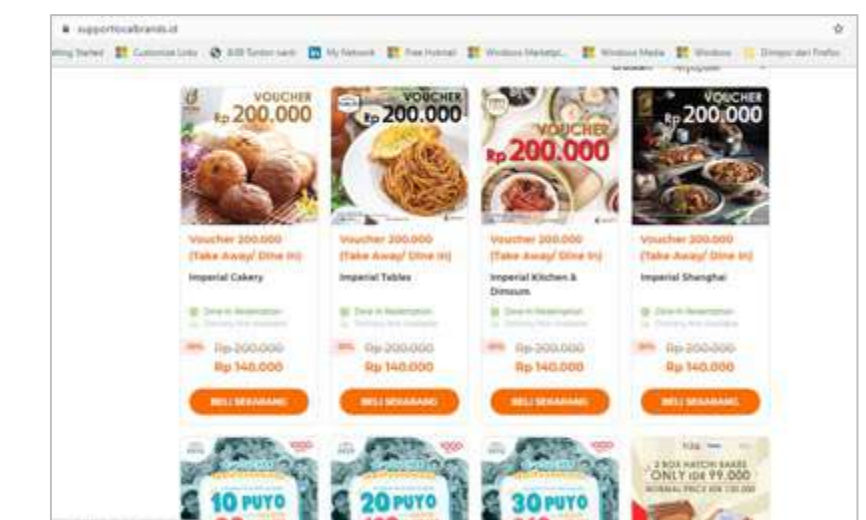
Food as symbol of solidarity



Mujigae appreciates frontline workers



Children queue for free Iftar meal

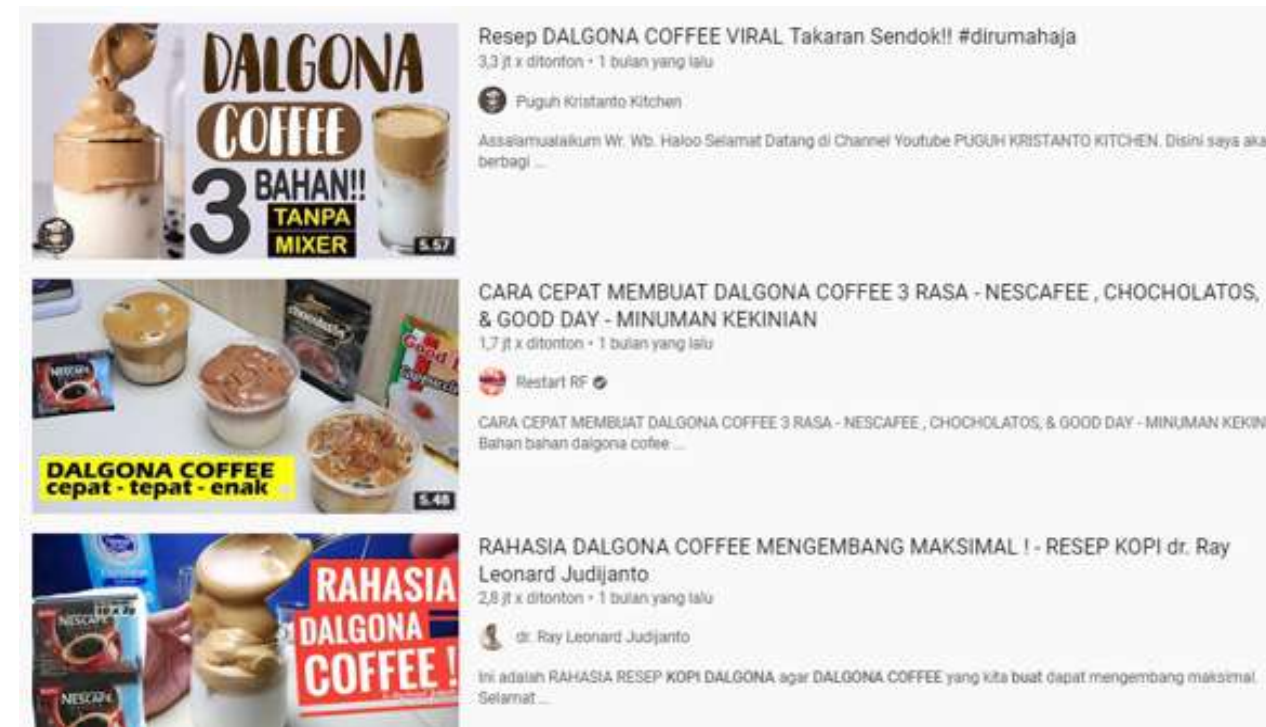


Supportlocalbrand.id to make sure that the local brands survive

FOMO Culture

Function: Maintain social presence and relevance

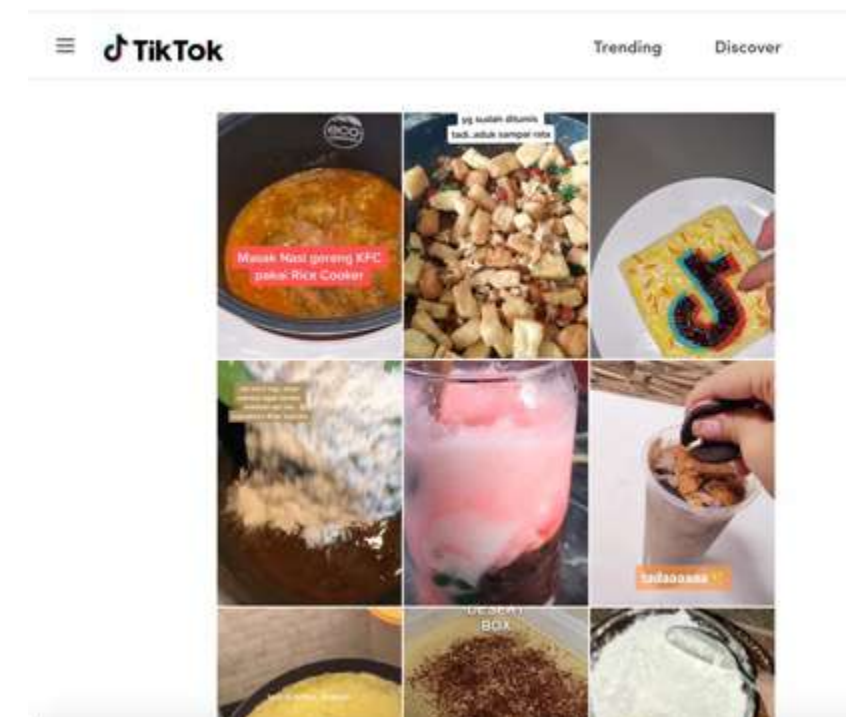
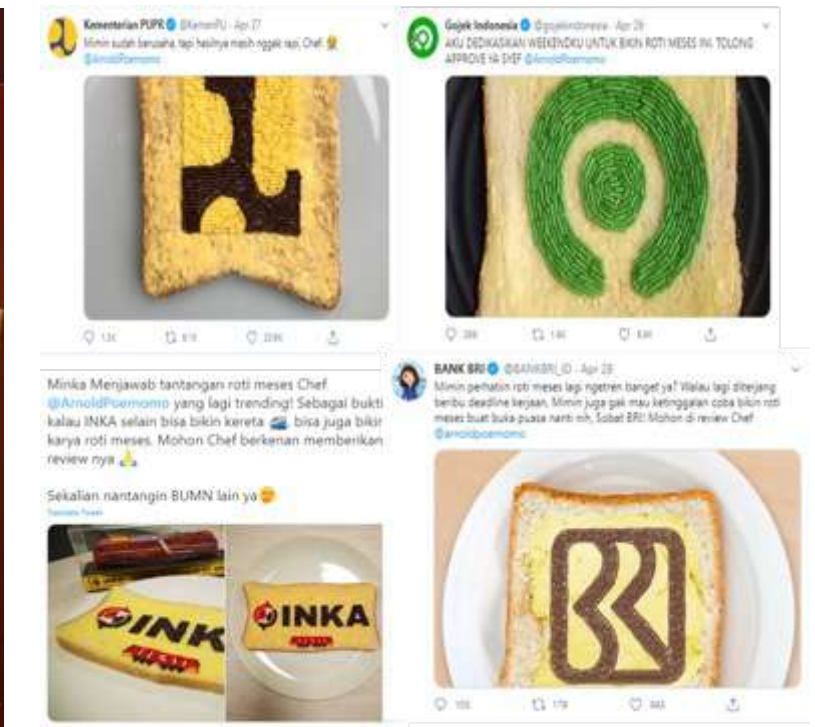
- **Keeping up** – a form of social comparison; in isolation one still does not want to be left out
- **Elevating the mundane** – simple food elevated to a greater status to create a sense of achievement and gain recognition
- **Food challenges** – participating in viral food challenges not only brings a sense of excitement, but also connects to the human desire of wanting to be accepted and to fit in



Tutorials on how to make Dalgona coffee have been watched by million people



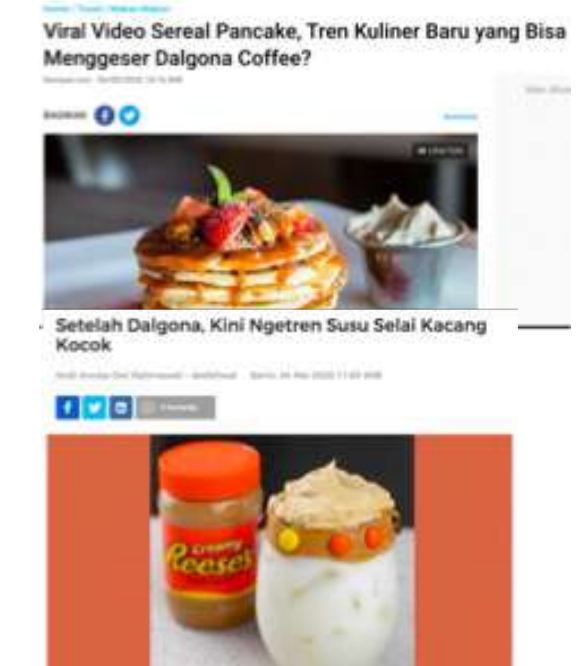
A Twitter user create her own design with chocolate sprinkles to fight her boredom and create an online challenge, then it went viral, even brands like Ceres and Gojek also exposes that and join the challenge



A Tiktok page showing variety of viral cooking challenge performed by consumers



Tiktok challenge Face and Cooking, where people compare their own cooking during stay at home to their face



Cereal pancake and peanut butter milk, are another viral food challenge after Dalgona coffee

Simulation of Normalness

Function: Food as a way to relive a normal life and regain control through lockdown

- **Restaurant foods at home (including high-end restaurants)** – to replicate that dining out experience that relates to ‘normal’ life; to give some additional pleasure and indulgence
- **Super Sized Foods & Beverages** – brings the quality of professionally prepared foods/beverages to assure that the normal routines remain untouched
- **Celebration** – During Ramadan, Indonesian Muslims want to be able to celebrate the normal wide range of traditional dishes, even when in smaller than usual family groups
- **Nostalgia** – Bringing back the days when things were ‘normal’



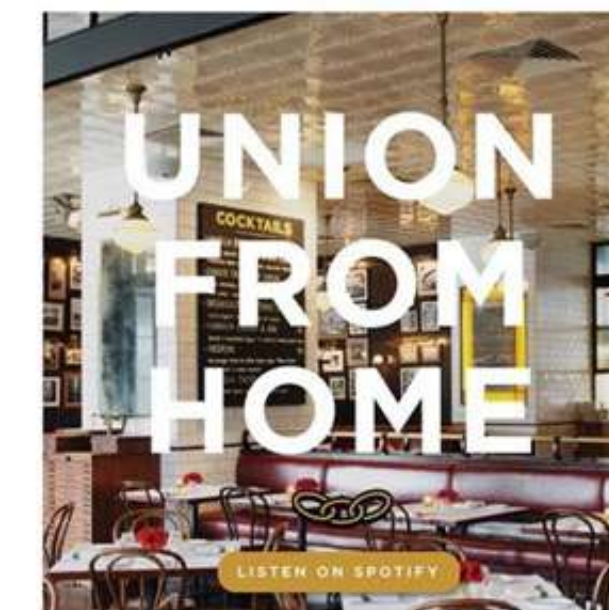
Larger sized drinks such as 1 litre ice coffee becoming popular



Star hotel restaurants offering home delivery



Home delivery Korean BBQ promoted by vloggers



Union Café and Spotify create their own version of playlist to let its customers can feel the mood like they were in the restaurant



Festive meal packages for small family celebrations

Survival

Function: Enabler for getting through hard times

- **Safety and hygiene** – Mindful food handling to avoid contamination and achieve optimum safety
- **Home cooking as a necessity** – the situation forces consumers to cook at home and avoid eating out
- **Online food services** – small businesses become more empowered and move online to provide their services.
 - As consumers grapple to adapt behind closed doors, they fully embrace the online food services that provide a multitude of options
- **Food entrepreneurs** – opening new doors, embracing new opportunities and not giving up



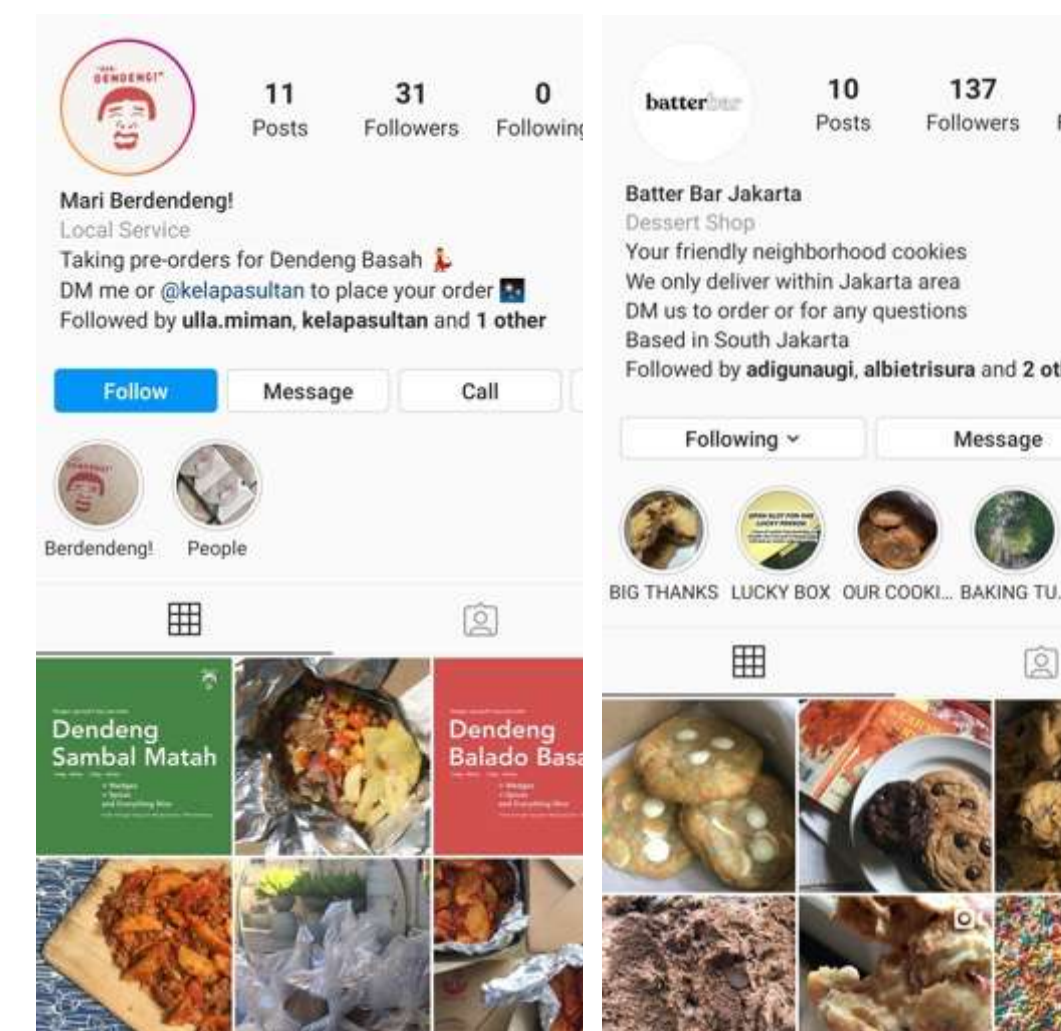
Restaurants and brands who do delivery service ensure to perform health protocol to their products



'Tukang Sayur' and small food seller expanding their service into online



Royco promotes cooking at home as part of protection for the family



More and more food seller accounts in the Instagram



Some restaurants and company provide online and delivery service

Food as the Defender

Function: Fighting against the evil

- **Traditional herbal to fight foreign evils –** Jamu is regaining popularity as it is believed to protect against coronavirus despite of the non-scientific claim.
 - It is also a symbol of Nationalism, as Indonesians are trying to prove that a local solution works better than foreign ones
- **Healthy foods during quarantine -** consumption of healthy foods is increasing to improve immunity and to ensure that we are staying in shape.



Controversy over DPR'/House of Representatives Covid 19 taskforce that claimed to have found herbal medicine for Covid 19. Some of the materials were imported from China despite Indonesia's rich jamu heritage, sparking controversy and sentiment of Nationalism.



Article about the change of eating habits during self-quarantine



"Empon-Empon", traditional concoction believed to improve body immunity to fight against coronavirus.

Pilih makanan yang tepat agar tetap sehat selama pandemi corona



Article about suggestion to choose healthy food during pandemic

Maintain Mental Health

Function: Food as the caretaker of the minds

- **Nostalgia** – comparing “how things were” with ‘How things are’; bring back what was good in the past to provide sense of assurance and stability
- **Comfort food** – people turn to their comfort food during restrictions of movement to sooth their anxieties.
 - The familiar taste of comfort food is reassuring and enables one to look forward to the day when the current crisis is over
- **Humour** – using food to bring laughter and lighten the ‘burden’ (fear of current situation)
- **Fighting boredom and stress** – there is a sense of ‘waiting’ during the pandemic and people just want to get through the current stage quickly and return to normal
 - Experimentation with food breaks the monotony that leads to boredom and stress
- **Home cooking trends** – cooking as a way to de-stress; to bring a sense of well-being – for some, cooking brings deeper meaning (as sense of purpose) thought the ability to create something and serve others



A mother try to limit her kids' snack consumption by creating a fake 'minimart' at home. Snack has become kids' comfort food during pandemic



Walls Viennetta, a popular ice cream back in 90's that regain its popularity now



Spotify exposes popular Indonesian comfort food 'Mie Rebus' to give sense of soothing and assurance for people during the pandemic



A video by Kompas TV highlight that cooking can cure boredom <https://www.kompas.tv/article/76442/memasak-bisa-atasi-kejenuhan-saat-karantina>



A Twitter user encourages people to post their failed cooking when staying at home



Indonesian famous influencers, like Rachel Vennya promoting masak #dirumahaja



Article about Youtube channel recommendation to learn cooking during pandemic <https://tirta.id/rekomendasi-channel-youtube-untuk-belajar-memasak-ada-food52-eNGw>

Respect for Simple Things

Function: Food as a symbol of of inclusiveness and gratitude

- **Being thankful and live simpler** - not hoarding foods, just live with what you have right now and enjoy it to the fullest
- **Everyone can cook** – sharing of simple cooking tips for those who are now forced to start cooking at home. Cooking is now not the only domain for home makers or experts
- **Simple things matter** – People start to notice the small things in life that they previously ignored. They begin to recognize and appreciate the ordinary things.



Telor Ceplok (Sunny Side Up) to symbolise simple menu that is sufficient for people to consume during pandemic, hence preventing people from hoarding food. This video from Edward Suhadi became viral and ask people to stay simple in their consumption.

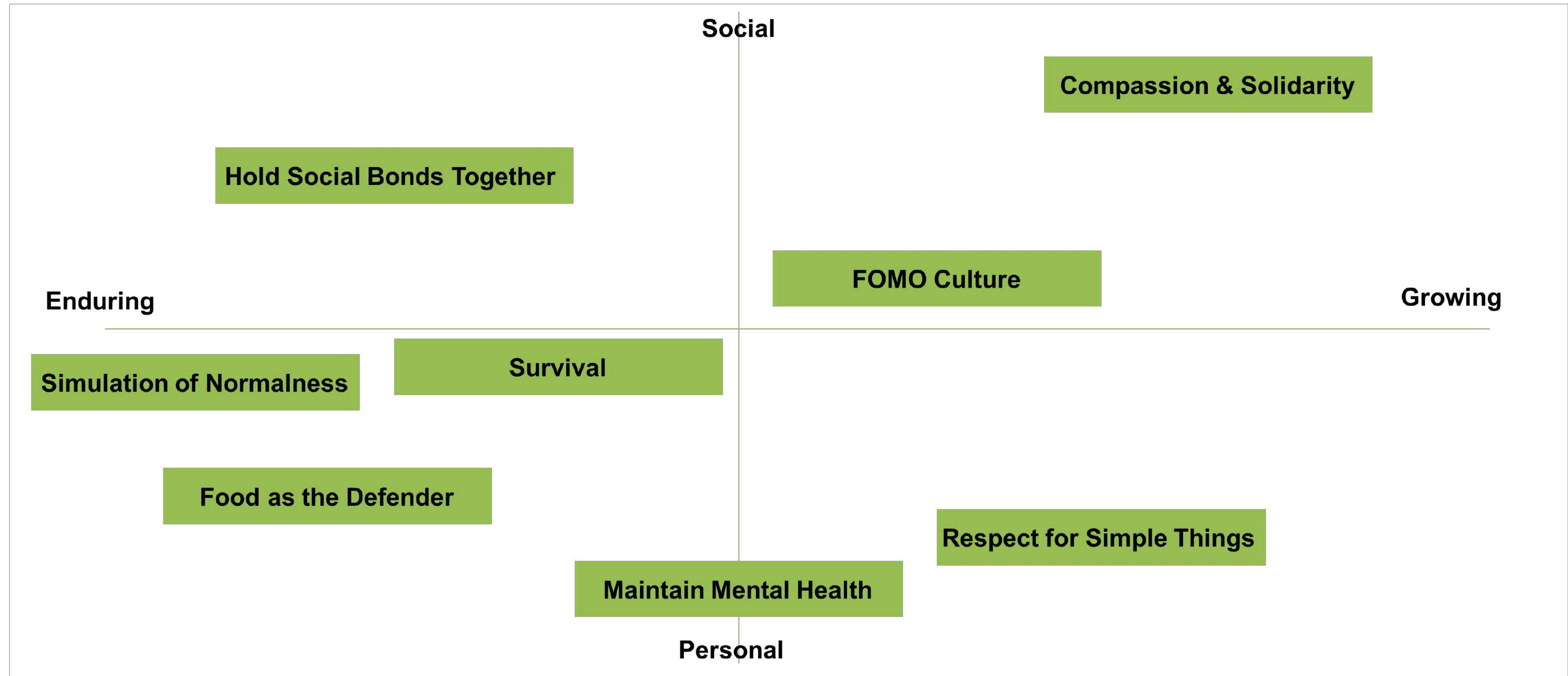


Food vloggers share their simple recipes to try at home



Lesson for Brands

Turning semiotic insights into action: using binary opposition

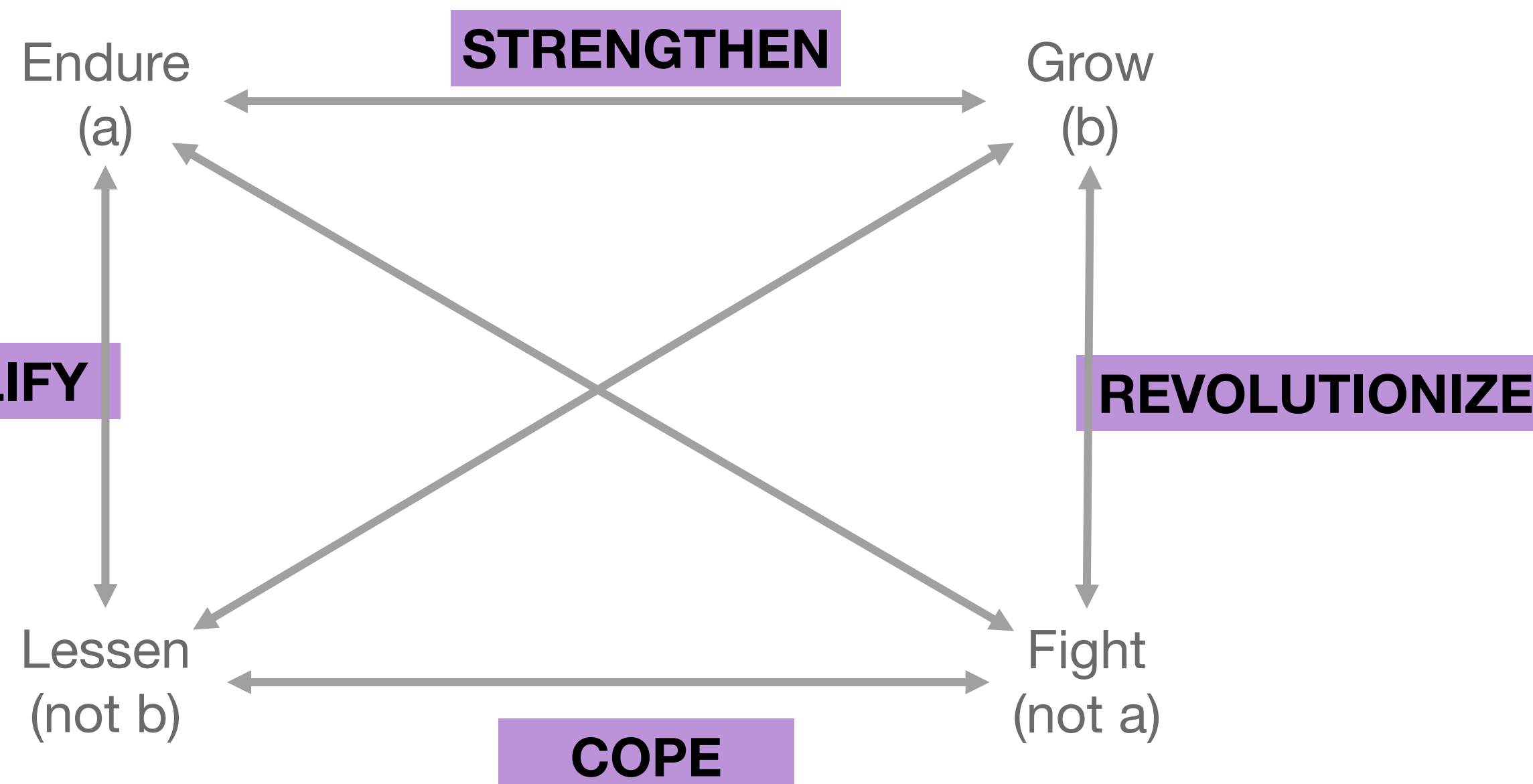


A binary opposition is a pair of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning.

What can F&B brands do to help our consumers?

Four approaches to communicate and innovate during the pandemic

Greimas Semiotic Square



1. **Help them to SIMPLIFY their life** - Help them to be more mindful and appreciative
2. **STRENGTHEN your consumers** – Facilitate them to use this time to make something better prepared for the post-pandemic world
3. **Provide mechanism to COPE** – Support them mentally through escapism or safe space
4. **REVOLUTIONIZE their way of life** – Introduce radical new things that will help them right now

Applying Semiotic Thinking in Innovation

The key benefit of semiotics is that all innovation, product/service/packaging design is rooted in the lived experience of human beings

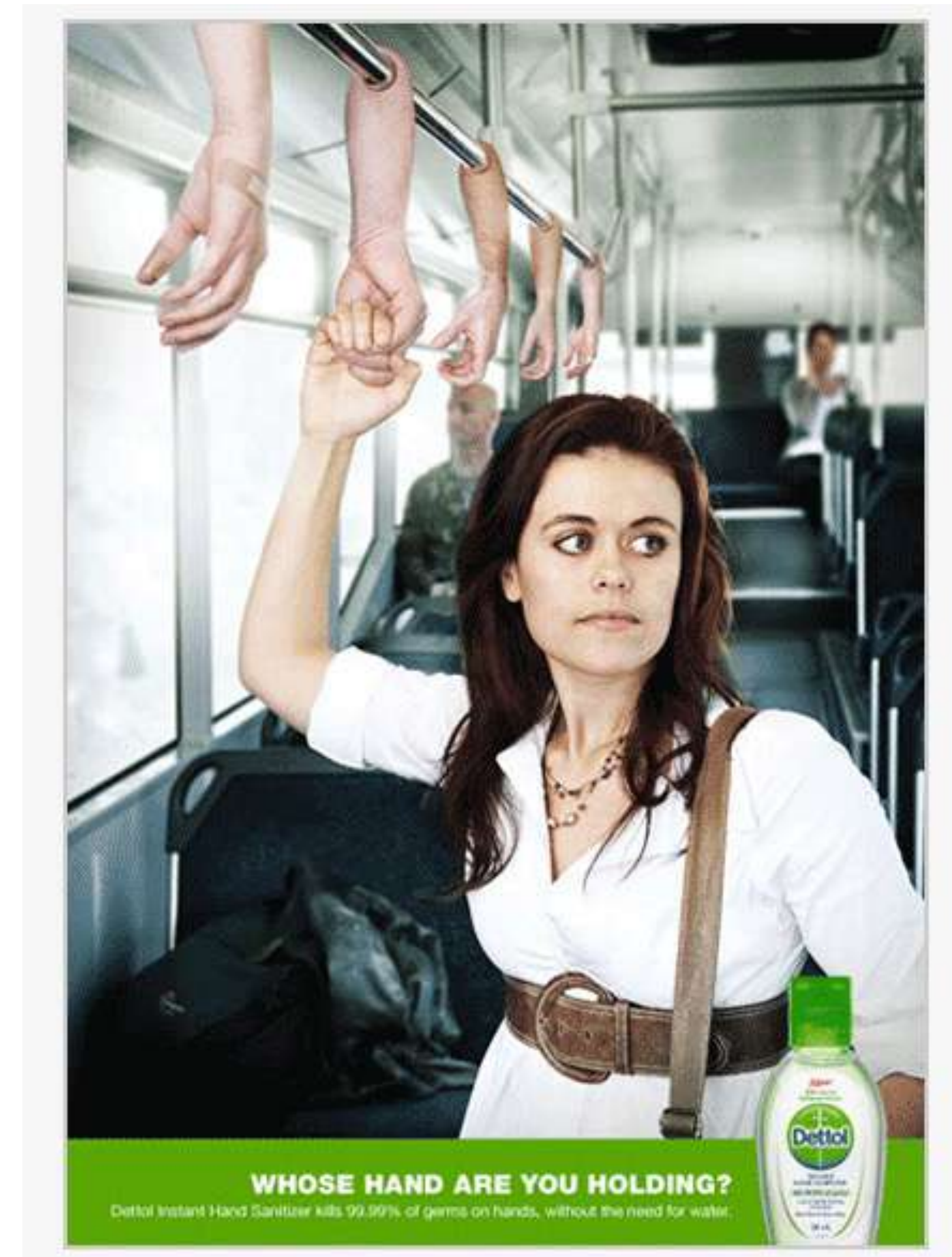
- **In the ideation phase**, semiotic thinking is helpful as it puts ideas directly into a cultural context and assesses them with regards to this context. It thus gives to the ideation phase a more precise and detailed orientation. Understanding of Emergent Codes and Binary Opposition also helps to create a distinct innovation ideas
- **In the prototyping phase**, semiotics helps to get a detailed analysis and assessment of a prototype, complementary to a consumer test
- **Semiotics assesses every single component of a product or service** and analyse the interpretation of these components within a particular culture. Why this component will perform better than another or not? Where do we need to put the emphasis? On which idea or components is it strategic to communicate to have the best welcome?



Applying Semiotic Thinking in Communication

Semiotic thinking helps to create a communication that is both unique against the competitors and relevant with the consumer culture

- Applying semiotic thinking helps to **understand and apply the right symbols** in brand communication and its significance and relevance to a particular culture in a particular time
- Semiotic approach also helps **to differentiate the brand communication**, via understanding of dominant vs. emergent cultural codes



Why is semiotic approach valuable?

- Fast and relatively inexpensive
- Transcend beyond qualitative focus groups/consumer interviews
- Able to detect the subconscious drivers of consumer behaviours
- Can be combined with other methodology to create a robust triangulation
- Helps marketers for both strategic purpose (brand positioning, innovation ideas, etc.) and tactical (product/service/packaging/communication design) as well.



**Contact us to start applying semiotic approach
to benefit your brand.**



FROM ILLUMINATE FAMILY TO
OUR CLIENTS AND PARTNERS,

Have a Happy Eid al-Fitr!

May you and your family be blessed with
peace, happiness, good health, and love.

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THANK YOU!

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