

Normalizing Online Gambling Through Multimodal Food and Beverage Advertising Imagery

Vivit Novita Axviarani*

Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Brawijaya, 65145,
Malang, Indonesia
vivitaxviarani@student.ub.ac.id

Reza Safitri

Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Brawijaya, 65145,
Malang, Indonesia
reza.fp@ub.ac.id

Fitri Hariana Oktaviani

Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Brawijaya, 65145,
Malang, Indonesia
fitri.oktaviani@ub.ac.id

Abstract

Online gambling advertisements have become increasingly prevalent across Indonesian social media platforms, although gambling is legally prohibited in Indonesia. These advertisements employ covert advertising strategies by masquerading as online gambling through familiar food and beverage imagery. Multimodal elements are utilized as a persuasive strategy to shape and normalize gambling practices. This study critically examines how multimodal elements are constructed in covert advertisements format and how these constructions contribute to the normalization of online gambling practices within Indonesian digital culture. The study demonstrates how multimodal elements operate as persuasive strategies in covert online gambling advertisements. Drawing upon Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), the study analyzes three advertisements collected from the Meta Ads Library in 2025 that masquerade as Mie Sedaap (instant noodles), Potabee (snacks), and Sprite (soft drinks). The findings reveal two dominant normalization discourses. First, gambling is normalized as a familiar and risk-free consumption practice through symbolic associations with familiar food

and beverage imagery. This process reflects a form of symbolic domestication, in which gambling is gradually relocated from a stigmatized and illegal activity into an ordinary and culturally familiar consumption practice. Second, gambling is normalized as an enjoyable and rewarding activity through promotional language emphasizing guaranteed winning and high financial profits, ultimately fostering an instant success fantasy. These findings contribute to critical discussions on covert advertising and online gambling normalization in Indonesia.

Keywords: Covert Advertising; Online Gambling; Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis; Normalization

1. Introduction

Online gambling advertisements have become increasingly prevalent across social media platforms, raising critical concerns regarding their visibility and influence, particularly in contexts where gambling is legally prohibited. In Indonesia, online gambling is officially prohibited. However, the advertisements often operate in covert forms, making them difficult to detect. Notably, these advertisements masquerade as familiar food and beverage imagery closely associated with everyday consumption. Unlike organic content, these advertisements are strategically designed as official paid promotions in social media platforms that exploit platform infrastructures while simultaneously evading regulatory detection. Digital platform advertising is often difficult to monitor because promotional content may appear in ephemeral, personalized, and “below-the-line” forms that are invisible to the broader public and regulators. (Carah & Brodmerkel, 2021). In response to this issue, a critical examination of how online gambling advertisements as an illegal practice are constructed within Indonesian social media timelines becomes essential.

Previous studies regarding online gambling advertisements on social media revealed several key findings. First, exposure to online gambling advertisements on social media influences the rise of online gambling cases. Individual attitudes, intentions, and behaviors may increase as a result of exposure to advertisements (Bouguettaya et al., 2020). Exposure to online gambling advertisements has the potential to increase gambling involvement, such as first-time gambling intention, and then encourage greater risk-taking during playing (Syvertsen et al., 2022). Furthermore, gambling advertisements are often deliberately designed to construct a positive corporate image, with the wording carefully crafted to attract more attention on social media platforms (Singer et al., 2024). Second, online gambling advertisements in Indonesia are insufficiently monitored by the

government. The absence of advertisement labeling makes it difficult for audiences to distinguish between entertainment content and promotional material (Basya et al., 2025). Although the Indonesian government has made efforts to combat online gambling, inconsistencies in legal terminology within existing regulations have hindered these enforcement efforts (Silalahi et al., 2024).

The increasing prevalence of online gambling advertisements suggests a transformation in how the messages are constructed and perceived. This condition calls for a critical analytical approach that uncovers covert strategies and discourses embedded within advertisements. In the Indonesian context, online gambling advertisements on social media platforms show integration of multimodal elements, such as semiotic resources (image, typography, color, composition). Further analysis of the resources should be conducted through descriptive, modality, interpretative, and discursive dimensions in order to critically uncover how meaning and persuasive strategies are discursively constructed within the advertisements. Therefore, this study uses Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) by Ledin & Machin (2020). It enables a systematic examination of how meaning is produced through the interplay of multiple semiotic resources, including color, typography, textual elements, and symbolic representations. MCDA provides a comprehensive framework to reveal how online gambling advertisements are strategically constructed as food and beverage, therefore subtly contributing to the normalization of gambling practices within digital environments.

The previous studies have examined online gambling advertisements, particularly in relation to exposure effects on gambling behavior and the inadequacy of regulatory frameworks in Indonesia. However, limited attention has been devoted to critically examining how advertisements are discursively constructed through the integration of multimodal elements, especially in Indonesia, where gambling is legally prohibited. This research gap becomes particularly salient when situated in the Indonesian digital landscape, where exposure to online gambling advertisements is pervasive. This condition highlights the necessity for a critical examination of how these advertisements are discursively and strategically constructed through multimodal elements to normalize gambling practices. In order to critically analyze the issue of online gambling advertisements in Indonesia, this study examines how multimodal elements are constructed in online gambling advertisements that masquerade as food and beverage imagery, and how the multimodal analysis represents the normalization of online gambling in Indonesia.

Addressing the purpose of the study requires the analysis of empirical realities, particularly data to demonstrate the persistence of online gambling advertisements in Indonesia. To illustrate the scale of exposure, a survey was conducted online on 21-28 November 2023 with 1,058 Indonesian respondents aged 17–55, who reported that online gambling advertisements were widely encountered across digital platforms. The survey found that 63% of respondents were exposed to such advertisements every time they accessed the internet, while 84% observed that these advertisements frequently appeared within social media content (Populix, 2024). The persistence of online gambling indicates its strategic adaptation to the communicative styles and visual cultures of social media. Through technologized advertising strategies, online gambling advertisements are often presented as humorous and seemingly harmless posts (Rossi & Nairn, 2022). Moreover, the advertisements show a complex graphic design. These elements are closely aligned with Indonesian culture. In advertising, graphic design elements play an important role in constructing symbolic meanings and creating visual familiarity between brands and consumers (Yılmaz & Kır, 2025). In social media environments, visual imagery increasingly plays a significant role. Visual imagery is capable of shaping audience perception and engagement, as users are continuously exposed to persuasive visual stimuli through digital advertising content (Ghaleb & Alawad, 2024).

In Indonesia, playing online gambling is an illegal activity and poses a significant risk, both financially and socially. From a financial perspective, transactions of online gambling in Indonesia reached approximately 927 billion rupiah between 2017 and the first quarter of 2025 (Report of Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center, 2025). Moreover, in the first quarter of 2025, the total number of players in online gambling is 1,066,000, with the age group 20-30 being the largest segment (396 thousand), followed by the age group 31-40 (395 thousand), and the rest are the other age groups (Izzudin, 2025). Most of the players are under 40 years old, individuals in this age are highly active social media users, and are highly exposed to online gambling advertisements in their social media timeline. Furthermore, from a social perspective, online gambling activity has endangered the stability in society, disrupting household economy and threatening the younger generation in the future (Febiola, 2025).

Online gambling advertisements proliferate across social media platforms, frequently providing direct gateways to gambling websites. These promotional materials demonstrate increasing sophistication in their deceptive technique, employing visually appealing and camouflaged

formats to evade regulatory detection. Covert advertising represents messages as familiar media formats, such as video games, news articles, social media posts, or viral videos, and relies on the fact that consumers will view the message as belonging to one of these familiar categories (Wojdyski & Evans, 2020). Some advertisements masquerade covertly as food and beverage imagery. This covert strategy represents an ethical violation of communication in the digital ecosystem. Misleading or deceptive communication practices erode public trust and blur the boundary between persuasion and manipulation (Bivins, 2009). These covert gambling advertisements exemplify how strategic ambiguity is employed to normalize potentially harmful practices while evading ethical accountability. In advertising ethics, covert advertising is an unethical practice. Covert advertising can be defined as advertisements that seek to mimic and blend in with the media context in which they appear and often provide a challenge for consumers to recognize them as an advertisement (Pierre, 2024).

A grey area is created by the digital ecosystem. It can be exploited and deviated from legal norms and violate ethical principles. Gambling is a stigmatized product and is certainly one with the potential to cause harm to those who lose control over their degree of engagement (Forrest & McHale, 2025). Digital platforms constitute an ecosystem where the control over information has shifted from users to capital owners. Social media platforms risk monopolizing users' cognition, because individuals are no longer autonomous curators of their own perceptions but rather passive subjects whose perceptions are shaped by invisible commercial interests (Masoud, 2025). The convergence of regulatory ambiguity and the harmful nature of gambling creates a fertile ground for the normalization of online gambling advertisements through covert advertising strategies.

2. Method

This study is framed in the field of communication studies, based on the critical tradition and the semiotic tradition (Littlejohn et al., 2021). The critical tradition enables the researcher to examine how communication practices, positioning the researcher not as a neutral observer, but as an interpretive agent engaged in uncovering the underlying discourses and strategic forms of manipulation embedded within the advertisements. Drawing upon a critical paradigm, this study assumes that media texts are not merely reflections of reality but are socially constructed and discursively loaded. Meanwhile, the semiotic tradition facilitates an understanding of how signs, symbols, and visual elements in advertising function as carriers of meaning and discourse.

These two traditions are complementary in explaining the discursive and meaning-making dimensions embedded within the visual representations of the advertisements. The researcher acknowledges that the interpretation of multimodal texts is shaped by a critical position toward deceptive advertising and the normalization of illegal online gambling in Indonesia. However, to avoid uncontrolled subjective interpretation, the analysis was systematically guided by the MCDA framework of (Ledin & Machin, 2020), focusing on observable semiotic resources such as image, color, typography, textual elements, composition, and modality.

This study draws on the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) framework proposed by (Ledin & Machin, 2020) which is grounded in social semiotic theory to analyze the advertisements. The selected advertisements are official promotional ads displayed on Facebook and Instagram, presented in image format. The advertisements were obtained from Meta Platform Ads Library (<https://www.facebook.com/ads/library>). The selection of these platforms is based on three considerations. First, Facebook and Instagram collectively host more than 100 million users in Indonesia in 2025 (We are Social, 2025), indicating their dominance within the Indonesian digital landscape and their capacity to shape user perceptions through repeated exposure to advertising content. In this context, Facebook and Instagram have become significant institutional actors in promoting addictive commodities through increasingly sophisticated advertising systems that are participatory, algorithmic, and data-driven (Carah & Brodmerkel, 2021). Second, both platforms provide publicly accessible ad library features that enable systematic collection and monitoring of advertisements across countries. Third, their timeline-based interfaces facilitate continuous scrolling and repeated exposure to advertising content.

Given the vast and continuously updated number of online gambling advertisements available in the Meta Platforms Ads Library, this study does not attempt to capture the total population of advertisements. Instead, it employs a purposive sampling approach to construct a focused analytical corpus. The data were collected in 2025, a period characterized by the increasing sophistication of digital advertising practices and the intensified use of covert strategies in social media environments. Focusing on this period allows the study to capture the most current forms of multimodal construction.

The advertisements were selected using a purposive sampling strategy based on several criteria. First, the advertisements explicitly or implicitly

promote online gambling services in image format, as image-based advertisements enable detailed and replicable analysis of visual and textual features within a single frame. Second, they employ covert strategies, particularly by masquerading as food and beverage imagery. Third, the advertisements are presented in the Indonesian language and specifically target Indonesian audiences. Fourth, the selected advertisements contain multimodal elements, including images, color, typography, textual context, composition (saliency, framing, and layout), and modality.

Based on these criteria, a total of three advertisements were identified as meeting the selection requirements and were subsequently included in the analysis. These advertisements were chosen as information-rich cases, as they consistently exhibit covert advertising strategies; the samples concentrated on the online gambling advertisements that masquerade as food and beverage imagery. The focus on food and beverage imagery was selected because these products show visual familiarity among Indonesian consumers and are commonly associated with pleasure, leisure, and accessibility. These characteristics make food and beverage advertisements particularly relevant for examining how gambling messages are strategically masqueraded, familiarized, and normalized through culturally recognizable consumer imagery. Therefore, the selected advertisements were treated as information-rich cases rather than statistically representative samples.

The analytical framework employed in this study is illustrated in Figure 1. The framework shows a systematic process of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) of this study. After the selection process, the three selected advertisements are examined. First, the examination begins with the identification of key semiotic resources, including image, color, typography, textual content, and composition (saliency, layout, and framing). Second, followed by a descriptive analysis to examine how these elements are constructed within each advertisement. Third, the analysis then proceeds to modality analysis, focusing on how different degrees of reality and affect are established through naturalistic (realism), sensory (emotional appeal), and abstract (conceptual meaning) modalities. Fourth, an interpretative analysis is conducted to explore how multimodal elements interact and are strategically combined to construct meaning. Fifth, the framework culminates in a discursive analysis to uncover the construction and normalization of online gambling practices.

Ethical considerations were taken into account because the advertisements analyzed in this study promote illegal online gambling activities in Indonesia. The data were collected from the publicly accessible Meta Ads Library and did not involve private user data, personal accounts,

comments, or audience interactions. To avoid amplifying illegal promotional content, the study does not provide clickable links, gambling website addresses, account identifiers, or any information that may direct readers to gambling platforms. The reproduced advertisement images are presented only as analytical evidence within the MCDA framework and should be understood as objects of critique, not endorsement.

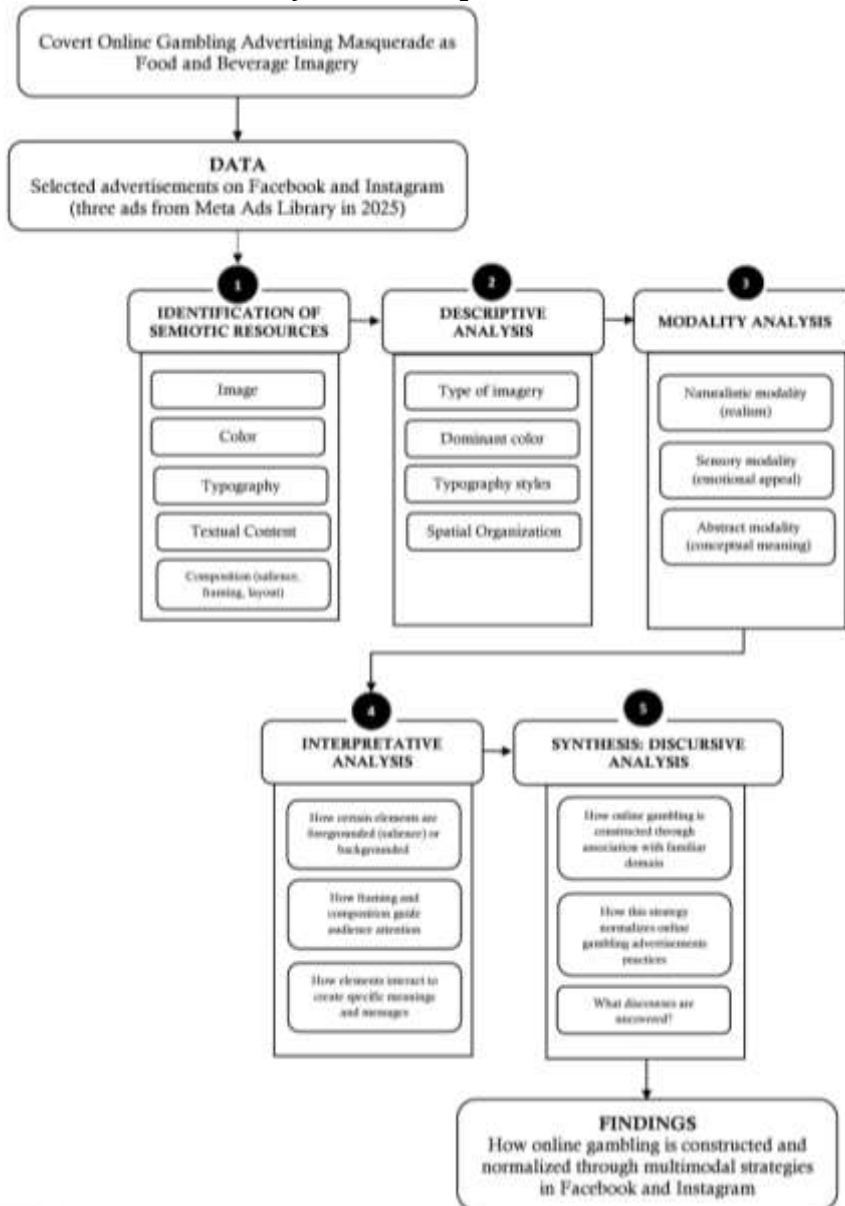





Figure 1. Analytical Framework MCDA in this study

3. Results

3.1 Multimodal Analysis of The Discursive Construction of Covert Online Gambling Advertisements Masquerading as Food and Beverage Imagery

The figures below present online gambling advertisements masquerading as food and beverage, deeply embedded in Indonesian consumer culture. The products are Mie Sedaap (instant noodles), Potabee (spicy-flavored snack), and Sprite (carbonated soft drink beverage). Each advertisement fulfills the established corpus selection criteria, as they represent verified paid advertisements from the Meta Ads Library, strategically employing covert advertising techniques by imitating familiar consumer products, particularly food and beverage. Each advertisement also demonstrates rich multimodal configurations that reveal how gambling messages are subtly embedded and normalized. These advertisements were listed as active in the Meta Ads Library in 2025. The three advertisements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Three Selected Advertisements

1	2	3
Food product: Mie Sedaap (instant noodles)	Food product: Potabee (spicy-flavored snack)	Beverage product: Sprite (carbonated soft drink)
		

3.1.1 The First Advertisement: Masquerading as Mie Sedaap Advertisement.

The advertisement below promotes online gambling using the image of instant noodles (see Fig. 2). Instant noodles are a popular food product, and have become embedded in culinary culture due to popularism. In 2022, Indonesia is the second-largest country which

consumed instant noodle after China (StatLedger Market Research Consulting, 2025). Previous studies confirmed the popularity of instant noodle is influenced by its simplicity, affordability, accessibility; moreover, Indonesians consume it once or twice a week (Nasution et al., 2023). Furthermore, instant noodle has been considered as a versatile food not only at home but also as food stalls during travel and concerts with family and friends (Perdana, 2022). The advertisement is presented in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Covert Online Gambling Advertisement (Left) Masquerades as Mie Sedaap Instant Noodles (Right)

The advertisement masquerades the visual identity of a familiar Indonesian instant noodle product through the use of packaging, product imagery, bold promotional typography, and food-related visual cues, while embedding gambling-related promotional messages within the design. Guided by the MCDA analytical framework developed in this study, the multimodal elements of this advertisement are further analyzed in Table 2.

Table 2. The Construction Analysis of the First Advertisement, adapted from the MCDA Framework

Analytical Step	Element	Description	Analytical Interpretation
Identification of Semiotic Resources	Image (Representation)	Visual combines instant noodle packaging (Mie Sedaap) with gambling-related elements such as mahjong tiles and bonus symbols	The advertisement disguises gambling as a familiar food product

Analytical Step	Element	Description	Analytical Interpretation
	Color	Dominant bright yellow	The yellow color is associated with optimism
	Typography	Bold, large, and promotional fonts (“Pondatang Baru Di Beri Bukti”, “Di Beri Hasil Bukan Janji”)	Typography emphasizes certainty, reward, and persuasive appeal, reinforcing trust in the message
	Text	“Pondatang Baru Di Beri Bukti” (New players are given proof), “Di Beri Hasil Bukan Janji” (Results, not promises)	The text constructs a narrative of guaranteed success, reducing perceived risk and uncertainty
	Composition (Salience, Framing, Layout)	Central focus on Mie Sedaap product; surrounding elements include coins, bonus symbols, and promotional text	The composition foregrounds the food product while integrating gambling cues into the background
Descriptive Analysis	-	Realistic food packaging, vibrant colors, dense promotional layout, and multiple reward symbols	The advertisement imitates commercial food advertising while intensifying promotional messaging through reward indicators
Modality Analysis	Naturalistic Modality	Realistic depiction of instant noodle packaging	Enhances authenticity and familiarity

Analytical Step	Element	Description	Analytical Interpretation
	Sensory Modality	Bright colors and appetizing food imagery	Evokes sensory pleasure and emotional attraction
	Abstract Modality	Association between food consumption and monetary reward	Gambling is constructed as a source of guaranteed gain and satisfaction
Interpretative Analysis	-	Combination of food imagery, reward symbols, and persuasive claims	Multimodal elements work together to construct gambling as both pleasurable and profitable
Discursive Analysis	-	-	Gambling is constructed as a familiar consumption and reinforced as a system of guaranteed success without the risk of loss

3.1.2 The Second Advertisement: Masquerading as Potabee Advertisement.

The following advertisement draws inspiration from Potabee, a well-known Indonesian potato chip brand characterized by its spicy flavor, which has gained enduring popularity among younger consumers (see Fig. 3). Enjoying spicy foods, they are generally more inclined to engage in novel and adventurous experiences (Vatikan, 2022). Indonesia's large-scale production of cabai rawit (bird's eye chili) indicates a widespread cultural preference for spiciness, which is a key element of national culinary identity. (Haq, 2025). The advertisement is presented in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Covert Online Gambling Advertisement (Left) Masquerades as Potabee Spicy-flavored Snack (Right)

This figure presents the second selected advertisement, which adopts the visual conventions of a familiar Indonesian snack product through its packaging style, product imagery, color composition, typography, and promotional layout. In accordance with the analytical framework developed in this study, these multimodal elements are further examined in Table 3.

Table 3. The Construction Analysis of the Second Advertisement, adapted from the MCDA Framework

Analytical Step	Element	Description	Analytical Interpretation
Identification of Semiotic Resources	Image (Representation)	Visual resembling snack packaging (potato chips) with a realistic appearance	The advertisement presents gambling as a familiar, everyday consumer product
	Color	Dominant red, orange, and yellow with high saturation	Red is associated with emotional intensity, while yellow is linked to optimism.

Analytical Step	Element	Description	Analytical Interpretation
	Typography	Bold, large, and playful font (“Slot Gacor”)	Typography emphasizes promotional appeal and conveys a sense of casual entertainment.
	Text	“Slot Gacor” (high winning chance) “Rasakan Serunya” (Feel the excitement), “Coba Sekarang” (Try now), “Anti Rungkad” (Never lose), “Anti Drama”,	Persuasive text frames the activity as entertainment with minimal risk and harmless activity
	Composition (Saliency, Framing, Layout)	The snack product is centrally placed, with visual elements (fire, chili, chips) surrounding it	The composition foregrounds the food product while backgrounding the gambling intent
Descriptive Analysis	-	Realistic food imagery, vibrant colors, centralized layout, promotional typography	The elements are constructed to masquerade commercial food advertising to enhance familiarity
Modality Analysis	Naturalistic Modality	Highly realistic representation of the snack product	Enhances credibility and creates the impression of the product

Analytical Step	Element	Description	Analytical Interpretation
	Sensory Modality	Bright colors and visually appealing imagery	Evokes positive emotions and sensory pleasure
	Abstract Modality	Implicit association between snack consumption and reward	Gambling is represented as an enjoyable and rewarding experience
Interpretative Analysis	-	A combination of food imagery, fire, chili, bright colors, and casual text	Multimodal elements work together to obscure the gambling identity as an optimistic activity
Discursive Analysis	-	-	Gambling is constructed as a familiar consumption practice and normalized as a harmless and risk-free activity.

3.1.3 The Third Advertisement: Masquerading as Sprite Advertisement.

The third advertisement below presents an online gambling message masquerading as Sprite, which is a carbonated soft drink beverage. Sprite is a widely recognized beverage brand renowned for its popular carbonated soft drinks worldwide (Susilo & Dizon, 2023). The characters of Sprite are giving refreshment and the position as the world's No.1 lemon-lime soft drink (Coca Cola HBC, 2026). Sprite has developed a significant market presence in Indonesia, with a particular focus on the youth demographic. The advertisement is presented in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Covert Online Gambling Advertisement (Left) Masquerades as Sprite Beverage (Right)

The figure shows how the advertisement masquerades the visual identity of a familiar carbonated soft drink product through beverage imagery, refreshing visual cues, bold promotional message, color composition, and commercial layout. Following the analytical framework developed in this study, the multimodal elements of this advertisement are examined in Table 4.

Table 4. The Construction Analysis of The Third Advertisement, adapted from the MCDA Framework

Analytical Step	Element	Description	Analytical Interpretation
Identification of Semiotic Resources	Image (Representation)	The visual features a Sprite that resembles the original product, combined with entertainment elements such as a carnival setting (Ferris wheel, amusement rides)	The advertisement disguises gambling as a refreshing beverage, associating it with leisure and entertainment
	Color	Dominant blue, green, and white tones with bright accents	These colors are associated with freshness, cleanliness, and positive energy

Analytical Step	Element	Description	Analytical Interpretation
	Typography	Bold and familiar Sprite-style font, accompanied by promotional text such as “Menang Berapapun Dibayar Lunas” (Any winnings are fully paid)	Typography reinforces credibility through brand familiarity while conveying persuasive promises of guaranteed rewards
	Text	“Menang Berapapun Dibayar Lunas” (Any winnings will be paid in full)	The language emphasizes certainty of winning and constructs an illusion of risk-free profit
	Composition (Salience, Framing, Layout)	The Sprite can is centrally positioned (salient), surrounded by carnival elements	The composition foregrounds the beverage product while embedding gambling cues within an entertainment context
Descriptive Analysis	-	Realistic beverage packaging, vibrant carnival background, centralized layout	The visual elements reinforce associations with fun and leisure
Modality Analysis	Naturalistic Modality	The Sprite can is depicted realistically, closely resembling the original product	Enhances authenticity and credibility
	Sensory Modality	Bright colors and a festive carnival atmosphere	Evokes excitement, pleasure, and

Analytical Step	Element	Description	Analytical Interpretation
			emotional engagement
	Abstract Modality	Association between beverage consumption, entertainment, and financial reward	Gambling is constructed as a pleasurable and profitable recreational activity
Interpretative Analysis	-	Combination of beverage branding, vibrant colors, and entertainment imagery	Multimodal elements work together to obscure the gambling identity and frame it as a leisure activity
Discursive Analysis	-	-	Gambling is recontextualized as part of familiar consumption and normalized as a fun activity, also guaranteeing the winning.

3.2 Normalization Discourses in Covert Online Gambling Advertising

The study identifies two discourses that reflect the normalization underlying covert online gambling advertising practice on Indonesian social media platforms. The first normalization comes from the construction of online gambling advertisements as analogous to the familiar food and beverage; the advertisements discursively normalize online gambling as familiar and risk-free consumption. Furthermore, by examining the orchestration of all multimodal elements within the advertisements, the second normalization discursively frames online gambling as an enjoyable and rewarding activity. The following sections elaborate on these discourses.

3.2.1 Online Gambling Normalized as Familiar and Risk-Free Consumption

The discourse reveals how covert online gambling advertisements normalize online gambling activity as a familiar activity, as frequent and

easily accessible as the consumption of food and beverages, which are commonly obtained and consumed in everyday life. Visual elements such as product packaging, color schemes, promotional text, typography, and composition layout imitate the aesthetic conventions of familiar consumer products. From the three advertisements, which analogize online gambling as a familiar food and beverage, force the audience to consider that online gambling is a risk-free consumption as enjoyable as consuming snacks and soft drinks. By adopting the visual identity of commonly consumed products, the advertisements obscure the harmful and illegal dimensions of gambling, while simultaneously constructing it as accessible, familiar, and socially acceptable in daily life. Therefore, it reduces the perceived social distance between gambling as an illegal activity and routine daily activities.

The advertisements demonstrate how covert online gambling advertisements contribute to the normalization of online gambling as a harmless and risk-free activity. Based on the analytical representation of multimodal analysis from the three selected advertisements, the advertisements obscure online gambling as a risk-free activity and guarantee a win for every player. This representation is reinforced through persuasive visual strategies, including exaggerated promotional claims, celebratory imagery, attractive bonus displays, and emotionally appealing text that emphasize rewards rather than potential losses. Gambling activity, which inherently impacts financial and psychological risks, is covertly packaged in these advertisements as a casual and entertaining activity. The advertisers present gambling as an activity with minimal risk while simultaneously disguising the advertisements to prevent them from being detected by platform regulations and moderation systems.

3.2.2 Online Gambling Normalized as Enjoyable and Rewarding Activity

The final discourse from multimodal analysis of the three advertisements reveals the normalization of online gambling as an enjoyable and rewarding activity. Each product is represented as fun and closely associated with youthful enjoyment and lifestyle. The supporting argument for this is reflected in the orchestration of vibrant colors, playful visual elements, and promotional text that collectively construct gambling as an enjoyable and entertaining activity rather than a harmful and illegal practice.

All advertisements also load promotional text to convince the audience that online gambling always guarantees winning for every player. Promotional phrases such as “Di Beri Hasil Bukan Janji” (Results, not promises), “Slot Gacor” (high winning chance), “Menang Berapapun Dibayar Lunas” (Any winnings will be paid in full), and other persuasive expressions are strategically embedded within the advertisements to

construct a sense of winning certainty. Through these promotional messages, gambling is normalized not as a speculative activity but as a rewarding source of profit.

4 Discussion

The findings from the multimodal analysis indicate broader discursive developments. The findings demonstrate that covert online gambling advertisements on Indonesian social media platforms operate through a process of recontextualization, in which gambling is transformed from an illegal and stigmatized activity into a familiar consumption practice. The findings resonate with Carah & Brodmerkel (2021) argument that platform-based advertising increasingly embeds promotional messages into everyday digital interactions, making harmful commodities appear ordinary, familiar, and socially acceptable.

By appropriating the imagery and visual identity of popular food and beverage products, such as instant noodles (Mie Sedaap), snacks (Potabee), and carbonated soft drinks (Sprite), the advertisements strategically embed gambling messages within culturally familiar consumer imagery. Food and beverage visuals commonly carry a symbolic connection with pleasure, leisure, and social familiarity within consumer culture. (Yılmaz & Kır, 2025). In this context, the advertisements subtly disguise gambling messages by blending them into ordinary patterns of consumption and entertainment, reflecting the characteristics of covert advertising practices that mimic and adapt to familiar media environments (Pierre, 2024). Therefore, gambling is no longer represented as a harmful or socially restricted activity, but rather as a familiar, accessible, and socially acceptable consumption practice closely associated with leisure and popular culture in Indonesia.

The normalization process identified in this study reflects a process of **symbolic domestication**, in which gambling is gradually integrated into culturally familiar forms of consumer culture. By appropriating the imagery and visual identity of familiar food and beverage products, these covert advertisements symbolically relocate gambling from a stigmatized and illegal activity into an ordinary and socially familiar practice. In this context, gambling gradually loses its aura of illegality and social stigma, as the advertisements repeatedly associate it with pleasurable consumption, youth culture, and entertainment-oriented experiences. This finding is consistent with (Rossi & Nairn, 2022), who argued that contemporary gambling advertisements increasingly rely on entertaining and seemingly harmless representations to enhance persuasive appeal in digital environments. Carah and Brodmerkel (2021) also describe the logistical

nature of platform advertising, where social media platforms integrate promotional exposure into everyday digital practices and consumption flows.

Another normalization discourse develops the construction of an **instant success fantasy** through promotional text, emphasizing the certainty of winning and guaranteed rewards. Expressions such as “diberi hasil bukan janji (results, not promises),” “anti rungkad (never lose),” and “menang berapapun dibayar lunas (Any winnings will be paid in full)” represent gambling as a reliable pathway to immediate profit without the possibility of loss. Instead of representing gambling as an uncertain and speculative activity, the advertisements frame it through a reward-oriented discourse in which success is portrayed as easily achievable, enjoyable, and free from risk. This construction reflects broader consumerist patterns. Digital advertising within capitalist consumer culture promotes ongoing consumption by producing unrealistic aspirations and idealized images of success (Akbar & Purwanto, 2025). From this perspective, the advertisements promote gambling platforms and also reflect fantasies of instant economic success that encourage audiences to continuously pursue profit through gambling practices, regardless of their illegality. Figure 5 below presents a conceptual diagram illustrating how the MCDA reveals two normalization discourses and their subsequent development in the discussion.

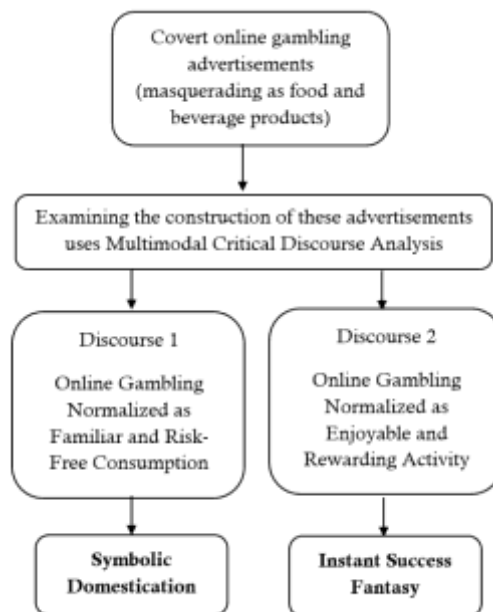


Figure 5. Relationship Between MCDA Analysis, Normalization Discourses, and The Discursive Developments

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the normalization of online gambling on Indonesian social media platforms does not primarily operate through explicit gambling symbolism but through the multimodal elements of culturally familiar consumer representations. In this broader digital advertising environment, social media platforms facilitate the circulation of visually persuasive promotional content designed to attract user attention and maximize engagement (Diaz Ruiz, 2025). In the Indonesian context, where online gambling remains legally prohibited, covert advertising strategies may exploit limitations in digital advertising oversight by allowing gambling-related content to circulate in disguised and culturally familiar forms (Basya et al., 2025; Pierre, 2024). The findings indicate that covert online gambling advertisements are no longer merely promotional media but have normalized into persuasive representations that blend into ordinary forms of entertainment and digital consumer culture. Consistent with broader transformations in global consumer culture, persuasive advertising practices increasingly blur the boundaries between entertainment, consumption, and harmful digital activities (Rathnayaka et al., 2022). Moreover, the platformization of attention, advertising, and consumption on social media operationalizes the relationship between looking and buying, enabling covert gambling advertisements to become embedded within routine visual and consumption practices (Carah et al., 2023).

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings indicate that covert online gambling advertisements no longer merely promote gambling platforms, but strategically normalize and reconstruct gambling as a culturally acceptable form of entertainment and consumer practice. The study reveals that this normalization is achieved through the multimodal construction of familiar consumer imagery. First, gambling is recontextualized as a familiar and risk-free consumption practice through symbolic associations with familiar food and beverage products. Through a process of symbolic domestication, gambling is gradually relocated from a stigmatized and illegal activity into an ordinary form of entertainment and consumption, causing it to lose its aura of gambling and social stigma. Second, gambling is normalized as an enjoyable and rewarding activity through the construction of an instant success fantasy emphasizing guaranteed winning and high profits.

The study contributes theoretically by demonstrating how the MCDA framework reveals how meaning is constructed both through textual messages and through the interaction of images, color, typography,

composition, and symbolic consumer imagery that collectively normalize gambling within covert advertising practices.

Nevertheless, the study is limited to a small corpus of advertisements collected exclusively from Facebook and Instagram within a limited temporal scope, which may not fully represent the broader variations of covert online gambling advertising across digital platforms. Despite these limitations, the findings highlight important implications for digital advertising oversight in Indonesia, particularly regarding the circulation of illegal promotional content disguised within culturally familiar representations. The findings suggest that existing digital advertising oversight in Indonesia remains insufficient to address covert gambling advertisements that strategically blend into ordinary consumer culture, indicating the need for more responsive regulatory and platform moderation policies. Facebook and Instagram have a large digital advertising ecology, and they are dominant social media platforms in Indonesia, allowing covert online gambling advertisements to circulate widely through visually persuasive content.

However, future research is recommended to expand the analysis toward emerging digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Telegram, and short-video ecosystems. Future research may ask how short-form video, influencer-style content, hashtags, comment sections, or private messaging channels contribute to the normalization of online gambling. Methodologically, future studies may combine Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) with digital ethnography, platform analysis, audience interviews, or reception studies to examine not only the semiotic construction of the advertisements but also how audiences interpret and respond to them. Theoretically, future research could draw on multimodal social semiotics, platform studies, audience reception theory, or the social construction of reality to further explain how covert gambling advertisements become normalized.

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