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Buy now, worry later: pay-later advertising, consumer desire, and the linguistic normalization of debt in Indonesia

Suaidi
Universitas Islam Negeri Madura

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ABSTRACT

Background: Pay-later advertising in Indonesia has become a prominent site where digital retail, consumer credit, and platform persuasion converge, yet its linguistic role in making debt appear ordinary remains insufficiently examined. **Objective:** This study examines how Indonesian pay-later advertising frames deferred payment as desire, convenience, access, and financially acceptable consumption. **Method:** This study applies corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis to 18 primary public advertising and product texts, supported by secondary and regulatory contextual materials, using lexical framing, pragmatic-semiotic analysis, and risk-visibility audit. **Results:** Promotional discourse is dominated by savings-oriented and immediacy-oriented frames that foreground "0%," flexibility, and present access while reducing the salience of repayment obligation. Debt is further softened through burden-reduction wording, platform legitimacy, and aspirational displacement that make borrowing appear compatible with smart, modern, and routine consumption. Risk-related information is unevenly visible, with cost and tenor more prominent than penalty, default, and explicit debt naming. **Implication:** These findings show that BNPL advertising should be evaluated not only as marketing, but also as financial discourse that shapes consumer understandings of obligation. **Novelty:** This study offers a discourse-based model for explaining how pay-later promotion normalizes debt through the interaction of desire, temporality, and selective risk visibility.

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Corresponding Author:

Suaidi
Universitas Islam Negeri Madura
Jl. Raya Panglegur Km. 4, Pamekasan, Jawa Timur, Indonesia
Email: suaidisyafiie1922@uinmadura.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's pay-later market has become a significant site where digital consumption, platform advertising, and household credit intersect. In January 2025, OJK reported that BNPL credit in banking reached IDR22.57 trillion, grew 46.45% year on year, and involved 24.44 million accounts; by July 2025, banking BNPL balances increased to IDR24.05 trillion with 28.25 million accounts, while BNPL financing from financing companies reached IDR8.81 trillion with a gross NPF ratio of 2.95%. These figures indicate that pay-later services are no longer peripheral checkout options but part of Indonesia's expanding digital-credit infrastructure. Regulatory recognition through POJK No. 32/2025 further confirms that BNPL must be treated as a financing practice requiring prudence, consumer protection, information disclosure, and billing governance. What is crucial, therefore, is not only whether consumers use pay-later services, but how advertising language makes delayed payment appear ordinary, desirable, and low-risk within everyday online shopping.

Existing literature has examined Indonesian economic discourse, financial inclusion narratives, platform branding, e-commerce pragmatics, and digital lending communication. Studies on economic inequality and policy communication show how financial realities are shaped by linguistic framing rather than merely reflected by language [1], [2], [3]. Research on Indonesian e-commerce advertising has identified pragmatic strategies that intensify urgency, convenience, and consumer appeal, while studies on startup branding and platform labour reveal how digital-market discourse constructs entrepreneurial and aspirational subjectivities [4], [5], [6]. More directly, work on microfinance and digital lending has shown that inclusion rhetoric can obscure unequal risk distribution and repayment burden [7], [8]. Yet these studies have not sufficiently explained how pay-later advertising linguistically converts debt into lifestyle access. This gap matters because BNPL advertising operates at the precise boundary between promotional desire and financial obligation.

This study examines how Indonesian pay-later advertising normalizes debt through lexical, pragmatic, and semiotic strategies. It asks how deferred payment is framed as convenience, opportunity, self-reward, flexibility, or inclusion; how words associated with debt, interest, penalty, and repayment risk are softened, displaced, or made less visible; and how platform advertising connects consumer desire with broader narratives of digital modernity. Rather than treating pay-later communication as neutral product information, this study approaches it as economic discourse that organizes the consumer's relationship with time, money, aspiration, and responsibility. This focus extends studies of economic metaphor, fintech legitimacy, and predictive financial communication by examining how platform language makes borrowing feel immediate, intimate, and affectively safe [9], [10], [11]. The objective is therefore to explain not whether BNPL causes indebtedness, but how advertising discourse helps make indebted consumption culturally intelligible.

This study advances a provisional argument that pay-later advertising normalizes debt through a double movement: it amplifies the present value of consumption while linguistically postponing the discomfort of repayment. Promotional terms such as ease, instalment, limit, flexibility, reward, and access can recode credit as a practical lifestyle technology rather than a financial liability. At the same time, regulatory and risk-related meanings often appear in separate, formal, or less affective registers, creating a discursive asymmetry between desire and obligation. This argument does not claim a causal relationship between advertising and consumer indebtedness; rather, it tests how advertising texts participate in the symbolic organization of debt as ordinary consumption. The implication is methodological as well as theoretical: analysing BNPL requires moving beyond adoption models and legal description toward a discourse-sensitive account of how platforms sell not only products, but also acceptable ways of owing money.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Debt normalization

Debt normalization refers to a discursive and cultural process through which borrowing becomes interpreted as ordinary, practical, and even desirable rather than exceptional or risky. Foundational consumer-credit studies argue that debt is not only an economic instrument but also a moral and symbolic relation shaped by everyday consumption narratives [12]. More recent work extends this view by showing how risky debt becomes routine through affect, instruction, and financial practice rather than through coercion alone [13], [14]. BNPL scholarship similarly shows that deferred payment can depoliticize debt by presenting credit as a convenient way to pay [15], [16]. Thus, debt normalization is best understood as linguistic, affective, and infrastructural.

Studies of debt normalization identify several recurring indicators: euphemistic naming, temporal displacement, reduced payment pain, gamified access, and moral reframing. BNPL platforms often replace debt vocabulary with softer terms such as limit, instalment, flexibility, and access, while repayment is moved into a less emotionally salient future [17], [18]. Research on young consumers further shows that BNPL can merge pleasure and obligation through playful interfaces, lifestyle promises, and frictionless checkout routines [19], [20]. In Indonesian settings, studies connect pay-later use with impulse buying, perceived risk, and overconsumption, yet they rarely examine how advertising language itself performs this normalization [21], [22].

2.2. Consumer desire

Consumer desire in advertising is not merely individual preference; it is a socially organized orientation toward objects, identities, and imagined futures. Marketing and consumer-culture research distinguishes utilitarian desire, which stresses usefulness and affordability, from aspirational desire, which links consumption to self-expression, lifestyle, and status. In BNPL contexts, this distinction becomes unstable because credit expands what consumers can desire in the present while postponing financial constraint [23], [24]. Indonesian studies on PayLater similarly associate deferred payment with hedonistic

lifestyle, materialism, and consumptive behavior [25], [26]. Desire, therefore, is mediated by platform language as much as by consumer psychology.

Indicators of consumer desire in pay-later advertising include immediacy, self-reward, scarcity, convenience, social aspiration, and reduced sacrifice. Speech-act approaches to marketing show that promotional language does not only describe products; it directs, invites, urges, and legitimizes action. Indonesian e-commerce advertising studies likewise show how pragmatic strategies intensify urgency and normalize rapid purchase decisions through affective and imperative wording [6]. When these strategies appear beside BNPL offers, desire is attached to payment delay: consumers are invited to enjoy now, manage later, and treat repayment as secondary. This makes advertising a key site where desire and debt become mutually reinforcing.

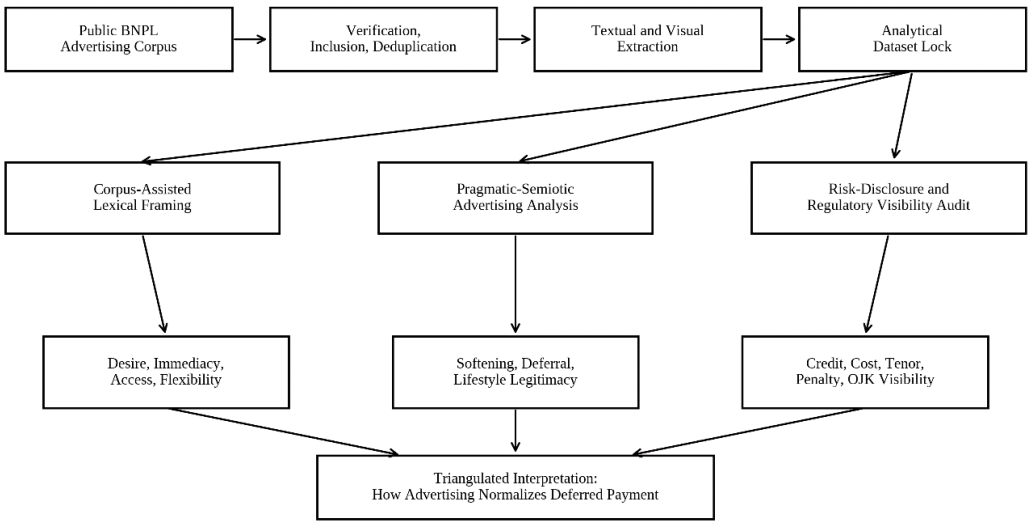
2.3. Financial inclusion

Financial inclusion discourse provides another conceptual anchor because BNPL is frequently framed as access, empowerment, and participation in digital finance. Inclusion can mean expanding financial services to underserved users, but critical studies warn that access-oriented language may obscure asymmetrical risk, weak literacy, and uneven consumer protection [8], [7], [27]. Platform and fintech studies similarly show that digital finance can be read either as democratization or as a debt trap, depending on institutional safeguards and communicative transparency [28], [29]. Hence, inclusion discourse must be examined not only as policy vocabulary, but also as promotional language that legitimizes borrowing.

The indicators of inclusion discourse include accessibility, simplicity, speed, trust, Sharia or regulatory legitimacy, and platform authority. Research on Indonesian startup branding, Sharia fintech, and platform labour shows that digital-market language often constructs users as empowered, entrepreneurial, and technologically modern while backgrounding dependency and precarity [4], [10], [5]. Corpus-based studies of financial and policy communication further demonstrate that institutional language can manage uncertainty by selecting frames that shape public interpretation [2], [3], [30]. This study therefore positions pay-later advertising as a discourse where debt normalization, consumer desire, and inclusion rhetoric converge, making deferred payment appear both attractive and socially legitimate.

3. METHOD

This study examines public pay-later advertising texts as its material object, with each document defined as one promotional, informational, or regulatory unit containing BNPL-related language. The corpus consists of 22 verified items collected from official platform pages, bank websites, fintech product pages, blog-based consumer education pages, and OJK regulatory sources. Primary data include advertising or product-promotion texts from Shopee, GoPay, Kredivo, Indodana, Atome, Traveloka, Akulaku, and BCA, while secondary and contextual data clarify financial-risk terminology and regulatory framing. This structure allows this study to compare desire-oriented promotional discourse with more formal definitions of credit, repayment, and consumer protection.



Black-and-white flowchart; textual, visual, and regulatory indicators are interpreted without causal claims.

Figure 1. Operational matrix of analysis

Table 1. Dataset composition

Code	Data Type	Source / Institution	Period	Characteristics
BNPL-ID-2026-P001	Primary	Shopee Indonesia	2026	"*Beli sekarang, bayar nanti*" framing
BNPL-ID-2026-P002	Primary	Shopee Indonesia	2026	0% instalment campaign wording
BNPL-ID-2026-P003	Primary	GoPay Indonesia	2026	Lightness and 0% cost framing
BNPL-ID-2026-P004	Primary	GoPay Indonesia	2026	Needs-based GoPay Later framing
BNPL-ID-2026-P005	Primary	Kredivo	2026	"*Belanja sekarang, bayar nanti*"
BNPL-ID-2026-P006	Primary	Kredivo	2026	0% interest/admin appeal
BNPL-ID-2026-P007	Primary	Indodana	2026	Merchant access and deferred payment
BNPL-ID-2026-P008	Primary	Indodana	2026	Instant approval and credit limit
BNPL-ID-2026-P009	Primary	Indodana	2026	Light instalment merchant campaign
BNPL-ID-2026-P010	Primary	Atome	2026	Smart shopping and reward framing
BNPL-ID-2026-P011	Primary	Atome	2026	0% interest and flexible instalment
BNPL-ID-2026-P012	Primary	Atome	2025	"*Gak perlu nunggu gajian*" wording
BNPL-ID-2026-P013	Primary	Traveloka	2026	Dream vacation and access framing
BNPL-ID-2026-P014	Primary	Traveloka	2026	Open access across Indonesia
BNPL-ID-2026-P015	Primary	Traveloka	2026	Credit-based payment explanation
BNPL-ID-2026-P016	Primary	Akulaku	2026	Flexible, safe, OJK-related appeal
BNPL-ID-2026-P017	Primary	Akulaku	2026	Instalment without credit card
BNPL-ID-2026-P018	Primary	BCA	2026	Explicit credit facility language
BNPL-ID-2026-S001	Secondary	CIMB Niaga	2026	Benefits and risks of paylater
BNPL-ID-2026-S002	Secondary	Kredivo Blog	2025	Short-term loan explanation
BNPL-ID-2026-C001	Context	OJK	2025	POJK 32/2025 regulatory context
BNPL-ID-2026-C002	Context	OJK	2025	BNPL governance and institutional scope

This study uses a corpus-assisted critical discourse design that combines systematic textual mapping with interpretive discourse analysis. This design is appropriate because pay-later advertising works simultaneously as promotional language, financial communication, and platform-mediated consumer instruction. Corpus-assisted procedures help identify recurring lexical patterns, while critical discourse analysis explains how such patterns participate in normalizing deferred payment. This combination follows recent work on Indonesian economic discourse, e-commerce pragmatics, fintech communication, and platform language, where linguistic choices are treated as socially consequential rather than merely stylistic. The design remains non-causal: it analyses discursive construction, not measurable behavioural effects.

Information sources were selected from public, official, and verifiable channels to ensure traceability. Primary sources came from official pay-later or BNPL-related pages owned by platforms, fintech providers, banks, and marketplace services. Secondary sources were included when they explained benefits, risks, or user guidance in non-campaign formats. Contextual sources came from OJK materials because regulatory language provides a contrastive register against commercial advertising. Each item was recorded with document title, platform, institution, channel, date, URL, search keyword, verification status, and contextual note. Visual fields were also prepared for image description, visual actor, visual symbol, colour, layout, logo position, frame, timestamp, transcript, and screenshot reference.

Data collection followed a transparent retrieval protocol. Searches used Indonesian and English keywords such as "PayLater," "buy now pay later," "*beli sekarang bayar nanti*," "*cicilan 0%*," "*bayar nanti*," "*limit kredit*," "*tanpa kartu kredit*," "OJK PayLater," and platform-specific combinations. The collection covered Indonesia-focused materials available during the 2025–2026 period, with corpus capture completed on 6 July 2026. Inclusion required public accessibility, relevance to pay-later communication, identifiable institutional source, and extractable textual or visual content. Exclusion applied to duplicate pages, user-generated testimonials, unverifiable reposts, inaccessible content, and materials without BNPL-related language. Deduplication used URL comparison, title checking, and excerpt-level similarity.

Data analysis proceeded in three connected stages. First, corpus-assisted lexical framing analysis identified how repeated words and phrases construct immediacy, desire, convenience, flexibility, access, and promotional value. Second, pragmatic-semiotic analysis examined calls to action, promises, reassurance, visual-text relations, and affective appeals that soften deferred payment into lifestyle-oriented consumption. Third, risk-disclosure and regulatory visibility audit assessed whether credit, interest, tenor, repayment, penalty, and OJK-related information appeared within or outside promotional discourse. These stages separate description, coding, and interpretation, while triangulation prevents isolated phrases from being overread. This procedure enables this study to evaluate how advertising language makes debt appear ordinary without claiming direct causal impact.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Lexical framing of consumer desire in Indonesian pay-later advertising

Pay-later advertising in this corpus organizes consumer desire through five recurring lexical frames: savings, immediacy, convenience, inclusion, and aspiration. The most visible frame is not luxury or status but cost-neutralized desirability, where phrases such as "0%," "*bunga 0%*," and "*biaya pasti 0%*" make deferred payment appear financially light. This pattern matters because pay-later promotion does not always need to hide credit; it can make credit feel acceptable by foregrounding affordability, ease, and present access. This finding corresponds with studies on Indonesian e-commerce pragmatics, fintech inclusion discourse, and digital lending communication, which show that platform language often converts financial products into everyday participation and lifestyle opportunity [6], [7], [8].

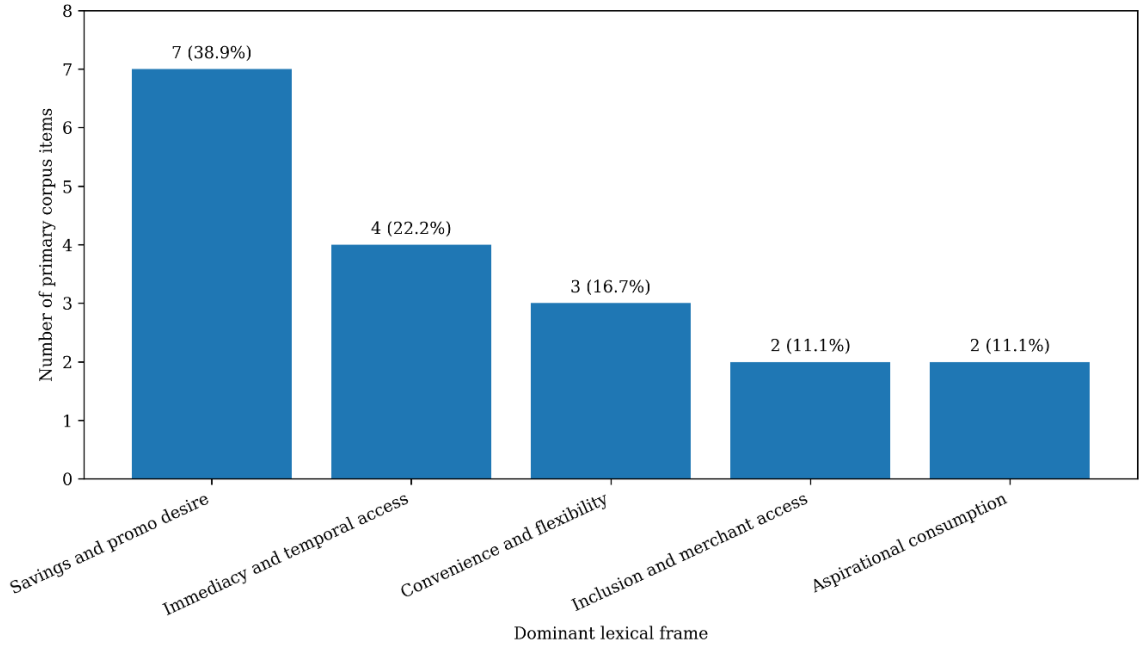


Figure 2. Lexical frames of desire in Indonesian pay-later advertising

The dominant pattern is savings-oriented desire, appearing in 7 of 18 primary items, or 38.9% of coded promotional texts. This category is supported by excerpts such as "*Bunga Cicilan 0%*," "*Biayanya Pasti 0%*," and "*bunga 0% hingga 45 hari*," which repeatedly place cost reduction before repayment obligation. The second pattern, immediacy and temporal access, appears in 4 items, using phrases such as "*jatuh tempo yang lama hingga 45 hari*" and "*Limit kredit hingga Rp50 juta*." Convenience and flexibility follow with 3 items, especially through phrases such as "#Se*fleksibel*itu" and "*belanja tanpa beban*." Inclusion and aspiration are less frequent, but still important because "*Ribuan Merchant*," "*semua Indonesia*," "*brand favorit*," and "*liburan impian*" expand debt into access and imagined fulfilment.

The pattern suggests that linguistic normalization of debt occurs through promotional reordering: benefits are made affectively immediate, while financial obligation is moved into a less prominent temporal and moral position. This reading aligns with BNPL scholarship that treats deferred payment as a platform-mediated form of credit consumption, where debt becomes ordinary through convenience, gamification, and reduced payment pain rather than explicit persuasion alone [15], [17], [19]. Within Indonesian pay-later advertising, this process is intensified by e-commerce discourse that combines discount logic, platform trust, and aspirational consumption. This study therefore interprets lexical framing as a discursive mechanism that makes owing money appear compatible with smart, flexible, and socially legitimate consumption.

Table 2. Lexical frames of desire in Indonesian pay-later advertising

Dominant Category	Subcategory	Operational Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Indicative Excerpt	Corpus Code(s)	Analytical Note
Savings and promo desire	Cost-neutralized consumption	Use of "0%," "*bunga 0%*," "*biaya pasti 0%*," promo, minimum purchase, and instalment discount	7	38.9%	Shopee, GoPay, Kredivo, Indodana, Atome	"*Bunga Cicilan 0%*"; "*Biayanya Pasti 0%*"; "*bunga 0% hingga 45 hari*"	P001, P002, P003, P006, P009, P011, P012	Deferred payment is framed as a saving opportunity rather than as credit exposure.
Immediacy and temporal access	Present purchase, future settlement	"*Beli sekarang*," "*bayar nanti*," "*jatuh tempo*," "*limit kredit*," "*persetujuan instan*," "*fasilitas kredit*"	4	22.2%	GoPay, Indodana, Traveloka, BCA	"*jatuh tempo yang lama hingga 45 hari*"; "*Limit kredit hingga Rp50 juta*"; "*fasilitas kredit*"	P004, P008, P015, P018	Time becomes a persuasive resource: consumption is brought forward while payment is postponed.
Convenience and flexibility	Burden-reduction wording	"*Fleksibel*," "*lebih ringan*," "*tanpa beban*," "*kemudahan*," platform-enabled ease	3	16.7%	Kredivo, Akulaku	"#Se*fleksibel*itu"; "*belanja tanpa beban*"; "*Kemudahan belanja sekarang bayar nanti*"	P005, P016, P017	Debt is softened through vocabulary of ease, comfort, and manageable routine.
Inclusion and merchant access	Expanded purchasing access	Merchant networks, all-user availability, national reach, access across services	2	11.1%	Indodana, Traveloka	"*di Ribuan Merchant*"; "*terbuka untuk semua pendaftar di semua Indonesia*"	P007, P014	Pay-later is linked to participation, reach, and availability rather than borrowing.
Aspirational consumption	Lifestyle and imagined future	"*Brand favorit*," "*liburan impian*," smart shopping, reward, self-upgrading	2	11.1%	Atome, Traveloka	"*berbagai brand favorit*"; "*mewujudkan liburan impian*"	P010, P013	Deferred payment is attached to lifestyle aspiration and affective self-reward.

4.2. Linguistic softening and temporal deferral of debt

Pay-later advertising does not normalize debt only through attractive product offers; it also does so through pragmatic and semiotic softening. The most frequent mechanism is cost reassurance, which appears in 6 of 18 primary items, followed by temporal deferral in 4 items. Together, these categories show that promotional discourse tends to manage consumer perception by reducing the felt weight of repayment. This pattern is consistent with the previous lexical framing, but it shifts analytical attention from what is desired to how obligation is made less visible, less urgent, or less morally troubling. Such a pattern corresponds with scholarship on BNPL as depoliticized debt and Indonesian studies on digital lending discourse, where access and ease can obscure risk.

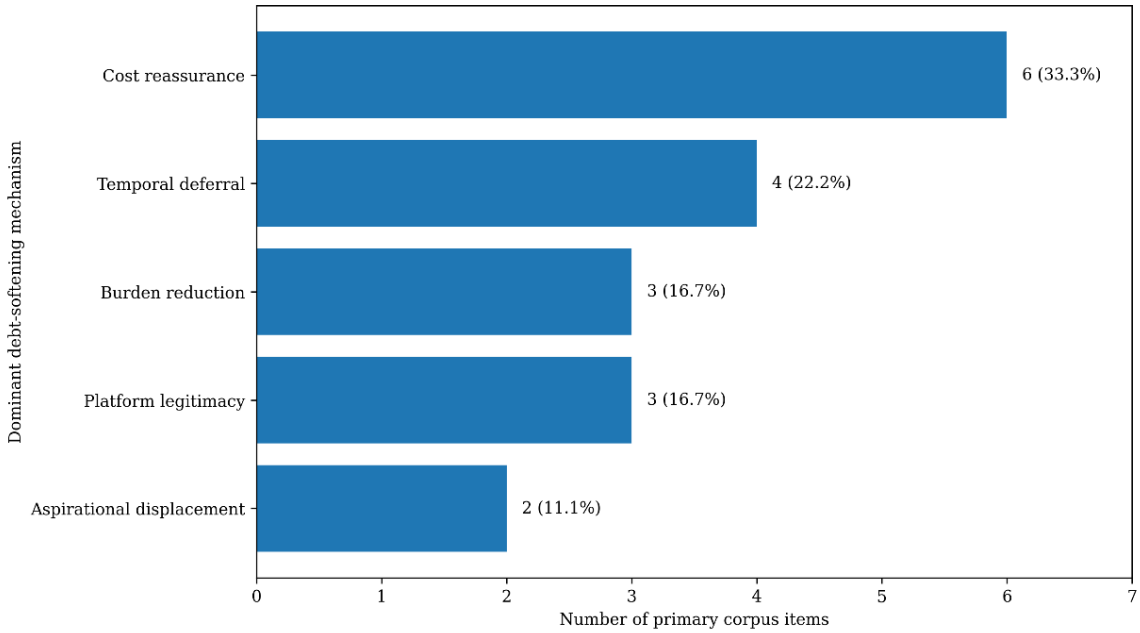


Figure 3. Mechanisms of debt softening in Indonesian pay-later advertising

The dominant textual pattern is the repetition of reassuring cost markers. Excerpts such as "*Bunga Cicilan 0%*," "*Biayanya Pasti 0%*," and "*bunga 0% hingga 45 hari*" foreground affordability before they foreground repayment. Temporal deferral works differently: phrases such as "*Beli sekarang, bayar nanti*," "*jatuh tempo yang lama hingga 45 hari*," and "*fasilitas kredit*" separate the pleasure of acquisition from the obligation of settlement. Burden-reduction phrases, including "#Se*fleksibel*itu" and "*belanja tanpa beban*," further recode credit as comfort. Platform legitimacy appears through merchant networks, national accessibility, and safety language, while aspirational displacement appears in references to "*brand favorit*" and "*liburan impian*." The pattern is descriptive, not causal, but it shows a clear hierarchy of softening strategies.

Debt softening works by redistributing attention. Advertising language places present enjoyment, cost certainty, and platform trust in the foreground, while repayment, risk, and default remain less affectively charged. This supports Peñaloza and Barnhart's argument [12] that credit becomes normalized through everyday consumption practices, while recent BNPL studies show that payment deferral reduces the psychological pain of paying and converts credit into ordinary platform use. In this Indonesian corpus, softening is also shaped by e-commerce pragmatics: imperatives, promotional reassurance, and lifestyle vocabulary merge into one persuasive register. This study therefore reads pay-later advertising as a discourse of managed obligation, where debt is not absent, but made linguistically lighter and socially acceptable.

Table 3. Pragmatic-semiotic mechanisms of debt softening in Indonesian pay-later advertising

Dominant Mechanism	Subcategory	Operational Indicator	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Indicative Excerpt	Corpus Code(s)	Analytical Note
Cost reassurance	Cost made affectively light	Use of "0%," "*tanpa biaya*," "*bunga 0%*," "*biaya pasti*," or promotional cost certainty	6	33.3%	Shopee, GoPay, Kredivo, Indodana, Atome	"*Bunga Cicilan 0%*"; "*Biayanya Pasti 0%*"; "*bunga 0% hingga 45 hari*"	P002, P003, P006, P009, P011, P012	Financial obligation is softened by foregrounding apparent cost relief before repayment obligation.
Temporal deferral	Future payment backgrounded	Use of "*bayar nanti*," "*jatuh tempo*," "*hingga 45 hari*," "*cicilan*," or future-settlement wording	4	22.2%	Shopee, GoPay, Traveloka, BCA	"*Beli sekarang, bayar nanti*"; "*jatuh tempo yang lama hingga 45 hari*"; "*fasilitas kredit*"	P001, P004, P015, P018	Debt is made less immediate by separating consumption time from repayment time.
Burden reduction	Obligation described as manageable	Use of "*fleksibel*," "*lebih ringan*," "*tanpa beban*," "*kemudahan*," or routine-shopping vocabulary	3	16.7%	Kredivo, Akulaku	"#Se*fleksibel*itu"; "*belanja tanpa beban*"; "*Kemudahan belanja sekarang bayar nanti*"	P005, P016, P017	Repayment is reframed as manageable convenience rather than financial constraint.
Platform legitimacy	Trust transferred from platform to credit	Use of institutional trust, security, OJK association, officiality, or platform authority	3	16.7%	Indodana, Traveloka, Akulaku	"*di Ribuan Merchant*"; "*terbuka untuk semua pendaftar*"; "*aman*"	P007, P008, P014	Platform credibility helps stabilize deferred payment as a legitimate consumer routine.
Aspirational displacement	Debt displaced by lifestyle promise	Use of dream, favourite brands, travel, smart shopping, reward, or self-upgrading vocabulary	2	11.1%	Atome, Traveloka	"*berbagai brand favorit*"; "*mewujudkan liburan impian*"	P010, P013	Borrowing is displaced by aspirational imagery, making obligation secondary to imagined fulfilment.
Total			18	100%	Primary advertising/product texts only			One dominant debt-softening mechanism was assigned to each primary item.

4.3. Risk visibility and regulatory language in pay-later advertising

Financial-risk and regulatory information appear unevenly across the same 18 primary advertising and product texts. Cost information is the most visible indicator, with 7 prominent and 5 partial appearances, yet it mostly appears through promotional reassurance such as "*Bunga Cicilan 0%*" and "*Biayanya Pasti 0%*." By contrast, penalty or default risk is minimally visible, with only 1 prominent and 3 partial appearances. Credit or debt naming is also limited: only 2 items make it prominent, while 12 items keep it absent or minimal. This pattern extends the previous findings by showing that pay-later advertising does not simply omit financial language; it selectively foregrounds cost-friendly terms while leaving stronger obligation and consequence terms less visible.

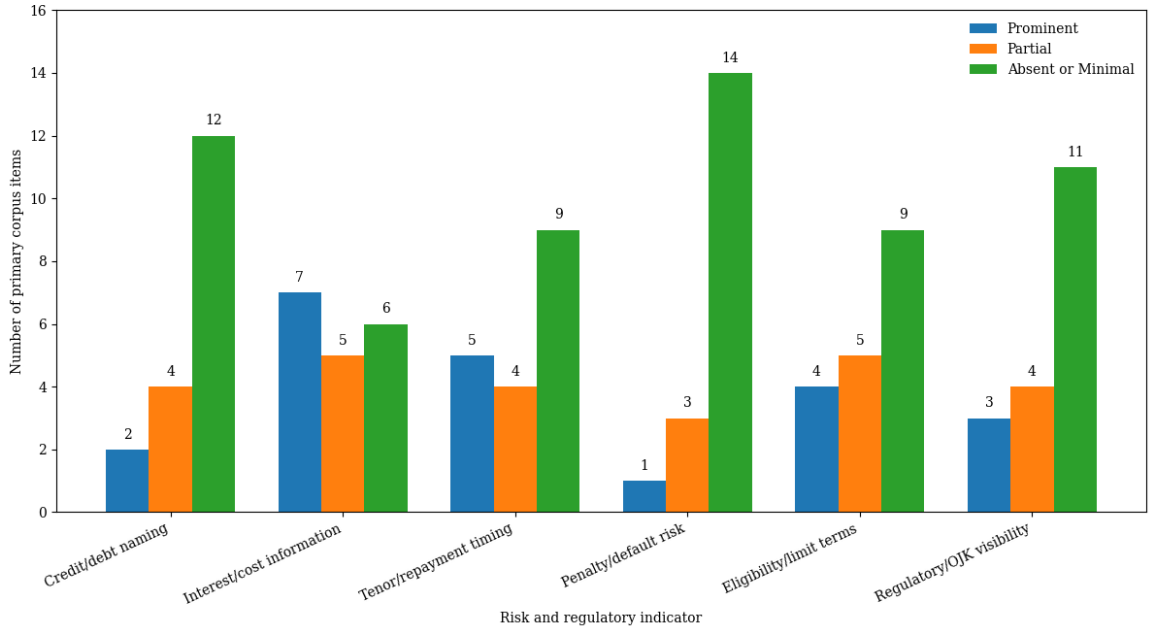


Figure 4. Visibility of financial-risk and regulatory information in pay-later advertising

The dominant descriptive pattern is a split between attractive financial information and less visible risk information. Interest and cost are not absent, but they are often presented as advantage, discount, or certainty rather than as part of a broader obligation structure. Phrases such as "*bunga 0% hingga 45 hari*" and "*biayanya pasti 0%*" make price-related information legible, while repayment consequences remain far less explicit. Tenor and repayment timing occupy a middle position: expressions such as "*jatuh tempo yang lama hingga 45 hari*" and "*cicilan*" identify future payment, but still frame time as flexibility. Regulatory or OJK visibility is also uneven, appearing through selected legitimacy cues rather than sustained consumer-protection explanation.

The pattern supports a discourse-sensitive reading of financial inclusion and digital lending communication. Inclusion rhetoric can expand access while narrowing attention to repayment asymmetry, a concern already raised in Indonesian studies on microfinance, digital lending, fintech legitimacy, and e-commerce pragmatics [8], [7], [10], [6]. In this corpus, advertising produces a hierarchy of visibility: benefits are immediate, costs are promotional, and consequences are peripheral. This does not prove consumer harm, but it shows how platform discourse can normalize deferred payment by making risk appear administratively secondary. This study therefore interprets risk visibility as a key mechanism through which debt becomes communicatively acceptable before it becomes financially accountable.

Table 4. Visibility of financial-risk and regulatory information in Indonesian pay-later advertising

Risk / Regulatory Indicator	Visibility Category	Operational Criterion	Prominent	Partial	Absent or Minimal	Total Audited Items	Indicative Excerpt	Corpus Code(s)	Analytical Note
Credit/debt naming	Debt as explicit financial relation	Direct wording such as credit, loan, debt, financing, or equivalent obligation terms	2	4	12	18	"*fasilitas kredit*"; "*limit kredit*"	P008, P018	Explicit credit language appears, but it is not the dominant promotional register.
Interest/cost information	Cost made visible	Mention of 0%, interest, fee, admin cost, or cost certainty	7	5	6	18	"*Bunga Cicilan 0%*"; "*Biayanya Pasti 0%*"	P002, P003, P006, P009, P011, P012	Cost information is comparatively visible, but mostly in promotional rather than risk-oriented form.
Tenor/repayment timing	Future obligation specified	Mention of due date, 45 days, instalment period, or repayment schedule	5	4	9	18	"*jatuh tempo yang lama hingga 45 hari*"; "*cicilan*"	P004, P011, P015	Time is often present, but commonly framed as convenience rather than repayment discipline.
Penalty/default risk	Consequence of non-payment	Mention of penalty, late fee, default, collection, account restriction, or repayment failure	1	3	14	18	Limited formal wording on repayment consequences	P018	Default-related risk is least visible in promotional discourse.
Eligibility/limit terms	Conditional access	Mention of approval, limit, registration, eligibility, verification, or user requirements	4	5	9	18	"*Limit kredit hingga Rp50 juta*"; "*pendaftar*"	P008, P014	Access is conditional, but condition language is often secondary to ease and availability.
Regulatory/OJK visibility	Institutional or consumer-protection reference	Mention of OJK, regulation, security, officiality, or consumer protection	3	4	11	18	"*aman*"; OJK-related legitimacy cues	P014, P016, P018	Regulatory visibility appears unevenly and is less prominent than promotional value.

5. DISCUSSION

The dominance of savings-oriented and immediacy-oriented frames indicates that Indonesian pay-later advertising functions by making deferred payment appear economically sensible before it appears financially consequential. Its discursive function is not simply to persuade consumers to buy, but to reorganize how purchase timing is understood. When "0%," "*bayar nanti*," "limit," and "*cicilan*" become dominant promotional vocabularies, credit is positioned as a rational shopping aid rather than a debt relation. This supports studies arguing that BNPL depoliticizes debt by presenting borrowing as a payment method, not as borrowing itself [15], [16]. It also extends Indonesian studies on e-commerce pragmatics and financial inclusion discourse by showing that platform advertising makes desire look disciplined through the language of savings and flexibility [6], [8]. The dysfunction lies in this semantic narrowing: financial access becomes legible, but financial exposure becomes less immediate.

This pattern emerges because pay-later advertising is structurally located at the intersection of marketplace promotion, fintech infrastructure, and consumer aspiration. Unlike conventional loan advertising, BNPL discourse appears inside shopping environments where users are already oriented toward acquisition, discount, and convenience. This placement matters because the payment option is encountered not as a separate financial decision but as part of completing consumption. Dehaan et al. (2024) [17] and Maesen and Ang (2024) [18] show that instalment payment can alter purchase perception by reducing the pain of paying and making cost appear distributed. This study does not claim that advertising causes indebtedness, but its corpus suggests a discursive correlation between temporal deferral and desire intensification. The underlying structure is therefore platform temporalities: consumption is accelerated, payment is postponed, and responsibility is administratively relocated. Debt becomes ordinary because it enters through checkout language rather than through explicit credit discourse.

The second pattern, debt softening, matters because it shows how advertising does not need to erase obligation in order to normalize it. Cost reassurance, burden reduction, platform legitimacy, and aspirational displacement work together to make repayment feel manageable, socially acceptable, and emotionally secondary. Terms such as "*tanpa beban*," "*fleksibel*," and "*biaya pasti*" function as affective shields: they do not remove financial obligation, but they reduce its symbolic weight. This supports Peñaloza and Barnhart's (2011) argument [12] that credit normalization occurs through everyday moral vocabularies, while Pellandini-Simányi and Vargha (2020) [13] show that risky debt becomes ordinary through practice, routine, and social familiarity. The Indonesian corpus adds a platform-specific dimension: debt is softened through promotional intimacy. The dysfunction is not misinformation in a narrow sense, but imbalance. Consumer comfort is foregrounded more strongly than repayment discipline, creating a persuasive asymmetry between pleasure and obligation.

This softening occurs because BNPL advertising depends on a split communicative structure: promotional language handles desire, while formal financial language handles obligation. Such division allows platforms to maintain commercial appeal while retaining technical disclosures elsewhere. Recent work on digital lending and fintech communication in Indonesia suggests that inclusion rhetoric often converts financial services into narratives of opportunity, convenience, and empowerment while reducing attention to unequal risk distribution [7], [10]. A similar structure appears in studies of platform labour and startup branding, where digital-market language constructs users as flexible, modern, and self-optimizing while backgrounding dependency or vulnerability [4], [5]. In this corpus, debt softening is not accidental stylistic ornamentation; it reflects an underlying commercial grammar. Advertising must keep debt attractive enough to be clicked, simple enough to be trusted, and light enough to be repeated as routine consumption.

The third pattern, uneven risk visibility, has direct implications for how consumer protection should be understood linguistically. Risk is not wholly absent from pay-later discourse; cost, tenor, eligibility, and regulatory cues do appear. However, they are unevenly distributed and often framed in promotional rather than cautionary terms. Interest-related language appears most visibly when it can be expressed as "0%," whereas penalty, default, and repayment-failure consequences remain comparatively peripheral. This supports critical work on financial inclusion warning that access can become ethically ambiguous when communicative transparency does not match product complexity [27], [29]. It also resonates with Indonesian work on digital lending and policy communication, where institutional framing shapes how uncertainty and responsibility are perceived [2], [3]. The implication is that transparency should not be measured only by whether information exists, but by where, how, and with what affective force it appears.

The uneven visibility of risk can be explained by the layered structure of platform finance. BNPL advertising must operate simultaneously as marketing, onboarding, financial explanation, and legitimacy-building. These functions do not carry equal persuasive weight. Promotional elements are designed for speed, recognition, and conversion; risk information usually requires slower reading, comparison, and regulatory

literacy. Gao et al. (2022) [30] show that readability, tone, and deception cues matter in online credit markets, while Hearn (2022) [28] argues that automated credit cultures reshape how users become creditworthy subjects. In Indonesian pay-later advertising, this structure produces a hierarchy of attention: benefit language is immediate, trust language is reassuring, and risk language is conditional or peripheral. This study therefore positions BNPL advertising as a discursive infrastructure of deferred responsibility. It does not prove that consumers misunderstand pay-later products, but it shows how advertising can make indebted consumption feel normal before financial accountability becomes fully visible. Mu*aman*ah and Fawaid's (2019) [31] study of price discounts and bonus packs in online business addresses an earlier form of the same promotional logic, in which discounts and bonus offers frame a purchase as advantageous.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Indonesian pay-later advertising normalizes debt less by hiding credit than by reorganizing its visibility. Across platform texts, desire is foregrounded through savings, immediacy, flexibility, inclusion, and aspiration, while repayment, penalty, and default remain less affectively prominent. This finding offers a methodological lesson: BNPL should be examined not only as consumer behavior, legal product, or fintech innovation, but as discourse that shapes how owing becomes ordinary. Its contribution lies in combining corpus-assisted lexical framing, pragmatic-semiotic analysis, and risk-visibility audit to renew questions about debt, advertising, and platform-mediated economic subjectivity in Indonesia.

Its limitations are equally instructive. This corpus consists of public and verifiable platform materials, so it cannot represent private targeting, algorithmic personalization, user interpretation, or actual borrowing outcomes. Coding also privileges dominant textual and visual cues, which may understate ambiguity within longer terms-and-conditions pages or interactive checkout interfaces. Future research should therefore integrate platform ethnography, consumer interviews, experimental reception analysis, and longitudinal monitoring of advertising changes after regulatory interventions. Comparative work across Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and other Southeast Asian BNPL markets would also clarify whether debt normalization is locally specific or regionally patterned through shared platform grammars and consumer-finance imaginaries.

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Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible pay-later advertising, product, and regulatory materials from platform, fintech, and banking sources in Indonesia.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible pay-later advertising, product, and regulatory materials from platform, fintech, and banking sources in Indonesia, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the author affirms that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the author's institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus of publicly accessible pay-later advertising, product, and regulatory materials analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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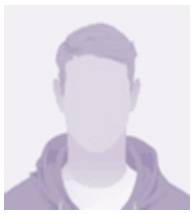
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BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR



Suaidi is affiliated with Universitas Islam Negeri Madura, Pamekasan, Indonesia, where his work engages corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, pragmatic-semiotic analysis, and the study of digital lending and advertising communication in Indonesia. His current research examines how Indonesian pay-later advertising normalizes debt through lexical framing, temporal deferral, and uneven risk visibility, combining corpus-assisted discourse analysis with a risk-disclosure audit. He can be contacted at email: suaidisyafiie1922@uinmadura.ac.id