

## PICTURING NATURAL DISASTER: COMPOSITIONAL MEANING ANALYSIS IN THE JAKARTA POST ONLINE NEWS GALLERY

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### ABSTRACT

*A photograph on newspaper has been known for years as an illustration of the news which has the meaning behind of it. A photograph also used to strengthen the emotion described by the text. The used of a photograph in mass media is getting greater nowadays. However, nowadays photograph on newspaper used only for the complement of the news, the decorator, as if it does not have meaning at all. The Jakarta Post one of the online newspaper tries to portray the past situation of natural disaster through their photographs. The cyclone Cempaka which has hits Java Island since the end of November 2017 has remained the condolence. This natural disaster which happened mostly in East Java and Yogyakarta, has taken several victims of the dead or declared missing. This news becomes a widespread topic in several media in Indonesia. This research aimed to examine the compositional meaning in terms of information value, salience, and framing of The Jakarta Post Online Newspaper Photographs portraying natural disaster. This study used visual grammar by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) as the analytical tools to investigate compositional meanings. This study analyzed five Photographs from The Jakarta Post Online Newspaper portraying natural disaster of Cyclone Cempaka. As a result, the study revealed that The Jakarta Post's Photographs tend to portray the physical destruction, especially private and public facilities building to gain empathy from viewers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Cyclone Cempaka, Photograph, The Jakarta Post, Visual Grammar*

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the photograph has dominated mass media, whether it is printed media such as newspaper or online media. The photograph in the newspaper is not only as a complement of the news, but also photograph is the news itself. Photograph not just illustrate the news, but deliver the idea, communicate with the reader, and also influence others. The good photograph is the one which could represent the core of the news briefly. The success of the photograph in the newspaper is when the photo could attract the reader to read the whole news or information and could encourage the reader to do something towards the tragedy in the news. For instance, when a newspaper came up with a news and photography about the post situation of an earthquake somewhere, it will encourage the reader to give their hand to the victim, such as organize donations and etc. It is believed that photograph or visual image on every newspaper has their own hidden meaning whether it is about critics, advice, or even satire which is as important as the verbal.

Recently, a cyclone Cempaka which is followed by floods and landslides ravaged Java Island especially in East Java and Yogyakarta. It damaged about 5000 houses, 36 bridges, 21 schools, 41 people have died or been declared

missing, and 28190 people were evacuated and live in shelters (Jakarta Post). The Jakarta Post Online has released some photographs regarding this natural disaster. The photograph stories show the real post situation after hitting by the cyclone. The editor of the press might have their own purposes by showing this kind of photographs in their newspaper. The study of finding the compositional meaning of the online newspaper gallery is needed. Therefore, the question is how the effect of the disaster is depicted by Jakarta Posts in terms of information value, salience, and framing.

There are some previous studies on the visual image analysis which conducted by many researchers. Good now (2010) conducted a research by comparing the photographs of two candidates of the USA presidential election, Clinton and Obama, in Time's Magazine "The Great Divide" through a semiotics field. There is six data, photograph which is analyzed and compared to discover any visual bias regarding the presidential election in 2008. (Yuliang, 2010) Conducted a research on visual analysis, which analyzes some female images in Chinese Woman Magazine. The research used four Chinese woman magazine and analyzed them through semiotic field. None of these previous studies above analyzed natural disaster photographs in a newspaper.

This paper aimed to examine the compositional meaning in terms of information value, salience, and framing of The Jakarta Post's Photographs portraying natural disaster. To achieve the aim of this study, this paper used visual grammar by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) as the analytical tools to investigate compositional meanings (information value, salience, and framing) depicted from the photographs.

## **THEORY AND METHODOLOGY**

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) have divided the visual grammar into three metafunctions of communication, the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual. The ideational is about how the image represented the experience. The interpersonal is about how the connection between the creator or producer, the viewer or the reader and the visual object in the picture. The interpersonal is realized through the gaze, frame size and shot, and angle. While textual is about how the image is arranged and presented. The textual is also about how the elements of the visual object connected each other to build the meaning. These three Meta functions actually adapted from Halliday (1985, 1994), but Kress and van Leeuwen then used different terms, they are representational for ideational, interactive for interpersonal, and compositional for textual. This paper only focuses on the compositional meaning of the photographs which is analyzed through the information value, salience, and framing.

Compositional is about how the image is arranged and presented, and how the elements of the image connected each other to build the meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) revealed that the composition of the image can be assessed by analyzing the information value (the position of the subject, left, right, bottom, up), salience (the main attention), and framing. (Kress, 2006) Revealed that informational value has three main visual areas; they are left-right, top-bottom, and center-margin. The first area, the left, and right are about the given and new, which the left is related to the given information, and the right is related to the new information, unknown, more important, and need to pay more attention. The second area is the top and bottom, Kress and van Leeuwen associated with the ideal and real, the top is the ideal which portrayed the promise and the bottom is the real which portrayed the real products. The third area is the center and margin, which the center is the nucleus or the core information, while the margin is supporting the center.

Another important feature to assess the composition of visual meaning is salience. Salience is the participant of the image or picture which get more attention. The first participant which takes viewers or reader's attention because it is presented differently and as the most important among others participants in the picture. To identified salience of an image or picture, one should consider the size (the larger participant, the greater the salience), the focus (the blue one is the one which gets the less salience), and foreground-background, the participant on the foreground get the greater salience than the background (Harrison, 2003). The last is framing, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) cited in (Stoian, 2015) stated that *framing* is about how the elements in an image connected each other by frame line or shape and space between elements. This feature of compositional of visual meaning elaborated by van Leeuwen on his book social semiotics, he stated that:

*“By ‘framing’ we meant the disconnection of the elements of a visual composition, for instance by frame-lines, pictorial framing devices – boundaries formed by the edge of a building, a tree, etc. – empty space between elements, discontinuities of color, and so on. The concept also included the opposite, the ways in which elements of a composition may be visually connected to each other, through the absence of disconnection devices, through vectors, through similarities of color, visual shape, and so on.”* (Van Leeuwen, 2005)

Framing will decide whether all the features of the image connect each other or not. The connection or disconnection can be decided through the existence of color, empty space between elements, and frame lines.

This study used qualitative approach and visual analysis to analyze and find the compositional meaning in terms of information value, salience and framing of the natural disaster photograph cyclone Cempaka in Jakarta Post online news gallery. This paper used the theory of visual grammar by Kress and van Leeuwen and focusses to the compositional meaning by analyzing the information value, salience, and framing. This paper used five photographs from Jakarta Post Online news gallery portraying natural disaster cyclone Cempaka in East Java and Yogyakarta. The photographs are downloaded from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/multimedia/2017/12/08/deadly-cyclone-empaka-hits-java.html>. Every picture will be analyzed its salience, information value, whether the position of the object is left-right, bottom-up, or center-margin, then also it's framing. The researcher interprets all of the photographs based on the compositional of every photograph draw the conclusion.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

picture 1 portrays a man riding his bicycle on the half damaged road. The destruction caused by the cyclone is shown by the collapsed building. In this figure, it used one information value, it is given and new, the street on the left (with the man on his bicycle) is the given, while the collapsed building and the flood on the right are the new features which the press wants to show as the point or the important one. In this figure, the most salient feature is the damaged road regarding the size and the focus. The cracks of the damaged road are in focus and in the foreground. For its framing, this figure considered as disconnected each other regarding the used of different color on every element of the photographs. The color of the flood, the road, the sky is different.



**Figure 1: Villagers Pass by a House Destroyed by Floods in Dogongan Village, Imogiri District, in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, on Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2017(Sagita, 2017)**

The picture 2 illustrated two boys who were saving the crops in the fields after the floods inundate their fields. In this photograph, the given-new information value is used. The given information is the field, and the new information which the editor wants to pay attention more is the boys who are saving their crops from the floods. The boys in the picture are the only object who grabs more attention than others; it means it can be the salient of this picture. This illustrates that the disaster is also giving a bad impact for farmers. The framing in this photograph is



**Figure 2: Two Teenagers Collect Melons that were Carried Away by the Flood waters (Sagita, 2017)**

The picture 3 depicted a damaged bridge, the man, and the boy. The man and the boy were checking the collapsed bridge which might be the only bridge connecting their village to another. The picture also showed the heavy stream of the river as an impact of the flood. This picture used given-new information. The given information is the man standing on the riverside which is nothing happened, normal situation. The new information on the right side depicted the elements which need to pay more attention because they are the key information which talked about. For example, the collapsed bridge and the heavy stream, river are positioned on the right side of the picture.

The collapsed bridge is the most salient, the most eye-catching element of the picture. The yellow color directly grabbed the viewer's eyes. The size which almost takes a half of the scene also the reason why the bridge is salient. The picture is framed by the sky on the top, the bamboo tree on the left, and the bridge. The frame lines existed, it means

that every element of the picture separately framed and disconnected each other. In this picture, the photographer attempted to show the destruction of public facilities, which hamper society's activities.



**Figure 3: The Remains of A Bridge Destroyed By Flood Waters in Blawong Village in Jetis District, Bantul Regency, on Nov. 28.(Sagita, 2017)**

picture 4 illustrated a collapsed house which is affected by the landslide. There were also some people who were trying to clean up the house from the remains of the landslide. The information value of this photograph is given-new information, which the given information is the landslide, and the new information in the house. The landslide on the left is one of disaster that befell the village, the viewer has already known previously about the disaster which is not only the flood but also the landslide. The new information that the Jakarta post wants to emphasize is about the destruction of the house.

The salient of this figure is the people, and the house destroyed by the landslide. The people grabbed the first attention through his color of clothes, and the house is portrayed as the biggest object of them all. The line on the rooftop framed the picture diagonally as if divided into two separated parts, the landslide part, and the house part. Similar to the previous picture, the photographer also attempted to focus on the physical destruction, especially private properties such as the private house. The Photographer also tried to show that society works by themselves to fix their houses as the impact of a disaster.



**Figure 4: The People Helped Each Other to Clean Up Debris at a House in Bantul Regency on Dec. 3, 2017 (Sagita, 2017)**

In picture 5, it portrayed a man (teacher) and a woman (student) carried their important stuff to save them from the floods. The information value used in these photographs is the center and margin. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) define the center information as the nucleus or the core information which should be paid more attention and the margin is complimentary. The center in this picture is a teacher and a student because the position is in the center and almost in the foreground. The margin is the flood, the door, and the classroom. The salient of this figure is the teacher and the student because they are in the foreground which grabbed more focus than the other elements. In this picture, the door frame is framed the salient which is the man and the woman. It separated between the room and the puddle of the flood which flowed into the room. This framing depicted that the flood as the individual tragedy which emphasized new information. This picture is located in one of the rooms in a school. The photographer attempted to focus on showing that the bad impact of disaster also happened even in a school, which negatively stopped the process of teaching and learning for a while.



**Figure 5: A Teacher and a Student Move Important Files from the Inundated SMKN 1 Vocational School Tanjung Sari in Gunungkidul Regency. (Sagita, 2017)**

The photographs above are about the disaster which ravaged several districts in East Java and Yogyakarta, Indonesia. It happened at the end of November. The Jakarta Post Online News took and released some photographs of it. Most of the photograph or picture focused on showing on the physical destruction damaged by the disaster by placing the elements on the right side as the new information, the most important one, such as the damaged road, the collapsed bridge, and the broken houses. Some public facilities such as school also got the bad impact of the disaster. Even the flood also messed up the field of the farmers. The photographer attempted to give the viewer several series of pictures which full of damage by focusing on the most grabbed attention things. The pictures are mostly strongly framed by the presence of several frame lines. It means that the elements of each picture separated and disconnected each other. The photographer tried to show the two kinds of the different situation between the normal situation and the disaster situation. By showing the destruction, the misery, and the disaster situation, the photographer attempted to create compassion, empathy, solidarity from the viewer or the reader toward the pictures.

## CONCLUSIONS

Photographs on newspaper whether online or printed newspaper has become part of vital things on newspaper. Every image conveys their own idea or message and communicates. The photographer or newspaper editor has their own purpose by putting the photographs on newspaper, but the main goal is to have an effect on the reader. Based on the visual

analysis above, it can be concluded that this study is trying to reveal the compositional meaning behind some photographs from The Jakarta Post Online News Gallery. The compositional features in terms of information value, salience and framing mostly present in all the pictures. Generally, the pictures used given-new information as their informational value to show the bad impact of a disaster. The used of given-new information hoped can be drawn people's empathy, compassion, and solidarity to help the victim recover from their misery. The photographer also puts some destroyed public facilities such as the collapsed bridge and the damaged road. The further implication by putting the damaged public facilities is to gain government attention regarding the disaster happened.

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