



Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis on Tempo Magazine Cover

Lejar Daniartana Hukubun

Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa dan Desain Visi Indonesia Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

lejarhukubun@gmail.com

**)Corresponding author*

History:

Submit : February 28, 2025

Review : March 29, 2025

Publish : April 30, 2025

Keywords:

Cover magazine, semiotics,
denotation, connotation

ABSTRACT

Book/magazine covers are one of the important things in protecting books, apart from that, they are also useful in introducing what is in the book, to communicate to the public, so that it is more attractive, appropriate illustrations or designs are needed and represent the contents of the magazine or book. Next, it is necessary to study the meaning of connotation and denotation through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The result of research is This study analyzes verbal, visual, denotative, and connotative signs on the cover of *Tempo* magazine (November 12–18, 2018 edition). The image features a robotic hand reaching out to a human hand, symbolizing mutual interaction and acceptance between humans and technology in the era of Industry 4.0. The fading gray-to-white background suggests neutrality and balance, while red lines represent courage and energy. The visual elements, supported by the headline "Revolusi 4.0 adalah Kunci" (Revolution 4.0 is the Key), emphasize the message that humanity is ready to embrace technological advancements for a harmonious and progressive future.

1. Introduction

Magazine covers are crucial elements in designing a magazine, as they ensure the content of the magazine/book remains safe, protected from damage, and other hazards. Cover paper is made differently from the inner pages, typically thicker than the material used for the inner pages. Additionally, book covers serve the purpose of introducing the content of the book to readers. To capture the reader's attention, illustrations are necessary to support the message conveyed by the magazine or book. Within the cover, various important pieces of information can be found, including the magazine title, main theme title, supporting theme titles, publication date, month and year, website address, ISBN number, main illustration, supporting background, accompanied by attractive colors, and a layout that enhances readability. Indonesia has a diverse range of information media, including various types of magazines covering topics such as animals, plants, humans, economics, social issues, culture, and many others, making them widely recognized by the public. One of the high-quality and renowned magazines is *Tempo*.

This magazine was established in 1971 by six journalists: Goenawan Mohamad, Harjoko Trisnadi, Fikri Jufri, Lukman Setiawan, Usamah, and Christianto Wibisono, with funding from the Jaya Raya Foundation. The name "Tempo" was chosen for its brevity and simplicity, easy to pronounce in the Indonesian language style. This name sounds neutral, not symbolizing any particular group. Finally, the name "Tempo" was chosen, meaning time, a familiar name often used in the publishing and journalistic world. The early editions of *Tempo* magazine featured articles on art, lifestyle, and behavior that felt

new and fresh. The magazine continued to grow with its history and struggles. On October 6, 1998, the magazine expanded under PT Arsa Raya Perdana. In 2001, this PT went public and changed its name to PT Tempo Inti Media, Tbk. (Company) as the new publisher of Tempo magazine, thus enabling it to publish Koran Tempo.

Over time, Tempo magazine has grown and evolved, as seen from the Tempo Media Group website. The magazine has consistently adapted to technological advancements and changes in the media industry. Its journey began with print magazine media and then expanded into digital media. The younger generation and productive age groups are familiar with the digital world. In 2019, approximately 183 million people, or roughly 118 million individuals aged 15-40 years, were closely connected to digital media and had the potential to access it. The magazine covers various topics including politics, economics, automotive, and celebrities. Until now, the magazine continues to progress. Tempo is known for its reliable quality, professionalism, and upholding values such as honesty, integrity, consistency, independent thinking, and expression.

The Tempo magazine cover features a truly captivating illustration style, exemplified by the edition released on November 12-18, 2018, titled "Outlook Ekonomi 2019, Revolusi 4.0 adalah Kunci" (Economic Outlook 2019, Revolution 4.0 is the Key). The subtitle focuses on the improvement of competitiveness, the placement of fourth-generation technology in the national industry expected to increase in the coming year, and the challenges regarding regulation. The magazine's illustration, in terms of concept, drawing technique, coloring, illustration style, and composition placement, grabs the reader's attention. It presents two hands from opposite directions, right and left, seemingly pointing at each other from top and bottom positions but not yet touching. Uniquely, the right hand is depicted as a robotic hand, evident from the depiction of metal accompanied by cables, while the left hand appears as a regular human hand.

To understand the purpose and meaning of this illustration, the author will attempt to analyze it using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. With the assistance of this theory, one can perceive the denotative and connotative meanings depicted through this illustration. Therefore, through this theory, one can delve into a deeper understanding of the illustration's significance and meaning, relating to the content of the story or information conveyed.



Figure 1. Tempo magazine cover

2. Method

The method used employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which examines semiotics based on the relationship between Denotation-Connotation-Myth. Roland Barthes has a specific technique in semiotic method; he divides it into two paths: denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (figurative

meaning), both of which are potentially subject to further development. The denotation path corresponds to the reality that occurs, while connotation is indirect, open to various possibilities, and uncertain. According to Piliang (2003:261, cited in Rahardjo 2013:67), Barthes' myth of coding is the encoding of meaning and social values as something natural. For a clearer understanding, please refer to the following writing schema:

TANDA ➡ DENOTASI ➡ KONOTASI ➡ MITOS

Gambar 2

Skema alur teori denotas/konotasi Roland Barthes (sumber Piliang, 2003: 262)

Image 2

Source: Semiotic Study of Vernacular Design "Tong Stand" Entertainment Vehicle at the Sekaten Night Market in Yogyakarta by Sudjadi Tjipto Rahardjo Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa dan Desain Visi Indonesia – Yogyakarta.

The description of Roland Barthes' structural semiotics was previously articulated by Adityawan (2008:27) as cited in Rahardjo (2013:67). Connotation attempts to explain the interaction that occurs when signs encounter feelings, emotions, and "cultural values". In other words, connotation is subjective, arbitrated, specific to a cultural environment, and heavily dependent on "cultural knowledge". Furthermore, Barthes elaborated that myth is a distortion that neither conceals nor reveals anything; it is not a lie or a confession, but rather a deviation of meaning.

Roland Barthes' semiotic concept within the elements of semiology consists of four parts: signs (signifier and signified), double system (connotation and metalanguage), two axes of language (syntagmatic and paradigmatic), and language (langue and parole). Barthes' attraction to semiotics lies in its exploration beyond language. Sunardi (2004:36) as cited in Ghazali (2017:29).

According to Barthes, as cited by Nurhadi (2011:158) in Ghazali (2017:29), signs comprise a triad consisting of three aspects: signifier, signified, and sign. The signifier is the material aspect of the sign, such as letters, sounds, words, gestures, or images, while the signified is conceptual (Rusputranto (2016:11) in Ghazali (2017:29)). In Barthes' book "Mythologies", he reveals the associative, which forms the crucial connection between the signifier and the signified to understand the sign.

Concrete explanation regarding the signified (concept) and signifier (material) of these two elements results in the sign. For example, the "name of an orange" is its conceptual signified, and the "orange fruit" is the material object (physical fruit) acting as the signifier. The association between the signifier and the signified involves an association (connector), with the sign serving as the association, leading to the understanding of the final sign, which is "orange".

What if the word "orange" takes the form of an image instead of a word? According to Sunardi (2014:39) as cited in Ghazali (2017:30), the signifier and the signified have a symbolic relationship, meaning the signifier symbolizes the signified, thus requiring agreement (convention). According to Budiman (1994:108) as cited in Ghazali (2017:30), symbols are one type of sign that is arbitrary and conventional, implying that signs can be not only linguistic but also pictorial.

Marking

The signified (petanda) and the signifier (penanda) constitute marking. In other words, marking is the act of binding the signifier with the signified, which produces a sign, another term called signification (signum: sign and facere: to make) which means to point and state (Sunardi, 2002:47 in Ghazali, 2017:31), but Barthes uses the word binding as a symbol of unification. Rusputranto (2016:15 in Ghazali, 2017:31).

Denotation and Connotation

According to KBBI (Indonesian Language Dictionary), denotation is the meaning of a word that directly refers to its tangible object, is objective, and corresponds to its actual meaning. Denotation aims to communicate facts, information, or clear and unambiguous statements. Connotation, on the other hand, refers to words that have other meanings behind them or meanings related to the word.

Illustration

One of the important elements in magazines is illustration; through these images, readers' attention can be drawn. Another benefit is that illustrations serve as a medium to facilitate readers' understanding of the content of a magazine. Due to the importance of an image, careful consideration is needed to convey a message effectively and communicatively. Generally, illustrations are created by depicting a story either written or audio. Illustrations can communicate a brief overview of a story to explain a scene.

The term "illustration" originates from the English word "illustration," which means picture, photo, or painting. The function of illustrative images is to narrate or provide explanations for a story or written manuscript. When viewed from Latin, "illustre" means to explain, and its form can be in the shape of a picture/symbol/relief/music intended to communicate or explain something (Sudarso, 2014:566 and Santosa, 2002:57 in Ghazali, 2017:21).

Explanation regarding information can provide an explanation of a purpose or objective visually. Furthermore, it is not only to support the story but also to embellish empty spaces in magazine, book, newspaper designs, etc. The form of illustration can vary, such as sketches, paintings, graphics, caricatures, and others. Kusrianto (2009:140 in Ghazali, 2017:21).

Forms and techniques of illustration vary, including naturalistic, decorative, cartoon, caricature, comic strip, and imaginary illustrations. The explanations are as follows: a. Naturalistic illustrations are images that have the same form and color as the real world. b. Decorative illustrations are images that serve to adorn something with simplified or exaggerated shapes. c. Cartoon illustrations have a humorous form and distinctiveness. d. Caricature illustrations are exaggerated images of human body parts, often found in magazines and newspapers. e. Comic strip illustrations are stories designed to match the content, with various interesting perspectives. f. Textbook illustrations function to explain text or an event depicted in the image. g. Imaginary illustrations are images created through imagination, often found in novels, romances, and comics.

Magazine Cover

In today's advanced technological era, many new media have emerged, but print and electronic magazines continue to exist to provide useful information to the general public. Magazine covers are also equipped with various facilities to make them attractive and communicative, such as color play, printing techniques, typography arrangement, thereby becoming the initial attraction and communication to readers.

Magazine covers can occupy both front and back positions. According to Rolnicki (2008:301 in Ghazali, 2017:30), there are several points that can be conveyed, including presenting the main news and one main focus. Often, the cover also features teaser headlines about other news.

Assegaf (1983:127 in Ghazali, 2017:30) defines two pieces of information regarding the cover. The first is the outermost sheet, which includes both the front and back covers created with thick paper. The second is the inner part, consisting of thinner paper, which is different from the cover. The cover features titles and illustrations that are attractive.



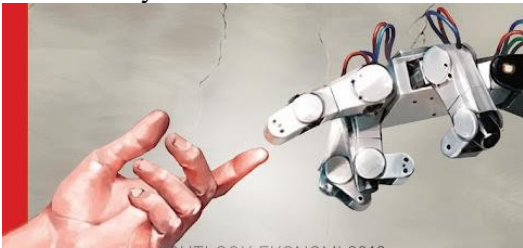
Indirectly, the cover becomes a marketing strategy. Its presence serves as the representation of the magazine's identity, which is based on the magazine's content. Therefore, after the cover is created, elements within it can build communication through typography, color, illustrations, and other elements to effectively communicate the magazine's content.

3. Results and Discussion



Figure 3. Tempo magazine cover with the main title "Economic Outlook 2019, Revolution 4.0 is the Key." November 12-18, 2019.

Table 1. Penanda (Signifier)

No.	Penanda (Signifier)	Petanda (Signified)
1.	<p>Verbal Analysis:</p>  <p>Caption text at the top of the magazine.</p>	<p>Displaying an informational caption: "Budget Embezzlement Syndicate" and "Threat of Stalled Kalibaru Megaproject." Normal size with Sans-Serif font.</p>
2.	<p>Verbal Analysis:</p>  <p>Title text of Tempo magazine.</p>	<p>Displaying an informational caption: "Tempo" and "Enjoyable to read and essential". The word "Tempo" is written in uppercase serif font, and the sentence below it is in uppercase but smaller size, using a sans-serif font.</p>
3.	<p>Visual Analysis:</p>  <p>Image of the two hands, one human and one robot.</p>	<p>Displaying a hand with different types, where the bottom left hand is human, and the top right hand is made of metal.</p>






4. Verbal Analysis:  Displaying informational text: "Economic Outlook 2019", "Revolution 4.0 is the Key", and "Driving competitiveness enhancement, the implementation of fourth-generation technology in the national industry is expected to become more vibrant next year, overlapping regulations still remain a challenge." Using Sans-Serif font with large and medium sizes.
- Text "Revolution 4.0 is the Key."
5. Visual Analysis:  In the bottom right corner, there is an ISBN logo depicted as lines accompanied by a white box. On the left side, there is a caption.
- ISBN logo image.
6. Verbal Analysis:  On the right corner, there is Sans-serif typography.
- Text of the date, month, year, magazine price, and supporting information.

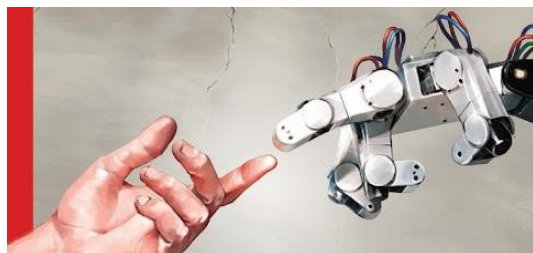
Table 2. Visual or Verbal

No.	Visual or Verbal	Denotation	Conotation
1.	 (Verbal Analysis) The caption text at the top of the magazine.	The additional caption text from the main title is created in uppercase letters with Sans-Serif font, colored white.	Providing an understanding of other subtopics as important information to convey the message.
2.		The main magazine title and supporting subtitle.	Tempo is specially designed with Serif font type with the largest size among other fonts, serving

(Verbal Analysis) The title text of Tempo magazine.

as the main attention-grabbing element of Tempo magazine's identity. Additionally, at the bottom, there is also a slogan supporting this title.

3.



Depicted are two hands nearly touching, one made of metal from above and one human hand from below.

The two hands almost touching, as if depicting humans in close proximity, getting acquainted, and communicating with technology.

(Visual Analysis) Image of the two hands, one human and one robot.

4.



(Verbal Analysis)
The text "Revolution 4.0 is the Key."

These letters serve as the main title of the magazine to inform the readers. Designed in black color and Sans-serif font type.

The font is created in a large size with black color, signifying strength, solidity, and boldness, thus directly focusing on the main point.

5.



(Visual Analysis) ISBN

In this section, there is a white box containing ISBN lines along with its number.

White and black colors are two contrasting colors, yet they perfectly complement any other color when juxtaposed with it.

6.



(Verbal Analysis)
The text of the date, month, year, magazine price, and supporting information.

On the right side, there are also the date, month, and year of publication, as well as the magazine price.

The font is made in white color and small size, placed at the bottom right corner of the magazine, serving as an indication of the publication date and period of the magazine's lifespan.

7.



(Visual Analysis)
Gray color

This magazine predominantly uses gray color as the background, gradually fading to white in the middle of the magazine and in some parts on the edges.

Gray is the most neutral color. It falls between white and black, giving it a gray impression. Sanyoto (2009:50).

8.



(Visual Analysis)
Cream brown color

The brown/cream color is used for the skin tone of the hand.

The brown color is associated with warmth, politeness, wisdom, and prudence. Sanyoto (2009:51).

9.



(Visual Analysis)
Black Color

The black color is seen in the typography, especially in the main title "Revolution 4.0 is the Key."

Black is the darkest color, symbolizing strength, formality, and elegance. Black may be mysterious, yet when paired with other colors, it completely changes its meaning. Sanyoto (2009:50).

9.



(Visual Analysis)
White Color

White color is used as a gradient on the magazine background, typography, and ISBN box.

White is the brightest color, associated with gleaming white light, stimulating, firm, yielding. This color signifies light, honesty, and sincerity. Sanyoto (2009:49).

10.



The color red is used to decorate the edges of the magazine.

Red is associated with blood, fire, as well as warmth. Its character is strong, fast, energetic, spirited, brave, angry, stimulating, and hot. Red is positive, aggressive, and energetic. Sanyoto (2009:47).

(Visual Analysis) Red Color

4. Conclusions

After analyzing the verbal signs, visual signs, as well as denotative and connotative signs on the cover of Tempo magazine edition 12-18 November 2018, the related interpretations obtained are as follows: In the second part, the hands are connected, one below and one above, as if wanting to meet and introduce each other, with one positioned above and the other below, giving the impression of giving and receiving something.

The upper hand resembles a machine, as if giving something, and is received by the human hand on the bottom side, on the left, symbolizing humanity's readiness to receive together. In the background, there is also a gradually fading gray color merging into white, while on the left and bottom sides, there are red lines, representing courage characterized by strength, speed, and energy, thus resembling the letter "L". The main title of the magazine is "Revolusi 4.0 adalah Kunci" (Revolution 4.0 is the Key). From various components arranged above, various interesting points can be formulated and interpreted, roughly as follows: humans accept living alongside technology as part of their lives. With technology, they can create harmonious relationships and facilitate their lives.

This is symbolized by the hand-to-hand connection between the human hand and the robot hand, indicating mutual giving and receiving. The background fades from gray to white, symbolizing the neutral nature of gray, representing that humans will utilize technological advancements well and smoothly, as technology will be beneficial and balanced. Additionally, the color red symbolizes courage to step forward with bravery and positive hope alongside the modern technological revolution 4.0 being the key.

References

- Arnas, Y., Sutarjo, M., & Fajarianto, O. (2022). Differences of students' mathematics learning results using Student Team Achievement Division (STAD) and expository methods on materials build a flat of a rectangle. *EduLine: Journal of Education and Learning Innovation*, 2(2), 146–150.
- Harsono, Y., Fajarianto, O., & Afriani, L. (2024). The influence of leadership style and work discipline on employee performance. *IJESS International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 5(1), 1–8.
- Harimurti, E. R., Rostini, D., & Fajarianto, O. (2020). Educational management for Baduy tribe's children in Lebak Banten. *Systematic Reviews in Pharmacy*, 11(8), 618–626.
- Ismail, U., Abidin, Z., & Fajarianto, O. (2025). Pengembangan animasi pembelajaran materi mitigasi bencana alam untuk siswa autisme. *Journal of Educational Technology Studies and Applied Research*, 1(3).
- Kurniawan, C., Fajarianto, O., Sari, I. N., Wulandari, T. C., & Marlina, E. (2022). Assessing learning management system (LMS) for the dairy farmer: Obstacles to delivering online learning content. *JTP-Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan*, 24(3), 341–352.

- Kusrianto, A. (2009). *Introduction to visual communication design*. Andi Offset.
- Rahardjo, S. T. (2013). *Semiotic study of vernacular design: Tong stand entertainment vehicle at Sekaten night market, Yogyakarta*.
- Sudrajat, D., Wijayanti, S. K., Wibowo, S. N., & Fajarianto, O. (2024). The effects of product quality and promotion on customer purchase intention on foods offered through online delivery services. *International Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting Research (IJEBAR)*, 8(1), [halaman jika tersedia]. [https://doi.org/\[tambahkan jika ada DOI\]](https://doi.org/[tambahkan jika ada DOI])
- Sukri, G. K. (2017). *Semiotic analysis on the cover illustration of Tempo Magazine (Why Choose Budi Gunawan edition, January 12–18, 2015)* [Undergraduate thesis, Visi Indonesia College of Fine Arts and Design].
- Tempo Magazine. (n.d.). *Majalah Tempo cetak*. Retrieved March 3, 2024, from <https://www.tempo.co/majalah-tempo-cetak>