

ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF HAPPINESS EMOTIONS IN DINDAPS' DIGITAL ILLUSTRATIONS ON INSTAGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representation of happiness emotions in digital illustrations by Dinda Puspitasari (@dindaps) published on Instagram. Dinda Puspitasari is a Jakarta-based digital illustrator widely recognized at the national and international level, having collaborated with clients such as Dior, Adidas, Spotify, and Victoria's Secret. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method to examine the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings embedded in the visual elements of her illustrations. The research focuses on three selected illustrations that explicitly represent happiness themes. The analysis reveals that Dinda Puspitasari represents happiness emotions through the use of warm and vibrant color palettes such as yellow, pink, and peach; cheerful facial expressions of illustrated figures; decorative elements such as flowers and positive everyday objects; and a playful, feminine visual style. This study is expected to contribute to the academic discourse on Indonesian digital illustration from a Visual Communication Design perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital illustration has become one of the most dominant visual communication mediums in the social media era, particularly on Instagram. This platform allows illustrators to build artistic identities while conveying emotional messages directly to millions of audiences. In Indonesia, this phenomenon is increasingly relevant with the emergence of digital illustrators who have successfully penetrated the international market. One such artist is Dinda Puspitasari (@dindaps), a Jakarta-based illustrator who has collaborated with global brands such as Dior, Adidas, Spotify, and Victoria's Secret, as well as government agencies such as the Jakarta Provincial Government. Her works consistently display themes of happiness through bright color configurations, expressive feminine figures, and positive decorative elements, making them relevant objects for academic study.

Several previous studies have examined digital illustrations using a semiotic approach. (Zulkifli, 2022) Applying Barthes' semiotics to Agung Budi Santoso's digital illustration work, while Agustín, (2025) used a similar method on photographic works on Instagram and demonstrated its effectiveness in revealing layers of visual meaning. However, studies specifically focusing on the representation of the emotion of happiness in the works of Indonesian illustrators active in the international commercial sphere are still very limited. No research has yet examined how an illustrator consistently maintains an artistic identity on the Instagram platform.

This gap motivated this study. Dinda Puspitasari was chosen because of her consistent, measured visual style, significant audience scale (88 thousand followers), and track record of commercial collaborations that prove the effectiveness of her emotional communication. Her works provide an opportunity to analyze how happiness is not only displayed but also visually constructed through systematic aesthetic choices. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of the emotion of happiness in Dinda Puspitasari's digital illustrations on Instagram using Roland Barthes's semiotic method, by examining the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings in the elements of color, figure expression, composition, and decorative elements of the three selected works.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Illustration

Illustration is a form of visual art that functions to explain, clarify, or beautify a text, idea, or narrative. (Sofyan Salam, 2017). In its development, illustration has transformed from a conventional hand-drawn medium into digital works created using technology such as computers, tablets, or graphic design software. (Rizky Fadillah & Made Ayu K, nd) Digital illustration acts as a visual communication medium that combines various design elements, such as lines, shapes, space, texture, color, and nonverbal signs, to convey messages to the audience.

Illustration is a type of visual art that aims to convey a message or idea through images. In the world of digital media, illustrations appear in various forms and platforms, one of which is Instagram. This platform serves as a crucial publication platform for Indonesian illustrators to reach a wider audience and help them establish their artistic identity in a consistent manner. (Zulkifli, 2021) noted that fine art in the era of disruption has experienced a significant shift due to technological developments, where digital media has become the main vehicle for distributing visual art works, including illustrations.

Representation and Emotion in Visual Works

Representation is the process of giving meaning to a concept using language, including visual language. (Mora, nd) explains that visual art has a strategic function as a nonverbal communication medium that represents collective meaning, values, and experiences. In this case, a visual sign not only has a clear meaning but also contains cultural, social, and emotional values. In visual works, depicting emotions is a way for artists to show and convey specific feelings to the audience.

Happiness is one of the most important positive feelings in human life. In visual art, happiness is often expressed through smiling faces, warm and bright colors, light and dynamic

compositions, and objects with positive and pleasant meanings. (Ramadan Munthe et al., nd) explains that color in graphic design has a crucial role in shaping the audience's emotions, where the acceptance of the meaning of color is greatly influenced by a person's cultural background, individual preferences, and past experiences.

Color psychology plays an important role in representing emotions in visual works. (Zahra & Mansoor, nd) Her research explains that colors can be associated with different emotions, influenced by religious, geographical, cultural, gender, and age factors. Generally, yellow is associated with happiness and optimism; pink is associated with gentleness and joy; while orange and peach convey warmth and enthusiasm. Strategically using this color palette in illustrations can effectively evoke feelings of happiness in the viewer.

Semiotika Roland Barthes

Semiotics is the science that studies signs and how humans understand the world through these signs. (Alex Sobur, 2013) explains semiotics as a science or method of analysis used to study signs and the meanings behind them in various situations, including in visual communication. Roland Barthes expanded the semiotic theory proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure by adding aspects of connotation and myth in the analysis of signs. According to Barthes 1977, every sign has two levels of meaning: the first level (denotation) is the real or direct meaning of the sign, while the second level (connotation) is the meaning that arises from the cultural, historical, and emotional relationships that exist in the sign.

The third level in Barthes's system is myth, which refers to the way certain ideologies are considered normal and natural in society. In visual analysis, myths can be values or perspectives embedded in images that appear ordinary and unquestioned. Tinarbuko (2009) states that semiotics in visual communication design is a good tool for understanding the meaning of signs in a work, from the surface to the deepest ideological layers. Barthes's semiotic method has been widely applied in digital illustration research, as was done (Risi & Zulkifli, 2022) In examining the digital illustration works of Indonesian illustrators, a similar approach is used.

Visual Elements in Visual Communication Design

Visual Communication Design (DKV) studies how to arrange visual elements so that messages can be conveyed effectively. According to Adi Kusrianto, (2007) The basic elements of Visual Communication Design (DKV) consist of lines, shapes, colors, textures, spaces, and typography. In image analysis, these elements are crucial for understanding how the artist conveys their emotional message to the viewer.

Visual composition is the way the elements are arranged within the image area. Sumbo Tinarbuko, (2009) explains that in visual semiotics, each design element, such as color, shape, and composition, has its own meaning and plays a role in conveying the overall message of the work. A balanced and harmonious composition usually conveys a pleasant and positive impression and supports the depiction of the emotion of happiness. (Agustin, 2025) In his research on the work of photographers on Instagram, he showed that semiotic reading of visual elements is able to reveal layers of meaning that are not visible to the naked eye but are felt emotionally by the audience.

RESEARCH METHODS

Types of research

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. (Moleong, 2017) explains that qualitative research is research that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior with the aim of understanding the phenomenon in depth and interpretatively. This approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the characteristics of the research object in the form of digital illustration works, where the emotional meaning contained therein cannot be measured statistically but must be interpreted systematically. The descriptive approach is used to describe in detail the representation of the emotion of happiness contained in Dinda Puspitasari's illustration works, with a focus on reading the visual signs inherent in each work selected as a research sample.

Analysis Method

The analysis method used is Roland Barthes' semiotics, by examining three levels of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth in each work that is the object of research. The analysis is carried out systematically on visual elements that include: (1) the colors and color palettes used, (2) the expressions and gestures of the figures shown, (3) the composition and layout of elements, and (4) the decorative and symbolic objects present in the work.

Objects and Sampling Techniques

The object of the research is a digital illustration work uploaded by Dinda Puspitasari on the Instagram account @dindaps. Sample selection was carried out using purposive sampling, namely the selection of samples based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. The sample selection criteria are: (1) works in the form of single digital illustrations (not photos or videos), (2) works that explicitly display the theme or nuance of happiness through their visual elements, and (3) works that receive a positive response from the audience as an indicator of the readability of emotional messages. Based on these criteria, three illustration works were determined as research samples.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques were carried out through: (1) documentation, namely downloading and documenting selected works from Instagram @dindaps; (2) literature study, namely collecting relevant theoretical references; and (3) visual observation, namely systematic observation of the visual elements in each work. The collected data were then analyzed using Barthes' semiotic framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Dinda Puspitasari as a Digital Illustrator

Dinda Puspitasari is an illustrator and live drawing artist based in Jakarta, Indonesia. She began her artistic journey by posting illustrations on her personal blog in 2008, before transitioning to Instagram, which has since become her primary platform. Her account, @dindaps, currently has over 88,000 followers, making her one of Indonesia's digital illustrators with a significant audience.

Dinda is known for her distinctive illustration style: bright and vibrant colors, feminine and stylish female figures, and compositions filled with decorative elements such as flowers, patterns, and aesthetically pleasing everyday objects. Her primary inspirations include still-life photography, architecture, flowers, and Japanese culture. Professionally, she has collaborated with international brands such as Dior, Adidas, Spotify, Victoria's Secret, as well as local brands and government agencies such as the Jakarta Provincial Government.

Semiotic Analysis of Selected Illustration Works

The following presents Barthes's semiotic analysis of three digital illustrations by Dinda Puspitasari (@dindaps) that represent the theme of happiness. Each work is analyzed based on three meanings: denotation, connotation, and myth, taking into account elements of color, figurative expression, composition, and decorative elements.

Work 1: “79th Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia #GenerasiMerZEKA” (Grab x OVO Collaboration, August 2024)



Figure 1. Illustration of "79th Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia #GenerasiMerZEKA" by Dinda Puspitasari (@dindaps), August 2024

Elemen Visual	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Color	The bright green background dominates, combined with bright primary	Green symbolizes hope and growth: the combination of primary colors reflects the cheerfulness,	Bright colors are naturalized as the visual language of Independence Day celebrations: national

	colors: yellow, red, blue, and purple in the figures.	youthful spirit, and optimism of the new generation.	joy is represented through a festive and inclusive palette.
Figure Expression & Gesture	Figures of various ages & ethnicities smile, wave, ride bikes, and play music.	Showing shared joy & inclusivity	Myth: True happiness is communal happiness, a united and empowered independent generation
Decorative Elements	There are red and white flags, musical notes, trumpets, vinyl records, white doves	Flags symbolize pride, music symbolizes celebration, doves symbolize freedom & peace.	Nationalism and diversity are considered as sources of modern happiness.
Composition	Full field, figures spread out without empty space	Showing the crowd & positive energy	Crowded celebrations bring happiness, loneliness has no place during independence

Table 1. Barthes' Semiotic Analysis of Work 1: 79th Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia #GenerasiMerZeka

Work 2: "Jakarta" — Illustration of the 1st Year Report of the Governor of DKI Jakarta (DKI Jakarta Provincial Government)

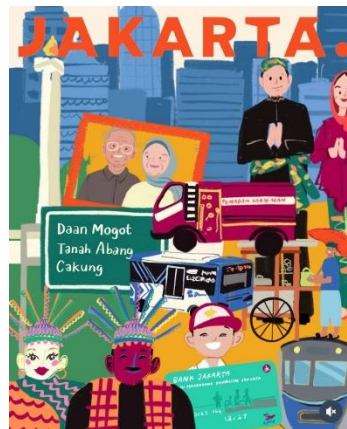


Figure 2. Illustration of "Jakarta" by Dinda Puspitasari (@dindaps) for the 1 Year Report of the Governor of DKI Jakarta

Elemen Visual	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Color	Color palette: orange, yellow, maroon, blue, pink; bright orange "JAKARTA" text	Orange & yellow symbolize warmth and familiarity; many colors symbolize the diversity of citizens & cultures	Jakarta is described as a beautiful, warm, vibrant and diverse city.

Expression & Gesture	Figures: smiling man in Betawi traditional clothes, elderly couple in photo, Betawi dancer, cheerful young man wearing peci	Happiness across generations; smiles show that life in Jakarta is fun	Myth: City progress always brings happiness to its citizens.
Decorative Elements	Monas, tall buildings, Transjakarta, MRT, cars, fire extinguishers, rickshaws, Bank Jakarta cards	Modernity coexists with tradition; a symbol of a developing city that still has its own identity.	Myth: Modernity and harmonious tradition symbolize Jakarta's ideal condition; infrastructure symbolizes the government's concern.
Composition	Monas on top, city elements are arranged in layers to form a panorama	The layered composition symbolizes the complexity of the city; despite the crowds, it still looks pleasant.	Myth: Jakarta's hustle and bustle is considered beautiful & proud, not tiring.

Table 2. Barthes' Semiotic Analysis of the Illustration "Jakarta" by Dinda Puspitasari (@dindaps) for the 1 Year Report of the Governor of DKI Jakarta



Work 3 : " Natur-E x Dinda Puspitasari" (Collaboration with Natur-E Indonesia, December 21, 2023)

Figure 3. Illustration of “Natur-E x Dinda Puspitasari” by Dinda Puspitasari (@dindaps), December 21, 2023

Elemen Visual	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Color	The ad uses a palette of bright yellow, light blue, green, and pink with a large	Yellow represents happiness and positive energy, while light blue reflects calm and freshness. This	A myth has developed that natural beauty products are part of a happy young woman's lifestyle, where visual

	sunflower dominating the background.	combination of color palettes creates a bright and cheerful impression.	beauty is equated with happiness in life.
Expression & Gesture	It shows a young woman with a bun, smiling confidently while holding Natur-E skincare products, wearing a red and yellow floral patterned dress.	These confident smiles and gestures convey a sense of satisfaction in taking care of oneself. Self-care activities are portrayed as both empowering and fulfilling.	There is a myth that happy women are women who actively care for their appearance, and that beautiful and glowing skin is seen as a sign of happiness.
Decorative Elements	The background of the advertisement contains elements of large sunflowers, white clouds in a blue sky, green trees, and silhouettes of urban buildings.	Sunflowers serve as a symbol of joy and optimism, while the combination of natural and urban elements represents a harmonious balance in life.	A myth has emerged that beauty products are not just for fulfilling basic needs, but have become part of the daily pleasure rituals of women living in urban environments.
Composition	The female figure is placed in the center or foreground as the main focal point, while natural and urban elements fill the background in a balanced and harmonious manner.	The placement of the figure in the center emphasizes the position of women as the main subject in the narrative of happiness, with background elements serving to support and strengthen this impression.	Women are positioned as the visual center that represents the narrative of girl power and female happiness, where personal happiness is constructed as a beautiful experience and worthy of being displayed publicly.

Table 3. Barthes' Semiotic Analysis of the Illustration "Natur-e" by Dinda Puspitasari (@dindaps)

Discussion

Analysis shows that Dinda Puspitasari employs a consistent visual strategy to reflect the emotion of happiness. Denotatively, happiness is directly conveyed through smiling facial expressions, bright colors, and objects with positive connotations. This is the most easily understood form of visual communication by audiences because it is universal and does not require in-depth interpretation.

On a connotative level, each visual element in the work holds a deeper layer of meaning than its mere physical appearance. The pink and yellow color palette applied is not only cheerful

colors, but also implies associations with femininity, warmth, and a sense of optimism. The female figure shown with open and expressive movements indicates the meaning of freedom, confidence, and self-acceptance, traits often associated with true happiness. On the other hand, the plant and natural elements in this work not only serve as visual decoration, but also symbolize growth, temporary but still precious beauty, and the happiness expressed in moments of everyday life.

At the mythical level, Dinda Puspitasari's work not only reflects a particular cultural narrative about happiness but also reinforces it. Happiness in her work is represented as something that is always aesthetically pleasing, feminine, and closely connected to a graceful and orderly lifestyle. This narrative is a powerful myth in today's social media visual culture, especially among young urban women. This aligns with Instagram's aesthetic trends, which are gradually normalizing certain visual standards as depictions of a happy and perfect lifestyle.

Dinda Puspitasari's consistent visual style in representing happiness also serves to establish a strong artistic identity. Audiences who follow @dindaps have become conditioned to associate her work with positive and joyful nuances, creating a kind of emotional contract between the illustrator and her audience. This phenomenon demonstrates how a digital illustrator not only creates work but also builds a unique emotional ecosystem on social media.

CONCLUSION

Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of Dinda Puspitasari's (@dindaps) digital illustration work on Instagram, it can be concluded that the emotion of happiness is represented through a consistent and layered configuration of visual elements. Denotatively, happiness is shown through the smiling facial expressions of the figures, the use of warm and bright colors, and the presence of objects with positive connotations such as flowers and natural elements. Connotatively, these elements carry deeper meanings related to femininity, warmth, optimism, freedom, and appreciation for the small moments in life. At the mythical level, these works reinforce the cultural narrative of happiness as something aesthetic, feminine, and aspirational in the visual culture of social media.

These findings demonstrate that Dinda Puspitasari has successfully constructed a distinctive and effective visual language in communicating the emotion of happiness, making her work not only aesthetically pleasing but also rich in meaning. This research is expected to serve as a reference for further studies in Indonesian digital illustration studies, as well as provide practical insights for illustrators in designing works that effectively convey emotions through visual elements.

This study is limited by its sample size and its failure to include audience perspectives in the analysis. Further research could consider adding a larger sample size, expanding the range of emotions analyzed, and using an audience reception approach to gain a more comprehensive picture.

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