Visual Rhetoric Analysis of "A Photo of a COVID-19 Victim in Indonesia Trigger Fear and Denial" by Joshua Irwandi

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ABSTRACT

Photojournalism by Joshua Irwandi uploaded on social media Instagram caused various responses among netizens. The photo showed the figure of a human body which was the corpse of a person who died from Covid-19 placed on a bed. This figure looked stiff and was wrapped in a shroud with plastic coated all over their body. The purpose of this research is to find out the visual rhetoric and elements of message arrangement in Joshua Irwandi's photo work. This research uses a qualitative approach with Sonja K. Foss' visual rhetoric analysis. The results of the analysis show that persuasive visual rhetoric will have an effect on the audience, if the visual symbols presented are familiar and close to the audience and are currently happening.

Keywords: Visual rhetoric, photography, Joshua Irwandi, Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

In mid-July 2020, the Indonesian social media universe was shocked by the upload of a photo on the @joshirwandi Instagram account. The uploaded photo, which until now (December 15, 2021) has received 353,437 likes and 9,279 comments, has received various responses from netizens. Many expressed admirations for the uploaded photo, some felt that the photo had so many irregularities that it made no sense. Even an Indonesian musician, Anji also commented on the photo until it became a polemic. He thought that Covid-19 was not so dangerous, and argued that a photojournalist should not take photos in a hospital if the family cannot see the victim. Some of the singer's follower wrongly accused Irwandi of taking photos with a mannequin, and even called him a "slave" of the World Health Organization (Wijayanti and Mochamad, 2020:263). Wiku Adisasmito, Head of the Expert Team of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Covid-19 Handling, also commented that the person who took the picture of the corpse of a Covid-19 patient (Joshua Irwandi, 2020) was considered unethical. This also included those who spread it to go viral on social media (CNN indonesia, 2020). As is known, the

viral photo was actually taken to accompany an article in the August 2020 edition of National Geographic magazine. Beyond the debate, Joshua's photo was actually made with the aim of raising public awareness and vigilance about the virus, and to honor the work of medical staff in Indonesia and around the world who were willing to risk their lives (Beard, 2020).

Nowadays, photography has become one o the media to convey messages to the audience both personally and a mass communication media. Photographic works are often interpreted more than words. In fact, Ray Bachtiar (Bachtiar, 2011) added that a photograph, any kind of photograph, not only speaks a thousand words, but is also part of a thousand series of events. Seno Gumira Ajidarma suggested that images produced by humans, including photographs, are part of visual literacy (Ajidarma, 2003:26). In short, photographs have become part of a personal way of speaking, expressing thoughts and feelings. Through photographs, the reality which exists in society is then constructed by photographers to convey messages which can raise the potential of social conditions (Artana, 2014). Images or photographs included in the realm of visual rhetoric have a rhetorical or persuasive function (Sa'idin, 2013).

Douglas Ehninger (Foss, 2005:141) defined rhetoric as the way in which humans "can influence each other's thinking and behavior through the use of symbols". Visual rhetoric is used to describe the study of visual imagery within the discipline of rhetoric, relating to the study of the use of symbols to communicate (Foss, 2005:141). Visual rhetoric is not only about design or images, but also about the culture and meaning reflected in the visual work. In simple terms, visual rhetoric can be defined as how or why a visual image has meaning. Although the direct response is not visible, indirectly it can be in the form of understanding, views, and actions which affect the way of thinking and persuade the audience.

In this context, visual rhetoric theory as one of the theories which aims to persuade the audience plays a key role. Rhetoric is the starting point of speaking in which the action has a purpose to be achieved (e.g. providing information). However, apart from its oral delivery, rhetoric is also capable of being delivered in writing. Therefore, rhetoric has a wider scope. Rhetoric is not only about speaking in front of the public using auditive communication methods but can also use visual and audio visual communication methods (Hendrikus, 1991:14).

Not all visual objects are visual rhetoric, there are 3 main requirements so that a visual product can be said to be visual rhetoric according to Foss (Foss, 2005:144), namely:

a.   Symbolic Action

Visual rhetoric, like all communication, is a system of signs. In a simple sense, a sign communicates when it is connected to another object. For example, the change of leaves in the fall is connected to a change in temperature, or a stop sign is connected to the act of stopping the car while driving. To qualify as visual rhetoric, an image must transcend its function as a sign, and become symbolic.

b.   Human Intervention

Visual rhetoric involves some type of human action. Humans engage in visual rhetoric when they are involved in the process of creating images such as watercolor paintings or taking photographs. This process involves conscious decisions to communicate as well as conscious choices about strategies to make function in areas such as color, shape, medium, and size. Human intervention in visual rhetoric might also assume the form of transforming non-rhetorical visual images into visual rhetoric. For example, a tree does not inherently become visual rhetoric. The tree is interpreted as such only when humans decide to use the tree as rhetoric, such as when the tree is brought into homes to symbolize Christmas. In other words, visual rhetoric requires human action in the creation or interpretation process.

c.   Presence of Audience

The visual elements arranged and modified by the rhetorician are not just for self-expression. While that may be the primary motive for the creator of an image, it is also to communicate with the audience. The creator of an image can be the audience of his own image, and the audience itself need not be a rhetorician.

A photograph with a rhetorical function is inseparable from the message contained in it which is arranged in such a way. According to Sidhartani (in Pradani and Eli, 2021:146), there are two models in the preparation of messages, namely: "informative message preparation" and "persuasive message preparation". The preparation of informative messages is the preparation of messages which aim to convey information to the public based on facts, while the preparation of persuasive messages is the preparation of messages which require audience reactions to do or

leave certain behaviors, attitudes, or beliefs in accordance with the author's expectations.

There are 4 kinds of methods which can be used in preparing informative messages, namely: Space order (preparation of messages based on place and space conditions), Time order (preparation of messages based on time), Deductive order (preparation of messages from general to specific, Inductive order (preparation of messages from specific to general) (Lotan in Pradani and Eli, 2021:146). Meanwhile, there are several ways which can be used in preparing persuasive messages, namely, among others: Fear appeal (method of composing or delivering messages by causing fear in the audience), Emotional appeal (method of composing or delivering messages by trying to arouse the audience's emotions), Reward appeal (method of composing or delivering messages by offering promises to the audience), Motivational appeal (composing or delivering messages which are made not because of promises, but are arranged to foster internal psychological audiences), Humorous appeal (composing or delivering messages accompanied by a style of humor) (Sidhartani in Pradani and Eli, 2021:146).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with Sonja K. Foss' visual rhetoric analysis. The qualitative method makes it possible to interpret and describe the message in the photo object using words. Furthermore, this method studies problems in society, whether it concerns procedures, situations, relationships, behavioral attitudes, perspectives, and influences in a community group (Restu in Illahi, 2017:8). This research focuses on visual rhetoric on photo objects which can cause responses from various groups. The object of this research is Joshua Irwandi's photojournalism which raises the theme of Covid-19 and is uploaded on Instagram social media. The data collection technique in this research uses the literature review method.

This research is assisted by the results of previous research, with the title "Representation of Covid-19 Victims in Photojournalism on Instagram @joshirwandi (Roland Barthes Semiotic Analysis" written by Rani Ika Wijayanti and Mochamad Syaefudin which was published in the journal Orasi volume 11 no.2 published in December 2020. The difference between the previous research and this research lies in the theory of analysis. The previous study used Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis,

while this study used the results of the analysis in the previous study to assist in the process of analyzing visual rhetoric using Sonja K. Foss' theory.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1.	Covid-19 Photo by Joshua Irwandi

A photo by Joshua Irwandi depicting an alleged corpse of a Covid-19 victim has stirred up the social media universe. This had caused pros and cons among netizens. Even one of Indonesia's top artists and the Head of the Expert Team of the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling Covid-19 commented on this matter. The Pewarta Foto Indonesia (PFI) organization had aired the statement of the Chair of the Task Force. In its Press Release, it stated that as long as those who photographed the Covid-19 bodies were competent journalists, it was considered legal and reasonable because not just anyone could get access and take pictures for editorial purposes in dangerous places (Pewarta Foto Indonesia, 2020). The Chairman of Center PFI, Reno Esnir, added that when taking photos, Joshua had fulfilled all journalistic codes of ethics, including following the required licensing procedures and health protocols (Amanaturrosyidah, 2020).
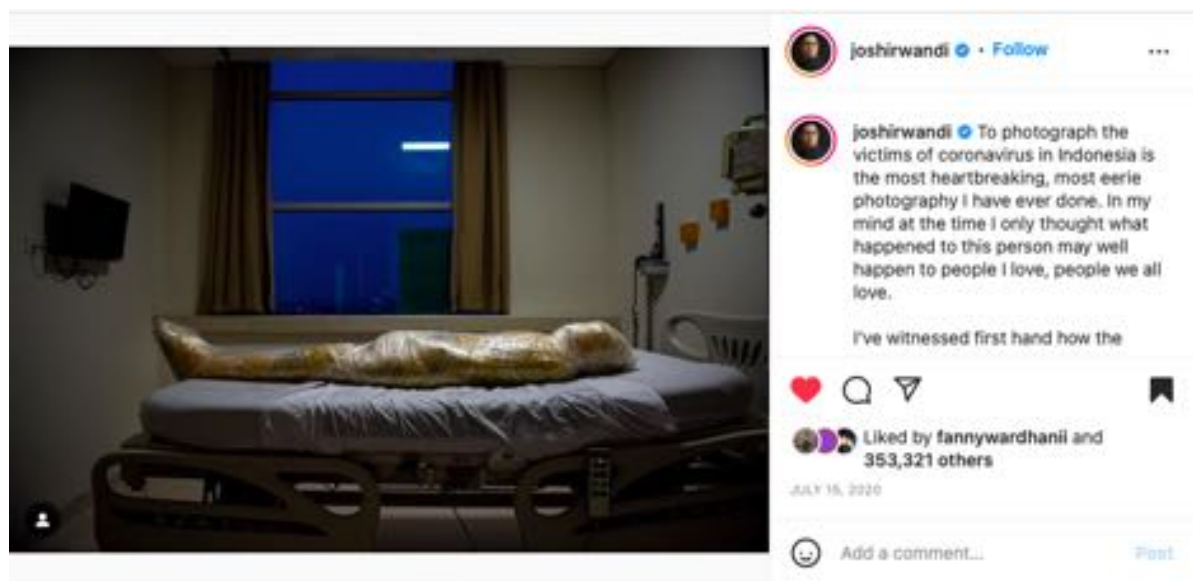

Figure 1 Photo of Joshua Irwandi's work uploaded on his Instagram social media
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CCp0qI0A4lG/

2.   The Application of 3 Characteristics of Visual Rhetoric in Joshua Irwandi's Photo

The symbol system in symbolic action characteristics is shown through the use of a sign system (Smith, Moriarty, Kenney, and Barbatsis, 2004:144). According to research conducted by Rani Ika Wijayanti and Mochamad Syaefudin (Wijayanti and Mochamad, 2020:267), the photo showed a human body which was a corpse who died from Covid-19 and was placed on a bed. This figure looked stiff and was wrapped in a shroud with plastic covered all over its body. Shroud is a white cloth used to wrap a corpse, especially in Islam and Christianity (Fanti in Wijayanti and Mochamad, 2020:268), the photo showed a human body which was a co. Plastic here also symbolizes eternity because it is not easily decomposed. In the connotation meaning, the coating or wrapping of the dead human body illustrates that they are already bound in the spirit world and can no longer return to the world. All deeds of worship, sins, and all their actions must be accounted for and there is no more opportunity to correct them. In general, funeral arrangements only use shrouds without being wrapped in plastic and coffins. Funeral arrangements by adding plastic and coffins aim to avoid transmission of the virus to others (Permatasari and Isra, 2020). As is known, the Covid-19 virus is a dangerous new virus and has a high risk of being transmitted to other people who are in direct contact with positive Covid patients which can cause death. The addition of plastic and coffins in funeral arrangements is a very new thing, especially with the Indonesian people who are predominantly Muslim, where funeral arrangements do not use coffins because they will be considered as bid'ah. Bid'ah is an act which is done not according to the established example, including adding or reducing provisions. Linguistically, this meaning relates to innovation, renewal, or even heretical doctrine. (Kharisma, Thesis, 2021:44).

In the photo taken by Joshua, the body wrapped in plastic looked like a mummy. In its understanding, a mummy is a preserved corpse, due to protection from decomposition by natural or artificial means, so that its initial shape is maintained (Wikipedia, 2018). Historically, mummies originated in Ancient Egypt which was a method of preserving the bodies of kings at that time. Over time, mummies were considered scary because the cause of death of the corpse in the mummy at that time was a mystery and was considered creepy.

Human intervention in Joshua's work is presented in the form of a human being who has died from Covid-19 wrapped like a mummy. In addition, there is a proximity factor because this pandemic is still ongoing and around us. Indirectly, this gives an appeal and a frightening effect for some people.

Joshua made this photo in a hospital room setting with dim lighting which adds to the gloomy aura of the photo (Wijayanti and Mochamad, 2020:267). The dim lighting is made to give a mood of sadness, gloom, loss, solitude, void, and emptiness. This is a fact because from the beginning people who were confirmed positive for Covid-19 were required to be isolated in a room or hospital room with minimal human interaction. And if they do not survive the treatment process, they will die in solitude and no relatives are allowed to perform rituals to honor the corpse as usual (Wijayanti and Mochamad, 2020:268). This aspect strengthens the presence of audience factor in which Joshua tried to provide visual facts in the form of a stiffly lying corpse left alone without being accompanied by relatives. In this photo, Joshua wanted to express that the Covid-19 virus is very dangerous, as quoted in his photo caption on Instagram:

> "The image is published here today as a reminder and a warning, of the ever-looming danger. To inform us of the human cost of coronavirus and how world governments have let matters get so far. As we head towards the second wave of the pandemic, people must realize they cannot take this matter lightly." (@joshirwandi, Instagram,2020).

3. Elements of Message Compilation in Covid-19 Photo by Joshua Irwandi

Photojournalism made by Joshua Irwandi shows how terrible the consequences of the Covid-19 virus are. In the elements of message arrangement, Joshua Irwandi's photo is included in the preparation of persuasive messages using fear appeal and emotional appeal.

a. Fear appeal is part of the preparation of persuasive messages of which message preparation can cause fear in its audience. Joshua made this photo with dim lighting, adding a gripping impression to the figure of a human body wrapped in plastic to resemble a mummy figure. Visually, this composition adds to the effect of fear in the audience.

b. Emotional appeal is part of the preparation of persuasive messages which can arouse the emotions of its audience. The photo can cause the effect

of shock and emotion of sadness from the audience when they see the corpse lying stiffly alone without any accompanying relatives.

CONCLUSION

This Covid-19 victim photo created by Joshua Irwandi sought to raise public awareness of the dangers of the virus. Using a persuasive approach, Joshua made this photo look tense with dim lighting. Making photos using the fear appeal approach aims to give psychological attention to things which are usually feared or have risks which will then be connected to everyday life.

The symbols seen in this photo look quite clear, and can be found around us. In addition, this photo looks quite simple, but on the other hand, the messages conveyed through the visual is quite strong, therefore, the photographer's message can be conveyed well. Persuasive visual rhetoric will have an effect on the audience, if the visual symbols presented are familiar and close to the audience, and the issues or themes raised are current events.

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