



Analysis of Image Capture Techniques in Journalistic Photos of the Cik Puan Market Fire Disaster in Pekanbaru Online Media

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Abstract

Journalistic photos play an important role in conveying information to the public in a visual way. Photos taken in disaster situations, such as fires, have a special role because in addition to recording events, they also contain social and humanitarian values. This study aims to analyze the techniques of capturing images in journalistic photos that capture the Cik Puan Market fire disaster in Pekanbaru, as published by TribunPekanbaru.com media. The study used a qualitative descriptive method with a non-participant observation approach. The results of the study showed that the photos used successfully captured the emotions of the victims, the condition of the burned market, and the extinguishing efforts made. Journalistic photography techniques such as framing, angle, and timing greatly influence the message in each image. TribunPekanbaru.com media consistently presents photos that have high news value without the applicable journalistic code of ethics.

Introduction

Photojournalism plays a very important role in conveying messages and information to the public. The images captured and published in the mass media not only function as complements to news texts but also have the power to influence emotions and shape public perspectives on an event. One approach in photojournalism is human interest, which emphasizes the humanitarian aspects of an event with the aim of evoking empathy from the readers (Widarmanto, 2017).

The fire disaster at Cik Puan Market in Pekanbaru is one event that has garnered significant public attention. Local media, such as Tribunpekanbaru.com, have displayed various photographs depicting the aftermath of the fire. Through these images, journalists strive to convey the meaning behind the event, particularly in the context of human interest. Aspects such as the victims' sorrow, the sense of community, and the efforts to extinguish the fire become focal points emphasized in the journalistic photos. Analyzing the human interest meaning in these journalistic photos is crucial because it helps us understand how the media plays a role in constructing a visual narrative that elicits public sympathy. Furthermore, these photos serve as visual historical evidence that can be used to explore the social, emotional, and psychological impact of a disaster (Byford, 2018; Baumann et al., 2021; Wright, 2024; Ogie et al., 2022).

In the world of journalism, photos do not only serve as visual documentation but also as powerful communication mediums (Khotimah, 2021). Each photo carries its own message, which can be interpreted differently by the audience. Photojournalism with a human interest theme has the power to portray the touching human aspects, often highlighting the emotional side of an event. By focusing on people as the main subjects, these photos do not only convey

information but also create an emotional connection between the event being covered and the audience witnessing it (Raja & Carrico, 2021; León et al., 2022). One major event that has attracted media attention in Pekanbaru is the fire that occurred at Cik Puan Market. The photos published by Tribunpekanbaru.com not only show the scale of the damage but also highlight the victims' suffering, the struggles of traders who lost their livelihoods, and the efforts of the community and officials in tackling the fire. Through these photos, the media not only informs the public about the event but also evokes feelings of empathy and solidarity among its readers.

This study aims to analyze how the meaning of human interest is conveyed through the photojournalism of the Cik Puan Market fire, published by Tribunpekanbaru.com. The study will also examine how these photos can influence public perception of the event and have an emotional impact on readers. The phenomenon that is the focus of this study is how local media, such as Tribunpekanbaru.com, utilize photojournalism to convey human interest messages in covering the fire disaster at Cik Puan Market in Pekanbaru. The photos featured often display the facial expressions of the victims, the poignant atmosphere, and the social interactions that depict resilience and solidarity in the face of disaster. This phenomenon is interesting to analyze because it reveals how the media manipulates visual elements to evoke sympathy and emotional engagement from the readers (Gorton, 2009; Wirth & Schramm, 2005; Bouko, 2023).

Mass media, particularly online-based outlets like Tribunpekanbaru.com, have the speed to disseminate information. However, behind this speed lies a strategy to touch the public's emotions. In the case of this fire, the photos selected for display are not merely documentation of the event but also serve as tools to convey moral, humanitarian, and social care messages. This phenomenon illustrates how photojournalism functions as an effective visual communication tool in shaping narratives and building public perception of the disaster (Dahmen et al., 2018; Hadi et al., 2020; Nabilah et al., 2024).

The fire at Cik Puan Market in Pekanbaru, which occurred on February 19, 2023, was a tragic and heartbreaking event. The market was a bustling trading hub and a source of livelihood for many traders and local residents. In this incident, as many as 400 vendor stalls at Cik Puan Market were completely burned down, including clothing stores, groceries, and jewelry shops. In a journalistic context, the market fire is an interesting topic to cover because it has a significant impact on the community (Ishwara, 2005; Rahmitasari, 2013). Reporting on the market fire can provide the public with information about the causes of the fire and how to prevent such incidents. A market fire not only causes material losses but can also affect the economic and social life of the local community.

However, not all reporting on market fires is the same. There are differences in how journalistic photos are taken and processed, resulting in various meanings (Borges-Rey, 2015). Good journalistic photography can provide a clear and strong depiction of a market fire, while poorly executed journalistic photos can lead to misunderstandings and even exacerbate the situation. According to Thomson et al. (2022), journalistic photography functions not only as a visual document but also as a communication tool that can influence public perception of an event. In reporting on the market fire disaster, the journalistic photos displayed by the media outlet TribunPekanbaru.com have a high Human Interest value. These photos successfully capture dramatic and touching moments, such as residents trying to save their goods and the fire engulfing the entire market building. Therefore, mass media outlets like TribunPekanbaru.com play a very important role in providing accurate, timely information while also embedding Human Interest value in the news they publish.

Human Interest is an important aspect of journalistic photography because it brings empathy and concern to the society reading or viewing the news (Reza Fahlepi, 2024; Widi Anggraini

Putri, 2024). In the context of the Cik Puan Market fire in Pekanbaru, the Human Interest meaning in journalistic photography can raise public awareness about the importance of fire safety. Additionally, Human Interest can humanize the victims of the fire and highlight inspiring stories from rescuers or those supporting the fire response. The use of Human Interest in the news can enhance reader attention and evoke stronger emotions than news lacking such a value. This can help mass media attract readers' attention and broaden the reach of their news coverage.

This research is directed toward understanding the meaning of Human Interest in journalistic photography conducted by mass media in covering the fire at Cik Puan Market in Pekanbaru. Through the use of Human Interest in these journalistic photos, it is hoped that the humanitarian values within the news can be enhanced and that the public will become more aware of the importance of safety during disaster situations. The application of Human Interest in journalistic photography can provide a more complete and in-depth picture of the events covered and increase empathy among readers (Midberry & Dahmen, 2020; Kędra, 2016; Willis, 2003). In this regard, semiotic analysis has been chosen as the method of analysis, as it can help understand the deeper meanings contained in journalistic photography. Semiotics is the study of signs and the meanings they carry. By using a semiotic approach, researchers can analyze the various signs present in journalistic photos and understand the implied Human Interest meaning within them.

This study utilizes Roland Barthes' theory, which is relevant to discussing Human Interest meaning in journalistic photography. Human Interest photography is a form of photography that depicts people along with their emotions, visually capturing what they are experiencing, whether joy, sadness, confusion, despair, anger, and so on. Human Interest photos are usually taken naturally and without staging the subjects (candid). This is because the goal of Human Interest photography is to inform the audience about the circumstances the subject is facing. Human Interest photography has its own appeal because the emotions of the subjects are framed through the photos and conveyed to the audience to evoke sympathy. According to Barthes, every object or sign in a photo has the potential to carry different meanings depending on the context and culture (Bouzida, 2014; McGraw & Ungar, 1989). In the context of analyzing the journalistic photos of the Cik Puan Market fire in Pekanbaru on *TribunPekanbaru.com*, Barthes' semiotic theory can be used to uncover the meanings contained in these photos, such as symbols, metaphors, and their connotations.

For example, a journalistic photo showing the sad face of a market fire victim can be considered a symbol of empathy and concern for the victim and their family. In Barthes' semiotic theory, such symbols are referred to as "denotation," or the meaning that is directly visible from the object. However, journalistic photos can also carry more complex and hidden meanings, referred to as "connotation." For instance, a photo showing thick black smoke over the market can be interpreted as a metaphor for the destruction and loss felt by traders and shoppers. By using Roland Barthes' theory, researchers hope to uncover the Human Interest meaning contained in the journalistic photos of the Cik Puan Market fire on *TribunPekanbaru.com*. Barthes' semiotic analysis can help reveal hidden meanings in journalistic photos of natural disasters, such as those related to empathy, concern, and hope for the victims.

Methods

Research methodology involves a series of steps in seeking truth within a research study. These steps begin with the thought process that forms the problem statement, which then leads to the initial hypothesis. Generally, qualitative research is associated with data collection through observations that have been conducted. This qualitative approach is descriptive, aiming to depict all the results of the research. Qualitative research is generally used in the

fields of social sciences and humanities, particularly to examine in detail patterns and human behavior, as well as the factors underlying them. This type of research is usually difficult to measure quantitatively using numbers. The goal of qualitative research is to maintain the original form and nature of human behavior and analyze its characteristics in depth, rather than converting them into quantitative variables.

The approach used in this research is semiotic analysis based on Roland Barthes' model. According to Barthes, a photo has two types of meaning: denotative meaning and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning is the direct meaning, which can be understood through the reader's visual senses. Meanwhile, connotative meaning is more complex, involving the emotions of the reader and the values related to the information conveyed. Barthes also proposed six methods that influence images as accurate representations of reality: trick effects, pose, object selection, visual appeal, beauty, and grammar.

Research Location and Time, this research was conducted on the online news media portal Tribunpekanbaru.com by collecting news photos of the fire at Cik Puan Market in Pekanbaru, which were uploaded from February 19 to February 28, 2023. The research itself will take place after the proposal seminar. Research Data Sources, there are two types of data in this research: primary data and secondary data. Primary data is obtained from photos of the Cik Puan Market fire in Pekanbaru, available on the Tribunpekanbaru.com media portal. The primary data consists of photos related to the Cik Puan Market fire that were uploaded between February 19 and February 28, 2023. Meanwhile, secondary data for this research is taken from several theoretical books that serve as guidelines, as well as journals, articles, and other relevant literature. This data is expected to provide direction, as well as additional data that will be used as supplementary or comparative material for the primary data. Data Collection Techniques, non-participant Observation, documentation, data Validity, data Analysis Techniques.

Results and Discussion

The researcher collected journalistic photos from the online media Tribunpekanbaru.com related to the news coverage of the Cik Puan Market fire in Pekanbaru, which occurred on February 19, 2023. The photos collected are journalistic photos uploaded between February 19, 2023, and February 28, 2023. This meaning is related to the emotions and values that encourage readers to interpret the meaning. According to Barthes, connotative interpretation can be done through six procedures: trick effect, pose, object, aestheticism, and syntax.

Photo 1

Title: BREAKING NEWS: Severe Fire Strikes Cik Puan Market in Pekanbaru



Figure 1. Merchants Watching as Their Shops Are Consumed by Fire

Photo Caption: The fire consumes stalls at Cik Puan Market, Pekanbaru City, Sunday (19/2/2023). [Tribunpekanbaru.com/Fernando Sikumbang](http://Tribunpekanbaru.com/Fernando%20Sikumbang).

The caption below the photo helps confirm what is seen in the image. For instance, one might initially think this fire occurred in a different place, but the photo caption provides information about where and when the fire took place. The human interest element captured in the meaning of the photo is the mix of sorrow and exhaustion in the emotional expressions. The photo conveys the sadness of seeing the livelihoods of the merchants now burned to ashes. The weariness and sorrow are visible in two men, who are holding their waists with both hands, their faces showing exhaustion and grief as their source of income has been destroyed by the fire.

Photo 2

Title: Acting Mayor of Pekanbaru Listens to Complaints from Merchants Who Became Victims of the Cik Puan Market Fire



Figure 2. Acting Mayor of Pekanbaru at Cik Puan Market

Photo Caption: Acting Mayor of Pekanbaru, Muflihun, inspects the fire that occurred at Cik Puan Market, Pekanbaru City, Sunday (19/2/2023). [Tribunpekanbaru.com/Fernando Sikumbang](https://tribunpekanbaru.com/FernandoSikumbang).

The photo caption mentions that Acting Mayor of Pekanbaru, Muflihun, inspected the fire at Cik Puan Market, and the news title reads "Acting Mayor of Pekanbaru Listens to Complaints from Merchants Affected by Cik Puan Market Fire." This emphasizes that the mayor is concerned and cares about the disaster that has affected the merchants of Cik Puan Market.

The fire caused the merchants to lose their livelihoods and suffer material losses. In the photo, the mayor is seen listening to the merchants' complaints, with a woman beside him visibly crying, one of the merchants affected by the fire. The mayor standing among the merchants suggests that the government is making efforts to help them resume their businesses, especially with Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr approaching. The merchants surrounding the mayor want to voice their grievances as victims of the fire and inquire about how they can continue to sell their goods. The sadness on the faces of the merchants is evident, making it clear to readers how deeply the fire has impacted their lives and how they rely on their businesses at Cik Puan Market for their livelihoods.

Photo 3

Title: Cik Puan Market Fire in Pekanbaru: Ten Fire Trucks Deployed to Extinguish the Blaze



Figure 3. The Fire Still Burns, Consuming the Market Building

Photo Caption: A massive fire ravages hundreds of stalls at Cik Puan Market, Pekanbaru City, Sunday (19/2/2023). *Tribunpekanbaru.com/Fernando Sikumbang*.

The caption states that a massive fire engulfed hundreds of stalls at Cik Puan Market, emphasizing the scale of the disaster, with hundreds of buildings destroyed by the fire. The photo shows the fire still burning the market structures, creating thick black smoke. People nearby are seen watching the flames consume the buildings, seemingly resigned to the situation, while others try to salvage whatever goods they can. The human interest element in the photo includes the expressions of anxiety and panic amid the unfolding disaster.

Photo 4

Title: Tears Flow as Merchants' Stalls Burn During Asr Prayer at Cik Puan Market



Figure 4. Aftermath of the Fire at the Market

Photo Caption: Two firefighters stand amidst the ruins of Cik Puan Market, Pekanbaru City, which burned down Sunday (19/2/2023). *Tribunpekanbaru.com/Fernando Sikumbang*.

The caption highlights that two Pekanbaru firefighters are seen amidst the ruins of Cik Puan Market. This underscores the magnitude of the fire, which left only rubble after hundreds of buildings were consumed by flames. The photo shows the charred remains of the buildings, signifying the massive destruction. Even though the fire has been extinguished, smoke still rises from the ruins, adding to the overall sadness and grief. The firefighters, standing and visibly exhausted, are shown resting after their efforts to put out the fire. The news title also mentions the merchants' tears as their stalls were destroyed, further emphasizing their grief over losing their livelihoods.

Photo 5

Title: Pekanbaru Fire: The Cause of Cik Puan Market's Devastation by Fire



Figure 5. Cik Puan Market in Pekanbaru Burns Down

Photo Caption: Cik Puan Market caught fire on Sunday (19/2/2023).

Tribunpekanbaru.com/Fernando Sikumbang.

In this photo, the photographer captured an image that can be easily understood by viewers without requiring a caption. The researcher notes that the photographer successfully conveyed the purpose of the image. By just looking at the photo, readers can understand what happened, as the fire has caused panic among merchants and nearby residents, who gathered to put out the flames. The photo also illustrates how important the market is to the local economy. The image shows the interaction between the community members, all united in their efforts to extinguish the fire.

Photo 6

Title: Behind the Firefighting Efforts in Pekanbaru: Firefighters Travel Back and Forth 4 Kilometers to Fetch Water



Figure 6. Exhausted Firefighters

Photo Caption: Pekanbaru firefighters exhausted after extinguishing the fire at Cik Puan Market, Pekanbaru, Sunday(19/2/2023). Tribunpekanbaru.com/Fernando Sikumbang.

The photographer highlights how three firefighters appear in the foreground, visibly exhausted. The caption mentions that the firefighters were worn out after putting out the blaze, emphasizing the intensity of the fire and the challenge of inadequate water supplies. The news title explains that the firefighters had to travel back and forth 4 kilometers to fetch water. From their posture, it is clear how tired they are, with their hands resting on their hips and sitting while still holding the water hoses. The human interest element captured by the researcher is the firefighters' teamwork and perseverance, having to repeatedly fetch water over long distances, which left them exhausted.

Photo 7

Title: Cleanup of the Debris from the Cik Puan Market Fire in Pekanbaru Scheduled for Saturday



Figure 7. Debris from the Fire

Photo Caption: Condition of the remains of Cik Puan Market after the fire, Jalan Tuanku Tambusai, Pekanbaru City. *Tribunpekanbaru.com/Fernando Sikumbang*.

In this photo, the journalist (photographer) successfully conveys the intended message to the readers. The photographer aims to show the aftermath of the fire and the process of cleaning up the debris left behind. This highlights that the fire caused significant losses, both materially and in terms of manpower and time.

Photo 8

Title: Cik Puan Market Merchants Relocated to an Abandoned Building Temporarily



Figure 8. Cik Puan Market Merchants

Photo Caption: Several Cik Puan Market merchants set up their stalls near an abandoned building, Tuesday (21/2/2023). *Tribunpekanbaru.com/Doddy Vladimir*.

In this photo, the photographer successfully conveys the message to the readers. The image shows merchants who were victims of the Cik Puan Market fire still striving to sell their goods, even if only under makeshift tarps. The photo caption helps readers understand how these merchants are making every effort to continue earning an income, despite the basic conditions, in order to support their families.

In the analysis of the journalistic photos of the Cik Puan Market Fire in Pekanbaru, the researcher emphasizes the human interest aspect present in the photos, using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. The photos evoke several semiotic elements, both in the form of denotation, which directly explains the relationship between signifiers and signified in reality, and connotation, which conveys indirect (implied) meanings. The semiotic aspects described include journalistic photos that contain a humanitarian side. This analysis encompasses the results of eight journalistic photos that were studied.

The eight journalistic photos uploaded by the online media *Tribunpekanbaru.com* have nearly identical denotative meanings, although some of them have different meanings. As previously explained, denotation refers to the level of signification that depicts the relationship between signifiers and signified in reality, resulting in explicit, direct, and certain meanings.

The eight journalistic photos studied by the researcher certainly possess a variety of connotative meanings. Connotation has been previously defined as the level of indicators that explain the relationship between indicators and signified, where its meanings are indirect, non-explicit, and uncertain. However, from the various photos and their connotative meanings, the author concludes that the connotative meanings in these eight journalistic photos show activities or events that contain a humanitarian aspect (human interest).

The journalistic photos of the fire disaster at the Cik Puan Market in Pekanbaru, published by the online media *Tribunpekanbaru.com* from February 19 to February 28, depict the condition of the Cik Puan market that was burned and the handling carried out by firefighters. During that time frame, there are eight photos used by *Tribunpekanbaru.com* in reporting the Cik Puan Market fire.

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory concept is commonly referred to as two orders of signification. The first stage is denotation or meaning based on what is visible in the photo, while the second stage is connotation or hidden meaning in the photo. In the denotative stage, the research findings from the study of the eight journalistic photos of the Cik Puan Market fire on the online media *Tribunpekanbaru.com* overall represent human interest photos that show how the Cik Puan Market building was burned and the condition of the traders who were victims, as well as the efforts made by firefighters to extinguish the fire.

For example, in photos 1, 3, and 5, it is evident how the fire engulfing the market with thick black smoke caused citizens and traders present at the market to gather, attempting to extinguish the fire and save any salvageable items. Meanwhile, photos 4 and 6 show the struggle of the firefighters who successfully put out the fire, with photos 4 and 6 also revealing debris from the burned building scattered around.

In photo 2, there are concerned parties regarding the fire, such as the acting mayor of Pekanbaru who came to the fire site to listen to the complaints of the affected traders. Likewise, photo 8 depicts how traders continue to sell their goods. Photo 7 shows efforts to clean up the debris from the fire, so that it can be restored and rebuilt as a place for traders to sell.

In the second stage, which is connotation, the author's research findings regarding the implied meanings in the eight journalistic photos of the Cik Puan Market fire indicate that these photos can be understood not only based on what is visible but also have deeper meanings. The entirety of the photos containing human interest value can be interpreted more profoundly by uncovering the hidden messages within them. For instance, in photos 4 and 6, firefighters battling the blaze had to work hard to extinguish the fire, needing to make trips back and forth for 4 kilometers to find water, until the fire was finally put out, showing the firefighters' exhaustion.

On the other hand, photos 1, 3, and 5 show the panic of citizens and traders as they witness their livelihood going up in flames, leaving them confused about what to do next. Photo 8 shows the traders expressing gratitude for being able to sell, even if they had to use tarps to shield their goods and themselves from the heat and rain. Meanwhile, photos 2 and 7 depict government efforts to assist the affected traders in ensuring they can continue to sell comfortably. Based on the category of journalistic photography, the photos of the fire disaster fall into the category of spot photos, or photos taken without prior planning.

According to the journalistic ethics that must be followed by journalists, in producing and disseminating information through photos regarding the Cik Puan market fire, the researcher found no violations of the code of ethics. One of the articles of the code of ethics that journalists and media often violate when providing information through images is Article 4, which states that "journalists must not create false, defamatory, or gruesome news." The photos used by Tribunpekanbaru.com did not contain such violations.

The author analyzed the eight journalistic photos using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Barthes illustrates two levels of signification, namely denotation and connotation. In the interpretation of connotation, there are six stages explained: Trick Effect, Pose, Object, Photogenia, Aestheticism, Syntax. This theoretical approach aids the author in uncovering deeper meanings beyond what is visible in these photos.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings by the researcher, the semiotic analysis of the photos of the Cik Puan Market fire in Pekanbaru, using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, reveals that the photos of the fire disaster published by the online media Tribunpekanbaru.com contain news values of human interest. These photos narrate the emotions of the victims and depict how the fire consumed the buildings where the traders conducted their business, as well as the struggles of the firefighters to extinguish the flames and the efforts made by the traders to continue earning a living.

From February 19, 2023, to February 28, 2023, the online media Tribunpekanbaru.com adhered to journalistic ethics in its efforts to produce and disseminate information regarding the fire at the Cik Puan Market in Pekanbaru. Referring to the problem formulation and research objectives outlined at the beginning, the researcher observes that alongside these photos, photojournalists also convey messages that evoke human interest for the audience. By framing the expressions of the traders and the struggles of the firefighters in saving merchandise and extinguishing the fire, Tribunpekanbaru.com consistently provides information of human interest without violating the applicable journalistic code of ethics.

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