

**W.J.T. MITCHELL'S MULTIMODALITY ANALYSIS TO REVEAL
PHOTO-TEXT MISINFORMATION DURING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC PERIOD IN INDONESIA**

Anastasia Jessica Adinda Susanti

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1621-6378

Student of Doctoral School of Philosophy, University of Szeged, Hungary

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to reveal photo-text misinformation during the COVID-19/ coronavirus pandemic in Indonesia, by using W.J.T. Mitchell's multimodality analysis. Massive digital misinformation can lead to serious damages in the real world, such as violence, hatred spreading, and even death. The method of this research is hermeneutic. The empirical object of this research is photo-text misinformation that is circulated in social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. The author interprets this empirical object from Mitchell's multimodality analysis perspective. In conclusion, photo-text misinformation is an example of an 'image/text' relationship, in which there is a problematic gap between visual representation and text. There are three 'image/text' forms of misinformation during COVID-19 in Indonesia: 1) photo and false comment; 2) photo and false text in messenger app; and 3) photo and false inscribed text. To reveal this misinformation, the composite of image and text/ 'imagetext' should be considered as 'image-text'. In 'image-text' relationship, the visual representation is nesting in some discourse from economic, politics, to social context.

Keywords: W.J.T. Mitchell, Multimodality, Photo-text, Misinformation, Covid-19, Indonesia

1. Introduction

Misinformation in digital media is not a novel issue, but up to now we still face the same problem, which is massive misinformation from political propaganda, racism, fundamentalism, to coronavirus misinformation that are circulated in our screen. The World Economic Forum 2013 had warned about massive digital misinformation that can cause 'digital wildfires'. Digital wildfires happen when false information in digital media causes damage in the real-world. (World Economic Forum Reports, 2013). In digital media, manipulation of information is more

easily to be done than in analog media. Internet users can use and alter information even after it was just released. (Lim and Nekmat, 2011: p.2).

One of popular form of misinformation is photo-text. In this form, the creator combines an ‘out-of-context’ photo with text. The photo is pulled out from its original context and is given new text by the creator that causes misinformation. This method of misinformation is more simple than deepfakes that involve picture or video algorithms editing (Liza Fazio, 2020). Although simple, the photo-text misinformation has significant impact on internet users because can causes serious disadvantage consequences such as violence against other race, panic buying, and even death.

This research aims to use W.J.T. Mitchell’s multimodality analysis to reveal misinformation, especially in photo-text form, during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. W.J.T. Mitchell is media, visual art, and literature theorist. He is known for his work on the relations of visual and verbal representation.

This article is divided into five main parts: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, and Conclusion.

2. Literature Review

Over the last two decades, the monomodality mode of representation has been replaced by multimodality. Monomodality emphasizes only in a ‘highly valued genre’, which is writing’, while multimodality crosses the boundaries between various art, media, and disciplines. (Kress and Leeuwen, 2001: p.1). The fall of monomodality is marked by a great shift from the dominance of writing to the dominance of image, and also from the medium of writing-printing to the medium of screen. A combination of writing on the dominant image and screen affects the humans’ cognition and affective, culture, relation to the world, and knowledge. (Kress, 2003:p. 1).

The crossing boundaries of multimodality has inspired twentieth-first hermeneutic and semiotic thinkers to develop a multimodality analysis, among of them are W.J.T. Mitchell (“Picture Theory”, 1994), ” Kress and Leeuwen (“The Grammar of Visual Design”, 1996), and James Elkins (“Visual Literacy”, 2009). (Anderson, 2014: p.3).

Multimodality analysis in media studies emphasizes the combination of media (John Bateman, 2014: 6) and its relation to various disciplines, that range from anthropology, philosophy, politics, psychology, visual media, cultural studies, linguistics to semiotics. (Gül Esra Çoşkun, 2015: p.40). W.J.T. Mitchell-- one of the key figures of multimodality analysis asserts that media is always mixed media and there are no media that can individually operate. (Mitchell, 2005:

p.261). In the ‘pictorial turn’ era, in which the abundance of image dominates our culture, picture is not only naive mimesis of reality but intertwined with apparatus institutions, bodies, and various discourse. (Mitchell, 1994:16). In his work “Picture Theory” (1994), he proposes a new approach to the study of mixed media, which is pictures that capable of making self-reflection or theorizing about themselves. In this book, he also traces verbal-visual interactions to power, value, and human interest. (Gander and Garland, 2013: p.116)

In the age of digitalization, multimodal representation is getting more familiar, from the television show, film, apps on the smartphone, to AI home robots. Hermeneutics and semiotics no longer speak in the specialized theoretical or monomodal mode, such as linguistics for language, art history for visual art, musicology for music, and so on. The need for multimodal analysis is inevitable. In the digital era, the different modes of representation from image, sound to verbal not only can operate in unified technology but also can be interpreted on unified semiotics, that based on multimodality analysis (Kress, 2001: p.1-2)

3. Methodology

The method of this research is hermeneutic that consists of the following elements: interpretative analyses, inductive-deductive, social-political-historical continuity, comparison, heuristics, and descriptive. Firstly, the author collects the empirical object of this research, which is photo-text misinformation that is circulated in social media during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. Secondly, the author filters relevant misinformation from various sources, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and turnbackhoax.id--an Indonesian fact-checking website. There are 92 photo-text misinformation related to COVID-19 that have been found by the author in the archive of turnbackhoax.id from January-July 2020 (per July 26th, 2020). Thirdly, the author chooses three representations of photo-text misinformation based on the kind social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp), issues (economy, social, politics), and social impact (scarcity of goods, marginalization, hatred spreading). Fourthly, the next step is to analyze the empirical object in the perspective of Mitchell’s multimodality theory.

4. Results and Discussion

On the discourse of multimodality, Mitchell divides three typography of the relationship between image and text. First, “image/text” is the traumatic gap between image and text. (Mitchell, 1994: p.89). In ‘image/text’, image and text work in dissonance rather than in concord. (Carter, 2007). Secondly, “imagetext” appears on the composite image and text in works or concepts (Mitchell, 1994: p.89), such as graphic narratives, comics, photo texts, poetic experiments with voice and picture, etc. This is the ‘literal’ manifestation of image and text composite. (Mitchell, 2015: p.39) Third, “image-text” is the *relations* of the visual and verbal, such as the relations of vision and

language in memory, the nesting of images (metaphors, symbols, concrete objects) inside discourse, and discourse/language in graphic/visual media. It is the 'figurative' version of the image and text composite. (Mitchell, 1994: p.89; Mitchell, 2015: p.39).

In this section, the author reveals the photo-text misinformation based on Mitchell's multimodality analysis.

4.1. Panic Buying at Mall



Image 1: photo, caption, and comment on Instagram about panic buying

Source: <https://star.grid.id>

On 2nd March, an Instagram account, posted photo of a man who stood by the stacks of instant noodle cardboards in a supermarket, with the caption "Monday (2/3) the condition in some supermarkets that are crowded with buyers" ("Senin (2/3) kondisi sejumlah supermarket yang dipadati oleh pembeli") (image 1). This post got a reply from an account that said:

*"Let's make this viral, DON'T BE PARANOID, don't need to RUSH SUPERMARKET * To all my brothers and sisters in the country, this morning our President Jokowi had just announced that there are two citizens who positively infected by Covid-19. This afternoon many of our brothers and sisters are paranoid, panic stormed (rush) the supermarket to buy goods"*



Image 2: Revealing Panic buying Misinformation

Source : <https://www.indozone.id>

On the same day, an account twitter uploads the screenshot of a personal message from someone who claims as the child of a man in that photo (image 2). The twitter account owner apologized for his carelessness to retweet misinformation. The personal message said that his father is a wholesaler, and they shop every day in Aeon Mall BSD City. They objected if that photo was uploaded as entertainment content and asked the twitter account owner to delete the tweet.

This misinformation (image 1) is an example of ‘image/text’ relationship. There is a gap between image and text. It combines a photograph with the comment as false text. Furthermore, to reveal this misinformation, the composite image and text/ ‘imagetext’ should be considered as ‘image-text’. In the “image-text” relationship, visual representation is nesting in some discourse and there is textual aspect/discourse in visual representation. For example, this image involves discourse from other disciplines or realm, which are economic and social fields. This posting was uploading amid the coronavirus spreading and leads to the interpretation that there is a panic buying in the supermarket. It might be beyond the expectation of the post creator. However, the combination of photo and false text comment can be misinformation, it seemed to indicate that the man in the photo was panicking buying. In addition, instead of prevent panic buying, this photo-text misinformation potentially spread panic buying.

To analyze this photo (image 1) from a multimodality perspective, other discourse about this photo is needed. Discourse in visual representation is not only resulted by the text that is attached beside the photo, but also by the text/discourse on the social context of this photo. By awareness of social context and fact-checking, internet users can help to stop misinformation spreading. To trace other discourse about a photo, internet users can use a reverse image search, such as Google search for image (in Google Chrome, users are right-clicking on a photo and click “search google for image”), Yandex (Russia’s image database web), or Tineye (image search and recognition web). (Liza Fazio, 2020).

4.2. “Don’t pass there, there is a family that is infected by coronavirus”



Image 3: Misinformation on Whatsapp

Source: <https://turnbackhoax.id>

On June 2nd, turnbackhoax.id reported some photos that were circulated on Whatsapp (image 3), show several members of the Covid-19 Handling Task Force of Samarinda are using a complete PPE (Personal Protective Equipment). The narration of the photos is “Don’t pass 12th Tenggiri street, there are 12 people in a family who are infected coronavirus”. Fact-checking to the authority results in different narratives. Samarinda City Health Office, Ismed Kusasih, told selasar.co, that the disinfectant spraying activity in that photos was unrelated to the positive coronavirus patient. The family member of the house was not positive coronavirus patient or in isolation circumstance. Those photos are sterilized houses of patients under supervision who have been picked up to IA MOEIS Hospital.

Those photos and messages on Whatsapp (image 3) demonstrate an ‘image/text’ relationship. There is a rupture between image and false text message. In order to grasp more comprehensive meaning of this image and text composite/‘imagetext’ post, the message recipient can incorporate the image with other discourse, from outside of the narration of photo. Fact-checking to the authority can be one of the options to know alternative narration. If asking the authority needs a lot of time, users can track the news or image on the internet and compare two or more sources. Ensuring to get accurate information can avoid the user from misinformation. Furthermore, it also saves the victim of misinformation message from marginalization. In fact, the family that resides at that house are not positive coronavirus patients. The misinformation about them can lead to the refutation of locals against them or difficulty in getting access to daily needs.

4.3. “Coronavirus is easy to overcome if I become China’s president...”



Image 4: Misinformation on Facebook

Source : <https://turnbackhoax.id>

Other kind ‘image/text’ misinformation is a photo with false text that is inscribed on it. A Facebook account upload a photo of President Jokowi with inscribed text: "Corona is easy to overcome if I become CHINA's president, keep that in mind ... !!"(image 4). The Facebook account owner also added a comment about this photo, "AGREE SO MUCH, BRING ‘CEBONG’ (a mock for Jokowi’s Supporter) AS A VOLUNTEER OF CORONA IN CHINA."



Image 5: Misinformation Revealing on Instagram

Source : <https://turnbackhoax.id>

Turnbackhoax.id traces the photo and finds that source of the photo is President Jokowi's Instagram account (image 5). In this post, President Jokowi warns the mass media to respect the patient's privacy.

As the ‘image-text’ relation, the internet users can trace alternative discourse of this visual representation (image 4). The further exploration of this photo shows that the Facebook post (image 4) is misinformation. It uses the original photo of President Jokowi with false text (image 5). The political context of this misinformation is Jokowi's contention with opposition in the second presidential election (2019). The opposition movement accused Jokowi of secretly become a kowtow of the Chinese Communist Party. (www.voanews.com). This ‘imagetext’ misinformation is one of the strategies to maintain false accusing by attacking the personality of Jokowi. The social impact of this misinformation is hatred spreading against Jokowi and Jokowi's political supporters.

5. Conclusion

In this research, the author uses Mitchell's multimodality analysis to reveal misinformation, especially in photo-text form, during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. These are some conclusions of this examination:

1. Photo-text misinformation is an example of 'image/text', in which there is a problematic gap between visual representation and text.
2. The 'image/text' relationship in photo-text misinformation during COVID-19 in Indonesia demonstrates in three forms: 1) photo and false comment in social media; 2) photo and false text in messenger app; 3) photo and false inscribed text in social media.
3. To reveal these misinformation, the composite of image and text/'imagetext' should be considered as 'image-text'. In 'image-text', the visual representation is nesting in some discourse that is sourced from other disciplines or fields, such as economic, political, or social context. Further discourse about the 'image-text' also can be found by using a reverse image search.
4. Mitchell's multimodality analysis can be used by internet users to reveal the misinformation post.

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<https://monoskop.org/W. J. T. Mitchell>

<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia/indonesian-opposition-movement-accuses-president-authoritarianism>

The source of images:

Image 1: <https://star.grid.id/read/452048140/dituding-panik-hingga-borong-mie-segunung-hingga-fotonya-viral-di-media-sosial-anak-dari-bapak-ini-justru-ungkap-fakta-lain-saya-dan-papa-keberatan-dijadikan-konten?page=all>

Image 2:

<https://www.indozone.id/news/5jsXoB/fakta-foto-bapak-yang-borong-mie-istan-karena-virus-corona>

Image 3:

<https://turnbackhoax.id/2020/06/02/salah-jgn-lewat-tenggiri-gg-12-ada-12-org-yg-kena-sekeluarga/>

Image 4 and 5:

<https://turnbackhoax.id/2020/03/20/salah-corona-mudah-diatasi-jika-saya-jadi-presiden-china-camkan-itu/>