

Flip, Click, and Virtual Tourism: A New Trend in Experiencing Nature and Culture

Wahyu Budi Priatna¹, Abung Supama Wijaya², Hudi Santoso³, Renny Soelistyowati⁴, Harries Marithasari⁵, Diadji Kuntoro⁶, Fikri Fachrurizal⁷

^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7}Vocational School, IPB University, Indonesia Digital Communication and Media Study Program

ABSTRACT: This study examines the role of visual elements in the digital magazine Explore Kuningan and the Online Flipbook of the Vocational School at IPB University in shaping immersive virtual tourism experiences. Using a descriptive qualitative approach along with visual content and semiotic analysis, this study explores the contribution of color, layout, and typography in creating aesthetic impressions and conveying local cultural identity. The results show that visual design functions as a sign system that builds cultural perception and users' multisensory experience, through color harmony, orderly layouts, and typographic expressions that reflect local and institutional values. This research introduces the concept of the aesthetics-locality nexus as a new theoretical framework connecting cultural identity with digital design in the tourism context. Its practical implications provide guidance for digital media developers and tourism agencies to integrate semiotic approaches into visual communication strategies. This study enriches the global literature with a Global South perspective and opens opportunities for further research using mixed methods to examine the relationship between visual elements and user responses.

KEYWORDS: digital magazine, virtual tourism experience, visual semiotics, visual communication design, digital tourism, cultural identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has transformed the way people interact with information and visual experiences, including tourism and communication media. In this digital era, visual media such as digital magazines have become a new platform that combines aesthetics, technology, and interactive information. Digital magazines now serve as conveyors of information and visual experiences that stimulate imagination and emotions. User interface (UI) design and user experience (UX) have become central elements in developing engaging digital media, especially in tourism and digital culture [1]. With the rise of mobile devices and social media, tourism is experienced both physically and virtually through immersive visual content [2]. This phenomenon highlights the importance of visual design in digital media for shaping perceptions, cultural identity, and aesthetic values in global society.

Nationally, tourism digitalization in Indonesia has grown rapidly along with the increasing need to promote local potential through visual media that is adaptive to digital audiences. The government and creative industry players are utilizing digital magazines as tourism promotion media that integrate cultural narratives. There is an academic gap in studies of local digital magazine visual design, particularly regarding how aesthetic elements influence user experience and perceptions of local culture. Although studies [3] show the importance of accessible interfaces in the context of Femina's digital magazine, there is still little research examining the semiotic dimensions of such designs. The gap in this research is important to explain how visual design plays a role in shaping immersive experiences and cultural meaning [4]. The relationship between visual storytelling, user experience, and visual semiotics is key to understanding modern digital magazine design. The study [5] emphasizes that text and images work as a semiotic unity that forms the narrative of tourist destinations. The concept of storynomic tourism becomes relevant [2]. The research [6] shows that the interpretation of signs in tourism advertisements can alter the understanding of cultural identity. The study [7] asserts that multimedia storytelling shapes participatory experiences through the integration of visual and textual communication. This study analyzes visual elements in the digital magazine Explore Kuningan and the IPB University Vocational School Online Flipbook to understand how design elements shape an engaging virtual tourism experience.

This research seeks to answer: (1) the most dominant visual elements in creating a virtual tourism experience, (2) the contribution of color and layout to the aesthetic impression, and (3) how visual elements convey local cultural identity. The

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approach used is descriptive qualitative with visual content analysis. This research contributes to two main areas. First, it broadens insights into the integration of semiotic theory and user experience in the context of Indonesian digital tourism magazine design. Second, the findings can serve as a guide for designers and digital content developers in creating engaging and authentic visual media. The novelty of this study lies in its visual analysis approach, which integrates semiotic, aesthetic, and user experience dimensions to understand the role of design in shaping perceptions of digital tourism [8], [9].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is based on three main theories: user experience theory, visual semiotics theory, and visual storytelling theory. User experience theory examines human interaction with digital media through cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions [10]. Visual semiotics focuses on the meaning of visual signs that represent ideas and cultural values through design symbols [11]. Visual storytelling theory explains how visual narratives build emotional appeal through the combination of aesthetics and digital technology [12]. The integration of these three theories forms the conceptual basis for understanding the relationship between visual design, user experience, and cultural representation in digital tourism magazines.

Previous studies have shown that visual design has a significant influence on brand identity formation and user perception of digital media. A study by [13] highlights how the consistency of design elements such as color, typography, and layout can build a strong brand identity. Research by [13] affirms that graphic design plays an important role in fostering a positive perception of academic institutions. In the context of tourism, [2] demonstrates that the use of local symbols in digital content can spark tourists' imagination and strengthen their connection with a destination. These studies underscore the importance of visual elements in creating both aesthetic value and effective communicative function.

There is a research gap in the context of local digital magazine design, specifically in the semiotic analysis of visual elements that shape cultural meaning and the user's aesthetic experience. Previous studies have focused more on technical aspects and visual marketing, such as optimizing design for promotion, but have yet to explore how signs and visual narrative structures work to build cultural representation [14]. Visual semiotic research tends to concentrate on social media or advertising, rather than digital magazines, which have more complex narrative structures [15]. This indicates the need for in-depth studies on the integration of design, visual narrative, and user experience in local digital tourism media such as Explore Kuningan.

This article integrates visual semiotic analysis and user experience theory in the study of digital magazine design. This approach aims to understand how color, layout, and typography function symbolically in shaping virtual tourism experiences. This study contributes to the development of qualitative visual research methodologies through in-depth visual observation. In a global context, research on visual semiotics and digital storytelling explains the formation of participatory experiences [16]. However, this study offers novelty by placing the local context and Indonesian cultural aesthetics as its primary focus.

Theoretical trends in the past five years indicate a shift from the use of visuals as promotional media toward tools for cultural communication and participatory digital experiences. Research on visual narratives in social media affirms that social media is an important arena where cultural meaning is shaped, represented, and negotiated through interactive and authentic visual stories, involving various actors and communities in the ongoing process of creating cultural meaning [17], [18], [19]. Research [20] shows that short films based on semiotics are capable of constructing persuasive messages in tourism promotion through culturally meaningful visual approaches. In a broader context, the semiotic approach is used in big data visualization to understand the ideology underlying modern visual design [21] showing that semiotics is becoming a relevant analytical tool in the digital context.

The methodological approach in visual studies has evolved. Recent research uses a combination of visual observation methods, content analysis, and aesthetic reflection to examine the meaning of digital design elements [22]. Several studies affirm that interactive digital content design on online tourism media is crucial because it can increase engagement, build positive perceptions, strengthen loyalty, and provide users with relevant personalized information. All these aspects synergistically influence users' decisions to choose certain tourist destinations through digital platforms [23], [24], [25], [26].

Based on the synthesis of the studies conducted, this research is grounded in a conceptual framework that integrates user experience theory, visual semiotics, and visual storytelling as its analytical framework. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in combining semiotic and user experience perspectives in the design of digital tourism magazines, an area that has not been widely explored. This research expands the understanding of the role of visual design as a dynamic form of cultural communication and as a medium for creating immersive tourism experiences through meaningful visual narratives.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research applied is descriptive qualitative research using a visual case study strategy, aimed at understanding the meanings of the design elements in the digital magazine Explore Kuningan and the Online Flipbook of the IPB University Vocational School. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objective, which focuses on visual interpretation and user

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experience of digital media based on tourism and education. The qualitative method enables researchers to explore the aesthetic and symbolic aspects of the visual composition of the digital magazine [27]. The case study strategy was selected for an in-depth analysis of the two research objects, considering cultural context and user experience, in line with semiotic principles that emphasize the interpretation of visual signs in a social context [28].

The data source used is primary qualitative data obtained from direct visual observation of digital magazine designs. The primary data includes visual elements on the digital magazine pages, such as dominant colors, layout composition, typography, illustration, and interactive elements that shape user experience. This study also uses secondary data in the form of scientific literature and relevant theories, including theories of visual semiotics, user experience, and visual storytelling. The literature sources are taken from reputable international and national scientific journals to support the analysis of the visual observation results [29].

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth visual observation and digital documentation. This observation involved analyzing each page and design element in the digital magazine using an observation guide based on visual semiotics theory and user experience. The process includes identifying color composition, layout structure, typographic choices, and the appropriateness of illustrations with respect to the cultural messages and tourism themes presented. Documentation was conducted by taking screenshots for further in-depth analysis. In the context of visual research, observation is participatory-interpretative, in which the researcher positions themselves as a reader experiencing an aesthetic interaction with the visual content [30]. This technique also refers to methodological guidelines in visual communication design research, which emphasize triangulation between observation, interpretation, and media design theory [31].

The inclusion criteria for data in this study comprise: (1) digital magazines focused on the promotion of tourism or visually-based education; (2) magazines officially published by institutions or organizations with established credibility; (3) magazine content containing representative visual elements such as color, typography, layout, and illustration; and (4) digital media that can be accessed publicly through online platforms. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria include: (1) general commercial digital magazines that are not relevant to tourism or education; (2) media with low resolution quality that hinders visual observation; and (3) content that does not present sufficient visual elements for semiotic analysis. The selection of these criteria aims to maintain the validity of interpretation and consistency of visual analysis within the context of digital tourism research.

The unit of analysis in this study is the visual elements and design structure in digital magazines. Each unit is identified based on categories of visual elements such as color, typography, layout, illustration, and interactive elements. The analysis focuses on the function of these elements as signs that represent cultural meaning and virtual tourism experiences. The unit of analysis includes the relationships between elements that construct the overall visual narrative [14]. The relationships among visual elements are analyzed as a system of signs that create meaning through association, opposition, and cultural conventions.

Data analysis techniques include visual content analysis and qualitative semiotic analysis. Visual content analysis is used to categorize design elements based on aesthetic and visual functionality criteria, encompassing dominant colors, visual forms, and layout composition. Semiotic analysis is conducted to interpret symbolic meanings using Roland Barthes's approach, which distinguishes between denotation, connotation, and cultural myths [32]. A post-phenomenological approach is used to understand user interaction with visual elements in generating aesthetic experiences [33]. The results of visual interpretation are thematically categorized to identify patterns of meaning and their relevance to the narratives of digital tourism and local cultural identity. The analysis employs thematic coding techniques and is verified through theory triangulation among visual semiotics, digital aesthetics, and user experience [34].

This methodology is designed to be flexible and in-depth, allowing researchers to explore cultural representations, aesthetic values, and immersive experiences resulting from digital magazine design. By integrating semiotic analysis, visual observation, and user experience theory, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how visual design shapes perceptions and digital tourism experiences in the era of interactive media transformation.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Key Empirical Findings

The main results of this study reveal that visual design elements in the Explore Kuningan digital magazine and the IPB University Vocational School Online Flipbook play a significant role in shaping immersive virtual tourism experiences through three main dimensions: (1) color harmony and emotional atmosphere, (2) layout order and visual navigation, and (3) typographic expression and cultural meaning. Warm and natural colors such as green, blue, and brown dominate the design of Explore Kuningan, conveying an authentic sense of nature and fostering the imagination of a tranquil tourist space. In contrast, the IPB University Vocational School Online Flipbook uses a palette of soft colors and neutral contrasts that create an educational and professional ambiance. This pattern supports the finding that color functions as an affective medium that mediates users' aesthetic and

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cognitive experiences, as also explained by [35] that interactive narrative visualization can trigger different emotional engagement based on the audience's visual preferences.

Additionally, the layouts in both digital magazines demonstrate a systematic visual structure with proportional use of negative space and a linear reading flow from top to bottom, allowing readers to smoothly explore the content without losing focus. This aligns with the findings of [36] which show that visual order in digital content enhances perceptions of professionalism and credibility. In a semiotic context, layout functions as visual syntax that arranges the relationships between sign elements to form coherent meaning. Typographic elements, on the other hand, display a strong symbolic role in communicating local cultural and institutional character. The modern sans-serif typography in Online Flipbook reflects innovation and science, while the use of traditional serif in Explore Kuningan reinforces a cultural and narrative image rooted in locality. These patterns emphasize that digital tourism experiences are not merely generated from destination visualizations, but also from design structures that instill a sense of cultural identity and local aesthetic values.

B. Theoretical Interpretation

Theoretically, these results confirm and expand upon the principles of User Experience Theory put forward by [12] in the study of visual semiotics in animation, where user experience is constructed through the synesthetic relationship between form, color, and visual narrative. In the context of digital magazines, design is not merely a communication tool but becomes a system of signs that shapes a multisensory experience. These findings also support the view of [7] that multimedia storytelling operates within three semiotic dimensions: ideation, composition, and reception, which are interconnected in creating narrative engagement. The Explore Kuningan design, for example, creates a visual punctum through a strong composition of landscape images and the use of minimalist text, evoking an emotional response from readers.

This study also extends Roland Barthes' theory of visual semiotics through its application in a digital-interactive context. The colors and typography in Explore Kuningan function as connotative signs that trigger emotional associations with Sundanese cultural values and the beauty of nature. Meanwhile, the IPB Online Flipbook presents denotative signs in the form of formal visuals that signify scientific knowledge and academic discipline. This demonstrates the double encoding of meaning, allowing a single visual element to produce both functional and symbolic meanings [37]. Thus, semiotic theory is not only valid for print media, but also remains relevant in analyzing digital visual communication, where interactivity adds a new layer of meaning.

C. Positioning within International Scholarship

Internationally, the results of this study occupy a strategic position in the global discourse on digital visual design and cultural experience. This study converges with the findings of [4] on virtual immersivity, emphasizing that visual immersion in digital technology involves the construction of somatic relationships between users and media. The emotional engagement found in Explore Kuningan reinforces this idea by demonstrating how color-based design and composition can stimulate embodied experiences without the presence of virtual reality technology. On the other hand, these results differ from the research of [38], which highlights art exhibitions as a multimodal narrative medium; in the context of digital magazines, narratives are constructed through the integration of text and static visuals that remain perceptually interactive.

These findings also broaden the academic discourse on digital storytelling in tourism, as analyzed by [20], who identified that short films employ emotional semiotics to construct tourism persuasion. This study adds a new perspective, suggesting that digital magazines can also serve as cultural narrative spaces that function not only as promotional tools but also as reflections of local identity. In a methodological context, the visual observation approach applied in this research is also in line with the study by [11] on online semiotic research practices, where the researcher acts as a visual curator interpreting the relationships between signs through reflective and interpretive processes.

D. Contribution to Knowledge

The main theoretical contribution of this research lies in the development of a new conceptual model regarding the relationship between visual semiotics and user experience in the context of digital tourism media. This article introduces the concept of the "aesthetic-locality nexus," which refers to the interrelation between local identity and digital aesthetic design that creates immersive tourism experiences without relying on physical representations of destinations. Methodologically, this study enriches the qualitative visual research approach by combining semiotic analysis and user experience within a single interpretive framework. Contextually, this research contributes to the global literature by highlighting Indonesia as a case study on how local culture can be digitally represented through magazine design. This approach broadens the horizons of international research, which has so far been dominated by studies in Western countries as conducted by [39] [40] by bringing a Global South perspective into the discourse of digital cultural visibility.

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E. Practical and Policy Implications

Practically, the results of this research offer new guidelines for designers, digital media developers, and tourism organizations to integrate semiotic approaches into digital visual communication strategies. The findings on the role of color and layout in shaping cultural perceptions can be applied to the development of tourism destination promotional media, locally-based tourism campaigns, and digital educational platforms. Policy implications arise in the aspect of developing a digital tourism ecosystem, where regional governments and educational institutions can collaborate to create interactive visual archives that display local cultural narratives in an aesthetic and educational manner. In the context of the creative industry, the application of user-centered semiotic principles identified here can enhance the competitiveness of local media products in the global market, while also strengthening Indonesia's cultural diplomacy in the digital realm.

F. Integrated Analytical Synthesis

Analytically, the findings of this research build the argument that digital visual design is a narrative practice that connects aesthetics, culture, and user experience within a single dynamic system of meaning. In the context of digital magazines like Explore Kuningan, the virtual tourism experience is not merely the result of beautiful images, but rather of semiotic relationships that unite colors, typography, and layout into a cultural narrative that can be felt. By integrating theories of visual semiotics, user experience, and visual storytelling, this research demonstrates that digital design can serve as a new epistemic medium in the study of cultural communication and tourism. Theoretically, this article expands the boundaries of semiotics from the study of signs to the study of visual experience, and methodologically, it establishes qualitative visual analysis as a valid scientific approach to understanding cultural meaning in the era of interactive media.

V. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to understand how visual elements in digital magazines such as Explore Kuningan and the Online Flipbook of IPB University Vocational School shape virtual tourism experiences through the harmony of design and culture. The analysis shows that visual design serves as a system of signs that builds perceptions and cultural connections between readers and the digital representation of a place. These findings indicate that the digital tourism experience is formed through a design structure that produces cultural meaning in alignment with local values. This study affirms that digital magazines function as spaces for cultural communication, enabling symbolic interaction between users and visual narratives. The main scientific contribution lies in the development of the concept of the aesthetics-locality nexus in shaping virtual tourism experiences. Theoretically, this research demonstrates that user experience is symbolic and influenced by cultural context. This article positions Indonesia within the global scholarly conversation on digital cultural representation, bringing a Global South perspective that enriches the understanding of local aesthetics in digital experiences.

The practical implications of this study are important for digital media developers, tourism agencies, and cultural policymakers. The findings indicate that visual designs based on semiotics can enhance the appeal of tourism promotional media and increase digital audience engagement. For educational institutions, the research results can serve as guidelines for integrating cultural values into visual communication design curricula. This study emphasizes the importance of building a digital cultural tourism ecosystem that fosters collaboration among the government, academia, and the creative industry. This approach can be applied in educational promotion, as it demonstrates that visually representing sensitivity to local cultural values strengthens digital collective identity. This study has limitations: it is qualitative in nature with a focus on two case studies, interpretations depend on the researcher's perspective, and it has not yet involved empirical user data. These limitations present opportunities for further research using mixed methods to examine the relationship between visual elements and user responses.

This study demonstrates digital visual design as an epistemic medium that conveys information and shapes cultural awareness. By integrating visual semiotics theory, user experience, and cultural narratives, this article contributes to a new paradigm in the study of visual communication design and digital tourism. The research shows that the digital space is a living cultural space, where aesthetics and identity interact beyond geographical boundaries. This conclusion opens new conversations for future research that bridges design, culture, and human experience in the digital era.

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