

REIMAGINING THE PAST: VERNACULAR GRAPHIC DESIGN OF GRAFIS NUSANTARA AND ITS EMOTIONAL IMPACT ON DIGITAL AUDIENCES

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Abstract: This research analyzes the emotional impact of vernacular Indonesian graphic design from the 1960s–1990s, as archived by Grafis Nusantara platform, on Generation Z and Millennials. Using a netnographic approach, the research examines user interactions on Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), focusing on affective responses to vintage visuals. The results indicate that the use of dominant colors, hand-drawn illustrations, and decorative lettering play a key role on triggering shared nostalgic sentiment, evoking users to familial and cultural memories. This research asserts that emotional design significantly contributes in transforming cultural memory in the realm of digital media and provides meaningful contributions to the development of contemporary branding strategies using vernacular aesthetics.

Keywords: affective response, collective nostalgia, user interaction, Grafis Nusantara, vernacular design.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis dampak emosional dari desain grafis vernakular Indonesia pada era 1960–1990-an, yang diarsipkan oleh platform Grafis Nusantara, terhadap generasi Z dan Milenial. Dengan pendekatan netnografi, penelitian ini mengkaji interaksi pengguna di Instagram dan X (sebelumnya Twitter), dengan fokus pada respons afektif terhadap visual-visual vintage. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan warna dominan, ilustrasi manual, dan huruf dekoratif memainkan peran penting dalam memicu sentimen nostalgia bersama, yang membangkitkan ingatan pengguna terhadap keluarga dan budaya. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa desain emosional berkontribusi signifikan dalam mentransformasi memori budaya dalam ranah media digital, serta memberikan

kontribusi yang bermakna bagi pengembangan strategi branding kontemporer dengan memanfaatkan estetika vernakular.

Kata kunci: *respons afektif, nostalgia kolektif, interaksi pengguna, Grafis Nusantara, desain vernakular*

INTRODUCTION

Graphic design serves not only as a tool for visual communication but also as a cultural artifact that captures the values, lifestyles, and visual identities of specific eras (Barnard, 2013). It embodies and preserves socio-cultural dynamics, functioning as both an aesthetic expression and a historical document. In Indonesia, vernacular design elements found in domestic product packaging, food labels, advertisements, film posters, and other print ephemera from the 1960s to the 1990s were once commonplace in everyday life. These designs, often considered “low” or ordinary visual culture, have recently resurfaced through digital archival initiatives, most notably the *Grafis Nusantara* project.

Grafis Nusantara, as an independent curatorial platform, plays a crucial role in collecting and sharing archival Indonesian graphic materials via social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter/ X. These platforms allow historical visuals to reach new and broader audiences, especially in younger generations unfamiliar with the era firsthand. By leveraging the virality and accessibility of social media, the platform transforms static archival content into a dynamic source of affective engagement. What was once considered obsolete visual culture has now become a site of emotional and cultural rediscovery for younger generations namely, Generation Z and Millennials, who consume and interact with these visuals in ways that are at once reflective and participatory.

The resurgence of interest in vintage Indonesian design is especially compelling due to the affective response it triggers among digital audiences. Users often comment with personal memories, expressions of warmth, or nostalgic longing despite having no direct lived experience of the historical period represented. This phenomenon indicates the presence of transgenerational affective transmission, where cultural memory is transmitted not biologically or historically, but digitally and emotionally. The emotional resonance of these visuals demonstrates the power of design to evoke collective memory and forge a sense of cultural belonging in virtual environments.

The theoretical framework of emotional design provides useful insight into this process. As outlined by Norman (2004), affective responses to design occur at three levels: visceral (immediate sensory response), behavioral (practical interaction and familiarity), and reflective (cultural meaning and self-identity). In the case of vernacular Indonesian visuals, features such as warm color palettes, hand-lettered typography, and analog-style layouts seem to activate all three layers simultaneously. Additionally, research by Fokkinga (2020) supports the idea that visual design can prompt emotionally rich experiences, even in mediated digital contexts, especially when such designs tap into latent cultural identities and aesthetic memories.

Another relevant theoretical dimension comes from the domain of vintage branding. Scholars such as Brown (2003) have shown how brands intentionally invoke nostalgia to establish affective attachment, particularly by referencing the visual language of the past. In the context of Southeast Asia, this strategy intersects with efforts to revalue vernacular heritage in response to the homogenizing forces of globalized design. However, while emotional design and vintage branding have been extensively studied in Western contexts, there remains a lack of research examining how Southeast

Asian users engage with localized vernacular visuals through digital platforms. Particularly underexplored is the role of social media as a hybrid space for both the distribution and reinterpretation of cultural memory.

This study seeks to address that gap by examining how emotional responses and collective nostalgia emerge through the interaction between digital audiences and vernacular visual archives. It focuses on the *Grafis Nusantara* Instagram and Twitter/ X accounts as cultural interfaces that facilitate this exchange. Using a netnographic method, the research investigates user-generated narratives comments, reactions, and discursive practices surrounding archival posts featuring Indonesian design from the 1960s–1990s. The objective is to understand not only which visual elements provoke affective engagement, but also how these responses relate to broader concepts of memory, identity, and cultural continuity in the digital era.

In doing so, this research contributes to the interdisciplinary discourse on emotional design, digital nostalgia, and cultural memory, offering new insight into how graphic design can function as an agent of affective resonance across generations. The study also provides practical implications for contemporary design practices, suggesting that vernacular aesthetics might be revitalized not merely for their visual appeal, but for their capacity to connect audiences to a shared, emotionally charged cultural past.

METHODS

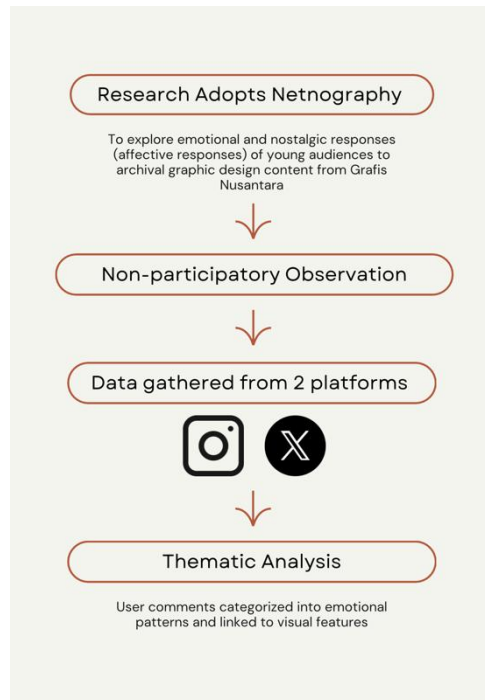


Figure 1. Analysis Schemes

Source: Personal Documentation

This study adopted a qualitative research approach by employing netnography to explore the affective and nostalgic responses of young audiences to archival graphic design content from *Grafis Nusantara* as seen in Figure 1. Netnography, as defined by R. V. Kozinets (2010), is an ethnographic method adapted to online communities and digital cultures, allowing researchers to observe naturally occurring interactions, meanings, and affective expressions without direct participation. This method was selected due to its suitability for investigating audience engagement with visual culture within digital spaces, particularly on social media platforms where historical design content is frequently encountered, shared, and discussed.

Data were gathered through non-participatory observation across two major platforms: Instagram (specifically the account @grafisnusantara), and

Twitter/ X (using keyword searches like “grafis nusantara” or “desain jadul”). These platforms were chosen because they are widely used by Gen Z and Millennial users and are rich in emotionally expressive interactions such as comments, emojis, reposts, and personal anecdotes. The researcher identified and documented approximately 10 to 20 posts from each platform that showcased vintage Indonesian visual materials and attracted high engagement levels.

The observation process involved systematically capturing screenshots and descriptions of visual content and user responses, including comments that expressed nostalgia, cultural pride, humor, or emotional reflection. These responses were then analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify recurring emotional patterns and their relationship to visual elements. Specific themes such as childhood memory, retro aesthetics, cultural identity, and ironic sentiment emerged from this process. These were then cross-referenced with dominant visual features like color palettes, typographic styles, and layout structures to understand how certain design elements triggered particular affective responses.

To ensure the validity of the findings, the research employed source triangulation by comparing data across three platforms. The method also followed thick description to maintain contextual richness and traceability in data interpretation. An audit trail was maintained throughout the research process to ensure transparency and replicability. Ethical considerations were observed carefully; only public posts were analyzed, user identities were anonymized, and the researcher did not interfere in any user interaction or discussion.

By focusing on how visual culture is emotionally re-experienced through social media, this methodological approach provided a lens to

understand the evolving relationship between design heritage and contemporary digital audiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section examines the findings of the netnographic analysis and provides analysis through interpretations based on theoretical frameworks that are related to emotional design, cultural memory, and digital affective communities. As previously described in the methodology, data were collected from two main platforms, Instagram and Twitter/ X focusing on interactions with archival content from Grafis Nusantara.



Figure 2. Grafis Nusantara Archives

Source: Instagram

The thematic analysis was conducted by categorizing user comments into recurring emotional patterns, such as nostalgic recollections, cultural identification, aesthetic appreciation, and humorous intimacy. These patterns were then interpreted in relation to specific visual features found in the archived designs. By combining visual cues (such as color, typography, and layout) with digital discourse, the study uncovers how vernacular design functions as cultural signs as seen in Figure 2.

To further strengthen the thematic analysis and highlight the emotional nuances embedded in users' responses, visual representations have been included. These visuals, ranging from annotated comments to categorization tables and vernacular design examples serve to illustrate how specific aesthetic elements correlate with emotional reactions in digital spaces. They do not merely support the findings but also allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the affective mechanisms triggered by vernacular graphic designs. By integrating these visual materials, the analysis situates the users' responses within both visual and discursive dimensions, offering a multi-layered perspective on how nostalgia and cultural identity are visually encoded and emotionally received.

The results are presented in six thematic subsections (a–f), each addressing a distinct aspect of emotional engagement with the visual archive. The final subsection (g) offers a theoretical integration of the findings, situating them within broader academic discussions on emotional design, nostalgia, and the role of netnography in design research.

The Dominance of Retro Aesthetics and Emotional Resonance

An analysis of 10 Instagram posts from @grafisnusantara and 10 related tweets on Twitter/X revealed that vintage aesthetics particularly from the 1970s to 1990s dominate the visual language. These include faded color schemes (pop tones), decorative typography, hand-drawn illustrations, and analog-style layouts.

Users, particularly from Gen Z and Millennials, expressed strong emotional connections, despite not having directly experienced the era. Examples of user comments include:

"Vintage vibes 🍷" (User IG01)

“Why did old designs feel so warm and honest?” (User TW02)

This emotional response reflects what Norman (2004) defines as the *reflective level* of emotional design, where meaning arises from personal or cultural reflection, even across generations.

Visuals as Triggers of Collective Digital Nostalgia

User reactions also demonstrate shared emotional memory, producing a form of *digital collective nostalgia*. For example:

“I like the design aesthetic of *obat obat cina*, it's giving the same sh*t *kyk packaging teh jaman dulu?* 😊” Translate: (“I like the design aesthetic of Chinese medicine packaging, it gives off the same vibe as old tea packaging.”) (User TW01)

“*Legend ini maahhh, penuh kenangan....*” Translate: (“This is legendary, full of memories...”) (User IG06)

“*Stiker macan yg melegenda*” Translate: (“The legendary tiger sticker») (User IG07)

“*Aromane khas w*” Translate: (“That scent that’s so me”) (User IG08)

According to Assmann (2011), cultural memory is carried through artifacts like product labels and print advertisements. These visual materials, when reactivated on social media, function as *memory markers*, creating affective communal spaces where users connect through shared emotional recall.

Affection Through Humor and Cultural Intimacy

Emotional expressions were often embedded in humorous or ironic tones, without diminishing their affective weight. Consider the following examples:

“Wah asian value 🔥” (User IG04)

“The wadimor, there will be champion in *taraweeh insyaallahh*” (User IG02)

This style of commentary aligns with notion of *cultural intimacy*, where familiar cultural elements are discussed through light-hearted humor, while still reinforcing emotional proximity and shared identity.

Vernacular Revival as Aesthetic Aspiration

Some users voiced a desire to see retro vernacular styles revived in contemporary design. For example:

“*Sumber inspirasi warga wargi.*” Translate: (“an inspiration for the community”) (User TW02)

“The rise of Western pop culture in the 1970s, especially its erotic undertones, sparked the creation of similarly kitschy visuals in Indonesia and Thailand.” (User IG02)

“*Stiker & label yang terdapat di buku ini diambil dari label bungkus rokok, batik, dan teh dengan gaya desain yang bernuansa religius hingga kultur pop.*” Translate: (“The stickers and labels in this book are taken from cigarette packaging, batik, and tea labels, featuring design styles that range from religious nuances to pop culture.”) (User IG03)

These comments suggest potential for *nostalgic branding* (Brown, 2003), where historical design elements become symbols of authenticity and trust. The younger audience actively seeks designs that reflect local identity and emotional depth.

Most Emotionally Resonant Visual Categories

Based on data categorization, the types of designs that generated the most emotional engagement include:

- Household product packaging as seen in Figure 3 (e.g., Cap Burung soap, cooking oil, spice brands)



Figure 3. Grafis Nusantara Household Product Label Archives

Source: Instagram

- Food and beverage labels as seen in Figure 4 (e.g., tea, coffee, condensed milk, bread wrapper)



Figure 4. Grafis Nusantara Label Archives

Source: Instagram

- Old Indonesian stickers as seen in Figure 5



Figure 5. Grafis Nusantara Sticker Archives

Source: Instagram

- Newspaper advertisements from the Old Order era as seen in Figure 6



Figure 6. Grafis Nusantara Old Newspaper Archives

Source: Instagram

These designs typically reference domestic environments and everyday experiences, making them especially effective in triggering emotional memory.

Table 1 Extracts of User Comments (Anonymized)

	User Excerpt	Comment	Type of Emotional Response
	"Arsip koleksinya Jaka membawa ke masa kecil.."	Translate: "Jaka's archive brings back childhood memories.."	Familial nostalgia
	"This sticker is so 90s Indonesia. it makes me feel calm."		Retro aesthetic appreciation
	"Recently, the nostalgic charm of Chinese-Indonesian vernacular design has sprung back to popularity within the Indonesian design landscape."		Transgenerational nostalgia



“Mari berharap bahwa diseminasi kebudayaan melalui inisiatif-inisiatif seperti ini bisa semakin berkembang ke depannya.”

Local design aspiration

Translate:
“Let’s hope that the dissemination of culture through initiatives like this will continue to grow in the future.”



“Pedagang pasar sentir bangga melihat ini *100*”

Humor and cultural familiarity

Translate:
“The pasar sentir vendors would be proud to see this *100*”

Source: Personal Documentation

These responses (as seen in Table 1) reflect a range of affective expressions, personal, collective, and aesthetic, underscoring the emotional potency of vernacular graphic design when mediated through digital platforms. The emotional responses observed in this study can be comprehensively understood through three levels of emotional design: visceral, behavioral, and reflective (Norman, 2004). These levels provide a layered framework to analyze how visual stimuli, such as the aged color palettes, hand-drawn illustrations, decorative typography, and analog layout styles from the Grafis Nusantara archives resonate affectively with digital audiences.

1. *Visceral level*: users exhibit immediate sensory reactions to vintage visual forms. Comments such as “aesthetic *banget*” (“so aesthetic”), “vintage! *Suka banget*” (“vintage! I like it”), or simply emojis like 🥰❤️ illustrate affective impressions formed without conscious processing. These reactions demonstrate the enduring appeal of retro design elements that are visually distinct and emotionally evocative.
2. *Behavioral level*: is activated when users associate these visuals with everyday domestic experiences.
3. *Reflective level*: illustrates how users form deeper cultural interpretations and emotional narratives around these visuals. Even those who never experienced the visual era firsthand articulate feelings of inherited nostalgia and cultural pride, such as “*aku belum lahir tapi ngerasa deket banget.*” (“I wasn’t even born yet, but it feels so close to me”). This suggests that cultural memory (Assmann, 2011) can be transmitted transgenerationally through digital visual culture. In this context, vernacular graphic design operates not merely as historical reference but as a living archive, constantly reinterpreted through affective engagement online.

Furthermore, the study reflects the emergence of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015), where emotional expressions shared on platforms like Instagram and Twitter form participatory networks of meaning-making. These affective communities strengthen a collective sense of belonging and identity by circulating, resharing, and recontext. This study finds that nostalgia is not merely an individual emotion but is socially constructed in online environments. These affective exchanges form affective communities, where users bond over shared sentiments around visual culture.

Designs archived by *Grafis Nusantara* function as cultural memory containers. They are not only curated representations of the past, but also live cultural materials that facilitate participatory memory practices among digital audiences. By utilizing netnography, this study captures naturally occurring affective responses without researcher interference. It reinforces (R. V. , D. P. Y. , & E. A. Kozinets, 2014) emphasis on reading user interactions—comments, emojis, and micro-narratives—as culturally meaningful data.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the visual design materials archived by *Grafis Nusantara* possess a strong affective impact on Indonesia's younger generations, particularly Generation Z and Millennials, despite their lack of direct experience with the visual eras represented. Key visual elements such as vintage color palettes, hand-drawn illustrations, decorative typography, and analog-era layouts emerge as powerful emotional triggers, evoking a deep sense of collective nostalgia tied to familial memories, childhood experiences, and local cultural identity.

By employing a netnographic method, the research effectively captures how emotional responses are organically produced and shared within digital platforms, particularly Instagram and Twitter/ X. These platforms serve not only as spaces for visual dissemination, but also as arenas for cultural negotiation, where users reinterpret the past and co-create affective narratives around vernacular graphic design.

The study's findings affirm that visual design functions beyond aesthetic or communicative purposes; it acts as a cultural medium through which emotional memory and identity are activated and sustained in

contemporary digital life. The novelty of this research lies in its application of netnography to explore collective emotional reactions to vernacular design, showing that nostalgia is not solely an individual sentiment but a socially constructed and digitally mediated phenomenon.

This research also demonstrates that even users without direct historical memory of these design artifacts can engage with them reflectively, suggesting that cultural memory can be transmitted transgenerationally through digital media. Future studies may expand this work by incorporating other archival platforms or exploring the role of visual nostalgia in branding and commercial design.

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