Multiliteracy in the Millennial Generation: A Case Study of Political Cartoons on Instagram Tempodotco

Adi Fadhilah Nurul Rahman

Postgraduate Communication Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article aims to explore how the millennial generation understands multimodal texts. The problem is focused on how readers construct real-world references from cartoons, narrate cartoons, interpret respondents’ facial expressions depicted, understand the relationship between text and images, and build metaphorical relationships between fictional cartoon scenes and political arguments. The data were collected through interviews with six people who were selected by year of birth as the millennial generation category and follow tempodotco on Instagram, but came from different backgrounds, and this data was analyzed qualitatively. This study concludes that political cartooning is a fairly complex process and requires one to draw from different literacies. The millennial generation’s experience with various related events also affects them in dealing with them and the reader’s familiarity with the cartoon genre, knowledge of cultural symbols, and the experience of analytical thinking about events and situations in the real world are also factors that determine readers.

Keywords: Millennial Generation; Political Cartoons; Visual Literacy


*Corresponding author:
E-mail: adi.fadhilah@ui.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Current technological developments have made the world of journalism migrate towards digital. For example is PT. Tempo Inti Media or commonly known as Tempo in the past only provided its publications in print, but current technological advances have made it migrate by publishing its news in digital form. Developments in the world of journalism are not just migration to the digital world, but the world of journalism is also changing by presenting visuals including headlines and illustrated images (Hampton, 2013). These changes were in part designed to increase the number of readers, including readers with limited educational backgrounds (Hampton, 2013). This was also done by Tempo, the presence of illustrations in Tempo publications is not only a complement to the news presented, but the illustrations have become journalistic speech itself (Desain Graphic Indonesia, 2015). The illustrations presented by Tempo are also not just ordinary depictions, but some of the illustrations that appear in its publications also contain satire on existing issues such as political and social issues. In a world that is increasingly dominated by this form of visual communication, many experts believe that the ability to understand visual texts is becoming increasingly important (Refaie, Multiliteracies: How Readers Interpret Political Cartoons, 2009).

Failure to understand the visual text can then also lead to undesirable things, for example, is the case experienced by Tempo when it published an illustration of news that showed Jokowi. Several parties later reported this illustration to the Press Council because they thought that Tempo had insulted Jokowi as the President of the Republic of Indonesia (Syafirdi, 2019). This case certainly shows how important multimodality is in understanding the illustrations presented by Tempo. Tempo’s migration to the digital world, of course, will make more and more parties get exposure to the illustration. An example is social media Instagram, according to data released by Napoleon Cat that in the January-May 2020 period, Instagram users in Indonesia reached 69.2 million (Iman, 2020). From this number, it is stated that Instagram users in Indonesia are dominated by the productive age group, in the range of 18-34 years or commonly known as the millennial generation (Iman, 2020). Even though political issues in the millennial generation are still considered normal issues, there are still parties in this generation who continue to follow news about politics and of course access them from digital media.

The previous study of this research is the research conducted by Elisabeth El Refaie (2009) with the title "Multiliteracies: How Readers Interpret Political Cartoons". The study aims to use a small-scale pilot study of media reader responses to three British cartoons to begin to understand how one would interpret the multimodal text. Participants in the study were academics from relatively homogeneous middle class backgrounds and highly educated. The participants were chosen by Refaie because they are considered to have the same interest in political matters. The results of this study show that for readers with high education and relatively good information about political events, reading cartoons in newspapers poses a considerable challenge and requires various kinds of literacy, including extensive knowledge of past events and events. current affairs, a good understanding of idioms and other linguistic phenomena, to the experience of analytical thinking about events and situations in the real world.

The next research is entitled "Young People’s Readings of a Political Cartoon and the Concept of Multimodal Literacy" by Elisabeth El Refaie and Kathrin Horschelmann (2010). This study aims to explore the concept of multimodal literacy by using the responses of young people in the UK to newspaper cartoons. The research found that political cartoons are complex subjects and require certain forms of literacy. This includes not only visual grammar, but also an understanding of the cartoon genre and how it is constructed with the intention of conveying certain meanings in certain social and cultural contexts.

The third research is entitled “The Multimodal Recycling Machine: Toward Cognitive-Pragmatic Theory of the Text/Image Production” by Ahmed Abdel-Raheem (2019). The study investigated the phenomenon of multimodal recycling with the aim of describing how intertext, on cartoons can be cataloged and labeled, as well as to illustrate some of the problems that arise in this procedure. The study found that cartoons can be viewed as a broad set of symbols along three main parameters: symbolic complexity, specificity,
and conventionality. These schemas are abstracted from the resulting or recycled images, and once defined as units, they can serve as templates that guide the formation of new images on the same pattern, as is the case in language.

Based on this phenomenon, researchers then analyzed how the millennial generation interpreted multimodal texts in the form of political cartoon illustrations found on Tempodotco's Instagram social media using the concept of multiliteracy. The millennial generation, which currently dominates the digital world, especially social media Instagram, certainly makes them easier to get exposure to Tempodotco's multimodal text. In addition, this study also tries to see whether the message that the creators of the political cartoon illustration wants to convey in Tempodotco has been successfully interpreted by the readers, especially the millennial generation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses case study method with descriptive type. This method is used to describe existing phenomena and real-life contexts that occur (Yin, 2009). This study uses three political themed cartoon illustrations that were broadcast by Tempodotco on Instagram. This study uses interviews with six people (A, D, F, H, K, and W) using three political cartoon illustrations taken from Tempodotco's Instagram. The three images are used by researchers with reference to three different political events. Researchers also avoid cartoons that refer to events that are not clear or may not be known to the respondents. The first picture entitled "Sixth Year Balance Sheet" discusses the second period of Jokowi's leadership as President of the Republic of Indonesia. It is stated that democracy and eradicating corruption are undergoing severe tests in this second period. This was then marked by the silence of critical voices through the hands of the apparatus. In addition, the economy is also facing serious challenges as a result of the upcoming pandemic event (Koran

Gambar 1. Sumber: Instagram tempodotco

Gambar 2 Sumber: Instagram tempodotco

Gambar 3. Sumber: Instagram tempodotco
Tempo). The second picture with the title "KO" discusses the current situation being experienced by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). The situation was when the Constitutional Court (MK) rejected a judicial review that questioned the procedure for revising the KPK Law. At the same time, 75 KPK employees who did not pass the national insight test were in a worrying position. Even the chairman of the Corruption Eradication Commission, Firli Bahuri, is said to be the architect of the eviction of the 75 KPK employees (Koran Tempo). The last picture, entitled "Abrakadabra Vaccine Nusantara" discusses the development of the Nusantara vaccine, which was initiated by Terawan Agus Putranto, former Minister of Health, this did not pass the clinical trial stage required by the Food and Drug Supervisory Agency (BPOM) and the World Health Organization (WHO). As a result of the sentiment of nationalism in this vaccine, a number of politicians in Indonesia support the vaccine based on dendritic cell technology, which was discovered by experts in the United States (Koran Tempo).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Multiliteracy, Visual Literacy, Millennial Generation and Political Cartoon

Multiliteracy, Visual Literacy. According to Elkins (2003), visual literacy refers to an adequate capacity to be able to identify images and describe them according to how readers refer to their world. In contrast to Elkins, some researchers in the field of visual rhetoric view that images can also express all kinds of non-literal and symbolic meanings (Huxford, 2001; Morris, 1993). Meanwhile, researchers in the field of social semiotics view that visual mode is able to embody many of the same complex meanings as verbal language, although in different forms. They also view that visual mode has a kind of grammar which then determines how visual elements are combined into a meaningful whole (Jewitt and Oyama, 200; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001).

The view of researchers in the field of visual culture sees that the goal of visual literacy training is to increase awareness of the power of images by developing a critical understanding of social functions and the effects of visual practice (Refaie, 2009). Visual literacy should also be seen as 'a kind of reading', in the sense that it then goes beyond the usual way of viewing visual material and requires various skills in framing, selecting, editing, and decoding the visual material that is around (Schirato and Webb, 2004). From the views of several researchers, the definition of literacy was then expanded to include the dual ability to read texts of a certain type, in a certain way and at a certain level, or can be known as multiliteracy (Gee, 1996). This approach can be regarded as a new approach in the sense of considering multiliteracy practices that occur as a result of technological change (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003).


In Indonesia itself there are also several experts who have opinions about this millennial generation. One of them is Hasanuddin Ali and Lilik Purwandi (2017) in their book entitled Millennial Nusantara, it is stated that this millennial generation is those who were born from 1981 to 2000. This generation was born in a culture full of innovation, so they will always want to make renewal their digital devices. According to Young, et al. (2013), this generation can use technological advances to communicate other than face-to-face.

Political Cartoon Genre. Political cartoons are a very specific genre. In the past, these cartoons were usually on a single panel published on the editorial or commentary pages of a newspaper. But now political
cartoons are also used as cover stories, just as digital tempo newspapers do. In general, these cartoons discuss current political issues or events, social trends, or a character’s personality, in their own way or by presenting a particular point of view. Although political cartoons are not always funny, they generally contain elements of irony.

The term cartoon was first used in the mid-19th century, when the British satirized using the title Punch for a series of humorous illustrations criticizing the government's plans for a new parliament and then comparing this luxury to the poverty that many ordinary people feel (Kleeman, 2006). While newspapers were still the dominant verbal medium, cartoons created visual sensations that are hard to imagine, and many cartoonists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were regarded as influential and highly respected political commentators (Walker, 1978). Today's cartoonists generally rely on widely shared cultural symbols and metaphors from popular culture, which often seem so natural that we accept them through almost unconscious thought processes (Edwards, 1997; Refaie, 2003).

Political cartoons generally operate on two distinct levels, on the first level they will tell an imaginary story about a made-up world, and on the second level will be more abstract, they will refer to real life events and characters. Viewers who understand cartoons at the level of their fictional narrative may find it difficult to discern real-life references, as this kind of interpretation requires an interest in public affairs and political knowledge. Edwards (1997) believes that political cartoons can also function as narratives because they encourage readers to complete this process of meaning in their heads. Political cartoons are often able to reveal certain types of essential truth, which in turn can encourage readers to see things from a new perspective (Refaie, 2009).

**Millennials Understand Multimodal Text**

During interviews, researchers always ask respondents to describe what they can see before trying to interpret the cartoon as a whole. This is done to make it easier for researchers to distinguish between several competencies involved in the interpretation process. This multiliteracy is explored by focusing on the following five questions: How do readers: (a) establish real-world references from a cartoon; (b) imposing narrative on cartoons; (c) interpreting the respondent's facial expressions depicted; (d) understand the text-image relationship; and (e) establishing a metaphorical connection between the fictional cartoon scene and political argument?

Setting Reference. In order to be able to read an image, the reader must first identify what in language is the lexis, namely the objects, places, people, and events described (Leeuwen, 2001).

Of the three images presented to the respondents, the third is quite detailed and realistic. When discussing this cartoon, all respondents agreed with their description of the scene where someone was selling goods. The identification of the general setting thus seems to depend on the reader's familiarity with the image of a salesperson who usually peddles his wares. Because the scene presented is so familiar, the identification of individual visual objects, such as a medicine carrying bag, becomes quite easy to understand. The atmosphere in the picture is very quickly identified by all respondents as a merchant atmosphere, because several drug trafficker objects are represented. Like respondent W, they seem to immediately recognize that the image represents the 'conventional merchant landscape': "This is like a person selling on the outskirts, like conventional models. We opened the tarpaulin, then there was a suitcase filled with drugs, then he also brought sound. It's common to see it in markets, right on the roadside, in front of shop houses, or what we usually see at peddlers, usually selling on sale items or discounted items" (W).

This example also reveals that cultural literacy is related to people's backgrounds and experiences. Although the six respondents both thought that this was a conventional merchant landscape, they described their merchandise to different places, depending on the experiences they had experienced and encountered in the field. Respondent A used to see these traders usually in front of the mosque and peddling alternative medicines, while other respondents (D, F, H, and K) saw these traders usually in the market, and what they sold was varied, ranging from medicines to used goods.

The figure in the background of Figure 1 is quite faint and is shown on the back, with quite a variety of characteristics. However, the
six respondents immediately agreed that this setting was intended to represent a group of demonstrators. Meanwhile, the figure at the front of this picture was immediately recognized by the six respondents as Jokowi, the President of the Republic of Indonesia. In contrast to Figure 2, respondents D and K do not immediately recognize the figure shown in this figure. Unlike the other four respondents who immediately knew the figure of the Chairman of the KPK, Firli Bahuri, this. These two respondents (D and K) only got to know this character after noticing that there was a KPK building behind him and just linked him to the character in front of him.

Apart from the characters depicted, the six respondents were able to identify the references taken by the illustrator. They agreed that the character is depicted as if he were Thanos, one of the characters in the Avengers film. This certainly illustrates that this millennial generation is influenced by popular culture in films. Popular culture itself according to Hebdige (Subandy, 2011) as a collection of existing artifacts, such as films, tapes, to television shows. In addition, caricatures tend to represent certain more permanent facial traits, often the mouth, eyes and eyebrows serving as the most important identities (Moyle, 2000). As Walker (1978) said that cartoonists quickly develop and improve the visual image of certain politicians, cartoonists also tend to mine each other's ideas.

Figure 1 provides a good example of how to recognize some of the visual elements attached to a particular character. The six respondents not only recognized the figure in Figure 1 from the caricature of his face, but also recognized the clothes he was wearing. As the respondents said: 'From the clothes, many people in Indo understand who the person who often wears the clothes is' (F), 'The clothes of the figures here reflect the image that was built by the Indonesian president, namely the white shirt' (K).

Of the six respondents, only one (H) then associated the gesture displayed by Jokowi's figure with Javanese culture: 'Taking from the factors of the Javanese, nek wong lungguhe koyok ngene mbek wong tuwo polite rak, if he is like explaining 'I I now have the power, the power to choose to sort out aspirations as a leader'.

Reading cartoons as narrative images. As Edwards (1997) argues, many political cartoons are meant to be read as narrative images. Therefore, readers must not only be able to read the cartoon's visual lexis, but also its visual syntax, namely specific patterns of how meaning is put together in images. According to social semioticians, visual syntax is generally more flexible than verbal. Certain visual structures are seen as representing a resource or potential for meaning rather than just a defined code (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001).

Figure 2 provides a good example of the potential for visual syntactic ambiguity. The hand style shown in the picture is of course still or without movement. The style only shows where the thumb and forefinger are seen forming a movement. The six respondents were successful despite the potential ambiguity in this style, they quickly agreed that this was a 'finger snapping' gesture. This success is apparently attributed to the previously described film reference, when Thanos' finger snap in the Avengers film has become iconic which is then applied to this image.

The visual syntax in Figure 1 does not seem to be captured by all respondents, only two respondents (A and F) later saw this as a backsidiing style: 'so he turned his back on the people again at the demonstration' (A), 'He had his back to the people behind him ' (F). Meanwhile, the other four respondents did not see this image as a backwards style, but only two separate images that have their respective meanings.

Recognize the emotions displayed. Understanding the meaning of cartoons often requires the capacity of readers to interpret facial expressions and to relate emotions to the characters depicted. When it comes to facial expressions in caricatures, Gombrich (1977) believes that this is one of the most important clues to which we react instinctively. This assumption appears to be supported by empirical studies, which show that basic emotions are indeed universally recognized (Ekman, 1999), although culture plays an important role in mediating the way these are displayed and perceived (Matsumoto & al, 2003). Even in real-life situations, humans usually need additional contextual information to be able to judge other people's moods or feelings from facial expressions (Messaris, 1994).
Some of the responses to the three cartoons reflect very different perceptions of the emotions displayed by the characters depicted. For example, when discussing Figure 2, the six respondents had different responses. Respondents considered that Firli Bahuri’s emotions in the cartoon had faces that were 'slab' (A), 'sad' (B), 'confused' (F), 'feeling successful' (H), 'just like Thanos' (K), 'confident' (W). In contrast to Figure 1, three respondents think that the emotion described in Jokowi is 'ignorant' (A, D, W), respondent H sees it as a person who is 'triggering', while respondent K sees it as someone who is 'calm'. In addition, two respondents also associated the emotions described with emotions in their culture, namely 'ngawewein' (A) and 'nyepeleke' (H). In Figure 3 there are also differences of opinion regarding the emotions described by Terawan's character, three respondents said that the emotions described were the emotions of 'smile, confidence, and happiness' (A, D, and K). Meanwhile, respondent W associated the emotions described with Terawan's figure in the real world, namely a 'relaxed' figure. Reading facial expressions for a respondent seems to affect his interpretation of the cartoon as a whole. In addition, the results found also illustrate the close relationship between the way respondents read facial expressions and how they then interpret the overall narrative meaning of the image. The ability to recognize the emotions displayed by characters in cartoons can also be related to the reader's level of familiarity with cartoon language and character figures in the real world.

**Interpreting the relationship of text and images.** The semiotician, Roland Barthes, coined the term anchorage to describe the language procedures that are often needed to improve the meaning of images, and relay to be able to refer to the relationship of text and images in sequential forms of communication, such as comics and films (Barthes, 1977). Since then, scholars have found a variety of different relationships about the relationship between verbal and visual modes (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001). McCloud (1993) shows how verbal and visual modes can be combined in comics, starting with a 'specific word' or 'specific image' where one mode carries meaning and the other only adds meanings that are not important. Although it is possible to separate verbal and visual meanings for analytic purposes, in fact in making a cartoon, the two modes are usually intertwined so that they are almost inseparable (Refaie, 2009). Words become part of the picture and are thus revealed in their materiality (Frahm, 2003).

In the history of political cartoons, verbal labels used to 'anchor' the meanings of different elements in political cartoons are a very common occurrence (Walker, 1978). Although the three images both have verbal titles that are also deliberately used as the main attention in the image, Figure 3 seems to be a good example to illustrate how the text in an image can provide meaning related to the image. The 'force' text contained in Figure 3 was successfully realized by the six respondents, the answer from respondent W himself was able to represent the other five respondents: 'Yes, it may be described as force in this sound, yes, we can see here if Dr Terawan really speaks up, I mean really showing that for example the vaccine is really forced, it's like being forced, whether it's good in terms of manufacture or not, in terms of promotion'. This text is then considered to describe how the characters in the image are 'forced' to sell the vaccine. Not only that, this 'force' is also interpreted in the process of making a vaccine which is considered too forced, considering that the vaccine brought by Terawan even though it has not received permission from BPOM but has been forced to undergo phase two clinical trials, even now it is heading to phase two clinical trials three (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

The six respondents also have the same understanding regarding the 'abracadabra' text contained in Figure 3. Abracadabra itself is a magician's speech or mantra when they get everything they want instantly (Inayati & Nuryatin, 2016). Although the visual does not describe the presence of a magician at all, all respondents associated this spell with the presence of the vaccine: 'it could actually exist' (A), 'a miracle suddenly exists' (D), 'know-what so' (H and W), 'from what is not, there is so there is' (K). Only respondent F then associated this spell with magical elements, namely the power of the supernatural aspect in supernatural alliances (Bailey, 2006). Respondent F saw that this vaccine had no scientific effect, but merely sourced from supernatural powers. The different interpretations and meanings of this text
illustrate how the point of view of the readers in interpreting the text is based on experience or information that has been obtained.

**Reading metaphors in cartoons.** The relationship between the two levels of meaning in the characteristics of political cartoons is fundamentally metaphorical: people and events are depicted as something not to arrive at a new definition of what is (Edwards, 1997). From a cognitive perspective, a metaphor is a collection of mappings between a more concrete source and a more abstract target (Kovecses, 2002). Metaphors can encourage a person to be able to see things in a new perspective and thus be able to re-conceptualize the whole reality (Cacciari, 1998).

Of the three examples used in this study, Figure 2 and Figure 3 are able to produce an interesting metaphorical thought process and trigger a chain of thoughts about weakening the KPK, supporting figures for Indonesian vaccines, to unreliable vaccine exploration. The metaphor used in Figure 2 is quite unique, considering that the illustrator uses an antagonist in one of the Avengers films, namely Thanos. The six respondents, who came from the millennial generation, then easily recognized the Thanos figure based on the existing pop culture. Respondent F described a metaphor that the illustrator wanted to portray: 'The character in the avengers is known to be evil, just the snap of a finger can wipe out half the earth's population. Firli Bahuri's presence as Thanos when he snaps his fingers can eliminate half or more of the population or honest people in the KPK. Even respondent K described Firli Bahuri's metaphor in Thanos as a bearer of 'catastrophe' for the KPK.

The metaphor of alternative medicine traders or roadside sales in Figure 3 is then interpreted by some respondents as an attempt to explore vaccines that do not yet have a clear scientific origin. As stated by respondent F: 'Like people who are selling in front of the market, gentlemen carry mics while promoting alternative medicines. Mr. Terawan, who is trying to sell his wares of alternative medicine, even though there are so many people who don't believe in these alternative medicines. Many people today are smart, they can't just promote through a screaming mic, or post testimonials. He is trying hard to offer the archipelago vaccine even though people are already aware that this vaccine is not yet clear. Respondent K's answer also provided additional information regarding the metaphor of the photos displayed in the picture: 'You could say that these figures, who support the archipelago's vaccines, are the same as salespeople selling the same thing, but they can't really hold on to it, even though it's true. We're talking about vaccines for health problems that are quite crucial and we can't just carelessly encourage this archipelago vaccine to be ready for use in the community'. From this example reveals, even if the cartoon is interpreted in a way that completely deviates from the meaning intended by the illustrator, the meaning still produces an interesting metaphorical meaning (Refaie, 2009).

As Nicholas Garland mentioned that cartoon language is not always self-evident and can be misunderstood by readers unfamiliar with the genre. For example, like the text 'driver' in Figure 3, readers are very minimally aware that this text has its own meaning and even contains elements of parody.

In the political cartoon genre, text and images often have a close relationship that cannot be separated. In some cases, however, this text simply adds more information. As shown in Figure 2, that the 'KO' text provides a clear picture of the defeat of the KPK itself, this meaning is quite prominent in the picture. In addition, the text 'abracadabra' also provides an overview of the miracle of the process of the emergence of the archipelago vaccine.

These political cartoons are generally designed to be suggestive and require critical transformation from the readers (Refaie. 2009). In fact, readers are required to think openly in the case of any cartoon based on a metaphor. As Figure 3 shows, political cartoons of this kind can trigger readers' critical thinking processes about the relationship between seemingly unrelated spheres of reality.

**CONCLUSION**

The results of this research on the case study of political cartoons on Tempodotco's Instagram seem to pose a challenge to those who view that cartoons are simple and easy to understand. The findings of this study indicate that for millennials who have relatively good information about political events, reading a political cartoon in tempodotco still poses a
challenge and requires various kinds of literacy, including extensive knowledge of current events, understanding related to traditional culture to very popular culture, good. According to some experts, these characteristics make political cartoons an excellent tool for developing ‘the ability to identify biases and then be able to formulate opinions’ (Kleeman, 2006) and can also be an excellent tool for honing analytical skills. from readers (Dougherty, 2002).

In this study, all respondents were very aware of the main problems surrounding Jokowi, Firli Bahuri, and Dr Terawan, but they still gave different responses. In addition, it can be seen that there are several different interpretations due to the unique socio-cultural background of the respondents, as clearly shown by the example of the vaccine trial by Dr. Terawan which gave rise to different interpretations from several respondents.

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