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SUSTAINABILITY IN DIGITAL INTERFACE DESIGN: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF COLDPLAY'S SUSTAINABILITY WEBSITE

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Abstract

The Coldplay "Music of the Spheres" sustainability website, aiming to deconstruct how visual communication design elements function to build a specific narrative about environmental responsibility in the entertainment industry. Amidst the global climate crisis, the digital interface serves not merely as an information repository but as a rhetorical tool constructing a myth of "hedonistic sustainability." Using a qualitative descriptive method grounded in Roland Barthes' semiotic framework specifically the tripartite system of denotation, connotation, and myth. This study meticulously dissects the website's visual components: color palettes (dark mode and neon accents), typography (custom 'Kaotica' scripts and bold sans-serifs), illustrative iconography, layoutand interactive animations. The data source is the live website, analyzed as a cultural text. The findings reveal a significant paradigm shift in environmental visual rhetoric: moving away from traditional "eco-beige" or "naturalist" aesthetics towards a "techno-futurist" visual language. The analysis exposes how the design elements actively construct the myth of "participatory redemption," suggesting that through technological intervention and fan engagement, high-consumption entertainment can be ecologically regenerative. These findings offer novel insights for Visual Communication Design students and practitioners regarding the power of interface design in shaping public perception of corporate sustainability, moving the discourse from austerity to innovation.

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INTRODUCTION

In a contemporary landscape where the climate crisis has shifted from a mere scientific warning to an urgent existential reality, the role of the creative industry, particularly the entertainment and music sector on a global scale, is undergoing a radical redefinition. World concert tours, traditionally seen as the pinnacle of pop culture celebrations, are now facing a sharp spotlight as one of the significant contributors to the global carbon footprint (Sartori, 2024). The logistics of transporting tons of equipment across continents, the mobility of thousands of fans, to the massive energy consumption of stadiums, put the industry in a paradoxical position: it voices love and unity, yet operationally often destroys the environment in which humans live. Recent studies estimate that the music industry, particularly through festivals and live tours, generates hundreds of thousands of tons of greenhouse gas emissions each year, with audience transport being the largest contributor (TheGreenShot, 2025).

Amid this tension, British band Coldplay took the bold step of postponing the *Everyday Life* album tour in 2019 in search of a more environmentally friendly touring solution. They then returned in 2022 with the "Music of the Spheres" tour which carried the promise of a 50% reduction in carbon emissions. The latest environmental impact verification report shows that the tour managed to reduce direct CO2e emissions by 59% compared to their previous stadium tour, an achievement validated by the MIT Environmental Solutions Initiative (Coldplay & MIT ESI, 2024).

However, this phenomenon does not stop at the calculation of emission figures or the technical specifications of solar panels. A much more in-depth and relevant area of study is how these sustainability efforts are communicated, framed, and visually constructed to a global audience through digital media. Their official sustainability website, Coldplay Sustainability Website, is here as a very interesting design artifact to research. This website is not just a static report that is commonly published by corporations to fulfill Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) obligations. Instead, it's an interactive, immersive, and visually rich site designed to persuade, educate, and validate the band's claims. This approach is in line with the findings that visual rhetoric in digital media is now shifting from static information delivery to "digital storytelling" that emphasizes immersive experiences to shape audiences' perceptions of environmental responsibility (Anialasalam et al., 2025)

The design of the website deviates from the conventional visual codes of the environmental movement that for decades have been dominated by green color palettes, recycled paper browns, and pristine images of nature (forests, rivers, rare animals). Instead, Coldplay adopted an aesthetic that could be termed "Eco-Techno-Futurism": the use of a dominant *dark mode*, glowing neon typography, schematic diagrams, and intergalactic iconography. This visual shift is not a purely aesthetic coincidence, but rather a sophisticated visual rhetorical strategy. From a semiotic perspective, every pixel, every color choice, and every animation transition is a sign that carries a load of meaning that can affect the *green brand image* in the eyes of consumers (Tu et al., 2024)

Roland Barthes, a fundamental theorist of culture and semiotics, provides a very sharp framework for dissecting this phenomenon. Through his concept of "Myth" in *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes taught that mass culture works by transforming history (something that is created) into nature (something that seems natural and should happen). The application of Barthesian semiotic analysis to modern media reveals how visual elements are used to instill certain ideologies, in this case the "myth" of corporate sustainability into the minds of the audience without them realizing it (Angesti & Dwi Puji Prabowo, 2025). In the context of Coldplay's website, visual design works to naturalize the relationship between high technology, mass entertainment, and environmental conservation. The design not only informs ("we use recycled batteries"), but also builds on myths ("technology and excitement are the saviors of the earth").

The problem of this research arises from the need to understand the mechanisms behind such visual persuasion. DKV students are often taught to

make "good" and "communicative" designs, but are rarely invited to criticize the ideological layers behind the design elements they use. Does the use of green always mean eco-friendly? The literature on visual *greenwashing* warns that the use of misleading graphic elements is often used to create a false or excessive impression of environmental responsibility (Sustainability Directory, 2025). Does minimalist design always signal transparency? Or, in the case of Coldplay, how is the *sci-fi* aesthetic used to validate the sustainability agenda? The gap in critical analysis of digital interfaces from the perspective of cultural semiotics in Indonesia is a gap that this study seeks to fill.

Based on this background, this study formulates the main problem: How do the visual communication design elements on Coldplay's sustainability website construct meanings and myths about sustainability in the digital age**?** The problem is broken down into a few specific research questions:

1. Denotative Analysis: What are the specific visual elements (colors, typography, illustrations, *layouts*, animations) that appear literally on the interface of *the Coldplay Sustainability Website?*
2. Connotative Analysis: What associative meanings do these elements construct, and how do they deviate from traditional eco-design conventions?

Myth Analysis: How do the interactions between visual signs shape cultural myths according to Roland Barthes, especially related to the narrative of *techno-optimism* and *hedonistic sustainability*?

Previous research has extensively discussed semiotics in advertising and packaging. For example, (Emillia Della et al., 2025) conducted a semiotic analysis of *H&M Conscious Exclusive* ads and found that visual elements are often used for *greenwashing*, where images of nature are manipulated to mask the reality of the polluting *fast fashion* industry . These findings confirm that green visual signs do not always represent ecological facts.

On the other hand, (Vallverdu-Gordi & Marine-Roig, 2023) in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* emphasize that effective graphic design can increase the audience's environmental awareness through emotional and cognitive reactions. The study highlights the crucial role of elements such as color and iconography in shaping positive perceptions.

While previous studies on visual semiotics have predominantly focused on advertising, branding, and greenwashing practices, and more recent works have begun to explore environmental communication through graphic design, limited attention has been given to digital interface design as a complex semiotic system that actively constructs sustainability narratives. In particular, the application of Barthesian semiotics to interactive, immersive web interfaces remains underdeveloped, especially within the context of non-traditional environmental aesthetics such as techno-futurism. Therefore, this study positions itself as an expansion of existing semiotic discourse by examining how sustainability is not only represented but also ideologically constructed through interface design mechanisms, moving beyond static visual analysis toward dynamic, experience-based digital environments.

However, specific studies of website interface *design* within the framework of Barthesian semiotics are still developing. (Worakittikul et al., 2024) who discussed "Green Semiotics" noted that the excessive use of green symbols sometimes actually causes consumer skepticism if it is not supported by transparent facts. This research will expand the discussion by focusing on non-traditional aesthetics such as *dark mode* and *neon* used by Coldplay, which have not been widely discussed in the context of environmental semiotics in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This method was chosen because its purpose is not to measure numerical data, but rather to decipher the meanings, symbols, and complex cultural codes in a design work. This approach allows researchers to act as key instruments that read and interpret visual texts based on a pre-established theoretical framework.

Semiotic Analysis Framework

The main analytical scalpel in this study is Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics, specifically the concept of "Two Orders of Signification" described in his book Elements of Semiology and Mythologies.

1. First Order (Denotation): Reading signs at the most basic or literal level. In the context of a website, this includes objective identification of colors (hex codes), font types, icon shapes, and layout structures. This is the answer to the question: "What do I see?"
2. Second Order (Connotation): Reading the meaning behind the literal sign that is formed due to culture and association of feelings. It answers the question: "What taste or idea arises from what I see?"

Myth: The final stage in which these connotations freeze into something that is considered to be common sense. Myth is the way ideology hides itself behind seemingly natural visuals.

Data Objects and Sources

1. Primary Object: Coldplay's official Sustainability website. The analysis focused on the main page (landing page) and the main initiative sub-page (Power, Travel, CO2 Emissions) because it contained the most dense visual elements.
2. Secondary Data Sources: Coldplay's *"Sustainability Update"* document , journal articles related to sustainable web design, semiotics theory books, and a visual identity guide to the album "Music of the Spheres" for comparative context.

Data Collection Techniques

1. In-depth Digital *Observation*: The researcher conducted an intensive search of websites using desktop and mobile devices to capture a responsive experience.
2. Visual Documentation: Screenshots of key elements: header, footer, interactive diagram, title typography, and color palette.
3. Inspect Element: Use the developer tools feature in the browser to technically identify the font type used (font-family), color code (HEX/RGB), and CSS grid structure. This is important to ensure the accuracy of the denotative data.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data is analyzed through the following stages:

1. Inventory: Grouping visual elements into categories: Colors, Typography, Layout/Navigation, and Animation.
2. Denotative Description: Describes the physical characteristics of each element.
3. Connotative Interpretation: Connects the element to cultural concepts, color psychology, and design principles.
4. Demystification of Myths: Synthesizing connotative findings to uncover the grand ideological narrative built by the website.
5. Conclusion: Draw the common thread of the relationship between visual elements and sustainability communication strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part is at the heart of the research, where visual data that has been collected from *Coldplay's Sustainability website* is dissected using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis knife. The discussion is divided based on the main visual elements to facilitate systematic reading.

Color Analysis: Challenging the "Green" Cliché with the "Dark Mode" Aesthetic

One of the most striking visual findings of the website is its rejection of the standard color coding of environmental campaigns. If we refer to *Green Semiotics* [1], the green and brown colors of the earth are the dominant signifiers for the concept of "nature". However, Coldplay chose a different path.

Denotation (First Order)

Denotatively, this website is dominated by a deep black or very dark background color (*Dark Mode*). Based on the elemental inspection, the background color code used is predominantly close to #000000 or dark variants such as #05233E (Tangaroa). On top of this dark background, text and graphic elements use high-contrast, full-saturation colors, such as *Cyan* (#0092FD),

Magenta (#942E53), *Lime Green* (#619B55), and *Golden Yellow* (#FEC67A). These colors do not appear in soft *matte* or pastel shades, but rather *glowing* or luminous, resembling fluorescent lights or digital screen displays, can be seen in **Figure 1.**

Figure 1. Coldplay Website Display

Connotations (Second Order)

The use of Dark Mode has strong functional connotations in the context of digital sustainability. On *OLED* and *AMOLED type* screens, black pixels mean pixels that are dead (not consuming power), thus literally saving the user's device's battery energy. Here, the aesthetic choice becomes an ethical statement: "The website itself is energy-efficient." This is different from a website with a white background that emits full light. The color palette analysis can be seen in **Table 1.**

Myth (Ideology)

Mythologically, Barthes would see this as a shift from the myth of the "Natural" (*The Natural*) to the myth of the "Technological". The neon colors on top of black create a "Cyberpunk" or "Space Age" atmosphere. It builds the narrative that saving the earth is not done by planting rice in rice fields (agrarian aesthetics), but rather with advanced solar panels, recycled BMW batteries, and high-tech kinetic floors. The myth that is built is *"Sustainability is the New Rock & Roll"***.** Sustainability is portrayed as something *cool*, futuristic, and aspirational for the younger generation, not a heavy and sad moral burden.

Typographic Analysis: Foreign Characters and Visual Authority

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of Color Palettes

Color Sample	Denotation	Konotasi	Myth
Solid Black (*Background)*	Light Attendance, color code *#000000,* Dark Mode .	Space, depth, mystery, screen technology *(OLED),* energy saving, focus, cinema.	**Efficiency & Futurism:** Signifies that sustainability is about an efficient and sophisticated future, not a return to the primitive past.
Neon Cyan & Magenta *(Aksen)*	Artificial light spectrum colors, high contrast, visual identity of the album *"Music of the Spheres"*	Electric energy, nightlife , concerts, digital/virtual world, excitement , modernity.	**Techno-Optimism:** Environmental solutions don't have to be boring, green technology can be just as exciting and *"cool"* as stage lights.
Rainbow Color*(Graphic)*	Spectrum color mixing.	Diversity, inclusivity, full spectrum of light (holistic), harmony *of "Music of the Spheres".*	**Cosmic Unity:** The environmental issue is a universal issue that unites all human spectrums.

The typography on this website plays a dual role: as a clear conveyor of information and as a graphic element that builds an *otherworldly* atmosphere.

Denotation (First Order)

There are two main typographic systems. First, the typography for the title and main points uses a bold Serif *typeface*, geometric, and uses *all-caps*. Based on the data, the fonts used are likely to

be custom variants of *the modified Helvetica* or *Sharp Sans*, as well as a special *display font of the* "Music of the Spheres" *album* called ***"Kaotica".*** The "Kaotica" font is unique in that it has a variant of glyphs or symbols that resemble alien characters or cryptographic code, as seen in **Figure 2.**

Figure 2. The Kaotica Font

The use of capital letters in keywords such as *"REDUCE", "REINVENT", "RESTORE",* can be seen in **Figure 3.** connotatively implies assertiveness, urgency, and loud shouting. It's the visual language of activism (like a protest poster) yet packed with modern corporate design neatness. This gives the impression of "serious" and "committed". The ***"Kaotica" (Alien Script)*** in this context is the use of illegible symbols in between standard texts creating a sense of mystery and exoticism. The connotation is "alien intelligence" or "extraterrestrial perspective". This invites visitors to see the earth's problems from the "above" (*overview effect*), as if we are citizens of the universe who are looking at the planet objectively.

Myth: Universal Citizenship

This typography constructs the myth of Universal Citizenship. By presenting a fictional language that no nation on earth possesses, Coldplay symbolically erases geopolitical boundaries. In the presence of the character of Kaotica, all human beings are the same: vulnerable inhabitants of planet earth. This myth serves to unite global audiences under one banner of climate struggle, denying the political or economic differences of each country. The message of sustainability is elevated from the level of technical policy to an intergalactic moral mandate.

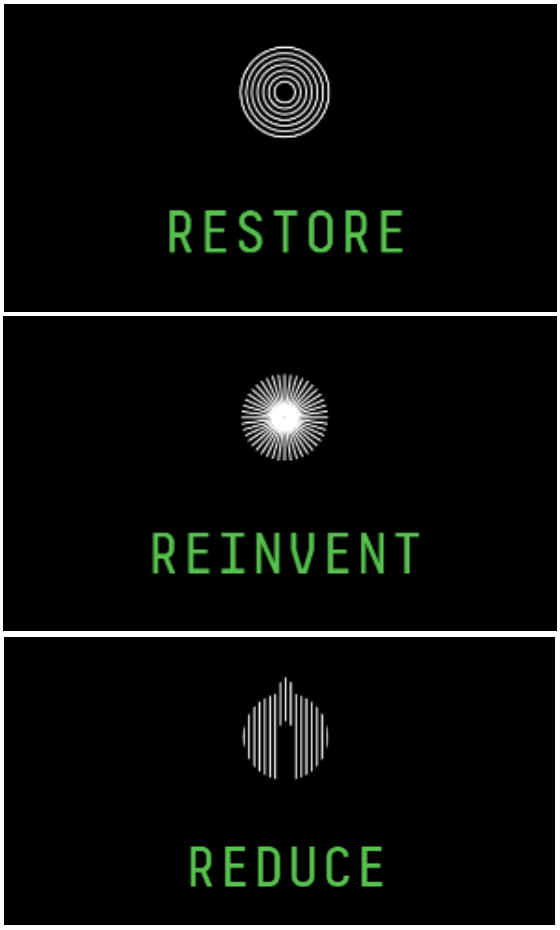

Figure 3. Fonts on Keywords
(Source: sustainability.coldplay.com)

Analysis of Layout and Interactivity: Participatory Narratives Through Scrollytelling

The navigation structure and layout of this website do not follow the rigid grid pattern of corporate reports, but rather are more fluid and narrative.

Denotation (First Order)

The website uses the Scrollytelling technique. The page is designed to length-scroll with a persistent side navigation (sticky menu) that lists the 12 main initiatives (Emissions, Power, Travel, etc.) can be seen in **Figure 4**. Each sexy change is accompanied by subtle transition animations, floating elements (parallax effect).

Konotasi

Scrollytelling**:** Continuous scrolling activity without loading new pages connotes an uninterrupted "journey". This places the user as a navigator navigating the narrative, not just a passive reader. The fluidity of the transition signifies transparency and inter-sector connectivity (that travel, food, and stage affairs are interrelated).

Figure 4. 12 Key Initiatives
Source: sustainability.coldplay.com

Mitos: Participatory Redemption (Penebusan Partisipatoris)

This is where the most powerful myth lies. This interactive design builds on the myth of Participatory Redemption. In traditional ecological discourse, consumption (watching concerts, traveling) is often considered an environmental "sin." However, the website's kinetic floor statement reverses that narrative: "By dancing (having fun), you generate energy." This statement validates the feeling that hedonistic pleasure does not contradict environmental ethics. This myth serves to relieve the guilt-free consumption of fans. The website assures them that their presence is not a burden, but a solution.

Discussion: Shift from "Natural" to "Technological"

The above analysis findings show a consistent pattern: Coldplay's sustainability website consciously abandoned the visual code of old-wave environmentalism (nature romanticism) and switched to new-wave environmentalism (technological pragmatism). In Barthes' theory, myth works by turning history into nature. Here, Coldplay turned technology (BMW batteries, SAP apps, DHL logistics) into a new "nature" for music touring. Technology is no longer positioned as an enemy of nature (the cause of pollution), but as a partner of nature (solution). A comparative summary of visual code shifts can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The Shift of Semiotic Codes in Sustainability Web Design

Design Aspects	Old *Code*	Kode Website Coldplay (New Code)	Myth Implications
Color	Green, Brown, White, Beige.	Dark Black, Neon Cyan, Magenta	From **"Back to Nature"** to **"Towards the Future"**
Typographers	Classic, Handwritten	Bold Sans-Serif, Alien Glyphs	From **"Personal Touch"** to **"Universal Mandate /Science".**
Atmosphere	Calm, Reflective, Guilty	Dynamic, Energetic, Participatory	From **"Asceticism" to "Continuous Hedonism".**

This shift is in line with the concept of "Hedonistic Sustainability" popularized by architect Bjarke Ingels, who argues that sustainability does not necessarily mean a decrease in quality of life or pleasure, but can instead be a better and more enjoyable design. Coldplay's website is a digital manifestation of this concept.

While positive in mobilizing action, this myth also risks hiding the residue of problems that technology alone cannot solve. The focus on "dance floor-powered stages" might distract from a much larger portion of fans' air transport emissions, although websites try to deal with them with travel apps. "Too good" design can serve as a *fetishization* of technology, in which tools (solar panels, applications) are revered as visual objects,

regardless of their actual effectiveness on a total scale.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Coldplay* 's Sustainability website is a prime example of how Visual Communication Design (DKV) can be used to reconstruct the meaning of sustainability in the digital age. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, it was found that the design of this website did not merely present transparency data, but actively constructed a new myth: Hedonistic Techno-Optimism.

Denotatively, the website uses dark mode, high-contrast neon colors, futuristic/alien typography, and diagrammatic illustrations. Connotatively, these elements establish associations with technological sophistication, the future, energy, and universality. Mythologically, this design naturalizes the idea that the climate crisis can be overcome without sacrificing the comfort or fun of the festival, provided it is mediated by the right technology and the active participation of fans.

The findings of this study carry important implications for contemporary visual communication design practice. Designers are not merely visual stylists, but active agents in shaping public understanding of sustainability through interface decisions. The use of techno-futuristic aesthetics, while effective in generating engagement and optimism, must be critically balanced with ethical transparency to avoid potential misinterpretation or superficial sustainability narratives. Therefore, designers should adopt a reflexive approach, where visual strategies are not only evaluated based on aesthetic appeal and user engagement, but also on their capacity to communicate environmental responsibility accurately and responsibly. This highlights the need for a more critical design practice that integrates semiotic awareness with ethical considerations in constructing digital sustainability narratives.

The implication for the DKV field is the need to understand that design for sustainability does not have to be fixated on the cliché "leaf green" aesthetic. Coldplay proves that futuristic and digital aesthetics are actually more relevant and persuasive for modern audiences (Gen Z and Millennials). However, designers also have an ethical responsibility to ensure that these stunning "visual packaging" do not become *a simulacra* that masks the true ecological reality. Design should be an honest bridge between the complexity of data science and public understanding, not just a curtain that beautifies corporate image.

For further research, it is recommended to conduct a *reception analysis* to test whether the audience (fans) really grasp these connotative messages as motivation to act eco-friendly, or just enjoy them as a visual spectacle.

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