



STICKERS AS IDENTITY AND MEMORY ARTIFACTS: A STUDY OF VISUAL PRACTICES BY VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN STUDENTS IN EVENT CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

This article examines stickers as a visual communication medium that operates beyond its graphic function, placing it as a discourse of identity and an artifact of memory in the visual practices of Visual Communication Design (DKV) students. Based on the perspectives of material culture and visual discourse, this study maps the shift in contemporary visual culture from large-scale media to portable micro-visual objects that are easily circulated in social interactions. This study uses an interpretive qualitative approach with visual discourse analysis methods to examine the process of production, distribution, and use of stickers in the context of student event campaigns. The results of the analysis show that stickers function as a performative medium that mediates the construction of identity, social affiliation, and collective experience. The practices of giving, sticking, and storing stickers show that the meaning of stickers is not solely determined by their visual representation, but also by the social relations and cultural context surrounding their circulation. Thus, stickers can be understood as a visual discourse that actively shapes the dynamics of visual culture in the academic environment of Visual Communication Design, while also emphasizing the importance of micro visual objects in the ecology of contemporary visual communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the development of global visual culture has shown a shift from large-scale media to micro forms of communication that circulate through small, portable, and easily exchangeable objects (Hoskins, 2018; Soreanu, 2022; Sosiawan & Wibowo, 2018). Small visual objects such as cards, pins, or stickers have come to be understood not only as aesthetic artifacts, but as mediums that carry memories, bind identities, and mediate social relationships in everyday life (de Zárte, 2020; Hoskins, 2018). The material culture perspective emphasizes that visual objects are not passive; they have agency that influences how individuals build affiliations, remember experiences, and negotiate meaning in social spaces (Bille, 2022; Hoskins, 2018; McDonnell, 2023). Even though their existence is often underestimated because of their simple form, these small objects actually work implicitly in shaping patterns of interaction and social memory.

This phenomenon is also evident in the context of visual culture in Indonesia, particularly in urban creative communities and design education environments. The shift from “big media” to “small but meaningful media” can be seen in the widespread use of stickers at community events, concerts, workshops, and student creativity-based campaigns. Stickers have become a medium that combines aesthetics, identity, and non-verbal communication through the practices of giving, sticking, exchanging, and personal storage. Within this practice, the meaning of stickers is not only based on their visual design, but also on the social relationships that are built through their circulation, something that is often overlooked in formalistic visual readings. Therefore, stickers operate as moving objects that produce memories and enhance a sense of togetherness (de Zárte, 2020; Kopytoff, 1986).

In the academic environment of Visual Communication Design (DKV), especially in student campaign activities, stickers serve a dual function: on the one hand, they are a visual representation of an event or project, and on the other hand, they serve as a social action when given to others. This visual practice makes stickers more than just a design product; they become a medium of identity, a token of affiliation, and a

marker of participation in a collective experience. This dual function does not occur automatically, but is shaped by the meanings that emerge in interpersonal relationships, so that the social value of stickers is often stronger than their visual value.

It is at this point that stickers need to be understood not only as graphic objects, but as a form of visual discourse that lives in the social interactions of students. When stickers circulate through the practices of giving, sticking, or storing, they not only convey visual messages, but also shape the way students interpret identity, relationships, and communal experiences. In other words, stickers operate as a discursive practice that is produced, negotiated, and interpreted within a specific social context. This understanding opens up space for analysis that not only reads the visual form of stickers, but also the network of meanings that surround them, including the tensions, preferences, and identity strategies that students play out through this small medium. Through this perspective, stickers can be read as a medium that helps construct the dynamics of visual culture in the DKV environment, which is not merely a reflection of student activities, but a mechanism that plays a role in maintaining and changing patterns of communication and affiliation within the community.

Viewing discourse as a social practice means placing it in a reciprocal relationship with the social context that enables its existence. Every discursive act, including forms of visual discourse, is always influenced by specific situations, institutions, and social structures, while at the same time influencing and reshaping these three domains. Thus, discourse is not autonomous, but is constructed, constrained, and directed by social conditions that include the position of communication participants, the objects of knowledge in circulation, the social identities of the actors, and the relationships between individuals and groups (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2017). This approach is important because it allows stickers to be read not only as designs, but as part of a system of practices that shape the way meaning circulates within the student community.

At the same time, discourse functions as a mechanism that maintains or negotiates change in

the social order in which it develops. Through discourse analysis (including visual discourse analysis), we can identify patterns, tensions, and social phenomena that are materialized in representational practices (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2017). In other words, visual discourse not only reflects social reality, but also shapes the way society interprets experiences, identities, and social relations. In the context of this study, stickers become a gateway to understanding how DKV students produce, exchange, and maintain meaning through the visual objects they create and distribute.

Based on this perspective, this study aims to examine how stickers produced and circulated in Visual Communication Design student event campaigns operate as visual media for identity construction and as material artifacts of memory. Specifically, the study investigates how the visual characteristics of stickers represent student identities and affiliations, and how the practices of producing, distributing, exchanging, using, and storing stickers contribute to the formation of personal and collective memories within the student community.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm, which aims to understand the social and cultural meaning of stickers as a visual communication medium in the context of Visual Communication Design (DKV) students. This approach was chosen because the research does not focus on quantitative measurements of media effectiveness, but rather on exploring how stickers are produced, distributed, and interpreted as identities and memory artifacts in student social practices.

The main method used is visual discourse analysis, with reference to the understanding of discourse as a social practice (Asidiky et al., 2022; Ledin & Machin, 2019). Within this framework, stickers are treated not only as visual objects, but as part of a discursive practice formed through the relationship between visual representation, social context, and the actions of the actors involved. The analysis does not stop at the form and aesthetics of the stickers, but also examines the process of distribution, use, and the social situations surrounding them.

The research data consisted of visual sticker artifacts, observations of their circulation and use, and interviews with DKV students involved in student event campaigns. The visual data comprised 24 sticker designs collected from four student events held between September and December 2025. The stickers were selected because they were produced specifically as visual communication materials for student events and circulated directly among students and event participants.

In addition to visual observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 DKV students who had experience as sticker designers, event organizers, recipients, or users. The interviews explored the participants' reasons for selecting particular stickers, their practices of giving, exchanging, sticking, or storing them, and the meanings and memories associated with these objects. The interviews were used not merely to confirm the visual analysis but to understand how meanings attributed to stickers emerged through students' experiences and social interactions.

The research data was obtained through visual observation of the DKV student event campaign stickers, which included variations in design, visual themes, symbolic messages, and the context of their use in academic and non-academic activities. This observation focused on how the stickers were produced and distributed at the event, how they were selected and posted by students, and how the stickers functioned as markers of affiliation and collective experience.

The analysis was conducted by combining the perspective of the grammar of visual design (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006) to read the visual representation structure of the stickers, as well as a material culture approach to understand stickers as objects that have a "social life" (Bille, 2022; Zinn, 2025). Through this combination, the research not only identifies visual elements such as colour, typography, and symbols, but also interprets how these elements contribute to the formation of identity, memory, and social relations within the student community.

The analysis was conducted in three interconnected stages. First, the stickers were analyzed visually by identifying recurring elements of illustration, colour, typography, symbols, and verbal messages using the grammar

of visual design perspective (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Second, observational and interview data were organized thematically around practices of production, selection, distribution, exchange, use, and storage, as well as participants' accounts of identity, affiliation, participation, and memory. Third, the visual and thematic findings were interpreted relationally through the perspectives of visual discourse and material culture to examine how the meaning of stickers was constructed not only through their graphic representation but also through their circulation and interaction with users.

To maintain the depth of analysis, the data is read contextually by paying attention to the relationship between the stickers, their creators, and the social environment in which they circulate. Thus, this research method allows stickers to be read as a living visual discourse, that is, as a medium that not only represents student activities but also plays an active role in shaping experiences, affiliations, and visual cultural dynamics in the DKV academic environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discourse on Stickers as Identity

Stickers are small sheets usually made of paper or plastic that are used to convey information and specific purposes (Rahayu & Zulkhaeriyah, 2023; Rahmawati & Sari, 2023). According to Santoso (Santoso, 2010), stickers are a popular medium and are relatively more durable than similar media. Their flexible nature allows them to be placed on various surfaces, making stickers an effective promotional tool in the context of marketing. Despite their simple form, stickers could enter many visual spaces that are not always accessible to conventional media.

In the context of DKV student events, stickers are made to be distributed to visitors or friends as an affordable branding medium, and as a medium for non-verbal interaction or even as a memento of having supported or visited the event. It is not uncommon for students to create different designs for a single event so that visitors can choose according to their preferences and tastes. The choices provided through these design variations indirectly open up space for visitors to express themselves through the visual selections they make.

As shown in Figure 2, identity and affiliation are communicated through the combination of event-specific verbal messages, institutional references, and distinctive visual symbols. S01 explicitly connects the phrase "Design to Connect" with the DKV UPJ exhibition identity, while S07 positions student creativity through the phrase "Kreasi Muda" and its designation as a student design festival. In S10, the expression "Speak Through Design" transforms design practice into a marker of collective voice, whereas S20 uses the label "DKV Night Session" and the "After Hours" visual treatment to construct affiliation with a particular student creative environment. These examples indicate that the stickers do not merely promote individual events; they provide portable visual markers through which students can recognize, select, and display their association with particular activities and communities.



Figure 1. The display of the "Design to Connect 2025" sticker on a student's personal laptop as a marker of visual identity and event affiliation.

As visual objects circulating in social practice, stickers not only carry images or messages but also function as markers of identity negotiated within a particular community. From a visual discourse perspective, identity is not considered something fixed, but rather something that is produced through representational practices, including the use and distribution of stickers. When individuals choose, stick, or share certain stickers, they are actually performing their identity, that is, presenting themselves through visual symbols that represent certain values, affiliations, or social groups (Kress & Leeuwen,

2006). In other words, the act of choosing a sticker reflects a small curatorial process undertaken by individuals in determining how they want to be seen by their community.

In the context of creative communities such as DKV students, stickers become a medium for displaying social position, visual style, and affiliation with certain projects or events. The act of distributing and sticking stickers serves as a declaration of participation as well as a reinforcement of relationships between community members. Thus, stickers operate as a discourse of identity in which they not only represent a group but also shape how individuals understand themselves as part of that social and visual cultural network. This relationship is not always harmonious. In some cases, stickers can also mark differences in aesthetic preferences or small fragmentations within the community, so that the identity constructed through stickers is always in a process of negotiation. Through their circulation, stickers help build symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them” and create a sense of togetherness bound by the same visual symbols.

Discourse on Stickers as Memory Artifacts

In material culture studies, small objects that are easily transferred from one person to another are often understood as media that store and produce memories. Hills de Zárte (de Zárte, 2020) explains that moving objects have the ability to “bind” social experiences through the process of transfer and everyday use. In this context, stickers not only function as visual elements, but also as markers of experiences formed when the object is given, received, or placed in the owner's personal space. In other words, the function of stickers does not depend solely on their appearance, but on the series of interactions that accompany their circulation.

The memories attached to stickers are not abstract; they are materialized through objects, following the premise that objects can store, mediate, and reconstruct human memories (Hoskins, 2018). When stickers are placed on laptops, water bottles, or sketchbooks, they undergo what contemporary research on material culture refers to as the transformation of objects from mere materials into narrative vessels that

carry traces of personal and collective experiences (Bille, 2022; McDonnell, 2023). However, this process does not occur automatically. Certain stickers may hold strong memories, while others are simply forgotten, showing that an object's capacity to store memories is highly dependent on the relational context and emotional experiences of its owner. In this process, stickers act as a medium that connects visual memories, emotions, and social relationships built during an event or project.

In the DKV student environment, stickers often store memories of the creative process, team dynamics, the atmosphere of events, and the networks of friendship formed through visual interaction. These experiences are not only recorded visually through sticker design, but also through the acts of giving, receiving, and storing them. This memory function becomes more pronounced when stickers survive beyond the duration of the event, settling or sticking to personal objects, and becoming part of the visual biography of their owners. Thus, stickers are not merely understood as graphic design outputs, but as memory artifacts that store layers of experience and become part of the construction of students' visual identities in academic environments and wider creative communities. In this context, stickers function not only as small, mobile archives or informal archives, but rather as something more intimate and closely tied to students' daily lives.

Figure 1. Selected sticker designs from DKV student event campaigns (sample of 8 from 24 corpus)



Figure 2. Selected sticker designs from DKV students event campaign (sample of 8 from 24 corpus)

The findings indicate that stickers do not inherently function as memory artifacts at the moment of their production. Rather, their

mnemonic value is gradually constructed through practices of selection, exchange, attachment, and preservation. As stickers move from event communication materials into students' personal spaces, they accumulate associations with particular people, events, and collective experiences. Memory, therefore, emerges not solely from visual representation but from the social biography of the object.

CONCLUSION

Through various theoretical perspectives on visual discourse, material culture, and social practices, stickers can be understood as a medium that works far beyond their graphic function. In the context of visual communication design students, stickers serve as visual representations, markers of identity, and artifacts of memory that bind collective experiences. The process of designing, distributing, and storing stickers presents a series of discursive practices that shape the way individuals and groups interpret themselves, their social relationships, and their creative experiences. Thus, stickers not only function as design products, but also as nodes where visual experiences, social affiliations, and personal memories meet.

Stickers are not only objects to be seen, but also objects that “act” through the social interactions that accompany them, from giving and receiving to use in personal spaces. In this framework, stickers exist at the intersection of visual communication, identity construction, and memory production. However, these functions are not singular or stable; they are always influenced by community dynamics, visual preferences, and the context of the stickers' circulation. This understanding shows that even small visual objects have the capacity to create social resonance and build affiliations, making them an important element in the dynamics of student visual culture.

Viewing stickers as visual discourse opens up space to examine how students' creative practices shape a living system of meaning within the academic community. This approach not only enriches our understanding of the role of visual media in everyday life, but also affirms the position of stickers as a significant cultural element in the processes of learning, identity production, and

collective memory formation in the DKV student environment. However, the role of stickers as a medium of visual discourse still leaves room for further exploration, especially regarding how variations in design, distribution strategies, or specific community dynamics influence the symbolic power and social value of stickers themselves. By opening up this possibility, research on stickers can contribute to a broader discussion of how small visual objects play an important role in the ecology of contemporary visual culture.

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