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The redefinition of Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s on Spotify

ABSTRACT

This study aims to critically redefine the ontological and graphic function of 1980s Indonesian pop music album covers remediated on the Spotify platform. Employing a qualitative case study approach grounded in post-digital theory, this research investigates how visual artifacts originally designed for tactile analog media adapt to, and survive within, an immaterial algorithmic ecosystem. Findings reveal that these album covers have evolved into dynamic hybrid artifacts. Rather than erasing physical limitations, the digital interface deliberately preserves analog imperfections such as manual letraset typography, CMYK halftone dots, and paper grain. This preservation creates a compelling "haptic visuality" that actively dismantles conventional dichotomies, including analog versus digital, physical versus virtual, and human versus machine. Crucially, the study identifies the socio-cultural phenomenon of algorithmic flattening. Spotify's curation mechanisms (e.g., compressed thumbnails and curated playlists) strip away the intense New Order-era socio-political hierarchies that historically divided Pop Kreatif (urban elite) and Pop Cengeng (censored melancholic pop). Ultimately, while this digitalization democratizes access and fosters transgenerational nostalgia through a renewed digital "aura," it simultaneously risks reducing profound local histories into commodified "retro" or "vintage" aesthetic tags within the global streaming landscape. This research offers vital insights for graphic design and digital culture studies regarding the continuity, resilience, and transformation of cultural memory in the post-digital age.

KEY WORDS
post-digital, graphic design, album covers, Indonesian pop music, 1980s, Spotify

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Introduction

Digital technology fundamentally transforms the contemporary media landscape, not merely altering how information is accessed, but fundamentally redefining the practices of graphic design and visual culture. In the contemporary digital ecosystem, visual objects no longer stand alone as independent physical entities; rather, they are integrated into screen-based interfaces. This phenomenon demands a paradigm shift from static design consumption to visual experiences curated by algorithmic platforms (Lupton, 2017). Streaming platforms like Spotify act as digital exhibition spaces where cultural artifacts, including album cover designs, undergo a process of remediation—a process wherein new media appropriates, modifies, and represents the characteristics of older media (Eskilson, 2019). In this process, the graphic design of the past is challenged to maintain its visual identity and communicative power amidst the compression and standardization of digital formats.

Furthermore, digitalization compels a reevaluation of materiality within graphic design. When a physical design artwork is transformed into a digital medium, it acquires "screen materiality," where physical, tactile interaction is replaced by optical interaction mediated

through pixels and backlit screens (Drucker, 2020). The criteria for visual aesthetic appreciation are now heavily contingent on how formal design elements—such as typography, color saturation, and composition—can survive and remain legible when drastically reduced into digital thumbnails or navigational icons (Kane, 2019). This shift in scale and the loss of physical tactility require visual artifacts to adapt, forcing a continuous negotiation between the preservation of original aesthetic beauty and the functional demands of digital interface usability.

Despite living within the dominance of instant, screen-based interfaces, humans continue to exhibit a longing for the organic sensations and material traces of physical objects. This alienation from tactile objects has given rise to the phenomenon of "offline romanticism," where users actively seek the remnants of the past within contemporary visual formats (Humayun & Belk, 2020).

In recent visual culture studies, the tendency to retain analog imperfections—such as visible paper textures or slightly faded colors—within digital mediums is viewed as a form of aesthetic resistance against the sterile visual cleanliness of modern technology (Paul, 2023). This exact condition brings us to the understanding of the post-digital era, where the boundaries between the physical and the digital dissolve, creating a hybridized space where graphic design from the past is not merely archived, but revitalized and imbued with new socio-cultural meanings.

In contemporary digital society, individuals evaluate imagery through a lens of "aesthetic authenticity"—the extent to which a digital representation replicates the optical depth and tonal richness of the physical world (Hoy, 2017). The appreciation of visual representations now hinges on their capacity to deliver immersive sensations that mimic haptic experiences. This pursuit drives the demand for digital design that increasingly mirrors physical interactions, even within virtual environments. Consequently, the transition to digital platforms necessitates a reevaluation of how we engage with cultural artifacts, as digitalization has redefined the formal criteria for a design's validity, shifting the focus from the durability of ink and paper to the fidelity of the pixel and screen-light.

This paradigmatic shift significantly impacts music album covers, prompting critical questions regarding their formal transformation. Historically, album covers function as essential visual media that utilize color theory, typography, and layout to represent musical content and capture the zeitgeist of an era (Sakrie, 2006). They operate through a complex visual hierarchy that guides the viewer's eye across a 12x12 inch canvas (Sgourev, Aadland & Formilan, 2023). In the current era of platformization—exemplified by Spotify—this large-scale format undergoes a drastic deconstruction. Album covers are now reduced to miniaturized thumbnails, often serving as secondary icons within a fast-scrolling interface.

This transformation raises a vital design issue: the visual hierarchy and legibility of the original cover are severely challenged. Direct interactions with the physical artifact disappear, and the aesthetic experience is now mediated by the constraints of the "thumbnail grid," where intricate details are often lost to visual compression.

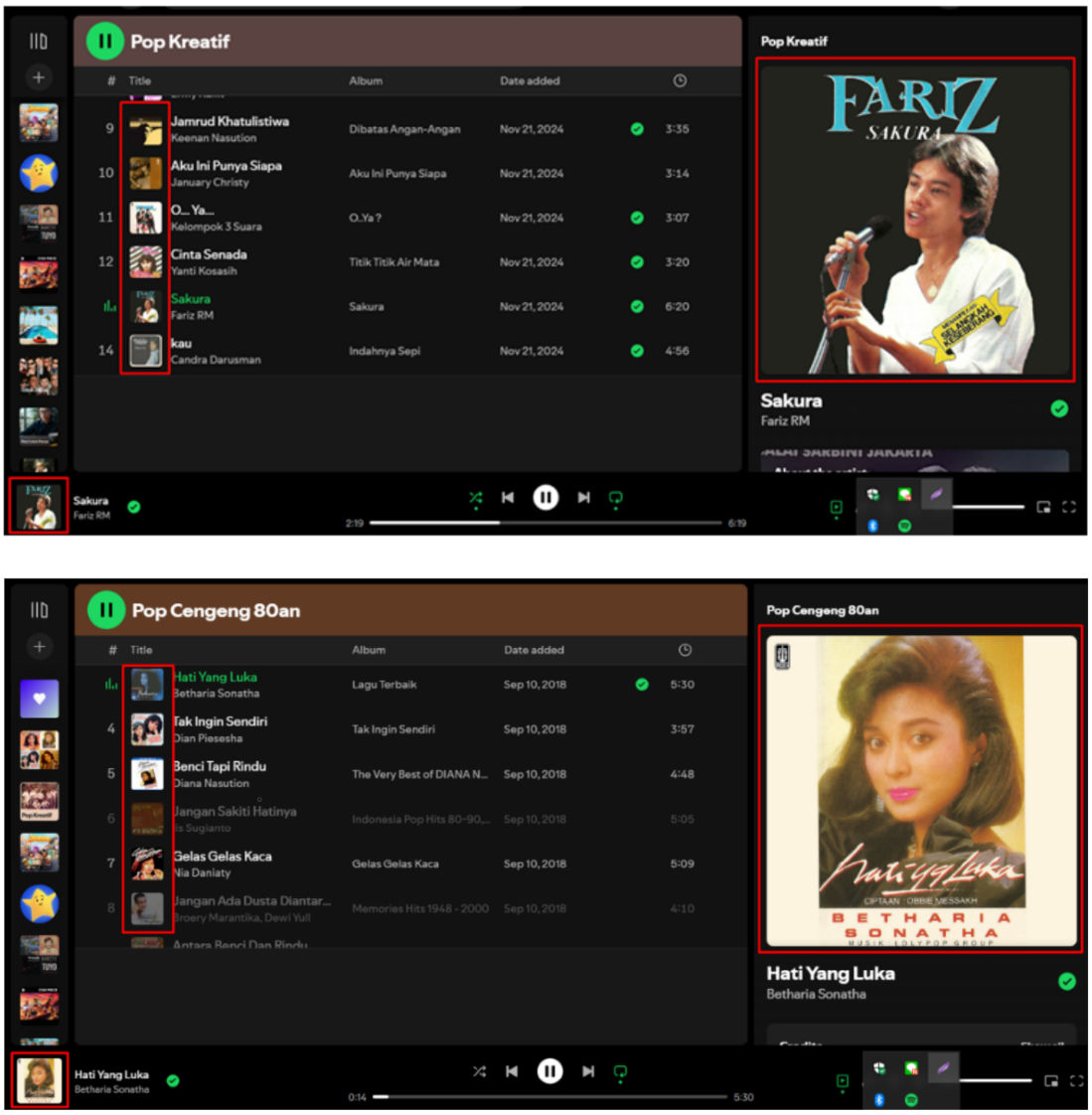
Amidst this digital dominance, a counter-movement emerges: a return to analog visual cues, driven by a desire for "visual grounding." This resurgence stems from a saturation with the rapid, ephemeral nature of digital thumbnails, leading to a yearning for the "haptic aesthetics" of the past (Humayun & Belk, 2020).

This movement responds to the visual fatigue caused by the endless stream of high-definition, frictionless imagery (Berry & Dieter, 2015). This behavior manifests in "neo-analog" design practices, which intentionally re-introduce "obsolete" elements—such as halftones, film grain, and manual lettering—to reclaim a sense of distinct materiality and emotional weight (Cramer, 2014). Such practices reflect a quest for a more personal visual experience, rejecting the digital efficiency that often flattens the depth of artistic expression (Nacher, 2018).

Within the framework of post-digital design, the visual world is no longer seen as a binary between "real" and "virtual," but as a continuum of materialities. The longing for profound visual experiences serves as an antithesis to the "fragmented scanning" typical of contemporary digital consumption (Ioannidis & Costa, 2019). Unlike the focused gaze required for physical art, digital interfaces often promote a superficial engagement (Citton, 2017).

The post-digital perspective, therefore, invites us to perceive technology not as a replacement for the old, but as a versatile infrastructure for archiving and re-narrating the aesthetics of the past (Cramer, 2014; Berry & Dieter, 2015). In this context, the Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s emerge as a significant case study. Often hailed as Indonesia's "golden age," the 1980s produced iconic pop works distinguished by a specific visual identity: a dominance of musician portraiture captured in distinctive poses, vibrant color palettes, and the extensive use of manual typographic techniques like Letraset (Sakrie, 2015; Dewanto, 2025).

The digitalization of these artifacts on Spotify presents a critical site for exploring the renegotiation of analog heritage within digital mediated networks. This research adopts a post-digital perspective and formal visual analysis to examine how these covers—originally designed for a tactile, physical format—survive and "resonate" as digital thumbnails. The significance of this study lies in redefining "visual aesthetic appreciation practices," which refers to the shifted ways audiences interact with miniaturized, screen-based representations that are rapidly consumed and algorithmically curated.



» **Figure 1:** *Screenshot of examples of Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s on the Spotify platform (desktop version). Top: "Sakura" album by Fariz RM (1980). Bottom: "Hati yang Luka" album by Betharia Sonata (1987). (Source: Spotify)*

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to conduct an in-depth analysis of visual textual elements within their original analog and remediated digital contexts. A qualitative approach is chosen because it aligns perfectly with the objective of comprehensively describing, interpreting, and evaluating specific visual phenomena over mere numerical representation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sambeka & Ali, 2024). In the realm of graphic design research, this qualitative method enables a profound exploration of how formal aesthetic choices—such as typography, color saturation, and layout—carry cultural and historical weight when translated across different media. Following the guidelines proposed by Leedy and Ormrod, this case study is bounded and structured to systematically evaluate the formal transformation of Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s within the contemporary digital ecosystem of Spotify (Muratovski, 2016).

Post-digital theory serves as the primary conceptual framework, providing a nuanced lens that views digital technology not as a novel disruption, but as an integrated infrastructure that continually archives and interacts with analog remnants (Cramer, 2014; Berry & Dieter, 2015). By synthesizing this theory with formal visual analysis, the research design effectively deconstructs the hybridity of these artifacts, bridging the disciplinary boundaries between media studies and graphic design to reveal how physical formats maintain their communicative power as digital thumbnails.

Sample Selection and Data Collection

To address previous methodological limitations and ensure a rigorous qualitative visual analysis, this study focuses on a concrete, clearly defined sample. The data consists of exactly 6 (six) Indonesian pop music album covers released between 1980 and 1989, accessed as digital thumbnails via the Spotify desktop application. The sample was determined using a purposive sampling technique designed to represent the two most dominant and culturally significant pop music sub-genres in Indonesia during that decade:

- Creative Pop
  3 album covers from highly productive musicians known for their experimental and progressive approaches, e.g.: “Sakura”- Fariz RM (1980), “Bossanova Indonesia”- Rafika Duri (1982), “Indahnya Sepi”- Candra Darusman (1981).
- Melancholic Pop
  3 album covers representing the massive commercial success of sentimental pop, e.g.: “Tak Ingin Sendiri”- Dian Piesesha (1984), “Kisah Kasih di Sekolah”- Obbie Messakh (1986), “Hati Yang Luka”- Betharia Sonata (1987).

The selection criteria for these 6 specific albums are based on the book of “Musisiku”(Ginting *& Sakrie*, 2007) and “Musisiku 2”(Komunitas Pencinta Musik Indonesia, 2009), which are: (1) Released during the 1980-1989 period; (2) Achieved high commercial success and profound cultural impact, ensuring their status as collective memory artifacts; and (3) Visually demonstrate a clear transition from a physical analog print (originally cassette formats) to a digital thumbnail representation on Spotify.

Formal Visual Analysis and Analytical Framework

To effectively bridge the post-digital theoretical framework with the discipline of graphic design, the analysis of the 6 selected album covers is operationalized through formal visual analysis. Rather than merely cataloging production techniques, this method evaluates the formal aesthetic and compositional qualities of the covers as they appear to the contemporary digital viewer. The visual analysis assesses four specific graphic design criteria:

- Typography
  The structural adaptation and digital legibility of analog lettering (such as Letraset) when compressed into a thumbnail.
- Color and Saturation
  The translation of the vibrant 1980s color palettes onto backlit digital screens.
- Composition and Visual Hierarchy
  How the spatial arrangement—specifically the dominance of musician portraiture—survives the constraints of the digital interface.
- Digital Reproduction of Analogue Materiality
  The visible retention of physical imperfections (e.g., paper textures, halftone dots, or faded edges) within the digital file.

These four graphic design criteria are then systematically analyzed through the three stages of the post-digital analytical framework. Post-digital theory is chosen as the analytical lens because it challenges binary distinctions between analog and digital, emphasizing hybridity—the blending of physical and virtual elements—and ambiguity in media experiences (Berry & Dieter, 2015).

This theory is integrated by applying its core concepts to the case study, allowing for a systematic deconstruction of how 1980s album covers are recontextualized (repositioned within new digital frameworks) and renegotiated (their meanings actively reshaped through user interactions and platform affordances) in the post-digital era. Key terms such as "recontextualization" (the relocation and adaptation of artifacts to new environments), "renegotiation" (the ongoing reinterpretation of cultural meanings), and "redefinition" (as defined above) are used consistently throughout to maintain conceptual clarity.

- Stage 1: Recontextualizing the Object/Phenomenon in the "Post-digital Condition".
  This stage examines how the formal elements—specifically the composition, visual hierarchy, and color palettes of the 6 album covers—adapt when relocated from physical cassette packaging to Spotify's thumbnail grid. It involves identifying these covers not as entities that are purely "digital" or "analog," but as artifacts navigating a new algorithmic environment where digital technology is integrated and "taken for granted" (Cramer, 2014).

- Stage 2: Deconstructing Binaries and Identifying Ambiguity/Hybridity.
  This stage analyzes how specific formal design choices—such as the digital reproduction of analog materiality (e.g., paper textures) or the legibility of manual typography (Letraset)—blur traditional dichotomies, including physical versus virtual and old versus new. This highlights the hybridity and ambiguity that frequently characterize the post-digital media experience (Berry & Dieter, 2015).

- Stage 3: Critical Analysis of Digitality Narratives and Socio-Cultural Implications.
  This stage evaluates how the persistent analog aesthetics (e.g., color saturation and the dominance of musician portraiture) of these 1980s covers challenge dominant narratives of digital progress, efficiency, and complete dematerialization.

This in-depth analysis requires adopting a reflective stance toward the broader socio-cultural implications, exploring how these visual elements actively renegotiate cultural meaning and evoke nostalgia within the global streaming landscape (Cramer, 2014).

Review and Synthesis of Literature

This section synthesizes existing literature on post-digital aesthetics and music album covers in the digital era, with a particular focus on Indonesian pop music from the 1980s. By integrating interdisciplinary perspectives from graphic design, media studies, and visual culture, this review establishes a conceptual foundation for understanding how analog media remnants, such as album covers, are recontextualized and renegotiated in post-digital conditions.

Post-Digital Aesthetic

The concept of post-digital aesthetics refers to the deliberate blending and interaction of digital and analog elements in art and design, reflecting the omnipresence of digital technology in contemporary visual culture. This aesthetic often involves the hybridization of digital and analog techniques, creating a seamless blend that challenges the boundaries between the physical and the virtual (Woo-Jung & Choon, 2022).

Within graphic design, there is a notable trend toward incorporating tangible, physical materialities—such as visible paper textures or manual print imperfections—alongside digital elements, which repositions digital creation within a new haptic aesthetic framework (Fernandes-Marcos & Pereira, 2022).

The post-digital artifact involves the conflation of medium and media, where the formal design parameters of an artwork (e.g., typography, color, and composition) and its networked, communicative status are intimately intertwined. This has led to the development of new formal traits and processes in contemporary visual communication (Frew, 2023).

Therefore, post-digital aesthetics represent a significant shift in how design is created and experienced, offering new possibilities for visual expression that embrace the remnants of the analog past to reflect the complexities of contemporary culture. This aesthetic not only challenges traditional boundaries but also opens up new possibilities for artistic expression and interaction. By understanding these key aspects, this article tries to gain a comprehensive view of the post-digital aesthetic concept and its impact on the case studies.

Album Covers in the Digital Era

The digital era has significantly transformed the music industry, fundamentally altering the functional and aesthetic role of graphic design in album covers. Despite the shift from physical formats to digital music consumption, album covers remain a crucial visual touchpoint in attracting listeners and shaping their perceptions. In the digital age, these covers must function effectively within the constrained interfaces of music streaming platforms. High-impact designs, characterized by strong visual hierarchy and legibility at thumbnail sizes, are essential for standing out in a crowded digital marketplace (Chang & Chiu, 2025). Furthermore, the design of these covers is heavily influenced by their socio-political, economic, and technological contexts (Chae & Kim, 2022).

Interestingly, the phenomenon of "digital nostalgia" has emerged, where the formal design cues of historical album covers evoke a sense of the past, appealing directly to consumers' emotions and collective memories. This nostalgic appeal is particularly potent in the digital landscape, where the aesthetics of obsolescence and analog materiality are deliberately highlighted to counter digital sterility (Jordan, 2024). Moreover, technological shifts—such as algorithmic curation on streaming platforms—offer new opportunities for value creation by recontextualizing historical artworks for modern audiences (Darvish & Bick, 2024). The persistent relevance of these visual artifacts, coupled with a resurgence in physical album sales in some markets, suggests a complementary rather than replacement relationship between digital and physical formats (Lee et al., 2020). Consequently, album covers remain a multidimensional aspect of the music industry; they are not merely promotional tools, but enduring visual artifacts whose graphic forms continue to mediate cultural and emotional responses in both physical and digital realms.

Results and Discussion

The post-digital era signifies not only the normalization of digital technology in daily life but also an ontological shift that reframes our understanding of visual culture through hybrid media forms. In this evolving landscape, conventional boundaries such as analog-digital, physical-virtual, and past-present become profoundly blurred, creating a hybridized space laden with aesthetic ambiguity where physical tactility is continuously renegotiated into screen materiality. The 6 (six) selected Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s serve as primary visual case studies that perfectly encapsulate this complexity. On Spotify, these graphic artifacts act as a vital bridge between analog nostalgia and digital functionality. They transition from tangible, historical prints into contemporary, algorithmic thumbnails, forcing formal design elements to adapt while continuously mediating collective cultural memory.

Recontextualizing Indonesian Pop Music Album Covers from the 1980s in the Post-digital Condition

The repositioning of an album cover from a material object—originally manifested in analog cassette inserts or vinyl sleeves—to the Spotify platform drastically alters its formal graphic function. Observing the 6 selected samples, ranging from the experimental pop of Fariz RM (*Sakura*, 1980), Candra Darusman (*Indahnya Sepi*, 1981), and Rafika Duri (*Bossanova Indonesia*, 1982) to the sentimental melancholia of Dian Piesesha (*Tak Ingin Sendiri*, 1984), Obbie Messakh (*Kisah Kasih di Sekolah*, 1986), and Betharia Sonata (*Hati Yang Luka*, 1987), the album cover now stands as a dialectical intersection. It is a negotiation between past analog materiality (e.g., printed paper textures, manual typography) and present digital immateriality (e.g., 50x50 pixel dimensions, backlighting, and interface metadata).

As seen in Figure 2 below, the visual aesthetics of these covers reflect traces of Indonesia's social, cultural, and technological conditions during the 1980s. However, when Spotify's interface reproduces these covers as miniaturized thumbnails, it necessitates a severe retranslation of their composition and visual hierarchy. In their original physical dimensions (e.g., a standard cassette j-card), these covers allowed viewers to explore intricate background details. In the post-digital condition of a screen, the visual hierarchy is forced to adapt. The dominance of the musician's portraiture—a hallmark of 1980s Indonesian pop design explicitly visible across all 6 samples in Figure 2—becomes the absolute focal point required to survive the compression of the digital grid. Spotify reframes the album cover artifact by miniaturizing it, yet it paradoxically relies on its vibrant color saturation and distinct analog poses to retain a nostalgic "aura" against the platform's sterile dark-mode interface.

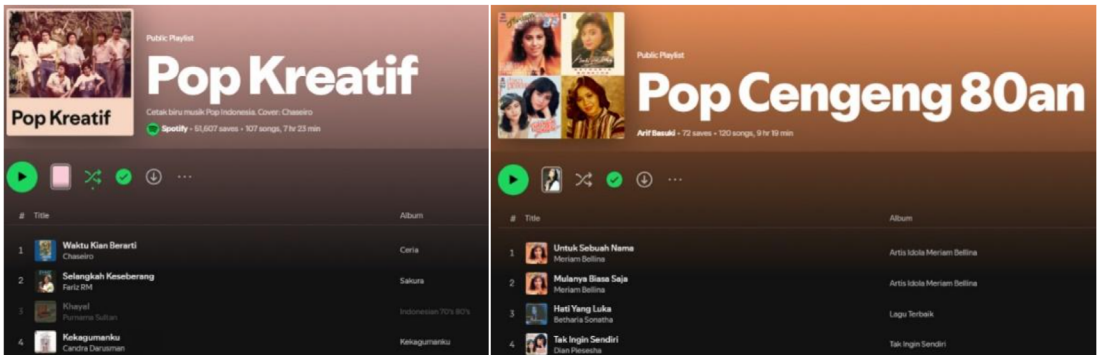
This recontextualization reveals a new perspective where these artifacts are not merely digitized relics but actively evolving visual entities. Consequently, the album cover undergoes a complete functional transformation. It no longer serves as a protective physical casing but emerges as a "visual gateway." The legibility of its colors and facial compositions must prompt users to "click," thereby granting access to audio archives and evoking collective memories of the 1980s. This post-digital interpretation reveals how graphic design not only alters our interactions with cultural artifacts but actively reshapes our relationships with time and memory.

Furthermore, the technological infrastructure governing the presence of pop music album covers warrants deeper examination as part of this recontextualization. By employing Spotify's curation algorithms, which record and implement personalization logic, the platform generates new contextual meanings. For example, the algorithm aggregates these historical visual artifacts and juxtaposes them in playlists titled "Creative Pop" or "80s Melancholic Pop" (See Figure 3).

In this algorithmic context, the graphic design of the album cover transcends its standalone visual form as a static physical casing, evolving into an active, clickable node within a vast digital information network. The persistent analog aesthetic of the 1980s—characterized by its manual typography, high-contrast portraiture, and vibrant color saturation—serves as a vital visual anchor in this fluid, data-driven dynamic. It actively unites contemporary users, historical artists, and nostalgic romanticism through the mechanism of screen materiality. Ultimately, this remediated visual artifact far surpasses its original analog function; it now operates as a continuous mediator of cultural memory, seamlessly weaving the tactile heritage of Indonesian pop into the everyday consumption patterns of the global streaming landscape.



» **Figure 2:** *The visualization of Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s on the Spotify platform. Top (left-right): "Sakura" - Fariz RM (1980), "Bossanova Indonesia" - Rafika Duri (1982), "Indahnya Sepi" - Candra Darusman (1981). Bottom (left-right) : "Tak Ingin Sendiri" - Dian Piesesha (1984), "Kisah Kasih di Sekolah" - Obbie Messakh (1986), "Hati Yang Luka" - Betharia Sonata (1987). (Source: Spotify)*



» **Figure 3:** *The "Creative Pop" (top) and "80s Melancholic Pop" (bottom) playlists, which users can locate in the search column and save to their favorite playlists. (Source: Spotify)*

Deconstructing Binaries and Identifying Ambiguity/Hybridity

This stage actively seeks to dissolve the tension of binary oppositions that have conventionally shaped our standardized understanding of media: analog versus digital, physical versus virtual, old versus new, and human versus machine. The post-digital stance eschews these rigid dichotomies, embracing ambiguity and hybridity as the constitutive characteristics of contemporary visual culture.

Consequently, the critical task of this elaboration stage is to identify how the formal graphic elements of the 1980s Indonesian pop music album covers on Spotify actively obscure and dismantle these conventional boundaries. Rather than viewing these digitized covers merely as static remnants of a bygone era, we must analyze them as dynamic interfaces where tangible print heritage collides with algorithmic display. By dissecting specific design choices—such as manual typography and retained paper textures—we can reveal how the physical past is continuously renegotiated within the digital present.

This analog-digital relationship can be recognized as an unstable binary opposition, where meaning remains incomplete and exists in a state of suspension (*différance*, drawing on Derrida's theoretical framework)—its meaning will never be fixed or universally agreed upon, continually evolving with time and subsequent technological contexts.

The Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s visually allude to their "original form" (such as physical cassette j-cards or vinyl sleeves), which physically no longer exists within the digital ecosystem of Spotify, yet they establish a new, authentic visual presence. By translating physical wear and manual typography into illuminated pixels, the graphic design of the music album cover transforms into an "open text." Its aesthetic meaning is perpetually rewritten through user interactions, responsive interface updates, and screen resolution variations across different devices.

The deconstruction commences with a rejection of reducing the album cover to an artifact aligned solely with either the analog or digital realm. On the Spotify platform, these album covers emerge as digital simulations that deliberately preserve the imperfections of analog print aesthetics. As highlighted by the red squares in Figure 4, subtle visual anomalies are evident across both the Creative Pop and Melancholic Pop genres.

For instance, the visible CMYK halftone dots on Rafika Duri's portrait (Creative Pop) and the faded print edges and paper grain on Betharia Sonata's and Dian Piesesha's covers (Melancholic Pop) are digitally reproduced. These retained flaws generate a compelling illusion of materiality within an entirely immaterial platform. By meticulously preserving these analog artifacts—which would normally be perceived as printing errors or signs of decay—Spotify's digital interface paradoxically enhances their authenticity as historical objects. This "tactile" visuality functions not as a technical failure, but as a deliberate graphic strategy to evoke a sense of haptic nostalgia in contemporary listeners navigating a sterile screen.

Moreover, this hybridity is distinctly articulated in the album cover's function as a temporal bridge between "new" and "old." On one hand, its graphic design—characterized by the bold, emotive lettering of Melancholic Pop or the experimental layouts of Creative Pop—evokes nostalgia for the collective memory of the 1980s, frequently romanticized as the golden era of the Indonesian pop music industry. On the other hand, Spotify situates these historical visuals within the framework of post-digital music consumption, governed by streaming logic, dark-mode interfaces, algorithmic personalization, and playlist preferences.

This ambiguity fosters a productive tension in the user experience: are they engaging with an authentic cultural artifact from the past, or a synthesized "retro" aesthetic reformulated to cater to contemporary listeners' visual preferences? The post-digital condition subtly compels us to acknowledge that the answer encompasses both simultaneously, thereby resisting binary simplification.



» **Figure 4:** *The imperfections of analog aesthetics (indicated by red square), which digitally reproduce an illusion of analog materiality. Top (left-right): "Sakura" - Fariz RM (1980), "Indahnya Sepi" - Candra Darusman (1981), "Bossanova Indonesia" - Rafika Duri (1982). Bottom (left-right) : "Tak Ingin Sendiri" - Dian Piesesha (1984), "Kisah Kasih di Sekolah" - Obbie Messakh (1986), "Hati Yang Luka" - Betharia Sonata (1987). (Source: Spotify)*

This deconstruction offers a fresh perspective that reframes these covers as embodiments of post-digital fluidity, where analog print imperfections fundamentally enhance digital authenticity rather than oppose it. The subsequent endeavor is to dismantle the binary divide between humans and machines. The original Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s are profound products of human creativity.

They were meticulously crafted by graphic designers, photographers, and art directors collaborating with manual tools—such as Letraset dry-transfer type, physical cut-and-paste layouts, and darkroom photography—that exemplify high "craftsmanship" consistent with the technological advancements of their time. Yet, on Spotify, these highly tactile, human-made objects are mediated, compressed, curated, and disseminated by non-human, algorithm-driven systems.

This dynamic does not reflect a hierarchical relationship (where machines are subordinate to humans, or vice versa) but rather a deeply symbiotic one. The Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s constitute inseparable hybrid entities: the tangible imprint of human creativity (authentic manual design) converges with machine logic (algorithmic curation and pixel grid rendering) and is animated by user behavior (scrolling and clicking).

The "soul" resonating within these music album covers hinges entirely on this exact hybrid interplay between human craftsmanship and machine distribution. Consequently, the ontological question that emerges shifts from "What is a music album cover?" to "How does the graphic materiality of the album cover manifest and survive within the post-digital condition?"

Narratives of Digitality and Socio-Cultural Implications of 1980s Pop Music Album Covers

This concluding in-depth analysis critically aims to elucidate how the Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s engage with—and frequently challenge—dominant narratives surrounding digital technology. Narratives such as linear progress, absolute efficiency, or complete dematerialization are not accepted uncritically. Instead, the researcher strives to interrogate them to reveal their embedded social, cultural, and political implications.

The prevailing narrative often portrays digitality as a democratizing force that revolutionizes access and eradicates physical/material constraints. At first glance, the digitalization of the 1980s Indonesian pop music catalog on Spotify appears to substantiate this narrative. Recordings once confined to physical media formats (vinyl records, cassettes) now enjoy boundless accessibility. However, rather than abolishing materiality, digitalization generates new materialities and revitalizes analog graphic aesthetics as visual commodities. Through their retained analog visual cues, these covers serve as instruments of symbolic resistance against the threat of total dematerialization. This evidence underscores that digital technology does not invariably erase the old; rather, it provides a versatile infrastructure for archiving, recontextualizing, and re-narrating the romanticism of the past.

The socio-cultural implications of this post-digital phenomenon are particularly compelling, especially concerning the emergence of transgenerational nostalgia. Younger generations, unacquainted with the physical tactility of cassette tapes, can now readily connect with the cultural heritage of preceding generations via the familiar interface of streaming platforms.

The “aura” of the artwork paradoxically re-emerges in a transformed ecosystem. This new aura no longer derives from the uniqueness of a physical print but from its immaterial capacity to evoke emotional resonance within a digital grid.

This new aura is actively sustained and manipulated by the platform's infrastructure, revealing a profound socio-cultural shift through algorithmic flattening. Historically, during Indonesia's New Order era in the 1980s, the music industry was sharply divided by socio-political hierarchies. Pop Kreatif (represented by artists like Fariz RM) was celebrated as the sophisticated sound of the urban intellectual class. In stark contrast, Pop Cengeng or Melancholic Pop (represented by Betharia Sonata or Obbie Messakh) faced severe government censorship in 1988 for allegedly "weakening the national morale" with its deeply sentimental lyrics and aesthetic. Yet, by systematically embedding these visual artifacts into curated environments—such as Spotify’s "Pop Kreatif" and "Pop Cengeng 80an" playlists (See Figure 3)—the platform strips away this intense historical hierarchy. The algorithm repackages these historically conflicted genres into identically sized, 50x50 pixel digital playlists, transforming a once-heated national political debate into adjacent, commodified "retro moods" for global digital consumption.

This structural integration demonstrates how the graphic covers negotiate commodification. Packaged and labeled merely as "80s" content, they face inevitable political ramifications. On one level, the digitalization elevates local Indonesian culture onto the global entertainment stage. Conversely, it risks severe cultural reduction.

Laden with local socio-historical struggles, these visual artifacts are reduced to mere aesthetic labels within a landscape perpetually craving exotic content. Post-digital critique compels us to reconsider: who ultimately controls this narrative? Do global platforms like Spotify, driven by commercial algorithms, now serve as the primary curators of Indonesia’s pop cultural heritage?

Philosophically, this inquiry prompts deep reflection on the interconnectedness of human memory and algorithmic curation. Our cultural identity is never static; it is perpetually reconstructed through efforts to reinterpret the past in response to present challenges. The 1980s Indonesian pop music album covers on Spotify emerge as significant visual sites within this narrative reconstruction. Yet, the resulting narratives are replete with dialectical tensions: between preservation and exploitation, historical authenticity and digital simulation, and organic memory versus algorithmic nostalgia.

Table 1

The key concepts and implications of the article’s findings

Main Theme	Key Concepts	Implications
Recontextualization	• Transformation from physical (vinyl, cassettes) to digital (thumbnails). • Shift from static images to interactive gateways. • Retention of analog aesthetics (e.g., decorative typography, vibrant color) in a digital format. • Integration into Spotify's algorithmic ecosystem.	• Album covers evolve from passive objects to dynamic, clickable elements. • Digitalization alters but preserves nostalgic value. • Technology reshapes cultural engagement and visual memory.
Deconstructing Binaries	• Hybrid identity blending analog print and digital pixels. • Simulacra preserving analog imperfections (halftones, scratches). • Temporal bridge between past and present. • Symbiosis of human craftsmanship and machine logic.	• Challenges rigid dichotomies (analog/digital, old/new, human/machine). • Fosters ambiguous, perpetually evolving visual meanings. • Reflects the aesthetic fluidity of the post-digital condition.
Narratives of Digitality	• Democratization through global accessibility. • Risk of commodification (e.g., algorithmic flattening into ""retro"" labels). • Transgenerational nostalgia. • Tension between historical preservation and commercial exploitation.	• Digital platforms archive and simultaneously commodify local culture. • Raises critical issues of authenticity and narrative control. • Connects generations while risking the reduction of socio-political history.

Through this synthesis of theoretical perspectives and visual analysis, the redefinition of 1980s Indonesian pop music album covers on Spotify emerges as a pivotal conceptual outcome (summarized in Table 1). These covers have been fundamentally transformed from static, physical packaging into dynamic, hybrid entities that re-frame our engagement with cultural memory in the post-digital era.

Originally tangible objects bound to the limitations of print technology, these covers have been remediated into clickable visual nodes. Their hybrid identity dismantles traditional boundaries, proving that analog imperfections actively enhance digital authenticity. Socio-culturally, while this digitalization democratizes access and fosters transgenerational connections, it simultaneously risks flattening rich, politically charged cultural histories into easily consumable aesthetic tags. Ultimately, the graphic design of these album covers transcends its original commercial purpose; it becomes a multidimensional mirror reflecting how a society navigates the delicate tension between preserving its localized tactile past and surrendering to a globalized, algorithm-driven future.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The primary findings reveal that Indonesian pop music album covers from the 1980s have evolved into dynamic hybrid artifacts, effectively bridging their tangible analog origins with their immaterial digital existence. This evolution actively dismantles traditional dichotomies such as analog-digital, physical-virtual, and human-machine. Within the post-digital condition—where digital technology integrates seamlessly into daily life—the role of the music album cover transcends mere visual packaging to become an interactive interface. By retaining and even amplifying analog graphic aesthetics—such as manual Letraset typography, visible CMYK halftones, and high-contrast portraiture—within a compressed pixel grid, these covers generate a renewed, haptic "aura." This condition overwhelmingly confirms that digitalization does not merely reproduce or archive cultural artifacts; it actively remediates them, imbuing them with new contextual significance.

On Spotify, these album covers function as digital simulacra, deliberately preserving the imperfections and physical decay of print media to create a compelling illusion of materiality within a sterile digital ecosystem. Their hybridity serves as a temporal bridge connecting the collective memory of the 1980s with contemporary streaming logic. Crucially, this research highlights the socio-cultural phenomenon of algorithmic flattening. Historically opposed genres—such as the politically scrutinized Pop Cengeng (Melancholic Pop) and the urban-elite Pop Kreatif—are stripped of their New Order-era socio-political tensions. Spotify's algorithms repackage these heavily coded historical artifacts into adjacent, identically sized playlists. Consequently, while this digitalization fosters transgenerational nostalgia and connects today's youth with the tactile heritage of the past, it simultaneously risks reducing profound cultural histories into commodified "retro" aesthetic tags for global consumption.

In summary, this research enriches the intersection of digital culture studies, graphic design, and the Indonesian pop music industry. By synthesizing post-digital frameworks with rigorous visual analysis, it contributes to design discourse by demonstrating how formal visual elements can be renegotiated to maintain communicative power in compressed digital formats. For contemporary graphic designers, this study offers actionable insights into "hybrid materiality" strategies. It proves that the deliberate simulation of analog imperfections (e.g., subtle scratches, paper grain, or faded colors) is a powerful mechanism to enhance emotional engagement, authenticity, and user retention in an era dominated by algorithmic curation. Furthermore, it advances the study of digital cultural artifacts by providing a robust analytical model for examining other analog-to-digital transitions in global media contexts.

Ultimately, through the post-digital lens, the 1980s Indonesian pop music album covers on Spotify transcend their status as mere digital image files; they embody multidimensional reflections of post-digital existential complexity. They invite critical reflection on how society navigates the delicate tension between preserving organic memory and surrendering to technological curation. Building on this theoretical synthesis, future studies could empirically examine user interactions with these album covers through survey analysis or UX methodologies to quantify aesthetic appreciation in post-digital contexts. Additionally, comparative research across other Southeast Asian music eras or streaming platforms like Apple Music could explore regional variations in visual hybridity and commodification. Finally, investigating AI-driven generative redesigns of analog artifacts may reveal emerging trends in automated cultural mediation, significantly extending the discourse on the ethical implications of design and digital heritage preservation.

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