

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Communication is an essential process that allows people to share thoughts, ideas, and emotions to build understanding and social connection. As Fiske (1990) explains, communication is “the production and exchange of meaning,” which shows that it does not only involve the transmission of words but also gestures, symbols, and visual elements that support the delivery of meaning. These elements serve as signs that represent ideas or concepts in ways people can interpret and understand. The study of communication extends into the field of semiotics, which investigate the use of signs and symbols in conveying meaning (Chandler, 2007).

Semiotics is a branch of linguistics that studies about signs. A sign is something that represents something to someone in a particular respect or capacity (Peirce, 1894). According to Saussure (1916), semiotics comprises two fundamental elements: signifier and signified. A signifier denotes the physical form of a sign, such as a word, image, or sound. On the other hand, signified represents the concept or meaning associated with that sign. Since meaning is constructed through the association between the signifier and signified, signs can appear in different forms, shaping the way people communicate and interpret messages. This leads to the distinction between verbal and non-verbal signs, which both play a crucial role in conveying meaning across various contexts

Barthes (1964) categorizes signs into two primary types: verbal and non-verbal signs. Verbal signs refer to any text in an image, like slogans, captions, or brand names. Meanwhile, non-verbal signs include everything people see in an image, such as colours, symbols, facial expressions, and composition. These signs have two functions or meaning, such as denotation and connotation. Barthes (1964) states that denotation is the literal, direct, or primary meaning of a sign, what is explicitly represented. It is the objective, dictionary definition of a word or the straightforward meaning of the object. Meanwhile, connotation refers to hidden or additional, cultural, emotional, or symbolic meanings that people associate with a sign. Denotation and connotation function together to shape how audiences interpret signs. Through the combination of verbal and non-verbal elements, these signs convey messages and create meaning within a given context, particularly in analyzing media communication.

In today's era, the media is the most effective communication tool for shaping public perception, ideas, and cultural understanding. This is noticeable in advertisements, films, posters, etc. A poster is a visual message designed to be displayed in a public area. (Pucacicua, 2014). In the film industry, posters play a crucial role as a visual communication tool. They are not only used for promotion but also to convey meaning through a combination of verbal and non-verbal elements. Netflix, as one of the leading streaming platforms, is well-known for creating its promotional media, including documentary film posters. In this study, selected Netflix documentary film such as *Period. End of Sentence* (2018), *Icarus* (2017), *The White Helmet* (2016), *13th* (2016), and *Winter on Fire* (2015) used as

data sources. Those posters effectively combine verbal and non-verbal signs using colours, symbols, and text to capture attention. They also reflect the themes of the documentaries. Each of these films explores diverse themes such as empowerment (*Period. End of Sentence*), corruption (*Icarus*), humanitarianism (*The White Helmet*), injustice/racism (*13th*), and revolution (*Winter on Fire*).

In recent years, Netflix documentaries have shifted from providing entertainment to becoming a medium that raises social awareness and encourages public engagement. These selected films have attracted large audiences and sparked significant public discussion. For instance, Reuters (2020) reported that the documentary *13th* experienced a major increase in viewership, reaching millions of people. This demonstrates that Netflix documentaries are highly effective in engaging the public and increasing awareness of social issues. Although these films have a strong influence, most academic studies still focus on film narratives or analyze posters from different contexts. Meanwhile, promotional materials, especially documentary posters, have received limited academic attention. In fact, posters play a vital role in visual communication by combining verbal and non-verbal elements to deliver messages and shape audience interpretation even before the film is watched.

The selection of Netflix documentary posters as the object of this study is based on clear academic considerations. From a semiotic perspective, posters are visual texts containing signs that can be systematically analyzed to understand how meaning is formed. While numerous studies have examined film posters across various genres, including horror, action, comedy, and other popular categories,

studies that specifically analyze documentary film posters are still limited. Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by analyzing how verbal and non-verbal signs in these posters convey meaning. This study is expected to contribute to semiotic studies and improve our understanding of how media visuals, especially documentary posters, influence public perceptions of social issues.

1.2 Problems of the Study

Based on the background described above, this study found two key problems, such as:

1. What are verbal and non-verbal signs found in selected Netflix documentary film posters?
2. What are the meanings of verbal and non-verbal signs found in selected Netflix documentary film posters?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the problem outlined above, this study proposes the following objectives:

1. To identify the verbal and non-verbal signs found in selected Netflix documentary film posters.
2. To analyze the meaning of verbal and non-verbal signs found in selected Netflix documentary film posters.

1.4 Limitation of the Study

Related to the problem above, this study limit the analysis only two objectives such as to identify and analyze verbal and non-verbal sign found in selected Netflix documentary film posters, using theory from Saussure in Chandler (2007) about semiotics, Barthes (1964) about meaning, and supporting by Wierzbicka (1996) about colours theory.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study divided into theoretical significance and practical significance. Those are explained bellow:

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

The result of this study might be useful to increase our knowledge in studying semiotics. It also aims to enhance readers' understanding of linguistics and semiotic theory, particularly the sign system applied in film posters and the meanings conveyed through verbal and non-verbal signs.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

Practically, the current study may use as a reference data source and provide supporting literature for other researchers who analyze non-verbal and verbal sign systems in film posters or other media. By offering insights into how meaning is constructed through semiotic elements, this study contribute to academic discussions and useful for future scholars in developing new perspectives on visual media examination.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE, CONCEPTS, AND THEORIES

2.1 Review of Related Literature

In current study of semiotics analysis, many researchers have explored the use of verbal and non-verbal signs in advertisements, film posters, also other forms of media. Semiotics, as a theory of signs, helps explain how meaning is created and communicated through both non-verbal and verbal elements. This review looked at previous studies on several data sources to provide a basis for analyzing Netflix documentary posters.

This study used five previous studies, which include two theses and three articles. The first study conducted by Manu (2024) titled “The Semiotics of Music Concert Digital Posters: A Comparison”. This study examines three Bali music concert posters for each year in 2013 and 2023 to investigate verbal and non-verbal signs in it. This study employed Saussure’s framework as cited in Chandler (2007) to identify verbal and non-verbal signs, applied Barthes’ (1977) theory to examine denotative and connotative meanings, also supported by Cerrato’s (2012) theory on color analysis. The study shows that, while words are important, the real impact comes from the visuals, which capture the attention of modern youth and make the content more engaging. Using familiar figures and authentic colours to connect youthful energy with regional identity, making the messages both meaningful and relatable. Both Manu’s study and current study use Saussure’s semiotic theory and

Barthes' meaning theories to examine how verbal and non-verbal work together to convey meaning. However, Manu focused on commercial advertising with playful themes, while the current study analyzed Netflix documentary posters that highlight serious societal issues such as empowerment, humanitarianism, revolution, injustice/racism, and corruption.

The second study was written by Dewitri (2023) entitled "A Semiotic Analysis of Verbal and Visual Signs in The Conjuring Universe Movie Posters". This study aimed to identify the denotative and connotative meanings of verbal and visual signs by applying Saussure's theory (Chandler, 2007) about semiotics, Barthes' (1977) concepts of denotation and connotation, and Cerrato's (2012) about colour theory. The study found that the visual and textual elements in the posters created a frightening atmosphere, which successfully captured the audience's attention. Both studies explore how non-verbal elements are combined with verbal elements to evoke emotions. However, Dewitri's focused on fictional horror movie posters designed to create fear, while the current study analyzed documentary film posters that aim to inform audiences about real-world issues.

The third study written by Agustia (2021) entitled "Semiotic Analysis of Hotel Advertisement" analyzed hotel advertisements in Bali using semiotic theories from Barthes (1964) and Saussure (1967). The study aimed to interpret the meanings of words and images in the advertisement and to address possible misunderstandings between hotel marketing messages and tourists' perceptions. Data were collected through observation and analyzed to ensure the symbols matched the intended meaning for the target audience. In contrast, current study

examined the verbal and non-verbal signs in Netflix documentary film posters which address social issues. It used Saussure's semiotics theory in Chandler (2007) and Barthes' (1964) about theory of meaning, along with Wierzbicka's (1996) colour theory. The posters used more complex and symbolic signs to encourage critical thinking and raise awareness about important social issues, rather than direct persuasion. The main difference is that hotel advertisements focus on clear, simple signs to attract customers, while documentary posters use deeper, symbolic signs to raise awareness and reflection. This current study also add colour analysis, which was not included in the previous study. Although both use similar semiotic and meaning theories, their goals and contexts differ.

The fourth study was written by Darmayanti and Marantika (2023) analyzed about "Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs Found in Titanic Movie Poster". In this study Barthes' (1997) semiotic framework is employed to analyze the meaning is communicated through verbal and non-verbal elements, and it is further supported by Cerrato's (2012) theory of color terms. The study highlighted the role of both signs conveying meaning in "Titanic" movie poster. The verbal signs, such as titles and taglines, alongside the visual elements, such as images of the actors, work together to attract viewers' attention and convey connotative meanings. Both studies aim to uncover the deeper messages communicated through the combination of words and visuals. However, the study of "Titanic" movie poster focuses on promoting a commercial entertainment film that emphasizing romantic and emotional appeal to attract audiences differ with current study that focused on documentary film posters which aims to raise awareness about societal issues.

The last study was written by Widiанти et al. (2024) analyzed about “Semiotic Analysis on Verbal and Visual Signs in Cyber Safety Poster”. This study aims to identify the types, meanings, and functions of verbal and visual signs in cyber safety posters by applying Pierce’s semiotic theory (Chandler, 2007) and Leech’s (1981) theory of meaning and function. The study demonstrates how verbal and non-verbal signs are used to convey conceptual and connotative meaning, as well as informative and directive functions, effectively communicating cyber safety messages. Both studies investigate how verbal and non-verbal signs work together to deliver meaning. In contrast, Widiанти et al. focus to inform and persuade people to raise awareness of cyber safety, meanwhile, current studies focused on Netflix documentary film posters that aim to inform audiences about critical societal issues.

According to the previous studies above, they influenced the current study by showing how semiotic analysis, especially of verbal and non-verbal signs, can be conducted using different theoretical approaches and data sources. Through verbal and non-verbal elements, Netflix documentary film posters created strong emotional connections with audiences and highlight various societal issues. Meanwhile, the difference between those studies and the current study lay in the theory and data source used. While all previous studies employed Cerrato’s (2012) theory to analyze the meaning of colours, the current study applied the theory of colour meaning proposed by Wierzbicka (1996).

2.2 Concepts

Concepts play an essential role in guiding this study, as they define the key terms that frequently used throughout the study. To analyze the data sources effectively, four main concepts were used: semiotic, verbal sign, non-verbal sign, and poster.

2.2.1 Semiotic

Semiotic is the study that investigates the role of signs and symbols in the process of conveying meaning. According to Saussure's theory, sign defines of two components: the "signifier" refers to the tangible form of the sign, whereas the "signified" is the concept or idea that the sign communicates (Chandler, 2007). Pierce categorized signs into icons, indexes, and symbols depending on their relationship to the objects they represent (Pierce, 1982). In the case of film posters, verbal elements like titles, taglines, and credits, along with non-verbal elements such as colours, character placement, and symbols, work together to convey themes and attract viewers.

2.2.2 Verbal Sign

Verbal signs consist of the words or text used in communication, including titles, taglines, and captions, which provides straightforward information about a subject. Barthes (1964) elaborated on Saussure's semiotic theory introduces two levels of meaning, in which denotation refers to the literal or primary meaning of a sign, whereas connotation, which includes the emotional and cultural meanings associated with it. According to Peirce (1867)

verbal signs, like all signs, can be categorized as iconic, indexical, or symbolic based on their relationship to their object. Verbal signs not only deliver straightforward messages to the audience but also carry deeper cultural and emotional meanings that influence how the audience understands the message, adding more depth to communication.

2.2.3 Non-Verbal Sign

Non-verbal signs include images, colours, shapes, and design elements that communicate meaning through sight. Barthes (1964) introduced the idea that non-verbal signs convey both denotative meanings, which are literal or straightforward, and connotative meanings, which involved emotional or cultural associations. Wierzbicka (1996) emphasized that the interpretation of colours is influenced by cultural and linguistic contexts, where colours often refer to specific reference points in nature or society. These non-verbal signs play a key role in expressing themes, emotions, and ideas, making them a powerful tool in media and advertising for capturing attention and conveying deeper messages.

2.2.4 Poster

A poster is a form of communication that presents an image displayed in a public space (Pucacicua, 2014). Poster is a large, printed picture or notice that is placed on a wall to decorate a space or to advertise something. It is designed to combine text and visual elements to effectively communicate messages and attract attention. Poster as “a medium combining visual and textual elements,

designed for display in public places to inform, persuade, or advertise,” which highlights its role as both a communicative and persuasive tool within media studies (Chandler and Munday, 2011).

2.3 Theories

This study used three key theories. The first is Saussure’s semiotics theory in Chandler (2007), entitled “Semiotic: The Basics” to analyze verbal and non-verbal signs by examining how the signifier (the physical form) relates to the signified (the concept or meaning it represents). The second theory comes from Barthes (1964) in his work entitled “Elements of Semiology” which focuses on understanding meaning and its layers, including denotation and connotation. The third theory proposed by Wierzbicka (1996) in her book “Semantics: Primes and Universals” focuses on the meaning of colours.

2.3.1 Theory of Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs, symbols, and how they create meaning. According to Chandler (2007) in his book “Semiotics: The Basics”, semiotics is not just concerned with ‘sign’ as understood in everyday language but with anything that represents or stands for something else. Chandler also explained that, in the context of semiotics, signs can take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, or objects. According to Saussure (1964) in Chandler (2007), signs are made up of two primary components: “signifier” and “signified”. The signifier refers to the physical form or sound of a sign, including written or

spoken words. Meanwhile, the signified denotes the concept or meaning linked to the signifier. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is called ‘signification’.

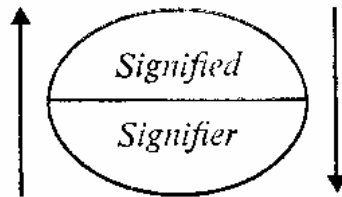


Figure 2. 1 Saussure's model of the sign (Saussure, 1964)

Source: Chandler (2007)

A sign requires the presence of both a signifier and a signified, as neither a meaningless signifier nor a formless signified can exist independently. If we take a linguistic example, the word ‘open’ (when interpreted by someone who sees it on a shop doorway) is a sign consisting of:

1. A signifier: the word ‘open’
2. A signified concept: that the shop is open for business.

The same signifier (the word "open") could represent a different signified (and thus be a different sign) if it appeared on a push-button inside an elevator (‘push to open door’). Similarly, many signifiers could represent the concept of ‘open’ (for instance, on top of a packing carton, a small outline of a box with an open flap indicating ‘open this end’), with each unique pairing constituting a different sign (Chandler, 2007).

2.3.2 Theory of Meaning

According to Barthes (1964), there are two levels of meaning in a sign: connotation and denotation. Denotation refers to the literal or primary meaning of a sign, while connotation refers to the hidden or additional cultural, emotional, or symbolic meaning that a sign carries. Both levels are essential for understanding how signs communicate messages. Furthermore, it explained below:

1) Denotation

Denotation refers to the first level of meaning in signs, where a sign expresses its literal or primary meaning. This level is straightforward and universal, focusing on the direct relationship between the signifier (the physical form of the sign) and the signified (the concept it represents). According to Barthes (1964), denotation offers clarity and objectivity, making it essential for effective communication. This concept is important for understanding language and communication because denotation typically refers to meanings that align with definitions found in dictionaries or meanings that are broadly accepted as valid in the context of communication and interpretation. For instance, Darmayanti and Marantika (2023) analyzed the *Titanic* movie poster, in which the image of Jack and Rose standing on the ship's bow literally represents the two main characters in a romantic pose. Based on Barthes' theory, this denotative meaning reveals the literal or explicit meaning of the poster. It provides a basis for interpretation, as viewers can easily identify the scene

and grasp its straightforward meaning before exploring any deeper symbolic or emotional meaning.

2) Connotation

Connotation refers to the meaning that goes beyond the literal or general interpretation. Barthes (1964) emphasizes that connotation is more complex and flexible than denotation, allowing signs to express deeper meanings beyond their literal interpretation. Connotation works at the second level of meaning and builds on denotation by adding layers of cultural, emotional, and ideological meanings to a sign. Barthes explains that connotation enhances communication by including personal interpretations shaped by context, experiences, and social values. For example, in the same *Titanic* poster analyzed by Darmayanti and Marantika (2023), the image of Jack and Rose standing on the bow also connotes romance, adventure, and heroism. The lighting, composition, and positioning of the characters convey emotions and values that are more than just showing two people on a ship. According to Barthes' theory, this connotative meaning highlights how visual elements communicate emotions and symbolic messages that influence viewers' interpretation and response about the movie.

2.3.3 Theory of Colours

Colour is important in posters because it helps draw attention and increase audience interest in the content. Wierzbicka (1996) states that there are seven primary colour terms that do not appear to conflict with each other in the same way or to the same degree. Below is a more detailed explanation of these colour terms:

1) Black and White

The meanings of the English words “black” and “white” show that they are important primary colour terms linked to darkness and light. Wierzbicka (1996) also mentions Leonardo da Vinci in his *Treatise on Painting*, where he states that white represents light, which is necessary for seeing any colour. On the other hand, the colour black is often associated with strength, elegance, formality, mortality, evil, and mystery. In contrast, white stands for brightness, simplicity, kindness, purity, and innocence, often representing new beginnings. Because of its positive meanings, white is seen as the opposite of black. In advertising, white is viewed as an opaque colour rather than transparent and is connected to ideas of coolness and clarity, inspired by the colour of snow.

Wierzbicka (1966) states that black and white are opposite colours, strongly linked to the concepts of dark and light. This contrast is connected to the difference between night and day, which helps explain why we use “dark” and “light” as colour terms. When people see dark objects, they

often think of them in bright light, which can create a sense of someone's presence nearby.

2) Green

Wierzbicka (1996) explains that the term "green" in English is strongly linked to grass, herbs, and vegetation, which are common associations across languages worldwide. In English, "green" often symbolizes growth and vitality. However, different shades of green carry varied meanings; for instance, dark green is connected to ambition, desire, jealousy, and greed, while yellow green can represent illness, cowardice, or discord. Olive green is traditionally associated with calmness and serenity, whereas aqua signifies emotional healing and protection.

3) Blue

The English word "blue" is historically associated with the sky and large bodies of water like lakes and seas. This connection evokes feelings of openness and tranquillity. Light blue is often linked to softness, health, healing, security, and abstract ideas such as creativity or inspiration. It can create a calming atmosphere that promotes relaxation. In contrast, dark blue conveys strength, morality, seriousness, and intelligence; it is often seen as a colour of authority and trustworthiness. This duality in blue allows it to be used in various contexts, from branding to emotional expression (Wierzbicka, 1996).