Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

The first chapter presents a general description of this research. This chapter is composed of research background, statement of problems, research objectives, research significance, conceptual framework, previous studies.

1. 1   Background of Problem

The modern age of communications nowadays mainly uses internet as the platform of instantaneous social interaction. Ranging from texting, video calls to sharing photos and videos on social media. Starting from the early 21st Century, internet had only a limited access and is used by a small margin of people. As the year goes by today almost everyone on earth uses internet regularly. The reason being, individuals are making use of technologies and modern and innovative methods in communicating because of advancements of technology and with the advent of modernization and globalization. (Kapur, 2020). The technologies created by more advanced systems now becoming an important part of our daily social interactions. However, despite these modern advances, the concept of communication remains the same as a process of exchanging symbols that can be understood by the listener. The technologies that are being created throughout the years also give rise to the internet or the *world wide web* as a bridge between all civilization in the world. Then advancement of internet will eventually give birth to a social media as a much simple and refine form of textual communication.

Social media now being used by individual and a community to interact with each other and shares their thoughts and experience for others to know and see. "*Social media also makes it easier for us to interact with many people without worrying about distance and time*" (Manurung et al., 2023) Since social media now conveniently became the main mode of communication worldwide, interaction with others conveyed through texts, pictures and videos also Meme. "Memes are contagious patterns of cultural information that are transferred from mind to mind,

which directly shape and transmit the key actions and mentalities of a social group" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). The impact of Meme in society is that they are a part of every culture in the world and are used to explain natural phenomena, where a people came from and how their civilization developed, and why things happen as they do. Today almost everyone on the internet shares memes as part of their social interaction between each other, regardless of their gender, age, and nationality. Most people only know that memes represent a comedic and funny way to communicate and shares with others to strengthen their relationship without knowing the true meaning of it. Modern Meme or The Internet "meme" is usually described as a catchy derivative that is being repeated over and over which contains some aspect of pop culture, essentially being an inside joke and catchphrase. It can however make its original meaning become muddled and completely different, beyond any recognition or humor If not used carefully. Fandom being what it is, this also applies to characters. Fans are liable to spread a "meme" version of a character which is usually at odds with the original depiction, such as a cheerful version of a dark or scary character, a sexy version of a character featured in Dexter episode, or an optimistic version of a normally depressed, tragic character. Memes often used ironically from the original source and regardless of content, or sensibilities may be the only ones who know enough about the source material to spread it. Furthermore, some memes reference something common, but become catchy enough to be associated with only a single new thing.

Basically, in a messy world we live in memes often giving a sense of meaning and peace. Richard Dawkins introduced the term "meme" in 1976 in his book and what could be best described as internet memes as a form of creativity (Dawkins, 2006). Although the meaning of memes been around a while for about a decade, relatively their study is new, with researchers seeking to understand their role in communication. Today, memes often featuring 2 dimensional characters or facial expressions. The earliest form of meme around the internet in 2010's was "ragecomic" featuring some like the "Me Gusta face", uploaded by illustrator Matt Oswald on the 4chan website on March 18, 2010 (Fitriyah, 2020). Fast forward until 2020's, meme format changes significantly from comic-like into something

resemblance a reactionary image. The images from memes contains a meaning and sometimes given a text to convey the emotion and background to the meme itself like a short story or an anecdote. These combination of images and text formed a meaning and a sign which makes meme as form of a semiotic studies.

In semiotic, memes are objects of communication in the form of images/symbols that reveal and contains a meaning and therefore must be understood. Semiotic is a study which learns the sign, object, and it's meaning scientifically, there are the signifier and the signified, the sign is the signifier and the signified refers to the meaning if the sign. Examples of semiotics commonly include traffic signs, and emoticons used in social media. Signs are everywhere around us. Consider a set of paired sinks in a bathroom. The hot water on left side, the right is the cold. Long time ago, letters are designated on each temperature of the water C for cold H for hot in English on all taps. Today taps semiotic content of sink tells us to turn right for cold and left for hot water, and have no letter designations or are included in one tap. The information about how to avoid getting burned is a sign. There are many theories of Semiotic from linguist experts like Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Roland Barthes. In this Thesis the writer will use Roland Barthes's Semiotic as the basis for the research.

Roland Barthes, a French literary theorist and philosopher, his contributions to semiotics is well known by experts, which is the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation. Barthes' semiotic theory emphasizes that meaning is constructed through the relationships between signs rather than being inherent in the signs themselves. According to Barthes, *"the image of the wrestler's physique is the signifier. The concept of baseness is the signified. The combination of the two—the villainous body—is the sign"* (Griffin et al., 2019). Overall, Barthes' semiotic theory highlights the complexity of communication and how cultural contexts shape our understanding of signs. This approach had a profound impact on literary criticism, cultural studies, and media analysis. Internet Memes also has the same structure of an image as signifier, and the text as the signified. Barthes refers to "orders of signification." as the first order of signification is denotation, while

connotation represents the second order (Ishar & Irawan, 2023). According to Roland Barthes' concept of semiotic connotations, the analysis of a sign goes beyond its primary meaning to explore its connotative meanings. The first order consists of the signifier and signified, forming a sign known as denotation. From these signs, additional meanings and mental concepts arise, which are linked to the sign (signifier). This new interpretation is termed connotation, which is understood as a signifier that functions as a denotative sign, comprising both a signifier and a signified. Roland Barthes's theory of Semiotic is used to convey the sign in memes that are being used in the internet and especially *Breaking Bad* memes.

Regarding the theory mentioned above, the researcher examined the semiotic context of Memes from Television series *Breaking Bad,* which is a widely popular American Drama series aired from 2008 to 2013 consisted of five seasons. The memes surrounding the series is interesting to examine and analyze, because the sudden comeback of *Breaking Bad* popularity despite the series ended over 10 years ago was because the meme that surfaced lately on the internet where people started share posts of their memes or for the lack of better term "ShitPosting". The researcher wanted to find the associated context inside the memes and how it changes the perception of this particular Drama-heavy series into a "meme worthy" satirical material for everyone around the world to use and share. The researcher uses *Know Your Meme* Website and a series of handpicked episode from *Breaking Bad* for research and comparison between the Meme context and the story context in the series. *Breaking Bad* is a popular TV Series that surprises not only the critics but a casual viewer as how deep and complex the story is for a cable television.

Breaking Bad is a 2008 American TV show written and directed by Vince Gilligan and Peter Gould, the show run from 2008 until 2013 when the fifth season finale aired and conclude the story. Chemistry teacher Walter Hartwell White played by Bryan Cranston and Aaron Paul as his partner in crime Jesse Pinkman. Supporting cast includes Anna Gunn as Skyler White, Rj Mitte as Walter jr, Walter's wife and son respectively. Dean Norris as Hank Schrader a DEA agent also Walter's brother in-law, and Betsy Brandt as Marie Schrader, Hank's wife also

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Skyler's sister. The story follows Walter White a chemistry teacher that had been diagnosed with lung cancer and expected to live very shortly, decided to turn his life to crime in order to secure his family's future by providing as much money as he can until he died, Walter team up with Jesse Pinkman a former student of JP Wynn high school turn drug dealer in order to find a way to the drug business. The series centers around the two protagonists as they navigate the sleazy underbelly that is Albuquerque New Mexico. The series is well regarded and being a successful both critically and commercially as the most watched and better reviewed Tv Series. Furthermore, critics today still analyze what made the series memorable and iconic through the use of plot, characters, camera works, to color and dialogue for character study. The writer chose this particular series as research object, mainly because of the newfound popularity among new and younger fans that introduced the series from memes that circulated in internet.

Although there are dozens of researches on this Breaking bad Series, most of them only analyzing the Character study, and the use of colors as a storytelling device, as well as the study of chemistry and the significance of the characters. For examples "*BREAKING BAD AS A MODERN WESTERN: REVISING FRONTIER MYTHS OF MASCULINITY, SAVAGERY, AND EMPIRE*" (2014) focusing on the protagonist Walter White on his transformation from unassuming Teacher on New Mexico into a drug Kingpin for a span of five seasons or 2 years in series real time. Then there are other researches like "*Beyond Good and Bad: The Linguistic Construction of Walter White's Masculinity in Breaking Bad*" (2015) where the research focuses on Walter White dialogues. Other numerous Journals and essays like "*An Essay on Liberation: Breaking Bad*" (2023) which analyzed the Characters motivation as freedom from everyday prison boredom.

Other previous semiotics research using Roland Barthes theory, the writer found four researches. First, semiotics research in the movie "*Dua Garis Biru*" (2020). The focus of the first research is on the social commentary on free sex in the movie. There are numerous scenes that depicts the free sex as a symbol that is present in the movie. The only same thing with this research is the theory using

Barthes' denotation, connotation, and Meme. The second previous research is on movie "*Bumi Manusia*" (2021). Focusing on representation of social discrimination using Barthes' theory. The third research is "*Deconstructing Internet Memes through Semiotic Analysis: Unveiling Myths and Ideologies in Visual and Verbal Signs*" (2023). Analyzing on a meme as object, using Roland Barthes and Saussure theories. The research focus is memes are not just humorous visual content, but also a product of a complex system of signs, codes, and symbols that convey meanings and messages to the audience. From all four of the previous researches above, three of it had the same object that is movie, while one of them using advertisement but the only one thing in common that are all of it using Roland Barthes' theory.

As stated above the previous researches, from analyzing meme using semiotic studies, or dissecting a movie poster for their meaning behind it. Researches from the show *Breaking Bad* from analysis for more in depth look on *Breaking Bad* as a literature form of digital media through deep dive analysis from the characters and dialogues. This thesis compared to others before it with similar methods and objects, will look at how the meme could change the perspective of the user on certain media by finding the purposes behind it using a semiotic study in the show *Breaking Bad*. This will create a form discussion of meme from the semiotic perspective when it applied in dramatic literature or in this case a tv show. The meme itself is used as a communication language that is understood by majority of users. When social media users creating a meme from a specific media, they are not only just for laughs but there is something or a hidden meaning and agenda behind it also intended only in certain group this time among newer fans of the series, which the researcher aim to discover in this thesis. Utilizing semiotic study to analyze the meme of its signs and compare it with the context of the scenes to find the purpose behind the meme itself. This research will not only combine elements of semiotic and meme, but also analyzing how the two actually have connection regarding a modern communication in social media.

1. 2   Statements of Problem

Based on the background that is explained above, modern communication has evolved significantly in the society at large. Establishing online interaction as more convenient way for interacting with other. The language of this new interaction is also changes to be more universal. Memes is another form of language in internet conversation that spreads as an inside joke of mutual understanding of certain group. *Breaking Bad* new community finds a way to the series popularity and spawns numerous memes that had been taken out of the context of the story. From a dramatic acting that tells the dire situation that they're in then turn into a silly joke about an absurd situation that the creator made up or found themselves in. From the problem the researcher formulated the questions:

1. What Denotations and Connotations are in Memes found on *Breaking Bad*?
2. How do Denotations and Connotations represent the purposes in every meme on *Breaking Bad*?

1. 3   Research Objectives

Based on the formulation of the problem above, the objectives of this research are:

1. To Know and reveal the Denotations and connotations in Memes on *Breaking Bad*
2. To know purposes showed in every meme on *Breaking Bad*

1. 4   Research Significances

Academically, it is hoped that the research will become a study material and also an analysis on social interaction that makes a positive contribution to English Literature students. The subject and the theory that significantly relevant and memes as newest form of communication worldwide. But also adding more contribution in analyzing literary works like *Breaking Bad* as the series is well known and loved by almost everyone.

Theoretically, this research is expected to be able to contribute in further research so that the research presented can be developed over time. The studies of semiotic is relevant in social behavior of human interaction. From identifying sign and signifier to better understood a conversation and everyday symbols. Also, for the studies of internet memes as new form of interaction between people of all countries that includes language and culture, which unites everyone without any kinds of borders. With the research aims to further developing semiotics in any forms of media not just street signs, and pictures, but also movies, poster, and tv series. The significant research of semiotic and memes will always relevant in years to come.

Practically, this research is expected to provide an overview of the community, especially fans of the *Breaking* Bad regarding the Meme context of the series. Not only *Breaking Bad* is already popular then and today, it will continue to be remembered for other generations to enjoy and analyze. Fans of the series always enjoys and rejoice whenever the series got mention or introduce to others to expand the fandom's popularity as an opened arm community that accepts newer fan with hospitality. The constant mention and research of *Breaking Bad* keeps the series from becoming irrelevant.

1. 5   Conceptual framework

This Research will used qualitative approach to analyze the selected data sources by implementing descriptive analysis method. The primary data that being analyzed are memes of *Breaking Bad* TV Series in the *Know Your Meme* web site and the researcher using Roland Barthes's Semiotic for separating denotation and connotation of the memes. Then added the context for the purpose behind the memes by using the original show background story.

1. 5. 1   Framework Table

        This Research will be focusing on analyzing a meme using a semiotic approach of Roland Barthes that consists of Denotation and Connotation. The analysis will be provided to further explains the correlation of Roland Barthes's semiotic and a context within the meme itself. To find the purpose of the *Breaking Bad* meme after the research has been conducted. The process can be seen in the framework table below.
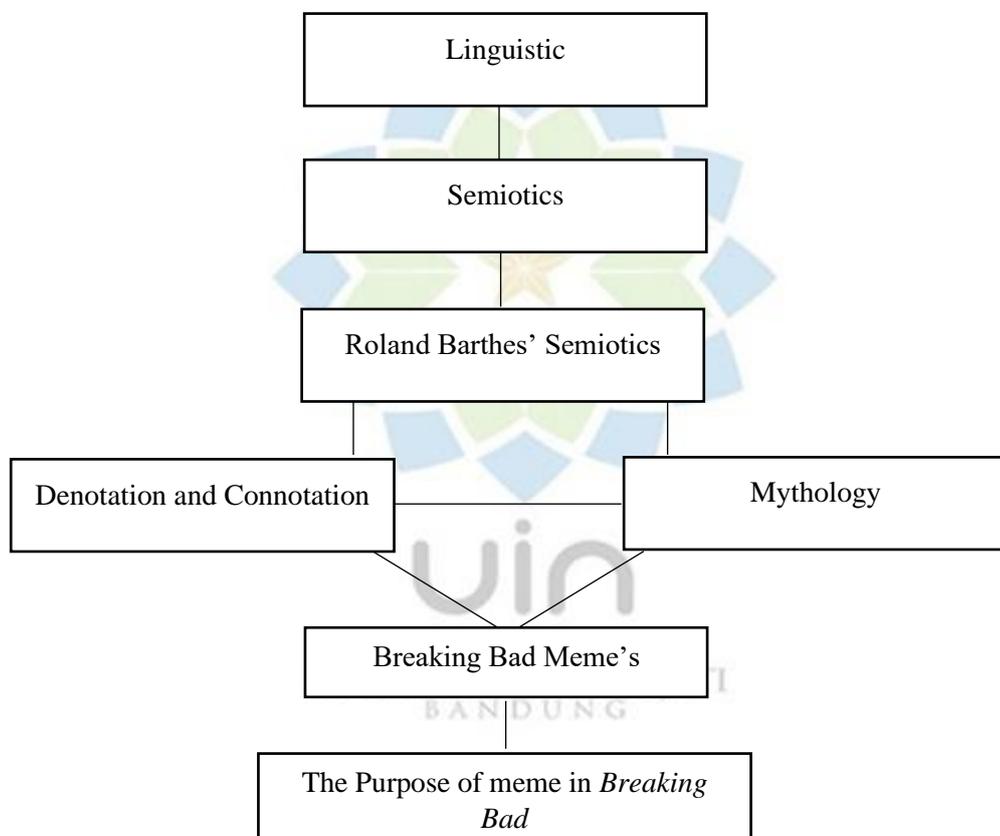

Figure 1.5.1.1 Framework Table

        Roland Barthes' semiotics is a theory of signs and symbols and their role in communication and meaning-making. His ideas have deeply influenced literary theory, cultural studies, and media studies. Building on Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic framework, defined the sign as composed of two parts. Signifier: The form of the sign (the vehicle of meaning, such as a word, image, or sound).

Signified: The concept or idea that the signifier represents (the meaning). Barthes distinguished between two levels of meaning, denotation is the literal, straightforward meaning of a sign (what is explicitly depicted), and connotation is the secondary, cultural, or emotional meanings associated with a sign that go beyond its literal interpretation. This layer is shaped by societal contexts and individual experiences. In his work "Mythologies," Barthes expanded his semiotic analysis to explore how myths operate as a form of communication that conveys ideological messages. Myths transform specific historical or cultural elements into universal meanings, reflecting and reinforcing societal values. Then intertextuality, Barthes argued that texts (including literature, films, and other forms of media) are interconnected and influence each other. No text exists in isolation; rather, all texts draw upon and reference other texts, creating layers of meaning. Next is Reader-Response Role, Barthes emphasized the role of the reader in constructing meaning. He argued that meaning is not fixed and can vary based on the reader's cultural background, experiences, and context. This idea is particularly evident in his famous essay "The Death of the Author," where he posits that the interpretation of a text should not be limited to the author's intentions. The last one is Cultural Codes as Barthes identified various cultural codes—systems of signs that influence interpretation and meaning-making. These include codes of genre, narrative structure, and cultural conventions that frame how audiences understand texts. Barthes' semiotic theory emphasizes that signs and symbols are not merely vessels of fixed meanings but are part of dynamic systems of communication that reflect and shape cultural realities. His work encourages a critical examination of how meaning is constructed in various texts and mediums.

Internet memes can be connected to Roland Barthes' concept of myth in several ways firstly meaning construction. Just as Barthes argued that myths are systems of signs that convey cultural meanings, Internet memes often rely on images, text, and context to create new meanings that resonate with specific audiences. Memes can simultaneously convey humor, social commentary, or shared cultural experiences. Denotation and Connotation: Internet memes often operate on both denotative and connotative levels, similar to Barthes' distinction. The image

might depict a straightforward scenario (denotation), while the text and context transform it into a comment on social behaviors, trends, or ideologies (connotation). Memes have Cultural Context that arise from and reflect the cultural context in which they are created. They can capture zeitgeist moments or comment on current events, mirroring Barthes' idea that myths change with cultural contexts and can be analyzed for underlying social meanings. Ideological Function: Memes can reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies, just as Barthes suggested myths can naturalize certain beliefs and values. For example, some memes might critique social norms or politics, while others may perpetuate stereotypes or cultural narratives. Barthes emphasized the idea of intertextuality, where texts reference or draw upon other texts. Similarly, memes often remix or reference existing cultural texts, producing layered meanings that rely on shared knowledge among users. Overall, analyzing Internet memes through the lens of Barthes' myth can reveal how they shape cultural understandings and reflect societal values, making them a rich field for semiotic analysis.

From there we can analyze Memes from the TV Series *Breaking Bad* which after having a newfound resurgence in pop culture lately, the younger fans with more exposure to gen z types of humor memes started to create newer one from the series. *Breaking Bad* already had a meme even before during their show run from 2008 until 2013, but these new memes are often more absurd and more situational joke that draws from younger fans sense of humor. It goes say that never tell an old joke because they are outdated and the punchline is not resonated with newer group.

The Researcher can conclude the usage of memes as a purpose of a certain group to comment and criticize social phenomenon through posting and sharing the memes. From personal statement of life to the absurdity of the situation of a current era post pandemic that hit the world in the early 2020. Connecting the new types of behavior that people had in 2020 of staying in solitary of home and spending their time with watching movies, shows, and playing video games and such.