

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Development in technology and digital media have brought about significant changes in how society produces, conveys, and comprehends information in daily life. These changes mean that communication processes no longer rely solely on verbal language—whether spoken or written—but increasingly utilize visual elements to convey messages. The diverse forms of media evolving today demonstrate that images, colors, symbols, illustrations, and other visual elements possess the power to shape perceptions and elicit specific interpretations of objects. Consequently, visual media is no longer viewed merely as a supplementary communication element but as a crucial component in the process of meaning-making. Information received by the public is often grasped through visual representations before the accompanying text is understood. Thus, visual media exerts an increasingly significant influence on how society perceives information and the reality around it. This context underscores the continued relevance of research into visual media across various fields of study.

One form of visual media that retains a significant position to this day is the movie poster. Movie posters serve as promotional tools used to introduce a movie to the public prior to its wide release. However, the evolution of the movie industry demonstrates that the function of a poster is no longer limited to conveying information such as the title, cast members, production company, or screening schedule. Posters have evolved into a medium of representation used to establish a visual identity and shape audience expectations regarding the movie being promoted. Through a carefully planned combination of visual elements and text, a poster can convey the movies atmosphere, conflicts, characters, and intended interpretive direction. Thus, the poster functions not merely as a promotional tool but also as a medium of communication that generates meaning. This shift in

function highlights that the poster occupies a more complex role than that of a purely informational device.

In the context of visual communication, movie posters are constructed through the use of verbal and non-verbal signs that interact to generate meaning. Verbal signs refer to linguistic elements—such as the movie title, tagline, cast names, production details, and typography—employed to support message delivery. Meanwhile, non-verbal signs encompass visual elements such as color, lighting, character expressions, costumes, settings, gestures, image composition, and the placement of other visual objects. These two components cannot be understood in isolation, as the resulting meaning emerges from the interplay between signs presented simultaneously. In a movie poster, verbal signs help clarify the direction of information, whereas non-verbal signs serve to establish atmosphere and reinforce the intended representation. This relationship demonstrates that the movie poster is a complex form of visual communication that does not merely convey information directly. Consequently, examining verbal and non-verbal signs is crucial for understanding how meaning is constructed within visual media.

Ideally, a movie poster serves as a medium of communication capable of effectively conveying the movie's identity and characteristics to the public. Every element featured in the poster should be designed to help the audience form an accurate initial impression of the movie's content. An ideal poster does not merely capture attention through its visuals; it also communicates the themes, atmosphere, conflicts, and values embodied by the movie. In this context, verbal and non-verbal signs should work in balance and mutually reinforce one another to create a cohesive representation. Furthermore, the poster is expected to help viewers form appropriate expectations before actually watching the movie. In other words, a poster's success is measured not only by the quality of its visual design but also by its ability to shape understanding and generate meaning. This perspective highlights that the poster fulfills both a representational and a communicative function.

However, in practice, movie posters are often perceived merely at a superficial visual level. Many audience members focus more on aesthetic aspects—such as striking colors, visual design, character appearance, or visual effects—without considering how these elements shape broader meanings. Consequently, posters are frequently viewed primarily as promotional tools rather than as media of representation embodying a system of signs. As a result, various verbal and non-verbal elements that actually serve symbolic functions are overlooked during the interpretation process. Yet, every element displayed in a poster is deliberately designed to elicit a specific perception of the movie being promoted. This gap between the ideal and the actual situation demonstrates that visual media are not always understood in alignment with their intended communicative purpose. Therefore, an approach is needed to explain how meaning is produced through the signs found in movie posters.

To understand how meaning is constructed through signs, an approach capable of explaining the relationship between representation and the process of interpretation is required. Semiotics is one such relevant approach for visual media research. It is a field of study that examines signs and how they generate meaning within social and cultural contexts. In semiotics, meaning is not viewed as something inherently attached to an object but rather as something produced through the process of interpreting the signs employed. This approach enables researchers to understand that images, text, colors, symbols, and other visual forms are part of a system of representation that conveys specific messages. By utilizing semiotics, research can go beyond merely describing what is visible in visual media to explain how meaning is shaped through the relationships between the displayed elements. Consequently, semiotics serves as a highly relevant approach for research on movie posters.

Roland Barthes is a key figure who contributed significantly to the development of semiotic studies. He explained that signs do not merely yield literal meanings but can also shape broader cultural and ideological meanings. According to Barthes, the process of interpreting signs can be understood through three levels:

denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the immediately apparent or first-level meaning. Connotation refers to meanings that evolve through the social and cultural experiences of a society. Meanwhile, myth refers to a system of meaning that causes a social construct to appear natural and generally accepted. This approach enables a more in-depth analysis of visual media, as it moves beyond mere visual description.

Several previous studies have addressed the use of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory in the analysis of visual media specifically movie posters and the study of verbal and non-verbal signs. Research conducted by Puthi Ade Jasmine (2020) in a study titled *Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs in Insidious Film Posters*, It demonstrates that verbal and non-verbal signs on movie posters do not merely serve as visual complements but also construct meaning through the process of interpretation. The findings indicate that textual elements, images, characters, and visual composition contribute to shaping representations and audience perceptions of the movie.

Another study conducted by Ni Putu Ghalih Diana Wati and Ida Ayu Putri Gita Ardiantari (2023) in *The Meaning of Verbal and Non Verbal Sign of Insidious Film Poster* shows that verbal and non-verbal signs have a mutually supportive relationship in building meaning in visual media. In addition, research by Ni Wayan Sinta Laras Hati and I Made Yogi Marantika (2024) in *A Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs Found in Descendants Movie Poster* demonstrates that the integrated identification of signs can help understand how visual elements and language work together to shape specific representations in movies posters.

A study of movie posters using Roland Barthes' theory was also found in the research of A'yun Nikmatus Shalekhah and Martadi (2021) in *Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes pada Poster Film Parasite Versi Negara Inggris* which demonstrates that the meaning within the poster does not stop at the visual presentation but evolves through the reading of denotation, connotation, and myth. Similar findings were also presented by Helga Pratama Sari (2024) in her research *Semiotika Roland Barthes pada Poster Film Budi Pekerti (2023)* which explains

that the signifiers and signifieds in movie posters are capable of generating layers of meaning related to social and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the study by Qonita Nailul Awwaliyah (2024) titled *Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes: Indonesian Thriller Movie Poster* shows that visual media can build representations through the use of symbolically arranged visual elements. Another study by Moch Rizky Pradana, Naufal Asyqor Mu'afiy, and Pungky Febi Arifianto (2024) in *Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes pada Poster Film Jakarta vs Everybody* It also demonstrates that movie posters are a medium of visual communication containing various signs that can be interpreted to reveal broader meanings through Barthes's concepts.

Nevertheless, a review of prior studies reveals that most research has tended to focus on a single poster subject or has emphasized general visual interpretation. Research specifically integrating the identification of verbal and non-verbal signs and interpreting the relationship between them through the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth within English movie posters across different genres remains relatively limited. Therefore, this study seeks to build upon previous work by treating verbal and non-verbal signs as a unified analytical whole, applying Roland Barthes's semiotic theory to the posters for the movies *Oppenheimer* and *Captain America: Civil War*. Thus, this study not only identifies the signs that emerge but also explains how those signs shape meaning and representation in visual media.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study above, the problems of this study are formulated as follows:

1. What verbal signs are found in the movie posters of *Oppenheimer* and *Captain America: Civil War*?
2. What non-verbal signs are found in the movie posters of *Oppenheimer* and *Captain America: Civil War*?

3. How are the meanings of verbal and non-verbal signs interpreted through denotation, connotation, and myth based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory?

1.3 Research Objective

Based on the statement of the problem above, the objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the verbal signs found in the movie posters of Oppenheimer and Captain America: Civil War.
2. To identify the non-verbal signs found in the movie posters of Oppenheimer and Captain America: Civil War.
3. To determine the meanings of verbal and non-verbal signs through denotation, connotation, and myth based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.

1.4 Research Significance

1. Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of semiotic studies, particularly studies related to verbal signs and non-verbal signs in visual media. The findings of this study are expected to enrich academic discussions regarding the application of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory in interpreting meaning through denotation, connotation, and myth. In addition, this study is expected to provide a broader understanding of how visual representation and textual elements interact in constructing meaning within movie posters. This study is also expected to become an additional reference for future researchers who conduct studies in semiotics, visual communication, and media analysis.

2. Practical Significance

This study is expected to provide practical benefits for several groups. For students, especially students in English Literature and related fields, this study is

expected to help improve understanding of how verbal and non-verbal signs construct meaning in visual media. For researchers, this study is expected to serve as a reference and comparison for future studies related to semiotics and movie posters. For readers and audiences, this study is expected to increase awareness that movie posters do not only function as promotional media but also contain meanings that can be interpreted through visual and textual signs. In addition, this study is expected to contribute to academic institutions as supporting material for learning and further research in the fields of semiotics and visual communication.

1.5 Previous Research

Previous research is used to situate the current study, identify similarities and differences with earlier work, and demonstrate the contribution this study aims to make. Therefore, the selected prior studies are those related to the analysis of verbal and non-verbal signs, visual media, movie posters, and the application of Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.

The first research was conducted by Puthi Ade Jasmine (2020) entitled *Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs in Insidious Film Posters*. The study examines the use of verbal and non-verbal signs in movie posters to explain how meaning is constructed through the relationship between linguistic and visual elements. The findings indicate that these elements complement each other in shaping the interpretation of the message conveyed to the audience. The similarity is in the focus on verbal and non-verbal signs in movie posters; the difference is the specific object of study and the more structured application of the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth in the current research.

The second study was conducted by Ni Putu Ghalih Diana Wati and Ida Ayu Putri Gita Ardiantari (2023), entitled *The Meaning of Verbal and Non Verbal Sign of Insidious Film Poster*. The study examined the relationship between visual and textual elements in constructing meaning in movie posters. The findings indicated that movie posters function not only as promotional media but also as

representational media that convey particular messages. The similarity between the previous study and the present study lies in the use of sign analysis on movie posters. However, the present study employs two movie posters with different visual characteristics as the research objects.

The third study was conducted by Ni Wayan Sinta Laras Hati and I Made Yogi Marantika (2024), entitled *A Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs Found in Descendants Movie Poster*. The study identified verbal and non-verbal signs appearing in movie posters and explained how these two elements work together to construct visual representations. The similarity between the previous study and the present study lies in the use of verbal and non-verbal sign analysis in poster media. The difference is that the present study not only identifies the signs but also interprets their meanings using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory.

The fourth study was conducted by A'yun Nikmatus Shalekhah and Martadi (2021), entitled *Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes pada Poster Film Parasite Versi Negara Inggris*. The study employed Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to reveal visual meanings through the stages of denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings indicated that the movie poster contains cultural representations that can be interpreted through a system of signs. The similarity between that study and the present research lies in the application of Roland Barthes' theory. The difference is that the present study integrates the identification of verbal and non-verbal signs within a unified analytical framework.

The fifth study was conducted by Qonita Nailul Awwaliyah (2024) entitled *Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes: Indonesian Thriller Movie Poster*. The study demonstrated that visual media can construct representations through the use of symbolically arranged visual elements. That study and the present research share the use of Roland Barthes' semiotic approach and movie posters as the research object. The difference is that the present study employs two movie posters from different genres.

Based on the previous studies, it can be concluded that research on semiotics in movie posters remains relevant for further development. However, most previous studies have focused on a single movie poster or have placed greater emphasis on visual interpretation rather than on the integrated relationship between verbal and non-verbal signs. Therefore, the present study seeks to extend the existing body of research by using the movie posters of Oppenheimer and Captain America: Civil War as the research objects and applying Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to interpret meaning through the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth.

1.6 Classification of Key Terms

To avoid differences in the interpretation of the terms used in this study, several key terms are defined as follows:

1. Movie Poster

A movie poster is a visual communication medium used to introduce, promote, and establish a movies identity to its audience through a combination of visual and textual elements. In this study, the term movie poster refers to the official posters of Oppenheimer and Captain America: Civil War, which serve as the research objects..

2. Verbal Signs

Verbal signs are signs conveyed through linguistic elements in the form of written language or text. In this study, verbal signs include the movie title, slogan, cast names, production information, tagline, and typographic elements appearing on the movie posters.

3. Non-Verbal Signs

Non-verbal signs are signs conveyed through visual elements rather than linguistic forms. In this study, non-verbal signs include color, lighting, character

expressions, costumes, background, visual composition, object positioning, and other visual elements appearing on the movie posters.

4. Semiotics

Semiotics is the field of study that examines signs and the process of meaning-making through those signs. In this study, semiotics is employed as an analytical approach to understand how verbal and non-verbal signs interact to produce meaning in visual media.

5. Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Roland Barthes' semiotics is a semiotic theory that explains that meaning does not end at the literal level but develops through multiple levels of interpretation. In this study, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is applied to interpret the signs appearing on the movie posters through the concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth.

