CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter divides into six sections. It provides research background, statements of problems, research objectives, research significance, previous studies, and definitions of key terms.

1.1   Research Background

Memes are spreading and growing in popularity among Instagram users. Most people look for memes or other visual inspiration on Instagram because this application provides various forms of entertainment, such as funny pictures and humorous videos. Instagram is a creative platform typically used by creative individuals, groups, and communities. Instagram has become the most popular social media compared to other types of social media because Instagram is almost in demand by everyone around the world. Indonesia is one of the countries with the highest number of Instagram users. Nuryadin supports this. Approximately 89 percent of Instagram users in Indonesia are between 18 and usually access Instagram more than once a week (Nuryadin et al., 2020). Instagram is a smartphone mobile application available for free on the App Store and Google Play Store. Instagram is a mobile app that allows users to take photos or images and share them instantly with mutuals. Initially, Instagram started by providing photo editing and sharing features but later added new features to share videos and send direct messages to other users.

In general, the Instagram accounts managed by the community have their characteristics depending on the content shared on the feeds. Therefore, many Instagram accounts specialize in sharing meme images or videos regularly, such as the Instagram account @sarcasm.og, which currently has more than 1.2 million followers from various countries. This can be seen from the different types of languages appearing in each post's comments section. This Instagram account has more than 10,000 posts, with the first post in 2017. Interestingly, @sarcasm.og has a specific theme, and the theme is sarcasm. All memes in each post on this account always contain sarcasm because the name represents the entire content on Instagram.

In addition, this account uses a male profile picture, where most of the content tends to refer to male expressions and feelings. This can be seen in how the author expresses sarcasm in memes by positioning himself as a male writer. Moreover, this account also informs followers about different cultures, customs, or habits worldwide. Information that is easy to understand and is delivered interestingly and humorously. A study from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and the School of Communication at Ohio State University found that participants were likelier to remember information presented in a humorous rather than non-humorous manner (Coronel et al., 2021). Essentially, humor stimulates activity in brain regions associated with social engagement, improves memory for several facts, and increases the tendency to share information.

Memes continue to grow in popularity every year. The British Evolutionary Biologist Richard Dawkins introduced memes in his work *The Selfish Gene* (1976). Dawkins coined the term meme by analogizing it to the cultural equivalent of biological genes, which are patterns of information copied from one person to another (Chielens & Heylighen, n.d.). Dawkins created and popularized the meme, which means imitation. It is a culture or term used as a cultural development concept. The essence of memes is to spread artistic ideas, meaning that the current developing culture is the internet and popular social media such as Instagram as a means by which people communicate. Communication usually uses writing, pictures, and videos, meaning memes are ideas spread and reproduced through online media. Examples of memes in pretext include specialized signs such as jokes, beliefs, traditions, melodies, catchphrases, chain letters, and fashions.

The word meme comes from the Greek "*mimema,*" signifying "something that is imitated" (Shifman, 2013, p. 363). Meme is a unit of cultural information spread by imitation. Therefore, a meme is an idea, behavior, or style that spreads through imitation from person to person within a culture and often carries symbolic meaning representing a particular phenomenon. In short, a meme is something imitated. Dawkins shortened with gene. Like genes, memes are replicators that undergo variation, competition, selection, and persistence. The basic idea behind

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memetics is that the popularity or success of a meme is determined by natural selection. Many memes are competing for the reader's attention at any given moment. However, only memes compatible with a particular socio-cultural environment are successful in spreading and being accepted by society. This leads to the general prediction that compatible memes will become more common than less consistent memes. To implement this idea, it is necessary to formulate specific selection criteria that determine how much memes can adapt and conform to a particular social-cultural environment. Thus, a successful meme can be analogized to a cultural virus that infects a group of people in a society.

Memes are identical to humor because the primary function of memes itself is to entertain readers. Raskin (1979) defined humor as a phenomenon where someone laughs when seeing or hearing something hilarious, which can be a situation, story, or thought that arises in daily life. It is supported by Attardo (1994) argues that humor is implicit or explicit laughter. Something that can make people laugh is something hilarious. In other words, it can be said that a mental phenomenon (humor) produces a complex neurophysiological manifestation or what is commonly referred to as laughter. However, humor is entertainment to liberate the audience psychologically and a means of social criticism of societal inequality. The most influential linguistic theories of humor are the GTVH (General Theory of Verbal Humor) and the SSTH (Semantic Theory of Humorous Scripts). The idea of SSTH is divided into three categories: superiority theory, relief theory, and incongruity theory.

In superiority theory, humor states that people usually laugh at the misfortunes of others because it highlights their superiority over the shortcomings of others. Adrian Bardon (2005) claims that superiority theory is a theory that states that the humor found in comedy and life is based on ridicule, where viewing the object of entertainment as inferior to oneself. Meanwhile, the relief theory maintains that laughter is a homeostatic mechanism that can affect psychological states. Damanik and Mulyadi (2020, p. 660) argue that humor reduces or releases physical tension or stress as laughter involves complex body movements that can ease breathing, increase oxygen, and is even thought to help fight infection.

Therefore, humor can be a model for releasing tension caused by one's fears. According to relief theory, laughter and mirth result from the release of neural energy. In incongruity theory, laughter arises from the realization that something does not fit the logic used to understand an event. When humor is present, it occurs when an unusual reality is interpreted. Something can be considered funny if it is illogical, irrational, paradoxical, inconsistent, false, or inappropriate. Humor is considered to be something that relates to a person's mental activity. Humor is based on aspects of one's thinking, as it involves an individual's perception of events, people, or symbols. In addition, humor in memes usually contains implicit meaning in the content delivered through sarcasm.

Sarcasm is an expression that can sometimes hurt someone's heart because of its subtle yet satirical pronunciation. Although it is not spoken directly, it still has an implicit meaning that readers must understand. According to Bharti in Kumar (2019, p. 7), sarcasm is a type of sentiment where people express negative feelings by using positive or intensified words in the text. People who use sarcastic humor usually want to soften criticism of something or intend to ridicule people in an abusive way by speaking more politely to convey the true meaning. In the beginning, sarcasm referred to harsh words meant to criticize or ridicule. Subsequently, the definition of sarcasm does not only include harsh words and hurtful taunts. However, it also covers a wide range of purposes in various contexts. The primary form of sarcasm is mockery or something negative, but over time, sarcasm is now commonly used in communication to identify a person's level of closeness. It can also be an expression of affection or merely humor. In other words, sarcasm can also have several purposes, such as criticizing, showing closeness, mocking, and expressing a joke.

Memes that contain humor delivered in sarcasm are often analyzed by various branches of science, including semiotics. Memes are one of the objects that are often analyzed in semiotic studies because semiotics itself is a branch of linguistics that studies signs and symbols. At the same time, the meme itself contains many signs and symbols. In addition, memes also have both explicit and implicit meanings. This branch of semiotics studies signs and the meaning

contained in the sign, whether the sign is shown from an image, text, or both. The meaning of the word semiotics itself comes from the Greek, namely "*semeion*" which means sign. Thus, semiotics has the most basic definition as the study of signs or an epistemology about the actuality or existence of signs in societal life (Yakin & Totu, 2014). In semiotic terms, signs can easily be found in various forms, such as words, images, sounds, movements, smells, tastes, actions, and objects. Contemporary semioticians study signs not in isolation but as part of a semiotic "sign system." Hence, semiotics is also referred to as the study of sign systems. Umberto Eco states semiotics concern everything that can be regarded as a sign (Eco, 1976). Semiotics studies a sign in daily language and everything that represents something else.

In semiotics, a sign is anything that represents something other than itself. Studying semiotics is very interesting because it can be applied to various human endeavors. Humans use various signs in social life to convey messages to others. Humans create meaning from the creation and interpretation of signs. However, something can only be a sign when humans give it meaning because nothing is a sign unless interpreted as a sign. Anything can be a sign that any person or community interprets it to refer to something other than itself. Studying semiotics is essential for understanding various symptoms of social reality, especially the multiple signs and meanings that live and develop in society. This is because semiotics studies how meaning is made and reality is represented. Semiotics concerns how representations produce meaning or the processes used to understand the meaning. Furthermore, semiotics studies signs, symbols, and sign interpretation. Typically, semiotic analysis studies the role of signs on a social and cultural scale. This study is used to inform readers about what interpretation to give to a sign because the study of semiotics is concerned with how meaning is constructed and understood. In other words, semiotics explores how words and signs can relate to each other to create meaning.

The term semiotics was introduced by an American philosopher, scientist, and logician, Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on September 10, 1839, and died in Milford, Pennsylvania, on April

19, 1914. Peirce is known for his work on relational logic and pragmatism as a method in research. According to Leed-Hurwitz (1993), logic in its general sense is another name for semiotic, the quasi necessary, or formal doctrine of signs. Peirce considered semiotics based on synonymity with the concept of logic, which focuses on the knowledge of human thought processes as outlined in his writings. The main principles contained in Peirce's theory are the human mind, the boundaries of signs, and a three-dimensional system commonly referred to as the three trichotomies of signs. Peirce developed his semiotic theory as a trichotomy of signs or a triadic model. The trichotomy itself is a concept from the development of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory.

Peirce's theory of signs is generally a theory of language and reasoning, which states that all ways of thinking depend on using signs. Based on his theory, Peirce argues that every thought is a sign, and every act of reasoning consists of interpreting a sign. The sign itself can be a mental representation of an object where the object can be known through the perception of the sign. The triadic model brings three terms into a three-dimensional system of signs: representamen, object, and interpretant. This is supported by Lubis, who states that the sign is an example of firstness, the object is an example of secondness, and the interpretant is an example of thirdness (2021). The representamen is the form the sign receives or functions as a sign. The object refers to the sign or something represented by the representamen. Meanwhile, the interpretant is a sign in a person's mind about the object referred to by a sign.

The representamen consists of three things: qualisign, sinsign, and legisign. Qualisign means that a quality functions like a sign. Sinsign is a sign formed by an object's actual physical reality or form. Legisign means the conventional sign or norm that the sign contains. Likewise, the object consists of three things, namely icons, index, and symbols. The icon is a sign that resembles what it represents or a sign that uses the exact likeness or characteristics as the one intended. The index is a sign with a phenomenal relationship or event and the existence of the sign. There is a causal relationship between the sign and the object. The symbol is a sign determined by generally recognized rules or created by mutual agreement. Symbols

are arbitrary and conventional signs. Furthermore, the interpretant also consists of three things: rheme, dicisign or dicent sign, and argument. The rheme is a sign that can still be developed because it allows different interpretations depending on the person interpreting it. The dicisign or dicent sign is a sign whose interpretation is a genuine relationship or a sign following facts and reality. The argument is a sign whose interpretation is generally accepted or a sign that contains a reason for something.

Several factors are behind the writer's semiotic analysis with memes as its object. First, analyzing uses semiotic theory because it allows readers to see things from different perspectives. Not only that, however, humans also usually use creativity in interpreting signs to create meaning, especially the meaning contained in memes. These meanings can be seen verbally and non-verbally through images and text. The verbal and non-verbal signs aim to discover messages from various aspects and the function and meaning of sarcasm in the meme. Second, @sarcasm.og memes have a specific theme, namely the theme of sarcasm. The memes posted by @sarcasm.og are interesting to study because the writer wants to know the message behind the humor implicit in the image. The concept of making humor in this Instagram account is wrapped in sarcasm to become interesting. In addition to entertaining, the meme can also satirize its readers. Third, the writer finds urgency in this research, especially in improving media literacy about understanding sign studies and how images and texts can relate to each other and create new meanings.

1.2 Research Problems

The research problem is taken because not everyone can interpret memes correctly, especially memes containing sarcasm. The writer concludes that there are two questions for this research as follows:

1. What are the trichotomies signs found in the memes used by @sarcasm.og?
2. How are the meaning of sarcasm created through the verbal and non-verbal signs in each meme used by @sarcasm.og?

1.3   Research Objectives

Based on the formulation of the research questions above, the writer is intended:

1. To identify the trichotomies signs found in the memes used by @sarcasm.og.

2. To explain the meaning of sarcasm created through the verbal and non-verbal signs in each meme used by @sarcasm.og.

1.4   Research Significances

As indicated by the clarification about this explanation in the research background, questions, and purposes. This analysis is very significant for superior getting semiotics. Hence, the meanings of this review are extraordinarily separated into two substances: theoretically and practically.

1.4.1   Theoretically Significance

The semiotic theory in this research is a development of several existing approaches. Charles Sanders Peirce developed his semiotic theory into a concept called trichotomy or triadic model. The concept of trichotomy is also often called the triangle of meaning because it consists of three things: representamen, object, and interpretant. At the same time, those aspects are divided into several more parts. In addition, sarcasm theory is also used in this research. The sarcasm is contained in the memes used as objects in this research. The meme is taken from one of the Instagram accounts that popularly and regularly share memes throughout the day on their social media account.

1.4.2   Practically Significance

In terms of practical significance, this research is primarily intended for other researchers and public readers. Firstly, for another researcher. This research is expected to provide insights and further understanding of the academic field, especially for English Literature students concentrating on linguistics in semiotic studies. This research is also expected to provide greater insight into how illustrated texts such as memes have meanings that refer to the nature of sarcasm. The meaning of the sarcasm effect sign will be associated with the meaning of the text contained in the meme.

As a result, the whole meaning of memes will appear. Because the primary function of memes, besides entertainment, is to demonstrate the moral message contained in the meme. Secondly, for public readers. The purpose of this research for general readers is to make it easier for readers to understand semiotic studies because these studies are essential and crucial to understanding. Thus, there are no misunderstandings in interpreting the signs around society. In addition, this research is made to provide better insight and knowledge and become a reference for others, especially for public readers interested in semiotics.

1.5 Previous Studies

To support this research, the writer reviews several previous studies that other writers have researched. These previous studies have the same topic as this research, namely:

The first previous study was the research of Dewi Murtaisah. (2020). *Semiotic Analysis of Meme for Woman at @9gaggirly Instagram Account.* Thesis, Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.

This thesis focuses on exploring the meaning of signs in memes and explaining the process of semiosis. This research uses descriptive analysis methods to describe, explain, and analyze the meaning of signs and examine the process of semiosis by using Charles Sanders Peirce's theory. The data analyzed in this thesis are memes taken from the Instagram account @9gagggirly. The writer focuses on analyzing memes posted on August 9 to 31. As a result, 20 memes taken by @9gagggirlly were collected as raw data. Peirce's theory of semiosis has three processes: representamen, object, and interpreter. Peirce's triangle explains these stages. The relationship between these three aspects can clearly define the selected meme. This process of conveying meaning and interpreting the meaning is called semiosis. There are several steps to take in analyzing them. Firstly, determine the icons and symbols of the memes and collect them for analysis. Secondly, based on the information, analyze the objects of the icons and symbols. After that, interpret all the signs in the meme.

Based on the research analysis, 27 icons and 39 symbols among 20 meme data have been selected by simple sampling. In addition, it was also found that the icons affect the writer's interpretation of the implicit meaning in memes. In other words, icons provide clues in understanding the meaning of memes. Most of the satire conveyed in iconic signs and symbols in memes is satire against women. In memes on the @9gagggirly account, satirical humor is mainly used to describe messages to female readers. These messages are taken from Peirce's concept of the semiosis of icons and symbols in a triadic process. However, this research does not focus on analyzing the index included in Peirce's triadic approach.

The second previous study was the research of Audia Eriana (2015). *Peirce's Semiotics Analysis of Icon and Symbol on Perfume Advertisements.* Thesis, English Letters Department, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.

The thesis focuses on knowing the meaning of signs in perfume advertisements and explaining the semiosis process. The descriptive analysis method is used in this research. This method uses Charles Sanders Peirce's theory to describe, explain, and analyze the meaning of signs and investigate the process of semiosis. The object of this research is women's perfume advertisements available on the Sephora website. The site has 510 advertisements from 72 different brands. However, only English-language advertisements were selected for analysis in this study. The result was 194 perfume advertisements with 29 brands. Due to the high number of ads, some were set for analysis using simple random sampling. The total data analyzed was 29 advertisements, each representing 29 different brands.

Several steps must be taken in completing this research, determining the icons and symbols of the advertisements selected for analysis. Then, based on this information, analyze the object of the icon or symbol in the advertisements. After analyzing the icons and symbols, understanding, and then interpreting the meaning contained in the advertisements. Attribution of meaning is based solely on the icon and symbol interpretation formula and the writer's understanding of sign interpretation. Based on the research questions and analysis, 29 icons and 23

symbols were found in 29 advertisements. Of the 29 icons and 23 symbols, there are 29 different meanings for each ad. In addition, the icons can be the central aspect that can provide the direction of meaning, then continue with the symbols used in the advertisement. From this, it can be concluded that each advertisement has different signs and meanings. This difference also gives different interpretations. Based on the semiotic analysis of the 29 advertisements, consumers can easily communicate and accept complex advertising ideas.

The third previous study was the research of Yudistira Pangestu. (2022). *Peirce's Semiotics Analysis toward Covid-19 Pandemic Impacts on 9GAG Memes in September 2021.* Thesis, English Literature Department, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, State Islamic University of Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.

This thesis focuses on analyzing semiotic signs and understanding the interpretation of the contextual meaning of memes on the @9GAG Instagram account containing COVID-19 narratives. As an analysis tool, the writer uses Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics as the leading theory to be used in this research. Peirce's semiotic theory consists of representamen, object, and interpretant. Representamen consists of qualisign, sinsign, and legisign. Object consists of icon, index, and symbol. Meanwhile, interpretant consists of rhyme, dicisign or dicent sign, and argument. The descriptive analysis method is used in this research. This form of research was chosen because it produces written descriptive data that clarifies the semiotic process and contextual meaning of 9GAG memes. The objects used in this research are 30 memes containing COVID-19 narratives on the @9GAG Instagram account. The meme object was chosen because many citizens use memes to express an opinion about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the analysis, the writer found semiotic signs, namely qualisign, sinsign, index, and rheme, with 30 data. This is the most dominant element. After that, there are nine icons and six arguments. Meanwhile, only one data was found in the legisign, symbol, and dicisign or dicent sign. This is because the meme has nothing to do with the law or anything that represents something in real life. Based on the explanation using Peirce's semiotic theory, it can be concluded that there are representamen, objects, and interpretants whose explanations are important from

the point of view of public opinion related to the fields of life affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Choosing suitable media also makes it easier for citizens, particularly young people, to express opinions through memes, especially for internet users.

The difference between this research and previous studies is found in the corpus used and the object. Not only that, but the way to analyze each datum is also different. There are two steps to be taken in this research. First, this research will be presented by describing each meme's representamen, object, and interpretant. Each datum's representamen, object, and interpretant will be analyzed separately based on the three trichotomies of Peirce. Second, explaining the types of sarcasm contained in the memes through the description of verbal and non-verbal signs. For that, the writer can obtain the overall meaning of each meme based on the two analyses that have been mentioned.

1.6   Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstandings in examining the content of this research, several keywords must be understood, as follows:

1.6.1 Semiotic

Semiotics is a branch of linguistics that studies sign. Furthermore, semiotics studies signs, symbols, and sign interpretation. This study is used to inform readers about what interpretation to give to a sign because the study of semiotics is concerned with how meaning is constructed and understood. Semiotics examines how representations produce meaning or the processes used to understand the meaning. In other words, semiotics explores how words and signs can relate to each other to create meaning. Therefore, semiotics can be defined as the science of meaning, which includes signs and sign processes, analogy, symbols, meaning, and communication.

1.6.2 Trichotomies

Peirce developed his semiotic theory as a trichotomy of signs or a triadic model. The trichotomy itself is a concept from the development of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory. Based on his theory, every thought is a sign, and every act of reasoning consists of interpreting a sign. The sign itself can be a mental

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representation of an object where the object can be known through the perception of the sign. The triadic model brings three terms into Peirce's three-dimensional system of signs: representamen, object, and interpretant.

1.6.3 Meme

Meme is a unit of cultural information spread by imitation. In other words, a meme is an idea, behavior, or style that spreads utilizing imitation from person to person within a culture and often carries symbolic meaning representing a particular phenomenon. In short, a meme is something imitated. Dawkins coined the term meme by analogizing it to the cultural equivalent of biological genes, which are patterns of information copied from one person to another (Chielens & Heylighen, n.d.). Furthermore, it is a culture or term used as a cultural development concept.

1.6.4 Sarcasm

Sarcasm is an expression that can sometimes hurt someone's heart because of its subtle yet satirical pronunciation. Although it is not spoken directly, it still has an implicit meaning that readers must understand. According to Bharti in Kumar (2019), sarcasm is a type of sentiment where people express negative feelings using positive or intensified words in the text. People who use sarcastic humor want to soften criticism of something or intend to ridicule people in an abusive way but with a more polite style of speech to convey the true meaning.

1.6.5 Instagram

Instagram is a smartphone mobile application available for free on the App Store and Google Play Store. Instagram is a mobile app that allows users to take photos or images, use various manipulation tools to change their appearance and share them instantly with friends on various social networks. Instagram first started with photo editing and sharing features. Later, it added new video-sharing features and direct messaging to other users. On Instagram, users can take photos or videos anywhere and anytime and share them with their followers either nationally or internationally. Therefore, this research uses the term @sarcasm.og to indicate that the Instagram social account @sarcasm.og is an Instagram account that regularly shares sarcasm memes in each post.

1.7 Organization of Writing

The writing organization discusses each chapter in this research. This research is divided into five chapters as follows:

1.7.1 Chapter I (Introduction)

This chapter divides into six sections. It provides the research background, questions, objectives, significance, previous studies, and the definition of key terms.

1.7.2 Chapter II (Theoretical Framework)

This chapter contains theories related to this research. Those descriptions are The Definition of Semiotic, Semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce, Three Trichotomies of Peirce, Meme, Humor, The Definition of Sarcasm, Types of Sarcasm, Functions of Sarcasm, Instagram, and @sarcasm.og.

1.7.3 Chapter III (Research Methodology)

This chapter will elaborate on the method used to conduct the research. The research method is essential in conducting research. The writer must apply an appropriate method to get some data required in this study. Those research methods are Research Design, Source of Data, Sample of Data, Technique of Collecting Data, and Technique of Analyzing Data.

1.7.4 Chapter IV (Findings and Discussions)

In this chapter, the writer divides the Charles Sanders Peirce semiotic analysis process of memes containing sarcasm on the @sarcasm.og Instagram account according to the statements of problems above.

1.7.5 Chapter V (Conclusions and Suggestions)

This section presents conclusions, including the results of the research in summary. This chapter also provides answers to the problem statements above. In addition, as the last chapter, also presents suggestions for future research improvements.