



SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF MEMES ON IMGUR APP

Presented as a partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Bachelor Degree

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I honestly declare this final project is my own writing. This is true and correct that I do not take any scholarly ideas or work from other dishonestly. All the cited works are quote in accordance with ethical code academic writing.

Tangerang, July 23rd 2024



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The researcher is aware that this thesis has many flaws. Therefore, the researcher will value any helpful critique and suggestions for enhancing the thesis. Thank you very much of all that support for make this research.

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ABSTRACT

Meme is an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads through imitation from person to person within a culture. Memes are frequently based on a recognizable format that can be modified and personalized with different captions, images, or variations. This can lead to the creation of new meanings with multiple interpretations. They can be humorous, satirical, or thought-provoking. Memes are full of signs and symbols, such as the image itself, text captions, any visual elements, pop culture references, and so on, and semiotics can help understand how these individual signs and symbols interact to create a broader meaning. The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. This study focused on analyzing the verbal and nonverbal signs, denotative and connotative meaning. The data used in this analysis is meme pictures that have been collected from an app. The method used in this study is qualitative because there is no numerical value. The findings revealed that there are 58 different types of signs, including 36 verbal and 22 nonverbal signs. Additionally, there are 22 denotative and connotative meanings in the memes. According to the findings of this study, verbal signs are more dominant than nonverbal signs.

Keywords: Memes, Semiotic, Roland Barthes

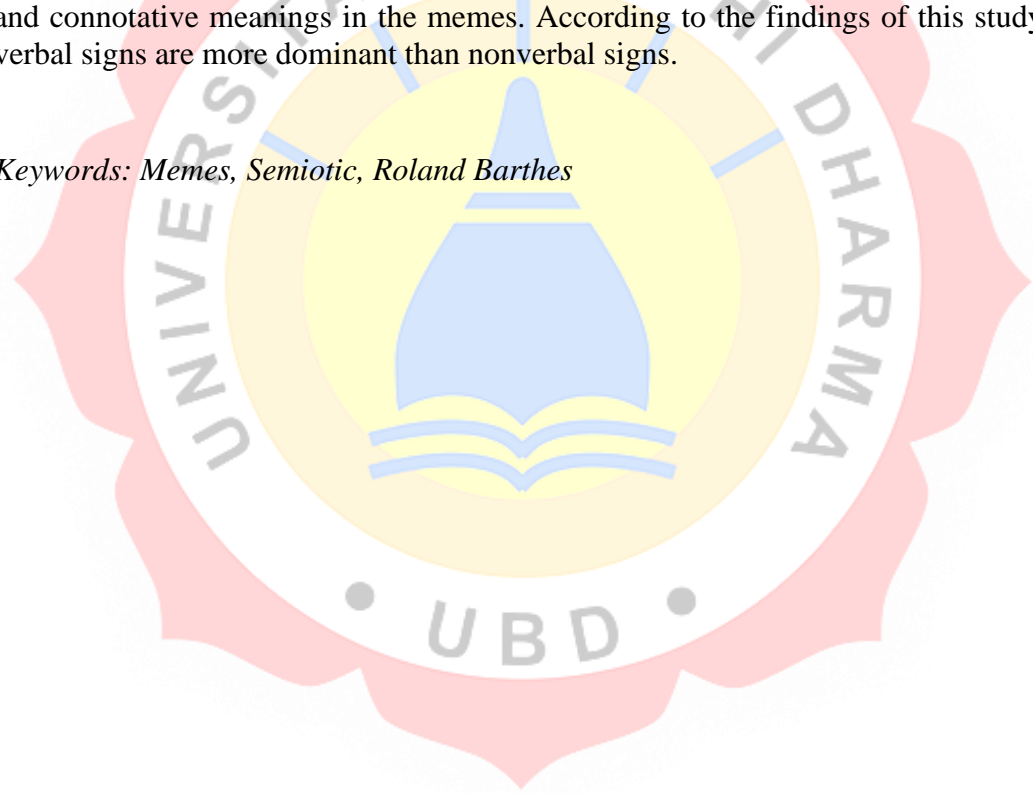


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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In a broader sense, a meme is an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads through imitation from person to person within a culture. This definition is attributed to evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1976), who saw memes as the cultural equivalent of genes. Memes can spread through a variety of channels, including writing, speech, gestures, rituals, and fashion trends.

In the context of the internet, a meme is a typically humorous image, video, text, or GIF that is widely distributed online, particularly through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, X which was previously called Twitter, and WhatsApp as well. These memes are frequently based on a recognizable format that can be modified and personalized with different captions, images, or variations. This can lead to the creation of new meanings with multiple interpretations. They can be humorous, satirical, or thought-provoking, and they frequently incorporate current or pop culture references.

The popularity of memes on social media is not unrelated to the method used by users of social media to gather information about popular memes. One notable exception is that users who find themselves drawn to the meme images and captions found in social media platforms will likely repost or re-upload the relevant memes to their own accounts. Thus, other users who are also concerned about the meme at hand will also do the same. Owing to this, there are many types and formats of memes that are offensive; they are not limited to users of social media alone, but are increasingly affecting the general public (Nugraha et al., 2015)

Semiotic analysis is one method of meme analysis that can be used to understand memes. According to Saussure (1916), semiotics is the systematic study of signs and symbols and how they produce meaning. Words, images, sounds, gestures, objects, and even actions can all be used as signs to convey meaning. Semiotics studies the relationships between these symbols and how they are interpreted in different contexts and cultures. Saussure divides signs into two

categories: the signifier (the actual element) and the signified (the concept or idea it represents).

There are several concepts of semiotic analysis through the lens of several key studies. Firstly, Sonya Ayu Kumala (2021) analyzed the material culture of Cina Benteng marriage traditions reflect historical, cultural, and identity memories through their meanings. The study uses qualitative approach, ethnography, archeology, and semiotics studies. This study also highlights the relevance of Cina Benteng culture to modern life and its ability to adapt to other cultures. Secondly, Muhammad Tsabit Fiddin (2022) analyzed using semiotic analysis to identify the signifiers and signified, also the denotative and connotative meaning of the memes in bitcoin memes. He used Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Thirdly, Fitria Arafah, Dohra Fitriasia, Siti Sarah Fitriani, & Fathimath Shaheema (2023) investigated the signs appearing on the names of Acehnese online newspaper using Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs. Finally, Saleha & Mia Rahmawati Yuwita (2023) analyzed using semiotic analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce to determine the semiotic meaning of the traffic sign symbol Dead End based on the meaning of color, shape, and also the meaning represented by the word Dead End itself. These three studies provide a strong foundation for understanding how semiotic analysis can be used to reveal the complex interplay of signs, meaning, and power.

In the context of memes, semiotics becomes a tool for studying the various signs and symbols that create a meme, as well as how they interact to create meaning. Memes are full of signs and symbols, such as the image itself, text captions, any visual elements, pop culture references, and so on, and semiotics can help understand how these individual signs and symbols interact to create a broader meaning. Semiotics also consider the cultural context in which the meme is interpreted. A certain symbol might have a different meaning for different audiences.

Daniel Chandler (2007) argues that internet memes function as a collection of visual and verbal signs that carry cultural significance. He emphasizes how these signs work together to convey a shared experience or reference point for a specific online community. Through semiotic analysis, Chandler highlights how memes can

be unpacked to reveal the underlying myths and ideologies hidden within the interplay of these signs.

Imgur is an app that has been established since 2009 which contains the funniest, most informative and inspiring images, memes, GIFs and visual stories presented in an endless stream of fun. This app reached 300 million people per month and it has billions of posts viewed every month. According to *Gizmodo*, Imgur is listed as one of the “100 websites that shaped the internet as we know it.” This means Imgur had a significant impact on how people use and interact with the internet. It helped to shape online culture, communication, and entertainment. Imgur’s influence is most likely due to its popularity as a platform for sharing and discovering images and GIFs, which has become an essential component of online communication and culture.

From the explanation above, the researcher would like to analyze memes using semiotic theory of Roland Barthes. This study will focus on analyzing signs, denotative and connotative meaning of the memes.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The changing landscape of internet memes presents a unique challenge in understanding their cultural meaning. While memes are undeniably funny, their ability to convey deeper messages and social comments is often ignored. The current meme analysis focuses on the signs that contribute to their meaning. This limited approach does not realize the full potential of memes as a form of cultural expression. The study aims to bridge these gaps by using a semiotic analysis that examines denotative and connotative meanings, providing a nuanced understanding of how meme uses visual and text elements to communicate complex ideas and social messages in a cultural context.

1.3 Research Question

Based on the research background and the statement of the problem above, the research question of this study as follows:

What are the meaning of verbal and nonverbal signs that found in memes?

1.4 Goal and Function

In the study, the researcher has the goal and function as follows:

1.4.1 Goal

To analyze the meaning of verbal and nonverbal signs in memes

1.4.2 Function

1. For the researcher, this study allows to enhance the researcher's skills, including data collection, analysis, critical thinking and a deeper understanding of semiotics and how it can be applied to analyze memes.
2. For the readers, this study provides readers with a deeper understanding of memes as communication tools and cultural expressions.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of Discussion

The scope of this study is the semiotic process on signs. This study is to identify the verbal and nonverbal signs, denotative and connotative meaning in memes. The limitation of this study is the researcher only analyze the verbal and nonverbal signs using semiotic theory of Roland Barthes, excluding the mythology. The data collected is in the form of images and texts from an app named Imgur.

1.6 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study as follows:

1. In searching for meme content, the researchers used Imgur a popular online image hosting and sharing platform. This app provided an enormous amount of material for the researcher's analysis.
2. To begin analyzing the memes, the researcher carefully separated the verbal and nonverbal components. This involved classifying the written text as verbal signs and the visual components (images, character expressions) as nonverbal signs.
3. To decode the deeper meaning within the memes, the researcher looked to Roland Barthes' semiotics theory. Barthes' framework distinguishes between two levels: denotative, which refers to the literal meaning of signs, and connotative, which investigates cultural associations and implied meanings.
4. After analyzing the memes through the lens of semiotics, the researcher reached a set of conclusions. This analysis most likely revealed how the interplay of

verbal and nonverbal signs influenced the memes' overall humor, social commentary, or cultural significance.



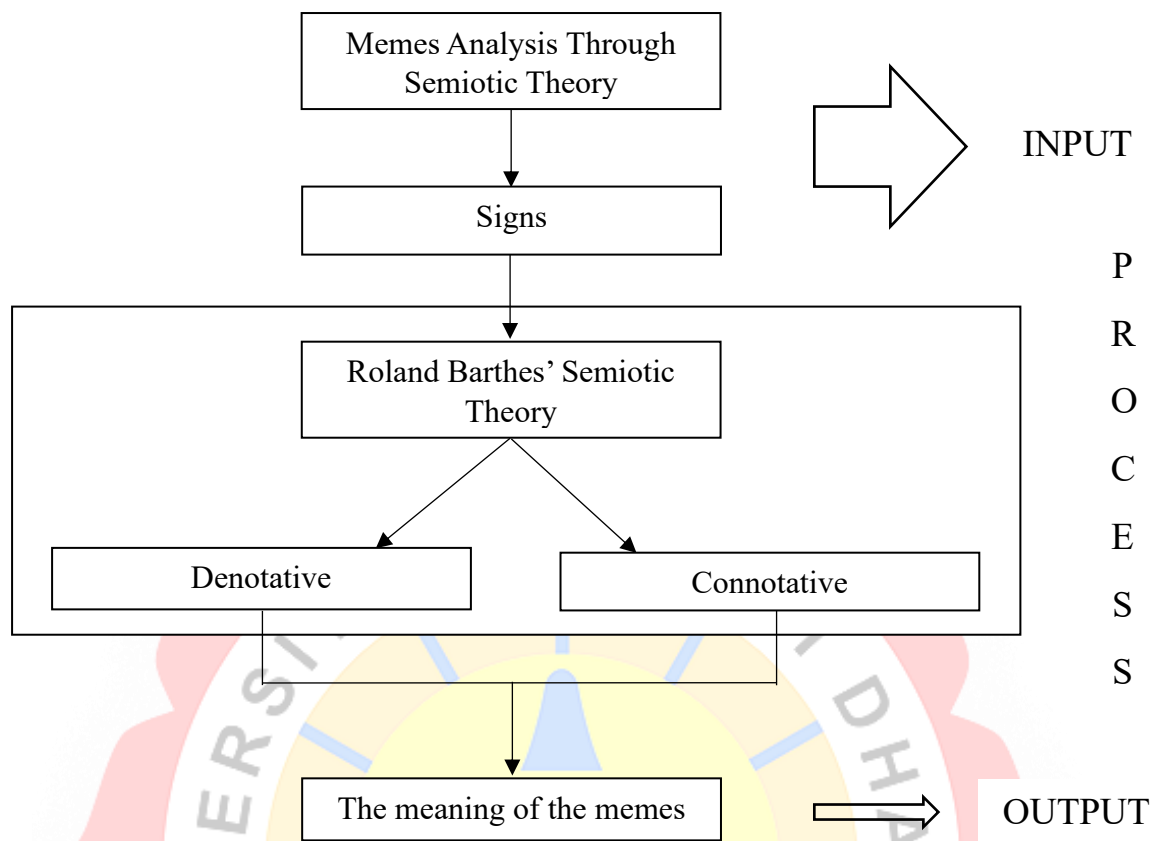


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Review of Previous Studies

The researcher has read three studies which are relevant to this study and used them as references. The studies are available in the form of theses and journal articles. The following are previous studies that have become references for conducting research.

The first study was conducted by Bella Thalia Weliana (2021) from Buddhi Dharma University entitled “Funeral Ceremony of Cina Benteng in Tangerang: A Semiotic Analysis”. In this study, the researcher uses Roland Barthes' theory of denotation, connotation, and myth to analyze the funeral ceremony of Cina Benteng in Tangerang. The data was collected through verbal and nonverbal signs, using Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary 9th edition. The study found 74 signs, including 4 verbal signs and 70 nonverbal signs. The denotative meaning was gathered using Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary, while the connotative meaning and myth were analyzed through the funeral ceremony. The results showed that not all attributes contained myths, with only six myths found. The study highlights the importance of understanding the meaning of objects through semiotic analysis.

The second study was conducted by Veronica Marel (2022) from Buddhi Dharma University entitled “Verbal and nonverbal Signs in Soul Movie Posters through The Semiotics Approach of Roland Barthes”. In this study, the researcher analyzes the meaning of movie posters using Roland Barthes' semiosis process, focusing on verbal and nonverbal signs. The data from two internet movie posters was collected qualitatively. The study found 15 types of signs, including denotative and connotative meanings, and one myth. The researcher concluded that nonverbal signs were more dominant than verbal signs, but the differences were not significant. Poster 1 had 4 verbal signs and 6 nonverbal signs, while poster 2 had 2 verbal signs and 3 nonverbal signs.

The third study was conducted by Desak Putu Eka Pratiwi, I Komang Sulatra, & I Gede Agus Dewangga (2023) from Mahasaraswati Denpasar University entitled “Deconstructing Internet Memes through Semiotic Analysis: Unveiling Myths and Ideologies in Visual and Verbal Sign”. In this study, the researcher explores the meanings of memes through semiotic analysis by Saussure and Barthes theory, a study that examines the use of visual and verbal signs in internet memes. The study aims to explore the myth and ideology conveyed through these memes and the message being communicated to the audience. The data was collected using an observation method and qualitative analysis. The findings suggest that memes are a form of communication that uses signifiers to convey a message, and their connotative meanings can reveal the myth and ideology behind the message. Understanding memes can provide insights into cultural reproduction in society.

Based on the studies above, there are some similarities with this study. First similarity is all three studies rely on Roland Barthes’ work on semiotics, particularly his concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth (in Weliana and Marel’s case). Second similarity is all studies analyze signs, both verbal and nonverbal, to uncover deeper meanings. Third similarity is all three studies use a qualitative for data collection and analysis. There is also a difference in object of interest. The first study’s object is funeral ceremonies and the second study’s object is movie posters. The third study’s object is more similar to this study which is memes, but this study incorporates Saussure’s theory alongside Barthes’ theory.

Based on the three studies above, the researcher draws the conclusion that Roland Barthes developed two elements such as a denotative and a connotative with verbal and nonverbal to analyze a sign. So, the researcher concludes that in order to analyze verbal and nonverbal signs in memes, it is necessary to apply Roland Barthes' theory.

2.2 Main Theory

2.2.1 Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of everything that can be interpreted as a sign. Signs can be words, images, sounds, objects, or even actions. They don't have a natural meaning

but become a sign when we invest it with a meaning based on cultural codes and conventions. Semiotics aims to comprehend how these signs function, how they relate to one another, and how they are perceived by different audiences (Eco, 2009).

In essence, semiotics equips us to decode the world around us. By understanding how signs function and how cultural contexts shape their interpretation, we can become more aware of the messages we send and receive, fostering richer communication and deeper cultural understanding. There are some popular semiotic theories, such as Charles Sanders Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Roland Barthes. The researcher will explain all of those theories but the researcher's primarily focus on theoretical approach of Roland Barthes' semiotics.

2.2.2 Charles Sanders Peirce Semiotic Theory

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) was the founding father of American pragmatism and a key figure in the development of semiotics. His most famous contribution is his triadic model of the sign, which proposes that a sign is a three-part relation between a representamen (the form that the sign takes), an object (the thing the sign refers to), and an interpretant (the idea or concept that the sign evokes in the mind of the interpreter). (Chandler, 2022: 18).

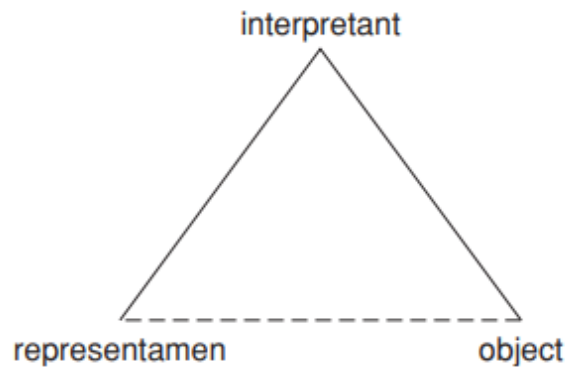


Figure 2. Charles Sanders Peirce Semiosis Process

Source: Chandler, 2022: 19

Peirce also identified three different types of sign according to the nature of the relationship between the representamen and the object. These are: iconic signs, which resemble the objects they represent; indexical signs, which have a physical connection to the objects they represent; and symbolic signs, which have an arbitrary relationship to the objects they represent (Chandler, 2022: 19).

2.2.3 Ferdinand de Saussure Semiotic Theory

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) was a Swiss linguist who is considered one of the founding fathers of modern semiotics. His most important contribution to the field is his distinction between the signifier (the form that the sign takes) and the signified (the concept that the sign refers to). Saussure argued that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and conventional, established through social agreement within a language community (Chandler, 2022: 15).

Saussure introduces four basic concepts in linguistics. Saussure's four concepts, namely (1) langue and parole, (2) signifier and signified, (3) synchronic and diachronic, and (4) syntagmatic and paradigmatic (Hamzah, 2020). Saussure differentiated between langue, the underlying system of rules governing a language, and parole, the individual acts of speaking and writing that utilize those rules. Saussure also broke down the sign, the basic unit of meaning in language, into the signifier (the physical form, like a spoken word) and the signified (the mental concept it represents). Additionally, he distinguished between synchronic and diachronic approaches to language study. Synchronic analysis focuses on how a

language functions at a specific point in time, while diachronic analysis examines how a language evolves over history. Finally, Saussure proposed the concepts of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. Syntagmatic analysis looks at how words connect and create meaning in a sequence, while paradigmatic analysis considers how words are related based on meaning or function and could potentially substitute for each other in a given context (Hoed, 2011: 30).

Ferdinand de Saussure, a key figure in linguistics, proposed that signs are not simple things but rather two-sided entities. According to Saussure, a sign is made up of the signifier, which is the physical form we perceive, like the spoken word "arbor" in Latin. This is linked to the signified, the mental concept it represents, which in this case would be the idea of a "tree." (Hoed, 2011: 32).

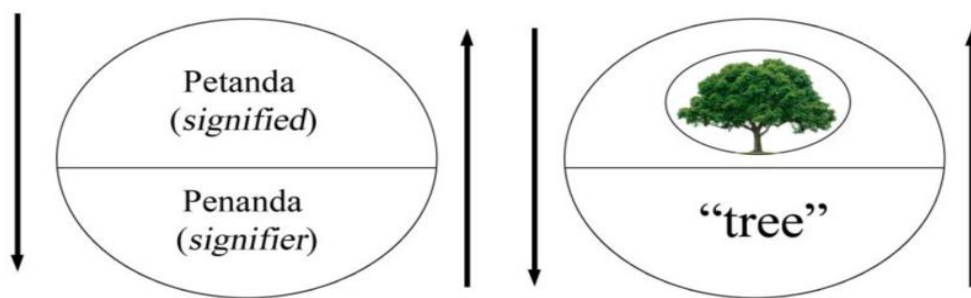


Figure 3. Saussure's Concept of Sign

Source: Hoed, 2014: 44

2.2.4 Roland Barthes Semiotic Theory

According to Roland Barthes, semiotics as a science and method for analyzing signs (Sobur, 2013:15). Semiotics, also known as semiology, focuses on how people interpret their surroundings and give them meaning. As a result, conveying those ideas and giving them meaning are incompatible. Giving something meaning entails providing information about the object in question as well as constitutionalizing details about the sign's structure.

Roland Barthes employs Ferdinand De Saussure's theory to interpret semiotics. Barthes reads the *Cours de linguistique générale* by Ferdinand De

Saussure. Ferdinand de Saussure was the source of Roland Barthes' theory. According to Barthes' semiology, the first level of the signification system is denotation, and the second level is connotation. In this case, denotation is more closely related to closed meaning. Barthes attempted to reject and get rid of this oppressive denotation in response to its literalness. There are only implications for him. He went on to say that the theory of significance which defines what is meant by "literal" is something that comes naturally to humans (Simandalahi et al., 2022).

Based on Barthes' definition, a sign is a system consisting of E, an expression (or signifier), in relation (R) to C, a content (or signified): ERC. If the extension is one of content, the primary sign ($E_1 R_1 C_1$) becomes the expression of a secondary sign system: $E_2 (= E_1 R_1 C_1) R_2 C_2$. In this case, denotative semiotics is the primary sign and connotative semiotics is the secondary sign. Barthes used a staggered system model to represent these relations (Winfried, 1990: 311).

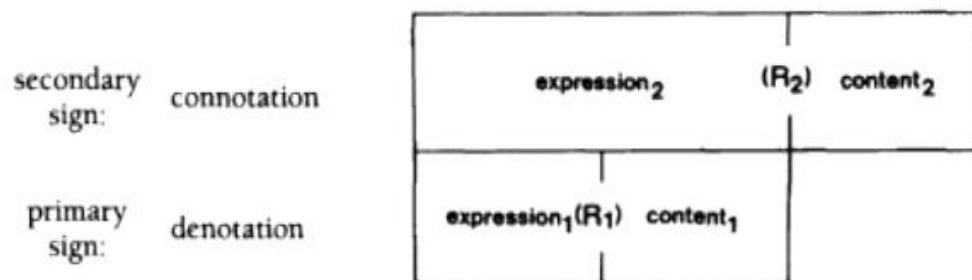


Figure 4. Barthes's model of sign

Source: Winfried, 1990: 311

Barthes employed the idea of connotative semiotics in his literary and cultural criticism to reveal the hidden meanings in texts. In his *Mythologies*, he classified these systems of secondary meanings as myths. Barthes later referred to this domain of meanings as an ideology. By trying to give their messages a basis in nature, which is regarded as a primary denotative system, the mass media constructs mythologies or ideologies as secondary connotative systems. They express primary, "natural"

meanings at the denotative level. They hide deeper, ideological meanings at the connotative level (Winfried, 1990: 311).

2.3 Verbal and Nonverbal

Verbal signs are a type of communication where messages or information are exchanged through speech or words (Wiyanti et al., 2021). Nonverbal communication is defined as behaviours that are produced through means other than words. This includes aspects like body language, eye contact, facial expressions, vocal cues (tone, pitch), and even personal space (Knapp et al., 2013).

In conclusion, verbal communication transmits the literal meaning through spoken or written words, conveys the core message. They form the foundation for what is commonly referred to as communication, in which messages are constructed using language-specific vocabulary and grammar. Some examples of verbal signs, such as greeting, asking questions, text messages, email, poem.

Nonverbal communication encompasses all the ways we send and receive messages without using spoken or written language. These signs can be conscious or unconscious, and they can convey a variety of information, including emotions, attitudes, intentions, and even cultural background. While nonverbal communication can be complex and vary across cultures, it remains a powerful tool for understanding others and expressing ourselves. Some examples of nonverbal signs, such as pictures, appearance, artifacts, drawings.

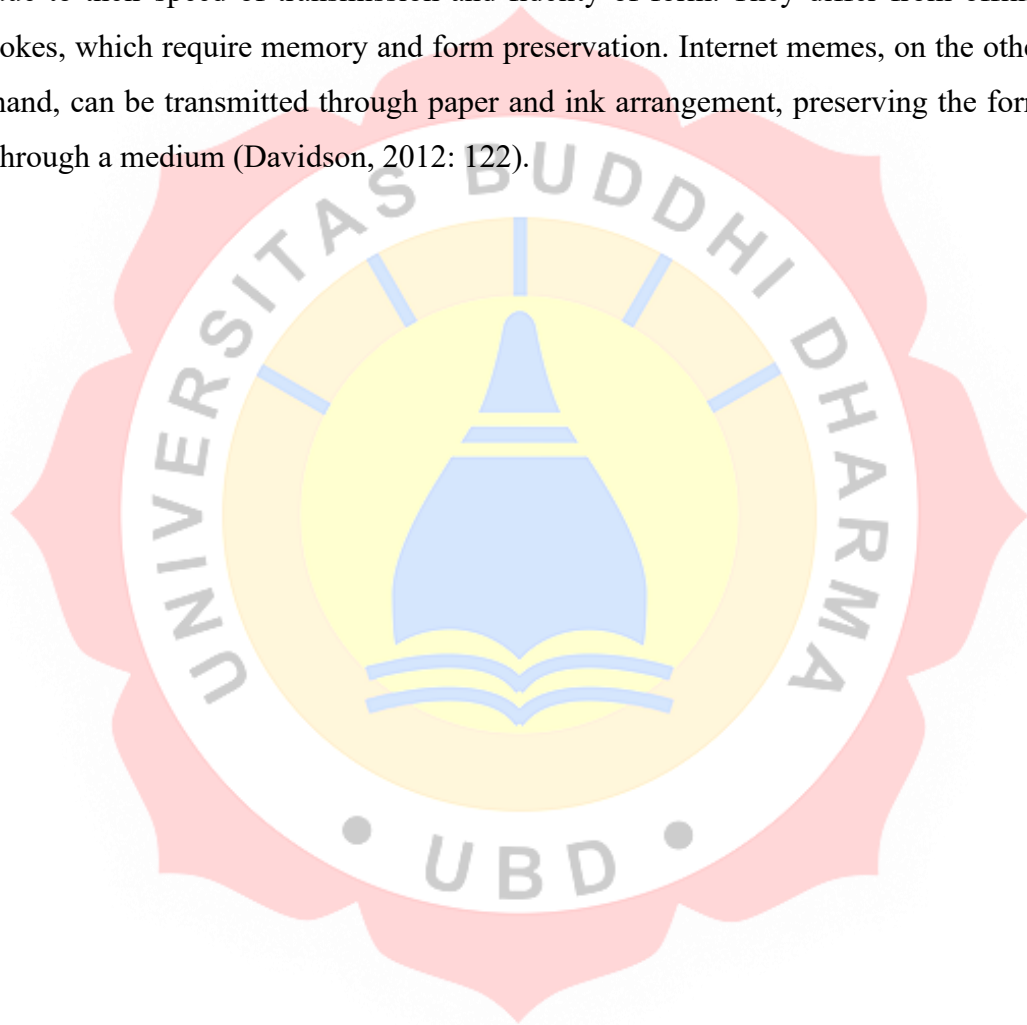
2.4 Memes

The term "meme" was introduced by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1976) in his research to describe the cultural evolution that resembles genetic evolution. He describes memes as replicators that should be considered as information units that are communicated through symbols (Johann & Bülow, 2019).

Shifman (2013) defines memes as groups of digital items sharing content, form, or stance, created with awareness of each other, and circulated, imitated, and transformed by users online. She highlights that memes are not isolated ideas but collections of digital content that riff off each other. They are created with the knowledge of prior iterations, and users actively participate in their spread and

transformation through online sharing. This definition emphasizes the internet as a platform for cultural participation and highlights the dynamic nature of memes.

An internet meme is a specific type of cultural element, typically a joke or humorous concept, that gains traction and spreads online. This online transmission is key to its identity as an internet meme. It's not just a funny idea, but something that flourishes and evolves through sharing on the web. Internet memes are unique due to their speed of transmission and fidelity of form. They differ from offline jokes, which require memory and form preservation. Internet memes, on the other hand, can be transmitted through paper and ink arrangement, preserving the form through a medium (Davidson, 2012: 122).



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

There are two types of research method, quantitative and qualitative. Creswell (2012), defines quantitative research as an inquiry process that utilizes measurement to collect data about phenomena and transform it into numerical data for analysis. This approach focuses on gathering objective findings through numerical measurements and statistical analysis. In Contrast, he defines qualitative research as an investigate strategy that explores and interprets the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. It emphasizes understanding the “why” behind phenomena through descriptions, observations, interviews, and other methods that capture rich, detailed data.

This study employs a qualitative research method for data analysis. The data itself will consist of a combination of images and texts. In this study the researcher used a semiotic approach by Roland Barthes to uncover the meanings contained in this data.

3.2 Data Types

There are two main classifications of data types, primary data and secondary data. Primary data refers to data obtained directly from the field by the researcher themselves. This can be collected through various methods like interviews, observations, questionnaires, and experiments. On the other hand, secondary data encompasses data that is not collected by the researcher directly but is obtained from existing sources like books, journals, articles, reports, and websites (Sugiyono, 2017).

This study used secondary data obtained from an app. This data consists of both images and texts. Since the data wasn't directly collected by the researcher, it is considered into the category of secondary data.

3.3 Data Source

The data of this study are memes which in the form of images and texts. The memes analyzed in this study were collected from Imgur, an app known for aggregating and showcasing user-created memes. By focusing on memes collected from this

platform, the research captures a diverse range of perspectives and ensures the data reflects current online trends.

3.4 Data Collection Method

There are several steps that the researcher used for collecting data:

1. The researcher finds data from an app, namely Imgur.
2. The researcher collects data in a form of images and texts.
3. The researcher identifies the signs that will be analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotics theory.

3.5 Data Analysis

There are several steps that the researcher took in analyzing the data:

1. The researcher uses Roland Barthes' semiotics theory to analyze verbal and nonverbal signs in memes.
2. The researcher analyzes the duality of language, differentiating between literal meaning (denotation) and implied associations (connotation) of each word.
3. After analyzing the data, the researcher concludes by summarizing the findings and their significance.