



Signification Analysis of 1984 Movie Poster

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Abstract. Movie posters function as promotional media that convey messages through verbal and visual signs. This research aims to identify the verbal and visual signs found in 1984 movie posters and analyze their meanings based on Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. The data of this research were obtained from the official 1984 movie poster published on IMDb. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method using documentation as the data collection technique. Ferdinand de Saussure's theory on signification through the association between the signifier and the signified was utilized in analyzing the data. Regarding the findings, the movie poster comprises of three verbal symbols like: headline, title, and baseline as well as five visual symbols which include: Big Brother's face, man and woman, color, typography and layout. These symbols possess certain meanings with regard to dictatorship, surveillance, oppression, rebellion and social control respectively. Thus, the movie poster 1984 acts not only as an advertising tool but also conveys the ideology of the movie.

Keywords: Ferdinand De Saussure's Theory; Movie Poster; Semiotic; Signifier And Signified; Verbal And Visual.

1. INTRODUCTION

Movie posters are one of the most important promotional media used to attract audiences and communicate the identity of a film. Besides providing information about a movie, posters also convey meanings through the combination of verbal and visual signs. According to (Chandler D. , 2001), signs in visual communication enable audiences to interpret meanings beyond their literal appearance.

One of the films that also applies this promotional strategy is 1984 movie poster. To reach different audiences in the various countries where it was screened, the film was promoted through several poster versions, each presenting distinct visuals, wording, and taglines adapted to different markets (Kerrigan, 2010). Directed by Michael Radford and adapted from George Orwell's classic dystopian novel Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984), the film is set in a totalitarian society ruled by constant surveillance and political oppression, portraying issues of authoritarianism, censorship, and the suppression of individual freedom. The film also received critical recognition, including the Best Film award at the Evening Standard British Film Awards and a BAFTA nomination for Best Production Design (IMDb, Evening Standard British Film Awards (1985), n.d. -b)These themes and achievements are visually reflected in the official movie posters, making them appropriate objects for semiotic analysis. Among these various versions, this research focuses on analyzing one selected official poster to reveal the meanings conveyed through its verbal and visual signs.

Several studies have applied semiotic approaches to analyze movie posters, such as the Oppenheimer poster (Mahendra, 2024), The Help poster (Rahmasari., 2014), and the Black

Panther poster (Durmuş., 2024). However, most of these studies relied on Roland Barthes' framework of denotation and connotation, while research applying Saussure's theory of signification to a dystopian-themed poster such as 1984 remains limited. This research addresses that gap by applying (Saussure, 1983), theory of signification to examine how the relationship between the signifier and the signified constructs meaning through the verbal and visual signs on the *1984* movie poster.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Film Posters

Movie posters are communication media in visual form, which apart from their promotional nature serve the purpose of communication by incorporating both textual and visual elements. Movie posters operate as multimodal texts, which are a combination of representational, interactive and compositional meaning in communicating the message and identity of a movie (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Using images, typography, color and layout, movie posters attract audiences while at the same time creating a symbolic representation of the movie (Sutanto, 2017).

Apart from the promotional function, movie posters communicate textual and visual information, thus setting up audience expectations regarding the movie before watching it. The development of typography, on the one hand, from just being an operational function to being a visual symbol of the tone and identity of a movie is one good example (Wang, 2019). Additionally, movie posters are crafted with the aim of effectively communicating messages and information to their audiences (Fitriani & Oetopo, A., 2023). In this case, therefore, movie posters can be considered meaningful visual texts whose verbal and visual parts work together to communicate certain messages.

Verbal and Visual Elements

The elements of printed advertisements such as movie posters are verbal and visual elements. The verbal elements are textual elements which involve headlines, sub-headlines, body copy, tag lines, titles and baselines (Supriyono, 2010). The verbal elements offer explicit information on the identity and promotional message of a movie. According to Chandler (2001), verbal signs refer to written language and textual signs that give meanings explicitly to the readers.

The visual elements include illustrations, typographies, colors, layouts, logos and others which are used for communicating meanings indirectly (Supriyono, 2010). Illustrations are used to grab attention of viewers and show some situations or people, while typography plays

a crucial role in conveying a movie poster's message and mood (Chidtian & Y. D. Renzina, 2022). Color plays a crucial role in symbol formation since color has its own distinct psychological meaning. Black color is the representation of power and dominance whereas red stands for danger and authority (Supriyono, 2010)

Ferdinand de Saussure's Theory

The present research is based on the theory of signification proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure to examine the meanings that are symbolically conveyed in the chosen movie posters from 1984. As suggested by (Saussure, 1983), every sign necessarily includes two aspects – the signifier that denotes the physical appearance of the sign and the signified that refers to the mental concept of the sign. The meaning is created via the connection between these two aspects and not the signifier alone.

According to (Saussure, 1983), a linguistic sign does not make any direct association between the object and its name; it makes an association between a concept and a sound pattern of the object. Taking into account the above-stated theory, all elements both verbal and visual of the movie posters from 1984 can be treated as signs representing certain concepts. Consequently, this research studies how the association between signifier and signified produces meanings regarding such themes as surveillance, authority, oppression, resistance, and social control.

Previous Research

Several studies have examined movie posters through semiotic approaches. (Mahendra, 2024), analyzed the Oppenheimer poster using Saussure's theory combined with Dyer's and Wierzbicka's frameworks, identifying signs related to the film's themes. (Rahmasari., 2014), applied Barthes' theory to The Help posters, revealing connotative meanings tied to racism, while (Durmuş., 2024), used the same framework to examine the Black Panther poster, finding signs that represented technological advancement, power, and social structure.

While these studies confirm the effectiveness of semiotic analysis, most applied Barthes' framework rather than Saussure's, and none examined the 1984 movie poster. This research addresses that gap by applying Saussure's theory of signification to this specific object.

Synopsis of the Film 1984



Figure 1. 1984 Movie Poster.

Source: IMDb (n.d.)

Directed by Michael Radford, *1984* depicts a society set in April of that year, where the ruling Party exercises total control over its citizens through relentless surveillance and propaganda. The story follows Winston Smith, a low-ranking Party member employed at the Ministry of Truth, whose job is to rewrite historical records to fit the Party's version of events. Constantly watched by Big Brother and the Thought Police, Winston grows increasingly disillusioned with the regime and begins secretly recording his private thoughts in a diary, an act considered a serious offense (IMDb, n.d. -a)

His situation changes when he enters a forbidden relationship with Julia, a fellow Party member who shares his resistance toward the government. Together, they attempt to reclaim a sense of freedom and individuality in a system designed to suppress both, but their defiance eventually draws the attention of the Thought Police. Winston is arrested and subjected to torture at the Ministry of Love, where he is forced to renounce his beliefs and betray Julia. By the end, Winston's identity is completely broken, and he submits to the Party's authority, illustrating the extent to which totalitarian power can overwhelm the individual (IMDb, n.d. -a).

3. METHOD RESEARCH

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method to investigate the signifying meanings represented in the selected *1984* movie poster. Qualitative research is appropriate for interpreting textual and visual data by emphasizing meanings rather than numerical measurement. Literary works and visual media are analyzed through interpretation to understand the meanings they represent within their social and cultural contexts (Ali, 2018).

Therefore, this method is considered suitable for examining the verbal and visual signs identified in the selected movie poster. In this research, the researcher served as the primary instrument, responsible for observing, classifying, and interpreting the verbal and visual signs found in the selected movie poster.

The data of this research consisted of one official *1984* movie poster obtained from IMDb. The poster was purposively selected because it effectively represents the central themes of the film through the integration of verbal and visual signs. The analysis focused on identifying the verbal signs, including the headline, title, and baseline, as well as the visual signs, namely illustration, typography, color, layout, and logo or symbol, presented in the selected movie poster.

The data were collected using the documentation method. According to (Ali, 2018), documentation is a technique of collecting data from written documents, images, and other recorded materials. In this study, the researcher downloaded the selected movie poster from IMDb, observed the verbal and visual elements contained in the poster, classified the identified signs based on their categories, and organized the data for further analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signification. Each verbal and visual sign was interpreted by examining the relationship between the signifier, referring to the physical form of the sign, and the signified, referring to the concept represented by the sign (Saussure, 1983). The analysis was conducted to explain how the interaction between verbal and visual signs constructs the ideological meanings conveyed in the selected *1984* movie poster.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data collection for this research was conducted through IMDb's official online database, from which the selected *1984* movie poster was obtained and subsequently analyzed. This section presents the analysis of the verbal and visual signs identified in the selected *1984* movie poster by applying Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signification discussed in the previous section. Each verbal and visual element in the movie poster is analyzed to reveal the meanings it conveys through the relationship between the signifier and the signified.

Following the classification of signs proposed by (Chandler D. , 2007), the signs identified in the movie poster are categorized into verbal signs and visual signs. Verbal signs refer to written or textual elements that explicitly communicate information to the audience, whereas visual signs consist of images and graphic elements that convey meaning through visual representation. In movie posters, verbal signs generally include headlines, titles, taglines,

baselines, body copy, and sub-headlines, while visual signs consist of illustrations, typography, colors, layouts, and logos or symbols (Supriyono, 2010).

The analysis begins with the verbal signs found in the selected movie poster.



Figure 2. Headline Text: “GEORGE ORWELL’S TERRIFYING VISION COMES TO THE SCREEN”.

Source: IMDb (n.d.)

Sign: Headline, Signifier: “GEORGE ORWELL’S TERRIFYING VISION COMES TO THE SCREEN”, Signified: This phrase evokes a sense of dread and warns of a controlling, dystopian world defined by constant surveillance.



Figure 3. Title “1984”.

Source: IMDb (n.d.)

Sign: Title / Logo 1984, Signifier: The title “1984” appears in white textured typography placed inside a red geometric design combined with a sharp V-shaped symbol. Signified: Presented this way, the title conveys dominance and represents a system built on authoritarian rule.



Figure 4. Baseline (Credit Titles).

Source: IMDb (n.d.)

Sign: Baseline, Signifier: The bottom section contains actor names and production information. Signified: Including the cast and crew details lends the film credibility and marks it as a professionally produced work.

After examining the verbal signs, the analysis proceeds to the visual signs found in the selected movie poster. According to (Supriyono, 2010), visual elements such as illustration, typography, color, and layout play an important role in communicating symbolic meanings and attracting the audience's attention.



Figure 5. Large face.

Source: IMDb (n.d.)

Sign: Large Face, **Signifier:** A large shadowed face dominates the upper part of the poster. **Signified:** This towering face embodies constant watchfulness, dominance, and the mental grip of “Big Brother” over society.



Figure 6. Man & Woman.

Source: IMDb (n.d.)

Sign: Man & Woman, **Signifier:** A man and a woman are positioned close to each other at the bottom of the poster. **Signified:** Their closeness conveys warmth, private connection, and the fragile pursuit of freedom within a repressive regime.

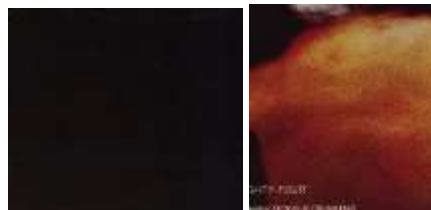


Figure 7. Black, Orange

Source: IMDb (n.d.)

Sign: Color (Black & Orange), Signifier: Black and orange tones appear throughout the poster composition. Signified: The black tones evoke dread, secrecy, and psychological strain, whereas the orange conveys alarm and heightened tension.



Figure 8. Rigid and geometric letterforms.

Source: IMDb (n.d.)

Sign: Typography, Signifier: The poster uses uppercase typography with rigid and geometric letterforms., Signified: Such lettering conveys discipline, structure, and an overarching sense of authority.



Figure 9. Top, Middle, Bottom.

Source: IMDb (n.d.)

Sign: Layout, Signifier: The poster is arranged vertically into top, middle, and bottom sections. Signified: This top-to-bottom arrangement visually mirrors a power structure where control flows downward onto individuals.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the analysis of the official 1984 movie poster using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach, the verbal and visual signs on the poster are closely tied to the film's central themes of surveillance, authoritarianism, and the loss of individual freedom. Beyond serving as promotional media, the poster functions as a communicative tool that conveys the film's ideological message to its audience, confirming that the relationship between the signifier and the signified can effectively reveal meaning in a movie poster's visual elements.

This research is limited to the analysis of a single official poster version and relies solely on Saussure's theory of signification; therefore, the findings may not fully represent the meanings conveyed by the film's other poster variants. Future research may apply other semiotic approaches, such as Roland Barthes' or Charles Sanders Peirce's, and expand the object of analysis to other visual media, such as film scenes, magazine covers, or digital advertisements.

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