

Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis Of The *Wicked* Film Poster: A Study Of The Meaning Of Denotation, Connotation, And Myth

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Abstract

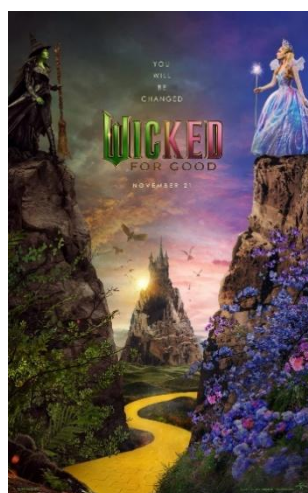
A film poster is a visual communication medium that not only functions as a promotional tool but also as a sign system containing various cultural and ideological meanings. This study aims to analyze the meaning contained in the Wicked film poster using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with documentation techniques on one object, namely the official Wicked film poster. Analysis was carried out on visual elements such as characters, colors, lighting, composition, background, typography, and slogans on the poster. The results show that at the denotation level, the poster displays two main characters with contrasting visual characteristics, a yellow road leading to the castle, and a strong fantasy nuance. At the connotation level, this visual contrast represents moral conflict, identity struggles, hope, and the process of character transformation. Meanwhile, at the myth level, the poster constructs an ideology about the dichotomy between good and evil, transformation as a path to redemption, fantasy as an emotional escape, and Western cultural constructions that associate beauty with goodness and physical differences with moral deviance. This study shows that film posters not only convey information about a film but also reproduce social and cultural values that exist in public spaces through a visual sign system. Thus, Roland Barthes's semiotics provides an effective analytical framework for uncovering the explicit and implicit meanings hidden in contemporary visual media.

Keywords: Roland Barthes's Semiotics, Film Poster, Wicked, Denotation, Connotation, Myth.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the global film industry has made film posters no longer merely a promotional medium but also a visual communication medium capable of shaping public perception of a film. Through the combination of color, typography, composition, lighting, character expressions, and other visual elements, posters convey symbolic messages that influence how viewers perceive a film's content and themes. Posters are visual texts that not only inform about entertainment products but also represent cultural values, ideologies, and the construction of social developments within society. Sari (2024) explains that film posters are sign systems containing multiple layers of meaning and can therefore be analyzed using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach. Analysis of film posters is crucial for understanding how visual media shapes social and cultural perceptions (Sari, 2024).

Semiotics is a discipline that studies signs and the process of meaning formation in various forms of communication. In the study of visual media, Roland Barthes's semiotic theory is used because it can reveal the relationship between signs, meaning, and cultural ideology. Barthes developed the concept of signification into three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal meaning that appears directly, connotation refers to the meaning that arises from social and cultural experiences, while myth is a system ideology that makes certain cultural values appear natural (Barthes, 2021). According to Rohmaniah (2021), Barthes's approach allows researchers to identify how visual media not only represents reality but also forms a method for the public to understand identity, power, morality, and social relations. Thus, Barthes's semiotics is a relevant approach in analyzing film posters as a visual communication medium.



Picture 1. Poster Wicked



The film *Wicked* is a popular musical adaptation that offers a new perspective on the classic tale of *The Wizard of Oz*. Unlike previous narratives that positioned the Green Witch as the antagonist, *Wicked* presents a more complex perspective on identity, discrimination, friendship, and morality. The film's official poster features two main characters, Elphaba and Glinda, in a contrasting visual composition. Elphaba is depicted predominantly in green and black in a dark environment, while Glinda appears in pink and lighting synonymous with tenderness and hope. The yellow path connecting the two figures to the castle, along with the slogan "You Will Be Changed," serve as visual elements that reinforce the narrative of transformation and moral journey. According to Nafi'ah et al., (2025), the *Wicked* poster uses visual contrast as a strategy to build expectations while conveying symbolic meanings about conflict and character change.

Various studies have shown that film posters function not only as marketing media but also as cultural representations that shape audience perceptions. Dewi and Pratiwi (2024) found that the use of color, composition, and visual symbols in film posters can evoke emotional responses while representing values of social development in society. Similarly, Sulistyaningrum et al., (2023) explain that film posters contain cultural elements that can be analyzed through denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. However, research on the *Wicked* poster is still relatively limited, especially those that study the meaning of representation using Roland Barthes's comprehensive semiotic approach. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings contained in the official *Wicked* film poster. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of visual media semiotic studies and enrich the understanding of how film posters represent ideology, culture, identity, morality, and social construction in contemporary public spaces.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis method to uncover the meaning contained in the official poster for the film *Wicked*. The qualitative approach was chosen because it focuses on understanding and interpreting social phenomena and cultural representations through visual signs, rather than on hypothesis testing or statistical analysis. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), qualitative research aims to understand the meanings constructed by individuals or groups regarding a phenomenon based on social and cultural context. Chandler (2022) states that semiotic study methods generate meaning, making them relevant for analyzing visual communication media filled with symbols and ideologies.





The object of this study is the official poster for the film *Wicked*, published as a promotional medium. This poster was chosen because it combines various visual elements, such as characters, color, typography, composition, lighting, background, and slogan, which form a visual narrative and influence audience perception. The research focuses on analyzing the characters of Elphaba and Glinda, their expressions, gestures, dominant colors, the yellow path leading to the castle, and the slogan "You Will Change" based on Roland Barthes's three levels of significance: denotation, connotation, and myth.

The data sources consist of primary data in the form of the official poster of the film *Wicked* and secondary data obtained through literature studies in the form of books, journal articles, proceedings, and previous studies on Roland Barthes' semiotics, visual communication, representational culture, and film poster analysis published in the period 2021–2026. The data collection techniques used are through documentation studies and bibliographic studies. Documentation studies are used to identify and classify each visual element in the poster, while literature studies are conducted to strengthen interpretations through theories and previous relevant research.

Data analysis was conducted using Roland Barthes' semiotic model through three stages: denotation, connotation, and myth. The denotation stage explains the literal meaning of each visual element, the connotation stage interprets the symbolic and cultural meaning, while the myth stage identifies the ideology represented through the entire sign system. Through these stages, this study explains how the *Wicked* poster systematically constructs a narrative about identity, morality, transformation, discrimination, and cultural construction, resulting in a logical, easily understood interpretation that can be scientifically justified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the official poster for the film *Wicked* using Roland Barthes's semiotic theory, which emphasizes three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. According to Rohmaniah (2021), Roland Barthes's semiotic perspective states that every sign not only has its own meaning at the first level (denotation), but also develops into connotative meaning and ultimately forms a myth as a representation of cultural ideology. Myth is a semiological system at the second level that makes cultural values appear natural (Barthes, 2021). The analysis of the *Wicked* poster goes beyond identifying visual elements but also reveals how these elements construct narratives about identity, morality, transformation, and cultural stereotypes (Barthes, 2021; Rohmaniah, 2021).

The results of this study indicate that each visual component in a poster is interconnected





and connected to form a complex sign system, resulting in multiple layers of meaning that influence the audience's perception of the film. Sari's (2024) research, which explains that film posters are not only promotional media but also visual texts that convey cultural signs, ideologies, and social representations through the relationship between signs and meanings. Nafi'ah et al.'s (2025) research on the Wicked film poster also shows that the visual contrast between the two main characters serves as a visual communication strategy to shape the audience's initial perception of the characters depicted.

Denotative Analysis

The first stage in Roland Barthes's semiotics is denotation, which is the literal meaning or meaning directly perceived without involving cultural interpretation. According to Barthes (2021), denotation is the first level in the process of signification, describing the direct relationship between the signifier and the signified. Rohmaniah (2021) explains that denotative analysis aims to describe objects as they exist without being influenced by social experiences and cultural signs.

Based on observations of the official Wicked film poster, several key visual elements can be identified. First, the poster depicts two figures playing, one standing on opposite sides. On the left side is a green-skinned woman dressed in black, a long robe, and a pointed witch's hat. The character stands on a cliff covered with dark trees, her expression solemn, and she gazes into the distance. On the right side is a young woman wearing a red dress that radiates bright light. The character stands on another cliff covered with bright flowers and lush vegetation. The two figures face each other, separated by a vast valley. This description conveys denotative meaning because it only depicts the visible object without providing a symbolic interpretation (Barthes, 2021).

In the center of the poster, a yellow, single-step path cuts through the landscape and leads to a large castle in the distance. The castle is the visual focus because it is positioned precisely at the perspective point of the image's composition. The sky in the poster displays a combination of blue, orange, and sunlight, creating a dramatic and magical atmosphere. According to Dewi et al., (2024), visual elements such as composition, color, perspective, and lighting are the first visual cues received by the viewer before developing symbolic meaning at the connotation stage. Therefore, all of these elements form the basis for the subsequent process of significance.

These visual elements, the poster also contains textual information such as the film title "Wicked," the names of the main cast, the production company logo, and the slogan "You Will





Be Changed" placed at the bottom of the poster. All elements are arranged symmetrically, creating a visual balance that attracts the viewer's attention. According to Sulistyaningrum et al., (2023), the typography, slogan, and layout in a film poster serve an informative function while also being part of a comprehensive visual message-building support system.

At the denotative level, all elements are understood as visible visual objects, namely two women with different characters, the color yellow, the castle, the tree, the flowers, the sky, and the film's promotional text. Meaning at this stage has not yet entered the realm of cultural elements and emotional interpretation, so it is objective, based on what can be directly observed. Barthes (2021), denotation is the initial stage of the meaning-formation process, serving as the foundation before signs develop into connotative and mythological meanings. Thus, denotative analysis provides a factual description of the poster's visual structure, which serves as the basis for uncovering cultural and ideological meanings in the next stage of analysis (Rohmaniah, 2021).

Connotative Analysis

In the second stage, the analysis focuses on connotative meaning, meaning that emerges through the social, cultural, and emotional experiences of society. Roland Barthes explains that connotation is a second-level system of significance formed through the relationship between signs and a society's cultural experiences. According to Barthes (2021), signs not only convey literal meanings but also generate new meanings influenced by values, ideologies, and social customs. Therefore, the connotative meaning of a poster is greatly influenced by how society interprets the visual symbols displayed (Barthes, 2021).

The figure of the green-skinned woman (Elphaba) is not only understood as a witch but also represents various figures from society in general. The color green in culture is often associated with something foreign, mysterious, and even dangerous. Black clothing, a witch's hat, and a dark environment reinforce images of alienation, discrimination, and the struggle for survival. Thus, Elphaba is constructed as an individual who experiences marginalization due to physical differences. Nafi'ah et al. (2025) which explains that the visualization of Elphaba in the Wicked poster uses symbols of color, lighting, and space to construct the image of a marginalized figure while simultaneously criticizing stereotypes against individuals who are considered different. The color green on Elphaba is not only a visual identity, but also represents the differences in social issues that give rise to internal stigma in society (Nafi'ah et al., 2025).

The female character on the right (Glinda) exudes an image of gentleness and purity. The dominant colors of pink, white, and light blue convey connotations of beauty, innocence, hope,





and social acceptance. The light surrounding her body reinforces the image of this figure as a good character. The presence of brightly colored flowers also reinforces associations with life, happiness, and optimism. According to Dewi et al., (2024), the use of bright colors and soft lighting in film posters is a visual strategy to build positive emotional perceptions of certain characters. They explain that the combination of color and lighting can create images of morality, hope, and social acceptance that do not directly influence the audience's interpretation (Dewi & Pratiwi, 2024).

The contrast between the two characters is a visual communication strategy that establishes a binary opposition. The audience is automatically led to differentiate the characters based on color, lighting, and their surroundings. However, this is precisely where the poster for *Wicked* begins to present a paradox, as the film attempts to overturn stereotypes about who is truly good and who is considered evil. Barthes (2021) emphasized that connotative meaning often operates through long-accepted public cultural oppositions, resulting in a particular interpretation of a sign. Thus, the visual contrast between Elphaba and Glinda demonstrates how the media utilizes familiar symbols to construct expectations that emerge in the film's narrative (Barthes, 2021).

The yellow road to the castle has its own symbolic meaning, representing the journey of life, the process of transformation, and the search for identity. In Western popular culture, roads are often understood as a metaphor for the journey toward objective life. The color yellow alone symbolizes hope, optimism, and a clear direction. Therefore, the presence of the yellow road simultaneously connects the two characters, suggesting that both will experience change throughout the story. This finding aligns with research by Sulistyaningrum et al., (2023), who found that the elements of spatial travel and paths in fantasy film posters serve as symbols of the characters' psychological journeys toward identity change and conflict resolution. They stated that visual elements such as roads, landscapes, and the characters' gazes represent the narrative journey that forms the core of the story (Sulistyaningrum et al., 2023).

The castle in the distance connotes power, dreams, ultimate goals, and the center of conflict. Its placement at a key perspective point suggests that the characters' entire journey culminates in that space. Thus, the castle serves not only as a visual backdrop but also as a symbol of the future and the resolution of the conflict. According to Sari (2024), the central point of the visual composition serves as both a focal point and an ideological symbol that directs the reader to the poster's overall narrative. In her analysis of the *Budi Pekerti* film poster, Sari (2024) demonstrates that the central visual composition represents the primary message the film intends to convey to the audience.





The slogan "You Will Change" reinforces the meaning of transformation. The phrase "No" is not only addressed to the characters in the film but also to the audience. Emotionally, the slogan encourages viewers to believe that the experience of watching the film will change their perspective on good, evil, friendship, and identity. Barthes (2021) explains that verbal language in visual media functions as an anchor, a directional marker for readers to understand the meaning of the image in accordance with the intended message. Therefore, the slogan on the poster, "No," serves not only to promote the sentence but also to reinforce the meaning of transformation, the film's main theme (Barthes, 2021).

Furthermore, the poster's visual composition demonstrates balance between the two characters. No one figure is positioned more dominantly than the other. This suggests that both characters hold equal importance in building the narrative. Thus, the poster not only depicts the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist but also depicts the complex relationship between two individuals with different backgrounds. Wulandari et al. (2025), who stated that balanced composition in film posters is a visual strategy to show the relationships between characters, allowing the audience to immediately understand the main conflict before watching the film. Through visual balance, the poster is able to build expectations while reinforcing the ideological message it intends to convey to the public (Wulandari et al., 2025).

Myth Analysis

According to Barthes (2021), myth is a second-level system of meaning that makes social and cultural constructs appear natural, thus being accepted by the public without question. In Barthes's view, myths function not only as traditional stories but also as ideological mechanisms that conceal cultural values behind visual signs. Rohmaniah (2021) also explains that myth, in Roland Barthes's semiotics, is a process of meaning that transforms signs into representations of social ideology, thereby shaping the public's understanding of reality. Based on an analysis of the official poster for the film *Wicked*, several cultural myths were discovered, constructed through the use of color, visual composition, characters, backgrounds, and slogans that complement each other in producing ideological meaning (Barthes, 2021; Rohmaniah, 2021).

The Mythical Dichotomy of Good and Evil

The *Wicked* poster represents the classic myth of the conflict between light and darkness as a symbol of morality. Glinda is depicted in the dominant colors pink, white, and light, which are culturally associated with goodness, purity, and hope. In contrast, Elphaba is placed in shades of dark green, black, and darker environments, creating perceptions of mystery, danger, or evil.



According to Barthes (2021), these meanings derive not only from color but also from cultural conventions that have been inherited and accepted as natural. Therefore, the visual contrast in the poster not only presents an aesthetic difference but also reproduces the ideology of the binary opposition between "good" and "evil."

The film *Wicked* precisely attempts to deconstruct this myth by showing that the character, traditionally perceived as an evil witch, is actually a victim of social stereotypes. This finding aligns with research by Nafi'ah et al. (2025), who stated that the *Wicked* poster uses visual contrast to capture the audience's attention through familiar cultural expectations, then reverses these expectations through the film's narrative. Thus, the poster functions as a medium that both reproduces and critiques cultural myths about morality (Nafi'ah et al., 2025).

Transformation and the Redemption Myth

The presence of the yellow road leading to the castle and the slogan "You Will Be Changed" construct a myth about transformation as a journey toward self-redemption. The road symbolically represents the life journey every individual must undertake to achieve understanding, maturity, and moral change. According to Barthes (2021), visual signs gain ideological power when the public connects them to long-standing cultural experiences in social life. In this context, the yellow road "No Longer" is understood not as a landscape element, but more as a metaphor for a spiritual and emotional journey.

Sari's (2024) research on the poster for the film *Budi Pekerti* also shows that visual elements in the poster are often used to construct a narrative about character change, self-reflection, and conflict resolution. This suggests that transformation is one of many myths used in modern visual media. In the poster for *Wicked*, the myth is reinforced by the slogan "You Will Be Changed," which is addressed not only to the characters in the film but also to the audience as an invitation to re-examine the meaning of good, evil, and identity after watching the film (Sari, 2024).

The Myth of Fantasy as a Space of Escape

The *Wicked* poster features a fantasy landscape featuring a majestic castle, dramatic skies, lighting effects, and a yellow road, creating an imaginative world. On a mythological level, these visuals foster the belief that fantasy worlds are spaces of escape (escapism), offering emotional freedom in times of hope from the troubles of real life. Barthes (2021) explains that mass media often utilizes cultural symbols to construct perceived narratives, leading audiences to embrace fantasy worlds as spaces imbued with moral meaning.

Sulistyaningrum et al., (2023) state that fantasy film posters utilize visual symbols such as castles, lighting, and magical landscapes to construct cultural values about courage, hope, and the struggles of life. Therefore, the fantasy world in the Wicked poster serves not only as a backdrop for the story but also as an ideological representation of freedom, self-discovery, and hope for social change (Sulistyaningrum et.al, 2023).

The Myth of Beauty and Morality

The Wicked poster also reproduces Western cultural myths that associate beauty with goodness. Glinda is depicted as a beautiful woman, dressed in brightly colored clothes, surrounded by flowers, and illuminated by soft lighting, making her visually associated with a good character. Elphaba, on the other hand, has green skin and dark clothing, making her more easily associated with an antagonist. Barthes (2021) emphasized that myths work by creating a connection between physical appearance and morality that seems natural, even though this connection is a cultural construct.

Dewi and Pratiwi (2024) shows that the use of color, lighting, and visual characteristics in film posters plays a significant role in shaping audience perceptions of the characters' characteristics even before the story is fully understood. However, Wicked critiques these constructions by demonstrating that a person's morality cannot be judged solely on physical appearance. Thus, the poster not only reproduces mythological beauty but also invites viewers to question the return of long-established cultural standards (Dewi & Pratiwi, 2024).

The Myth of Difference as a Threat

Elphaba's green skin is a primary symbol of individuals perceived as different by their social environment. On a mythological level, difference gives rise to stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and social rejection. Barthes (2021) myths operate by transforming social constructs into something seemingly normal, so that the public often perceives discrimination as a natural consequence of individuals who are different. In the context of the Wicked poster, green skin not only serves as the character's visual identity but also as a metaphor for minority groups experiencing marginalization.

Who found that the character of Elphaba represents a critique of social stereotypes about individuals who are physically and socially different. The poster demonstrates how a person's identity is often formed based on outward appearance before the public understands their true character. Therefore, the myth of "difference" as a threat in the Wicked poster is not only related to a fantasy world but also reflects various contemporary issues such as



discrimination, social exclusion, and inequality in modern society (Nafi'ah et al., 2025).

Based on analysis, it can be concluded that the mythological layer in the Wicked poster serves to critique various cultural ideologies that have long existed in society. The poster not only represents the conflict between good and evil but also raises issues of identity transformation, beauty standards, discrimination, and the acceptance of differences. Thus, in accordance with Barthes's (2021) concept, the film poster is a system capable of reproducing signs while deconstructing mythical culture through complex visual representations.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the Wicked poster functions not only as a promotional medium for the film but also as a visual communication medium representing various social and cultural ideologies. A film poster is a sign system that conveys not only information about a cinematic work but also constructive meaning through the relationship between visual elements and the audience's cultural experiences. At the denotative level, the Wicked poster features two main characters against a contrasting background, a yellow road leading to a castle, and typography that introduces the film's identity. These elements provide literal meanings that form the basis for the formation of subsequent meanings (Sari, 2024).

At the connotative level, each visual element in the poster conveys symbolic meanings about identity, friendship, discrimination, hope, and transformation. The green color associated with Elphaba represents alienation and social stigma, while the dominant red color associated with Glinda connotes purity, beauty, and social acceptance. Nafi'ah et al., (2025) explain that the visual contrast in the Wicked poster is constructed through the use of color, lighting, and composition, creating a binary opposition between the two characters. They stated that "the visualization of Elphaba and Glinda represents a symbolic conflict that underpins the film's narrative". Findings consistent with this study suggest that the poster's connotative meaning not only depicts the characters' differences but also leads viewers to question stereotypes about the depiction of good and evil.

At the mythical level, the Wicked poster constructs a narrative culture about the dichotomy between good and evil, beauty standards, moral journeys, and the acceptance of difference. From Roland Barthes' perspective, myth is a second-level system of meaning that transforms cultural constructs into something perceived as natural. As explained by Rohmaniah (2021), myths work by disguising ideological values so that the public accepts them as reasonable truths. Therefore, the depiction of the beautiful character as a symbol of good and the differently-looking character as a symbol of evil in the Wicked poster reflects a mythical culture





that has long developed in Western society. However, the film's narrative attempts to deconstruct this myth by demonstrating that a person's morality cannot be measured by their physical appearance.

The findings of this study also demonstrate that Roland Barthes's semiotic theory remains highly relevant for analyzing contemporary visual media. Barthes (2021) explains that every visual sign has two systems, the significance of which then develops into myth as a form of cultural ideology. In "Mythology," Barthes states that "myth transforms history into nature" (Barthes, 2021, p. xx), indicating that myth transforms social constructions into something seemingly natural. This concept is clearly evident in the poster for *Wicked*, where the use of color, composition, and visual symbols shape perceptions of the characters before the audience watches the film.

These findings are also supported by Sulistyaningrum and Sabri's (2023) research on the poster for the film *Coco*. They found that film posters not only convey visual information but also represent cultural values lived in society through symbols, color, and visual composition. Thus, posters become a medium that connects aesthetic experience with cultural construction. Dewi and Pratiwi (2024) also suggest that film posters have the ability to evoke emotional responses while shaping social perceptions through the use of symbolic visual elements. This reinforces the research findings that the *Wicked* poster is a cultural communication medium that conveys multi-layered meaning through a system of visual signs.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the *Wicked* poster is not only a marketing instrument in the film industry, but also a medium of cultural representation that simultaneously deconstructs various social ideologies. Using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach, this research demonstrates that each visual element in the poster has a complete reciprocal relationship in constructing denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings. Therefore, film posters can be understood as a cultural text that not only influences the audience's perception of a film but also shapes how society understands identity, morality, power, and difference in social life.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the meaning contained in the official poster for the film *Wicked* using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. The results show that the poster for *Wicked* functions not only as a promotional medium for the film but also as a visual communication medium that represents cultural values, ideology, and social construction through a system of interrelated signs. At the denotative level, the poster depicts two main characters, Elphaba and Glinda, with contrasting



visual characteristics, accompanied by a yellow road leading to the castle, a distinct setting, and the slogan "You Will Change," which establishes the film's visual identity. These elements form the basis for the formation of meaning at the next level.

At the connotative level, the visual elements in the poster represent symbols of identity, discrimination, hope, friendship, transformation, and moral struggle. The contrasting colors, lighting, and visual composition suggest conflict during the complex relationship between the two main characters. The yellow road is interpreted as a symbol of life's journey and identity change, while the film's slogan emphasizes that transformation is not only experienced by the characters in the story but also becomes an emotional experience for the audience. At the mythical level, the poster constructs a cultural ideology about the dichotomy between good and evil, transformation as a path to redemption, fantasy as a space for reflection and escape, and social constructs linking beauty to morality. Despite using widely recognized cultural symbols, the narrative of *Wicked* attempts to deconstruct these myths by demonstrating that a person's identity and morality cannot be determined solely by physical appearance.

This study demonstrates that Roland Barthes's semiotic approach remains relevant for studying contemporary visual media because it reveals the relationship between visual signs and ideological culture. This research is still limited to a single object; therefore, further research is recommended to conduct comparative analyses of various film posters or other visual media by combining a semiotic approach with representation theory or cultural studies to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of meaning in visual communication.

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