

## VISUAL AND VERBAL ANALYSIS OF ACTION MOVIE POSTERS

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze visual and verbal signs in the movie posters John Wick 2, Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol and The Expendables 2, using the semiotic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, as well as Herman Cerrato's color theory. Ferdinand de Saussure's theory distinguishes between "signifier" and "signified" to describe how visual and verbal elements act as signs in the transmission of messages. Roland Barthes' theory emphasizes denotation and connotation, which allows for a deeper analysis to find the meaning behind signs. Finally, Herman Cerrato's color theory was used to determine how the use of color influenced the audience's perspective. The research used a qualitative descriptive method to identify and analyze the visual and verbal signs of the three movie posters. The data were collected by direct observation of visual and verbal elements in the posters and analyzed according to semiotic and color theory. The results of this research show that there are 13 visual and 16 verbal signs identified in three movie posters. Visual signs include characters, weapons, buildings and the background of the poster. Verbal signs include the title of the movie, the sequence of the series, the name of the cast, and other information related to the movie. The analysis of these signs revealed that each poster had different, but complementary visual and verbal features to convey the entire movie's message to the public.

**Keyword:** visual signs, verbal signs, movie posters, semiotics

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tanda visual dan verbal dalam poster film John Wick 2, Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol dan The Expendables 2, dengan menggunakan teori semiotika dari Ferdinand de Saussure dan Roland Barthes, serta teori warna dari Herman Cerrato. Teori Ferdinand de Saussure membedakan antara "penanda" dan "petanda" untuk menggambarkan bagaimana elemen visual dan verbal bertindak sebagai tanda dalam transmisi pesan. Teori Roland Barthes menekankan pada denotasi dan konotasi, yang memungkinkan analisis yang lebih dalam untuk menemukan makna di balik tanda. Terakhir, teori warna dari Herman Cerrato digunakan untuk menentukan bagaimana penggunaan warna mempengaruhi perspektif audiens. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis tanda-tanda visual dan verbal dari ketiga poster film tersebut. Data dikumpulkan melalui pengamatan langsung terhadap elemen visual dan verbal dalam poster dan dianalisis berdasarkan teori semiotika dan warna. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa terdapat 13 tanda visual dan 16 tanda verbal yang teridentifikasi pada tiga poster film tersebut. Tanda-tanda visual meliputi karakter, senjata, bangunan, dan latar belakang

poster. Tanda-tanda verbal meliputi judul film, urutan seri, nama pemeran, dan informasi lain yang berhubungan dengan film. Analisis dari tanda-tanda ini menunjukkan bahwa setiap poster memiliki fitur visual dan verbal yang berbeda namun saling melengkapi untuk menyampaikan pesan film tersebut secara keseluruhan kepada publik.

**Kata Kunci:** tanda visual, tanda verbal, poster film, semiotik

## INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is the study of the signs and meanings that arise from various forms of communication, such as language, images, symbols, and other signs. The main figures in semiotics are Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, who made important contributions to understanding the structure of signs and meaning. Saussure has developed a basic concept of a symbol consisting of a “signifier” and a “signified”. On the other hand, Roland Barthes introduced a more detailed analysis through denotative and connotative concepts to explain how actual meaning can evolve into a broader meaning.

Film posters are one of the most important advertising media in the film industry, and they are used not only to attract audiences' attention, but also to visually and verbally communicate the main message and theme of the film. This research focuses on posters from the films John Wick 2, Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol and The Expendables 2. The methodology used was qualitative descriptive and aimed at identifying and interpreting the visual and verbal symbols on posters based on the semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes and the color theory of Hermann Cerrato. This research will analyze three action movie posters, John Wick 2, Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol and The Expendables.

These three movies were chosen because the visual and oral elements used were not only well-known in the community, but also very strong to create a deep impression of the genre of action they claimed. Through their posters, these movies try to convey identity, story and protagonists to the public even before they watch these movies. Therefore, the analysis of these visual and verbal signals can give a deeper insight into the meaning contained in these movie posters.

Persada (2020) analyzed the posters of the Gundala film using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. The results showed that the use of dark colours, damaged buildings, and central characters gave the image of a powerful, stress-free, and dark background in the film. The use of oral elements such as movie titles and writing strengthens the theme of superheroes in the local Indonesian context. This research helps to understand how visual and verbal signs on posters build complex meanings and attract attention to the public, which is related to my research on the analysis of action film posters with the semiotic approach.

Mega and Tawami (2022) studied Suspiria's film posters using Roland Barthes' semiotic method to understand the verbal and non-verbal aspects of the posters. Their results show that the language and non-language signs of the Suspiria film posters play an important role in conveying meaning through these signs' association. The study

showed that posters' symbols and signs were able to effectively describe and convey movie messages through symbols, symbols and mythical meanings generated. The novelty of this study lies in the methods of combining the semiotic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes and Hermann Cerrato to analyze action film posters.

The research focused not only on the analysis of visual and verbal elements separately, but also on how to form a more deeply and effective message in action film posters by combining these two elements.

## **METODE / METHOD**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a semiotic approach and color analysis. Ferdinand de Saussure introduced the concepts of signifier and signified which will be used to identify and interpret the meaning of visual and verbal signs in movie posters. Roland Barthes completes the analysis by distinguishing between denotative (literal meaning) and connotative (symbolic or implicit meaning) meanings. In addition, Herman Cerrato's color theory is used to understand how the use of color in posters affects the audience's emotions and perceptions of the film.



The data sources used in this study are movie posters of John Wick 2, Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol, and The Expendables 2 downloaded from the Pinterest platform. Apart from the fact that the movies are very well-known in the wider community, the posters of these movies were also chosen because they represent the action movie genre that uses strong visual and verbal strategies to attract the attention of the audience. The observation technique was carried out as a data collection method and in analyzing the data, the researcher used several methods, namely (1) Identifying visual and verbal signs on each poster, (2) Analyzing data using the theories that have been mentioned, (3) recording the data that has been obtained.


## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Visual and Verbal Signs in Those Action Movie Posters**

In this section, the focus of the discussion is to identify the visual and verbal signs found in the three movie posters. Then, explain the meaning of the visual and verbal in those posters.

**Table 1.** Visuals and Verbals in All of Three Movie Posters

No	Title of Movie	Visual Signs	Verbal Signs
1	John Wick Chapter 2 (2017) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The main character (Keanu Reeves)</li> <li>• People that pointing their guns</li> <li>• Guns</li> <li>• Black background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keanu Reeves</li> <li>• John Wick</li> <li>• Chapter</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 02.10.17</li> </ul>
2	Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol (2011) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 characters in the movie</li> <li>• A carry bag</li> <li>• A gun</li> <li>• Foggy background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No plan, No Backup, No Choice</li> <li>• Tom Cruise</li> <li>• Mission: Impossible</li> <li>• Ghost Protocol</li> <li>• In theaters and IMAX this December</li> <li>• The names of the actors who played a role in this movie</li> </ul>

3	<p>The Expendables 2 (2012)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 characters that will be in the movie</li> <li>• An air force</li> <li>• An old building</li> <li>• Fires background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stallone, Statham, Li, Lundgren, Norris, Crews, Couture, Hemsworth, also Van Damme with Willis and Schwarzenegger</li> <li>• The Expendables 2</li> <li>• Back for War</li> <li>• The names of the characters who play in this movie</li> <li>• August 17</li> </ul>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>

The data in Table.1 will be analyzed using Saussure’s semiotic tehory, then its meaning will be analyzed using Barthes’s semiotic theory, and to analyze the meaning of color using Cerrato’s color theory.

**2. The Meaning of Visual and Verbal Signs Found in Those Action Movie Posters**  
**Poster 1:**

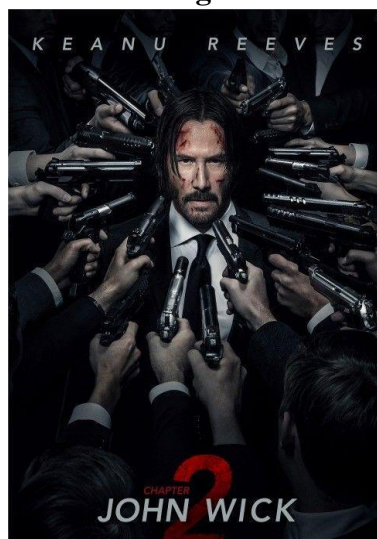






Figure 1. John Wick 2

In the first poster, there are 4 visual signs and 5 verbal signs. Then, it will be analyzed using Saussure’s semiotic theory which is divided into two parts, there are signifier and signified. After that, the meaning will be analyzed using Barthes’s semiotic analysis which is divided into 2 parts, namely denotation and connotation. And finally analyze the meaning of the color using color theory from Cerrato.

**Table 2.** Signifier and Signified of Visual Signs Found in John Wick 2 Movie Poster (2017)

No	Signifier	Signified
1		A main character who became the main icon of the John Wick movie.
2		Dozens of people surround the main character while pointing their guns.
3		As many as 20 guns are pointed at the head of the main character.
4		Black background

The first visual is the main character in the middle. His position was being surrounded by people that put the guns to his head (denotative). The connotative meaning of this visual is that John Wick is being chased by people who want to kill him to get a






tempting prize. His expression is calm, indicating he is not afraid of threats that endanger his life.

The second visual is people pointing guns at Jhon Wick. They pointed their gun at John Wick's head with the aim of killing him (denotative). While the connotative meaning is that they participate in a 'competition' to kill Jhon Wick in order to get a tempting prize.

The third visual is guns, a weapon often used by contract killers (denotative). The connotative meaning is that a gun is a fairly 'simple' weapon to carry anywhere. Its not too big size is easy to put in pocket or bag. The gun is also a weapon that is precise on target when it is used.

The fourth visual is a black background. The color is dark and scary (denotative). The connotative meaning is that dark represents the tension that will occur during the movie. Meanwhile, according to Cerrato (2012) black describes power, control, strong, and serious.

**Table 3.** Signifier and Signified of Verbal Signs Fund in John Wick 2 Movie Poster (2017)

No	Signifier	Signified
1		The name of an actor who will play a main role in the John Wick 2 movie.
2		The title of the movie.
3		Shows the series in the John Wick movie.
4		Shows the second series in the John Wick movie.
5		Release date of this movie.

The first verbal is **Keanu Reeves** which is the name of an actor who plays the John Wick 2 movie (denotative). Reeves is the main character as well as an icon in every John Wick movie series (connotative). The role of John Wick's himself seemed to have been created only for Keanu Reeves. He will fearlessly face his enemies. His clam demeanor even though he is fighting is an attraction for the audience.

The second verbal is **John Wick** which is the main title of this movie (denotative). John Wick himself is the name of someone in the movie who is good at fighting and

using weapons (connotative). A dangerous spy agent who decided to quit his job, but because of several assassination attempts he had to plunge back into a ‘dangerous world’.

The third verbal is **the chapter** that denotes the series in the John Wick movie on this poster (denotative). The John Wick movie itself so far has 4 chapters which indicates that this movie is very popular for audiens (connotative).

The fourth verbal is **2** which is a sign that this movie is the second chapter of the John Wick movie (denotative). After the success of the first series, the John Wick movie returns with a second chapter that is no less tense (connotative). The John Wick movie itself has 4 chapters, all of which are very good. The fourth chapters was released in 2022.

The fifth verbal is **02.10.17**, the release date of this John Wick 2 movie (denotative). By including the release date of this movie, it is hoped that audiens will be enthusiastic and come to the cinema to watch this movie on that date (connotative).

**Poster 2:**







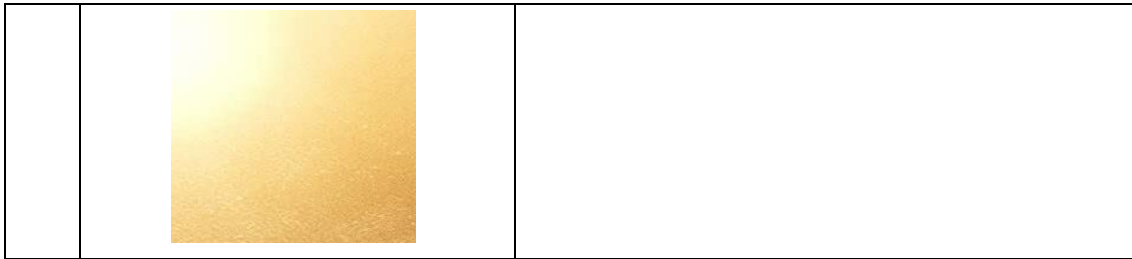
**Figure 2.** Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol

In the second poster, there are 5 visual signs and 6 verbal signs. Then, it will be analyzed using Saussure’s semiotic theory which is divided into 2, namely signifier and signified. After that, the meaning will be analyzed using Barthes’s semiotic analysis which is divided into 2, namely denotation and connotation.



**Table 4.** Signifier and Signified of Visual Signs Found in Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol Movie Poster (2011)

No	Signifier	Signified
1		The characters who become important role in this movie.
2		The place setting in this movie.
3		A fairly large bag is carried by one of the male characters in the poster.
4		The gun is the hand of the only female character in this movie poster
5		The fog caused by the sandstorm that will be in this movie.



The first visual is **the 4 characters** who will play the role in Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol movie (denotative). The character at the forefront is Ethan Hunt who is the main character in every Mission: Impossible movies. The man on the left carrying the bag is Brandt, the woman on the right is Jane and the man at the back is Benji (connotative).

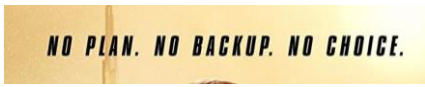


The second visual is the **Burj Khalifa Tower** which is the background for the poster, this tower is in Dubai, UAE (denotative). Having a height of 828 meters makes this tower suitable for use in the movie Mission: Impossible which is known for its extreme character actions (connotative). In this movie, Hunt, who is the main character, will climb the outside of the tower using only magnetic gloves attached to the glass and without any safety devices.




The third visual is **a carry bag** that is being carried by Brandt (denotative). This bag contains tools that will help them in their dangerous mission this time (connotative). In one of the scenes in this movie, the bag will be taken by Brandt to contain important documents that they must protect.

The fourth visual is **a gun** in Jane’s grip (denotative). This gun is Jane’s weapon to attack the enemy when in a state of urgency (connotative). The gun was chosen because it is not too big and easy to hide in a pocket or bag.

The fifth visual is **a foggy background** (denotative). The fog in this poster is caused by a sandstorm that will occur in this movie, the fog will be a small obstacle for Hunt and his friends in completing their mission (connotative).

**Table 5.** Signifier and Signified of Verbal Signs Found in Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol Movie Poster (2011)

No	Signifier	Signified
1		They carry out mission without options and cannot back down.
2		The name of the actor who will play the main character in this movie.
3		The main title of the movie.

4		Title of the movie series.
5		The place and platform to watch this movie.
6		Names of people who will take the role in this movie.

The first verbal is **No plan, No Backup, No Choice** which is the motto in this movie (denotative). In the mission impossible chapter, they carry out missions without a thorough plan, they also have no choice to withdraw from the mission, they only rely on teamwork (connotative).

The second verbal is **Tom Cruise**, the name of the actor who plays a role in this movie (denotative). Tom Cruise is an iconic character in every Mission: Impossible movie series (connotative). Playing the role of Ethan Hunt, who is an agent with the best skills, made this movie much liked by the audiens.

The third verbal is **Mission: Impossible** which is the main title in this movie (denotative). Mission: Impossible is a very famous (connotative) Hollywood action movie title. This movie presents the dangerous attractions of a spy agent named than Hunt who is assisted by his friends to complete the missions that are impossible for some people, but Hunt completes all of thses missions well.

The fourth verbal is **Ghost Protocol** which is the title of the series in the movie Mission: Impossible (denotative). It is called Ghost Protocol because this time the delivery and implementation of the mission was carried out secretly like a ghost (connotative).

The fifth verbal is **In theaters and IMAX this December** which is the place and media t watch this movie (denotative). This movie will be shown in theaters almost all over the world, apart from the IMAX application platform will be the second medium to be able to watch this movie legally (connotative).

The sixth verbal is **the names of the actors at the under the poster** who will play a role in the movie Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol (denotative). The names of the actors and actresses in this section will contribute to this movie, whether they support Ethan’s mission or even hinder it (connotative).




**Poster 3:**




Figure 3. The Expendables 2

In the third poster, there are 4 visual signs and 5 verbal signs. Then, it will be analyzed using Saussure’s semiotic theory which is divided into 2, namely signifier and signified. After that, the meaning will be analyzed using Barthes’s semiotic analysis which is divided into 2, namely denotation and connotation. And finally analyze the meaning of the color using theory from Cerrato.

Table 6. Signifier and Signified of Visual Signs Foun in The Expendable 2 Movie Poster (2012)

No	Signifier	Signified
1		The charcters who will play a role in this movie.
2		The plane is used as a vehicle to carry out missions in this movie.
3		The setting of the place in this movie.

4		There is destruction and fore that will occur in this movie.




The first visual is **11 character** who will take art in this movie (denotative). The positions of the figures are divided into 2 parties, namely the right and left with th main character (Sylvester Stallone) in the middle. On Satllone’s right is the original team he believes in, while on Stallone’s left is his former team who helped Stallone to avenge the person who killed one of his team members while on the move (connotative).



The second visual is **an air force** which are air transportation (denotative). This fighter aircraft has become an iconic vehicle in all The Expendables movies because it is the vehicle that Stallone and his team always use on missions (connotative).

The third visual is **the old building**, a tall building (denotative) which will be one of the settings where Stallone and his team take revenge for the death of one of their members who was killed by the enemy (connotative).

The fourth visual is **fires background**, fire and wood indicating a big fire in this movie (denotative). Fires caused by shots from fighter planes and firearms used by the charcters in this story (connotative). Black and yellow colors dominate the entire movie poster for The Expendables 2. According to Cerrato (2012) the color black depicts tension, strength, and seriousness. Yellow is paired with black, a combination often used as a danger sign.

**Table 7.** Signifier and Signified of Verbal Signs Fund in The Expendables 2 Movie Poster (2012)

No	Signifier	Signified
1		The ‘real’ names of the 11 characters in the movie.
2		The main title in this movie.
3		Serial title in this movie.

4		The names of the characters involved in this movie.
5		Movie release date.

The first verbal is **Stallone, Statham, Li, Lundgren, Norris, Crews, Couture, Hemsworth, also Van Damme with Willis and Schwarzenegger** which are the real names of the 11 people on the poster (denotative). Several famous Hollywood actors such as Sylvester Stallone, Jason Statham, Dolph Lundgren, Chuck Norris, Terry Crews, Randy Couture, Jean Claude Van Damme, Bruce Willis, and Arnold Schwarzenegger will be a team that will work together to take revenge for the death of Liam Hemsworth in this movie (connotative).

The second verbal is **The Expendables 2** which is the main title of this movie series (denotative). The Expendables is a Hollywood action movie that is quite famous because in it there are many actors who are famous for the action movies they have played. Great success with its first chapter, The Expendables presents a second chapter that is no less exciting (connotative).

The third verbal is **Back for War** which is the title of the second chapter of The Expendables (denotative). After the death of one of their team members due to being killed by the enemy, they intend to return and take their revenge on the killers (connotative).

The fourth verbal is **the names of the characters who play a role in this movie** which are at the bottom of the poster (denotative). Apart from the 11 important figures in the poster, of course there will be other figures who play a role in this movie. It is common for a movie poster to write the names of the characters who play a role in the movie poster (connotative).

The fifth verbal is **August 17**, which is the release date of this movie (denotative). This date is intended so that audiences will be prepared to see this movie on August 17, 2012. As with any major movie, this movie will also be shown on cinema from that date.

## CONCLUSION

Movie posters are the ‘first impression’ for the audience, the more interesting the poster, the more curious the audience will be to watch the movie. Movie posters have many uses apart from being a promotional medium for a movie, one of which is communication media. In communication, of course there is a message to be conveyed. As a one-way communication medium, the message to be conveyed in the poster is not all understood by the audience. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to find out the meaning to be conveyed in a poster.

This research focuses on the analysis of visual and verbal signs in three action movie posters, especially the movies John Wick 2, Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol and The Expendables 2. In analyzing, the researcher uses 3 theories, namely the semiotic

theory of Ferdinand de Saussure which contains 2 important points namely Signifier and Signified, then to find the meaning, the researcher uses the theory of semiotics from Roland Barthes which contains connotative meaning and denotative meaning. And one more theory that helps researcher, namely the theory that describes the meaning of color by Herman Cerrato, a graphic designer and color consultant.

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