A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF HOLLYWOOD MOVIE LOGOS

Research Paper

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

In the recent world, a logo has become an important part on the recognition of an institution. According to Rivers (2003: 7), a logo is "essentially a distinguished work designed for a company, product or service and is there to create association and recognition in order to make the reader feel safe and trusting of a particular company." It becomes the cornerstone of a company image and one of the base elements of a corporate identity. In a simple definition, it is confirmed that a logo is "a distinctive mark for a brand that represents its core values and attributes" (Bost, 2008: 1). Today, there exist many corporations, services, products, agencies and other entities using specific form of sign as their logo. This is an observable phenomenon, as one can see obviously that the logo of Microsoft, the largest computer software corporation, for example, is different from that of other corporations producing the similar product, like Linux or Apple.

In the area of mass communication, logo is also widely used. It is noticeable that there are various different images that are claimed to be the logo of the television broadcasting companies, daily newspapers, magazines, and suchlike. Movie is a sort of media that is broadly used in mass communication. Mass communication is described as communication from one person or group of persons through a transmitting device (a medium) to large

audiences or markets (Biagi, 1988: 13). Undoubtedly, movies are targeted to attract the attention of the mass. The moviemakers are capable of putting their ideas in the form of movie to communicate their specific messages to the audiences.

The number of movie released in a period indicates the rapid growing of movie industry. In this age of information, movie becomes a valuable business matter. Turner proposes that there exist a viewpoint of the society that Hollywood is in show business, and therefore making money is all about (2007: 19). As a leading commercial movie industry, Hollywood has spread its products nearly all around the globe. In order to get the maximum profit, each movie produced needs an effort of the maker to get as many as number of audiences. Squire (in Biagi, 1988: 148) confirms that:

> "In commercial movie industry, the idea is to make movies that attract vast audiences who cumulatively pay enough money for the privilege so that all the cost involved in making that movie are recouped, with enough left over to make more movies. The profit motive is at work here, but the formula that attracts audiences is as elusive as can be."

The use of logo is also common in a movie. The purpose of a movie logo can be strictly said as a tool for movie recognition and identification. The movie logos can be categorized as signs. "Signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts, or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning" (Chandler, 2002: 17). A branch of science that studies the sign is called semiotics. In other words, signs are the core of semiotics. Things are

interpreted as signs largely unconsciously by relating them to familiar systems of conventions. The writer provides two examples of the movie logo below.

Figure I.1   Figure I.2

1. Figure I.1

   Enchanted is the title of the movie in which its logo appears in figure I.1. As a sign, the logo contains three elements, i.e. representament (the sensible form), object (the reference), and interpretant (the idea that links the representament and the object). The *representament* is the golden logotype **Enchanted,** all in uppercase upon deep blue background. The logotype is domed-shape and an image that resembles the shape of the sun is inserted in the last letter. There is a golden plant in the middle of the logotype that seems to unite the letter H, A and N. The logo of Walt Disney, the company that produces the movie, appears above the logotype. The *object* of the logo is a fairy princess who is enchanted by a magic spell of an evil queen that causes her to be pushed away and stranded in the human real world and a man that falls in love to her due to her enchanting fairy characteristics. The *interpretant* can be explained like

this: the domed shape and the golden color that resemble a crown signifies the existence of the royal family, meanwhile the golden plant clarifies that the shining star in the end of the logotype is the sun, since it is the source of living on the planet earth, including the life of plants. The sun is personified as a man, whereas the earth, more specifically the plant part in the logo is the female element. After all, male-female relationship occurs in the name of love. From the triadic elaboration, it can be inferred that the meaning of the logo of Enchanted is the basic theme of the movie, i.e. the love relationship between man and woman that involves royal family interference.

2. Figure I.2

Figure I.2 is the logo of a movie entitled Mr. Brooks. The *representament* is the white logotype **Mr. Brooks** upon black background. A black horizontal line seems to separate the logotype into the upper and the lower part. It is noticeable that the dot (.) is performed in red colour with shapeless form like a bloodstain. The *object* is a man named Mr. Brooks, the main character in the movie that has a tendency of psycho. The *interpretant* that can be proposed is that the white colour signifies a man with good characteristics, whereas the black line across the logotype signifies the personality split. The stain of blood can be traced to the bloody crimes committed by the figure. By considering the explanation, the meaning that can be inferred from the logo is that it is the representation of person, i.e. the main character of the movie.

Theoretically, the two logos serve as the identity of each movie they represent. The identity can be understood if the reader is able to identify the core values of the movies which are reflected in the logos that distinguish them from other movie logos. To understand this specificity, one has to take a look at the story of the intended movies and relate it to its logo. Beside that, to get a better understanding or to verify that a movie logo serves as the movie identity, one needs to examine other movie logos and/ or other type of signs that in a certain way correlate to the logo.

Enchanted is a movie that deals with a fairytale princess that is enchanted by an evil queen and then forcibly pushed away from her fairy world and stuck in the real man's world before she can marry her prince. In this real world, her innocent fairy princess characteristic becomes her attractiveness. A divorced man having a young daughter takes her home and finally makes her his wife. The essence of the Enchanted movie is depicted in its logo. The plant in the middle of the logo is an olive branch; it is signified by its form. Olive is a sacred plant that symbolizes immortality due to its prolific or regenerative principle. Beside that, olive is regarded as the symbol of peace and victory. Looking back to the ancient time, there was a queen of Egypt namely Isis, the wife of Osiris that often wore olive branches to decorate her crown. Isis was regarded as the representation of the moon or earth and also the mother of all living. Besides, she was also known as the goddess of fertility. It becomes clearer as the sun is put in the end of the logo, because Osiris was regarded as the Sun God. The domed or convex shape of the

logotype depicts the rounded form of the planet earth where a plant can live. The logotype shape also resembles a crown and the golden colour enhances its significance. A plant on earth always needs source of energy to sustain its life, and the energy is directly coming from the sun. In other words, the concept of regeneration needs two fundamental elements, male and female. Thus, the logo shows the specific core values of the Enchanted movie, i.e. the love relationship between a man and a woman that involves the interference of a royal family. The relationship will lead to the continuity of living because the descendants will be born.

The logo of Enchanted has connection with other Hollywood movie logos. It connects to those of *The Princess Diaries* and its sequel, *The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement* in which each was released in 2001 and 2004. Princess Diaries deals with an ordinary teenager who does not realize that actually she is a princess of a kingdom. In The Princess Diaries 2, several years later, in order to become a queen, she has to get marry first, whereas she does not know with whom she will do it. She is only given a month period to find her soul mate and it is successfully accomplished. In its logo, a form of a plant branch can be found in the middle of each letter *E*. This branch is similar in form with that of olive in the Enchanted movie logo. Olive is the prolific and peace symbol at once. Besides, in the ancient time, Queen of Egypt, Isis, wore it as the ornament of her crown. The golden ring symbol under the letter *S* signifies a bond of marriage. Thus, the logo of this movie reflects its main value, i.e. the male-female relationship in the name of love.

Next, another movie logo that correlates to the Enchanted logo is the logo of *Anastasia*, a movie which was released in 1997. This is an animation movie that tells about a little princess, the daughter of the last Russian czar named Anastasia that remains alive after her parents cursed by a vengeful sorcerer. She got amnesia due to a knock in her head and stayed in an orphanage. A decade later, the princess would like to find her true identity that leads her to a journey to find her grandmother. There is also a love story between Anastasia and one of her companions during the journey. The logo of Anastasia is loaded with sacred symbols; there is a crown on the top position and a symbol of two headed birds facing opposite direction below the crown. The two headed bird is an ancient symbol that is attributed to Nimrod, king of Babylon. Besides, the golden colour that dominates the logo enhances the significant of the royal family existence throughout the movie since it implies the wealth owned by the family.

After elaborating the Enchanted logo, it can be inferred that the logo is built through the placement of sacred symbols that reveal its basic theme, the regenerative principle that requires the love relationship between man and woman.

Mr. Brooks is a thriller movie about a man that seems to have two different personalities. At home, he acts as if he is a good husband and father as well. The tendency of psycho is another part of his character. The tendency turns him into a wild man who commits a series of killing. This character can be read in Mr. Brooks' logo. The white color signifies the man with good

characteristics, whereas the black line across the logotype signifies the personality split. The stain of blood can be traced to the bloody crimes committed by the figure.

The logo of Mr. Brooks has the similar way of design with at least two logos of other Hollywood movies, such as *Psycho*, a movie which was released in 1998 and *American Psycho* of 2000. Both movies have a primary character of a man who commits a set of killing, although their performance in the daily life does not reflect such criminal tendency. The three logotypes use two dominant colours, i.e. black and white. All of the logotypes are written in white color. The logos of Mr. Brooks and American Psycho have a red mark. The differences are located in the way the red colour is placed. In American Psycho, a long thick red line with a pointed end is placed under the logotype. The similarity between the logo of Mr. Brooks and Psycho is located in the design; both have a white line across the logotype. The Psycho's logo is bolder than that of Mr. Brooks. Through these description and comparison, it can be understood that the logo of Mr. Brooks represents the identity of Mr. Brooks's movie because it reflects the essence it contains and it is distinguishable from other movie logos that seem to have similar identity. Thus, the Mr. Brooks' logo becomes the specific sign that represent the movie through the visualization of its main character's features.

The above interpretation suggests that the two logos are capable of reflecting the identity of each movie they represent, since both contain the core movie values and capable of distinguishing them from other brands or

products, particularly from other movies. Without interpretation, a movie logo may end up as something that is merely ignored and meaningless. Pierce (in Chandler, 2002: 17) declares that "nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as sign". For the researcher, the statement is very challenging. Therefore, the researcher attempts to conduct a research dealing with this subject and gives it a title "A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF HOLLYWOOD MOVIE LOGOS".

B. Previous Studies

Several studies in semiotic field have been conducted by the students of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. Slamet Raharjo (2003) completes a research entitled *A Descriptive Study of Comic Covers: A Semiotic Approach*. This research finds the characteristics of meaning of comic covers and discovers the dominant ideology and the structural elements of the comic covers.

Ani Muzalfah (2004) conducts a study entitled *A Semiotic Analysis on Marlboro Cigarettes Advertisement Posters in Magazines*. The result of this research is the finding of the dominant ideology, the finding of the signified, the signifier, and the finding of the dominant character of machoism in cigarette posters.

Another researcher, Lathifah Ruchi (2004) analyzes sms text messages on her research entitled *An Analysis on Symbols Used in SMS: Semiotics Approach*. The outcome of this study is some symbols, number, letter, and both are used in sms text messages.

Hengki Purnomo (2005) conducts a research entitled *Semiotic Study of Emoticon Used in Chatroom*. The outcome of his study is six basic emoticons as projected by Paul Ekman, Ph.D., they are happy, unhappy, angry, surprised, disgust and fear.

A Semiotic Study on Simile Used in English Translation of Al-Qur'an is a study done by Sakinah (2006). The researcher finds that, based on Halley's human perception of space, there are nine types of symbol variations exist in The Holy Qur'an. The meaning of variations of simile symbol used in English Translation of Al-Qur'an have some matters, they are criticizing, reminding, sarcasm, and beautifying.

Another research dealing with semiotics is a research done by Kharisma Sri Wijayanti (2007) entitled *An Analysis of Warning Icons Used on Food and Beverages Cartons: Semiotics Approach*. She identifies the variety of meanings and the reason of the warning icons used in food and beverages icons.

Ratih Pratiwi (2008) completes a research entitled *A Semiotics Study on Metaphor Used in English Translation of Al-Qur'an.* She describes the variation symbols of metaphors based on Halley's Human Perception of Space and then identifies their meaning.

Candra Agus Nugroho (2008) completes a research entitled *A Semiotic Study on the Islamic CD's Cover.* In the research, he identifies the meaning of the index on the Islamic CD's Covers and finds the relation between the myths and the picture on those covers. The relation is based on function of the

index in daily life or based on the authentic hadeeth. The meanings refer to Islamic literature and the myths that exist in society.

Pramitha Septy Wulan (2008) makes a research entitled *A Semiotics Analysis of Travel Icons at the Airport*. In the research, she defines the meanings and the reasons of using the travel icons at the airport.

From the previous researches, the writer finds none of them directs their exploration toward movie logo. Therefore, in this research, the writer tries to analyze the meaning of movie logos and their formulation as a movie identity through semiotic approach.

C. Problem Statements

Based on the research background, the writer formulates the problem statements in two following questions.

1. What is the meaning of the Hollywood movie logos?
2. How do the Hollywood movie logos lead to the identity of the movie they represent?

D. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the meaning of the Hollywood movie logos.

2. To describe the way Hollywood movie logos lead to the identity of the movie they represent.

E. Limitation of the Study

This study is limited only on the Hollywood movie logos released in 2007 that are analyzed from the semiotic point of view. The meaning is searched by applying the Peircean triadic model of sign, meanwhile the identity of the movie which is reflected in its logo will be analyzed by using intertextual approach.

F. Benefits of the Study

The writer expects this study will give a beneficial result in terms of:

1. Academic Benefits

   a. This research can be functioned as an additional reference for the next researchers, especially for those who are interested in the study of semiotics.

   b. The result of this study will give a contribution in the field of semiotics, particularly on the use of movie logos.

2. Practical Benefits

   a. This research can be used by the readers in general as a source of information about movie logo, its meaning, and its usage as the movie identity.

   b. This research will enable the students to get a deeper understanding regarding the use of logo in movies.

G. Research Paper Organization

In order to make this research easily understood, the writer organizes her research paper into the following concept:

Chapter I is Introduction. This chapter consists of the background of the study, previous studies, problem statements, objectives of the study, limitation of the study, benefits of the study, and the organization of the research paper.

Chapter II is Underlying Theory. It encompasses the notion of semiotics, the tradition of semiotics, types of sign, intertextuality, movie logo, movie genre, Hollywood movie industry, and terms related to the research.

Chapter III is the Research Method. The content of this chapter is the type of the research, object of the research, data and data source, technique of data collection, and technique of data analysis.

Chapter IV is Research Finding and Discussion. The analysis of the data and the discussion of the research finding will be presented here.

Chapter V is Conclusion and Suggestion.