

The Meaning of Motivation in the Netflix Documentary Serial “The Last Dance” (John Fiske Semiotic Analysis)

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Abstract

This study discusses the meaning of motivation, especially in the documentary film The Last Dance using John Fiske's semiotics method. Motivation based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs coded in the documentary film The Last Dance is categorized into three levels of needs, namely social needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. The purpose of this study is to determine the meaning of motivation at the level of reality, the level of representation, and the level of ideology. This study uses a qualitative method, which is a research approach based on phenomenology and an interpretive paradigm. In this study, the subject used is the Netflix documentary series The Last Dance which consists of 10 episodes. Meanwhile, the objects in this study are signs that contain the meaning of motivation in the documentary film The Last Dance. Data collection techniques used are documentation studies, literature studies, and online data searches. This study concludes that the level of reality that displays the motivation of social needs in the form of the film shows Michael Jordan's relationship with his Chicago Bulls teammates and family. The motivation for self-esteem needs is shown by the appearance and speech of the characters in the film, which focuses more on Air Jordan shoes. Meanwhile, the motivation for self-actualization needs shows Michael Jordan's hard work to practice his basketball skills. Furthermore, the level of representation in The Last Dance film, motivational social needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs are shown by shooting techniques in the form of long shots, medium shots, close-ups, conversations, and backgrounds as well as editing that combines footage and interviews. And the last is the ideological level, the motivation of social needs shows the meaning that the relationships and interactions carried out by Michael Jordan are based on love and feelings of not wanting to be underestimated. The ideology that emphasizes the motivation for self-esteem needs is the popularity of the Air Jordan shoe brand as a form of appreciation from the world community for Michael Jordan's achievements. And the ideology displayed in the motivation for self-actualization needs is Michael Jordan's efforts to always improve and develop his basketball skills.

Keywords

Motivation; semiotics; film



I. Introduction

In general, humans need an element of entertainment and joy in their daily lives as humans as a source of motivation (Mulyadi, 2007: 1) Without realizing it, entertainment becomes a very important element to be in life itself because entertainment is one way for humans to be able to clear things up. His thoughts on all the problems of life in his daily life as well as entertainment can be a motivation for humans (Marpaung, 2018: 61).

Humans can get happiness from running a hobby, vacationing to a place that can create a sense of pleasure, and meeting people who can entertain, but along with the progress of time which causes technological advances also help add and develop sources of human happiness such as new hobbies that arise when playing games either alone or on their own. with friends, watching movies or watching an entertainment program or listening to music that can create a sense of pleasure, not only get happiness by doing activities, humans can also get happiness from simple but important things such as health, without health happiness will be difficult to obtain and with health happiness can be increased (Ali et al., 2020:437).

Watching movies has become a part and habit for some people. After the development of technology, films can be accessed by anyone regardless of background, gender, and age, and regardless of the limitations of space and time. The film not only serves as a medium of entertainment and to pass the time, but also can be used as a medium for information and perspectives, learning, and trying to understand other cultures. The film is visual art that has been created in the last 300 years, as an art and mass entertainment medium, and in its capacity can have a significant impact on a sociological scope and is rooted in knowledge and technology (Webster, 1981:78).

According to data reported by variety, there is a large surge in viewers due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The audience limits their daily activities by doing activities at home, one of which is watching movies. Therefore, digital use is getting higher because of the existence of a streaming platform, one of which is Netflix, which makes it easier for audience entertainment activities such as watching anytime and anywhere. The outbreak of this virus has an impact of a nation and Globally (Ningrum et al, 2020). The presence of Covid-19 as a pandemic certainly has an economic, social and psychological impact on society (Saleh and Mujahiddin, 2020). Covid 19 pandemic caused all efforts not to be as maximal as expected (Sihombing and Nasib, 2020).

According to Waterson (2007: 54) in a documentary, filmmakers will reconstruct historical facts through their interpretive point of view. Therefore, filmmakers will represent real events from a certain point of view to convey the messages implied in a documentary. The motivation in the documentary *The Last Dance* is described by the filmmaker through Michael Jordan's life journey during his career in the world of basketball.

Based on the various learnings and the meaning of motivation contained in the documentary *The Last Dance*, there has been no scientific research that discusses the meaning of motivation in the documentary. The meaning of motivation in this film will be analyzed using John Fiske's semiotic approach to describe the signs that represent motivation. By referring to John Fiske's semiotic theory, the signs found in the film will be analyzed based on three levels, namely the level of reality, the level of representation, and the level of ideology. At the level of reality, the signs found will be described based on what is seen in the film including expressions, costumes, voices, gestures, and others. While at the representation level, it describes the signs of film packaging in the form of shooting angles, editing, sound management, and others. Meanwhile, at the ideological level, it will explain the analysis of signs in the form of the main idea or core message conveyed in the film.

Research that examines a film using John Fiske's semiotic analysis has been done by many previous researchers. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there has been no research that examines the meaning of motivation, especially in the documentary film *The Last Dance*. This study seeks to analyze the signs of motivation, then group them into levels of need according to Maslow's theory. This is what makes the importance of this

research, which is to see how Maslow's level of need is represented in a documentary from Michael Jordan's career to motivate many people.

Mass media is the main tool in the process of mass communication. In this case, the mass media can be in the form of print media, electronic media, films, the internet, or other forms. Print media include newspapers, magazines, bulletins, and books. Meanwhile, electronic media includes radio and television. With the various media used, the information conveyed in mass communication can be received by several people scattered in various regions.

Some of the things that are the main characteristics of mass communication that distinguish it from other types of communication include: first, mass communication is one-way. This means that a communicator conveys information through mass media to the communicant, but the communicant cannot provide a direct response or feedback. Second, communicators are institutionalized. The institutional nature of this communicator is influenced by the institutionalization of the media used as a means of delivering information.

Semiotic analysis is an effective approach to interpreting the material in visual culture, namely by determining the sign and considering the components or parts that make it up (Rose, 2016: 106). There are two main components in semiotics, first is a signifier, namely a sign that includes what is spoken, written, or a visual symbol, second is a signified, namely a certain concept or idea associated with a symbol (Longhurst et al., 2016:95).

Charles Sanders Peirce states that signs are formed through a triangular relationship between signs, users, and external reality as a model needed to assess meaning (Fiske, 2010:60). External reality is referred to as an object, a sign is a social and cultural context that becomes a reference as the object is interpreted, and the interpretant or user is the person who gives meaning to the object (Fiske, 2010:60). Peirce also suggests three types of signs which are distinguished based on how the relationship between the signifier and the signified is understood (Rose, 2016: 108).

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the semiotic approach is one way that can be done in interpreting the elements contained in the communication. Film as one of the audio-visual media that displays verbal and non-verbal signs can be interpreted through a semiotic approach to understand the meaning contained in the film

This study uses the semiotics method by John Fiske. There are two main concerns in Fiske's semiotics, namely the relationship between signs and their meanings, and how a sign is combined into a code (Fiske, 1978: 3). Text is the main focus of attention in semiotics. According to Fiske, text can be interpreted more broadly, everything that has a communication sign system such as that contained in written texts, films, dramas, advertisements, photos, and others can be used as semiotic objects (Fiske, 2010: 60). Fiske analyzes television shows as texts to examine various socio-cultural layers of meaning and content so that various types of works in society have signs that communicate meaning (Fiske, 2010:60).

II. Review of Literature

Different theoretical frameworks from theory will give birth to a paradigm in research that affects the way knowledge is learned and interpreted (Mertens, 2019:55). This study uses an interpretive research paradigm. The interpretive paradigm grew from the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl and the study of Wilhelm Dilthey and other German philosophers on interpretive understanding called hermeneutics

(Mertens, 2019:56). The interpretive research approach has the aim of understanding the world of human experience and showing that reality is socially constructed (Cohen et al., 2002:23). Interpretive researchers tend to rely on participants' views about the situation being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:32).

This study uses a qualitative method, a research approach based on phenomenology, and an interpretive paradigm in developing science (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:4). The characteristics of qualitative research are using a natural setting, using humans as the main instrument, using qualitative observations to obtain data, analyzing data inductively, formulating theories from the bottom up, analyzing data descriptively, being more concerned with processes than results, limiting research problems based on focused, using separate criteria to validate the data, using a temporary design, and the results of the research are mutually agreed upon by humans who are used as data sources (Moleong, 2021:3).

The subject used in this research is the Netflix documentary series *The Last Dance*. This 10-episode documentary series chronicles the rise of superstar Michael Jordan and the 1990s Chicago Bulls, with footage from the 1997-1998 season (<https://www.netflix.com/en/title/80203144> accessed on 15 November 2021, 19:42 WIB). The objects in this study are signs that contain the meaning of motivation in the documentary film *The Last Dance*. Unit The analysis used is behavior, conversation, gestures, expressions, and voices of characters. The reason the author focuses on the unit of analysis is that in the documentary more show conversation and Interviews from some related sources with a documentary theme.

III. Result and Discussion

When referring to the theory of the function of mass communication, the film *The Last Dance* fulfills the function of entertainment by providing entertainment for Michael Jordan fans and the audience in general. In addition, the film *The Last Dance* has fulfilled its function as the transmission of value, namely spreading the motivational values of Michael Jordan in realizing his dreams and ideals (Halik, 2013: 60). Referring to the value distribution function, this section will explain the motivation of Michael Jordan which is shown in the codes of *The Last Dance* movie. Based on the results of data analysis that has been described in the previous sub-chapter, the codes are described based on the stages of John Fiske's semiotics, namely, first, the level of reality which is encoded through social codes packaged in films such as expressions, behavior, fashion, makeup, the speech of characters, , display, environment, and more. Second, is the level of encoded representation through shooting, sound, lighting, editing, and more. And the third is the level of ideology which is based on coherence and social acceptance of ideologies such as individualism, patriarchy, materialism, or other main ideas depicted in films (Fiske, 1978: 285). Based on this theory, the motivation in *The Last Dance film* will be discussed according to the level or level of reality, the level of representation, and the level of ideology.

At the reality level, the code used to analyze motivation uses codes in the form of appearance, the speech of characters, and the social environment depicted in the film *The Last Dance*. While at the representation level, the descriptions that explain motivation focus more on explaining the techniques of shooting, editing, and sound systems in films. And the ideological level tries to relate the meaning of motivation to the level of reality and the level of representation by referring to Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation regarding the hierarchy of basic human needs.

Motivation based on social needs in the film *The Last Dance* is represented in episodes 2 and episode 7. At the level of reality, episode 2 shows Michael Jordan's actions and emotions when he finds out Scottie Pippen has to resign from the Chicago Bulls due to an injury. Michael tried hard to encourage his colleagues on the Chicago Bulls team to train harder. This is a form of expression for Michael Jordan to respond to the absence of Pippen from the team. Expressions describe the emotional state that a person feels, producing uncontrollable signs that indicate a person's response to a situation. For most people, it will be difficult to hide micro-expressions, because it is a spontaneous response that is produced when someone is faced with something (Mulyana, 2002: 96). Based on this theory, it is appropriate if the researcher categorizes the actions taken by Michael Jordan as an expression, he issued to respond to the problem of Scottie Pippen being absent from the Chicago Bulls.

It was also emphasized in the character's speech as a code that Michael Jordan provided encouragement and input to his Chicago Bulls teammates to improve their basketball skills and strategies. Then when viewed from the side of the social environment, the Chicago Bulls is an organization or team that is compact and helps each other to achieve victory in the Chicago Bulls. As said by Sari and Dwiarti (2018: 61-62) that social needs include the need for friendship, affiliation, and closer interaction with other people. The organization means that it can be fulfilled by the existence of a cohesive working group to achieve common targets. Thus, what is shown in episode 2 can be categorized as Michael Jordan's motivation based on social needs. This is due to the close relationship between fellow basketball players on the Chicago Bulls team.

Not much different from the reality in episode 2, social needs in episode 7 are depicted through Michael Jordan's close relationship with James Jordan (Michael Jordan's father). Based on the level of reality contained in the display code, speech of characters, and social environment, it can be concluded that the relationship between the two people is a social need, according to Sobur (2013: 277) who says this is because the relationship that exists is based on mutual love, love, and affection between family members.

If we look at the level of representation, the motivation for social needs in episodes 2 and 7 of the film *The Last Dance*, is packaged in the form of a combination of *footage* and the results of character interviews. Videos are displayed in various shooting techniques such as *long shoot*, *medium shoot*, and *close up*. A *long shoot* is a shot that shows the background as a whole. *The medium shoot* is taking pictures by showing the main target more closely to the exclusion of unnecessary background and detail. While *close-up* is taking pictures by focusing on the subject or a certain part and putting aside the others so that attention is focused on one object (Sadiman, et al., 2012: 159). The use of this shooting technique has the aim of showing a representation of Michael Jordan's social needs both with his family and with his Chicago Bulls teammates. The conversations of the characters as well as sounds such as the sound of whistles, the sound of ball *dribbling*, the sound of rubbing the floor with shoes, and others also represent that Michael's interactions with his teammates are indeed carried out during practice.

At the ideological level, the main idea conveyed in episodes 2 and 7 is the relationship that Michael Jordan has with the Chicago Bulls team and family. Social relationships involve interactions between individuals which are ultimately reflected in the form of feelings. For example, in episode 2 it is told that when Scottie Pippen was absent from basketball, Michael Jordan wanted to show that the Chicago Bulls would still be the best team even though one of their best players was absent.

IV. Conclusion

The meaning of motivation contained in the documentary film *The Last Dance* is shown through John Fiske's semiotic codes starting from the level of reality which shows the motivation of social needs in the form of a film showing Michael Jordan's relationship with his Chicago Bulls teammates and family. The motivation for self-esteem needs is shown by the appearance and speech of the characters in the film, which focuses more on Air Jordan shoes. Meanwhile, the motivation for self-actualization needs shows Michael Jordan's hard work to train his basketball skills. The level of representation in *The Last Dance* film, motivational social needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs are shown by shooting techniques in the form of long shots, medium shots, close-ups, conversations, and backgrounds as well as editing that combines footage and interview.

At the ideological level, the motivation of social needs shows the meaning that the relationships and interactions carried out by Michael Jordan are based on love and feelings of not wanting to be underestimated. The ideology that emphasizes the motivation for self-esteem needs is the popularity of the Air Jordan shoe brand as a form of appreciation from the world community for Michael Jordan's achievements. Social needs motivation shows the meaning that Michael Jordan's relationships and interactions are based on love and feelings of not wanting to be underestimated. The ideology that emphasizes the motivation for self-esteem needs is the popularity of the Air Jordan shoe brand as a form of appreciation from the world community for Michael Jordan's achievements. And the ideology displayed in the motivation for self - actualization is Michael Jordan's efforts to always improve and develop his basketball skills.

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