

Meaning Visualisation Through Semiotic Theory of the Malay Film *Doh*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the process of meaning formation in the Malay film *Doh* (2023) by utilising Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory. Films are not merely entertainment; they also negotiate and perpetuate dominant ideas, emotional narratives, and social identities. This paper employs a descriptive qualitative methodology to decode selected visual and linguistic signifiers, including the brown diary, Hacks mint candy packaging, and bird imagery. It demonstrates that seemingly straightforward items are permeated with profound ideological significance. The results indicate that visual components, such as colour, gesture, and object location, are not neutral; rather, they serve to normalise traditional family hierarchies, filial obligation, and the conflict between modern desires and ancestral obligations. The diary symbolises inherited emotional effort, while the red-coloured candy packaging emphasises the ideological bond of family obligation. In a paradoxical twist, the flocks of birds, which symbolise liberation, underscore the significance of loyalty and return. This investigation exposes the extent to which *Doh* reinforces traditional values and conventional gender roles within a myth-making process by operating behind the façade of intimate family stories. The research underscores the critical importance of semiotic analysis in understanding the subtle ways in which visual media influence and sustain broader socio-cultural concepts through the identification of these multiple meanings.

INTRODUCTION

Films represent an essential facet of daily human experience, serving as a medium of entertainment that is shared with the wider public through television (Sazirah, 2021). As an essential element of cultural

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dimensions, it captivates individuals across all levels of society. As noted by Norwani (n.d.), cinema holds significant value, serving as a vital source of entertainment for community members. In contemporary society, numerous individuals frequently grapple with significant stress, and the act of watching films is regarded as a means to mitigate this issue (Abdul Rahim et al., 2023). A study conducted by Cromarty et al. (2023) reveals that films are perceived as a valuable educational tool for individuals with learning disabilities, as they enhance understanding of reading materials and provide appropriate avenues for creative and significant self-expression. Furthermore, visual elements in films are employed to assist students with high incidence disabilities in recognising visual features that align with the seven components of screenplay across different cinematic works (Dunn, 2020). Kubrak (2020) identified significant impacts on adolescent viewers following their experience with *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2012). The film profoundly influenced their evaluations of the regulatory, cognitive, and emotional characteristics of older individuals.

Understanding Semiotic Theory

Semiotic theory, articulated by Roland Barthes in the 1950s, serves as a framework for analysing the construction of meaning via signs and symbols in many kinds of communication. Barthes expanded upon the foundational work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), who characterised a sign as consisting of two fundamental components:

- a. The *Signifier* that represents the physical existence that can take place in forms of sound, word, image, shape and colours.
- b. The *Signified* represents the mental concept of the signified element.

For instance, the Manchester United logo's crimson tint, which dominates the emblem's background, is symbolic of the club's fervor and identity. Yellow and black are additional primary colours that represent vitality, prosperity, and contrast, respectively. Manchester United supporters perceive the club as the most venerable football institution, as evidenced by a legacy of prestige, triumphs, and renown, as per these readings (Rohmani et. al., 2025).

The *Doh* film

The film *Doh* was released on September 16, 2023. Directed by Muhamad Ariffin bin Zulkarnain, it centers on a familial conflict around Farhan's bakery, owned by Faiz's father. The death of his father has led to a dispute among the siblings on the management of the bakery, placing him in a quandary.

Application of Semiotic Theory in films

Films, as a visual and aural medium, are abundant in signs and symbols, making them an exemplary topic for semiotic research. Semiotics may be used to several components in films, including language, visual imagery, music, colour, and narrative structure. The following illustrates the practical use of the theory:

- a. Visual imagery

Colours, shapes and objects carry significant meanings in films. For instance, the brown diary held by Faiz in the movie signifies his comfort, stability and reliability as he finally has to make an important

decision on the matter of his father's bakery. By holding and scrutinising the diary, he feels a sense of comfort as he knows that whatever decision that he will take is agreed by his late father.

b. Language and dialogue

The choice of words, tone, and delivery in dialogue conveys not just literal message but also deeper social or emotional contexts. For example, *Abang janji, suatu hari nanti, abang balik sini jaga kedai sama-sama dengan bapak. (I promise, that one day, I will come back to take care of the shop with you.)* is a dialogue uttered by Farhan to his late father, when he informs him that he has finally landed a job a bit far from home. The use of the word *janji (promise)* signifies his pure intention of taking care of the bakery with his late father.

c. Symbols in narrative

Specific items or repeating motifs serve as symbols, embodying fundamental concepts or character developments. A bakery in *Doh* exemplifies family connections and the patriarch's heritage, while also serving as a venue for sibling discord and reconciliation.

Semiotics and cultural ideology in *Doh*

Barthes' notion of mythology is the investigation of quotidian cultural artefacts and activities that communicate ideological significances beyond their superficial appearance. Myth, as articulated by Barthes (1957), denotes systems of communication, or second-order sign systems, that convert historical and cultural values into perceived natural and universal realities. Analysing cinematic signals reveals concealed meanings that reflect cultural conventions, power dynamics, and ideologies. In *Doh*, the predominance of the male character, Faiz, in leadership positions throughout the film supports conventional gender hierarchies. This film focuses on a family bakery, enabling a profound examination of ideological conflicts about heritage, tradition, and modernity.

Semiotics in film analysis

Through the use of Semiotic Theory, filmmakers may intentionally encode messages, enabling critics and researchers to decode these meanings for a deeper comprehension of the cultural and psychological effects of films. This method may aid in the analysis of:

- a. how films develop identities, ideologies, and social roles
- b. how films emotionally connect with viewers via visual and auditory clues.
- c. the interaction of visual, aural, and narrative symbols in the construction of meaning.

Semiotic theory, as articulated by Barthes, provides important perspectives into the construction and communication of meaning via signs, making it an effective instrument for the analysis of films and other cultural materials. Films, being a medium abundant in visual, aural, and narrative components, provide a conducive environment for using this theory to reveal meanings that are beyond the literal interpretation. Barthes' framework, emphasising signifiers, signifieds, denotations, connotations, and myths, facilitates the deconstruction of cultural, emotional, and ideological meanings inherent in cinematic works.

The examination of the film *Doh* illustrates the pragmatic use of Semiotic Theory in analysing how visual imagery, conversation, symbols, and sound facilitate the creation of meaning. The bakery in *Doh* serves

as a potent emblem of family connections, discord, and resolution, while the conversations and character interactions illustrate wider cultural and ideological conflicts about tradition and modernity. Barthes' notion of myths enhances this research by revealing how ostensibly mundane components in the film normalise society conventions, including conventional gender hierarchies and family duties.

Analysing these levels of meaning improves our understanding of how films construct identities, engage audiences, and reflect societal norms. This aligns with broader goals in semiotic film analysis: to examine how cinematic texts function not merely as entertainment but as vehicles for cultural and ideological expression. The concepts of Semiotic Theory are crucial for examining films and modern cultural artifacts like memes, as they clarify the complex connections between signals, meaning, and ideology within our shared cultural frameworks.

As Semiotics is the examination of signs and meanings; it therefore provides a robust framework for analysing visual narratives and artefacts. Visuals, music, and symbols relate to signs, while semiotics provides methods to interpret the nuances of meaning conveyed by these elements. This theory posits two essential carriers of meaning: the *signifier* that are manifested as tangible things and the formation of a mental concept upon perceiving a physical form is denoted by the term '*signified*.' When these two concepts are juxtaposed, they contribute to the meanings of a sign. Medina (2021) established the element of signification, defined as the intersection between signifier and signified, a convergence of rational and subjective realms. For instance, when an attractive guy smiles at you, you attempt to comprehend the grin in an instant. The remarkable aspect of this processing is that the response will manifest as affection rather than through cognitive means. Babayiğit and Pilatin (2025) assert that, in essence, semiotic theory is an appropriate framework for analysing the concealed meanings underlying signs. A lot of cultural codes are employed in movies to get people to like and pay attention to them. In addition to this, movies are a substantial component of intercultural communication, indicating that people from various cultures can get to know and understand each other better and become aware of their biases. (Günay and Saygılı, 2024). Nonetheless, individuals' diverse cultural backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences result in various interpretations and understandings of meanings (Fiveable, 2024). A study by Akpan and Ikuelogbon (2023) stated that culture plays an important role in helping audience to achieve meanings. The study examined film scenes from the US and Nigeria, revealing that signs are most intelligible within their respective cultural contexts. The data analysis concludes that films convey more than simple narratives, concepts, and settings; they transmit substantial signs (signifier, signified).

Films function as significant cultural artefacts that reflect on and influence the society from which they emerge. They are not only entertainment but are substantial reservoirs of social, political, and cultural significance. Films, as visual and narrative forms, embody the ideas, values, and ideologies of their era, providing spectators insight into the collective consciousness of a society. They serve as a medium of narrative, using symbolism, language, and images to reflect and criticise societal norms, power dynamics, and historical circumstances. Films also serve as cultural artefacts that encapsulate the zeitgeist of their time. Historical dramas and science fiction both interact with social concerns (Rosenstone, 2023; Khoo et. al., 2021), either by explicitly confronting them or by providing a metaphorical perspective for interpretation. Dystopian films often examine concerns around technological progress (Al Zahrani et. al., 2022), humans' struggle in a world full of chaos (Matondang, 2022; Mukherjee, 2022), alien invasions (Briggs, 2022) and social disparities (Virameteekul, 2021; Love and Fox, 2020). In addition, romantic comedies illustrate evolving gender roles and relational dynamics.

These tales enable viewers to interact with cultural ideas on both conscious and subconscious levels. Zetulkhina et. al. (2023); Chan (2022); William and Schwarz (2020) and Latiffa and Kristianto (2022) conclude that films are also able to function as medium for the construction of identities, contestation, and reimagining of cultural identities (Mishra, 2025; Lu, 2023). They provide a platform for marginalised populations to articulate their experiences and contest prevailing narratives. Independent film has been crucial in enhancing varied viewpoints, providing alternative storylines to popular portrayals. Analysing films reveals the underlying ideologies, power dynamics, and social conflicts inherent in the cinematic text.

Furthermore, films are dynamic cultural artefacts, since they are viewed variably by audiences who are influenced by their own cultural backgrounds. The same film may provoke diverse reactions, as people impose their own experiences and prejudices onto the storyline. This polysemy renders films a participatory cultural medium, always redefining meaning between artists and spectators. As globalised media, films surpass geographical limitations, facilitating cultural interchange and hybridisation. They expose people to many cultures (Kolker et. al., 2024; Nematzadeh et. al., 2021) while also facilitating the homogenisation of global media (Anand, 2024; Chen & Shen, 2021). Hollywood, Bollywood, and several other film industries significantly influence worldwide cultural perspectives, underscoring the convergence of art, business, and ideology in cinema. Films serve as cultural texts that amuse, educate, challenge, and alter. Examining them enables researchers to elucidate intricate levels of meaning, providing insights into the cultural, historical, and ideological framework of society. Films are essential instruments for comprehending and scrutinising the world in which we live.

Hence, this begins a broad semiotic examination of *Doh*, whereby semiotic theory will aid in deciphering and comprehending the many symbolic, social, and cultural tales embedded in *Doh*. This work has not garnered any artistic awards so far, resulting in little attention to its basic semiotic patterns, particularly about the socio-cultural reality it represents. This introduction initially delineates the issue statement and emphasises the significance of a semiotic analysis to elucidate the complexities of *Doh*'s narrative and systems of meaning.

Research questions

1. What are the functions of visual and text as presented in the four selected scenes and a dialogue found in the *Doh* film?
2. How are the interaction between visual and written modes found in the four selected scenes and dialogue shape the interpretation of the selected scenes and dialogue found in the film?

Research objectives

1. To present the functions of visual and text as presented in four selected scenes and a dialogue found in the *Doh*.
2. To discover how the interaction between visual and written modes found in the four selected scenes and a dialogue shape the interpretation of the three selected scenes and a dialogue found in the *Doh*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Barthes' Semiotic theory has been extensively applied to analyse films as semiotic texts, revealing how visual and auditory signs function to convey ideological messages. Christian Metz (1974), a French film theorist introduced *film semiotic*, an extension of the Semiotic theory by exploring the cinematic codes that govern narrative construction, mise-en-scène, and sound. This further highlight cinema's capacity to construct layered meanings, situating films as vital cultural artifacts. These foundational theories have informed numerous studies on the semiotics of films, with scholars examining the interplay between signs, narratives, and audience reception (Umberto Eco, 1998).

Barthes' concepts of denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (associated meanings) are particularly relevant in analysing Malaysian films, where visual and narrative elements often carry deep cultural connotations. For example, elements like traditional attire, architectural styles, and local languages in Malaysian films serve as cultural signifiers that reflect broader socio-political and historical narratives.

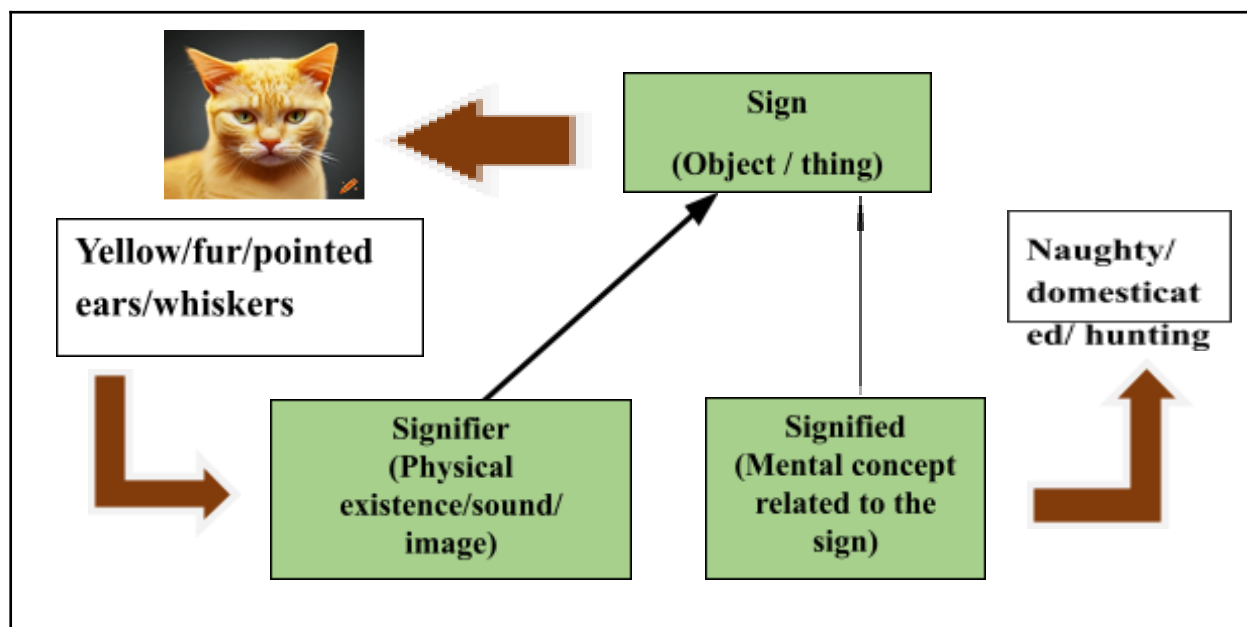


Figure 1. Semiotic Theory (Yellow Cat image adapted from <https://pics.craiyon.com/2023-11-15/yHa5KfY3Q523ppWdzPaVYQ.webp>)

Cultural factors in *signifier*

A study conducted by Achin and Bianus (2022) reports that cultural factors and knowledge of myths, beliefs, and social differences are the key aspects of symbolism application in films, especially in the animation field. The study analysed *signifiers* that are found in a Malaysian-animated adventure film *Seefood* that was produced in 2012; a story of the adventure of two sharks in their adventurous journey on stopping the illegal poachers from stealing marine life. Two sharks Pup and Julius are characterised as brave and determined; however, in Japanese culture, sharks are described as characters who are easily deceived but have a determination (Kravitz, 2024) and perseverance (Tattoo, 2025a) towards things that they want to possess. On the other hand, a population in Kalimantan, Indonesia describes sharks as large

animals that have tenacity and courage. These important findings indicated how culture and geo-location mold the *signified* interpretation of *sign* produced in any type of discourse.

In another study conducted by Robin and Giacinta (2024), critical paradigm approach was used in gaining an in-depth understanding about the *signifier* found in *Pulang* the film. 12 scenes were carefully selected in unfolding the prejudice on the word “*pulang*”. As mentioned earlier, *signified* can take forms in sound, word, visual, sound and colours. The word *Pulang* as according to the researchers has invoked a form of prejudice. Positively, it portrays returning home as something pleasant. Adversely, the same word could also represent embarrassment and terrifying situation, as the protagonist is a former offender.

Signifier as a physical existence in films

The representation of a ball used in football is another excellent example in the use of *signifier* in representing an important theme found in the *Ola Bola* (2016) film that was produced in 2016. With multiculturalism as the issue, Maheendran (2017) discovers that the film maker has successfully crafted the idea of sharing the same culture is more than having different skin colour or speak different languages. All this is due to the same multicultural elements like body languages, dialogue, gestures, characters and context. Deraman and Razak (2018) share similar view as their research proves that a *signifier* in a form of ball has successfully united different races in Malaysia. The study also discovers other *signifiers* that are closely related to patriotism; national flag and national anthem as they transport sense of loyalty and deep connection to one another. Other forms of *signifiers* have also been the center of studies for few researchers where the focus is on themes and ideologies found. Boon-Arch's study (2024) consists of five films directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, a Thai independent director (Teh, 2011); the research findings reveal that semiotic analysis, following semiotics theory, delves deep into the films, encompassing both denotative and connotative meanings. It emphasises themes like medicine and public health, forests, myth, gender, politics, memory, love, sleep, truth and illusion, marginal people, time, instinct, and orchids. Through intermedial analysis, the use of symbols to create meaning is evident, fostering diverse media networks that broaden understanding and interpretation.

Signifier in a form of colour scheme

Even without direct communication, symbols convey connotative meanings effectively. Swamynathan (2023) presents several significant findings from the semiotic analysis of the movie “*Yaavarum Nalam*” a Tamil horror film that was produced in 2009. One of the focuses of the study is the elements of *signifier* that is represented by the use of colour scheme to depict both positive and negative aspects within the film. The duality in colour utilisation enriches the narrative, enabling viewers to interpret scenes in several manners, which is very significant in a horror context. Güzel's (2023) findings reveal that the use of red, black and white in the “*Fresh*” movie poster play a crucial role in establishing the film's horror genre. Red is associated with blood and danger, while black conveys darkness and evil while white signifies purity (Pasya & Rahayu, 2024). These colours contribute to the overall mood and help set the audience's expectations regarding the content of the film.

Nonetheless, the representation of *signifier* may often be mistaken by some audience who are not familiar with a culture portrayed in a particular film. On top of this, some audience may not be fully equipped with the appropriate background knowledge needed. To illustrate, Desi (2019) mentioned that the *signifier* found in both of the *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001) sequels could be wrongly interpreted.

Bridget Jones' Diary is a *signifier* that represents her frustrations, hopes and romance in her life, which may be incorrectly interpreted by some who think that her actions who pen down every event in her life is just based on her imagination that leads to negative interpretation of the character.

Thus, this research attempts to provide logical elaborations of the three selected scenes and a dialogue from the movie *Doh*, considering the associations of colours, shapes, visual and imagery found.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyse signs and their interpretations within the selected film. As noted by Aspers and Corte (2019), qualitative research focuses on understanding and interpretation, which entails gathering diverse materials and employing various approaches, including observations. The emphasis shifts from objective meanings to subjective interpretations, such as personal attitudes, motivations, behaviours, events, and contexts.

According to Kim, Sefcik and Bradway (2016), the descriptive qualitative method is characterised as a study that produces data aimed at detailing the 'who, what, and where of events or experiences' from a subjective viewpoint. Therefore, qualitative research emphasises the subjective interpretations, such as the writer's perspective, rather than solely relying on the established facts associated with an object. It allows for the greatest autonomy in forming conclusions based on individual observation.

For the data collection, the Malay film *Doh* was chosen due to its diverse scenes that offer significant signifiers, leading to meaningful signified concepts. In the analysis of these data, Semiotic Theory (Barthes, 1957) is employed, as it addresses the relationship between signifier and signified elements.

The following is a compilation of scenes that have been identified.

Table 1. Lists of selected scenes for data analysis

Datum	Item	Minute in the film
1	Brown Diary 	66:75

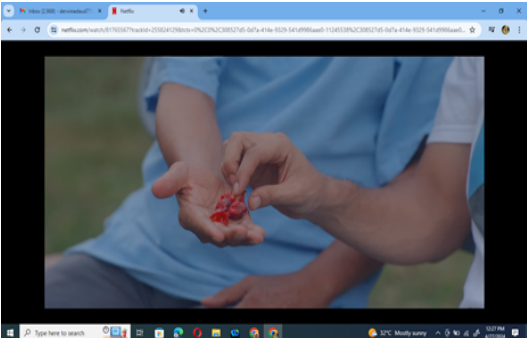
2	Hacks wrapper in the diary that belongs to Faiz's late father. 	66.89
3	Hacks wrapper handed by Faiz's late father 	67:42
4	Flocks of birds flying away 	67:56

Table 2. Conversation between Faiz (the protagonist) and his dad

Character	Conversation in Bahasa Melayu	English Translation of the conversation in Bahasa Melayu
Faiz/The protagonist	Abah, abang dah dapat surat dari KL.	<i>Abah, I received a letter from KL.</i>
Abah /Dad	Oh ya! Macamana?	<i>Oh, really. What did it say?</i>
Faiz/The protagonist	Diaorg terima abang.	<i>They accepted me.</i>
Abah /Dad	Alhamdulillah. Bila abang nak pergi?	<i>Praise to God. When will you go?</i>
Faiz/The protagonist	Tak tau lagi. Tapi bila nanti abang dah kat sana, susah pulak nanti abang nak balik sini.	<i>I'm not sure yet. But once I am there, it'll be hard for me to come back.</i>
Abah /Dad	Takpe, bapak dengan mak memang ada je kat sini. Ada masa nanti, balikkah.	<i>It's fine. Your mom and I will be here. When you have time, come home.</i>
Faiz/The protagonist	Terima kasih, abah.	<i>Thank you, abah.</i>
Abah/Dad	Jaga diri. Kerja elok-elok. Faham?	<i>Take care. Work hard. Got it?</i>
Faiz/The protagonist	Abang janji, suati hari nanti, abang balik sini jaga kedai sama-sama dengan bapak.	<i>I promise, that one day, I will come back to take care of the shop with you.</i>

FINDINGS

RQ1: What are the functions of visual and text as presented in the four scenes and one dialogue found in the *Doh* film?

In datum 1, the brown diary that Faiz (the protagonist) possesses illustrates the psychological effects of human emotions and conduct (Minnibach, 2025). To begin, this colour is closely linked to security, stability, and tenderness. When encompassed by a brown hue, individuals can experience feeling at ease. As this old diary is inherited from his late father, holding it has helped Faiz to form a reconnection to his late father's life as a confectioner. The way Faiz holds the diary and how he places the diary onto his lap demonstrate how precious and delicate the diary is to him. By positioning this diary on his lap, it conveys a personal reflection in which he may be in the verge of reading something intimate, which in this case, his father's words on hopes for the bakery. It also demonstrates a great significant in terms of Faiz's emotional conditions. When his fingers softly caressing the pages on the diary, it indicates profound thoughts and recollections of memories. Typically, when a character in a film has a diary on his lap, it often signifies contemplation, confidentiality, or the burden of personal experiences. The journal may symbolise a link to historical occurrences, concealed realities, or important recollections that the character is reflecting upon.

Datum 2 employs the same situation; however, the presence of the red Hacks mint candy wrapper signifies a heightened emotional response from Faiz. The mint candy wrapper was discovered concealed between the pages of the brown journal, perhaps placed there by his late father as a memento of their chat just before Faiz relocated to Kuala Lumpur after accepting the job offer. The mint candy wrapper has intensified Faiz's emotions as this colour is believed to have the ability of influencing psychological functioning, thus, acting as a significant link to his recollections of his deceased father.

The same Hacks mint candy wrapper is also detected in Datum 3, where Faiz's late father handed him the candy with a palm-up (PU) gesture. Cliff (2020) concludes that palm-up (PU) gestures reveal to be responsive, rather than initiating. PU cues, whether used independently or in tandem with other hand movements that consists of reaching, showing (Cienki, 2021), check understanding of the participants' action (Jokipohja & Lilja, 2022), serve to initiate speaking turns, pose questions, request favors, and express personal opinions, feelings, and moods. Often, this universal gesture conveys generosity and trust, openness and honesty but speaking from this context, the palm up gesture displayed by Faiz's late father can be considered as an invitation to accept or participate willingly.

This context is further heightened with the presence of the colour of the Hacks mint candy wrapper which can be translated as a positive assurance of the discussion that took place between Faiz and his late father. Although the PU has been variously labeled, documented and researched, one of the aspects that has been overlooked is what Manrique (2011) and Floyd et. al. (2016) call 'hold' which means personified action with turn taking; a pointing gesture accompanying a question held until the end of the recipient's answer, and only released just before the gesturer's own acknowledgement (Mondada, 2007). This gesture encompasses a wide range of embodied actions deploying the head, eyes, face, hands or abdomen or any combination of these.

As for the fourth scene, the birds that are flown in flocks carry a deep and meaningful symbol. In Datum 4, a flock of birds is seen flying away leaving the current location where a deep conversation between Faiz and his deceased father took place at a playground. Babič (2023) explains that birds according to Slovenian folklore symbolises freedom, beauty and wisdom; on the other hand, an indigenous tribe in western Ethiopia exhibit a profound cultural connection to birds, viewing them as a sacred and spiritually valuable beings as a result of cultural values (Aticho et. al., 2024).

The duration of the dialogue (Table 2) is one minute 77 seconds, takes place at the 1:09:52. In the conversation, Faiz's late father presents him with a mint candy towards the end of the conversation, and the same wrapper was kept in pages of the brown diary for years. This is a notable move that signifies his late father's high hopes that one day, Faiz would return to manage the bakery, as Faiz said *I promise, that one day, I will come back to take care of the shop with you.*

RQ2: How do the interaction between visual and written modes found in the four selected scenes and one a dialogue shape the interpretation of the selected scenes found in the film?

The interaction between visual and written modes in *Doh* (2023) plays a pivotal role in shaping how audience interpret key moments in the film, specifically in scenes involving the brown diary, the Hacks mint candy wrapper, and the emotionally charged dialogue between Faiz and his late father. These multimodal interactions do not operate in vacuum; instead, they collide to create complex meanings that shape the viewer's emotional and ideological analysis of the narrative. The brown diary functions as both a visual artifact and a narrative stimulant. The viewer's perception of reflection, emotional anchoring, and

personal responsibility is activated by the presence of the object, which is accompanied by Faiz's physical engagement (stroking the pages, settling it on his lap). The traditional values that Faiz is currently fighting with are visually reinforced by the colour brown, which is associated with stability, comfort, and connection. The diary, as a signifier, extends its literal function and emerges as a symbol of inherited duty and familial legacy.

In addition, the Hacks mint candy wrapper leads to this dynamic by incorporating a dual-layered semiotic interaction: visually, the red wrapper conveys emotional urgency and filial attachment, while textually, it is incorporated into a recollected discourse. This exchange is further accentuated by the palm-up gesture, which serves as a visual cue that signifies emotional openness, surrender, and invitation. Faiz's present emotional conflict is directly connected to his prior intentions by the transformation of a simple object into a mythic token of promise through the combination of these modes.

The speech further solidifies these visuals by a vocal commitment - "*Abang janji...*" ("*I promise...*"). This statement enhances the visual context, incorporating cultural ideals of filial piety, duty, and reciprocity. The dialogue's semantic content, along with non-verbal gestures and symbolic imagery, directs the audience towards an interpretation influenced by Barthes' notion of myth - where individual choice is obscured as cultural determinism.

In the concluding symbolic moment (the flock of birds taking flight) the visual representation implies liberation or departure (Siqi, et. al., 2023). However, in relation to the prior discussion, it assumes an ironic significance. The birds symbolise emotional release intertwined with unavoidable responsibility, quietly suggesting that real freedom may never be completely achievable within the confines of cultural expectations. The interplay between visual elements (colour, gesture, object) and verbal components (conversation, narration) reconfigures audience interpretation by establishing a polygonal semiotic framework that normalises cultural ideals, particularly about gender roles, tradition, and familial loyalty. *Doh* uses multimodal clues to replicate and mirror societal norms in family drama, portraying them as emotionally valid and socially unavoidable, rather than depicting them neutrally.

DISCUSSION

The semiotic analysis of *Doh* (2023) reveals that meaning within the film is carefully constructed through a network of visual and verbal signs that do more than advance the narrative - they operate ideologically, shaping viewers' perceptions of family, tradition, and personal responsibility. The brown diary, red Hacks candy wrapper, and the imagery of birds are not neutral symbols; rather, they function as emotional and cultural anchors (Piermattéo, 2021), inviting audience to accept particular social values as inevitable and natural.

The diary, associated with stability and emotional continuity, subtly reinforces the expectation that the eldest son must shoulder familial obligations. It transforms a personal object into a cultural artifact (Heersmink, 2023; Ankenbauer et. al., 2024) of duty and nostalgia, normalising patriarchal succession within the family unit. Similarly, the red Hacks wrapper - laden with emotional resonance - operates as a site of memory and promise, intensifying the affective power of familial bonds while masking the weight of inherited obligation. The gesture of the father offering the candy in a palm-up position furthers this ideological transfer, disguising duty as a freely chosen emotional bond.

Meanwhile, the flight of birds, often read as a symbol of freedom, ironically signals entrapment in the specified scene. Although the birds visually suggest departure and liberation, their movement is tied directly to Faiz's internal conflict between personal ambition and family loyalty. The film thus subtly disarms resistance to traditional roles by cloaking obligation in the language of love, belonging, and memory.

Through these signifiers, *Doh* participates in the wider cultural project of myth-making described by Barthes - transforming historically contingent social structures into seemingly natural and universal truths. The myth of the "dutiful son" and the sanctity of inherited family roles are not interrogated but reaffirmed, emphasising emotional reconciliation over critical examination of tradition. In doing so, *Doh* invites the audience into a comforting narrative that stabilises cultural norms while rendering their ideological work invisible.

It is indeed crucial for audience to recognise this dynamic, as film like *Doh* demonstrates how cultural productions, even those that appear intimate or localised, are deeply implicated in the reproduction of societal hierarchies. Meaning is never innocent; it is crafted, circulated, and absorbed in ways that both reflect and reinforce the existing social order. Semiotic analysis thus serves not only to decode symbols but to expose the cultural negotiations and power dynamics hidden beneath the surface of everyday storytelling.

CONCLUSION

The semiotic investigation of *Doh* (2023) unveils the profound ideological functions embedded within its visual and narrative design. By applying Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory, this study demonstrates that the film does more than narrate a familial drama - it subtly encodes and circulates dominant socio-cultural values (Dong, 2023; Wang and Yuan, 2024) particularly those surrounding ancestral obligation, tradition, and gender roles. The film's symbolic elements - the brown diary, the red Hacks mint candy wrapper, and the flock of birds—are not merely decorative props but are carefully selected to signify emotional weight, ideological loyalty, and cultural expectations.

The brown diary, through its association with warmth, stability, and memory, becomes a powerful metaphor for inherited obligation and emotional continuity. It visually reinforces the protagonist's role as the bearer of his family's legacy, not by force but through sentimental attachment. Similarly, the red candy wrapper acts as a symbolic relic, embedding memory, promise, and emotional debt into a seemingly trivial object. These visual cues, when combined with dialogue and gestures; such as the palm-up offering of the sweet operate as powerful conveyors of cultural norms, cloaking obligation in the affective language of love and loyalty.

Moreover, the scene of the birds in flight encapsulates the paradox of freedom versus responsibility. While birds are traditionally seen as emblems of liberation, their placement within the narrative following an emotionally charged conversation between father and son renders their symbolism more complex. Rather than offering an escape, their flight gestures toward a cycle of return, loyalty, and inescapable cultural duty. Thus, even nature itself becomes part of the ideological landscape, reinforcing the emotional and cultural pull of home and heritage.

These findings reaffirm that *Doh* is not a passive cultural product but an active participant in myth-making. It naturalises certain ideological structures, particularly those concerning patriarchal authority, male leadership in family enterprises, and emotional labor disguised as voluntary devotion. The film does not question these roles but affirms them, thus contributing to the quiet endurance of hierarchical traditions.

This analysis underscores the significance of semiotics in unpacking the implicit messages embedded in film and media. It also calls attention to the importance of critical viewing practices among audience. Films like *Doh* illustrate how even intimate, localised stories carry with them the weight of cultural narratives (Guo and Chen, 2023) that shape collective perception and behaviour. Through the decoding of these layered signs, researchers and viewers alike are invited to re-examine what is presented as natural, inevitable, or benign.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the power of film lies not only in storytelling but also in the transmission of ideology through symbol, sound, and silence. By making the invisible visible, semiotic analysis enables a deeper, more critical engagement with the media we consume and the cultural narratives we inhabit.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author contributed to the conception and design of the study.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author used Quillbot and Gemini in order to check facts, generate initial ideas and citations for accuracy. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

DATA AVAILABILITY/SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Derwina Daud upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research has gained UiTM Research Ethics Committee approval. The REC approval number is REC/02/2025 (ST/EX/2).

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