# Analysis of Maher Zain's *"The Chosen One"* Video Clip: Rolland Barthes Semiotic

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| Article Info | Abstract |
|---|---|
| | Humans are inherently social beings, relying on communication for their survival. Video clips serve as a significant medium for expression and interpersonal connection. They hold the power to influence the public through visual narratives that complement lyrical content. Viewers often experience a direct emotional connection with the message conveyed in a video clip. In the case of Maher Zain's "The Chosen One," directed by Lena Khan, the narrative depicts the daily interactions of a Muslim individual within American society, predominantly comprised of non-Muslims. The video begins and ends with a textual reference to the inspiration drawn from Prophet Muhammad SAW, setting the thematic tone. This research endeavours to dissect the denotative, connotative, and mythological layers embedded within "The Chosen One" video clip. Music videos are complex constructs woven with various signs and symbol systems, combining visual and linguistic elements to encode messages. In this study, semiotic analysis, employing Roland Barthes' methodology, is utilized to uncover explicit meanings within the video clip. Barthes' framework distinguishes between denotation and connotation, with the latter delving into the realm of ideology or 'myth,' elucidating prevalent societal values. The findings of this research unveil the transmission of Islamic Shariah da'wah messages to the audience, emphasizing the integral role of Shariah in Islam. Shariah encompasses divine laws governing human relationships with the divine and with fellow beings, serving as a guiding framework for ethical conduct in daily life.<br><br>© 2024 Universitas Negeri Semarang |

## INTRODUCTION

Communication through electronic media is believed to spread information faster than any other media. As such, many people use electronic media to quickly obtain information, promote, and influence beliefs and behaviours (Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2000).

As we know electronic media is developing very quickly such as television, radio, *smartphones*, and others. It is difficult to find a household without

a television, which is the most commonly used electronic media(Reid Chassiakos et al., 2016). Television itself has many programmes such as movies, advertisements, music, etc. Nowadays, there are many music programmes on television. Of course, the music show is also equipped with video clips. Video clips are a form of communication that conveys messages using audio and visuals (Finkler & León-Anguiano, 2019). In addition, the video clip is used to add a more vivid

impression so that the message conveyed to the wider community can be received very well.

Video clips as a medium of communication means that a video clip is a means of conveying a message (Finkler & León-Anguiano, 2019). Video clips have been used as a medium for conveying moral, religious, social criticism, and propaganda messages. Video clips as a means of conveying moral messages are when the video clip inserts material messages or moral advice that is usually visualised in the story in the form of events in the dialogue played by the model (Shifman, 2013).

Likewise, the delivery of religious messages, social criticism, and propaganda is visualised in visual or audio scenes in the form of songs.

One of the video clips that is now being discussed by people and is one of the interesting topics is the video clip in the song *The Chosen One*. *The Chosen One* song was popularised by a famous singer from Lebanon, Maher Zain. This video clip was produced by Awakening Record in collaboration with Hectic Film and produced by Noel Vega. The music video director of the song is Lena Khan where the location chosen for the filming of this song is Rickey Bird and the lyrics of the song are written by Bara Kherigi. The music video tells the story of the life of Prophet Muhammad as a role model for humanity in this world.

This video clip also conveys a message regarding the teachings of Islam concerning Shariah. Shariah, in Islam, is closely associated with outward actions that adhere to the rules or laws of Allah, regulating the relationship between humans and their God, as well as interactions among fellow human beings(Bensaid & Machouche, 2019).

The video clip of "The Chosen One" depicts a series of scenes, commencing with a scenario where a neighbour consistently engages in unpleasant behaviour towards others, while a kind-hearted neighbour exercises patience without resorting to conflict or retaliation.

Hence, the author is intrigued to delve into comprehensive research on the video clips within the song "The Chosen One," particularly focusing on the Islamic-themed messages intended for the general public through the content of these clips. This research uses Rolland Barth semiotic concept**.** Semiotics, as perceived by Barthes, seeks to investigate how humanity attributes meaning to things. In this context, "meaning" (to signify) is distinct from "communication" (to communicate) (Ibrahim & Sulaiman, 2020). Signifying implies that objects not only convey information, as

intended for communication but also form a structured system of signs (Jolayemi & Olayemi, 2017).

Roland Barthes can be seen as continuing Saussure's line of thought. Saussure was primarily concerned with the intricate construction of sentences and how sentence structures dictate meaning, yet he showed less interest in how the same sentence could convey different meanings to different individuals in varying contexts. Barthes furthered this by highlighting the interplay between the conventions embedded within a text and those anticipated or experienced by its readers. Barthes termed this concept the "Order of Significations."

An important aspect explored by Barthes in his examination of signs is the role of the reader. Connotation, though inherent like signs, necessitates reader activity to function (Thwaites, Davis, & Mules, 2018). Barthes delineates what he terms a second-level system of meaning, which builds upon pre-existing systems. This second system, as identified by Barthes, is connotative, a term he explicitly distinguishes from denotative or the primary level of the meaning system.

Barthes elaborated on a dual-tiered system of signification, comprising denotation and connotation. He referred to these as "orders of signification." Denotation, constituting the first order, encompasses the signifier and signified within the sign, denoting its primary meaning. Connotation, on the other hand, represents the second order of signification, where meanings extend beyond the immediate, tangible representation of signs(Loeckx & Heynen, 2020)(Niu, 2020).

The denotation system operates as a primary signalling system, featuring a chain of signifiers and signs that delineate the relationship between the materiality of the signifier and the abstract concept it signifies. In contrast, the connotation system, or the secondary level of signalling, elevates the signifier/signified chain from the denotation system to the status of the signifier within a broader signalling chain(Li, 2017)(Lachmann, Eshelman, & Davis, 1987).

Denotation pertains to what is commonly accepted as the obvious or observed meaning of a sign. It explicates the relationship between signifier and signified, or between the sign and its reference to reality, yielding an explicit, direct, and definite meaning.

Connotation emerges from the signs comprising the denotation system. Connotations are broad, generalized, and diffuse, often embodying fragments of ideology.

Building on Hjelmsev's study, Barthes created a map of how signs work:

| 1. Signifier (marker) | 2. Signified (sign) | |
|---|---|---|
| 3. Denotative sign (sign denotative) | | |
| 4. Connotative signifier connotative) | | 5. Connotative signified connotative) |
| 6. Connotative sign | | |

In Barthes' framework, the denotative sign (3) is comprised of a signifier (1) and a signified (2). However, simultaneously, the denotative sign also functions as the connotative signifier (4). Put simply, it serves as a material element: only upon recognizing the sign "lion" can connotations such as pride, fierceness, and courage arise. Thus, in Barthes' concept, the connotative sign not only carries an additional meaning but also encompasses both components of the denotative sign upon which it is built. This contribution by Barthes represents a significant refinement of Saussure's semiology, which primarily focused on denotative signification.

There exists a distinction between denotation and connotation in the general sense and how Barthes interprets them. In the general sense, denotation typically refers to the literal or "real" meaning, sometimes even conflated with reference(Allan, 2007). This constitutes the initial level of the signification process, while connotation represents the second level. Denotation is often associated with the finality of meaning and, consequently, censorship or political repression. As a radical response to the oppressive nature of denotation, Barthes sought to eliminate and reject it entirely. For him, only connotation remains. Although this rejection may seem extreme, it serves as a corrective to the notion that the "literal" meaning is inherently natural.

Within Barthes' framework, connotation equates to the operation of ideology, which he terms 'myth', functioning to expose and justify the prevailing dominant values within a given period(Griffin, 2013). Myths adhere to a three-dimensional pattern of signifier, sign, and signified(Barezki & Aras, 2021). However, uniquely, myths are constructed upon a pre-existing chain of meanings, or in other words, myths represent a second-level system of meanings. In myths, a sign can embody multiple other signs.

A myth, according to Barthes, is a narrative through which a culture explains or interprets some aspect of reality or nature (Huppatz, 2011). Primitive myths revolve around themes such as life and death, humanity and divinity, and good and evil. Modern myths encompass topics like masculinity and femininity, family dynamics, success, law enforcement, and science(Huppatz, 2011). Barthes views myths as a cultural lens through which individuals conceptualize or understand various phenomena, viewing them as interconnected concepts forming a chain.

Barthes positions ideology alongside myth because both entail a motivated relationship between the connotative signifier and connotative signified. He perceives ideology as a form of false consciousness, wherein individuals inhabit an imaginary and idealized world, divergent from their lived reality. Ideology persists as long as culture endures, with connotation serving as an expression of culture. Culture manifests itself through texts, and ideology manifests through various codes embedded within texts, such as characters, settings, and perspectives(Oswell, 2006).

Some research has been conducted related to Rolland Barth semiotic analyses on song clips. The first study by Maria Fransiska Larasati et al (Larasati, Daniar, & Marta, 2022). analyzed the song "Epiphany" by the South Korean boyband BTS, focusing on the theme of self-love. Using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis method, the researchers identified four aspects of self-love depicted in the lyrics: self-awareness, self-worth, self-esteem, and self-care. Alvin Tito Anggoro and Fitria Widiyani Roosinda (Anggoro & Roosinda, 2020) conducted a study on the song "Anti Social" by While She Sleeps, aiming to describe modern society's portrayal and social criticism in the song's lyrics and music video. They utilized a critical paradigm and Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to highlight the loss of empathy and social disconnect depicted in the video. Indriani Oktavyanthi and Muh Kholiq (Oktavyanthi & Kholiq, 2020) examined Taylor Swift's music video "Blank Space," focusing on the signs and meanings within the video. Employing qualitative analysis, they identified visual and verbal signs, as well as denotative and connotative meanings embedded in the video. Efiana Salfini and Alex Sobur (Salfini & Sobur, 2023) analyzed the music video "Pastikan Riuh Akhiri Malammu" by the Bronze Band, exploring the moral message conveyed through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Their qualitative study revealed denotative meanings through visual elements and connotative meanings

through body language and music, emphasizing the importance of not forgetting one's parents' contributions. Fitri Soraya and Arie Prasetio (Sendouw, Pangalila, Pasandaran, & Rantung, 2023) investigated John Legend's music video "Surefire," employing Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to explore the denotation, connotation, and myth within the video. They uncovered themes of interreligious love and opposition to Islamophobia, challenging stereotypes surrounding Muslim women's representation. Anggy Rusidi (Anggy Rusidi & Trinanda, 2019) analyzed Stars and Rabbit's music video "Man Upon The Hill," focusing on the symbolism and visual communication within the video. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic method, the study revealed the video's portrayal of human spirituality and harmony with nature through various symbols and natural elements. Jalu Ihza Susetyo (Susetyo, 2022) analyzed the music video "Last Roar" by Tuan Tiga belas, exploring environmental issues and human cruelty depicted in the video. Employing semiotics studies and Roland Barthes' theories, the study uncovered messages regarding tiger extinction and humanity's destructive impact on nature.

In short, these research papers share similarities in their methodological approach and objectives in analyzing media content. However, they also demonstrate differences in terms of the types of content studied, thematic focus, analytical frameworks, and cultural contexts. This recent study shares a similarity in theory or approach, namely the semiotic approach of Roland Barthes, but differs in its object of study, which is the music video of Maher Zain's "The Chosen One."

Based on the background the research's problem formulation centres around several key questions, such as: What are the meanings of denotation, connotation, and myth conveyed in the video clip of the song "The Chosen One"?

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method that naturally emphasizes contextual analysis techniques (Levitt et al., 2018)(Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As the name indicates, the qualitative descriptive technique prioritizes the aspects of words or sentences collected from written speech and narratives on the topic of research above the numerical context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998);(McClave et al., 2016). (Bukhari, Heathcote, & Dawson, 2009)) stated that the qualitative descriptive approach offers advantages, such as

allowing researchers to assess study data in real-time due to the completeness of the material. After careful thought, the researchers chose to employ this strategy to gain denotative, connotative and myth in *"The Chosen One"* Video Clip.

The research centres on Roland Barthes' semiotics, particularly his theory of two-order signification: denotation and connotation. Barthes' semiotics is chosen for its ability to interpret signs in visual media like television adverts. Emphasizing the role of the reader, Barthes' semiotics underscores the necessity of reader engagement for signification. This approach involves deciphering the real meaning (denotation) of communication codes within television adverts and examining the implied meaning (connotation) arising from the relationship between signs.

### Subjects and Objects of Research

The subject of inquiry is the video clip of the song "The Chosen One," with the object of research being specific visual scenes within the clip related to the behaviour and teachings of Prophet Muhammad SAW.

### Non-participant Observation

The author employs non-participant observation as a data collection method. This involves direct, unobtrusive observation of the research object and unit of analysis—scene-by-scene examination of the video clip and its lyrics. Scenes are then selected and analyzed according to the research framework.

### Documentation

Data collection also involves reviewing and studying relevant literature to serve as argumentation material. This includes books, newspaper articles, archival documents, dictionaries, and online resources that contribute to the research topic.

### Data Collection Technique

Data collection involves gathering both primary and secondary data. Primary data consists of recordings of "The Chosen One" video clip, segmented into scenes selected based on the research questions. Secondary data comprises literature and documents supporting the primary data, such as relevant books, newspaper articles, lecture notes, dictionaries, and online sources.

In the data collection technique, the author watches the video clip of the song "The Chosen One" several times and pauses then takes a

screenshot of every scene in the video clip. Every scene will adjust based on the lyric.

### Data Analysis Technique

after collecting data, the author classified the data based on its visual or scene, and types of shot (close-up, extreme long shot, and medium shot). After classifying the data the author then interprets and does analysis using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis technique. Barthes' approach delineates two levels of signification—denotation and connotation—which elucidate explicit meanings and help understand the message construction within "The Chosen One" video clip regarding Prophet Muhammad's behaviour and Islamic teachings.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Analysis of Denotation, Connotation, and Myth Meaning of The Chosen One Video

#### Scene I (Good and Healthy Neighbourhood)

#### a. Denotation Meaning

Scene 1 shows the generosity of a young Muslim man who has an unpleasant neighbour but he never retaliates against him and is always kind to him. This scene is played at the beginning of the story and then continues at the end of the story. The initial scene of the story is visualised at duration 2:01 with a total duration of about 25 seconds. It is told that when a young man is changing clothes in his house, a woman, namely his neighbour, comes with a bag of garbage and then the garbage is placed in front of the door of the young man's house.

| Visual | Type of Shoot | Symbolic Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
|  | Close up | A scene of players tidying up inside the house |
|  | Extreme Long Shoot | A woman came from inside her house looked panicked at the surroundings and rushed towards the main player's house with a plastic bag of rubbish. |
|  | Close Up | The contents of the bag were spilt on the doorstep of the young man's house. This woman's behaviour shows her dislike or hatred towards the main character. |
|  | Close Up | The young man is seen removing the rubbish with his feet. This shows patience, he is not angry at what has happened to him? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
|  | Medium close up | The woman who had done this pretended not to know what she had done while seeing what the young man's reaction would be. |
|  | Medium shoot | The young man went home and looked at the window and saw that his neighbour was sick. |
|  | Close up | The young man went home and looked at the window and saw that his neighbour was sick. |
|  | Close up | The soup was given to him directly showing that the young man did not have vindictive nature and honoured neighbours |
|  | Medium shoot | This shows courtesy and manners and how to honour the master. |
|  | Medium shoot | The young man knocked on the door. |

When the young man found out he did not say a word or get angry with the woman who was his neighbour. He just walked away. After that the *scene* continues at duration 3:33. In this section, the man who was wronged by his neighbour returns home. Arriving home he accidentally looked out of the window and found that the neighbour who did not like him had fallen ill and immediately he cooked soup to give to him.

**b. Connotation and Myth**

As we all know, since 9/11 Islam has been in the spotlight for people in America. There is a lot of anti-Islamic sentiment because the perpetrators of 9/11 are identified as coming from Arab countries,

and they are all Muslims. The young man in this scene is Maher Zain who is Lebanese (Arabic). He is also a Muslim. The behaviour of the young man in this scene shows a noble character. Although he has neighbours who are mean and nosy, he remains patient and continues to behave as the Prophet teaches, which is to always be kind. In the same situation as the Prophet when he had a Jewish woman neighbour who spat at him every time he passed in front of his house he never got angry with her. The Prophet asked how she was doing and visited her when her neighbour fell ill. Neighbours are familiar figures in our daily lives. Often, our neighbours know more about us than our relatives who live far away, and when we are sick or in trouble, our neighbours are the first to help us. It is no wonder that Islam places so much emphasis on doing good to our neighbours because the impact of harmonious relationships between neighbours brings so much benefit.

### Scene 2 (Love to give alms)

#### a.  Denotation Meaning

Scene 2 is visualised by a young Muslim man walking on the side of the road in a shanty town in America. The young man is seen ignoring some social phenomena there such as gambling, robbery and drunkenness. Then the young man is seen giving alms to a beggar on the side of the road and then the beggar gives back the money he got earlier to the poor old man. Seeing this incident, the Muslim

| Visual Communication | Type of Shoot | Symbolic Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
|  | Close up | Seen a small gambling event being held on the side of the road. The money used is American dollar bills of 5 dollar denominations. |
|  | Medium long shoot | Figure main character eemed to ignore the gambling game because things were not in line with the teachings of the Chosen One. |
|  | Medium long shoot | The protagonist does not spend his money on Gambling but for the member is sedekah to beggar by the side of the road. This is a symbol of generosity and noble character. |
|  | Medium shoot | The beggar hurriedly went to the old man on the side of the road. |
|  | Close up | Beggars gave his money to the old man. |

| | Close up | The old man turns his head towards the young man or protagonist. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Medium Shoot | The protagonist gave a genuine smile to the old man |

youth gave a sincere smile to them. This scene is visualised at duration 0:50 with a total duration of 44 seconds.

### b.  Connotations and Myths
In this *scene, we* see a young man who does not care about the lifestyle around him. He walks as if he already has his lifestyle. He chooses not to spend his money on gambling or buying alcohol like the other people there but instead, he spends his money on charity.

### Scene 3 (Honouring the old and loving the small)

### a.  Denotation Meaning

Scene 3 is visualised in a Muslim family home, where there is a close concern and attachment to each other. A child helps his grandfather look for a thread that has fallen, then another child comes and immediately climbs on his father's back when he is in a prostrate position at prayer time in the morning because of the incident the father slows down his prostrate movement, and at the end of this scene a mother is seen educating her daughter by reading a book together.

### b.  Connotations and Myths
The scene in this scene implies the meaning and message that It is obligatory to have compassion for each other for every human being. This is

| Visual Communication | Type of Shoot | Symbolic Interpretation |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Medium Shoot | A child descends from the stairs of the house. The carpet behind it has a decoration inscribed with the word Allah so the children are certainly Muslims. |
| | Close Up | The child is seen helping his grandfather pick up the yarn that had fallen. |
| | Medium Shoot | Another child in the house came towards the man who was praying. The man was not praying in the congregation and many members of the family were not praying together, so it was certain that the man was praying sunnah |

|  | Medium Shoot | The child was seen riding on the back of a man who was performing sunnah prayers. Then the man then the man prolonged the duration of his prostration. |
|---|---|---|
|  | Medium Shoot | A woman with a small child reading a book. |

regarding the love of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The manifestations of affection for fellow human beings are: First: honouring elders, Second: loving small children.

*Scene 4 (No Littering)*

**a.  Denotation Meaning**

Scene 4 is visualised in a crowded city park where a young boy is running in the city park.  when he running sees two men throwing garbage in the park. The little boy picks up the rubbish and throws it into the bin.

**b.  Connotations and Myths**
The useless paper should be thrown away but not

| Visual Communication | Type of Shoot | Symbolic Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
|  | Long Shoot | Set in a city park where many people play and pass by. |
|  | Long Shoot | Two men were walking and one of them was throwing paper on a public street. Useless paper is supposed to be thrown away but not to be thrown away indiscriminately. |
|  | Long Shoot | The child was seen picking up the rubbish. |
|  | Long Shoot | The man is running towards the rubbish bin. |

| | Medium Shoot | Paper he found earlier and threw it in the rubbish bin. The proper place where rubbish belongs. |
| --- | --- | --- |

in any place. Paper that is piled up and scattered on the street can damage nature and the view. Therefore, every Muslim must maintain and clean his environment because he likes everything clean. Clean is sometimes also equated with the word holy, in Arabic called Thoharoh as stated in QS. Holy or clean can be interpreted as a condition where something is free or clean from the name of dirt and small and large Hadas.

### Scene 5 (Loving Animals)
### a. Denotation Meaning
This scene is visualised by a child filling his shoes with water to give a stray dog in the park a drink.

### b. Connotations and Myths
The scene contains implicit meaning about the meaning of love and compassion in Islamic teachings. Love is not only limited to fellow humans. Love in Islamic teachings is intended for the universe including humans, animals, plants, the environment and our earth. In the hadith the Prophet said: "People who have compassion will be loved by Arrahman (the Most Compassionate), therefore love those on earth, surely you will be loved by those in the sky."

### CONCLUSION

After describing and analysing the data findings that have been presented in the previous chapter, in this chapter the author draw several conclusions as follows:

1. *The Choosen One* video clip has a denotation meaning as a short film that describes how the face of Islam in everyday life in the midst of non-Muslim life.
2. The connotation meaning is that everything done in the scene is the behaviour that should be done by a Muslim wherever he is, including in the midst of non-Muslim society.
3. This video clip confirms the myth that what is done in the video clip is based on love and obedience to God and his beloved based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, the

| Visual Communication | Type of Shoot | Symbolic Interpretation |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Medium Shoot | A child in a park was seen seriously filling the water with shoes.. |
| | Medium Shoot | The child ran towards a dog in the park. |
| | Close Up | The water-filled shoe is given to a dog and the dog drinks it. the dog drinks it. |

role model of life, *The Chosen One.*

4. This video clip is full of messages about the teachings of Islam in the field of *shari'ah*. *Shari'ah* in Islam is closely related to outward (real) deeds in order to obey all the rules or laws of Allah to regulate the relationship between humans and their god and regulate the association of life between fellow human beings, among others: Being a good and healthy neighbour, Being fond of charity, Respecting the old and loving the small, Maintaining cleanliness, Loving animals and Being gentle with the wife.

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