

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This introduction chapter explains the nature of the study. It begins with the background of the study from which the formulation of research questions and the aims of study are based. This section also includes reasons for choosing the topic and the significance of the study. There is also research methodology section that explains the steps used in conducting the study. This chapter ended with the clarification of some terms used in this study and the organization of the paper as a general description of the outline of this research paper.

### 1.1 Background of Study

Globalization has a tendency to defend the patterns of western socialization which are already established in the world (Sardar & Borin, 1999). Globalization, they further explain, promotes dominant values and cultural practices which are visions about how to deal with life by sacrificing their own values and culture. Thus, globalization has serious practical consequences.

Globalization, according to Sardar and Borin (1999: 161), is a process that “rapidly shrinks distances, compresses space and time, and changes the world into a

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‘global village’”. Today a large amount of daily interaction occurs on the Internet (Derks, et al., 2008). Instant Messaging (IM), chat rooms, social networks, and personal websites have become new media where people can communicate with other people around the world to get information and entertainment. Those new media of communication are believed to be the results of the globalization.

As time goes by, globalization has become Americanization. In 1900s, the term “Americanization” referred to the process of acculturation, assimilation by immigrants to American customs and values (Moffett, 1907). Nowadays, however, the term “Americanization” refers more to the cultures, life styles, visions, ideas of North Americans (USA) that globally spread (Hoynes, et al., 2011). The U.S. spread their values and assumption to the world through globalization.

There are some American values and assumptions that are considered as the part of Americanization which is being spread globally. Althen and Bennet (2011) mentions those values and assumption as follows: Individualism, freedom, competitiveness, privacy, equality, informality, the future, the change, the progress, goodness in humanity, time, achievement, action, work, materialism, directness, and assertiveness. Those values and assumptions proposed by Althen and Bennet (2011) are discussed more detail in chapter II.

Internet websites, in this case comedy websites, are the results of the cultural industry that is specially designed to reach people, especially teenagers around the

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world. Moreover, just as any other media which is intended for people, websites are ideological in some ways. Horkheimer and Adorno (2007) argue that US mass media, including websites, share an ideology to support their *status quo* or existence. Horkheimer and Adorno believe that the enormous businesses which control messages from the mass media have ideological interests in it (*ibid*).

One of the ways to share an ideology is through Internet memes. Memes can be ideas, symbols or practices formed in various forms, such as melodies, catchphrases, clothing fashion or architectural styles (Shifman, 2011). Memes are widely used nowadays in many websites. The term “Internet meme” is used to describe a concept that spreads via the Internet (Schubert, 2003). She further explains that the term “Internet meme” is a reference to the concept of memes, an idea or behavior or style that spreads from person to person within a culture, although the latter concept refers to a much broader category of cultural information (*ibid*).

A comedy website named 9GAG (<http://9GAG.com/>) is one of the websites that use Internet memes to share ideas among the members. The 9GAG had 67 million visitors in April 2012, and is still growing until now. It has more than one billion monthly page views as of December 2011 (Gannez, 2012). In 9GAG, the members can upload “gags” which are usually comical images (Internet memes). People also use Internet memes mostly as a language of communication in 9GAG. Internet memes are used almost every time either in 9GAG or in other websites.

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Every Internet meme is believed to be used as a new medium of communication because people communicate and share ideas through it.

Generally speaking, the communication takes place in two ways, verbal and non-verbal communication. The visual communication includes the non-verbal communication because it lacks the use of language. In this case, the Internet memes are inferred as a language in the form of images. Internet memes are also considered to be signs and can be interpreted as something else.

Semiotics is often used to confront the question of how images make meanings head on (Rose, 2002). The orders of signification theory proposed by Barthes (1991), which is a part of semiotics, explore the meanings behind things. In that theory, sign can be denotative (the first order signification or denotation) that describes something, or connotative (the second order of signification or connotation) that carries a range of higher-level meanings. Connotative signs can be divided into two kinds: metonymic, the signs are something associated with something else, and synecdochal, the signs are part of something standing in for a whole or a whole representing a part. Whereas, myth (the third order signification) is the naturalization process when every representation is portrayed as something normal, usual and fine (*ibid*).

There are some related studies which have been conducted by using a semiotic analysis to explore the cyber world. Junida, et al. (2011) conducted a study

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to analyze the cyber emoticons using Barthes' orders of signification. They explored the emoticons in the *Lounge Forum* of *Kaskus*, the largest Indonesian cyber community forum. They found that each of the emoticons has meaning and function as a way to communicate among members. The emoticons were used as a means of visual communication, and to show emotion of someone's feeling so that other members can easily understand the emotions (*ibid*).

Ririn and Amalia (2012) discovered the ideology behind the *AXE Chocolate* advertisement. They explored each scene in the *Axe Chocolate* advertisement and analyzed those scenes with Barthes' model of sign. As the results, they found that masculinity appears as negative and positive ideologies because masculinity is not contradictory with Indonesian culture. The value of masculinity shown by the advertiser, however, is narrowed down into the area of sexuality. They also found that the advertisement also gives a negative stereotype to women by showing women as figures who like to show their body through wearing outfits that exposes the women's body (*ibid*).

There have also been some studies conducted to observe Internet memes. Shifman (2011) uncovered the attributes common to 'memetic videos' in YouTube, a video-sharing website. She employed a combined qualitative and quantitative analysis for her research. She found that the 30 memetic videos that she assembled have six common features: focus on ordinary people, flawed masculinity, humor,

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simplicity, repetitiveness, and whimsical content. In conclusion, she addressed that the rapid popularity of something in contemporary digital culture has something to do with economic, social, and cultural logics.

Framing by those studies, this study attempts to explore the significance of Internet memes on 9GAG. It used 10 Internet memes taken from “Hot Page” of 9GAG. This study uses Barthes’ (1991) orders of signification to discover how the myths of Americanization are represented in the Internet memes.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Pertaining to the reasons that have been mentioned before, this study was conducted to respond to these following questions:

1. What are the connotative meanings of these Internet memes?
2. What are the myths contained in those connotations?
3. Do these Internet memes represent Americanization?
4. If so, how these Internet memes represent Americanization?

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### **1.3 Aims of Study**

Given the formulation of research questions above, this study is aimed to investigate the Americanization myths in Internet memes in 9GAG based on semiotic analysis.

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This study is investigated the significance of Internet memes in 9GAG and attempts to examine how the myths of Americanization are represented in the Internet memes. The investigation pertains to the analysis of the orders of signification theory proposed by Barthes (1991) which consists of first order signification, second order of signification and myth of the Internet memes.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Internet memes actually contain important ideologies and cultural values which represent the current norms of people in today's life. These ideologies and values embody the motivating elements that influence the ways people conduct their activities. By discovering these ideologies and values, this study can contribute to help people to discover what are the ideologies and values represented in the Internet memes.

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## **1.6 Research Methodology**

### **1.6.1 Research Design**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach framed in Barthes' (1991) orders of significations theory to achieve the aims of the study. The descriptive method was used because this study attempts to describe existing phenomena, current events, conditions and situations (Picciano, 1991). Meanwhile, the qualitative method properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit them (Berg, 2001). Moreover, this study uses Barthes' (1991) orders of signification theory, which includes first order of signification (denotation), second order of signification (connotation), and third order of signification (myth), as well. The myths then are explored by using the USA's values and assumptions which are proposed by Althen and Bennett (2011).

### **1.6.2 Data Collection**

Data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted by investigating some selected Internet memes from 9GAG "Hot Page". Therefore, this study focuses on the process, meaning and understanding taken through the Internet meme.

The data were taken from the Internet memes which appeared in the 'Hot' page of 9GAG. Ten Internet memes were purposively selected as data source of this

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study. Those Internet memes were selected because they were suitable and relevant to the problems and the aims of this study.

### **1.6.3 Data Analysis**

The data were gathered and analyzed by using a semiotic theory to investigate the significations of the Internet memes. The orders of significations theory by Barthes (1991) were used to discover the ideological meaning behind Internet memes in 9GAG. Furthermore, the first order signification was used to describe elements in each Internet meme. The second order of signification was used to elaborate connotative meanings attached to Internet memes. Finally, the myths were analyzed to discover how the naturalization process on every representation is represented in Internet memes. The myths then were examined by using the USA's values and assumptions theory which are proposed by Althen and Bennett (2011).

### **1.7 Clarification of the Terms**

The following are some terms which were used for the study. The terms are clarified to avoid misunderstanding of the problem in this study:

- 9GAG

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9GAG is public comedy website, hosted in the United States. The website was launched in 2008. It contains Internet memes. The 9GAG had 67 million in visitors April 2012, and is still growing until now. It has and more than one billion monthly page views as of December 2011 (Gannez, 2012).

- Internet meme

The term Internet meme is used to describe a concept that spreads via Internet. The term Internet meme is a reference to the concept of meme, an idea or behavior or style that spreads from person to person within a culture, although the latter concept refers to a much broader category of cultural information (Schubert, 2003). In this study the term Internet meme refers to the meme (usually visual image with one or two phrases) which can be found in the 9GAG.

- Meme

Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976) uses the term “meme” to refer to small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, which are spread by copying or imitation. Like genes, memes undergo variation, selection and retention. Memes can be ideas, symbols or practices formed in diverse incarnations, such as melodies, catch-phrases, images, clothing fashion or architectural style (Shifman, 2011).

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- Myth

The term 'myth' in this study is a term which refers to the term which Barthes' (1991) proposes. Myth is a second order semiotic system (Rose, 2002) which is built on the principle of connotation. It is also applied to 'naturalize' the message in the denotational level as a vehicle for connotational meaning. For Barthes, a myth is a way of encoding the meaning and social value (which essentially arbitrary or connotative) as something natural (Barthes, 1991).

- Americanization

The term "Americanization" refers more to the cultures, life styles, visions, ideas of North Americans (USA) that are globally spread (Hoynes, et, al., 2011).

## **1.8 Organization of the Paper**

This paper is organized into five chapters:

### **CHAPTER I**

This chapter contains background of the study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, clarification of the terms, and organization of the paper. This chapter also includes research method, research design, data collection, and data analysis.

### **CHAPTER II**

It consists of theoretical framework that provides a basis for conducting the research problems.

### **CHAPTER III**

This section contains the research methodology, discussing the steps and procedures of the study, and the data resources in conducting the study.

### **CHAPTER IV**

In this part the results of the research are presented. This chapter contains the research findings and discussions.

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## CHAPTER V

This last chapter contains the interpretation toward the results of the study in a form of conclusions and suggestions in accordance with the study.



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