

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Today's era evolves from time to time, and the development of communication is rapid, especially communication through mass media. Mass media became necessities in obtaining information, entertainment, and advertisement, where it may take the form of newspaper, radio, television, and film (Nikolova, 2012).

One of the mass media that has a rapid growth is films. More than millions of people watch films in cinemas, television and videos each week. According to Statista (2021), there were 223 million tickets sold in the U.S. in 2020 alone. The highest revenue the global box office reached in 2019 was \$42,3 billion (Stoll, 2021). Thus, many experts consider that films have the ability to influence the public (Sobur, 2006). It became an alternative for the public to make ends meet in terms of entertainment.

Aside from providing entertainment, films consist of messages and information with its own meaning. It may act as a medium for society to understand and interpret the meaning of a certain topic portrayed and delivered in the film. Since films are often related to reality, it is not seldom for issues that relates to real life to be described, implicitly or explicitly, these descriptions take the form of visuals, sounds, conversations, gestures, and dialogues in a film (Irawanto, 2017).

According to Ardianto (2014), films influence people's behaviour, attitude, and opinion, due to the interpretation the audience creates. Representation itself refers to a process where an individual interprets a concept they may encounter (Hall, 1997). Hall also stated that representation is one of the most important practices in creating culture. Culture is a broad concept that involves 'shared experiences', and someone can be considered having the same culture when they share the same experience and share the same concepts. When films represent cultures and their values, it does not only portray but also affect how these values are consumed and interpreted by the audiences. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to what messages and representations that films may possess. Plenty of Hollywood movies insert meaningful issues or ideologies in the scenes or the plot. One of the most distinct terms brought by the media is women empowerment.

Women empowerment itself can be defined as promoting women in their sense of self-worth, ability in determining their own choices, and their rights in influencing social changes for themselves and others (Worldvision, 2021). It is often aligned with the feminist movement, where it refers to the battle in transforming immoderate systems, equality, rights, and position, into equals between men and women (Fakih, 2013). While feminism refers to the movement that seeks equality between the genders, women empowerment refers to the process or the action that allows the increased participation of women in all aspects of society. Feminists are motivated by the notion of 'equality', where women empowerment is not constrained in any way, it does

not necessarily focus on equality alone but rather beyond empowering women and the concept of 'equality' (Phillips, 2002). Both women empowerment and feminism relate with supporting the female gender, since division between the genders exist. Men are often considered to be above women, which causes the emergence of this ideology (Hanum, 2018).

Having the power to make choices and participate in decision making and issues can also be defined as women empowerment. An empowered women itself is the ability of an individual to think, have freedom, and act according to their own impulses to meet their needs and desires without having to rely on others (Astuti et al., 2006). It is often associated with women who have well autonomy and power and is not only determined by the role of women domestically, but also opportunities to interact further from is to develop their potentials (Karnawati, 2020). In addition to that, a women empowerment can be seen as women's freedom, be it from violence, or to determine what and when in carrying out various activities in the society. Women empowerment is often related with certain phases of the women's rights movement in history, especially in Western countries.

The movement is known to tend to be split into three waves, with the first beginning in the 19th and early 20th century where suffrage was a main issue. Then it was during the 1960s with the sexual revolution and the role of women in society, while third wave feminism then surfaced in the 1990s. Being a part of a major global movement and dynamically breaking new grounds in recent years were resulted. Moreover, days like International

Women's Day exist to celebrate women's achievements. But despite a great deal of progress, women continue to face discrimination and many other issues in every part of the world. Therefore, it is important to understand the meaning and values of women empowerment and for women to possess it.

Women should be able to live a safe, fulfilled, and productive lives, where their full potentials can be reached (Worldvision, 2021). As an attempt to spread the meaning of the empowering a woman to the society, mass media, or films in this case, plays a part in it, since films can influence people and portray reality.

Initially, the film industry often produced films that portrayed women only as a side character with weaknesses, unlike the male characters. Women's perspectives were lacking in Hollywood movies, due to the number of men working in the film industries compared to women. According to the data in Geena Davis Institute, within the 120 films released in 3 years, there are only 30.9% of women as the main character and dominated by men with 69.1% (Whiting, 2019). It can be seen that gender inequality exists in films, let alone a portrayal of women empowerment.

Women's films genre exists in the film industry, where women are at the centre of the universe and the whole plot revolves on women's traditions, such as occupation, love life, women's traits, and physique (IlianFilm, 2020). It existed since the 1800s, however it became popular in the 1960s since Bette Davis starred as a main character in *Now, Voyager*, Joan Crawford in *A Woman's Face*, and heroines of Hitchcock films (Greven, 2010). This genre

then grew and one of the women's films genre evolution is known as 'chick flicks', where it deals mainly with romance and the main character's love life (Simpson, 2009).

These films are practically the same as any other films, however it focuses more on the specific messages that the creators want to deliver. The messages are expected to be a thought for the audience that may cause changes, invitation to participate, or at least become an influence on the current social condition (Fajar, 2014). On the other hand, not all women's films raise accurate messages in women's values. Not a few are even considered to be sexist, resulting in failure in delivering meaningful messages to the audience.

Although not many, several films quite successfully portray women, especially their ability to empower women such as *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Hidden Figures* (2016), and *The Help* (2011). These films show that women are not necessarily only passive, emotional, and weak beings, but are capable of knowing their sense of self-worth, strength in making their own choices, while being able to embrace their femininity. *Clueless* (1995), is one of the most iconic 'chick flicks' films that existed back then, it does not only portray romance or heartbreak with the main character, but it offers such a fresh perspective of friendship, fashion, catchphrases, and women's independence, especially in the 1990s.

The researcher chose this film because even after 25 years of its release, people still consider in to be relatable in the current society, as it is

often featured or referred in other types of mass media. In addition to that, this movie was quite popular that time and there has not been a research of the representation of women empowerment in this film. The movie also presents a unique main character. The researcher finds it interesting how the main character Cher, can represent values of empowerment, independence, whilst being visualized as a privileged, spoiled, high school teenager. Hence, the researcher is interested in analysing and exploring through a critical discourse analysis, as it depicts how media can be used as a medium to deliver the representation of women empowerment through how certain roles are assigned to genders through the character's behaviour, dialogue, and thinking process.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Films that fail to tell the audience something about the human condition are more likely to be quickly forgotten. Yogesh Master, a progressive writer and filmmaker stated that films should give a social message and should reach the people, particularly the youth. According to Master, films are an effective media to gain awareness among people and create a healthy society (The Hindu, 2017). Master's statement is opposed by Samuel Goldwyn, a legendary film producer, where he asserts that pictures are for entertainment, while messages should be delivered by Western Union.

A variety of both complex and uncomplicated films are produced due to the difference of opinions regarding messages in films. Still, these

‘uncomplicated’ supposedly message-free films are exceptions and even a shallow analysis of many of the movie blockbusters eventually reveal quite clear agendas. An example would be how *Jaws* was not just about sharks, but rather post-Watergate attack on corrupt authority figures, or *Star Wars* in highlighting how easy democracy can be replaced by tyranny, and how *Avatar* promotes a strong environmental issue (Anderson, 2020). In fact, genres even often endorse particular agendas, which concludes that no matter how superficial, films mostly contain meaningful messages to be delivered to its audiences.

For many years, the media has played a role in defining genders’ illustrations. Since films have a message, albeit a subtle one, it is similar to espousing a viewpoint or personal insight in a novel, a play, or even a song, because it adds gravitas to the creative endeavour (Anderson, 2020). This means that how films portray genders affects men and women in reality. It is common for the film industry to produce movies with a male main character. Men are often portrayed as the hero, the strong one, or the leader, while women on the other hand are often portrayed as emotional, helpless, being over sexualized and seen as objects. This may seem harmless; however, films affect how the society interprets the messages delivered.

For feminist theorists, there is no doubt that media functions with other institutions to reflect, reinforce, and mediate existing power relations and ideas about how gender is (Beck, 2018). Feminist theorists believes that mass media serve as a medium to deliver stereotypical, patriarchal and

hegemonic values about women, which results their existence in mass media to appear normal. Thus, this basically reflects on society's dominant social values that symbolically belittle women, either by not showing them at all, or by depicting them in stereotypical roles in mass media (Beck, 2018). Therefore, women's perspectives are often not openly articulated

The film industry then started producing films that portrays more women who does not act in accordance with their stereotype. How the gender is portrayed through the characters and the plots of the film are changed, more women also direct or write the film. Successful films with an independent woman as a main character started coming out and pleased the audience such as *Miss Congeniality* (2000), *Joy* (2015), and *Brave* (2012). These are movies aired in the 2000s, yet apparently, empowered women as main characters, movies, and directors have been thriving since the 1990s.

The 1990s were comparatively a great time for women in front, and behind cameras. In fact, women directed nine per cent of the top 250 grossing films in 1998. Kathryn Bigelow, Penny Marshall, Jane Campion, and Sofia Coppola are some of the names of successful female directors in the 90s that were able to show their abilities and strengths as a woman. These directors were not solely producing films about women, and although there are women behind and in front of the camera the need of a woman empowering messages delivered still exist.

Many of the films produced for or by women allowed Hollywood to reanimate lucrative old properties, instead of raising the real message. One of

the examples is *Ghostbusters*, a female reboot of the original film by recasting with a more diverse cast and good politics was released in 2016, but aggrieved fans of the original film see the film as a politically motivated assassination. The fans considered it as narrative murder committed by humourless feminists due to the replacement of their childhood comedy idols with women. This resulted in women believing that the impact of woman empowering messages in films are lower now than in the 1990s.

Clueless is a movie released in 1995 and were considered by some articles to be able to break down barriers and paved the way to women's films genre until now (Salah, 2019). Clueless is an adaptation of Jane Austen's novel Emma, a coming-of-age novel originally published in 1815. In the novel, Emma is about youth and romantic misunderstandings, set in a fictional country village of Highbury. However, directed by Amy Heckerling, Clueless follows Cher Horowitz, a spoiled high school teenager living in Beverly Hills who eventually matured and reflected the rise of third wave feminism in the 1990s. It offers a fresh perspective towards the audience in the possibility of embracing the traditional aspects of a woman's femininity whilst being independent, strong, ambitious, and empowered. The movie was considered to empower women in an undertone, light, and relatable way, even after 25 years of its release (Hu, 2020).

The movie contains some examples of false consciousness as well, which refers to a socially induced misperception of misunderstanding of social life. It is a concept derived from Marxist theory of social class.

Members of a subordinate class suffer from false consciousness in that their mental representations of the social relations around them conceal the realities of subordination and domination (Ratner, 2014). In *Clueless*, false consciousness takes form of “high-school popularity”, where popular kids are dominant, while the others are considered as subordinates, and difference that exists between the wealthy students and the working-class students.

In addition to the previous chapters, in an interview with Chang and Times (2020), *Clueless*' writer and director Amy Heckerling opened about her experience as a woman filmmaker navigating the male-dominated field and how she managed the sexism within the industry. Heckerling stated that there were a lot of “Girls can't do this, girls don't know what's funny”, and that she would just try to do what she needed to do and keep her vision.

In conclusion the researcher finds the film to be an interesting object of study in analysing the meaning of women empowerment through its characters, dialogues, and scenes, where false consciousness also lies in the movie, causing the need to further dissect the movie.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Based on the problem identification and the background of the study that has been stated, it is concluded that the question to this problem is “How does the movie *Clueless* represent women empowerment?”

1.4 Purpose of the Study

From the statement of the problem that has been elaborated, the purpose of this research study is to apply semiotic analysis regarding how the movie *Clueless* identifies its characters and the thought of women empowerment in certain roles. By doing so, the researcher will be able to evaluate whether the movie *Clueless* contributes or delivers the issues of women empowerment that exists in society.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1. Academic Aspect

In an academic aspect, the researcher hopes to act as a tool to convey messages about women empowerment. By addressing verbal communication and non-verbal communication in analysing the movie through semiotics the researcher also hopes to be of use for future studies since the film industry will continue to grow and will always relate in representing the existing society.

2. Practical Aspect

Through this research study, the researcher hopes that the study can provide ideal knowledge by understanding and analysing the meaning of women empowerment in the movie *Clueless*.

1.6 Organization of the Study

CHAPTER I: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Problem

The background of the problem that will be discussed further in the research

1.2 Identification of the Problem

The problem that is identified will be the main objective of the research

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The problems that are stated and will be the main topic of the research

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study that is correspondent to the background of the research

1.5 Significance of the Study

Academic and practical aspect of use in the research

1.6 Organization of the Study

CHAPTER II: Object of Research

In this chapter the subject and object of the research will be discussed and further explained. The subject of this research is an adaptation of Jane

Austen's novel *Emma*, the movie *Clueless* (1995). The object of this research will revolve around how the movie assigns roles to its characters to provide the meaning of women empowerment throughout the film and analysed with critical discourse analysis theory.

CHAPTER III: Literature Review

This chapter will focus on literature review, the concepts and theories that support the research study, which will provide the answers for the research questions that have been stated in chapter one. This will include the concept of mass communication, film, meaning, critical discourse analysis, and women empowerment.

CHAPTER IV: Research Methodology

Chapter four will explain the research methodology. In this research, the researcher adopts a qualitative explanatory research method. This research will also provide an explanation of the method that collects the data, analyses, processes that explains the unit of analysis, and the limitations that the researcher has.

CHAPTER V: Research Findings and Discussions

Chapter five will discuss the data gathered and the findings found based on the data obtained and the literature review on chapter three. The researcher will discuss and explain in detail in order to answer the research question in chapter one.

CHAPTER VI: Conclusion and Suggestion

In the last chapter, the researcher will give a review on this research, which will consist of conclusions and suggestions to improve the study.

