

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the research background, the research problem or research questions, the research purpose, the significance of the research, and the definition of essential words. These stages are detailed more below.

1. 1 Background of the Research

Media play a vital role in shaping how people perceive and understand the world around them. Messages about identity, equality and social issues are constantly generated and transmitted through news, commercials, campaigns and social media throughout countries (Kellner, 1995; Buckingham, 2013). In the digital age, communication today is not only in the form of spoken and written language, but also includes numerous semiotic modes, such as images, colors and symbols, which interact together to construct meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Jewitt, 2009). Hence, media are not just carriers of information but also strong cultural tools that shape the way social realities are depicted and constructed (Bezemer & Kress, 2015).

Among the several types of media, posters are still one of the most efficient and popular means of social communication. Posters are designed to communicate messages rapidly, and they use text, color, imagery, and layout to capture attention and shape public opinion (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Bateman, 2014). Posters are attractive visual artifacts that serve as cultural texts for establishing social meanings around themes of health, justice, and equality (Hall, 1997; Kellner, 1995). Public campaigns often utilize posters to foster awareness and alter conduct, but

these visual texts can also perpetuate existing societal inequalities and stereotypes. Social inequality is a reoccurring topic represented in numerous campaigns, hurting people's access to resources, opportunities and healthcare (Tilly, 1998; Nowakowski, 2017). As Hall (1997) points out, media representation is not merely a reflection of reality but actively produces it, altering how audiences understand power relations and social divisions.

To understand how inequality is depicted in media one must connect with theoretical ideas that explain how power and hierarchy operate in society. Bourdieu (1984) presents the idea of cultural and symbolic capital to describe how inequality is reproduced not only via economic institutions but also through social beliefs, practices and representation that indicate belonging and privilege. Such types of capital are circulated via cultural media such as commercial, cinema, and public campaigns, which reinforce social divisions and normalize uneven power relations (van Dijk, 1998; Wodak, 2015). Thompson (1990) further argues that symbolic power is exercised through communication and representation and in this way dominant ideologies are perpetuated in everyday life. Media texts often use repetitive visual images, metaphors and grammatical patterns to marginalize particular social groups and to legitimate dominant views. Therefore, the exploration of representations of inequality in public campaigns, especially in health-related posters, is important to understand how symbolic meanings are involved in the maintenance of social power systems (Hall, 1997; Kellner, 1995; Nowakowski, 2017).

Social meanings have been constructed and negotiated through multi-modal texts such as posters and campaigns in communication and education research. McWhirter et al. (2012) show how the linguistic framing and visual imagery of health campaigns influence views of authority and responsibility, often neglecting structural elements of inequality. Nowakowski (2017) demonstrates how propaganda posters use visual composition and symbolism to sustain ideological hegemony. Saidu et al. (2025) point to how text, image, and color interact to convey humanitarian crises and social inequality. Cahyati (2025) and Kettani and Ouahidi (2025) argue that in the educational setting, multimodal analysis can offer a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which visual and verbal modes contribute to the development of critical and visual literacy. These findings indicate that campaign and educational images are not only communication devices but also pedagogical devices that mold how audiences view power, ideology and meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

To investigate these semiotic relationships, this research applies Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). MDA provides a systematic framework for the research of language, images, spatial layout and other semiotic modalities in their integration in meaning-making. Jewitt (2009) points out that a multimodal approach allows academics to go beyond surface messaging and to investigate how ideologies, identities and power relations are produced through design. This paradigm is particularly suited to campaign posters which employ spoken slogans, images, colour and composition to persuade viewers and convey social themes. In educational practice, MDA also helps learners

to comprehend how meaning is made across modes, therefore encouraging the development of critical awareness in line with the goals of multimodal literacy in English language instruction (Serafini, 2014; Unsworth, 2020).

Thus, this research focuses on *The Chrysalis Initiative's* “Inequality You Can’t Ignore” (USA, 2023) program, which aims at addressing the differences in breast cancer outcomes between women of diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. The commercial exposes the systematic difficulties faced by women from underprivileged populations in screening, diagnosis and treatment. Striking imagery and a symbolic inequality sign ($\neq$) painted on the female body show the continuance of healthcare inequity. The campaign centers unequal access to health services, raising awareness and at the same time calling attention to structural injustice. Because of its use of bodily imagery, linguistic slogans and visual contrast, the work is a valuable object for investigating how inequality is portrayed through the interaction of verbal, visual and symbolic resources.

Some research initiatives have used Multimodal Discourse Analysis to investigate how visual communication encodes meaning, ideology and power. McWhirter et al. (2012) explore breast cancer communication using linguistic and visual analysis and demonstrate how framing methods influence conceptions of authority and responsibility. Similarly, Nowakowski (2017) studies propaganda posters using visual grammar and shows how color, layout, and symbolism contribute to ideological supremacy. Other studies use this concept in health and humanitarian missions. Wakefield et al. (2010) underline that combining verbal and visual signals boost message memory whereas Ingolo and Ong’onda (2024) point

out that color contrast and culturally unique images foster social unity in COVID-19 posters. Saidu et al. (2025) further exemplify the interaction of multimodal resources in the depiction of humanitarian principles and inequity. Taken together, these data support the efficacy of MDA in identifying social meanings hidden in the visual content of campaigns.

Cahyati (2025) in the realm of education shows that multimodal analysis of English textbook covers shows the construction of student identity and social values through visual aspects. The visual design of learning materials affects learners' engagement and interpretation (Muhassin et al., 2022). Multimodal techniques enhance inclusive and culturally relevant pedagogy (Kettani and Ouahidi, 2025). The findings of this research suggest that MDA is not just confined to media analysis but also makes a substantial contribution to English language instruction as it allows teachers and students to read multimodal texts critically. Research of this type suggests that multimodal literacy is an important competency for English teaching today.

Multimodal representation in media and education has been researched, but, less emphasis has been paid to the multimodal resources used to portray healthcare inequity in advocacy efforts, especially in the Western setting. Currently, the majority of studies are focused on general health promotion (McWhirter et al., 2012; Ingolo & Ong'onda, 2024; Ezirim & Aworo-Okoroh, 2023) or on educational resources such as textbooks (Cahyati, 2025; Kettani & Ouahidi, 2025; Muhassin et al., 2022). There is little research directly connecting multimodal representations of

healthcare disparity in advocacy efforts to wider social and pedagogical implications.

Accordingly, the present research adopts Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Multimodal Discourse Analysis methodology to *The Chrysalis Initiative's* campaign "Inequality You Can't Ignore" (2023) and examines the interplay of verbal, visual and symbolic modes in the representation of healthcare inequity. The campaign is in the United States, but it provides a global example of how racial and social inequities in healthcare are communicated using multimodal means. The worldwide setting discussed in this research enhances cross-cultural awareness of the visual representation of inequality and has implications for English instruction in Indonesia. In educational contexts, multimodal analysis helps learners to read the interplay between words and images in the production of meaning, ideology and power. Thus, this research also fosters the development of multimodal and critical literacy abilities, which are crucial competencies in today's English language education.

1. 2 Research Questions

1. What multimodal resources are used to represent social inequality in *The Chrysalis Initiative's* "Inequality You Can't Ignore" campaign posters (2023)?
2. How do the multimodal resources interact to construct the representation of social inequality in the campaign posters?

1.3 The Objectives of the Research

1. To identify and examine the multimodal resources used to represent social inequality in *The Chrysalis Initiative's* “Inequality You Can’t Ignore” campaign posters (2023).
2. To analyze how visual, and symbolic modes interact to construct the representation of social inequality in the campaign posters.

1.4 Scope and Limitation

This research focuses on the campaign posters of The Chrysalis Initiative’s “*Inequality You Can’t Ignore*” (2023) and examines how social inequality is represented through visual and symbolic modes using Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The research emphasizes visual elements such as composition, gaze, pose, color, symbols, and numerical representations as the primary resources in meaning-making.

The scope of the research is limited to poster materials produced as part of the campaign and does not include other media forms such as videos, social media content, or audience responses. In addition, the analysis is confined to the campaign’s socio-cultural and healthcare context in the United States of America. As the campaign is situated within a specific national and institutional setting, the findings are interpreted within this context and are not intended to represent healthcare campaigns in other cultural or national environments.

1. 5 Significance of the Research

a. Theoretical Significance

This research contributes to the advancement of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) by applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework of visual grammar to the health campaign posters integrating linguistic, visual and symbolic resources. Whereas much of the existing research on health communication has focused on persuasion, information delivery or raising awareness (Clarke et al., 2012; Ingolo & Ong'onda, 2024), this research highlights the interaction of multimodal factors in the construction of representations of healthcare inequity. This research adds to theoretical understanding of the operation of visual advertisements as cultural texts that can both reinforce and challenge social hierarchies and power relations by concentrating on inequality as a product of representation.

b. Practical Significance

This research has practical implication for campaign designers, health organizations and educators in demonstrating the use of multimodal tactics to communicate healthcare inequities in public campaigns. Knowledge of how posters transmit social inequality through visual design might inform the construction of more inclusive, persuasive and socially responsive health communication. The findings also encourage critical engagement with visual campaigns in line with Buckingham's (2013) work on media literacy, so enabling audiences to better comprehend and examine cultural messages encoded in advocacy materials. Furthermore, the research demonstrates that multimodal texts can be used by English language teachers and students as real learning

resources for the development of students' critical and visual literacy. It is expected that the findings will encourage English teachers to include multimodal resources into classroom practices to enhance students' critical and creative analysis and production of media texts in line with the goals of contemporary English language education.

1. 6 Definition of Key Terms

a. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is a methodology that investigates how multimodal semiotic elements, such as the linguistic, the visual and the layout, work together in meaning making.

b. Social Inequality

Social inequality is the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges in a society.

c. Campaign Poster

A campaign poster is a visual media designed to convey messages intended to raise awareness or inspire action on social, political or health issues.

d. Representation

Representation is the way ideas, identities and social realities are represented through language and pictures.