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Denotative and Connotative meaning
in Among Us Look Alike meme

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Abstract

Memes as an entertainment media have become a way to communicate with people of this era as a way to deliver a message or to retell the events of today or the past. The Among Us is one amongst many memes existed on the internet, once starting of as a small community exclusive to enthusiasts to something that ordinary people can enjoy whether it is from things that relate to them as of playing the game or something sensational that spreads into everyday objects, thus created subgenre "Among Us Look Alike". The method chosen for this research is descriptive qualitative with an addition of parts needed to construct the meme. The researcher uses Roland Barthes' theory to analyze the data. The researcher also explained the Denotative and Connotative meaning in the Among Us Look Alike meme. The researchers selected two memes for this analysis in Among Us memes based on the appearance of the Among Us character in the image. The result show that the Denotative meaning of the data are what to be expected from the object itself, and Connotative meaning of the data are varied and explained deeper into the context, such as the first data explaining the office culture and speculate on where the image is happening to how the image with the context presented to be in an office culture preceded the Among Us games by few months and the second data explaining the post-apocalyptic event and how the trace of Among Us character survived due to its material and how it shares the same material as the currency of the post-apocalyptic zone of "Fallout" game. The data showed that the images have both Denotative which is the literal description of the object and Connotative which range from just knowing the basic context of the meme, which is to know what parts needed to manifest the figure into deeper subjective meaning of the image.

Keywords: *Connotative, Denotative, Meme, Semiotics.*

Introduction

In this modern era, the growth of information media has developed rapidly, from newspapers which we must wait for its release, to the internet which provides us with live service. With the arrival of such an advanced form of media, information flows from the source right to the readers, and the readers can retell what they thought of a certain event into a similar form of media through the use of comedy.

Media have a form of comedy in them to tone down a stressful topic into a more approachable topic for readers, especially those who have a faint of heart. Now with the existence of the Internet, everyone can retell the happenings with the help of comedy by creating memes which uses the same formula as previously mentioned comedic relief in media and apply the creator's opinion in a form of self-made scenario about the happenings into a template currently popular at the time. Though, ultimately, memes serve as an entertainment medium for internet denizens. Memes use a well-known figure as an actor to convey a certain feeling of the opinion, this figure could be anything, whether it is an icon, a logo, etc. (KnowYourMeme.com, 2010).

Semiotics is a knowledge that deals with both creating and interpreting the meaning in text of any form. The word "Semiotics" is derived from Greek semeion, meaning signs, omens or traces of which points toward meaning that is important, be it visible or invisible at a glance. In western culture, words are the primary carrier of meaning and thought (Hodge, 2020). Based on the previous statement regarding memes, it is most likely that the figures used in memes are so popular that even a slight gesture of the said figure can convey meanings into the message, all in the form of symbols or signs. In this topic, there are ways to convey the meaning of memes, one of them is by using the principle made by the expert in the field of semiotics, Roland Barthes (1964).

Roland Barthes developed signs into many kinds of form, from signs in language such as social norms and ways of communicating, as well as symbols which developed into metaphor and allegory to contemplate its meaning and music to convey feelings (Wati, 2023). Roland Barthes describes his theory in two different aspects, those are signifiers, which convey the message through things that can be sensed through physical senses and signified, which convey the message through thought or interpretation (Zuo, 2024), through this, we can confirm that Roland Barthes is an expert in semiology studies in which he categorizes several unspoken language such as body language and symbols into two different category to make a concise point toward the language dubbed as signs.

Roland Barthes coined the term Denotative and Connotative as categories regarding signifier and signified. Denotative is a term used to imply a sign as its own thing without referring to any other sources that may have a relation with it and Connotative is a term used to imply a sign as something with hidden meaning in a figurative manner (Zuo, 2024). To give an example, let's use the object "Skull", in Denotative term, skull is a bone of the head, while in Connotative term, skull is a sign used to refer to imminent danger that could cause death or death itself, meaning, the term used to view the object are different, Denotative being literal and Connotative being figurative.

Roland Barthes also included another factor in the labelling of signs, the factor of labelling based on myth. Myth is the second stage of Denotation due to the agreement made by a community toward connotation, thus becoming the second stage of Denotation. According to Barthes, The sign that gets the second stage of denotation will be placed after the sign-signifier-signified is formed, of which the sign will become a new marker for the next sign existed afterward, making it a "myth" due to a community agreement that started off as connotation turned into denotation (Jazeri, 2020).

Memes as a concept was first brought in by Dawkins, the expert who wrote the book "The Selfish Gene" in 1976, which stated that "meme" is a cultural ideas which transmitted through one person to another person as a mean to spread the gene of ideas from one generation to another, similar to vaccine spreads its influence into a herd of people (Raevskaya, 2019). If succeeded, the memes will live rent-free inside the mind of the people, and the only one burdened by their presence is the people itself, which concludes about how influential memes are, as long as there is/are sharer, the idea will lingers in the mind of the people, and if interested, will be the new carrier of the meme.

Memes, as a media of communication, is a phenomenon that increases in popularity significantly from time to time, most notably the image form of memes. The popularity of which came from the original memes that is continuously shared and eventually changed in a way which fits the narrative to make the joke relatable. Started from the 2000s, the media had gone through a lot of change, from rigid and fixed into flexible and modifiable, of which costed the memes into a more intricate and complex media that requires context of which only those affiliated with the community can interpret it, even if further context does not equate much thus creating a sense of irony. (Vulliamy, 2021)

There are a wide variety of memes on the internet, some died out and forgotten by a week, and some survived through the test of time, and one of the surviving memes happens to be from a game made in 2018, and popularized in 2020, *Among Us*. This franchise and its meme caught the attention of the writer due to its simplicity of the logo and the icon in it and is popularized again in a recent several months ago which fills the criteria of it fitting into both Denotative and Connotative categories behind it. This franchise and its meme got its significant global recognition in July and August 2020 after several streamers took notice and

played the game "*Among Us*" (KnowYourMeme.com, 2020), which mean, through sheer luck, referring to the previous selfish gene, the influence of things can spread outside of its regional recognition, that is the "*Among Us*" community, into relevance in global range, even more if the influencer is a well-known streamer.

Among Us as a franchise is an online-multiplayer murder mystery game which offers two ways of playing, those being Crewmate and Impostor. Crewmate is a role of a local worker whose job is to maintain the facility while on looking for an individual who could be deemed as suspicious, their goal is to either complete the maintenance of the facility or eliminate all suspicious individuals. Impostor is a role of an invasive alien whose job is to eliminate Crewmates until there are 2 remaining Crewmates, their way to conceal their identity is to "fake" tasks that should be done by Crewmate as well as accusing the crewmates into betraying one and another, Impostor also has the ability to "vent" through vents to widen their opportunity to strike in many critical points.

Among Us as a meme is a community-made joke to share with each other, using lingos and terms mostly known by the community, first instance of Among Us meme is popularization of the word sus, which is short for suspicious, at that point, most people who are up to date with the meme culture will catch a glimpse of the meme, as previously-mentioned "The meme will live rent-free inside the mind of the people", one of the instance that immortalized a persona to forever be correlated with the meme is "Sus Jerma", a meme that was created by the fans of a Twitch streamer "Jerma985", with the self-portrait of the streamer edited using FaceApp by user Monkeyboy3 on Discord, then later captioned by LavaMeteor written "When the imposter is sus!".

The writer has read some research related to the object discussed in this research. The first research is A Semiotics Study of Verbal and Visual Sign Within Selected Internet Memes Found at 9GAG Instagram Account by Dewangga (2023). In their research, they researched memes found at 9gag's Instagram page, a page which posted memes relevant to recent events, mostly about living situation of many people and examined 6 selected memes with each meme categorized into four different categories with the theory of semiotics from Saussure and Theory of meaning from Barthes. The contents of the research are variative, have a concise description and are well detailed, but broad in the main topics, covering 6 different memes of a different name.

The second research the writer has read related to the object of this research is Peirce's Semiotics Analysis on 9GAG Memes that Contained COVID-19 Pandemics in September 2021 by Pangestu (2022). In their research, they researched memes found in 9GAG regarding the COVID-19 pandemics, which include how people's opinion and activities by using meme as a way to convey their message, which comply with the previously-mentioned meme as a comedy to lessen the weight of the event.

The third research the writer has read related to the object of this research is The Functions of Memes in Contemporary Internet Discourse by Porubay (2022). In their research, they researched memes found on the internet in general, regardless of platforms. The research covered memes as a media of communication and connection with other internet users. The contents of this research are generalized in both description and detail.

From the three studies above, the writer found that there are few meme-related researches made by people in the study of Semiotics and Roland Barthes, the Main topic of the research. After reviewing the three research studies, the writer chose the research object "Among Us" because it stands out from three of the research. The object "Among Us" is uncommon as the object of the research due its name "Among Us" always prompts into "Among US (United states) citizens", and "Among Us" fulfills the characteristics of the three studies, those being verbal and visual signs of the first research study, which in "Among Us" there are popularization of the word "sus" and simple geometry of "Among Us" character "Crewmate", influence of memes in COVID-19 era on the second research, which is when the "Among Us" started to peak, and communication through meme, which in "Among Us", is a media to help people cope with the COVID-19 while also communicating and interacting with each other, which in turn popularized the term "sus" into its own meme identity. Therefore, the writer is interested in examining memes using the approach of Roland Barthes' Denotative and Connotative in the meme "Among Us" with the title Denotative and Connotative Meaning in "Among Us" Meme.

To emphasized this problem, the writer defines two questions to be the main focus on this research, those are:
- To find out the Signifier and Signified description of Denotative and Connotative used in the "Among Us" meme.
- To find out the description of Myth used in the "Among Us" meme.

Method

This research will use descriptive qualitative. The data collected and processed in qualitative methods are in the form of words, pictures, and not numbers (Hikmat, 2011).   This method will greatly facilitate writers to research and explain their data. According to Cresswell (2018), qualitative methods are collecting of open-ended data, analysis of text or pictures, representation of information in figures and tables, and personal interpretation of the findings all inform qualitative methods. This method is suitable because the purpose of this research is to find the denotative and connotative meanings of memes by explaining the denotative and connotative meanings of these memes.

In addition to descriptive qualitative, this research will also use content analysis as a supplementary method to flexible the research and its sampling (Stemler, 2015). According to Lock (2015), content analysis can also be applied to the other method of approach, quantitative approach, to provide further flexibility of content analysis, such as the use of statistics. This method is suitable for this research for its flexibility because the research will provide many samples in it.

The form of the data used in this research is memes which are images. Data in this research meme will be taken from a website Knowyourmeme.com, specifically, the imageboard of the KnowYourMeme.com in the section "Things That Look Like Among Us Crewmates" and the image's phrases, sorted by recent date or newest, to oldest in the archive. NSFW tag, which stands for "Not Safe for Work" will not be included as it may be too inappropriate for this research.

The data of the research use the images taken from Knowyourmeme.com in the section "Things That Look Like Among Us Crewmates". This data consists of images and the application of Denotative and Connotative theories as well as the anatomy values needed for an Among Us character to be recognized as itself, anatomy values in this case are: body shape, visor, and limbs all presented in the table. The total amount of data provided by KnowYourMeme.com is 122 images.

Out of 122 images, 30 images will be analyzed with a reason of sufficient enough samples needed to be explained denotatively and connotatively as well as an additional specification of the feature in the object analyzed into three possible anatomy values to create the illusion of Among Us character, The Amount of 30 images was chosen purposively because the remaining data available from the website are lacking in terms of Connotation due to the simplicity of the image. The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling due to the data coming from a specific, singular entity, as well as the use of "anatomy values" as an additional technique to find the statistical result in the research.

The anatomy value of the Among Us meme means the shapes of the original character needed to resemble the Among Us character from 3 aspect, those are the "Body Shape" which constitute a similarity with the overall shape of the Among Us character seen in the image below. The "Visor" which constitute the shape on the top half part, in the case of the image below is the wide circular shape at the top half of the character, but in most case, if it fulfills the criteria of "wide shape at the upper half of the object", it is considered "Visor". Lastly, the "Limbs" which constitute the bulge parts in the bottom half of the character.

Data collection techniques in this study are observation and documentation. According to Creswell (2014) collecting data in a qualitative study, one needs to record any potentially useful data thoroughly, accurately, and systematically, using field notes, writer sketches, audiotapes, photographs, and other suitable means. Documentation was used to collect data, and the documentation in this study is an

example of the meme itself included in the sample from the quotation, the writer takes some steps to collecting data.

First process of collecting data Searching for Among Us Look-alike Memes, the writer searched the meme of a subgenre of "Among Us" called "Among Us Look-Alike" on the internet, mainly in KnowYourMeme for a more concise description of the media. Second, the writer read the article related to the "Among Us" sub-genre meme "Among Us Look-Alike" on KnowYourMeme to find credible articles of memes on the internet. Third, the writer downloads the media of where the meme was made, in this case, pictures, to be used as research objects. Fourth and last, the writer arranges the data collected from previous steps into a table template made to research the object in a concise way.

After collecting the data, the next steps of the research are as follows. First, the writer categorizes the data into two categories, those being Denotation and Connotation. Second, the writer analyzed the data using a theory made by Roland Barthes regarding the previously-mentioned categories, Denotation and Connotation. Third, the writer implements the theory into the object of research, that is, the "Among Us Look-Alike" meme and the image's phrases. Fourth and last, the writer concludes the discussion of the research.

Results & Discussion

This paper aims at identifying the meaning behind Among Us Look Alike meme image by using Roland Barthes's theory. There were three meme images used as data to examine. The research will be conveyed in a table with the image of the meme and a few paragraphs for added context. the table of research can be seen on the next page:

Table 1. The Meanings of Denotative and Connotative in "I can't Take this Anymore" image.

I can't Take this Anymore

(Source: https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/2024373-things-that-look-like-among-us-crewmates)

Signifier:	Signified:
- Red book	- Red book, which placed behind Blue book describing role in Among Us, Red being Imposter
- Blue book	- Blue book, which placed in front of Red book describing role in Among Us, Blue being Crewmate
- Background with repetitive pattern	- Repetitive pattern on the background describing the scenario of the event being repetitive
- "FOLIO KAS 3K" on each book	- The "FOLIO KAS 3K" describing the same label each character has, only the

content is different.

Denotative:	**Connotative:**
The objects appearing in the image are 2 books with flannel patterns and a white rectangle on the top half of the book.	The object appearing in the image resembles the Among Us character based on the white rectangle on the top half of the book and 2 books each with different colors. Red at the back signifies that its role is an Imposter trying to stab Blue, the Crewmate in the back.

Myth:

The repetitive background pattern on the table, or something of a similar use, signifies the workplace of the user is at, which is most probably in a photocopy station, be it in an actual workshop for photocopying or just a sector of an office.

The image above is a picture taken at a workplace the user of Discord social media judging from the meticulousness of the picture based on the date the image was taken at the bottom right of the image, in the picture, there are 2 books usually used in workplace in a pristine, not yet used condition taken by the camera of what seems to be from a phone, judging from the dimension of the picture being portrait. The initial reason for the photo taken in the first place is to report the spending made for the workplace, those are 2 books each with different colors, red and blue, for convenience sake. While it may be improbable, the words written in the bottom half of the book, that is "FOLIO KAS 3K" signifies that the book will be used for accounting reasons, but most people use it as a general logbook, though leaning more to the first statement more due to it provides and market the product and many other necessity of office work, though does not invalidate the statement of it being in a sector of an office due to the intention of the photo, only taken 2 units of book for report on workplace spending.

The correlation of the image and the Among Us look-alike meme is mainly based on the books themself, but the most surprising reason beyond that is the date when the image was taken, 31st of March, 2018, which makes it predates the game it was made a meme as, that is 15th of June, 2018, or roughly 2 and a half months before the game released, and 2 years before the trend, and eventually the meme,

popularized on the internet. Meaning, the original intention of the image was not for the meme, but rather, for the statement made in a previous paragraph. In terms of the meme itself, the image has 2 objects that represent the character in Among Us, those are the books, each books has a white box at the top half used as an ideal spot to write the title of the book based on its use, which in this case represent the Among Us character's Visor part, but because it is still clean of any writing, if we put in the perspective of the game into the object, it signifies that both characters present in the image are still, technically, innocent.

Based on the gameplay, if there is a tag along tailing on your back, it means the tag along could be the Imposter, meaning, the Among Us character in red could be the Imposter among them due to the nature of the Imposter is to blend in and backstab the Crewmate, and the status of the one who got tailed, in this case, the Among Us Character in blue, is on a life-threatening situation (albeit still being able to play after death to help the group of which it is belongs, in this case, Crewmates), thus making the image an Among Us Look alike meme as well as Among Us meme in general, and the extra repetitive pattern on the image to represent the gameplay loop of Among Us, repetitive but fun.

Table 2. The Meanings of Denotative and Connotative in "Help Me" Image.

Help Me

(Source: https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/2024374-things-that-look-like-among-us-crewmates)

Signifier:	**Signified:**
- Rocket-shaped trash bin - Ruined building - The caption "Jesus Help Me"	- Rocket-shaped trash bin looks familiar with Among Us character from the lid which represent the Visor - The ruined background describing the sight toward the pattern of Among Us character persist even after the nuclear fallout - The caption "Jesus Help Me" describing the horror of seeing the pattern even after the nuclear fallout

Denotative:	**Connotative:**
The object appearing in the image is a red colored rocket-shaped trans bin with a silver-colored lid.	The object appearing in the image resembles the Among Us character based on its shape and the silver-colored lid as a visor.

Myth:

(The description of the game warps the perception of people, especially those who played the game and consume any media regarding the post-nuclear environment.)

The game takes place several years after the nuclear fallout, enough time for the radioactivity to tone down into a manageable state, albeit still more than able to kill if neglected, or if too close to the danger zone in a designated area. Not only radioactivity, there are many other threats living among the area, be it man or monster, there lives a group of survivors who thrive on the deserted area of fallout longer than you and are most probably not so welcoming of those outside of their group in fear of infiltration, in which the game offers a way to combat that through "persuasion" that scales based of of charisma statistics of the player in order to convince or coerce other into the player's liking, and on the other half of the threat, there are monsters spawned as a product of long exposure toward radioactive, ranging from a recognized but terrifying giant roach, to an indescribable entity not resembling any wild animals, all of which requires strength to combat them. Due to the insignificance of paper money, they use a cap of a bottle due to the abundance of brand famous throughout the series, Nuka Cola, a product so famous that it influences the infrastructure in the city, in this case, a nuke-themed trash can.!

The image above is a picture taken from the game series "Fallout". As the title of the game series suggests, the theme of the game is post-nuclear destruction, thus the name "Fallout", a short but catchy derivative of nuclear fallout. The correlation of the image and the Among Us look-alike meme is mainly based on the trash can itself, but the other reason of it being out of place in a rather out of place dystopian future is interesting due to the fact that despite anything the world or the government has to offer.

In this case the destruction of the whole city into not just a crater empty of any meaningful materials left, but a sadder state of the living still stands and force to survive on a man-made wasteland that spawns mutated beasts beyond recognition, the trash can, despite having a series of dent on its exterior, is still, pretty much, intact and is probably still useable as to compare with its surrounding, previously a brick wall is now a debris and unusable sink. And if we correlate that to the meme, the Among Us meme, while dying out, is still   recognizable and triggers the response of which similar to back then unlike most meme that are seasonal and will die in the next few weeks due to them not having a jargon most of the time, meaning, no sense of connection toward others who recognize the meme. And as for the trash can correlating with the meme, the trash can have an opening closed by a lid at the top half, making it similar to visor of Among Us character.

Table 3. The Meanings of Denotative and Connotative in "Among Door" Image

Among Door

(Source: https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/2024944-things-that-look-like-among-us-crewmates)

Signifier:	Signified:
- Red door	- Red door describe the color of the potential Among Us Character
- Window at the top-half	- Window at the top-half describing the Visor of the Among Us Character
- Two rectangular motifs	- Two rectangular motifs describing the Limbs of the Among Us Character
- Misplaced door frame	- Misplaced door frame describing the door being out of place, thus making it suspicious in Among Us terminology and giving it the role of the imposter

Denotative:	Connotative:
The object appearing in the image is a door with a window at the top half and 2 rectangular motifs.	The object appearing in the image resembles the Among Us character based on the window at the top half as a visor and 2 rectangular motifs as limbs.

Myth:

The door with such pattern is commonly used in houses as the main door of the house, or more accurately, a door placed at the outer side of the house due to it being made with sturdy wood that can withstand quite a punishment from the elements of the outside and any other type of punishment, making the indoor of the house safer in comparison to not having door at all, especially in a community where the house are usually not fenced and gated personally.

The image above is a picture of a red door with a small window at the top half and two rectangular motifs common to many doors most preferably requires more protection such as layered second door to provide extra lock slot to stall out some time in case the worse has happened, an extra filter to ward of insects and alike and overall more safety for the owner, which it seems the owner of the house lacks of due to the peeking window, a circular dot-sized window in between the two rectangular motifs which most likely means the second door behind the main door isn't present, thus leave the option of the extra door to be on the outside of the door, which is unusual for most house but is somewhat considered by the owner due to a noticeably open gap on the front of the main door, as to signify that the main door was probably placed more outward from the door frame than innards as of now.

The current main door also don't have a typical hinges usual to its placement in the house, which is l-shaped hinges, a circular hinges is usually place on the door on the inner side of the house, that one especially is used as the hinges of bathroom, due to the less-sturdy material used to partitioned bathroom, that is plastic. And lately, the door being placed outward instead of inward signifies its unusual placement not originally belonging to that specific placement.

The correlation of the image and the Among Us look-alike meme is mainly on the top frame of the door, that is the two rectangular motifs as limbs and the window as the visor. The further correlation of the two are the context given in the previous

paragraph, the theme or the location of the image taken is most probably in the west, in which the door is served as the only partition between the inside and the outside, thus leaving the door at more risk due to total exposure from the outside world, which signifies the role of Crewmate. The door is seemingly placed inward of the door frame which probably means there is no extra door behind the backdoor, thus signifying vulnerability, a trait common for those with a role of a Crewmate. But, the door is also unusual, the hinges that are usually placed on a bathroom door and the door stopper at the opposite end of the door opening means the door isn't originally placed as the main door, thus creating confusion, which signifies the role of Imposter.

Conclusion

After the researcher observed the denotative and connotative meanings from the data that had been taken, the author made a conclusions based on the research questions, namely: The aspect of denotative and connotative is always present in the Among Us Look alike memes, and its appearance in unassuming places is easily enjoyed by meme enthusiasts who prefer quick consumptions of memes provided by the community on a denotative perspective. As for the connotative perspective of the meme, the meme enthusiasts can also delve deeper to find the meaning of the image, mostly based off of the situation of when the image was taken, adding more context of the image beyond pattern recognition of the Among Us figure that appeared in everyday life.

The author suggests the future researchers who are also interested in researching semiotics, especially researchers who planned on using the Roland Barthes' theory of denotative and connotative to look for references from wide range of places, especially in memes where each entry correlates with many different culture, be it real life culture of internet culture, as well as delve deeper into the meaning present inside the memes to further understand memes beyond the meaning of entertainment and into a level where memes can be appreciated more by knowing the context, thus making meme enthusiasts adore the memes more than before.

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