CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   The Background of the Study

A shift toward a paradigm of learning and communication that may represent the current heterogeneous society is a prerequisite as present educational concepts are primarily predicated on the premise of a homogeneous society (Ho, 2016). In such a diverse culture, communication, in particular, may occur through various modes and necessitates multiple ways of interpretation. In other words, throughout all spheres of the contemporary social realm, meanings across all communications involve an array of ensembles that combine diverse modes to derive meaning, including speech, gestures, objects, visuals, gaze, stance, and other acts, all denoting meaning (Bezemer, et al., 2012; Luca, 2020; Wilson, 2011; Tang, et al., 2014). When all the resources that matter in meaning are in question, the instruments of a single discipline - linguistics and its sub-disciplines - can no longer provide adequate explanations of the materials at hand as well as the queries they raise; thus, multimodality becomes the focal point of analysis, shifting from linguistics to semiotic considerations (Adami & Kress, 2014). Through situational configurations of image, gesture, gaze, body position, sound, writing, music, speech, and other media, multimodality devotes attention to meaning as it emerges (Jewitt, 2008). Leveraging distinct channels (modes) offers varying meaning potential, and the potentially distinct meaning comes with different societal consequences (Bezemer & Kress, 2016: 10). It should be

noticed, however, that the choice of mode in one context will generate distinct interpretations elsewhere.

In response to the rising popularity of multimodal communication, research in multimodality has grown in interest, sparking intriguing and pressing probes into how multimodality has been embraced within and across different academic disciplines over the last two decades (Guo, 2017: 1; van Leeuwen, 2015: 448), that is to gauge the applicability of linguistic frameworks at hand, primarily used for verbal text analysis, in the context of other semiotic resources including but not limited to gesture, music, mathematical symbols, and images (Caple, 2013: 13), though it has come out from relative obscurity as a term that has been adopted in language and literacy research, theory, and practice (Rowsell & Collier, 2017: 1), while compared to a mere decade ago, it was feasible to utilize conventional analytical techniques primarily reliant on textual data, for instance, transcribing and organizing observations and conclusions based on specific criteria into simple lists or tables (Tan, et al., 2020: 272). Additionally, Badir (2017: 105) asserts that the applicability of semiotics to any medium is subject to some practical limitations. In particular, semiotics has mostly been employed in the realm of artistic expression, rather than addressing all forms of communicative manifestations.

Multimodality offers a theoretical foundation for a thorough examination of visual texts, accounting in painstaking depth for the meaning feasible of aesthetic elements of graphic shapes (Wagner & Sherwin, 2014), such as font type, size, and resources for "framing," such as punctuation (Bezemer & Kress, 2008), and how the semiotic and epistemic functions of modality shape meaning, even though the

recognition of the embodied meanings is reliant on the readers' abilities to perceive the multiple modalities (Jaipal, 2010). Furthermore, a multimodal framework could bear some potential for critical analysis, shedding insight into viewers'/readers' social conceptions, affinities, and moral principles (Adami, 2015).

The emergence of cutting-edge technologies in digital media and the internet in the 1990s drove further interest in multimodal theory. Scholars embarked on exploring how novel kinds of communication emerging from groundbreaking technologies, such as hypertext and multimedia, turned the way we conceive and make meaning. Yang (2016: 1596) asserts that the rapid advancement of science and technology has transformed people's daily lives, as well as how they utilize language and other social semiotics in regular interactions, considering that in the current multimodal society, people constantly share and pass on information through the teamed up-employment of semiotic resources. On top of that, the massive advent of electronic visual media has revolutionized profound changes in social and cultural behaviours throughout the entire globe as well. The growing trend of visual representations, particularly those taking place on webpages, impacts the meaning-making process (Zhang & Bowcher, 2014). In addition, Turra, (2020) contends that the increasing number of internet users and the multicultural nature of websites have undoubtedly altered communication and advertising practices, as well as changes in consumer behaviours, and the market as a whole. This matter becomes increasingly challenging as the modes of communication and message transmission through visuals considerably vary from words alone.

A rising interest in communication techniques or modes other than speech and writing is a consequence of the growing prevalence of digital photographs and video recordings in the investigation of human communication (Lyons, 2016: 268). As a response to calls for looking beyond language in a constantly evolving social and technological landscape orientation, it is enticing to inquire into how the adoption of digital technologies extends the spectrum of communication resources, overhauls the relationship between resources such as image and writing, and has the potential to significantly reconfigure the concepts of spatiality and embodiment as well as genre conventions, all of which may arise in tailored and some novel breeds of texts (Jewitt, 2013: 250). As well, Fiyinfolu (2021:1) maintains that with technological expansion and enhancement, communication has moved on from face-to-face or strictly verbal messages to encompass visual resources such as colors, images, designs, etc., which were once thought of as entertainment, and now have been expanded with the use of visual resources to enhance the processes for encoding and decoding messages and to accommodate numerous modalities in conjunction with verbal resources in assembling and interpreting codes. Besides, communication in digital contexts provides sign-makers with a large variety of modal alternatives (Adami, 2016: 3).   Thereupon, digital technologies become a key site for multimodal investigation (Jewitt, 2013: 251).

In tandem with the swift change of communication brought on by the proliferation of digital multimedia, a plethora of multimodality-oriented analyses on communication modes via the Internet or digital media has provoked academics and educators to engage in a broad spectrum of studies on how communication by

way of such modes makes meaning. Digitally mediated communication entailing websites becomes one of the research foci of multimodality. The inquiry into how meaning and communication take shape via digital media like websites has garnered a great deal of attention from scholars, such as Pauwels (2012); Laba (2020); Moran & Lee (2013); Harvey (2013); Thorpe & Lukes (2015); Swan (2017); Lilliedahl (2022); Michelson & Valencia (2016); Chiluwa & Chiluwa (2020); Zhang & O'Halloran (2013); José-Santiago & Fernández-Vázquez. (2020. Website is recognized as an effective mode of communication due to the widespread use of semiotics for passing along complex meanings. Websites provide individuals an opportunity to juxtapose words, images, color, and other graphical elements to construct discursive contexts that might be difficult to pinpoint or question (Moran & Lee, 2013: 373). These modes function on their own but also generate meaning through their interactions in configurations. Websites, on this account, are thus often referred to as a distinctive form of media that contributes to the negotiation of meaning (Swan, 2017: 275).

As electronic communication tools, websites have gained widespread use by users including higher educational institutions or universities. Upon the widespread use of the Internet, university websites have shifted from merely informational or highly promotional platforms, liable for providing a substantial portion of the institutional identity of university profiles electronically (Laba, 2020: 1), earlier contrasted with hand-printed advertising pamphlets. Another motive why universities all over the globe have redesigned and overhauled their websites' visual appearance and layout is the changing social context of their usage (Zhang &

O'Halloran, 2013: 465), like students who hinge heavily on university websites as an all-in-one resource for discovering more about the university and accessing reliable information ahead of enrolling in classes. A visually appealing and well-laid-out Web page greatly facilitates user access and enhances the browsing experience (Wu, et al., 2016: 1062). Over and above that, due to the subjective and particular criteria for content selection, viewers prefer to click on sites that they perceive as congenial (Liu & Jiang, 2021: 433).

Figure 1.1 An Instance of the Front Homepage Portrayal of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara

The aesthetically pleasing and well-organized layout as shown in the preceding figure facilitates the university to share information, interact with various stakeholders, attract potential students, support academic activities, and establish its online presence. The internet-based information that is segmented into packets may help viewers readily access and get all relevant content with a single click.

The wide-ranging utilization of websites as an avenue of propagating their details has evoked academics and teachers to undertake an assortment of studies on university website homepage to reveal how meaning-making is advocated by multiple semiotic resources endorsed upon the web. Lewin-Jones (2019: 222), for instance, researching university marketing webpages from discourses of internationalization perspective via multimodal critical discourse analysis reports

that the role of internationalization and international students reflected in the webpages is marginalized as the university is more inclined to highlight buildings/facilities, services, support, and above all individual employment success, not the curriculum, knowledge, and academic staff. Mafofo & Banda (2014: 428), in their study "Accentuating institutional brands: A multimodal analysis of the homepages of selected South African universities", also unpack that the use of multi-semiotic choices on the homepages has given the universities differentiated, competitive, powerful, and attractive brands, and rebranded themselves through repurposing the transformation discourses and images to recast themselves as de-racialized, egalitarian and altruistic institutions of higher learning.

Despite the fact that a number of studies have echoed the nature of university website homepages through critical discourse analysis, such as promotion, brand endorsement, and other marketing purposes, queries about university homepages addressing the ideological basis viewed from a multimodal perspective have received less attention from academia. Therefore, there is room for research into how multimodal design principles contribute to ideological identity construal as an institutional context-bound mode of discourse. With multimodal analysis, this current study looks into how the ideological construction of universities is brought to light on their homepages through multimodal representation, including linguistic and aesthetic elements. Ideology, inextricably linked with language as a means of communication (Wodak, 2007:1), is attributed to underlying patterns of meaning, frames of interpretation, world views, or forms of everyday thinking and explanation, and presumed as a subject worthy of

investigation (Verschueren, 2011: 7). While taking account into the role of ideological construal in educational circumstances, a university's ideology matters because it determines the fundamental tenets, beliefs, and values that direct the organization's decisions, policies, and actions. In addition to serving as centers of knowledge, universities are also vital to ensuring the growth of a society's intellectual culture and values. As such, the ideology of a university shapes its academic ventures, objectives for research, employment practices, and even administrative procedures. Given this, it is clear that the embodiment of university ideology is crucial to distinguishing it from outside groups, discerning it from other educational institutions, and establishing a distinctive and one-of-a-kind academic community.

The very fact that these studies have been conducted in Western affluent nations and their results extrapolated as relevant to higher education institutions in the rest of the world as well constitutes another significant consideration. Nevertheless, given the divergence in status and background between educational institutions in advanced and developing nations, it is required to ascertain whether or not the above-mentioned recommendations are feasible for the latter (Mafofo & Banda (2014: 417). That is to say, Indonesia as opposed to the remaining countries on the list, has not given in-depth and full focus to this sort of probe. Alongside improving their environmental communications and reaching the general public more effectively (José-Santiago & Fernández-Vázquez, 2020: 2690), this research through a multimodal methodology thereby shed light on how multimodal communication involving verbal and nonverbal texts should be utilized for

advancing the ideological character of universities, bearing in mind that universities do not merely serve as conduits for the dissemination of academic information, but more than that, that value or the perception of their readers and the public, in general, becomes institutionally responsible for universities. Moreover, the findings of this study provided insights into the multimodality subject matter to aid in the development of a rich and substantive understanding of multiple modes of communication in contemporary technological forms (Flewitt, et al., 2018), especially within the realm of the educational milieu.

1.2 The Focus of the Study

The study of multimodal discourse analysis, particularly in light of digital channels such as the websites of higher education institutions, has become an intriguing topic in the past two decades. Scholars have devoted an immense amount of effort to investigating how communication/discourse and meaning-making occur via multi-semiotic resources on such electronic platforms. Throughout the entire investigation, the issue of ideological identity remains unexplored. In the end, the study focused on gaining insight into how a university supplied varied semiotic resources to depict ideological identities represented on its homepage through multimodal analysis.

1.3 The Problems of the Study

In light of the gap stipulated in the background, the problems of this study are outlined as follows:

a. By what sorts of semiotic sources does the university represent ideological insights on its homepage?

b. How do the different types of semiotic resources delineate the university's underlying ideologies on its homepage?

c. Why are such ideological identities articulated the way they are?

1.4 The Objectives of the Study

In conjunction with the problems as mentioned above, the objectives of this research include:

a. To inquire into the semiotic resources employed to represent institutional ideological depictions on the university homepage.

b. To describe how the utilization of various sorts of semiotic resources on the university homepage depicts the institution's underlying ideologies.

c. To shed light on the reasons why such ideological identities are communicated the way they are.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

The results of this study were expected to be beneficial in both theoretical and practical settings.

a. Theoretically, this research has the potential to present insights for university holders on how to make use of multi-semiotic resources in designing their institution's website homepages that are culturally appropriate for societies, given that the information shared on the

homepages is publicly consumed. Aside from that, considering that a university is not merely a center of knowledge, but more than that, it is responsible for the ideology construal of society represented through fundamental tenets, beliefs, and values; therefore, the findings of this research illuminated university holders to expand their awareness of the weightiness of an ideology to convey to the public, particularly in preparing their homepages as a gateway of information for the communities.

b. Practically, this study provided several practical contributions.

Firstly, enhancing communication: incorporating multi-semiotic resources can enable universities to communicate more effectively with their target audience by presenting information in different forms such as text, images, videos, and audio. Secondly, promoting branding: understanding multi-semiotic resources can showcase the university's identity, values, and culture. By using consistent visual and textual elements across different media, it provides a cohesive branding experience to the user, which can help to build brand recognition and loyalty of the universities. The other prominent benefit is to enhance the university website design. Getting to know multimodal analysis can inform the design of products, websites, and other visual media by identifying how different modes of communication can be used to enhance user experience. From a research methodological perspective, this research provided a framework of research on multimodal analysis to carry out future relevant studies on communications through multiple channels, particularly digital-based interaction, such as artificial

intelligence. Understanding complex communication can help researchers and practitioners understand how different modes of communication, such as text, images, and sound work together to convey meaning.