

A Semiotic Analysis Of Moral Value In Animated Film Luca (2021)

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Abstract. Animated films are recognized as powerful media for conveying moral values, yet the ways these values are embedded in visual and verbal signs remain underexplored. This study analyzes the film Luca (2021) by Pixar Animation Studios, which portrays themes of friendship, identity, and courage. This study aims to identify the moral values in the film based on Thomas Lickona's (1991) character education theory and to analyze how those values are represented through signs using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory (1972, 1977). This research employs a qualitative descriptive method. The data consist of selected scenes and dialogues analyzed through Barthes' two levels of signification: denotation and connotation. The findings reveal seven moral values: honesty, empathy and kindness, moral courage, self-control, respect, responsibility, and cooperation. These values are conveyed through signs that operate literally at the denotative level and carry deeper emotional, cultural, and social meanings at the connotative level. This study concludes that Luca (2021) functions as a meaningful medium for moral education and character building, with direct implications for the use of animated film in character education.

Keywords: *Character Education, Luca (2021), Moral Values.*

INTRODUCTION

By analyzing Luca from a semiotic perspective, this study aims to identify and interpret the moral values embedded in the film's visual and narrative elements. This research will explore how the film communicates messages about personal growth, tolerance, and bravery through signs and symbols. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of how animated films function not only as entertainment but also as tools for moral education and character building. There are five previous studies that related to this present research. First, study by Aif Tawakkal et al (2021) entitled "Moral Messages in Raya and The Last Dragon" analyzes the moral values presented in the animated film Raya and The Last Dragon using a qualitative method and Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. The researchers focused on examining the meanings behind the dialogues of the characters to uncover the moral messages embedded in the film. The findings highlight several key values, including friendship, cooperation, responsibility, leadership, courage, and unity, with a strong emphasis on the power of trust as a central moral message. This study demonstrates how animated films can serve as a medium for conveying important ethical values through both verbal and non-verbal signs, supporting the relevance of semiotic analysis in exploring moral dimensions in visual storytelling. This research provides a useful reference for the current study in analyzing moral values through semiotic elements in the film Luca, which similarly promotes messages of acceptance, courage, and identity.

Second, a relevant study by Bella Surya Oktaviani and Abdillah Nugroho (2025) entitled "Values of Friendship in Animation Movie Angry Birds: A Semiotic Analysis" applied Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to examine how moral values are represented in the animated film

Angry Birds (2016). This qualitative descriptive research analyzed visual signs, character interactions, narrative scenes, and symbolic elements in the film. By employing Barthes' levels of signification, specifically denotation and connotation, the study found that the film conveys key moral values such as friendship, teamwork, trust, loyalty, sacrifice, and togetherness in adversity through recurring visual cues and narrative motifs. The findings suggest that these signs work collectively to reflect broader cultural ideologies about cooperation and social support in challenging circumstances. The authors concluded that animated films like Angry Birds can serve as meaningful media for moral learning, as they embed ethical values within accessible and engaging storytelling. This research reinforces the relevance of applying Barthes' semiotic framework in analyzing moral values in animated films and supports the use of animated cinema as a medium for moral education.

Third, a study conducted by Defita Nabila Zahra, Yeny Prastiwi (2025) in her journal entitled "Semiotic Analysis of Moral Messages in Otto's Character From A Man Called Otto (2022) Movie", The study of the film A Man Called Otto directed by Marc Forster shows that movies function as an effective medium of communication to convey social and moral messages. This research applies a semiotic approach based on the theory of Roland Barthes to analyze denotative and connotative meanings reflected through characters, settings, dialogue, and symbols, with a primary focus on the main character, Otto. The method used is qualitative descriptive, where data are collected through direct observation of the film and supported by relevant scholarly sources. The findings reveal seven moral values represented by the main character, namely empathy, loyalty, caring, responsibility, honesty, heroism, and generosity. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how signs and symbols in films communicate messages within social and cultural contexts, making it a relevant reference for semiotic film analysis.

Fourth, a study by Mila Salsaby, Rubino (2023) entitled "A Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes" in the analyzed the moral values presented in the film Cinta Subuh by Ali Farighi, emphasizing the use of film as a medium for da'wah and moral education, particularly among teenagers. Using a descriptive qualitative method and Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, the study examined signs through the stages of denotation and connotation to uncover deeper meanings behind the film's content. The findings revealed a comprehensive categorization of moral values, including morals toward Allah (such as sincerity, repentance, and trust), toward oneself (such as patience and humility), toward fellow humans (such as honesty and kindness), and toward the environment (such as protecting nature and maintaining cleanliness). This study illustrates how films can serve as effective tools for communicating complex moral teachings, reinforcing the role of semiotics in uncovering layered messages embedded in visual storytelling. It also supports the relevance of analyzing films not only for entertainment value but as reflections of ethical and spiritual principles.

The last is a research by Triyani, Supriyanto (2024) entitled "A Semiotic Analysis Of Monster University Movie Using Barthes's Theory" a study on the animated film Monster University explored how moral messages are conveyed through the use of semiotic analysis, particularly focusing on the relationship between teachers and students. Utilizing Roland Barthes' semiotic theory through denotation and connotation alongside body language theories from Paul Ekman and Mark L. Knapp, the research analyzed verbal and non-verbal signs in key scenes of the film. The study employed a qualitative descriptive method and investigator triangulation to validate its findings. The results revealed both positive and negative portrayals of teacher-student interactions: ten data points showed oppressive communication, while six demonstrated appreciation and encouragement. The film subtly criticizes rigid educational stereotypes and emphasizes the importance of motivation, character development, and supportive teaching. This research highlights how animated films, even those featuring fantastical elements, can reflect real-world educational dynamics and serve as tools for moral

and character education. It further supports the effectiveness of semiotic analysis in uncovering the deeper meanings embedded in visual narratives.

The researcher found five previous studies related to this research, and previous studies tended to analyze moral values in animated films descriptively or through a character education approach. However, there is still little research that examines moral values in the animated film Luca (2021) using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, particularly at the levels of denotation and connotation. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by revealing the moral meanings embedded in the visual and verbal signs in the film Luca.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Etymologically, the term semiotics comes from the Greek word semeion, meaning "sign." Semiotics has a long history, beginning in Ancient Greece and continuing through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and into modern times. Its scope is broad and interdisciplinary, covering fields such as medicine, philosophy, linguistics, and other areas of study. Semiotics is the study of signs and how they are used to represent meaning. It is not limited to literary studies; almost all fields of knowledge can be analyzed using a semiotic approach. A sign can be defined as something that, based on shared social conventions, represents something else. In this sense, semiotics functions as a scientific method for analyzing meaning. Signs help humans understand the world and communicate with one another.

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory explains how meaning is constructed through signs in cultural texts such as films. A sign consists of a signifier (the physical form, such as an image, word, or gesture) and a signified (the concept or meaning it represents). Barthes proposes a two-level system of signification. The first level is denotation, which refers to the literal and explicit meaning of a sign. The second level is connotation, which refers to the associative, emotional, and cultural meanings attached to the sign. Through these two levels, Barthes provides a systematic framework for interpreting how films communicate moral messages and underlying ideologies.

A sign can be defined as anything that represents something beyond itself. Peirce's definition of a sign as "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect" remains influential, particularly in visual studies (Sobur, 2021). In contemporary film semiotics, signs are understood as meaning-bearing elements that guide audience interpretation through visual and auditory cues (Bateman et al., 2021).

METHODS

The data in this study were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method with a semiotic approach. This method was used to systematically interpret meanings embedded in verbal and visual signs found in the animated film Luca. The analysis was guided by the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes, which conceptualized meaning through two levels of signification, namely denotation and connotation (Barthes, 1977):

RESULTS

This study examines how moral values are represented in the animated film Luca (2021) through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Thomas Lickona's character education framework. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method, with selected scenes and dialogues as the main data. The analysis focuses on two levels of signification: denotation, or the literal meaning of what is shown and spoken, and connotation, or the deeper moral, emotional, cultural, and social meaning produced by those signs.

The findings identify 21 selected data points that represent seven moral values: honesty, empathy and kindness, moral courage, self-control, respect, responsibility, and cooperation.

These values are not presented as direct moral instruction; instead, they appear through character actions, facial expressions, dialogue, narrative conflicts, and interpersonal relationships. The film therefore communicates moral education through visual storytelling, allowing audiences to understand good character through concrete behavior rather than abstract explanation.

Table 1. Distribution of Moral Values Identified in Luca (2021)

Moral Value	Frequency	Representative Meaning
Empathy and Kindness	5	Helping, protecting, and giving support
Honesty	4	Truthfulness, confession, and self-disclosure
Moral Courage	4	Facing fear and defending what is right
Respect	4	Polite treatment and recognition of others
Responsibility	2	Accountability and care after consequences
Self-Control	1	Managing provocation and emotional response
Cooperation	1	Teamwork and shared commitment

Selected Visual Evidence

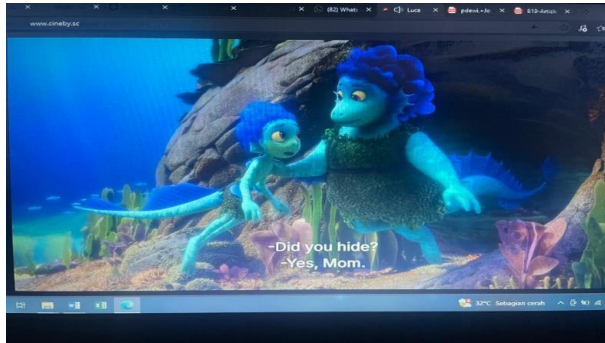


Figure 1. Honesty: Luca admits hiding from a boat,

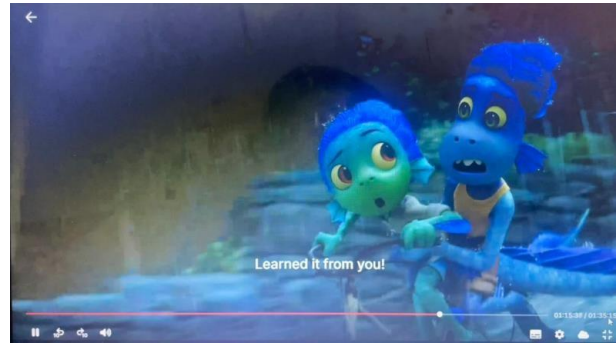


Figure 2 Moral courage: Luca runs through the rain to save Alberto.

Interpretation of the Findings

In the first category, honesty is represented through scenes where Luca and Alberto choose to reveal truth despite personal risk. At the denotative level, the audience sees characters giving factual answers, confessing desires, or revealing hidden identities. At the connotative level, these acts signify trust, integrity, self-acceptance, and the courage to be truthful. Honesty becomes a foundation for moral growth because the characters must confront fear, parental expectations, and social rejection before they can build authentic relationships.

Empathy and kindness appear as the most dominant values in the findings. Giulia's actions toward Luca and Alberto, such as rescuing them from bullying, offering shelter, sharing knowledge, and helping during the competition, show that kindness is expressed through direct assistance and emotional support. Semiotic analysis shows that these scenes carry meanings beyond simple help: they symbolize social acceptance, solidarity, and the moral duty to protect vulnerable others. This value is important because it opposes the prejudice directed at sea monsters in Portorosso.

Moral courage is strongly represented through Luca's struggle to overcome fear and defend his friend. Scenes such as the phrase "Silenzio, Bruno!," Luca's dangerous bicycle ride, Giulia's confrontation with Ercole, and Luca's decision to run through the rain to save Alberto reveal courage as both internal and social action. Denotatively, these are scenes of risk-taking

or confrontation. Connotatively, they reflect bravery, resistance to intimidation, and the willingness to act ethically even when the consequences may be dangerous.

The values of self-control, respect, responsibility, and cooperation complete the moral structure of the film. Self-control is shown when Giulia teaches the boys to ignore Ercole's provocation, suggesting that moral maturity requires emotional discipline. Respect appears through greetings, polite behavior, and recognition of others' dignity, including family members, sea creatures, and Massimo. Responsibility emerges when Luca accepts the consequences of exposing Alberto's identity and when Luca and Alberto check on Giulia after she is injured. Cooperation is shown when the characters agree to work together by using each person's strength, turning competition into a shared moral project.

Overall, the results show that Luca functions as an effective medium for character education. The film integrates moral values into character development and narrative conflict rather than presenting them as explicit lessons. Barthes' semiotic framework helps reveal how literal scenes become deeper moral signs, while Lickona's theory explains how the film connects moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Therefore, Luca can be used not only as entertainment but also as a meaningful tool for moral learning, discussion, and character building in educational contexts.

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the representation of moral values in the animated film Luca using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Thomas Lickona's character education theory. The analysis was conducted based on 21 selected data consisting of scenes and dialogues that represent moral values throughout the film. Each data was examined through two levels of meaning, namely denotation and connotation, and then classified according to Lickona's seven moral values: honesty, empathy and kindness, moral courage, self-control, respect, responsibility, and cooperation. Based on the findings, all seven moral values were consistently represented through the characters' actions, dialogues, and interactions. Among these values, empathy and kindness emerged as the most dominant, appearing in five data points. Honesty, moral courage, and respect were each identified in four data points, while responsibility appeared in two data points. Self-control and cooperation were each represented in one data point. These findings indicate that Luca communicates moral values not only through explicit messages but also through meaningful visual and verbal signs that reinforce the narrative.

The semiotic analysis further reveals that the moral values in Luca are conveyed indirectly through two levels of signification. At the denotative level, each scene and dialogue presents observable actions or events without conveying moral meaning by themselves. However, at the connotative level, these visual and verbal signs acquire deeper cultural, social, and emotional meanings that construct the moral values represented in the film.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Luca serves as an effective medium for character education by integrating moral values into its narrative, character development, and visual storytelling. Rather than presenting morality as abstract concepts, the film illustrates moral values through concrete behaviors and interpersonal relationships. These findings support Barthes' (1977) argument that cultural meanings are constructed through connotation, while also reinforcing Lickona's (1991) view that effective moral education develops moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action through meaningful narratives

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the moral values represented in the animated film Luca (2021) using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Thomas Lickona's character education theory. The findings show that the film contains seven moral values: honesty, empathy and kindness, moral courage,

self-control, respect, responsibility, and cooperation. These values are represented through scenes and dialogues performed by the main characters throughout the film.

Using Barthes' semiotic framework, the study found that the moral values are conveyed through two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation. At the denotative level, the scenes and dialogues present literal actions and conversations as directly observable signs. At the connotative level, the film communicates deeper emotional, cultural, and social meanings related to moral behavior, reflecting broader values about good character, friendship, courage, and acceptance.

The study also reveals that dialogue and visual scenes function as important semiotic signs in communicating moral values. Through its engaging story and characters, Luca can be considered a valuable medium for character education because it teaches positive moral lessons in an indirect and meaningful way.

However, this study is limited to selected scenes and dialogues and only focuses on semiotic analysis using Barthes' theory. Other aspects such as cinematography, color symbolism, music, and audience response were not analyzed and can be explored in future research.

LIMITATION

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher offers several suggestions. Future researchers are encouraged to analyze other animated films from different cultural backgrounds to gain broader insights into moral values in cinema. Further studies may also examine additional semiotic elements such as color symbolism, cinematography, lighting, and music to provide deeper analysis. In addition, educators may use animated films and semiotic analysis as teaching tools to support character education and moral learning in the classroom. This study is also expected to contribute to future research on semiotics, moral values, and animated films. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to use more recent and diverse references to strengthen the quality and depth of their research.

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