

## Conference Paper

# Afrofuturism in Black Panther Superhero Costume as Culture Sustainability Media (Charles Sanders Pierce Semiotic Analyst)

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### Abstract

*Black Panther* is a successful film with various awards and a large revenue. One factor that received attention from the global community was the hidden message contained in the film. The costuming in *Black Panther* was one of the most important message media. This study determines the various meanings contained in the costume using Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotics theory, which connects representamen, object and interpretant. Pierce's semiotics theory is classified as a communication semiotics theory, which communicates a thought with new thoughts. Semiosis in communication semiotics occurs continuously or in a rolling manner. Semiosis will be stopped if the researcher has found meaning. Communication semiotics is considered relevant to this research, because the Black Panther costume can be analyzed from various aspects, so the meaning found will be varied, unlimited and profound.

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to the stages of determining the problem, determining the type of data, determining the method of data collection, determining analysis techniques, and making conclusions. The data obtained were analyzed using Pierce's semiotic trichotomy table. Data analysis was also strengthened with relevant bibliography, so that contextual meaning was found.

The results of semiosis in this study indicate that the Black Panther costume represents the existence of the black race through physical form, color and symbols. The costume is a product of the afrofuturism movement, a movement that aims to campaign for African culture. The Black Panther costume represents that Africa has a rich and competitive culture. Through the Black Panther character, black people are imaged as a virtuous, civilized, advanced, intellectual, artistic and warrior-spirited nation. The image is an attempt to sensitize the public about human rights equality and tolerance between groups.

**Keywords:** Black Panther, Kostum, Semiotika, Afrofuturisme.

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## 1. Introduction

Film is one of the audio-visual mass media that can act as the dissemination of cultural values. Film as a work of art was born from a creative process that demands freedom of creativity

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The film titled Black Panther is one type of story film produced in 2018. The film produced by American Marvel Studio has managed to become the highest-income film in the world throughout 2018. The Black Panther film also received many awards from various institutions.

The film tells of King T'Challa as Black Panther who is also the leader of Wakanda, a hidden country in the African continent. A few days after he ascended the throne, he found that there was one from among the royal family who wanted to usurp the throne namely Killmonger. Killmonger has the ambition to start a war to rule the world using all the technological advancements that Wakanda has. He had a thought that it was time for the black race to occupy the world and avenge the atrocities against the black people in ancient times. This feud between King T'Challa and Killmonger started the conflict in the film.

Black Panther is the first film adapted from Marvel comics with Negroes as the main character. Broadly speaking, this film science fiction genre contains various messages. According to various media, one of the main messages to be shown in this film is the existence of black race people. In a big country like America, a group that is considered different is people dark skin. These black people came to America from Africa to become slaves. Blacks or negroes often get discriminatory treatment.

Other minorities such as Hispanic and Asian also often get racism. In the American media, the appearance of black groups in films gave rise to many studies that looked at the phenomenon of their roles and characters in films. One example in a film study conducted by USC's Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative found that among 600 popular films, only 25.9% of the dialogue characters were from minority groups. The minority is even less represented in the main role. Only 15.5% of the 1,070 films released from 2004 to 2013 featured minority actors in leading roles (Kaden, 2015: 35).

Black Panther is one of the most successful films globally, with most of the characters being played by niggers. As mentioned before, this film managed to get a large profit and won various prestigious awards.

Black Panther costume is one of the factors that makes the Black Panther movie popular. This can be proven by the Black Panther winning the best costume design at the Oscar award, one of the awards for the world's most prestigious film industry. Reporting from Time magazine in an article entitled The Revolutionary Power of Black Panther, the Black Panther character is able to give pride to the black race community who watch this film because they feel their capabilities are well represented. Black Panther has also become viral on various social media platforms with the #blackpanther hashtag recorded more than 35 million tweets as of March 2018. The impact produced

by the film *Black Panther* on minority races makes writers who are also a minority race interested in finding the meaning contained in this film. The minority context in this study refers to the US population census as a country producing *Black Panther* Films. Based on the United States Census Bureau website, the percentage of black race is 13.4% and the Asian race is 5.8% of the total population recorded 327,167,434 people as of 2010. The race that occupies the highest number is the white race or Caucasians which is 60.7%. For this reason, the author feels represented by the film *Black Panther* because the writer assumes that this film not only represents the black race but also other minority races. The costume was chosen as the object of semiotic research, because the costume has a strong relationship with the *Black Panther* figure. The author assumes that the *Black Panther* costume is one of the campaign tools used to represent black culture.

Visually, the *Black Panther* costume can be analyzed in terms of color, shape, style and texture. The analytical theory used in this research is Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics theory. According to Peirce the sign and meaning is a cognitive process called semiosis. This process of semiosis consists of three stages.

The first stage is the perception of the representament aspect of the sign through the five senses. The second stage is to associate spontaneously the representament with the experience of the cognition of the interpreter. This aspect of cognition is called an object. The last stage is interpreting the object as desired, and this stage is called interpretant. It does not stop there, interpretants can become new representatives to find the next object and interpretant. The process can be repeated according to the wishes of the researcher. This process of sustainability by Peirce is called as unlimited semiosis. Peirce's semiotics theory is classified as pragmatic semiotics because it starts with a concrete thing, therefore the *Black Panther* costume can be analyzed its visual form first then continued with a deeper interpretation. Peirce's semiotics theory also belongs to the semiotics theory of communication, which communicates a thought with a new thought. In communication semiotics, the process of semiosis occurs continuously or rolling. The semiosis process will stop if the researcher feels satisfied or sufficient with the results of the semiosis. With this method, the *Black Panther* costume can be analyzed from various aspects and the meaning found will be varied, unlimited and profound.

## 2. Method

The study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975, in Moleong, 2007) states that qualitative research methods are research procedures that produce descriptive data in the form of written words from people and behaviors that can be observed.

The basic assumption of semiotics is the study of signs, where in the meaning of each person will vary according to culture, experience, etc. Therefore, semiotics as a method of interpreting signs has subjective characteristics. Thus, semiotic analysis would be more appropriate using a qualitative approach because qualitative research methods are subjective so that the research is the researchers themselves

The research is carried out with systematic stages starting from determining the problem until the research results are obtained. This study uses the stages of semiotic research compiled by Christomy (2001b) in Sobur (2012: 154), as follows:

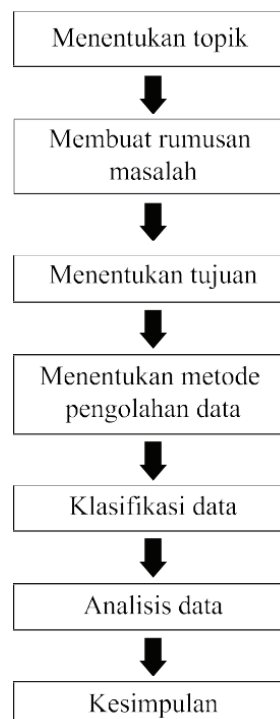


Figure 1: Semiotic Analysis Method

## 3. Results

The Black Panther film is a film that had great success. This can be proven by the amount of income and various awards obtained. One factor that received attention from

the global community was the technologies found in the film. In this film technology is the main attraction for the audience. That is because the technologies in the film are so sophisticated.

The Black Panther costume is a product of Wakanda technology that has caught the public's attention. Black Panther costume designs adapt the embodiment of the Black Panther beast. Forms of adaptation that can be identified are the black color of the costume, the shape of pointed ears and claws on the hands and feet. These elements give direct meaning that the superhero Black Panther has a strong relationship with the Black Panther beast. In addition, these elements have an implied meaning that represents the abilities and advantages possessed by T'Challa as Black Panther. Pointy ears have the meaning of the sharpness of T'Challa's senses and instincts, so that he becomes a person who is responsive and dynamic. Claws on the hands and feet are weapons that the Black Panther uses in combat. The claws give meaning that the Black Panther is a frightening hero, because he fights like a Black Panther. Another characteristic of the Black Panther costume is its tight shape so it shows the fit and muscular shape of T'Challa's body. This gives the meaning that T'Challa is a figure of a mighty man who is able to protect his people.



**Figure 2:** Black Panther Costume

The Black Panther costume is used by T'Challa when he needs it. When he doesn't need a costume, he keeps the costume in the necklace he always wore. All parts



**Figure 3:** Panthera Pardus Melas / Black Panther

of the costume can be stored on a small necklace because of the nanotechnology developed by Shuri. T'Challa's necklace is shaped like an animal's teeth. In African culture, the necklace has a philosophical meaning that indicates the user's social status. For T'Challa, the necklace marks T'Challa's status as Wakanda leader.

The Black Panther costume is not only unique from its physical appearance. Black Panther costume has an advanced function that is not shared by other superhero characters in the Marvel world. The function is the ability to store energy from the attacks received and then shoot them back. This technology can be developed thanks to costume material, namely vibranium which can store vibrational energy.

This ability gives meaning that the Black Panther is a superhero who has the most advanced technology compared to other superheroes. This technology also represents the ability possessed by the skin with high levels of pigment, which is able to protect the body from the sun's radiation and convert it into substances useful for the body.

**Figure 4:** Kostum Black Panther mampu mengubah energi dari serangan yang diterima

Another characteristic contained in the Black Panther costume is the presence of symbols originating from African culture. These symbols are the symbols of Adinkra and Nsibidi. Adinkra are visual symbols created by the Ashanti tribe who came from Ghana. In the Black Panther costume, there are 4 symbols of Adinkra namely (1) Nea Ope Se Abidi Nehe which means, "He who wants to be king" has the meaning of leader and service. (2) Nea Onnim no Sua A Ohu which means "He who does not know comes to know by learning", has the meaning of knowledge and intellect. (3) Nkiyimu which means "to play" has an initiative and dynamic meaning. (4) Epa which means "handcuff" has the meaning of law and justice. These four symbols represent the characteristics of the Black Panther. He is an intellectual leader who is ready to uphold the law and protect his people with all his abilities.

Another symbol found on the costume is the Nsibidi symbol. Nsibidis are symbols used in the authorship system. The Nsibidi writing system is the same as the use of

pictograms. Nsibidi is widely used by the Nigerian people. In this study, only one Nsibidi symbol was analyzed. The symbol is a triangle symbol found on almost the entire surface of the costume so that it forms a pattern. The triangular pattern in Nsibidi has the meaning of leopard skin or in the Indonesian language leopard skin. As described above, the Black Panther is a superhero who adapts the appearance of a leopard in terms of physical form, fighting style and so on. In the Black Panther costume, leopard skin which in its original form is irregularly shaped, represented by a symbol of the Nsibidi triangle pattern. It aims to strengthen the value of African culture and add aesthetic value.



**Figure 5:** Adinkra and Nsibidi Symbols

## 4. Conclusion

The results of the semiosis in this study, showed that the Black Panther costume truly represented the existence of the black race. This film tries to give a new perception to the world, that the black race is a great race. Black Panther film itself is one of Afrofuturism products. Afrofuturism movement that collaborates elements of African culture with the development of modern science and technology, successfully represented in the Black Panther costume. Therefore, it can be said that the film Black Panther is a successful campaign as a media representation of the existence of black people.

The Afrofuturim Movement basically aims to campaign for African culture or black racial culture. The campaign value, is that Africa has a rich culture. African culture has competitiveness with other national cultures. Through the Black Panther, black



people were imaged as a virtuous, civilized, advanced, intellectual, artistic and warrior spirit nation. It aims to change the negative stereotypes about black people who are considered to be lagging behind. Therefore, it is not fitting that the events of oppression (racism) against black people still occur.

The final interpretant found in this study, relates the signs found in the Black Panther costume to Human Rights (HAM). Through various signs, the Black Panther costume provides a variety of positive representations about the physical characteristics, nature to the potential possessed by blacks / negroes. Basically, all human races in the world have the same potential to develop. Of the various races, no one is superior because everyone has the same potential. Everyone has the right to get the same treatment in the community. Black Panther costume deliver a message to the audience about the importance of upholding tolerance.

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