

Analysis of Visual Representation of the Character in the Animated Film Jumbo

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Abstract

The development of a child's character is influenced not only by family and society but also by the media they consume. As one of the most popular Indonesian animated films this year, reaching 10 million viewers, Jumbo serves as a significant cultural reference. This research aims to explain the visual representation of Indonesian children through the film's characters and to identify the social values conveyed within the narrative. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method. To achieve a deep understanding of the visual and narrative layers, the researcher utilizes Roland Barthes' Semiotics to deconstruct the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings of the character designs. Furthermore, Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation is applied to examine how these characters reflect the social identity and cultural reality of Indonesian children. The findings reveal that the visual design of each character meticulously represents the physical and stylistic reality of Indonesian children, specifically evoking the nostalgia and characteristics of the 2000s era. Beyond aesthetics, the storytelling in Jumbo serves as a vehicle for essential social values. The analysis identifies key themes such as solidarity, loyalty, empathy, tolerance, cooperation, and mutual assistance (gotong royong). Jumbo is not merely entertainment but a cultural artifact that mirrors the social attitudes and visual identity of Indonesian children, providing a relatable and value-driven viewing experience that contributes to character building.

Keywords: *Visual Representation, Semiotics, Social Values, Indonesian Children.*

INTRODUCTION

The family serves as the primary and closest social environment, playing a vital role in an individual's development, particularly in children. It functions as the initial foundation where children begin to recognize values, norms, and behavioral patterns that ultimately shape their character and personality (Astiti et al., 2025). The formation of a child's character originates within the family and serves as their social capital when interacting with the broader community (Handayani, 2016: 63).

Society and the surrounding environment also play a significant role in character building by providing positive role models. Through active community engagement, children can develop social skills, empathy, and environmental awareness (Rahayu et al., 2023). Early childhood is characterized by a high capacity for learning and a remarkable tendency to imitate. This period is a potential "golden age" for character formation, ensuring that these traits endure and become a lifelong identity (Aulia et al., 2022).

Character building can occur at home, in the neighborhood, or through the media children consume. In the current era, significant advancements in the creative industry, particularly in animation, have shifted the perception of cartoons. Animation is no longer viewed merely as entertainment for children; it has evolved into a medium for learning and visual communication capable of conveying influential messages and social values.

Research on Walt Disney's *Luca* by Vanda Kristanti and Ira Maisarah (2023) demonstrates that animated films carry values suitable for educational purposes. *Luca* is deemed appropriate for elementary school students as it contains values such as cooperation, persistence, mutual assistance, and deliberation. However, children still require guidance from teachers and parents to fully internalize these values. Similarly, research on Disney's *Wish* (2025) by Via Apriliani indicates that the protagonist, Asha, serves as a role model embodying strength, persistence, cooperation, and empathy. Thus, films like *Wish* act as effective character education tools for children and adolescents.

In Indonesia, the animation industry has shown positive growth over the last decade. This is supported by research on the popular Indonesian series *Adit Sopo Jarwo*, where Dody Ginanjar (2020) found that the animation significantly influences children's character building and social values. These studies conclude that modern animation functions as more than just entertainment; it is a vital medium for instilling social values.

Currently, many cartoons serve as beneficial viewing for early childhood, combining entertainment with education. One such film is the animation *Jumbo* (2025) by Visinema Studio, which marks a significant milestone in Indonesian animation. *Jumbo* tells the story of Don, a 10-year-old boy with a large physique who is often underestimated by his peers. Throughout the story, Don strives to prove himself through a performing arts showcase, navigating conflicts with peers and embarking on a fantastic adventure with his best friend. The film presents various compelling visuals for analysis, ranging from the representation of Indonesian children to social values such as self-acceptance, bravery, friendship, *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), and self-confidence (Yulianto et al., 2025).

Jumbo has successfully captured public attention, reaching over 10 million viewers and becoming the highest-grossing Indonesian animated film of all time (Yonatan, 2025). This achievement demonstrates that local animation is widely accepted and possesses great potential to convey cultural representations and values relevant to Indonesian society.

This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive method, employing Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis and Stuart Hall's theory of representation. Through these approaches, *Jumbo* will be analyzed to examine the visual representation of Indonesian children and the values embedded within the film. Given its monumental achievements, *Jumbo* serves as a highly relevant research object. It is expected that this analysis will provide a valuable reference for Indonesian animators in creating future animated works.

METHOD

A research method is a scientific approach to obtaining data for specific purposes and applications (Sugiyono, 2019: 2). Scientific methods are closely related to the procedures, techniques, tools, and research designs employed. Generally, research methods are categorized into two types: qualitative and quantitative. The method utilized in this study is descriptive qualitative. Qualitative research involves research procedures that produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observable behaviors. Thus, a descriptive qualitative study is defined as an approach to behavior, phenomena, events, issues, or specific circumstances serving as the object of investigation, where the findings are presented as meaningful descriptive sentences that explain a particular understanding (Leksono, 2013).

Bogdan and Biklen (1998: 6) argue that:

"In qualitative research, nothing is trivial; every piece of information, no matter how small, can serve as a vital clue to understanding the phenomenon under study. The researcher must constantly question minor details within the environment because no assumptions are taken for granted, and all statements must be critically analyzed. Descriptive qualitative research serves as an effective data collection method if every element is observed thoroughly and meticulously."

This aligns with Moleong (2017), who states that: "qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspective, focusing on their meanings, experiences, and views" (p. 6). Accordingly, the researcher deems this approach suitable for analyzing the character representations and values found in the animated film Jumbo.

The approach used in this research employs Roland Barthes' Semiotics as the primary theory and Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation as the supporting theory. In this study, Semiotics will be used to analyze visual signs within the research object, namely the animated film Jumbo. According to Roland Barthes, the visual semiotic method is divided into three layers: denotation, connotation, and myth. Consequently, the visual character analysis in Jumbo will be examined through these three dimensions of meaning.

Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation will be applied to examine the representation of Indonesian children through the characters in the film and to identify the values conveyed within the narrative.

This research will conduct a visual analysis through Roland Barthes' semiotics, followed by an analysis of the representation of Indonesian children's characters and values. Through these approaches, the researcher can analyze the film Jumbo to ensure that the elements within the animation are not only aesthetically pleasing but also meaningful, communicative, and effective in conveying values.

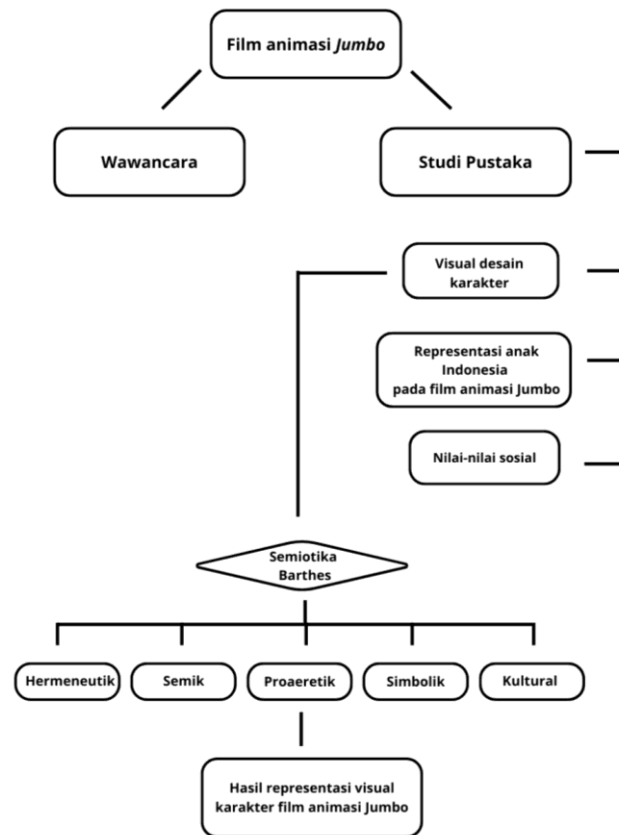


Figure 1. Design Method
(Source: Gabriela Krisanti, 2025s)

A framework of thought is a logical and systematic flow of reasoning, spanning from the research problem to the eventual problem-solving achieved through research activities (Sugiyono, 2017). Thus, a framework of thought effectively explains the relationship between the research problem, theory, data, and the direction of the solution or the design to be implemented in a study.

In this research, the subjects of study are the character designs and the social values within the animated film *Jumbo* produced by Visinema Studio (2025). Data will be obtained through interviews and literature reviews.

Esterberg (2002) defines an interview as a meeting between two people to exchange information and ideas through questions and answers, allowing the results to be processed and constructed into a specific topic. Meanwhile, a literature review is a series of activities related to the methods of collecting library data, reading, note-taking, and processing research materials without having to go directly into the field (Mestika, 2014).

In this study, a literature review is conducted to obtain data regarding the visual designs of the characters in the animated film *Jumbo*. These designs will then be analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotics to examine the representation of Indonesian children and the social values embedded in the film.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After examining the characters of Don, Meri, Atta, and Pak Kades, as well as analyzing key scenes in the animated film *Jumbo*, the researcher synthesized these findings into a final analysis. The results are as follows:

a. The Character of Don



Figure 2. Don
(Source: Youtube Visinema Picture, 2025)

Don is a 10-year-old boy characterized by his short and stout physique, which often leads to him being underestimated by his peers. This is evidenced in the opening scenes (08:32–09:32), where his friends refuse to let him join their baseball game. Even when Don retrieves the ball and asks to play, they reject him using the excuse of playing football instead, claiming their team is full despite lacking members. When questioned, they admit they fear losing if Don joins, viewing him as clumsy and unskillful.

Furthermore, Don is portrayed as highly imaginative and deeply protective of a book left by his late parents; he yearns for his stories to be heard. However, Don lacks self-awareness regarding his own inability to listen to others. This trait is symbolically represented in his character design: unlike his friends, Don is designed without ear canals. This visual semiotic is reinforced by a dialogue between Don, Mae, and Nurman (01:01:33–01:01:54). While his friends' words initially sadden him, his grandmother (Oma) provides support and advice, leading Don to realize that he must learn to listen to those around him.

Don represents a child with a vivid imagination who desires attention but struggles with social receptivity and physical insecurity. Despite these flaws, his journey highlights positive traits such as empathy, humility, forgiveness, and the capacity for self-introspection and personal growth.

b. The Character of Meri



Figure 2. Meri
(Source: Youtube Visinema Picture, 2025)

Meri is an entity invisible to most people, as established in the scene at (24:31–24:59). Her character design

features a transparent body enveloped in a glow and the ability to fly. She wears a purple nightgown reminiscent of 1940s European fashion. Her wavy brown hair further indicates non-Indonesian ancestry. Notably, she wears a jasmine necklace; jasmine was chosen because it signifies two major life transitions in Indonesian culture: marriage and death. In this context, the jasmine symbolizes the death of Meri and her family.

Meri is portrayed as a supernatural being with a kind heart. She is helpful, friendly, and deeply cares for her friends. This is demonstrated through several key scenes: retrieving Don's fairytale book (29:42–31:42), helping Don and his friends win a competition to fund their arts showcase (37:46–41:11), and assisting them during the final performance (44:21–48:21).

c. The Character of Atta



Figure 3. Atta

(Source: Youtube Visinema Picture, 2025)

Atta is initially presented as active, athletic, dominant, and confident, serving as a foil to Don. His design, tall with a scarred eyebrow and confident poses, communicates dominance. In early interactions, Atta frequently teases Don by calling him "Jumbo," mocking his physical differences.

However, Atta is not the antagonist but rather an "in-between" character who undergoes significant development. This shift occurs at (01:06:38), when Atta visits Don's house to honestly express his feelings. Following this conversation, they reconcile and collaborate to save Meri and Abang Acil.

Atta possesses emotional depth, visually represented by his predominantly green, layered clothing, which symbolizes his complex layers of emotion. He is ultimately depicted as a hardworking, courageous, and loyal friend who is brave enough to apologize and care for his family.

d. The Character of Pak Kades (The Village Head)



Figure 3. Pak Kades

(Source: Youtube Visinema Picture, 2025)

Pak Kades is initially portrayed as an authoritative, wise, and nurturing leader. His physical design, a tall, large build with a thick mustache, symbolizes maturity and emotional stability. His predominantly yellow clothing represents ambition and hope.

However, his true nature is revealed later in the film. He harbors a hidden ambition to destroy Meri's family grave to make way for an overpass project. His motivation stems from deep-seated trauma; his own wife's grave was previously demolished for a similar project. He believes that others should experience the same injustice and pain he felt. This backstory is explained in detail during the scene at (53:11–54:15), revealing the tragic motivation behind his actions.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to determine the visual representation of Indonesian children through the characters in the animated film *Jumbo* and to identify the social values conveyed within the film. The visual design analysis of the characters is conducted using Roland Barthes' Semiotics, specifically examining five codes: the hermeneutic code, semic code, proairetic code, symbolic code, and cultural code. These codes serve as the framework for analyzing the visual designs of Don, Meri, Atta, and Pak Kades. Additionally, Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation is employed to analyze the social values intended to be conveyed by the film.

The data obtained through Barthes' semiotic analysis reveals that the child characters in *Jumbo* represent Indonesian children, while the adult characters represent the adult population in Indonesia. The conclusions for the four analyzed characters are as follows:

1. The Character of Don Visually, Don is a 10-year-old boy with a physical stature that differs from his peers. He has a wide face, a short and stout body, a "*jambul*" (quiff) hairstyle, and wears a red cloth around his neck. Most of his clothing features horizontal stripes, and notably, his character design lacks ear canals. This design serves as a representation of an Indonesian child who is absorbed in his own world, one who struggles to listen and only wishes to be heard. It also represents children who are often marginalized or isolated simply because they are perceived as different.
2. The Character of Meri Meri is depicted as a supernatural being, indicated by her transparent visual design and a purple glow surrounding her body. She is a young girl with a gentle appearance, brown hair, a purple dress, and a jasmine (*melati*) necklace that she always wears. Meri represents minority groups or children in Indonesia. The choice of jasmine signifies the film's message that this flower is deeply connected to two vital life aspects: marriage and death.
3. The Character of Atta Atta is a boy of Don's age with a starkly different physique. He is tall and slender, with thick eyebrows, notably a scar on his left eyebrow and a bowl-cut hairstyle. Atta's design represents Indonesian children who are active, confident, playful, adventurous, and slightly mischievous.
4. The Character of Pak Kades (The Village Head) The design of Pak Kades depicts a middle-aged man with a tall, large, and sturdy build. He has a thick mustache and is characterized by neat hair and clothing. His visual design represents a figure who appears nurturing and helpful, possessing both status and power, and living a prosperous life.

Furthermore, this study examines *Jumbo* through Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation to identify social values beneficial for character building. Based on the analysis of visual scenes, setting, music, and narrative, it is concluded that *Jumbo* is a film that provides a profound cultural reflection of the identity of Indonesian children. The research indicates that *Jumbo* emphasizes social values such as solidarity, tolerance, persistence, cooperation, empathy, humility, and self-acceptance as the primary foundations of social interaction. Through character dynamics such as Don's experience with rejection and his eventual reconciliation with Atta. The narrative conveys that physical differences and diverse backgrounds are not obstacles to building harmonious relationships. The use of local settings and emotional musical scores further reinforces the message that a child's strength of character grows through family and community support.

The final results demonstrate that the visual character representations in *Jumbo* serve more than just an aesthetic purpose; they act as a "memory bridge" connecting the audience to the reality of Indonesian children in the 2000s era. By incorporating authentic local elements, the film creates a nostalgic space that strengthens the social messages intended for a modern audience. In conclusion, through meaningful visual design and emotional storytelling, *Jumbo* proves the capacity of local animation as an effective medium for character education. The film transcends mere entertainment to become a cultural reflection that honestly portrays the social reality of Indonesian children. The success of *Jumbo* in representing and conveying Indonesian social values provides a new reference for the creative industry specifically for Indonesian animators showing that content rooted in local values possesses significant appeal and a powerful influence on the character development of the nation's next generation.

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List of Resource Persons/Informants

Dermawan Syamsuddin, Deputy of Education & Human Resource Development at AINAKI (Asosiasi Industri Animasi Indonesia), interview on 30 Oktober 2025 through zoom meeting, Surakarta, Solo