

REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE IN *LEAGUE OF LEGENDS (WILD RIFT)* VIDEO GAMES CHARACTERS: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTARCT

This research analyzes how females are represented in the popular online game League of Legends (Wild Rift). This research is interesting because League of Legends (Wild Rift) is one of the most popular and widely played online multiplayer games globally with more than 48 million downloads in the Play Store, holding substantial influence within the gaming community. Using semiotics, this research aims to find how female representation is depicted in League of Legends (Wild Rift) characters. Previous research has shown that women are often placed as side characters and tend to be represented with negative stereotypes created by game developers. In this war-themed game, two female characters, Miss Fortune and Ahri, are chosen as objects who are designed based on various references, including women. The researcher used qualitative methods and Roland Barthes' semiotic model in this study, viewing League of Legends (Wild Rift) characters as signs and texts that can be analyzed to understand the representation of women. The results showed that women are represented with a high level of sensuality, characterized by an unattainable ideal body shape and revealing clothing. However, women are also portrayed as capable of doing things usually associated with men, such as leadership and expertise in combat.

Keywords: Semiotics, Online Game, League of Legends (Wild Rift), Gender, Representation

I. INTRODUCTION

Video games are a form of entertainment media, but as time has progressed, they have been created to convey the game creator's message to players about their thoughts. Nowadays video games contain the thoughts of their creators, which can take the form of propaganda, historical narratives, and ideologies. This message is expressed in video games through stories and characters that represent something (Kumoro, 2017). Furthermore, according to Faulkner & Lie (2007) in (Prescott, 2014, p. 99). video games designers who are usually young or middle-aged men when designing for girls/women they tend to build on stereotypical females or females they view aesthetically pleasing.

Female Representation

The presence of female in the media such as video games has created specific images of female, and the media's role in shaping the general perception of female is significant, often resulting in various stereotypes. Female characters in video games are portrayed as supplementary elements or to pique the players' interest, female characters are frequently depicted with large breasts and wearing tight or revealing clothing, emphasizing their body forms in a sensual way (Kumoro, 2017).

Due to this issue, research on female character representation has been conducted by Kondrat (2015) undertook an analysis of female gender representation across various video game genres by surveying both game players and professionals in game design. Similarly, Fisher (2015) investigated the representation of women in six video game magazines. Furthermore, Ginting, Zein, and Perangin-Angin (2022) conducted a comprehensive analysis of female characters, Ellie and Abby, within the game 'The Last of Us Part II. Based on the previous research, there are several differences with this research, this research focused on League of Legends (Wild Rift), a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game and This research specifically employs Roland Barthes's semiotic theory focusing on denotation, connotation, and myth that are associated with the representation of females.

Semiotics

Semiotics plays a crucial role in understanding the messages conveyed within video games, encompassing both visual and verbal signs. Semiotics is the study of signs and how they carry specific meanings. According to (Seiter, 1992, p. 31) it encompasses a wide range of elements that can be translated into language, including images, traffic signs, letters, flowers, music, medical symptoms, and more. Roland Barthes, a renowned figure in semiotics, is often associated with both structuralist and post-structuralist approaches, following in the footsteps of Saussure. His semiotic theory, referred to as signification theory, relies on two significant processes to generate denotative and connotative meanings.

Denotation is the straightforward, literal meaning of a sign, such as a visual image, which is universally understood without considering cultural, ideological, or societal influences. (Bouzida, 2014, p. 1005). On the other hand, connotation involves a more complex system that adds extra layers of meaning to the initial sign. It utilizes the first sign (signifier and signified) as its basis and attaches additional meanings or signified concepts to it. (Seiter, 1992, p. 39). According to (Barthes, 1972, p. 107) the terms of myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. What defines myth is not the content of its message but the way it delivers that message.

The researcher has selected League of Legends (Wild Rift) a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) game released in 2020 by Riot Games as the object of this research for being popular free-to-play game has been installed on more than 48 million smartphones worldwide (Nur Sabilly et.al, 2023), it holds substantial influence within the gaming community. The representations of female characters in video games have significant implications, contributing to the shaping of societal perceptions and stereotypes about female. Video games, including League of Legends (Wild Rift), often depict female characters in ways that reinforce traditional gender norms, emphasizing physical appearance.

II. METHOD

The method of this research is qualitative. The qualitative design primarily centers on gathering data, analyzing it, and presenting the findings in alignment with the research process. The main data for this research are 14 screenshot pictures and 14 sentences from skin descriptions or the costume variants of the female characters. These data were collected from the game itself League of Legends (Wild Rift). Book and journal article also chosen as supporting data of this research.

In collecting the data, the researcher first chooses the game League of Legends (Wild Rift) as the main source of data. Next researcher played the game, and choosing two characters with the most skin, then taking screenshot to get the visual data, and taking note for verbal data from the skin descriptions in form of phrase or sentence. Then researcher taking the data sample includes verbal and visual data from those recorded play.

In analyzing the data, the researcher uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to help understand the meaning of the sign, which is divided into denotation, connotation, and myth. The researcher first compiled pictures and the skins description of the two female characters into a table for analyzing, next each visual and verbal sign associated with the female characters is individually analyzed for Denotation and Connotation. And then, analyzing the myths of each data by describing the cultural aspects that show the representation of women.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As to Roland Barthes, the system of signification is the process by which meaning is created by the signifier and signified as the inseparable component of the sign (Chandler, 2017, p. 14). The semiotic idea of Roland Barthes examines the relationship between signs and cultural values in addition to the meaning of the signals. After analyzing the data, the researcher found two categories: 1) Negative representation and 2) Positive representation and two categories of myths that is 1) Female sensuality as a marketing tool, 2) Women empowerment.

Denotation and Connotation

Denotation is commonly defined as a sign's definitional, literal, obvious, elementary, or commonsense meaning, while Connotation often refers to personal associations for individuals

1. Negative Representation

Negative representation or stereotypes where females often being represented using gender stereotypes for examples, women are overly emotional, irrational, and incompetent, whereas female are hot tempered, and lack empathy. If these negative expectations are applied to all female, this grossly exaggerates the gender expectations of female.

a. *“Curvy” is the ideal body type*



Figure 1. Pop Star Ahri


Connotation		
Signifier		Signified
Denotation		
Signifier	Signified	A "curvy" body is the standard body that women desire
	Ahri is wearing a K-pop idol-like outfit that looks tight showing her curvy body, on stage walking gracefully.	

Table 1. Data 1

In Denotation steps the visual data shows Ahri wearing a K-pop idol like outfit that looks tight that accentuated her curvy body, while she was walking on the middle of stages. This has meaning, that. Ahri who has curvy body became a famous idol.

The connotation of the visual data has meaning "curvy" body is the standard body that women desire especially if they want to become an idol or becoming famous should be having curvy body. This sign describes the ideal body for women. Women especially if they want to become a famous model or artist must have a curvy or slim body type. Curvy bodies are often associated with idols or artists so it gives an idea if you want to become a famous model or artist you must have a curvy or slim body type.

b. *Women are temperamental*

Verbal Data: "Miss Fortune is a hot-headed Star Guardian Gunslinger"

Connotation		
Signifier		Signified
Denotation		
Signifier	Signified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are uncontrollable • Women are <u>Temptamental</u>
"Miss Fortune is a hot-headed Star Guardian Gunslinger"	Miss Fortune is an emotional character	

Table 2. Data 2

At the first level of denotation, the description of Miss Fortune's Star Guardian skin characterizes her as a "hot-headed star guarding gunslinger." According to Cambridge hot-headed means doing things or reacting to things quickly and without thinking carefully first. So, this verbal data portrays Miss Fortune as a woman who is quick to anger and exhibits a fiery temperament.

And the connotation has a meaning that women are temperamental, meaning they are uncontrollable or prone to emotional outbursts, has deep roots in historical gender stereotypes and societal perceptions. Throughout history, women have been portrayed as more emotional or volatile compared to men, contributing to the perception that they are inherently less stable or predictable in their behavior.

2. Positive Representation

Gender stereotypes can be positive in that they bestow positive qualities on a particular gender group, for example, that female are warm, friendly, caring, competent, and assertive, these positive stereotypes suggest that all female should have these respective qualities.

a. *Friendly and embracing leader*

Verbal Data: “Ahri is poised to guide these divas to even greater heights....”

Connotation		
Signifier		Signified
Denotation		friendly and embracing leader
Signifier	Signified	
“Ahri is poised to guide these divas to even greater heights....”	Ahri guides her friends to become more famous	

Table 3. Data 3

The verbal data above is taken from the description of Ahri's K/DA All out skin, based on the verbal above, the denotation meaning obtained is ahri as a leader who guides his friends so that they can become more famous, it can be seen from the term "guide", this suggests her leadership position, where she not only navigates their journey but also provides direction and support. Ahri's commitment to guiding her friends to fame signifies her recognition and nurturing of their potential, highlighting her selflessness and dedication to their collective success.

In connotation step the representation of Ahri as a leader who challenges traditional gender roles carries very strong connotations. In many cultures, leadership roles are often associated with masculinity and men related work while women were often positioned as objects or support for male characters, rarely given leading or powerful roles. This representation shows that women are capable of taking an equally important role in leading and shaping the direction of a group or community. In addition, Ahri's emphasis on support and friendship reinforces the idea that women's strength lies not only in individual success, but also in their ability to build strong and supportive relationships with others.

b. *A Brave Superhero*



Figure 2. Star Guardian Ahri

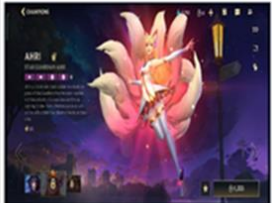
Connotation		
Signifier		Signified
Denotation		A strong and brave superhero
Signifier	Signified	
	Ahri, wearing a sailor moon-like outfit with a revealing dress that does not cover her armpits, is seen doing a jumping style.	

Table 4. Data 4

In denotation step the visual data depicts her wearing an outfit that resembles Sailor Moon and striking a posture suggestive of a superhero. This depiction of Ahri wearing her attire was employed at the denotation stage of analysis.

The connotation of this visual data suggests that women are depicted as brave superheroes. This challenges the traditional patriarchal notion that women are incapable without the presence of a man. Ahri's Star Guardian skin visually portrays her as a strong superhero, subverting gender norms and empowering women. Ahri is depicted dressed as Sailor Moon, a character from a Japanese manga and anime series where teenage girls are the primary superheroes and central characters. Ahri's portrayal as a brave superhero in her Star Guardian skin serves as a compelling example of how visual representations can challenge and subvert traditional gender roles, also empowering women.

Myth

Myth is the second-order meaning of the signified. In Roland Barthes' concept, myth is the same as connotation, which is on the second order of signification (Chandler, 2017, p. 172). If the denotative sign became the signifier of connotation, in myth, the denotative sign became the signified of myth (Fiske, 2011, p. 83). And in the signifier of myth, a myth will be formed that refers to worldviews of ideas that are false.

a. Female sensuality as a marketing tool

One of the myths that depicted from all the visual and verbal data that collected from Ahri and Miss Fortune skins is women sensuality. Female characters in League of Legends (Wild Rift) are presented through a sexualization process. In the two characters Ahri, Miss fortune and the skins analyzed present the meaning of sexuality, this is also aimed at the players, this sexual exploitation also occurs through the bounce effect and only affects female characters. The effect makes the female character's breasts bounce during movement and physical contact. This effect only gives a realistic impression of combat and does not affect male characters.

The sexualization of women that occurs in reality is not merely represented in the form of a body that fulfills desire, but also has selling value. Even without the presence of visuals, female voices can be used to attract audiences, as exemplified by Seno (2013) on the sensuality of female voices in radio commercial advertisements. In League of legends (Wild Rift), the sexualization of female voices can be found when female characters sigh every time they are killed by other characters in battle. In contrast to male characters who tend to groan when in pain.

The things above make it clear that developers utilize the sensual value of women as their merchandise. In easy language, developers commodify or can be interpreted as the process of changing the value of function into selling value (Yuwono, A. 2021). In League of Legends (Wild Rift) characters are developed by doing various forms of sexualization. Characters that function as tools/media for competition are commodified into selling values to fulfill the desires of their players. Where developers sell a variety of digital content that makes it possible to change one's playing experience.

Category	Default Skin Miss Fortune	Cowgirl Miss Fortune	Star Guardian Miss Fortune	Lunar Beast Miss Fortune	Arcade Miss Fortune	Ruined Miss Fortune
Breast disproportion to body size	1	2	1	3	3	3
Skins of armpits and the bottom of the breasts are exposed/accentuated by clothing	3	2	3	1	3	2
Skins of the buttocks are exposed/accentuated by clothing	1	2	1	2	2	2
Skins of midriff are exposed/exaggerated hip size	2	3	1	3	3	3
Skins from hip to the top of knees are exposed.	1	2	3	2	3	1
Movement to draw sexual attention	3	2	2	3	3	3
Total number	11	13	11	14	17	14
Percentage	61.11%	72.22%	61.11%	77.78%	94.44%	77.78%

Table 5. Six criteria of sexualized characters (Table is adapted from (Geeraerts, 2010))

From the analysis table Six criteria of sexualized characters with scaling from numbers 1-3. Shows that almost all of Miss Fortune's skins have scores and percentages above 50% with the highest percentage at 94% obtained in the Arcade skin Miss Fortune is one of the skins that changes the appearance of Miss Fortune's character to use retro-themed clothing.



Figure 3. Retro outfit (wildrift.leagueoflegends.com)



Figure 4. Arcade Miss Fortune (wildrift.leagueoflegends.com)

This also shows that the sexualization of female characters in League of legends (Wild Rift) is realized by attaching various types/forms of sexualization such as exploitation of the physical form of the body carried out in the initial design as well as with various exposed skins. These images then enable players' sexual fantasies to be fulfilled widely, from the character design to the skins worn. These various skins are also commodified so that in fulfilling their desire to see / enjoy sexy characters, a player must spend money per purchase item. Sexualization by League of legends developers (Wild Rift) is a form of commodification and monetization that leads to financial gain. The sale of additional digital content is done in such a way. The variety of costumes and various cosmetics that make up female characters in League of Legends (Wild Rift), although they do not have any impact on the abilities of the characters fitted with costumes.

By incorporating sexualized elements into every character design and offering various exposed skins, the game not only caters to players' sexual fantasies but also commodifies these representations. This approach not only fulfils players' desires for sexy characters but also generates revenue through the purchase of these items, highlighting the effective use of female sensuality as a marketing tool in the gaming industry.

b. Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is the process by which women who previously lacked the ability to make choices and decisions in life, eventually gain that ability. Empowerment entails alternative capabilities or in the sense of choosing differently, using aspects of power, where initially powerless, then empowered to make many choices in life. Since women and men have the power to choose differently, women need alternative capabilities. Women need transformation with the achievement of demonstrating decision-making ability, which refers to women's ability to act on life choices with motivation, purpose, and to act against the patriarchal coercive structures usually portrayed in life (Kabeer, 2005, p. 13-15).

(Skin Description: Ahri is a charismatic team captain who leads her group of Star Guardians from the outer...)

In League of legends game, especially in the Star Guardian Miss Fortune and star guardian Ahri skins despite having sensual visuals while the description of the two skins depicts a strong and very brave woman,



even though in general super heroes are often portrayed as played by a man, this refutes the dominant ideology that exists in society shows that women are considered to have a weak position, excluded, considered inferior, and so on. Women's participation is still limited to highlighting beauty, eroticism, sex objects, sometimes even becoming objects of violence, harassment, an outlet for desire, the oppressed, or discrimination that can lead to gender bias. The underlying patriarchal ideology causes women to be expressed through the male point of view and the image of women is also dominated by the male point of view.

League of Legends (Wild Rift) embraces and encourages women empowerment among its characters, therefore offering a captivating alternate storyline. Because female characters in this game are shown as strong, tough, and capable people, it provides a forum for questioning conventional gender conventions and stereotypes. Unlike traditional depictions that sometimes reduce women to supporting or passive roles. League of Legends (Wild Rift) presents women as key characters who demonstrate courage, strength, and leadership traits. The way that the game presents female characters as strong fighters and leaders is one of the main ways it encourages women empowerment. Their achievements on the battlefield identify these heroes more so than their gender. Female League of Legends (Wild Rift) champions dispel myths and questions accepted ideas of femininity by exhibiting qualities like bravery, resilience, and strategic skill.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the context of female representation in the League of legends game (Wild Rift), researcher found negative and positive representation of female in the game through the visuals of the character skins and also the skin descriptions. This representation is explained by denotation, connotation and myth based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Based on the results of this analysis, it can also be found from the visual characters Ahri and Miss fortune along with each of their skins that have been analyzed, although the subject of this research is only a character from an online game, they also represent several aspects that adopt things related to real life social reality such as, female sensuality and stereotype. In the league of legends game is depicted through the visual design of the character, from abnormal body proportions such as breasts, protruding hips, this is also used by game developers as monetization material by selling skins that are exposed, so that this can be considered that sensuality in women is used as a marketing tool.

Although the female characters in this game are depicted with visuals that remain sensual, they also represent female as strong in combat and great in leadership. So, it can be assumed that the female characters

also participate in fighting, which is something generally done by men, they do not leave their femininity and identity as a woman. This shows that the developer wants to show the audience that there is a strong character as a woman even with the sensual element in the visual skin of the characters.

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