

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Research

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is an approach of discourse analysis that focuses on how meaning is constructed through the combination of modes of communication, not only written and spoken language, but also images, color, sound, typography, sign, and movement (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). They further emphasize that each of the modes has three main metafunctions, which are representation (showing the content or object), interpersonal (to create the relation between the sender and receiver), and textual (organizing the message to be cohesive). Consequently, multimodal analysis allows the researcher to comprehend more about how digital communication is not just a text, but a complex combination of several sources of meaning.

Instagram became one of the modern social media networks that is relevant to be analyzed through the MDA approach. Unlike the traditional media, such as newspapers and magazines, that commonly display black and white static images and texts, Instagram serves multiple multimodal features: colorful images, video, captions, emojis, hashtags, mentions, as well as interactive elements such as polling (Leaver et al., 2020). The complexity of Instagram gives a chance to the users to display themselves more strategically and layered. As stated by Barthes (1977), texts in media are used as *anchorage* that direct the image interpretations, while on Instagram, captions, hashtags, and emojis strengthen or extend the visual meaning that is being represented. Because of that, Instagram became a space for social identity, cultural, and personal deconstruction consciously.

In the context of women's representation, Instagram presents truly fascinating dynamics. Women are frequently regulated by complex social norms associated with

femininity, beauty, and success (Doring et al., 2021). On top of that, the *impression management* theory that was put forward by Goffman (1959) became the concern of how individuals, including women, organize how they are displayed in front of the audience to form an identity. Goffman sees social interaction as a “stage” where each individual plays a role to maintain the desired impression. Leary and Kowalski (1990) from *self-presentation* explain how individuals consciously present themselves according to social expectations, for instance, with the *exemplification* strategy (display themselves as a moral and inspiring figure) or *self-promotion* (highlight talents or achievements). It is related to the *visibility labour* strategy, where the continuous work in order to maintain an identity that is acceptable to the audience, especially in influencer worlds (Abidin, 2016). Therefore, these theories emphasized that the self-representation of women on social media can not be separated from the conscious strategy to fulfill the social expectation and the audience that constructs their identity in the digital space.

Accordingly, Chiara Ferragni was chosen as an object of the research because she is one of the most influential influencers in the world. Her career started from *The Blonde Salad* blog in 2009, which initially contained personal photos and fashion inspiration, but quickly developed and became a global phenomenon. Along with the development of Instagram, Ferragni uses this platform to broaden her audience reach, strengthen her personal brand, and create businesses, including *Chiara Ferragni Collection*, that are recognized internationally. Not only chosen because of his position as one of the most influential influencers globally, but also her significant role in forming cultural fashion, digital, and the habits of the audience. Ferragni is known able to integrate personal identity, digital marketing strategy, and the aesthetics of Instagram visuals that are consistent, making her a representative example in the case of women representation in social media (Abidin, 2016; Weiser, 2018). Casadesus-Masanell and Dorobantu (2015) used Ferragni’s popularity as a study material in Harvard

Business School because it is considered a successful example of a personal branding strategy in the digital era. With a huge number of followers that reach tens of millions, Ferragni is not only seen as a model icon but also as a woman who used Instagram as a multimodal medium to construct identity.

Other ways, the research aims to analyze the women's representation in Chiara Ferragni's Instagram accounts using the framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis. Instagram, as a multimodal platform, provides a space where text, image, and sign interact to create a complex meaning. This study makes an effort to examine how Ferragni, as a women influencer, constructs her identity through the combination of visual and textual elements, also how those actions represented the role of women in the digital era. Through this analysis, the research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how women's identity is constructed and presented in contemporary social media culture.

For example, in one of the selected posts, Ferragni appears wearing a red dress with a background that contains several huge brand logos. As a visual, a red dress, symmetrical body position, and direct gaze to the camera represented authority and self-confidence (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). On the other hand, the caption that consists of emojis and mentions use and anchorage that strengthen Ferragin's position as a public figure globally (Barther, 1977). This is going to be how the researcher analyzed the data. Of course, with more relevant theory and deeper analysis, the findings and results can be accurate and clear.

## 1.2 Research Question

Based on the background of the study explained in the previous subchapter, the researcher uses several questions as the problem of this study:

1. What are the multimodal elements found in Chiara Ferragni's Instagram post?

2. How does Chiara Ferragni's Instagram content use the elements of multimodal to construct her identity?

### **1.3 The Objective of the Research**

The objective of this research is related to the research question. Therefore, the objective or the aim of the research will be:

1. This research provides elements of multimodal content found in Chiara Ferragni's Instagram post.
2. This research describes how Chiara Ferragni constructs her identity through the multimodal elements in her Instagram post.

### **1.4 Focus of the Research**

This research focuses on the multimodal aspect of how women construct their identities and represent themselves on Instagram through Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account, by combining the visual and textual elements (images, videos, captions, emojis, hashtags, etc). Usually, women do not just post or make content on Instagram without any consideration; they must consider what clothes they are going to wear, what colors of the clothes are, what types of filters, and even the captions of the posts. Because of that, a multimodal landscape is used to seek all the reasons behind this consideration. After using and combining these visual and textual elements, it can help to construct the identity of women, and we can see the representation of women on Instagram through Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account.

### **1.5 Methods of the Research**

This study analyzes the content of the document to find specific features using a qualitative method. Ary et al (2002) state that content and document analysis is the method of research that is used to analyze written or visual items, aiming to identify the specific characteristics of the items. Therefore, this type of analysis is particularly matched for this



study, because this study analyzes the visual (images and videos) and textual elements of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account.

### 1.5.1 Data Collection

The data were taken from the Instagram account of Chiara Ferragni (id: @chiaraFerragni). This study selected content posted by Chiara Ferragni on his Instagram account to find the representation of women on Instagram through his Instagram post. The content chosen by some consideration to find the most related and relevant results of women's representation on Instagram.

Two posts of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account will be selected purposively, with the consideration that the two posts represented the important performative moment in constructing Ferragni's public identity. The first selected content is posted by Ferragni on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025. This post contains 12 slides, which consist of 4 short videos and 8 pictures. Ferragni uses clothes that are quite striking here, and in the caption, Ferragni uses some emojis that are often used in his other Instagram posts. The second selected content was posted by Ferragni on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025. This post contains 9 slides, which consist of 2 short videos and 7 pictures. Ferragni attends the Goya awards in Granada, and she posts the documentation of his presence at the awards. This post became one of three posts that Ferragni pinned to his main grid, and this picture received 790,058 likes, which made it the highest-liked post of February 2025. This research will be focused on analyzing the photos and excluding the videos. The consideration was made because of the different characteristics of photos and videos. The photo is static, so elements such as composition, framing, salience, pose, gaze, and background can be analyzed deeply using the selected theory.

In collecting the data, the researcher used several steps in collecting the data as follows:

1. Accessing the social media Instagram of Chiara Ferragni by typing @chiaraFerragni in the search tab on the Instagram application.
2. Downloading all pictures posted by Chiara Ferragni using the *Snapinst* website. This website allowed its users to download photos and videos from Instagram by copying the URL link of the post. A screenshot will also be taken to take the picture of the caption of the selected posts.
3. The selected content posted by Chiara Ferragni should be posted between February 2025 and March 2025, because the researcher wants to focus on the recent content of Chiara Ferragni.

### 1.5.2 Data Analysis

All collected data will be analyzed by using the MDA method, MDA helps to examine how different modes of communication contribute to the production of meaning. Moreover, the analysis will just focus on the women's representation that is found in the data selected of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram account. Visual and textual elements became the main concerns to be analyzed. Furthermore, this study will examine how some of those modes of communication construct women's representation on Instagram.

### 1.6 Definition of Key Terms

- **Multimodal Discourse Analysis** is a theory of discourse analysis that examines how different modes of communication, such as text, images, symbols, and videos, contribute to the production of meaning in specific cultural contexts (van Leeuwen, 2005).

- **Identity** is the state of having unique identifying characteristics held by no other person or thing.
- **Self-presentation**, Erving Goffman (1956), from the theory of dramaturgical, said that every person tries to give a good impression to others.
- **Instagram** is one modern social media platform that allows users to upload content such as videos and images.
- **Exemplification** is a strategy that is used to show their selves as a figure to be emulated, inspiring, and a moral person (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).
- **Self-promotion** is used to promote oneself by showing their achievements, skills, or talents (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

