SEMIOTICS OF PERFORMING IN NAJWA LATIF'S MUSIC VIDEOS

Jyh Wee Sew
National University Of Singapore

Abstract

With more than 53 million hits on her *YouTube* videos, Najwa Latif is an icon of contemporary Malay popular culture. Just two of her music videos - *Cinta Muka Buku* (Facebook Love), and *AdaMu* (Your Existence), have received more than 12.9 million hits at the time of writing with the former earning a nomination for best Malay song at the coveted Champion Songs Award in 2011. Equally relevant is the semiotics of performing in the music videos that captures the hearts and minds of the cyberspace-inhabiting Generation Y. Contrary to the existing studies of Malay popular culture that usually focus on linguistic content we use atomization as the framework to analyze the rich and rapid visual content in *Cinta Muka Buku* and *AdaMu*. By atomizing the musical content into visual frames, we derive base units for examining the semiotic hybridity that underscores the positive identification with an online fan base. The segmented visual frames provide the locus for studying the interplay of semiotic elements in the visual symbolization. Consequently, we may identify the semiotics of performing and its relationship with the consumption of Najwa Latif's Malay music videos in cyberspace.

Keywords: *Malay popular culture, Malay music video, Najwa Latif, semiotics of performing, sensuous self, visual symbolization*

SEMIOTIK PERSEMBAHAN DALAM VIDEO MUZIK NAJWA LATIF

Abstrak

Dengan lebih daripada 53 juta kali tontonan bagi video-videonya di *YouTube*, Najwa Latif merupakan ikon kontemporari budaya popular Melayu. Dua daripada video muziknya - *Cinta Muka Buku*, dan *AdaMu*, telah merakamkan 12.9 juta kali tontonan semasa penulisan rencana ini, di samping itu, video yang pertama juga menerima pencalonan bagi juara lagu Melayu, anugerah pujaan ramai di Anugerah Juara Lagu, pada 2011. Yang juga penting, semiotik persembahan wacana dalam kedua-dua video muzik tersebut telah memikat hati dan minda Generasi Y penghuni alam siber. Berbeza dengan kajian budaya popular Melayu tersedia ada yang lazimnya menumpukan perhatian pada kandungan linguistik, penulis menggunakan kaedah pengasingan atomik sebagai kerangka analisis untuk mengkaji kandungan visual yang kaya lagi pantas dalam video muzik *Cinta Muka Buku* dan *AdaMu*. Dengan menyaring kandungan muzikal secara atomik ke dalam bingkai visual, kita memperolehi unit asas untuk penelitian semiotik kacukan yang mendasari rujukan positif daripada para peminat talian. Bingkai-bingkai visual penggalan ini menawarkan tadahan bagi memahami interaksi semiotik di sebalik proses simbolisasi visual. Ekoran itu, kita dapat mengenalpastikan semiotik persembahan dan peranannya dalam rujuk-guna video-video muzik Najwa Latif di alam siber.

Kata kunci: Budaya popular Melayu, video muzik Melayu, Najwa Latif, semiotik persembahan, jati diri sensual, simbolisasi visual

INTRODUCTION

YouTube, the largest repository of video clips in Internet, has the capacity to launch a professional career for individuals, who choose to showcase their talents digitally. Several Malaysian artists have proven that it is possible to jumpstart a singing career in *YouTube*. Some of the current Malaysian female artists who have begun their music career with singing performance on *YouTube* include Zee or Izyan Alirahman (AsiaOne News, 2009), Joyce Chu (Idolfever, 2015), Ainan Tasneem (Fajar Tri, 2015) and Najwa Latif (Freride H. Atak, 2011). This article examines two *YouTube* music videos of Najwa Latif to highlight the

significance of digital visual as a relevant strategy for promoting one's creative work in the current world of Malay popular music. Najwa Latif's digital video clips are selected for discussion based on two reasons. First, the viewing hits of all her *YouTube* music videos have scored the highest viewing hits among all the Malay *YouTube* singers. Second, Najwa is the most versatile singer in terms of song writing and vocal renditions, not least because she writes (both lyrics and rhythms) and sings her own songs, which have become the favorites of the online fans whenever the songs are issued as singles.

WHO IS NAJWA LATIF?

We begin by looking at the bio-data and basic achievements of the singer who commands a substantial online following. Imratul Najwa Binti Abdul Latif, or better known as Najwa Latif is a Malay singer-song writer. Hailing from the town of Batu Pahat in Johor, West Malaysia, she received a nomination for the coveted best Malay song award with her original song *Cinta Muka Buku* (Facebook Love) in *AJL 26*, or *Anugerah Juara Lagu* (Champion of Songs Award 2011) when she was just 17 years old (Mohd. Zaid, 2012). This is no simple feat for a Malay girl who obtained 4 As in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia in 2013, the equivalent of the Cambridge Examination Syndicate O-levels, and who is now enrolled in UNITAR International University's Foundation in Management (Mohd. Al Qayum Azizi, 2013). Najwa is the third child among four siblings and her parents separated in 2008 when she was 14 years old.

Najwa Latif's rising popularity in the contemporary world of Malay popular culture is due to her appearance which appeals to the local Muslim Malays. Najwa's gender features index the prototypical signs of a Malay girl in accordance to local sociocultural values. Adhering to the etiquette of a pious Islamic female, Najwa observes a moderate dress code that indexes decorum. Accordingly, Najwa covers her body fully by wearing either *baju kurung* (traditional Malay dresses), or long sleeve T-shirts with long pants. More importantly, the head veil is Najwa's trademark attire that signifies an adherence to Muslim religious values (see images in Table 3 & 4). The message of moderate behavior is reflected through her lyrics in a duet song *Untuk Dia* (For him) that receives over 17 million-hits has a line that says, *Tapi sebenarnya ku biasa-biasa saja* (but actually my lifestyle is only moderate). If there was ever any negative report, it would be her father's accusation to the media that she did not pay respect to him for not showing up at the airport when he arrived from pilgrimage in 2011 (Ana Ahmad, 2012). This information is included to demonstrate that the Asian values of filial piety are something not be ignored, especially when one becomes a public figure. The filial card may be used to either enhance or condemn one's career.

Apart from the music videos, Najwa maintains a *facebook* presence, thus, constantly engaging her followers with a series of multimodal interaction online. And up to four news feeds may be generated daily, inviting fans to like digital

pages, watch memes, view digital photos, or solve digital puzzles in facebook. Additionally, Najwa's English vocal is equally sound as her unplugged renditions of Jessie J's *Price Tag,* and Ne-Yo's *One In A Million* received 2.43 and 1.05 million hits in *YouTube*, respectively. Indeed, Najwa's music appeal is global. If the number of *YouTube* hits is any indication, the songs Najwa has written and sung are very well-received. The tabulation of the hit counts for each Malay song in Table 1 excludes other duplications in various digital formats.

Table 1: Number of hit count for Najwa Latif's music videos in *YouTube*

Najwa Latif's Malay songs	Publish date	Hits on 5 Aug. 2015
Cinta Muka Buku		
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fKVNb-dYVc	22/07/2011	8,798,169
AdaMu		
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHPGPb0ZpKI	20/07/2012	4,162,543
Kosong		
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzdXMHaGCTQ	03/05/2012	5,652,637
Carta Hati		
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGllgO_mBoE	18/11/2011	3,177,459
Terima Kasih Cikgu (feat Upin Ipin)		
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTrS2JpgLD8&list=RD 02hgh4WDgl9S8	16/05/2012	5,078,539
Sahabat (feat Sleeq & Syamkamarul)		
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ya3b7_1Kz8Q	19/11/2012	4,848,092
Untuk Dia - Sleeq & Najwa Latif		
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlO2sSuezXw	04/06/2012	17,530,755
I Love You		
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K44T7Kt5XX8	04/06/2013	3,861,347

The popularity of Najwa's music videos containing her digital persona is a good reason for this discussion to focus on Najwa's semiotics of performing online. In comparison, the music videos of many popular Malay female artistes, who are the contemporary singers along with Najwa Latif, do not receive as many hits as Najwa. The number of hit counts for the music videos of three selected top Malay divas is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of hit count for selected Malay female singers in *YouTube*

Digital Music video of Malay divas	Publish Date	Hits on 5 Aug. 2015
Dejavu – Shila Amzah		
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTO_2_UqdW4	06/06/2012	1,022,373
Terukir di bintang - Yuna		
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TimC5_2sMKk	26/06/2012	353,623
Kamu Saja – Ainan Tasneem		
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnI0ybMHQtI	27/12/2012	1,111,839

The visual component that contributes to Najwa's success in the Malay virtual world is the focus of this study. Table 1 shows that the hits on a music video may be the indicator to the magnitude of popular reception on a singer's music (Wingstedt, Brandstrom & Berg, 2010). It is rather difficult to measure the significance of the visual symbols in the music videos, not least as the linguistic content, that is the lyrics, tends to eclipse the impact of the visual content. A main reason is due to the limitation of a mono-modal decoding skill acquired from mainstream education, which is predominantly based on attaining linguistic competence (cf. Gee & Hayes, 2011). However, the visuals of music video are meaningful enhancements to the music, as Richard Howells and Joaquim Negreiros inform (2012, p. 281):

> *...but from our own experience we can see that sometimes a good video can visually surpass the musical content. It may be the images rather than the sounds that we remember, and new meanings can be created by the confluence and juxtaposition of images.*

This discussion provides a semiotic analysis based on the visual strength of Najwa Latif's Malay music videos. By understanding the dynamics of visual symbolizations in the music videos we may locate the power of positive self-identification in the semiotic hyperconsumption of online Malay popular culture. Hyperconsumption refers to the current nature of consumer behavior that tends to be hyperindividualistic, experiential and emotional in satisfying the fantasies of a grandiose self (Vannini, Waskul, & Gottschalk, 2012, p. 155). This study examines the *mise-en-scène* of two of her music videos - *Cinta Muka Buku* and *AdaMu,* to highlight the aforementioned significance. A mise-en-scène is concerned with *everything which is seen within the frame as it unfolds in time together with the accompanying soundtrack* (O'Halloran, 2004, p. 117). The selected prototypical shots are considered the critical components that anchor the attention of the audience to appreciate and enjoy Najwa's online persona.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A recent study raises an interesting question on the role of language as the primary source of knowledge in human civilization. Despite schools imbuing young children with the ability to produce and understand knowledge in linguistic codes, the study raises a cautionary point that human conceptualizations of reality are not merely word-based. In an analysis of selected brochure images produced by Malaysia's *Tourism Development Corporation*, we are informed that our immediate environ contains "an industrialised and centrally managed discharge of massive symbols-systems that are part of the mainstream of common consciousness" (Mus Chairil Samani & Jamilah Maliki, 2010, p. 67). Language is therefore not the only meaning-maker; designer imageries and visual symbolizations too communicate vital meanings in the hypermodern human interactivity. The exclusion of visual content reveals an incomplete understanding of the importance of symbols (van Leeuwen, 2004).

In an analysis of the Malay mini drama *"Seputih Qaseh Ramadhan"*, Siti Zanariah (2011) juxtaposes Qaseh, a traditional first wife, against Maria, a progressive second wife to illustrate the hybridization of Malay, Islam and Western culture and its role in enabling "Malay modernity". Although onscreen Malay cultural hybridity is argued to be a calculated move of a state that wishes to maintain its political hegemony, Md Azalanshah Md Syed (2013) argues the Malay women have displayed tactical readings when watching Malay soap opera on television as they adopt elements that are culturally appropriate and reject those that transgress from the local customs. Siti Zanariah does not provide any visual content to support the claim that the *baju kurung* and loose headscarf are symbolic of uneducated rural Malay women. In comparison, Nagata (1995) has convincingly highlighted reasons why educated Malay women might continue to don the headscarf, thus negating Siti Zanariah's claim that urban Malay women do not wear traditional attire. That traditional dressing including *baju kurung* and head scarf are invoked as the semiotic symbols signifying characteristics of being less-educated indicates that a multiple intelligent reference incorporating visual objects is necessary for establishing the sociocultural point. This in turn suggests that the study of visual presentation is important in meaning construction not least because meaning making is a material process that cannot be comprehended by any single system of representation (Lemke, 2004a, p. 189).

More recently, in a study on popular culture, Moore argued that the Internet has provided Indonesian musicians and artists with an alternative channel to promote their music. This is important for new and independent musicians who face many difficulties in attempting to break into the national music market. A difference of 300 visits in social networking sites compared to the band website can be attributed to social networking media's ability to draw musicians and fans closer, particularly as musicians respond directly to fans' comments and questions (Moore, 2013, p. 375).

In a multimodal analysis of *Dirty Dancing,* Rheindorf observes that meaning

is realized through more than one medium. The music in the movie, for example, supplies varying modes of meaning as it moves from the non-diegetic to diegetic spaces. The symbolic elements depicted in the visual content become important semiotic elements that supersede language because the large numbers of people and the style of dancing are indices representing membership of a particular social class (Rheindorf, 2004, p. 149). This study informs that multimodal decoding is a critical semiotic component in the analytical framework of screen-based popular culture. Understanding visual qualities become a vital part of cultural literacy that should be included in modern education not least visual images are an inherent component of musical interaction and viewing experience in the new economy (Scheible, 2015; van Leeuwen, 2012; Power, Dillane & Devereux, 2012). Additionally, the visuals interfere how we would interpret our listening of music in conceptual resonance. Interestingly, in the phenomenon of conceptual resonance (Wingstedt, Brandstrom & Berg, 2010: 194), *the sound makes us see the image differently, and then this new image makes us hear the sound differently, which in turn makes us see something else in the image and so on.*

Despite screen-based popular culture relying on a rich multimodal visual content, there is a tendency to ignore visual symbolization because present education systems have not equipped students with the necessary skills to decode such semiotics (Gee & Hayes, 2011; Lam, 2009, Sew, 2009a; Cary, 2004). As a result, the understanding of screen-based popular culture will become less meaningful and incomplete as visual content analyses are excluded. More importantly, failing to analyze visual content in the studies will demonstrate the reliance on linguistic content as the dominant code of human knowledge. Although language is an important medium in human interaction, it is nevertheless essential to recognize other forms of communication, which include music listening where the power of musical meaning is contingent on the relations of power and solidarity created from musical interaction (van Leeuwen, 2012). This study, thus, examines the visual content of two Malay music videos and highlights the significance of a visual grammar that evokes immediate emotional reactions in a way that words cannot (Bateman & Schmidt, 2012; Jones & Hafner, 2012). The analysis of music video adds an additional complement to the logo-centricity of current research methods might be a topological method that works toward a balanced triangulation and production of knowledge (cf. Lemke, 2004b). Findings from the analysis may provide helpful information to explicate the semiotic hyperconsumption of online Malay popular culture as a digital trend.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the principles of systemic-functional grammar (cf. Halliday, 1994), this study analyzes the multimodal interplays underlying the transitions of visual frames in two Malay music videos featuring Najwa Latif. The visual frames

form the dynamic component in the viewing experience of music videos, not least because the transitioning phases introduce new clusters of information that builds into a repetitive visual chain recognizable by the viewers (cf. Baldry, 2004). Noteworthy, inherent in each information cluster is visual symbolization consisting of an interlinking relationship of a salient participant interacting against secondary participants to supply a visual reference. The roles of primary and secondary participants translating into attractive viewing responses are described in detail to understand the semiotics of performing in multimodal transitions.

Firstly, the visual symbolization encompasses concrete or abstract references capable of rousing emotion in the digital world of Malay popular music. Secondly, the visual symbolization mediates the psycho-visual impact of new and/or given messages that transpire between the performer and the audience. Thirdly, the visual symbolizations encode a series of syntactic visual relationships according to the socio-cultural framework of contemporary Malay popular music. These are extensions of the ideational, interpersonal and textual meta-functions in systemic-functional grammar (cf. Bateman & Schmidt, 2012). These semiotic notions underscore the operating intertextual principle that each visual frame in the music videos has representational, interactive and compositional qualities (Sew, 2009b).

Najwa Latif's music videos *Cinta Muka Buku* and *AdaMu* are structured into frames of visual composition that comprises of prototypical shots in accordance to the atomization approach for yielding a series of base units (cf. Kong, 2013; Bateman, 2008). The advantage of fragmenting the music videos into frames has to do with its capacity to accommodate multiple points of examination. Each atomic frame becomes a visual grid for a scrutiny of semiotic hybridity. Each frame contains a visual chain decodable into semiotic relations of action, reaction, transaction, or non-transactive composition. A visual grammar is, thus, derivable from a series of visual chains that may consist of linear relations, also known as vectors. A vector may be transactive when the visual syntax consists of linear relations between actor and goal; or non-transactive when the visual syntax only contains an actor or a goal (cf. Jewitt & Oyama, 2001).

While a carrier is a participant whose meaning or identity emerges in the symbolic process, a symbolic attribute, in contrast, represents the meaning or identity itself (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). A symbolic attribute is the object of reference accorded with saliency in any forms of representation, or simply the object in the spotlight:

> *Symbolic structures define the meaning or identity of a participant. In the symbolic attribute structure the identity or meaning of one participant (the 'carrier') is established by another (the 'symbolic attribute')…Symbolic attributes are recognized through one or more of the following characteristics: they are made salient in the representation, for example by their size, position, colour, use of*

> *lighting; they are pointed out by means of a gesture; they look out*
> *of place in the whole…(Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p. 144).*

The actors and the goals become the symbolic attributes and/or the carriers in a rich tapestry of visual symbolization. Within a fragmented frame, the visual symbolization may consist of transactive or non-transactive configurations that impact upon one's viewing experience. As a result, the visual syntax generated may have a vector connection that involves the eye line of an actor that in turn induces different reactions from the viewers, or the other actors in the frame. When the viewers see both the actor and what s/he is looking at, a reaction is generated in a triadic interrelation. This discussion offers triadic interrelation as a powerful visual phenomenon that integrates both the bottom-up and top-down mechanisms of visual perception outlined in Holsanova (2014, p. 228). The inter-individual differences in understanding the music videos are muted by the lyrics of the song in the music videos, not least because the linguistic content shapes the task or purpose of viewing the music videos. At this point, we reiterate van Leeuwen's semiotic insight, namely *visual communication increasingly fulfils a syntactic role while language is increasingly reduce to a lexical role* (2004, p. 17).

ANALYSIS

The fragmented visual frames in Najwa Latif's music videos are full of disparate images, creating a diegetic world similar to that of a film. In this diegetic world, the shots are selected and edited into a visual narrative that unfolds sequentially. The symbolic elements are visually iconic and allow direct meaning-development. However, the understanding of the "short-circuit signs" of content is dependent on the experience and knowledge of the individual observer (Bateman & Schmidt, 2012). The situated relations of a frame's symbolic elements constitute a vector within a visual chain of the narrative. A series of interrelated visual syntaxes that unfolds from one frame to the next underscores the ideational and textual foundation of a visual narrative that is open to viewers' interpretation.

This study proceeds to analyze the first music video *Cinta Muka Buku* in Table 3. Five frames are selected to highlight the prototypical organization of visual symbolization that form part of the basis that one may develop from the music video as the cognitive locus for understanding the visual narrative.

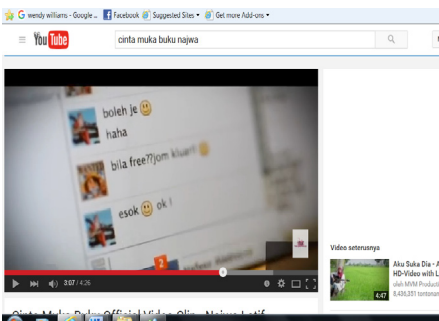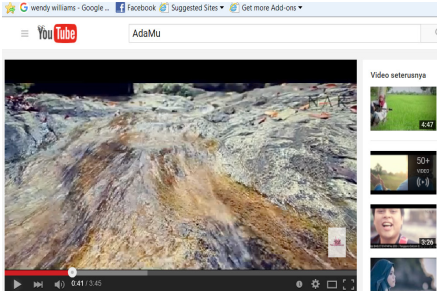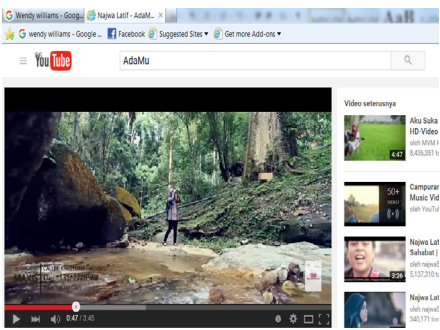| *Cinta Muka Buku*	
Visual Frame 1.1	
	Frame 1.1 contains visual symbolizations that comprise of a symbolic attribute (a male) and a carrier (Najwa). A visual syntax indicating a surprised transactive vector as indexed in her gesture. The frame contains a polarized given-new composition of two symbolic elements.
Visual Frame 1.2	
	Frame 1.2 contains visual symbolizations that comprise of a symbolic attribute (Tutti Frutti as the goal) in front of two carriers. A visual syntax that indicates a transactive vector illustrating a carrier grabbing the symbolic goal of the second carrier. The frame denotes social congregation in a centred-given-new polarization.
Visual Frame 1.3	
	Frame 1.3 contains visual symbolizations that comprise of an actor making eye contact with viewers. A non-transactive visual syntax that consists of the perplexed actor gesturing as she is unsure if the male symbolic carrier in frame 1.2 deserves her friendship. Viewers are invited to be part of the decision making in the frame of centre-margin composition.

Visual Frame 1.4	
	Frame 1.4 contains visual symbolizations that comprise of a symbolic attribute, namely the Facebook message page as the goal. The image qualifies as an iconic representation - the typical messages among young social media users in the frame of centre-margin composition.
Visual Frame 1.5	
	Frame 1.5 contains visual symbolizations that comprise of the symbolic attributes in the middle of the frame. A visual syntax denoting a non-transactive vector in an amorous pose. This frame of centred, triptych centre-margin composition illustrates a head-to-head poise that depicts a blissful couple.

Table 3: Selected visual frames of the music video *Cinta Muka Buku*

This study refurbishes the insight that "the visual component is an independently organized and structured message, connected with the verbal text but in no way dependent on it" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p. 18). This conveys a clear direction in the analysis of visual grammar. With this, we turn to the semiotic analysis of *AdaMu* in Table 4. Another five visual frames are selected typifying the visual symbolization from which an understanding for the visual narrative presented in the second music video may emerge.

AdaMu	
Visual Frame 2.1	
	Frame 2.1 contains visual symbolizations that comprise of nature. The visual grammar consisting of the running water and the rock surface are the symbolic attribute and carrier. Water as an iconic resource vital to life symbolizes the expansive grandeur of the creator in the circular composition.
Visual Frame 2.2	
	Frame 2.2 is a visual symbolization that comprises of the symbolic attributes (rocks, trees, water) and a carrier (human). The visual syntax symbolizes the omnipresence of nature saliently with the human being a minute subpart. This frame is a mediator of given-new composition.
Visual Frame 2.3	
	Frame 2.3 is a visual symbolization with the symbolic attribute - the sky, as the goal over the symbolic carrier - an actor. The visual syntax denotes a transactive vector symbolizing an image of reverence. The frame illustrates religious faith in an ideal-real composition.

Visual Frame 2.4	
	Frame 2.4 is a visual symbolization with human hands as the symbolic carrier and water as the symbolic attribute. The visual syntax demands a reaction to the water as a creation capable of cleansing and rejuvenating human life. This frame is of real-ideal composition.
Visual Frame 2.5	
	Frame 2.5 is a visual symbolization with the mosque as the symbolic attribute located in front of the actor as the symbolic carrier. This frame has a polarized ideal-real composition symbolizing prayer as an approach for affirming God's existence. The visual syntax contains a transactive vector in which an actor goes to the goal thus demanding a reaction from viewers.

Table 4: Selected visual frames of the music video *AdaMu*

DISCUSSION

Sensuous self as an "agentic product of action, experience and performance" (Vannini, Waskul & Gottschalk, 2012, p. 87) is critical to the appreciation of Malay music videos. The notion of self is necessary for explicating the psycho-visual impacts of music videos on the viewers, not least as they are text participants as well as text users at the same time (Hagood, 2008). Being text participants, the viewers are involved in making meaning of the text while using texts functionally in response to their experiences. Accordingly, Lemke's view on literacy as a form of mental collaboration between the text producer and the end users helps us grasp a music video. According to Lemke, *literacies cannot be understood as passive receptivities. Making sense with a printed text is a complex and active process of meaning making not so different from writing the original of that text* (2004b, p. 74).

The study postulates that viewing music videos may enable viewers to identify digital visual grammar, resulting in a transformative relationship similar to that of a reader and a printed text. Both viewers and readers of the digital and printed materials are involved in a dynamic indulgence of mental interactivity. Identity

realignment as a psycho-visual outcome of viewing music videos is contingent on a vital feature, namely narrative-identity, as that of Paul Ricoeur (Asthana, 2012). As a significant concept in media studies, narrative-identity exists in a bipartite of *idem* (sameness) - such as genetic code, and *ipse* (selfhood).

> *The notion of narrative identity as dialectic between idem-ipse and the idea of embodied subjectivity developed by Ricouer offer analytical insights in the study of youth media practices, particularly because young people are involved in constructing personal and social narratives through creative and critical imaginaries (Asthana, 2012, p. 34-35).*

This study states further that music videos may induce a (collective) sensuous self through an empathy with the digital persona in the visual symbolization. As a result, the viewer aligns their mind to the chain of the visual narrative. The narrative and conceptual structures of the videos become the fertile grounds for an emergence of the sensuous self. One may consider the work of mime artist, Ramesh Meyyappan as the scaffolding to understand the emergence of sensuous self. The awareness of narrative and conceptual structures as a dynamic basis of reaction and action becomes visible in Meyyappan's miming of Mr. Jones based on Charles Dickens' classic ghost story, *The Signalman*. A command of sensuous self underscores the miming, be it the obvious, e.g. descending the stairs, drinking, or the less illustrative, e.g. the smoke from the train, the stars in the sky, the snow, the bats, etc. (Sew, 2009c).

Indeed, the transformative component of identity that expresses itself through a dialectic process that involves the mediation of visual symbolization with cultural scripts underscores the formation of a sensuous self. This discussion concurs with Butler's position (1990) that both male and female viewers can relate to performative reiteration in the forms of acts, gestures and desire. If identity is not an *a priori* state, Najwa's music videos are capable of stimulating the formation of a sensuous self, based on an emergent narrative identity. In this respect, the viewers are collaborating agents interacting audio-visually with the visual syntax of the visual symbolizations in Table 3 and Table 4. During the Q & A session, a member of the audience asked Darren Soh, the speaker who is a professional photographer (Soh, 2013), if he is more of a documentary historian, or an artist because he seems to romanticize the composition in his specialty, namely photography of old buildings. Darren replied that he took the pictures, the viewer romanticizes the photographs, which brings home the point that identification is the viewers' reaction toward an image, be it still, or moving.

The semiotics of performing in Najwa's music videos, thus originates in the embodied vector relations available in the visual syntax with which viewers generate a subjective yet sensuous self. As part of the hyperconsumption effect arising from Internet-based knowledge-making, watching music video impacts on the dimension of sociocultural stance in the politics of race that may lead to the politics of human (cf. Chun & Walters, 2011). Engendered by the constant

searchability and distributability operations of the global algorithmic knowledge economy (Smith, 2013, p. 383), the sensuous self plays the underlying operative mechanism in human identities formations. Arguably, watching Malay music videos online is not merely an entertaining experience but a series of momentary transformations that involve the formation of sensuous self. The visual grammar is, after all, capable of conscripting sequentially a visual narrative instrumental that enables subjective identification. Subjective identification may be related with the deep structure thinking patterns that include heroes such as Rama, Wonder Woman and Superman, among other characters found in the *Rescue Narrative* (Lakoff, 2008). For many Asians, deep thinking patterns are rooted in didactic fashion based on the characters and subplots found in the Asiatic storylines of the local (mythological) narratives acquired during one's upbringing (Sew 2015a). Arising from this subjective identification is an interpretation of sensuous meanings based on the intertwining of personalized comprehension and video viewing practice (cf. Yanow, 2014 on interpretation as a form of knowledge creation).

The symbolizations in the selected music videos, which are representational visually and interactive, unfold serially, thus invoking a narrative identity upon which a sensuous self develops. In this instance, the visual syntax of each music video engenders a powerful mode of semiotic representation capable of delivering a rich spectrum of denotative and connotative significance in the hyperconsumption of popular culture online (cf. StÖckl, 2004). In any visual analysis, projecting meaning on a digital communicative object such as a music video is part of the viewer's interpretation based on one's particular values, political interest, and the searchability of the digital object. The meaning derived in the Malay music videos is a generative process developed from one's inclination for a certain social existence online that synchronizes with other liked-minded viewers of the music videos. After all, searchability implies that there is agency on the music video viewers' part as consumer. Whenever this digital medium is accessed as a resource, the consumers are in control, similar to how they choose to read a book at their convenience and pace (cf. Howells & Negreiros, 2012). Systematically, hyperconsumption of any online productions originates in a prewired connection of a ubiquitous system, e.g. *YouTube* readily available in an android phone (such as Samsung Galaxy Note 5 or Apple IPhone 6).

Individually, the raison d'etre of any visual meaning from the music videos is a personal reading of each viewer of a common collective that shares certain symbolic references with the digital object. The meaning from the fragmented music videos in Table 3 and Table 4 should not be regarded as political messages inscribed as part of Najwa's social stance. In the visual frame 1.3 (Table 3) containing a demand image that acknowledges the viewers' presence (cf. Machin, 2010, p. 40), for example, the viewers are invited to decide for Najwa (if she should meet with her Facebook associate) through the sign of perplexity

indexed by Najwa's outward pointing hand gesture and the innocent smile on her face. The concept of demand image is first introduced by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 148) with which a viewer may be compelled to react due to a framing of direct gaze detectable symbolically from the image. Bell (2001) has incorporated the demand frame into visual content analysis of which Najwa's gaze while smiling directly at the viewers may be considered as a symbolic affiliation of equality with the audience. This opens an interactive window for the viewers to be involved symbolically with the subplot of the audio-visual material.

The Malay music videos that promote the songs are objects with meaning potential capable of evoking a set of possible meanings (cf. Machin & van Leeuwen, 2007). For the music videos to communicate any meaning, certain conditions are required, namely relevant technical accessibility, sufficient linguistic ability and sociocultural compatibility. In watching the music videos, the viewers may participate psycho-visually in staging the desire for a romantic or divine relationship entirely based on the visual grammar chain of the music videos, respectively (cf. Rose, 2012). In video viewing, psycho-visual process is an integrated part of the multiplicative principle with which the interpretative meaning of multimedia operates. Jay Lemke explains the multiplicative principle as such (2012, p. 83):

> *In essence, each semiotic mode contributes a set of possible meanings, only one of which usually actually occurs at a particular moment or point in the multimedia text…the informative value of that one depends on its not being any of the others, and the more others there could have been, the more informative, in principle, the one that does occur is.*

In alignment with indirectness as an Asian cultural norm (Sew, 2015b, 1997), the Malay music videos do not expound overt political messages such as those of 'Interesting Drug' that operate with symbolic book titles, *Whale nation* and *Molby Dick* to reference animal cruelty and class status (cf. Power, Dillane & Devereux, 2012, p. 386). However, claiming that the music videos of Najwa are harping on a political issue outright in a show business wrought of religious male gazes is less convincing than suggesting that watching music video as a practice of hyperconsumption is bound with the operating technological systems supporting the videos (Smith, 2013). The Malay video viewers' encounters with Najwa's music videos are shaped by the ideologies inscribed in the software, i.e. *YouTube* (cf. Scheible, 2015, p. 114). This means viewing Najwa's videos is related to the display order of the video clips, the hits (as a possible selection criterion), the searchability of the videos with certain key words, and the strategy of linking the videos with a particular cluster of singer in terms of distributability (Sew, 2010). The appropriating variables of *YouTube* are subsumable in the searchability and distributability of Google search engine, thus playing a vital part in shaping viewership online that bears an effect on the hyperconsumption

of Najwa's music videos.

Culturally speaking, the animate visual narrative in *Cinta Muka Buku* contains a happy ending, which dovetails nicely with the ideal and nostalgic notion of a romantic relationship. Nostalgia has a *powerful benchmarking potential* as it locates in memory an earlier version of self for measuring a current condition of self (cf. Vannini, Waskul & Gottschalk, 2012, p. 98). Table 3 contains the visual syntax of a familiar cultural script - "sexploitation", a common theme of many music videos. In a group discussion among Malay undergraduates, sexploitation in hip-hop music videos are perceived as presenting the message "guys give love to have sex, and gals give sex to have love" (Fuziah Kartini et al., 2010). The message of sexploitation is a common topic discussed or portrayed in popular culture.

The nostalgia and hope in *Cinta Muka Buku* befits Malay cultural values not least as viewers take being forgiving to be a virtue. On the other hand, the music video *AdaMu* is a straightforward psycho-visual cultural resource for deference to a higher power. Table 4 contains a series of culturally-consonant visual syntaxes that transcend gender and age boundaries, thereby developing a sensuous self that is different from the one in *Cinta Muka Buku*. Religious viewers would be emotionally invested in *AdaMu's* visual path. Being Najwa's double (cf. Trinh, 2011), a viewer may be moved by the experience of a harmonious relationship with God. At the same time, prolonged viewing of the visual grammar chain may result in generic realism, i.e. viewers' judgement of the communicative object in its own terms sans external reality (Chandler, 2007). In this way, the visual grammar of this digital resource may bring about a cathartic personal experience that reinforces a religious self in the viewer.

A limitation of this study is that analytical and rhetorical purposes guide the selection of visual frames (cf. Bezemer & Mavers, 2011). The prototypical shots representing the major visual transcripts of music videos are selected in accordance to a subjective decision of relevancy. Since the associative qualities of a certain color – pink in visual frame 1.5 (Table 3, cf. Trinh Min Ha, 2011), and blue in visual frame 2.3 (Table 4, cf. Machin, 2010) – may provide additional psycho-visual impacts to one's viewing experience, more attention on the grammar of colors is required in future analysis (cf. Kress & van Leuwen, 2002).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Semiotic terms such as "demand frame", "transactive vector", "non-transactive vector", "symbolic attribute" and "symbolic carrier" are exploited to offer a new channel for interpreting symbolic interaction. As a result, a rich understanding of digital interactivity between viewers and the music videos is possible. In the current understanding, the symbolic attributes and symbolic carriers are processing inputs familiar to the cultural script of Malay viewers making sense of concrete and abstract references in music videos. Additionally, the interplay of transactive and non-transactive vectors arising from the spatial relations of the

symbolic elements may generate reaction and action in the viewing experience. As such, the visual syntax within the transition phase provides a cognitive trajectory to accommodate the sensuous self whose emergence is based on a narrative identity due to the different emotive reflexes from viewing the music videos.

Consequently, two types of visual experiences underscore the success of *Cinta Muka Buku* and *AdaMu*. Personalizing the positive behaviors symbolized in the visual grammar of the music videos qualifies the digital resources as attractive sites for viewers seeking a cathartic or familiar experience online. A momentary world of "now" emerges from viewing the embodied vector relations of Najwa Latif in either a social congregation or on a spiritual journey. Developing an identity from viewing and reacting to the digital and *YouTube* persona of Najwa Latif is an alternative space, or even a "moral space", for Malay music video viewers to "congregate". Furthermore, identifying semiotics of performing as the viewers' self-identification with select visual symbolizations of the music videos renders the semiotic reflex as a visual response arising from the hyperconsumption of digital products. The reflexive responses from viewing Najwa Latif's music videos, thus, form the basis for defining the semiotics of performing as a psycho-visual phenomenon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jyh Wee Sew, who teaches Malay at Centre for Language Studies (CLS), National University of Singapore, is a recipient of Hadiah Karya Kencana (DBP, Kuala Lumpur, 2011). Having three book titles with Universiti Malaya Press, Jyh publishes in Kajian Malaysia 33; and WORD 61. An editorial member of Theory and Practice in Language Studies (Academy, UK), Jyh was the Deputy Head of CLaSIC2014 Abstract and Program Committee of CLS.

REFERENCES

Ana Ahmad. (2012). Najwa Latif anak yang perlu melakukan derhaka? *Blog Kerana Ana*

Ahmad. http://amad-jalanan.blogspot.sg/2012/12/najwa-latif-anak-yang-perlu-melakukan.html

AsiaOne News. (2009). Malaysian YouTube sensation. *The New Straits Times.*

http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest+News/Showbiz/Story/A1Story20090809-160022.html

Asthana, S. (2012). *Youth media imaginaries from around the world*. New York: Peter Lang.

Baldry, A.P. (2004). Phase and transition, type and instance: Patterns in media texts as seen through a multimodal concordancer. In K.L. O'Halloran (eds.), *Multimodal discourse analysis: Systemic-functional perspectives* (pp. 83-108). London: Continuum.

Bateman, J.A. (2008). *Multimodality and genre: A foundation for the systematic analysis of multimodal documents*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bateman, J.A. & Schmidt, K-H. (2012). *Multimodal film analysis: How films mean*. New York: Routledge.

Bell, P. (2001). Content analysis of visual images. In T. van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (eds.), *Handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 10-34). London: SAGE.

Bezemer, J. & Mavers, D. (2011). Multimodal transcription as academic practice: A social semiotic perspective. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology 14*(3), 191-206.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.

Cary, R. (2004). Howard Gardner's theory of visual-spatial intelligence: A critical retheorizing. In J.L. Kincheloe (ed.), *Multiple Intelligences reconsidered* (pp. 84-118). New York: Peter Lang.

Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: The basics* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Chun, E. & Walters, K. (2011). Orienting to Arab orientalisms: Language, race and humor in a *YouTube* video. In C. Thurlow & K. Mroczek (eds.), *Digital discourse: Language in the new media* (pp. 251-273). New York: Oxford University Press.

Fajar Tri. (2015). Mengenal Ainan Tasneem. *AntiqueID* http://bocah1248.blogspot.sg/2015/07/mengenal-ainan-tasneem.html

Feride H. Atak. (2011). Najwa Latif cetus fenomena di stesen radio. *MStar*.

http://www.mstar.com.my/hiburan/berita-hiburan/2011/09/26/najwa-latif-cetus-fenomena-di-stesen-radio/

Fuziah Kartini Hassan Basri, Faridah Ibrahim, & Mus Chairil Samani. (2010). What's hip, what's hop? Disharmonized representations of gender in music videos. *Malaysian Journal of Communication 26*(2), 33-46.

Gee, J.P. & Hayes, E.R. (2011). *Language and learning in the digital age*.

London: Routledge.

Hagood, M.C. (2008). Intersections of popular culture, identities and new literacies research. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D.J. Leu (eds.), *Handbook of research on new literacies* (pp. 531-551). New York: LEA.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Arnold.

Holsanova, J. (2014). In the eye of the beholder: Visual communication from a recipient perspective. In D. Machin (ed.), *Visual communication* (pp. 331-355). Berlin: de Gruyter.

Howells, R. & Negreiros, J. (2012). *Visual culture* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity.

Idolfever. (2015). Stunning MalaysianYouTube sensation Joyce Chu. *IDOLFEVER Let it Burn*.

http://idol-fever.com/stunning-malaysian-youtube-sensation-joyce-chu/

Jewitt, C. & Oyama, R. (2001). Visual meaning: A social semiotic approach. In T. van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (eds.), *Handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 134-156). London: SAGE.

Jones, R.H. & Hafner, C.A. (2012). *Understanding digital literacies: A practical introduction*. London: Routledge.

Kong, C.C.K. (2013). A corpus-based study in comparing the multimodality of Chinese-and English-language newspapers. *Visual Communication 12*(2), 173-196.

Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2002). Colour as a semiotic mode: Notes for a grammar of colour. *Visual Communication 1*(3), 343–368.

Lakoff, G. (2008). *The political mind: Why you can't understand 21st-century American politics with an 18th-century brain*. New York: Viking.

Lam, W.S.E. (2009). Second language literacy and the design of the self: A case study of a teenager writing on the internet. In P. Hubbard (ed.), *Computer assisted learning Vol. II: CALL & Language skills* (pp. 254-278). London: Routledge.

Lemke, J.L. (2012). Multimedia and discourse analysis. In J.P. Gee & M. Handford (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 79-89). London: Routledge.

Lemke, J.L. (2004a). Multiplying intelligences: Hypermedia and social semiotics. In J.L. Kincheloe (ed.), *Multiple intelligences reconsidered* (pp. 177-200). New York: Peter Lang.

Lemke, J.L. (2004b). Metamedia literacy: Transforming meanings and media. In C. Handa (ed.), *Visual rhetoric in a digital world* (pp. 71-93). Boston: Bedford/St Martin.

Machin, D. (2010). *Analysing popular music: Image, sound, text*. London:

SAGE.

Machin, D. & van Leeuwen, T. (2007). *Global media discourse: A critical introduction*. London: Routledge.

Md Azalanshah Md Syed. (2013). Malay women as discerning viewers: Asian soap operas, consumer culture and negotiating modernity. *Gender, Place and Culture 20*, 647-663.

Mohd. Al Qayum Azizi, (2013). Najwa Latif Terima Biasiswa Dilantik Duta UNITAR. *MStar*. http://www.mstar.com.my/hiburan/berita-hiburan/2013/06/22/najwa-latif-terima-biasiswa-dilantik-duta-unitar/

Mohd. Zaid. (2012). Keputusan Penuh Pemenang dan Juara Anugerah Juara Lagu 26 #AJL26. *Mohd Zaid.com*. http://www.mohdzaid.com/2012/01/29/keputusan-pemeang-dan-juara-anugerah-juara-lagu-26-ajl26.html

Moore, R.E. (2013). 'My music, my freedom(?): the troubled pursuit of musical and intellectual independence on the Internet in Indonesia'. *Asian Journal of Communication 23*(4), 368-385.

Mus Chairil Samani, & Jamilah Maliki. (2010). Cultural discourse using visual elements: An analysis of a TDC brochure. *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies 12*(1)*,* 61–76.

Nagata, J. (1995). Modern Malay women and the message of the 'Veil'. In W. J. Karim (ed.), *'Male' and 'Female' in developing Southeast Asia* (pp. 101–120). Oxford: Berg Publishers.

O'Halloran, K.L. (2004). Visual semiosis in film. In K.L. O'Halloran (eds.), *Multimodal discourse analysis: Systemic-functional perspectives* (pp. 109-130). London: Continuum.

Power, M.J., Dillane, A., & Devereux, E. (2012). A push and a shove and the land is ours: Morrissey's counter-hegemonic stance(s) on social class. [*Special Issue: The Critical Analysis of Musical Discourse*] *Critical Discourse Studies 9*(4), 375-392.

Rheindorf, M. (2004). The multiple modes of *Dirty Dancing*: A cultural studies approach to multimodal discourse analysis. In E. Ventola, C. Charles & M. Kaltenbacher (eds.), *Perspectives on multimodality* (pp. 137-152). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Rose, G. (2012). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*. London: SAGE.

Scheible, J. (2015). *Digital shift: The cultural logic of punctuation*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

Sew, J.W. (2015a). Multilingual reconciliations in Singapore's Pioneer Generation Package campaign. *NUS-INALCO Symposium*: *Multilingualism & multiculturalism in language studies in Singapore, Paris and beyond*. Kent Ridge Guild House, 14-15 Nov. 2015.

Sew, J.W. (2015b). Cultural literacy in Chinese and Malay. *WORD 61*(2), 165-

177.

Sew, J.W. (2010). *Persembahan@Media.com*. Kuala Lumpur: University of
Malaya Press.

Sew, J.W. (2009a). Wired new learning: Blogging Malay literacy. *Electronic
Journal of Foreign Language Teaching 6*, 302–314. http://e-flt.nus.edu.sg/
v6sp12009/sew.pdf

Sew, J.W. (2009b). *Semiotik persembahan wacana*. Kuala Lumpur: University
of Malaya Press.

Sew, J.W. (2009c). Gin and tonic and passing trains. *Intersections: Gender
and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 23. http://intersections.anu.edu.au/
issue23/sew_review.htm

Sew, J.W. (1997). Power pragmatics in Asian languages. *Language Sciences
19*(4), 357-367.

Siti Zanariah Ahmad Ishak. (2011). Cultural hybridity: Adapting and filtering
popular culture in Malaysian television programmes. *Malaysian Journal
of Media Studies 13*(1)*,* 1–15.

Smith, M. (2013). Theses on the philosophy of history: The work of research
in the age of digital searchability and distributability. *Journal of Visual
Culture 12*(3), 375-403.

Soh, D. (2013). Photographing banal spaces, *Guest Lecture*, Centre for
Advanced Studies in Architecture, School of Design & Environment,
National University of Singapore, 22 Oct.

StÖckl, H. (2004). In between modes: Language and image in printed media.
In E. Ventola, C. Charles & M. Kaltenbacher (eds.), *Perspectives on
multimodality* (pp. 9-30). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Trinh, M.H. (2011). The walker and her double, *Keynote Address*, UC
Berkeley Gender & Women Studies 20th Anniversary Conference, 7 Oct.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZv9WHaB1QI

Wingstedt, J., Brandstrom, S., & Berg, J. (2010). Narrative music, visuals and
meaning in film. *Visual Communication 9*(2), 193-210.

van Leeuwen, T. (2012). The critical analysis of musical
discourse. [*Special Issue: The Critical Analysis of Musical
Discourse*] *Critical Discourse Studies 9*(4), 319-328.

van Leeuwen, T. (2004). Ten reasons why linguists should pay
attention to visual communication. In P. Levine & R. Scollon
(eds.), *Discourse & Technology: Multimodal discourse
analysis*, (pp. 7-19). Washington: Georgetown University
Press.

Vannini, P., Waskul, D. & Gottschalk, S. (2012). *The senses in

self, society, and culture: A sociology of the senses. New York: Routledge.

Yanow, D. (2014). Neither rigorous nor objective? Interrogating criteria for knowledge claims in interpretive science. In D. Yanow & P. Schwartz-Shea (eds.), *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and interpretive turn* (pp. 97-119). New York: M.E. Sharpe.