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Representing Ideology in *Midway* (2019) Movie Posters: A Semiotic and Visual Grammar Analysis

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ABSTRACT
War movie posters function not only as promotional materials but also as multimodal texts through which complex historical conflicts are selectively organised into particular narratives of war, national identity, and heroism. However, limited attention has been given to how promotional visual texts transform warfare into emotionally persuasive ideological narratives through the interaction of semiotic and visual resources across multiple posters. This study examines how visual and verbal signs in selected *Midway* (2019) movie posters construct ideological meanings of nationalism, heroism, and war legitimacy through Barthes' semiotics and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar. A qualitative descriptive method was employed to analyse twelve selected official posters from twenty-two identified posters. Barthes' framework was used to examine how meanings move from denotation and connotation into ideological myths, while Visual Grammar was applied to analyse narrative and conceptual representational processes. The analysis identified 179 recurring visual and verbal elements across the posters. These signs operated denotatively as military representations, while their combination produced connotative meanings associated with courage, sacrifice, leadership, and national responsibility. At the mythic level, these representations naturalised particular understandings of nationalism, heroism, and war legitimacy by framing American military action as disciplined, purposeful, and morally meaningful. Conceptual processes dominated the representational structure, occurring across all 179 elements, while narrative processes appeared in 52 elements. The study demonstrates that movie posters do not merely reflect patriotic narratives but actively participate in producing ideological meanings by transforming warfare into emotionally persuasive narratives of national identity, sacrifice, and moral justification.
Keywords*: Semiotics, Visual Grammar, Ideological Representation, Movie Posters, War Ideology.*

INTRODUCTION

Visual media play a central role in shaping how meaning is produced, communicated, and interpreted within contemporary society, operating as communicative systems in which images, colours, symbols, and composition convey cultural values, social identities, and ideological perspectives. Rose (2016, as cited in Darnhofer, 2018) emphasises the importance of examining visual materials as part of the processes through which social meanings are constructed. Hall (1997, as cited in Erlan et al., 2025) explains that representation plays a central role in meaning-making because meaning is constructed through language, signs, and shared cultural codes. Meaning-making also depends on audience interpretation, involving an active process in which audiences construct meaning based on cultural and contextual factors, rather than passively receiving it from the image (Chandler, 2007, as cited in Travere, 2023). In movie posters specifically, these visual resources work together to establish audiences' initial perceptions of characters, themes, genre, and narrative even before the movie itself is viewed. Visual media can therefore be understood as dynamic cultural texts, in which representational choices and audience interpretation jointly contribute to the construction of social, cultural, and ideological meanings.

Movie posters are multimodal promotional texts combining visual and verbal resources to communicate information and shape audiences' initial perceptions. Pooranalingam (2024) states that movie poster design relies on the deliberate placement of graphic components to create an immediate visual impact and communicate information before audiences watch the movie. Characters are among the most prominent visual components, as their appearance, clothing, posture, expression, gaze, and positioning communicate identity, status, role, and relationships. Aley and Hahn (2020, as cited in Kagan et al., 2024) show that main-character representation establishes differences in visual prominence. Semiotically, these features generate denotative, connotative, and ideological meanings, while in Visual Grammar terms, characters function as represented participants whose relationships and actions shape visual meaning. Settings likewise construct context through environments such as landscapes, buildings, skies, seas, battlefields, and cities, with Fitria and Sakinah (2026) noting that elements like sky, water, and landscape establish

setting while contributing to narrative atmosphere. Colour shapes mood, emphasis, and symbolic association, and is both culturally conditioned and widely recognisable, making it relevant to denotative and connotative interpretation alike (Wierzbicka, 1996, as cited in Cahyani et al., 2022). Typography, through typeface, size, weight, spacing, alignment, and colour, contributes to textual hierarchy while also signalling genre, mood, period, and identity (Kremida et al., 2023, as cited in Saqib, 2025). Symbols and objects, including weapons, vehicles, uniforms, flags, maps, and medals, connect literal representation to cultural and ideological meaning; Muazzomah (2023) demonstrates that such elements function as icons, indexes, and symbols whose relationships with other elements shape broader representational meaning. Composition further organises these resources through position, size, salience, information value, and framing, enabling visual and verbal signs to operate together (Budiastono & Noverino, 2024). Verbal elements such as titles, taglines, release information, and character names provide explicit information while guiding interpretation and establishing visual hierarchy through their placement and prominence (Karenski et al., 2023). War movie posters can also function as ideological texts because their representations of warfare may communicate particular values concerning nation, military power, heroism, and sacrifice. The selection and arrangement of military figures, weapons, national symbols, and dramatic scenes can establish particular interpretations of conflict rather than presenting warfare as a completely neutral reality. As Williamson (1978, as cited in Hamouda, 2021) argues, advertising extends beyond its commercial purpose by constructing structures of meaning that influence how reality is perceived. Through Barthes' concept of myth, such connotations become naturalised when culturally specific values are presented as self-evident. War movie posters can therefore simultaneously promote a movie and construct ideological meanings about warfare and its participants.

Movie posters are multimodal promotional texts that combine visual and verbal resources to communicate information, construct audience expectations, and shape initial interpretations before viewers engage with the complete film narrative. Beyond their commercial function, movie posters operate as cultural texts in which images, colours, typography, symbols, and linguistic elements interact to produce particular meanings.

Pooranalingam (2024) argues that poster design depends on the deliberate arrangement of graphic components to create immediate visual impact and communicate essential information about a film. Characters represent one of the most prominent visual resources because their appearance, clothing, posture, facial expression, gaze, and positioning communicate identity, status, roles, and relationships among represented participants. Aley and Hahn (2020, as cited in Kagan et al., 2024) demonstrate that character representation establishes visual prominence and influences audience interpretation of central figures. Other visual elements, including settings, colours, typography, and symbolic objects, also contribute to meaning construction. Settings such as landscapes, skies, seas, cities, and battlefields establish narrative contexts and emotional atmospheres, while colour functions as a culturally shaped resource that produces both emotional and symbolic associations (Wierzbicka, 1996, as cited in Cahyani et al., 2022). Typography communicates genre, historical period, identity, and mood through choices of typeface, size, weight, spacing, and alignment (Kremida et al., 2023, as cited in Saqib, 2025). Likewise, military objects such as weapons, vehicles, uniforms, flags, maps, and medals operate as symbolic resources that connect literal representation with broader cultural meanings (Muazzomah, 2023). Through compositional arrangements involving salience, framing, position, and information value, these visual and verbal resources are organised into meaningful structures that guide interpretation (Budiastono & Noverino, 2024). Therefore, movie posters should not be viewed merely as promotional materials but as multimodal texts where representational choices contribute to the construction of social meanings, identities, and ideological interpretations of events such as warfare.

The ideological dimension of movie posters can be examined through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, which explains how signs develop from direct representation into broader cultural meanings and ideological myths. Barthes distinguishes between denotation, connotation, and myth, arguing that meanings are produced through multiple levels of signification. At the denotative level, signs refer to observable objects, actions, or participants; at the connotative level, they evoke culturally constructed associations; and at the mythic level, these meanings become naturalised and appear as common sense rather

than as historically and socially constructed interpretations (Barthes, 1972, 1977). Myth, in Barthes' perspective, does not conceal meaning but transforms particular cultural and historical values into seemingly universal truths, allowing ideological assumptions to operate invisibly within everyday representations (Chandler, 2022). From a Barthesian perspective, ideological meanings do not primarily operate through explicit statements but through processes of naturalisation, where particular values are transformed into seemingly objective realities. This process is particularly significant in visual culture because images often appear immediate and transparent, even though they are produced through selective choices of representation, framing, and emphasis (Rose, 2023). In war-related visual culture, heroic sacrifice, national unity, military discipline, and armed action may be represented not as ideological choices but as self-evident moral values.

As Lene Hansen (2021) explains, visual representations of war do not merely depict violence but actively participate in constructing particular understandings of enemies, heroes, victims, and legitimate military actions. Therefore, analysing war movie posters requires attention not only to what signs represent but also to how these signs make particular understandings of warfare appear normal, legitimate, and emotionally persuasive. National identity in visual media is similarly constructed through selective symbols and narratives that connect individual actions with collective belonging, historical memory, and imagined national values (Anderson, 2016). This perspective is further strengthened by Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar, particularly through representational meanings that explain how visual participants, actions, and symbolic attributes construct meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Narrative processes reveal actions, events, and relationships among participants, whereas conceptual processes establish identities, classifications, and symbolic associations. Through these representational processes, military figures, weapons, uniforms, and national symbols become more than visual objects; they function as ideological resources that shape interpretations of war and national identity. Furthermore, representations of heroism in war narratives often depend on cultural processes that associate sacrifice, obedience, courage, and suffering with moral superiority, thereby making military participation appear socially meaningful and desirable (Campbell, 2020). Within

this framework, nationalism is understood as a visual construction of collective identity, historical memory, and national responsibility rather than merely the presence of national symbols. Heroism is constructed through representations of courage, sacrifice, discipline, and collective duty, while war ideology emerges through symbolic processes that frame military actions and sacrifices as meaningful, necessary, or legitimate. As Enloe (2022) argues, military narratives frequently rely on gendered and nationalised representations that normalise militarism by presenting military service as a form of protection, honour, and collective responsibility. Consequently, war movie posters participate not only in promoting films but also in producing and circulating ideological meanings about warfare, heroism, and national identity.

However, the ideological significance of war representations does not simply lie in the presence of patriotic symbols or heroic characters. More importantly, it lies in the semiotic processes through which selective interpretations of conflict are produced and presented as natural, legitimate, and emotionally compelling. Promotional materials such as movie posters play an important role in this process because they compress complex historical events into visually powerful narratives that privilege certain values while limiting alternative interpretations of war.

Although previous studies have examined war films from historical, political, and cinematic perspectives, limited attention has been given to how promotional visual texts participate in the ideological construction of warfare. Movie posters are often treated merely as advertising materials; however, they function as condensed ideological texts where visual and linguistic signs organise particular meanings of heroism, national identity, and military sacrifice. Therefore, analysing *Midway* movie posters provides insight into how war narratives are simplified, emotionalised, and normalised before audiences encounter the film itself.

This ideological potential is examined in this study through the official promotional posters of *Midway* (2019), a war movie dramatizing the Battle of Midway and its significance in the Pacific theatre of the Second World War. The selected posters are treated as multimodal texts combining military participants, equipment, battle environments, maps,

and verbal elements, making them a relevant object for examining nationalism, heroism, and war ideology.

As official promotional materials produced within the Hollywood film industry, *Midway* posters should be understood within a commercial context where visual choices are shaped by marketing strategies, audience expectations, and genre conventions. Therefore, this study does not treat posters as neutral representations of historical events but examines them as cultural texts in which ideological meanings are constructed through selective visual and verbal choices.

Based on a review of previous studies, it is apparent that research on movie posters has primarily concentrated on either semiotic analysis or Visual Grammar, with few studies combining both approaches. Darmayanti and Marantika (2023) applied Barthes' semiotic theory alongside Cerrato's colour theory to the *Titanic* poster, identifying nineteen verbal and non-verbal signs whose colours, character images, and textual elements construct denotative and connotative meanings of character and atmosphere. Amri and Pratiwi (2023) drew on Saussure, Peirce, Danesi, and Barthes to examine eight semiotic signs across the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* teaser and theatrical posters, showing that facial expressions, posture, and setting construct meanings of adolescence, insecurity, and identity, while Barthes' concept of myth reinforces cultural ideas about teenage life. Arianti et al., (2025) applied Barthes' framework to the five factions in *Divergent* movie, result that denotative meanings of knowledge, friendliness, honesty, selflessness, and bravery develop connotatively into associations with logical thinking, harmony, social order, responsibility, sacrifice, and fearlessness. Shifting to Visual Grammar, Harjantoko et al., (2024) examined narrative processes (transactional, non-transactional, reactional) and conceptual processes (classificational, analytical, symbolic) in the *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* poster, showing that gaze, participant relationships, positioning, and symbolic attributes represent conflict, hierarchy, authority, patriotism, and cultural identity.

Similarly, Rizqullah (2024) applied Visual Grammar to the *Moonlight* (2016) poster, result that its triptych arrangement represents the protagonist across life stages while direct gaze, framing, posture, and colour construct interactional meaning, and central placement,

typography, and framing construct compositional meaning tied to identity, marginalisation, and self-discovery. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that movie posters construct meaning through visual and verbal signs, symbolic resources, and visual structures, yet each applies semiotic analysis and Visual Grammar separately, focusing primarily on sign identification, cultural meaning, or character representation rather than their integration.

The objective of the study has 3 objective such as first, analyse the denotative and connotative meanings constructed through the visual and verbal signs in the selected *Midway* movie posters. Then, examine how ideological myths of nationalism, heroism, and war ideology are naturalised through the visual and verbal signs in the selected *Midway* movie posters. Lastly, explain how representational processes construct visual meanings of nationalism, heroism, and war ideology in the selected *Midway* movie posters. Roland Barthes' semiotic framework is utilised to analyse denotative, connotative, and mythological significations, focusing specifically on nationalism, heroism, and war ideology. Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar is limited to representational meaning, particularly narrative and conceptual processes, to explain how actions, participants, identities, classifications, and symbolic attributes construct ideological meanings. Interactive and compositional meanings are excluded from the analysis in order to maintain a focused and consistent analytical scope.

The study has three objectives. First, this study analyses how denotative and connotative meanings are constructed through visual and verbal signs in the selected *Midway* movie posters, particularly how these signs organise interpretations of war, national identity, and military action. Second, this study examines how ideological myths of nationalism, heroism, and war legitimacy are naturalised through visual and verbal signs by revealing how selective representations of sacrifice, courage, and collective identity transform a historically complex conflict into an emotionally persuasive narrative of national duty. Lastly, this study explains how representational processes construct ideological meanings by examining how visual participants, actions, settings, and symbolic attributes position audiences to perceive war through particular frameworks of heroism, national identity, and moral justification. Roland Barthes' semiotic framework is utilised to examine how meanings move from visual representation to ideological myth. Rather than assuming

nationalism, heroism, and war ideology as fixed meanings embedded within the posters, this study investigates how these meanings are produced, circulated, and naturalised through specific semiotic choices. Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar is applied specifically to representational meaning, particularly narrative and conceptual processes, to explain how actions, participants, identities, classifications, and symbolic attributes contribute to ideological constructions. Interactive and compositional meanings are excluded to maintain analytical consistency. This approach does not evaluate whether the representation of war is historically true or politically valid; instead, it examines how promotional visual texts construct particular understandings of conflict by making certain values, emotions, and interpretations appear natural and persuasive.

This study demonstrates how Barthes' semiotic and Kress & Van Leeuwen's visual grammar can be applied together to analyse ideological meanings in war movie posters. Rather than claiming to develop the theory itself, it provides a practical example of integrating semiotic and visual grammar approaches in a specific context. This helps clarify how abstract frameworks can be operationalised for poster analysis and serves as a guide for future studies on visual ideology.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design, which was considered appropriate for interpreting meanings, concepts, and patterns embedded in visual and textual data rather than measuring statistical relationships (Creswell, 2014). This design guided the examination of how visual and verbal signs constructed ideological meanings in the *Midway* movie posters. The analysis concentrated on observable semiotic resources, including represented participants, military objects, colours, settings, gestures, symbolic elements, titles, taglines, and historical statements. The study integrated Roland Barthes' semiotic theory and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar to examine how these resources constructed meanings related to nationalism, heroism, and war ideology. Barthes' framework was used to examine denotative, connotative, and mythic meanings, whereas Visual Grammar was applied specifically to representational meaning, particularly narrative and conceptual processes. The combination of the two frameworks enabled the study to

examine both the levels of signification and the visual structures through which ideological meanings were constructed.

The primary data consisted of twelve purposively selected official *Midway* movie posters, including teaser and theatrical versions. The posters were selected from twenty-two identified official promotional posters because they represented varied visual and promotional arrangements and contained visual and verbal signs relevant to the research objectives. The posters were obtained from credible promotional and distribution sources to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the visual materials. As multimodal texts, the selected posters combined visual and verbal resources within a single communicative composition. The visual data included military participants, uniforms, aircraft, naval vessels, weapons, gestures, facial expressions, colours, battle environments, maps, explosions, and other symbolic objects. The verbal data included the movie title, taglines, release information, historical statements, character names, credits, and production information. These elements were treated as analytical units because they contributed to the construction of cultural and ideological meanings within the posters.

The primary data consisted of twelve purposively selected official *Midway* movie posters, including teaser and theatrical versions, from twenty-two identified official promotional posters. The selection was based on their analytical relevance to the research objectives, particularly their representation of visual and verbal signs associated with nationalism, heroism, and war ideology. The selected posters were chosen because they contained recurring representational elements, including military participants, national symbols, combat scenes, symbolic objects, heroic figures, and verbal expressions that contributed to the construction of ideological meanings. Rather than focusing solely on visual variation, the selection aimed to capture different strategies through which the film's promotional materials represented warfare, national identity, and military sacrifice.

The posters were obtained from official promotional and distribution sources to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the visual materials. As official promotional products within the Hollywood film industry, the *Midway* posters are understood as commercial cultural texts shaped by marketing purposes, genre conventions, and

anticipated audience expectations. Therefore, this study does not treat the posters as neutral representations of the historical Battle of Midway, but examines them as multimodal texts in which ideological meanings are constructed through selective visual and verbal choices. The analysis focuses on how these representational choices produce meanings within the poster texts themselves rather than evaluating the studio's marketing strategies, the filmmaker's perspectives, historical accuracy, or audience reception. The visual data included military participants, uniforms, aircraft, naval vessels, weapons, gestures, facial expressions, colours, battle environments, maps, explosions, and other symbolic objects. The verbal data included movie titles, taglines, release information, historical statements, character names, credits, and production-related information. These elements were treated as analytical units because their interaction contributed to the construction and naturalisation of cultural and ideological meanings within the posters.

Data were collected through a documentation procedure. The researcher first identified and collected official Midway posters from verified promotional platforms and trusted film databases. The authenticity, version, and visual completeness of the posters were checked before they were included in the corpus. The selected posters were then observed repeatedly to develop familiarity with their visual compositions and verbal information. The researcher identified and recorded relevant visual signs, including participants, military objects, actions, colours, settings, battle effects, and symbolic attributes, as well as verbal signs such as titles, taglines, historical statements, and other promotional information. The identified signs were subsequently documented in a structured data sheet that recorded their visual characteristics, textual features, location, and preliminary interpretation. The data were then organised according to the analytical categories derived from Barthes' semiotics and Visual Grammar. Finally, representative signs that were most relevant to nationalism, heroism, and war ideology were selected for detailed analysis.

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The collected data were subsequently organised according to analytical categories derived from Barthes' semiotics and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar. Given the interpretative nature of semiotic analysis, reflexivity was maintained throughout the analytical process by recognising that ideological meanings are not inherently contained within signs but are constructed through theoretically informed interpretation. To enhance analytical credibility, interpretations were repeatedly examined against the visual and verbal evidence across the poster corpus to ensure consistency and avoid unsupported assumptions. Finally, representative signs most relevant to nationalism, heroism, and war ideology were selected for detailed analysis.

Following the data organisation process, the analysis was conducted through a qualitative interpretive procedure integrating Barthes' semiotics and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar. Given the interpretative nature of semiotic analysis, reflexivity was maintained throughout the analytical process by recognising that ideological meanings are not inherently contained within signs but are constructed through theoretically informed interpretation. To enhance analytical credibility, interpretations were repeatedly examined against visual and verbal evidence across the poster corpus to ensure consistency and avoid unsupported assumptions. Each identified sign was examined through Barthes' three levels of signification: denotation focused on literal and observable characteristics, connotation explored cultural, emotional, and symbolic associations, while myth examined how particular meanings were naturalised into broader ideological messages related to nationalism, heroism, and war ideology. Subsequently, Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar was applied to examine representational meanings, with narrative processes

analysed through vectors, actions, movements, gestures, and relationships among represented participants, while conceptual processes focused on symbolic, classificational, analytical, and identity-related structures. This stage examined how participants, objects, and visual relationships constructed particular identities and ideological meanings within the posters. Representative signs most relevant to the research objectives were then selected for detailed interpretation. The analytical categories were not treated as predetermined meanings; rather, they functioned as interpretative frameworks for examining how visual and verbal resources produced meanings within the specific cultural context of *Midway* movie posters.

The results from the semiotic and Visual Grammar analyses were integrated, as the researcher compared the denotative, connotative, and mythic meanings identified through Barthes' framework with the narrative and conceptual structures identified through Visual Grammar; the interpretation then focused on recurring patterns across the selected posters to determine how visual and verbal resources contributed to the construction of nationalism, heroism, and war ideology, with particular attention given to how military figures, uniforms, weapons, aircraft, maps, battle effects, colours, titles, taglines, and other symbolic resources collectively reinforced particular representations of war and national identity.

By integrating the two analytical perspectives, the study interpreted not only what the posters represented but also how their visual and verbal resources organised and naturalised ideological meanings, and this interpretive procedure provided a systematic basis for explaining the relationship between visual representation, cultural meaning, and ideology in the *Midway* movie posters.

By integrating the two analytical perspectives, this study does not assume that visual signs possess fixed meanings or that representational structures operate as universal codes. Instead, Barthes' semiotics is used to examine how meanings move from literal representation to cultural associations and eventually become naturalised as ideological myths. Meanwhile, Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar is applied to analyse how visual structures organise participants, actions, and symbolic relationships within specific social and cultural contexts. Therefore, the two frameworks serve complementary analytical

purposes: Barthes explains the ideological processes through which meanings become naturalised, while Visual Grammar explains how visual arrangements construct particular representations. This approach avoids treating Visual Grammar categories as fixed meanings and recognises that ideological meanings emerge from the interaction between signs, representational choices, and cultural contexts.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study identifies the visual and verbal meanings constructed in the selected official *Midway* movie posters through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar. From twenty-two official promotional posters initially identified, twelve posters are purposively selected as the primary corpus because they provide sufficient variation in visual composition, represented participants, military imagery, battle environments, and verbal promotional elements, and are treated as multimodal texts in which visual and verbal resources operate together to communicate information and construct cultural and ideological meanings.

The study identifies 179 visual and verbal elements across the selected poster corpus, including military participants, uniforms, aircraft, naval vessels, weapons, maps, battle environments, fire, smoke, explosions, titles, taglines, historical statements, release information, and other promotional texts. These identified elements are analysed at three levels of Barthesian signification and through two forms of representational meaning in Visual Grammar: at the denotative level, each element is described according to its observable form, including participants, objects, settings, movements, visual characteristics, and verbal information; at the connotative level, the same elements are interpreted through their cultural, emotional, and symbolic associations; and at the mythic level, the analysis examines how recurring associations become naturalised as broader ideological meanings related to nationalism, heroism, military duty, sacrifice, historical memory, and war ideology. Visual Grammar is applied to determine whether the represented elements primarily construct meaning through conceptual or narrative processes, with conceptual processes identified through symbolic, analytical, and classificational structures, whereas narrative processes are identified through vectors, actions, reactions, movements, and relationships among represented participants. The distribution of the identified meanings shows a clear

dominance of conceptual representation: all 179 identified elements contain denotative, connotative, mythic, and conceptual meanings, while 52 elements contain narrative meanings, a distribution indicating that the selected posters consistently provide literal descriptions, cultural associations, ideological implications, and relatively stable representational identities for the visual and verbal elements, whereas narrative structures occur more selectively when the posters depict actions, movements, attacks, or reactions.

Table 1. Distribution Data of Denotation, Connotation, Myth, Narrative and Conceptual Meaning in *Midway* (2019) Movie Posters

No.	Description	Total
1	Denotative meanings	179
2	Connotative meanings	179
3	Myth meanings	179
4	Narrative meanings	52
5	Conceptual meanings	179

Table 1: The distribution of denotative, connotative, mythic, narrative, and conceptual meanings across the 22 official *Midway* movie posters. The study identified 179 visual and verbal elements and analysed them using Barthes' semiotic framework and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar. All 179 elements contained denotative, connotative, mythic, and conceptual meanings, while only 52 elements contained narrative meanings. The results were then classified according to recurring visual, verbal, ideological, and representational categories.

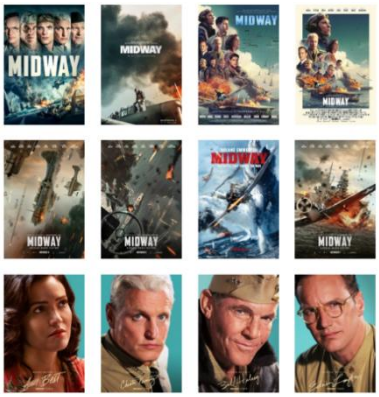

Figure 1. The 12 posters included in the data (thesis appendix)

The study cropped specific visual and verbal elements from the twelve posters to examine each sign according to its dominant analytical category. The cropped data preserved

their relationship with the original posters, while the complete images provided information about placement, scale, visual hierarchy, and surrounding elements.

The Construction of Military Identity and Ideological Meaning through Visual Signs



Figure 2. Hierarchical Composition of Military and Civilian Characters of Midway

The *Midway* posters construct military identity through a layered visual hierarchy of professional role and institutional authority. Figure 2 illustrates a group arrangement featuring a naval aviator wearing a uniform with a flight helmet and goggles at the top, followed by various officers marked by rank insignia and differing uniforms, with a civilian woman interspersed among them, and enlisted personnel positioned at the base of the composition. At the denotative level, this vertical arrangement identifies distinct military roles and a single civilian presence without yet attributing ideological value. Barthes' framework explains how this arrangement moves from literal identification toward connotation. The aviator's elevated placement connotes command and elite skill, the mid-tier officers connote institutional order, and the enlisted men at the base connote collective operational support, forming a graduated system of authority that myth naturalises as the self-evident structure of military competence. Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar clarify the underlying mechanism: analytical processes attach visible attributes (helmet, insignia, uniform variation) to identify each participant's role, while vertical positioning functions as a compositional marker of institutional rank, and classificational structures group participants within a single organised military system. Marked by dress rather than

uniform, the civilian woman's placement outside this vertical rank order further denotes a structural boundary between military and civilian space.

These results extend prior semiotic and multimodal work on hierarchy in movie posters. Consistent with Işık & Bilici (2020) and Dianiya (2020), visible attributes such as clothing and positioning are shown to encode social and professional distinction. This study extends that result by linking such attributes specifically to institutional military rank rather than class or narrative adaptation. Hanh and Chi (2024) similarly identify occupational meaning through Visual Grammar processes but stop short of examining ideological naturalisation through myth. Building on Nurfahresi and Prastiwi (2025) study of gendered leadership, the present analysis shows that *Midway* organises institutional authority as a graduated male hierarchy, positioning the civilian woman as structurally separate from it. This arrangement links rank, gender, and wartime ideology within a single composition.

American Heroism, Leadership, and Collective Military Discipline



Figure 3. *Collective Aerial Attack and Coordinated Military Heroism in Midway*

Heroism in the Midway posters is constructed as a collective military value rather than individual bravado. Figure 3 depicts a dive-bomber squadron descending in coordinated diagonal formation toward a burning carrier. The aircraft maintain uniform trajectory despite the visible destruction below, denoting controlled, purposeful action rather than chaos. Barthes' model explains how this coordinated movement, combined with recurring close-ups of controlled facial expressions elsewhere in the corpus, connotes psychological composure and duty, which myth elevates into a narrative of natural American heroism.

Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar identify the underlying structure. transactional action processes assign the aircraft actor status against the carrier as goal, while reactional processes, such as the off-screen gazes seen in other posters, represent vigilance rather than fear.

This construction develops beyond results in prior action and war-poster studies. Alfianinsih (2024) shows those courage and readiness are conveyed through weapons and dangerous settings in *John Wick and Mission: Impossible*, the present study supports this but shows Midway relocates such qualities from an individual action hero to an organised institution. Yin & Hassan (2021) multimodal analysis *of Little Big Soldier* offers the closest comparison, demonstrating that vectors, central positioning, and determined gazes jointly construct bravery and patriotic commitment. The present study confirms and extends by tying heroism specifically to coordinated formation movement rather than individual positioning. Pasya & Rahayu (2024) similarly link facial restraint to psychological pressure in *Oppenheimer*, though *Midway* reframes that restraint as a collective military virtue rather than personal trauma.

Military Power, Technology, and the Ideology of American Superiority



Figure 4. *American Dive Bomber Attacking a Japanese Battleship in Midway*

The representation of American military superiority in the *Midway* posters is structured not only through intact technological capability, but through the *resilience* of coordinated formations under fire and the *precision* of individual strikes. Figure 4 presents several dive bombers descending together across a battlefield filled with explosions and smoke. One aircraft trails thick black smoke from visible damage, yet the surrounding planes

maintain their trajectory and spacing undisturbed. At the denotative level, the image identifies a squadron in descent with one damaged unit. At the connotative level, however, the unbroken formation around it denotes continuity of operation despite individual loss. Barthes' framework explains how this composition moves toward myth: damage to a single aircraft would ordinarily signify vulnerability, but its containment within an otherwise orderly formation converts it into evidence of systemic strength, forming the myth of a military machine so organised that even losses cannot disrupt its operational momentum. Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar clarify the formation-level mechanism through classificational and compositional structure: the undamaged aircraft share equivalent size, spacing, and downward vectors, classifying them as one coordinated unit, while the damaged aircraft's divergent smoke trail marks it as an exception absorbed by, rather than disrupting, the collective pattern.

These results extend previous studies on visual representations of power and ideology. Nazwa and Wenerda (2024) show that poster elements construct ideological meaning beyond simple promotion, supporting the broader claim that visual signs of power are never neutral. The present study extends this by showing that *Midway* locates superiority not in flawless technology alone but in organisational resilience under duress and consistent precision in individual engagements. Boysan and Kiziltan (2023) confirm that classificational processes assign group meaning to represented objects in movie posters generally. The present analysis extends this mechanism by showing how classification can absorb visible damage into a narrative of collective strength rather than individual failure, while transactional processes elsewhere in the corpus reinforce the same ideology at the level of a single attack.

War Destruction, Sacrifice, and the Legitimation of Violence



Figure 5. *Naval Bombardment and Battlefield Violence in Midway*

War destruction in the *Midway* posters is consistently rendered through damage to machines rather than to bodies, even when destruction is shown at close range. Figure 5's composition presents burning wreckage floating on the ocean surface with twisted metal engulfed in orange flame in the foreground, a secondary fire visible at the frame's edge, and a vertical water column rising in the background where a projectile has struck the sea, while an aircraft carrier remains intact and distant in the upper frame. At the denotative level, the image records fire, wreckage, water impact, and an undamaged vessel within a single maritime scene without a pilot, sailor, rescue effort, or human casualty appearing anywhere in the composition despite the concentration of destructive elements. Barthes' model explains how this selection moves from literal combat damage toward a myth of necessary sacrifice. The wreckage and flame connote physical loss, but their isolation from any visible human presence connotes endurance and continuity, and myth presents this loss as an expected condition of national achievement rather than a consequence of contestable strategic decisions. The undamaged carrier surviving in the same frame as the burning wreckage further naturalises the idea that individual loss is absorbed without disrupting the greater military effort.

Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar clarify the mechanism through non-transactional vectors and salience: the wreckage and water column function as visible outcomes of purposeful military action rather than random casualties, while the intact

carrier in the background anchors the scene in continued operational control, framing violence as severe yet contained.

The present results extend prior work on visual representations of violence and ideological legitimation. Nurziyati (2022) shows that visible horror in the *Pembantaian Dukun Santet* poster is transformed into myths legitimising violence through cultural fear. *Midway* performs a structurally similar transformation but legitimises destruction through military necessity rather than supernatural belief. Utami et al., (2025) foreground victims and moral injury directly through concentration-camp imagery in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, a contrast that highlights how *Midway* instead suppresses wounded bodies almost entirely, even within a single frame that combines wreckage, fire, and an intact vessel. The present study extends these results by showing that *Midway* does not merely depict destruction. Rather, it reorganises wreckage, fire, and water impact as controlled, machine-borne sacrifice that coexists with, and sustains, continued operational strength.

Nationalism, Historical Memory, and Midway as a Turning Point



Figure 6. *Promotional Tagline Representing Directorial Authority in Midway*

Nationalism and historical memory in the *Midway* posters are constructed partly through declarative verbal signs that frame the battle's historical weight. Figure 6 recurring tagline reads "ONE BATTLE TURNED THE TIDE OF WAR," rendered in bold capital letters that dominate its section of the composition. At the denotative level, the statement identifies a single military engagement and claims a causal link between that engagement and a broader shift in the war's outcome. Barthes' framework explains how this verbal sign moves toward myth: the words denote a factual claim about historical consequence, but their absolute phrasing "one battle," "turned," and "the tide of war" connotes decisiveness and inevitability rather than contested historical interpretation, and myth subsequently presents Midway not as one contributing engagement among many but as the singular, self-evident hinge point of the entire Pacific War. The bold, capitalised typography reinforces this authority by giving the claim visual weight comparable to the film's title itself. Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar clarify this through salience and information value. The tagline's

scale, contrast, and placement grant it interpretative priority, positioning the statement as a fact the viewer is meant to accept rather than a promotional claim to be evaluated.

These results extend prior work on visual and verbal signs in collective memory. Pratiwi et al., (2024) show that linguistic and non-linguistic signs in the *Surau dan Silek* poster communicate cultural identity alongside narrative information, supporting the broader claim that posters function as cultural-historical texts. The present study extends this by showing that a single declarative tagline can compress an entire historical narrative into a claim of decisive national significance. Nauli and Halomoan (2021) similarly find that personal objects preserve memory and emotional continuity in *Forget Me Not*, a comparison that highlights how *Midway* performs an equivalent memorial function at a collective, national level through verbal assertion rather than personal artefacts, using declarative language, rather than material objects, to anchor historical significance.

The Representation of Japan as the Military Other



Figure 7. *Promotional Tagline Representing Directorial Authority in Midway*

Japan occupies the position of the military Other in the *Midway* posters through recurring contrasts between American agency and Japanese vulnerability. Figure 7 presents an aerial combat scene in which American aircraft, marked with white star insignia, dive toward a Japanese vessel identified by its rising-sun emblem. Tracer fire connects the aircraft to the ship, while smoke and an explosion mark the point of impact. At the denotative level, the image identifies two opposing military forces and an ongoing exchange of fire. Barthes'

theory explains how this contrast develops into a mythic opposition. The star and rising-sun emblems denote national affiliation, but their differing positions, with the American aircraft rendered active and elevated while the Japanese vessel remains stationary and struck, connote control versus vulnerability, and myth then presents Japanese defeat as the expected resolution of conflict rather than a contested military outcome. Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar clarify the participant relations sustaining this hierarchy. Transactional action processes assign the American aircraft the role of Actor and the Japanese vessel the role of Goal, while the tracer lines function as the vector connecting them. The poster excludes Japanese sailors, casualties, or any human presence aboard the targeted ship, reducing emotional identification with Japan and converting the exchange into a purely operational outcome.

The representation of Japan as the military Other extends prior studies on exclusion and unequal visual agency. Alharbi (2026) shows that spatial positioning and salience in movie posters articulate national identity through compositional structure; applied here, American aircraft consistently occupy active, elevated trajectories while Japanese vessels appear as static targets. Toon (2022) similarly demonstrates that American World War II posters historically constructed the Japanese enemy through hostile visual association without individualising representation of a pattern this analysis confirms and extends by showing that even without dehumanising caricature, the sheer asymmetry of actor–goal roles is sufficient to construct Japan as a defeated Other, requiring no explicit hostility in the visual design itself.

Gender Ideology and the Representation of the Home Front



Figure 8. *Close-up of a Civilian Woman with an Upward Gaze in Midway*

Gender ideology in the *Midway* posters is constructed through the unequal allocation of military authority between male and female participants. Figure 8 presents a close-up composition of a civilian woman's face turned slightly upward and to the side, her eyes directed toward a point outside the frame, her expression composed but visibly concerned, with a hint of patterned civilian clothing at the frame's edge. At the denotative level, the image identifies a woman's facial expression, gaze direction, and civilian attire without yet attributing symbolic value. Barthes' framework explains how these visible cues move toward ideological meaning. Her upward gaze and restrained expression connote waiting, concern, and hope rather than command or action, while her civilian clothing connotes care and private attachment rather than public authority. Myth then presents masculine protection and feminine emotional endurance as complementary, naturalised wartime roles. Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar clarify this through reactional process. Her off-screen gaze positions her as a reacter responding to an unseen phenomenon, a structure that frames her participation as emotional response rather than direct action, denying her the actor role consistently assigned to male military participants elsewhere in the posters.

These results contrast with prior studies on female agency in visual media. Wardah and Kusuma (2022) show that *Raya and the Last Dragon* represents women as independent leaders challenging patriarchal stereotypes. *Midway* presents the reverse arrangement,

confining female presence to concern and waiting rather than command or combat. Chen (2025) similarly demonstrates that the *Barbie* poster constructs female agency through direct gaze and central positioning with a compositional strategy *Midway* withholds by directing the woman's gaze off-frame rather than toward the viewer, reinforcing her passive, reactional role. The present study extends these results by showing that gender ideology can operate through gaze structure alone: an off-screen eyeline reframes emotional presence as response rather than agency, distinguishing feminine participation from the direct, transactional action consistently granted to men.

Narrative and Conceptual Processes in the Construction of Ideology

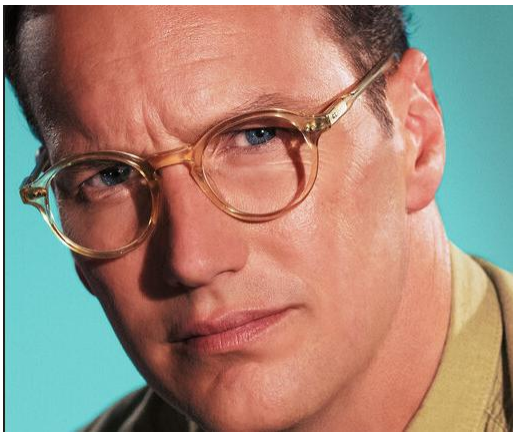

Figure 9. *Close-Up Representation of a United States Navy Officer in Midway*

One close-up composition illustrates the conceptual pole through an analytical process: a naval officer's eyes and transparent-framed eyeglasses, isolated from the wider body and any surrounding action, function as a Possessive Attribute attached to the officer as Carrier. Figure 9 framing excludes weapons, interaction, or movement, directing attention toward stable professional identity, intelligence, and strategic judgement rather than unfolding activity. Barthes' semiotics explains how both types of signs acquire connotative and mythical value, while Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar explains the structural difference. Conceptual processes, as in the eyeglasses, assign stable categories and attributes independent of action, whereas narrative processes, as in the attack sequence, depend on vectors connecting participants through movement and consequence. The numerical dominance of conceptual elements indicates that *Midway* privileges stable military identity

and categorisation, encompassing professional role, rank, and institutional membership, over continuous action in constructing ideological meaning.

These results extend prior multimodal studies of poster corpora. Zia et al., (2024) analyse fourteen Punjabi movie posters using Kress and van Leeuwen's framework and find that visual elements combine to construct representational and compositional meaning shaped by cultural context, without quantifying process distribution. Linh (2021) examines fifteen romantic comedy posters and finds conceptual structure appearing almost as often as narrative structure, though she notes the boundary between the two is often unclear.

The present study develops these approaches by measuring process distribution: 179 elements contain conceptual meanings, while only 52 contain narrative meanings. This pattern demonstrates that Midway systematically privileges classification, attributes, identity, and symbolic value over continuous action in its ideological representation overall.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine how visual and verbal signs in the official *Midway* movie posters construct representational meaning through Barthes' semiotics and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar. The results indicate that the selected posters construct ideological meanings through the interaction of visual and verbal signs at denotative, connotative, mythic, and representational levels. Among the 179 identified elements, direct representations of military participants, uniforms, aircraft, naval vessels, maps, battle environments, destructive effects, titles, and taglines recur in association with meanings of courage, discipline, leadership, sacrifice, national responsibility, and military capability.

At the mythic level, the posters naturalise nationalism, heroism, and war ideology by presenting American military action as disciplined, purposeful, and legitimate, while limiting alternative perspectives through the reduced representation of civilian suffering, psychological trauma, political disagreement, strategic failure, and Japanese experiences. The findings further show that conceptual meaning occurs across all 179 elements, whereas narrative meaning appears in only 52 elements, indicating that the posters prioritise stable military identities, institutional roles, and symbolic qualities over continuous representations of wartime action.

This study focuses on the semiotic construction of ideology within poster texts and does not investigate studio marketing strategies, production decisions, audience reception, or broader historical debates surrounding the Battle of Midway. Future research may integrate these contextual dimensions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of war representation.

The study contributes to visual-semiotic and multimodal research by demonstrating how Barthes' levels of signification and Kress and van Leeuwen's representational processes can be integrated to explain not only what ideological meanings are represented but also how those meanings are organised and naturalised through promotional visuals. This contribution has implications for the critical study of movie posters as cultural and communicative texts, particularly in understanding how promotional materials shape representations of war, national identity, and military legitimacy before audiences encounter the complete movie narrative.

The results are limited to twelve intentionally chosen posters from a total of twenty-two recognized official posters, the selected ideological classifications, and the examination of representational rather than interactive and compositional significances. Subsequent studies may thus augment the poster collection, analyze depictions of war across various national and historical frameworks, integrate interactive and compositional significances, explore alternative promotional media, and assess audience reception to ascertain how diverse viewers interpret and navigate the ideological implications embedded in war-related visual texts.

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