REPRESENTATION OF TERROR IN THE FILM 13 BOMBINGS IN JAKARTA

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the representation of mass media in disseminating information about terrorism as portrayed in the film 13 Bombs in Jakarta. *The film illustrates how terrorist groups utilize media to spread fear through televised and digital threat broadcasts, while the government uses the same medium to deliver public appeals and foster social solidarity. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic analysis, which includes three key elements: icon, index, and symbol. Data were collected through direct observation of film scenes that depict the role of media within the narrative. The findings reveal that mass media in the film serve a dual function: as an instrument of terror dissemination and as a tool of information control by the state. This representation reflects a social reality in which media not only deliver information but also construct narratives, shape public opinion, and influence societal perceptions of terrorism.*
Keywords: Representation, Mass Media, Semiotics

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi media massa dalam penyebaran informasi teror pada film *13 Bom di Jakarta*. Film tersebut menampilkan bagaimana kelompok teroris memanfaatkan media sebagai sarana untuk menebarkan ketakutan melalui penyiaran ancaman di televisi dan platform digital, serta bagaimana pemerintah menggunakan media untuk memberikan imbauan dan membangun solidaritas publik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode analisis semiotika Charles Sanders Peirce, yang meliputi tiga elemen utama: ikon, indeks, dan simbol. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi terhadap adegan-adegan yang menampilkan peran media dalam alur cerita film. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media massa dalam film ini memiliki peran ganda, yakni sebagai instrumen penyebar teror dan sebagai alat kontrol informasi oleh negara. Representasi tersebut menggambarkan realitas sosial di mana media berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai penyampai informasi, tetapi juga sebagai pembentuk opini publik dan konstruksi persepsi terhadap isu terorisme.
Kata kunci: Representasi, Media Massa, Semiotika

I. INTRODUCTION

Mass media plays a crucial role as a means of communication capable of reaching a wide and rapid audience. In modern communication systems, media not only serves as a conveyor of information but also plays a role in shaping the collective consciousness of

society. Through media, messages can be disseminated from communicator to recipient simultaneously, across time and space. The uniqueness of mass media lies in its ability to package messages in various formats—text, audio, visual, or a combination of the three—so that information can be conveyed in an engaging, effective, and easy-to-understand manner (Alrizki, 2021).

Visual communication, including film, is one of the most influential forms of mass media. Film conveys messages not only through verbal dialogue but also through symbols, visualizations, and the emotions evoked in the scenes. The audio-visual characteristics enable film to portray social realities imaginatively and persuasively, making it a medium that is not only informative but also inspiring and influences the mindset of the audience. Messages conveyed through film can shape public opinion and encourage collective action in society (Kustati, 2024).

Lasswell (Wahyudin, 2024) emphasized that effective communication can be understood through five main components: who sends the message (who), what the message says (what), the channel or medium used (in which channel), the target recipient (to whom), and the impact (with what effect). Lasswell's model demonstrates that communication is a complex process, involving interactions between elements that influence each other. This framework is widely used in mass communication studies because it explains how messages are structured, transmitted, received, and responded to by audiences, and serves as a basis for assessing communication effectiveness in various contexts such as education, politics, and information media.

Over time, film has become more than just entertainment, but also a medium for social and cultural reflection. Etymologically, the term film or cinematography comes from the words cinema, meaning movement, and phytos, meaning light, indicating that film is an art form that depicts movement through the play of light (Alfathoni, 2020). Films represent social conditions during their production, thus serving as social records depicting values, conflicts, and societal dynamics.

The Indonesian film industry has shown rapid growth, evident in the diverse range of genres, from comedy and adventure to drama, to action films featuring terrorism (Hidayah, 2024). According to Sunarto & Ida (Wahyudin, 2024), film genre is a pattern or structure that helps classify works and influences how audiences perceive their messages. Terrorism is a

particularly compelling genre because it highlights social and ideological issues relevant to contemporary society.

In Indonesian cinema, several works present narratives about terrorist movements, often linked to issues of social inequality, poverty, and the marginalization of certain groups. This representation also reflects the role of the state, through institutions such as the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), in addressing the issue of radicalism. However, depictions of terrorists in films often emphasize violence and dehumanization, without depicting the more complex side of humanity (Rahimah, 2024). One film that addresses these issues is 13 Bombs in Jakarta, which attempts to represent the social reality of modern society still beset by ideological conflict and the threat of terror.
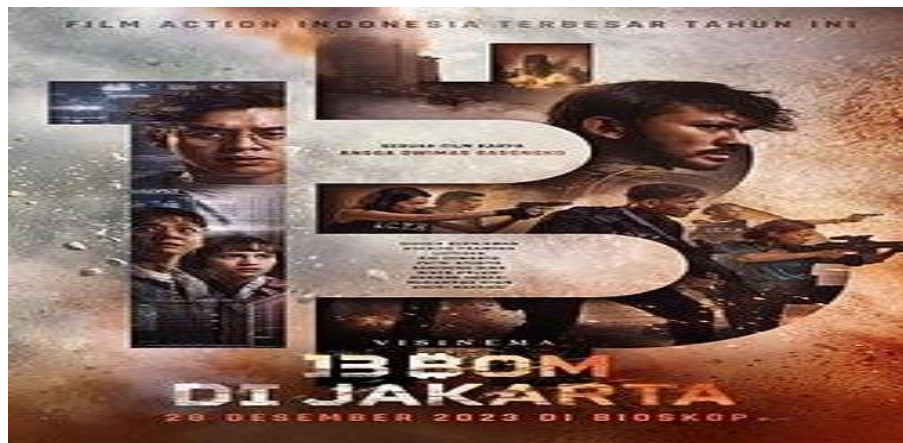

Figure 1.1 Poster for the Film "13 Bombs in Jakarta"

The film "13 Bombs in Jakarta" centers on the efforts of intelligence officers to thwart terrorist attacks planned by a group of terrorists at various strategic points in the capital. The main character, played by Rio Dewanto, is depicted as an agent directly involved in the investigation to prevent bombings at thirteen different locations. The conflict escalates when suspicions of betrayal arise within the investigation team.

The terrorist group's leader, Arok, employs a psychological terror strategy of detonating bombs every eight hours to exert pressure on the government and the public. Information about the threat is disseminated massively through mass media, from television broadcasts and cell phone chain messages to digital billboards throughout the city. This pattern of information dissemination creates a domino effect of public panic and widespread social tension. Arok's demand to exchange citizens' safety for money in the form of bitcoin reinforces the representation of terrorism as a phenomenon that utilizes digital technology and modern media to achieve ideological and economic goals.

Through this storyline, the film not only displays the suspense of action but also depicts deeper social issues, such as injustice, social inequality, and resistance against a system perceived as oppressive. This representation demonstrates that the acts of terror in the film can be understood as symbolic forms of social unrest in modern society. Thus, 13 Bombs in Jakarta becomes a cultural text reflecting the relationship between power, media, and society.

II. THEORETICAL STUDIES

Mass Media

The term "media" comes from the Latin word "medius," meaning "intermediary" or "connector." Media is defined as a means of conveying messages from one party to another. According to Gearlach and Ely (Novianti, 2022), media encompasses everything, including people, objects, and events, that can create learning situations, enabling individuals to acquire new knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Technological developments have propelled mass media into a primary instrument for disseminating information and popular culture, reaching various levels of society worldwide. As a result, human activity is now heavily connected to media, whether through television, radio, the internet, or print media (Wiedyudja, 2023). Media serves not only as a means of entertainment but also as a space for the formation of social and cultural identities.

Cangara (Safitri, 2024) defines mass media as a tool for conveying messages from communicators to a wide audience through mechanical communication devices, such as newspapers, radio, and television. Mass media serves as a bridge that allows messages to be received simultaneously by many people, making it a key pillar of the modern public communication system.

Mass media wields significant power in influencing public behavior and views through the processes of social familiarization and imitation (Apriyani, 2021). History shows that in the early 20th century, particularly in the 1920s in Europe, governments took control of broadcasting because the media was perceived as capable of shaping public opinion and directing society's collective perceptions.

McLuhan argued that mass media is an extension of the human senses, enabling individuals to learn about things they cannot directly experience. Media not only disseminates information but also functions to shape social images and perceptions. Mass media is an organized system for conveying messages to a wide audience through various platforms such as television, radio, film, and newspapers (Castells, 2024).

Representation

The term "representation" comes from the English word "representation," meaning a representation, image, or depiction. Representation is a process involving various techniques for producing meaning, such as camera placement, lighting, editing, and the use of music and sound effects to present reality or ideas through specific symbols and codes (Fiske, Madinatuzzahroh, 2024).

There is no single, correct representation in a text because each form of representation always opens up space for multiple interpretations (Hall, Septiani, 2024). Meaning emerges through a process of selection, omission, and differentiation, making it dynamic and debatable. Hall distinguished two systems of representation: mental representations of concepts within the mind, and language as a means of communicating those concepts.

In media and communication, representation encompasses various forms such as words, images, narratives, and symbols that function to convey ideas, emotions, and social realities (Nasution, 2024). Representation also plays a role in shaping public understanding of issues such as gender, race, social class, and power, thus having significant cultural and political implications.

Representation operates through signs and images, whose meanings are influenced by prevailing cultural values (Hidayah, 2024). Media become agents that select and frame reality according to a particular perspective. Representation is a way of using language to construct comprehensible meaning (Hartley, Lesmana, 2024). This process involves the interaction of signs and social interpretation, making it a signifying system in various text forms such as film or video.

The representational system consists of two main components: mental concepts and language, which are interrelated and inseparable (Fauziya, 2024). Film and drama are effective media for conveying representation because they can shape public perception and influence how people view social reality.

Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory

Charles Sanders Peirce defined semiotics as the formal doctrine of signs (Lesmana, 2024). For Peirce, a sign is something that represents or symbolizes something else, called an object, and produces a specific meaning, called an interpretant. Signs not only have physical form but also function as a link between reality and human understanding.

In general, semiotics is understood as the study of signs and the process of meaning formation. Peirce introduced this concept in the late 19th century and asserted that all aspects of human life, including language, symbols, and communication behavior, are composed of signs that enable humans to understand the world around them (Amelia, 2025). Semiotics is used as an analytical approach to explore how signs work to construct social and cultural meaning.

Semiotics is an important method for analyzing how messages are conveyed through certain symbols and codes. Film is one medium often studied using this approach because it contains various visual, verbal, and audio elements that contain meaningful signs. Peirce viewed semiotics as the study of signs and all their accompanying processes, consisting of three main components: Representamen (the visible form of the sign), Object (the reality or thing referred to by the sign), and Interpretant (the meaning or understanding that arises from the sign) (Saputra, 2025).

Peirce argued that all phenomena, both natural and cultural, can be understood as signs. This view is known as pansemiotics, the belief that everything in the world can be interpreted through a system of signs (Bondan, 2023). Peirce's sign model is triadic, emphasizing that signs function to represent something else (something that represents something else).

In a more detailed explanation (Lesmana, 2024), Peirce developed a triadic model of meaning consisting of three elements:
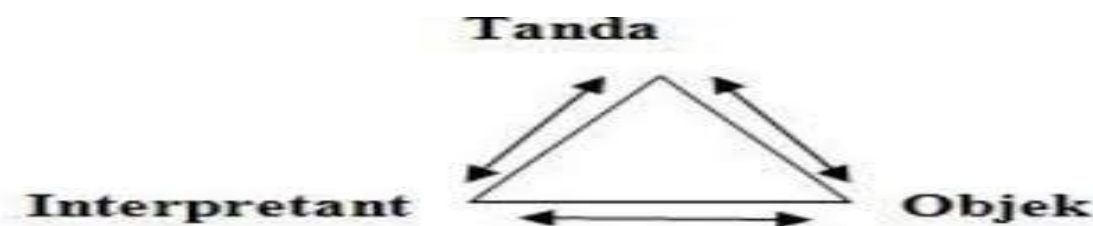

Figure 2.2 Charles Sanders Peirce's Triangle Model

1. Sign or Representamen, which is a physical form that can be perceived by the senses and acts as a sign; it refers to something external to itself.

2. Object, which is the thing or concept referred to by the sign, which can be a social situation, an object, or a specific idea.

3. Interpretant, which is the understanding or meaning formed in the individual's mind after observing the sign and the object it refers to.

These three elements form an interconnected and dynamic relationship in the interpretation process. Through Peirce's semiotic approach, film can be analyzed as a complex system of signs, where every scene, dialogue, lighting, and visual symbol contains layered meanings and opens up the audience's interpretation.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with Peirce's semiotic analysis method, which aims to understand the meaning of mass media representation in the dissemination of terror information through the film 13 Bombs in Jakarta. The qualitative approach was chosen because it focuses on the meaning, interpretation, and social context of the object of study, rather than on statistical measurements (Creswell, 2014). Descriptive qualitative research allows researchers to describe phenomena in depth through content and symbolic analysis of texts or visuals (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In this study, the analysis was carried out using Peirce's semiotic theory, which consists of three main elements, namely signs (representamen), objects, and interpretants, which are dialectically interrelated in forming Peirce's meaning (Budiman, 2024). The object of this research study is the film 13 Bombs in Jakarta, which is analyzed textually by observing visual signs, dialogue, and narratives that represent the role of mass media in disseminating terrorism information. Data were collected through non-participatory observation and documentation techniques, including scene recordings, dialogue transcripts, screenshots, and supporting sources such as film reviews and related articles (Sugiyono, 2019). The analysis was conducted through three main stages: sign identification, object determination, and interpretation of meaning, to find the relationship between the form of representation and the social message conveyed in the film. This study seeks to uncover how mass media is represented as an agent of information delivery, a shaper of public opinion, and a bearer of ideology in the context of the dissemination of terror information in film media.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

Representation of Mass Media in the Dissemination of Terrorist Information

A semiotic analysis of the film "13 Bombings in Jakarta" shows that mass media is represented as a highly strategic element in the dissemination of terror information. Based on Peirce's triangle of meaning theory, which includes sign, object, and interpretant, each scene in the film demonstrates how visual signs, dialogue, and character actions shape specific meanings regarding the media's role in the context of the crisis. In the first scene, the media is

depicted as a tool of terrorist communication. Through a threatening video sent by Arok, the media is used as a means to spread fear and pressure on the ICTA (Indonesia Counter Terrorism Agency). The threatening video becomes a symbol of digital terror, emphasizing the media's ability to transform public space into a space of fear (McQuail, 2010).

Media representation develops into a tool of propaganda and symbolic power. Arok hijacks national television broadcasts and billboards to convey his ideology to the public, transforming the message of terror into a political message that blames the state system. This action emphasized that mass media is not merely a channel for information, but also a battleground for discourse between the state and opposition groups (Fairclough, 2013). On the other hand, the ICTA, through the figure of Mr. Damascus, demonstrated the media's function as a tool of state control and coordination. The government utilized social media, satellites, and digital communication systems to trace the source of threats.

The media functioned as a public pacifier and a shaper of public opinion. Through television news broadcasts, the government attempted to reassure citizens and encourage public participation in maintaining security. However, this message indirectly created an effect of fear and hypervigilance among citizens, as illustrated by the reaction of the internet cafe operator who immediately reported it to the authorities. This demonstrates the media's ambivalence, acting as a public communication tool while simultaneously amplifying the atmosphere of panic (Gerbner, 1998).

The media's dual function was to disseminate information and amplify the effects of terror. News of the bomb explosion on the MRT was broadcast intensively on television and radio, increasing public panic and a loss of sense of security. Peirce (1931–1958) explained that meaning arises not only from the sign itself, but also from the social and psychological context of the recipient. In this case, the dissemination of news becomes a form of sign that extends the effects of terror into society's domestic sphere. The conversation between Agnes, William, and a street vendor demonstrates how media information directly influences social behavior, from economic activity to citizens' sense of security.

The media is once again portrayed as a tool for legitimizing state power. Through a press conference, Mr. Damascus announces the decision to impose a curfew as a form of social control. However, this scene also demonstrates the psychological pressure the government faces in dealing with public and media demands. The journalists' persistent

questioning illustrates the media's dual role as both a watchdog and a transmitter of anxiety (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

This research demonstrates that the film "13 Bombs in Jakarta" presents the mass media as an ambivalent entity between a means of communication, social control, propaganda, and a disseminator of terror. Through Peirce's semiotic analysis, it can be concluded that the signs appearing in the film not only represent the technical functions of the media but also contain ideological meanings that reflect the power relations between terrorists, the state, and society. The medium of film has become an arena for a battle for meaning that shapes how the public understands crisis, fear, and authority in a digital age full of disinformation.

No.	Sign (Tanda)	Object (Objek)	Interpretant (Makna/Interpretasi)
1	Video ancaman Arok yang disebarkan ke media	Terorisme digital dan penyebaran pesan ancaman	Media menjadi alat komunikasi strategis bagi pelaku teror untuk menebar ketakutan dan menarik perhatian publik; mencerminkan kekuatan simbolik media dalam membentuk persepsi ancaman.
2	Siaran televisi dan billboard yang dibajak oleh Arok	Propaganda ideologis dan perlawanan terhadap negara	Media direpresentasikan sebagai ruang perebutan wacana antara kekuasaan negara dan kelompok teroris; menunjukkan bahwa media dapat dimanfaatkan sebagai alat kontrol atau perlawanan politik.
3	Siaran berita resmi pemerintah di televisi	Upaya pemerintah mengendalikan opini publik	Media berfungsi sebagai instrumen kontrol sosial yang menenangkan masyarakat, namun sekaligus memperkuat atmosfer ketakutan dan kepanikan kolektif di ruang publik.
4	Adegan pemberitaan ledakan bom di MRT	Informasi teror yang tersebar cepat ke masyarakat	Penyebaran berita menciptakan efek domino berupa ketakutan massal; memperlihatkan peran media dalam memperluas dampak psikologis aksi teror.
5	Reaksi masyarakat terhadap berita teror (warga, pedagang, operator warnet)	Respon sosial terhadap media	Menunjukkan bahwa media tidak hanya menyampaikan fakta, tetapi juga memengaruhi perilaku dan persepsi sosial masyarakat terhadap keamanan dan kepercayaan terhadap pemerintah.

| 6 | Konferensi pers Pak Damaskus dengan wartawan | Representasi negara dan legitimasi kekuasaan | Media menjadi arena negosiasi antara kekuasaan dan publik; wartawan berfungsi sebagai pengawas (*watchdog*), sementara pemerintah menggunakan media untuk membangun legitimasi dan kendali sosial. |

Discussion

The film 13 Bombs in Jakarta depicts how the mass media plays a crucial role in disseminating terror information to the public. In the various scenes analyzed, it appears that the media serves as a dual instrument: on the one hand, it is used by terrorist groups to spread their messages and threats, and on the other, it serves as the primary channel for the government to inform policies and emergency response measures. Through Peirce's semiotic analysis, each scene embodies the relationship between sign, object, and interpretant, revealing how media representations are shaped in the context of social and political crises.

Scene 1

In the first scene, a video threat by Arok, distributed to authorities, appears, claiming that 13 bombs have been planted in various parts of Jakarta with a ransom demand of 100 Bitcoin. The video threat functions as a sign that refers to the object of digital terror and power negotiations. Its interpretant demonstrates the use of mass media as a strategic communication tool to spread mass fear. Information initially internally spreads rapidly through the media to the public sphere, creating collective panic. Mass media has the ability to expand the symbolic impact of messages, shaping public perceptions of threats and dangers (McQuail, 2010).

Scene 2

The second scene shows Arok hijacking national television broadcasts and public billboards to broadcast his ideology live. He accuses the government of corruption and oppression, while displaying propaganda about their struggle against injustice. This scene illustrates that media is not only a channel for conveying information, but also an arena for the struggle for meaning and power. The sign, in the form of a hijacked broadcast, refers to the object of the struggle for discursive space, while the interpretant emphasizes that media has become an ideological stage where terrorist groups attempt to transform their image from perpetrators of violence to moral champions. Media is a discursive space where various social forces compete to construct legitimacy and social meaning (Fairclough, 2013).

Scene 3

In the third scene, an internet cafe operator reports to the police after encountering three suspicious individuals (William, Oscar, and Agnes). This scene marks a shift in the media's function from merely conveying information to triggering social engagement. The sign, in the form of citizen reporting, demonstrates public involvement in social oversight facilitated by the media. The interpretation is the formation of collective awareness that strengthens coordination between the community and authorities. This scene supports the concept of participatory communication in the digital age, where the public is no longer a passive recipient of information but becomes part of the social security system (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Scene 4

The fourth scene shows news of the second bomb explosion on the Jakarta MRT line, killing 12 people. The news footage, accompanied by visuals of destruction and tense background music, heightens the emotional impact on the audience. According to Peirce, the television news signal represents the object of the terrorist tragedy, while its interpretant indicates that the media contributes to extending the psychological effects of terror through repetition of information and dramatic visualizations. This aligns with Gerbner's (1998) Cultivation Theory, which states that intense exposure to violent news can foster disproportionate fear in society, a phenomenon known as mean world syndrome. The media, in this case, prolongs the duration of the terror by spreading symbols of fear.

Scene 5

The fifth scene shows the social reaction of the community after the explosion: street vendors and ordinary residents are afraid to go about their activities, while radio remains the primary source of information. The radio broadcast and residents' reactions represent the object of changes in social behavior due to the influence of the media, and the interpretant is the formation of collective trauma that alters community routines. The media, in this case, not only conveys facts but also shapes perceptions and regulates citizens' behavior patterns. In line with McQuail's (2010) view, media has a symbolic function in producing social reality, where perceptions of danger can form more quickly than actual facts. Terrorism not only causes physical damage but also penetrates the psychological and social realms of citizens through media construction.

Scene 6

The final scene shows the government, through Mr. Damascus, holding a press conference to calm the public and announce the imposition of a curfew. The sign, an official government broadcast, refers to the object, namely the state's efforts to control public opinion, while the interpreter demonstrates the government's dilemma in using media as an effective yet risky public communication tool. On the one hand, media helps the state restore order and legitimacy; on the other, uncontrolled dissemination of information can exacerbate panic. This confirms the theory of McQuail (2010) and Shoemaker & Reese (2014) that media is an instrument of power that can strengthen or weaken government legitimacy depending on how it is used.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the representation of mass media in the film 13 Bombings in Jakarta illustrates how the media functions not merely as a channel for conveying information, but also as an agent for shaping public opinion and creating new social realities. This finding aligns with the view (Cangara, 2013), which asserts that mass media has the power to influence, shape, and direct public opinion through a structured communication process. This also aligns with Marshall McLuhan's (1964) theory, which states that "the medium is the message," where the media not only conveys the content of the message but also determines how that message is received and interpreted by the public. Meanwhile, according to McQuail (2010), the media acts as a social institution capable of controlling the flow of information and shaping the collective consciousness of society through its primary functions: to inform, to educate, to influence, and to control.

In this film, the media is portrayed as an ambivalent entity: on the one hand, it plays a role in disseminating information and helping the public understand the situation, but on the other, it actually amplifies the effects of panic and creates mass fear. The film "13 Bombs in Jakarta" functions not only as entertainment but also as a mass communication medium conveying social and political messages about the misuse of information technology and its impact on public security. This reinforces the view that film is an audio-visual medium loaded with ideological values and has the potential to shape the social consciousness of its audience.

From the perspective of Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation, this film demonstrates how the meaning of mass media is constructed through symbols, language, and

visual scenes. Media representation in film is not singular—it can be both a "savior" and a "spreader of terror." Thus, the reality depicted in film is the result of a construction of meaning that is continuously negotiated between the filmmaker, the visual text, and the audience.

Using Peirce's (1931–1958) semiotic approach, this study demonstrates that signs in film, both visual (such as newsreels, bomb explosions, or digital devices) and verbal (threat narratives and media coverage), can be analyzed through the triadic relationship of sign-object-interpretant. These signs represent the object of the terrorist act and the media's role in conveying it. Their interpretation is interpreted as fear, panic, and a collective awareness of the media's power to shape social reality.

The film "13 Bombs in Jakarta" depicts the mass media as an entity with dual power: as a transmitter of information and as an ideological instrument that can amplify the effects of terror. This research confirms that media and terror have an intertwined relationship; media record, shape, and simultaneously expand the social effects of terror itself. Ultimately, the film serves as a critical reflection on the role of media in contemporary society, where the boundaries between information and manipulation are increasingly blurred in the fast-paced digital communication space.

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