

# Encoding Signifieds of Hairstyles in the movie ‘Unstoppable’ A Semiotic Analysis

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## Abstract

Media play an important role in conveying entertainment to the audience. As there are a lot of developments and discoveries in this postmodern era, media promote all those ideas which are newly introduced in any genre. Film from the very start, is one of the major genre in literature (visual) which claims more attention from the audience than any other form of entertainment. Media also play an important role in socio-cultural change of the society. Community considers media the best source of information, although at times, it is not. Media play an important role in shaping beliefs and ideologies of a common man.

Film is considered the important medium which brings a lot of cultural changes in the society, The movie Unstoppable also invites those changes and left some questions in the minds of the audience. The present study analyzes the various hairstyles of the movie actors and how these styles are changed according to the setting of the scene along with employing the state of minds of the characters. What these styles signify?. How various hair styles are used as a sign in this movie?. Researchers study this phenomenon through semiotic analysis. Few images were selected to analyze the reasons behind that act under the discipline of semiotics.

**Key words:** Semiotics, Unstoppable, Hair style, Analyze, sign.

## 1. Introduction

Media play an important role in the development of each community either its electronic media or print media. Media affect the social, cultural values of the society by presenting the culture of another society and transferring it to someone else. Electronic media is much more common in the world as compared to the print media. Literacy rate is one of the important factor in promoting electronic media as compared to print media. The visuals play an important role in maintaining the strength of the audience of electronic media. These visuals left an everlasting effect on the minds and social and cultural values of the viewers. According to the Dan Laughey

“With the advent of television, telephone and radio, however, Meyrowitz claims that access to knowledge and information is shared by all, regardless of literacy skills. So electronic media help to blur class, age and other social differences.  
(Laughey; 2007,84-5)”

Semiotics can simply be defined as (Eagleton: 1986:100) puts it ‘ as the study of signs. Semiotics is actually study the system of signs with reference to the particular space and time. It entrusts the proximity of Linguistic patterns which is known as meta Linguistics with the pattern of signs’.

American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand De Saussure were considered the head or source thinker of this genre or discipline. Peirce investigated and found the logics of semiotics and Saussure introduced semiology at the same time. Saussure in 1915 said in course of general linguistics, “ the logics which study the society and its norms must be included in general psychology or in social psychology and I termed the study of these logic as semiology” ( derived from Greek word semeion mean sign) (Saussure: 1966:16).

According to Schroeder (1998: 225) semiotics brings awareness about the cultural aspects of the society which later on is handed over from one generation to the next. It reminds to the generations that not even a single cultural and social value is natural it is all about that how they are socially constructed in various cultures. The movie ‘Unstoppable’ is analyzed in this study by applying the conceptual meanings of sign to the hairstyles of the leading characters. The hair styles are basically analyzed and linked with various situations of the movie. The movie is about a runaway train which is a serious threat for the inhabitants of the city. It is attempted to investigate how different hair styles of the actors in the movie convey meanings regarding their traits and temperament according to the situation. The various images of the hairstyles are discussed in this study to know the relationship between the state of the mind in which the character finds him/herself and the natural tendency of the character to react at a particular situation. The trait and attitude the character displays, is semiotically analyzed and it is investigated that the hairstyle of the actors, as signs, signify the mental state of the character.

### 1.1 Hypothesis

Hair styles present the mental state or the temperament of the of the characters in the movie.

### 1.2 Research Question

what are the reasons behind the various hair styles?

How hair styles are relevant to the story and action of the movie?

What is the basic link between hair style and the characters of this movie?.

### 1.3 Research objectives

The study aims at following objectives

To study the hidden ideologies in various hair styles of the movie.

To check how media create effects on viewers by using various techniques.

To analyze the various ideologies with reference to the different hair styles of the actors

### 1.4 Delimitation of the study

Following are the delimitations of the study:

\* The researchers only selected one movie to answer all the research questions.

\* Various Hair styles of movies are selected for semiotic analysis.

\* Only those images have been selected which import specific meanings in the movie.

## 2. Literature review

The present study defines all the terms which are discussed in the analysis. The last twenty five years of the twentieth century makes this discipline interesting, Researchers feel cultural studies as an important discipline in last ten years of the twentieth century specially and later on, it was an established discipline all over the world as an academic course in 1999. In the discipline of semiotics, earlier work was to be found in 1964 which was done by Birmingham center. Richard Hoggart is considered the **conspicuous** regime of the cultural studies in the whole world as well as in Britain from 1970s onward to 1980s. According to (Easthope: 1988: 74), the Birghingham center's works is one of the most important paramount culture studies intervention in Britain. According to (Turner, 1996, 70), the Birmingham center is considered as one of the historical institution of this field.

Semiotics, the study of signs can help us to know the other side of theoretical issues and help us to de-naturalize them. (Douglas 1982,199; culler 1985, 102). Semiotics can be treated as the one of the major discipline and if we take it into the empirical or positive side, it is clear that it helps us to get know how of the culture with reference to the previous ones ( Franklin *et al* 1996, 263). According to the (Peirce 1931), Human minds can only think in form of images and than, later on they name it as food, city or another item. In this way, he imports the importance of sign in the community and sets this discipline. Saussure also takes sign as a separate phenomenon and refers toward the sound pattern or sound images and take writing as another secondary dependent and comparable sign pattern (Saussure 1974, 1983).

Film analysis or studies is generally considered the entertainment activity by sitting or watching around the film. Film studies with reference to the cultural effects is not very much common phenomenon in Pakistan. Danish (2008) works on the semiotic analysis of the cultural aspects of Punjabi movies. Films play an important role to bend the culture of the society. Films are actual presentations of any culture and bring knowledge about other cultures even if, the audience is not a part of it . On the same side, films structures have dual meanings, statements which a specific community watches for the purpose of entertainment and researchers who take it as a set of data to analyze the hidden meanings within the lines of various disciplines like CDA, semiotics, MD analysis etc. The viewers of films are greater as compared to the viewers of television because of its good visual representation and resolutions. According to the Deborah Shaw and Ruth Doughty, film has more intoxicating effect on audience.

English Movie *unstoppable* has been selected for analysis with reference to the various hair styles according to the situations and finding out the basic relationship between the various hairstyles and the story of the movie . The various hair styles of the actors which researchers have chosen for analysis are analyzed on the parameter of semiotics. The study of various Hairstyles under the discipline of semiotics is considered as a pioneer work. No proper reference has been found at any level of the study in which semiotics has been employed at analyzing hairstyle in the movies and fluctuating state of minds of the characters of the Hollywood .

## 3. Research Methodology

The main theoretical frame of this research is semiotics and falls within the domain of contextual studies. Different meanings have been conveyed to the community by using different visuals aids in the movies. The study falls in to the realm of qualitative studies. In depth semiotic analysis has been done to analyze the various images of the movie in which hair styles are changed according to the role of actors.

Semiotic analysis has been done to expose those implications in the movie which are hidden. Semiotics means the systematic study of signs. All those signs have been studied which signify the hidden implications by the directors of the movie in the hair styles of the actors.

Ferdinand de Saussure's model has been used to analyze the images of the movie. He talks about sign, signifier and signified. All these terms are analyzed in the images of the movie.

#### 4. Semiotic Analysis

Semiotic analysis deals with the study of signs. What signs represent and what is the significance of the representation in the entire world? At the start of civilization, the way life had been desperate. In every age, humans communicated through various media. When Language was not introduced, communication took place through signs and gestures. Old paintings, sculptures, sketches, present the way of living and communication of primitive societies. Engraved Stones were considered the best way to promote the culture, heritage, lifestyle, norms, etc. All these signs were engraved on the stones and culture was transferred to the next generation. When language was introduced, folk stories and folktales had been used to promote the cultural values and norms to the next generation.

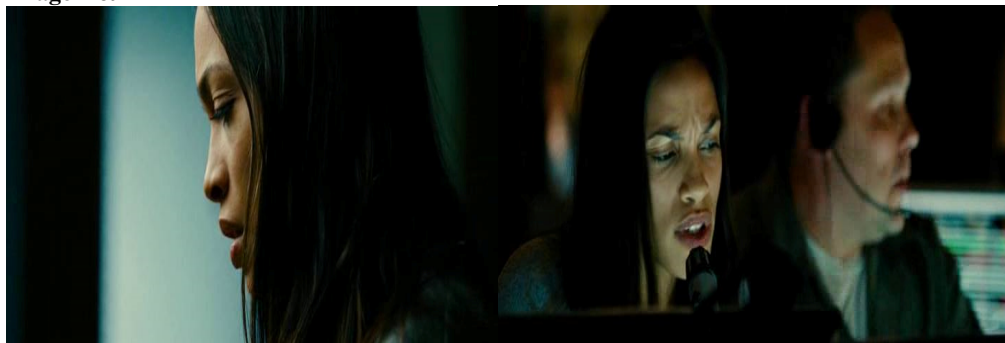
In 1940, Johannes Gutenberg, offered a new way to represent the various dimensions of culture by inventing the printing press and spread it all over the world. Print media is very common medium of conveying infotainment to the readers and even now a days, it claims the same tendency of readership. The spell of electronic media all around the world has exceeded the fame of print media creating better ratio in the audience and easy access.

All the representation of cultural norms or anything else through electronic or print media the readers and viewers decode it according to their preferred meanings and context. Images which are presented on the electronic media raise the doubts of the viewers regarding the reality itself. All the things which are involved in the perception of meaning from the side of viewers like costumes, camera angle and scene setting, etc. help viewers in constructing such meanings.

The English Movie Unstoppable is one of those unique movies which doesn't fall into the genre of romantic movies. The movie starts from the Railway station where the driver tries to change the lane of the train. For this purpose, he slows it down and alights from it on the track. After doing the needed task, he is unable to alight on the engine again. The driver tries his level best to catch the train, but fails to do that. The air breaks of the trains are not in working position so the train is more dangerous for others.

Ultimately the office and the ministry of railways get activated to secure the risk of runaway train and coordinate with each other on the issue. The directions are forwarded through the head of the regional office, a lady who manages to transfer the orders to the other officials after receiving them from the higher authorities. The head of the regional office of railway station, when tries her level best to stop the train, her hair is free and she doesn't have any clip in her hair as shown in the image below

**Image 1 & 2**



The hair of the character shown in the 1st image is free. She doesn't use any clip or anything else to bind them at that time she is not supposed to be under supervision of anyone. She is the head of the regional Railways station. She gives commands to others to control the runaway train which it is a serious threat for the city. All the while in the movie, she gives commands to the staff without the supervision of someone else, her hair is free.

In the second image of the movie as shown above, the lady in the movie gives commands to the staff while sitting on a chair and her hair is again free. In this movie, various hair styles of the actors show the nature of the character as free hair style of the heroine conveys her free approach towards her professional skills and she is not answerable to anyone. Her free hair in the moment of crisis ,signifies her carefree attitude, not towards the situation, but towards the authority she is grappling with on the issue of restoring command. Her hair in the image is a sign of rebellion and revolutionary spirit.

### Image 3



In the third image as shown above, the character is trying to do her hair. The head of the regional railways station is unable to stop the train and her boss from the main office conveys guidance to control it. When she is under the supervision of his head, she manages to confine her hair. Her done hair represents her bondage and her constrained spirit as her hair is. She fails to command according to her own planning as she is legally bound to comply with the commands of the authorities. She is supposed to follow the instructions of her boss. Her hair in bound position represents her whole character as being in the supervision of someone else. When she commands according to her own planning, her hair style is free. When her boss joins her in giving suggestions, she binds her hair signifying her bondage and constraints.

### Image 4 & 5



In image 4, one of the main characters of the movie has been shown and he is bald. His character traits and temperament also correspond with his baldness as in the movie, he only acts in the way he thinks right. He doesn't obey anyone. When his boss says, 'I will fire you from the job', he directly responds him saying 'you already fired me from the job, I don't care about it'. He himself plans how to stop the runaway train and then acts upon it. His baldness signifies that he is not obeying any one. He is responsible for all the acts what he did by himself. As in the images shown earlier, the free hair signifies the rebellion towards commanding nature while bound hair signifies the supervised nature of the lady, baldness signifies his free nature and who never allows anyone to supervise or command him in the whole movie. His physical gestures in the movie support his temperament of inviting risks for the safety of the town, his bald head signifies his mind to be a place of "NOBODY", a free willed man.

In image 5, the side hero of the movie and his hair style is not much refined, in spite of his thick hair. He neither has long hair nor short ones. As we discussed earlier, baldness signifies free nature of the character, this character has short hair and he is also a free and mature man at the start when the hero of the movie sets out a plan to save the runaway train. He disobeys him and shows no interest in the attempt, risking his life and job for the sake of the task not assigned to them. He says that he is not interested in it but agrees later on. His hair style is not defined, it can either be dressed the way desired as his hair is not long enough to be styled. His immediate boss coaxes him to be with him and he obeys him, risking his own life while attempting necessary action. At the end of the movie, he manages to jump into the driver's cabin with his foot injured and controls the train... His hair style signifies the nature of the character in the movie. As he has short hair, his character has also



some undefined traits. His hair style signifies his accommodating nature as he refuses his immediate boss the first time, and then complying with his orders .

**Image 6&7**



In the 6th image of the movie, the character has multiple hair styles, some of his hairs are free and he ties the rest. His mixed hair styles also signify his nature as we already have set a pattern that bound hair signifies the supervised nature of the character and free hair signifies the commanding nature of the character. His hair style is mixed and so is his character, as he first obeys the order of the lady incharge to stop the train. When this effort seems useless, he sets his own plan and later on when she calls him on his cell phone, he simply cuts her call with the statement ' I will call you back'. His hair styles also seem like his dual nature of character, as at first he obeys the orders and later on, he disobeys.

In the last image which researchers have selected for analysis, the senior official has been shown and he is almost bald and has a few strands of hair dressed in a set pattern. His baldness also represents his free nature as he enters in the script, he simply gives orders to others and doesn't accommodate any suggestions from anyone else. Some strands of hair are also present on his head, which seem like he is bound to some extent. When the heroine of the movie requests to destroy the train where civilians are not present, he refuses her just because of his limitations and commitment to rules and regulation.. His hair style signifies the nature of his character, as he cares for nobody, but needs subordinate to abide by the rules and regulations of the job He fires the driver who initiates rebellious tendency and hedges his claim by making his efforts fruitful and even threatens the rest of the officials at regional station for corresponding with the drivers. His hair style can be signified as he is neither bald, nor hairy. It signifies his dual nature as he is not willing to accept the proposal by the others to control the train by making desperate efforts, nor is he willing to defy the rules in order to accomplished task.

### **5. Conclusion**

Semiotic analysis of various hair styles have been done on the basis of the close relevance between the characters and their hair styles. In this movie, Unstoppable, hair styles of the actors are changed according to the nature of their characters and their particular state of mind. Free hair style represents the unbound nature of the various characters in the movie. Baldness represents that they don't care about any one. They develop their own approach to save the civilians from disaster of train in the movie. Clipped hair style represents the bondage or subordinate nature of the character.

The analysis represents that the hair styles of the characters also import meanings to the text and give various direction to the viewers. Different hair styles according to the nature of the character import such directions for the viewers which are also interesting for them.

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