

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Cultural portrayal in mainstream media, particularly in movies, significantly impacts how society views and interprets various cultures. Media does not merely mirror reality it also creates understanding through its use of language, imagery, and storytelling. Movie stands out as one of the most powerful media forms, capable of showcasing an extensive and convincing representation of culture to audiences worldwide. In this manner, movie plays a key role in forming the public's views of the cultures it depicts (Barker, 2018).

Movie serves not just as a source of amusement but also as a platform where cultural significance is created and examined. Through narratives, characters, and tensions, films express the beliefs, identities, and perspectives of specific social and cultural communities. Popular culture is deeply intertwined with ideology as it shapes how viewers perceive social reality and interactions between cultures (Storey, 2015). The cultural representations found in movie are frequently regarded as genuine and intrinsic, even though they are actually shaped by storytelling decisions, the filmmaker's viewpoint, and the societal backdrop in which the movie is made (Barker, 2018).

The function of movie grows increasingly important when it showcases cultures that may not be well known to viewers. In these instances, movie serves as a crucial resource for cultural understanding, providing significant influence over public views, stereotypes, or broad assumptions regarding other cultures (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, 2017). During the age of globalization, audiences worldwide can more readily engage with local cultures through the global film sector. Yet, in this exchange, cultural features might be simplified to align with commercial preferences, potentially diminishing their intricate historical and social aspects (Pieterse, 2015). Thus, research on how culture is depicted in movie is vital for grasping how local traditions are represented and shared in the realm of global entertainment (Storey, 2015; Barker, 2018).

One notable movie that emphasizes indigenous culture is *Moana* (2016), an animated feature created by Walt Disney. The narrative follows a young girl from Polynesia who embarks on a voyage across the sea to save her community and restore harmony with nature. More than just a tale of adventure, *Moana* incorporates numerous aspects of Polynesian culture, such as myths, maritime customs, ancestral beliefs, and communal principles. As a result, *Moana* can be seen as not just a source of amusement but also a cultural narrative that presents Polynesian identity to an international audience.

At the same time, *Moana* becomes intriguing when examined through the lens of identity and leadership. The character is depicted as a young girl who finds it challenging to grasp her own identity and the duties that come with being a future leader of her community. Her adventure across the sea symbolizes not just

a physical quest, but also a journey of personal growth and identity development. The movie illustrates how Moana's approach to leadership is influenced by cultural principles such as courage, living in harmony with the environment, accountability to her community, and honoring traditions. This relevance makes Moana a significant subject for exploring the connections among cultural principles, identity development, and women in leadership roles.

This study is undertaken to examine how Polynesian culture is depicted in Moana and the impact of these cultural principles on shaping Moana's identity as a young female leader. Through this research, the aim is to enhance the understanding of how culture is portrayed in movie and the ways in which identity is formed through mainstream media.

Many earlier scholars have explored the movie Moana from various viewpoints, especially concerning how culture is represented and how identity is formed. An Analysis of Cultural Demention in Moana Movie: A Semiotics Study by (Tarigan et al. 2024) examines how the film depicts elements of Polynesian culture, such as mythology, ocean symbolism, and local customs. The research concludes that while the movie tries to showcase local cultural principles, certain cultural aspects are oversimplified for a worldwide audience, which diminishes some of their authentic historical and social context. This indicates that while mainstream movie can highlight indigenous cultures, they often alter them for profit-driven reasons.

Another previous study by (Fatha et al. 2021), entitled *Cultural Appropriation of Polynesian Portrayed in Moana Movie*, emphasizes how Disney

modified several Polynesian cultural elements to fit mainstream media narratives. The research contends that many cultural icons in Moana are changed primarily for visual appeal or storytelling rather than for preserving cultural accuracy.

In their study *Empowered Femininity: The Evolution of Female Strength in Disney's Moana*, Pramesty and Nurhidayat (2025) look at Moana as a female character who defies gender norms via bravery, leadership, and independence. According to the study, Moana is depicted as self-sufficient, brave, and able to make significant leadership choices without the support of male figures. Because of this, contemporary animation portrays Moana's character as a manifestation of female empowerment. Furthermore, the Kumparan platform's essay, *Representation of Polynesian Culture in the Movie Moana: An Anthropological Study*, notes that Moana makes numerous allusions to Polynesian cultural and social values, such as the connection between people and the ocean, respect for forebears, and a sense of communal community identity.

Even if it's not an academic journal, the piece makes the case that Moana represents significant cultural values. The majority of these studies have examined these aspects separately, even though they have covered Moana from the viewpoints of cultural representation and female identity. There are very few studies that examine in detail how Polynesian cultural ideals, as portrayed in the movie, influence Moana's leadership identity as a young woman leader. As a result, this study seeks to bridge this gap in the literature by examining the relationship between cultural representation and the development of identity and leadership in the Moana Movie.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How is Polynesian culture represented in the Moana Movie?
2. How is the journey of Moana in searching her identity depicted in the movie?
3. How does Moana's Leadership Identity Represent In Moana Movie?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To know how Polynesian culture is portrayed in the Moana Movie
2. To identify how Moana's search for identity is depicted in the Moana Movie
3. To analyze How does Moana's Leadership Identity Represent In Moana Movie

1.4 Significance of the study

This research was conducted with the hope of providing significant benefits, both in theory and practice. One of the expected benefits of this research is as follows:

1.4.1 Theoretical Benefits

Theoretically, it is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to insights and knowledge in the study of literature and movie, particularly in relation to cultural representation and the formation of character identity in animated movie. This research is also expected to deepen the study of Polynesian culture and how these cultural values are presented through popular media such as the movie Moana. In addition, the results of this study can be used as a reference

for future research discussing the themes of culture, identity, and female leadership in movie.

1.4.2 Practical Benefits

From a practical standpoint, this research is expected to benefit various parties. For film makers, this research can serve as input for producing films that are not only entertaining, but also contain cultural values and positive messages, especially in representing indigenous cultures and female characters as leaders. As for the audience, this research is expected to help increase understanding and appreciation of Polynesian culture and leadership values presented through the character of Moana.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

1.5.1 Cultural Representation

Cultural representation here refers to how the movie Moana depicts and conveys Polynesian culture through its storyline, characters, symbols, mythology, traditions, and the values of its society. In cultural studies, representation is not only considered a depiction of reality, but also a process of meaning formation that influences how audiences understand a culture.

1.5.2 Polynesian culture

The Polynesian culture referred to in this study refers to the values, beliefs, traditions, and practices of Polynesian island communities as depicted in the movie Moana, such as the relationship between humans and nature, sailing traditions, the role of leaders, and the value of togetherness in the community.

1.5.3 Self Identity

Self-identity reflects Moana's process of understanding and accepting herself, both as an individual and as a future leader of her tribe. In the movie Moana, self-identity is depicted through Moana's physical and emotional journey in search of her purpose and role in society.

1.5.4 Women's Leadership

Female leadership in the context of this study refers to Moana's characteristics and actions as a woman who is capable of making decisions, taking responsibility, and leading her community. This leadership is not only seen from Moana's position as a candidate for tribal chief, but also from the cultural values that shape the way Moana leads with empathy, courage, and wisdom.