CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The age of post-modernity and the New Media has affected the way information are presented and distributed. Mass media is decentralized, giving multiple narratives available for the public. What is interesting in the decentralization of media does not only concern on the way narratives are presented, but the way people consume them. In the era of information superhighway and virtual reality, users of internet are able to become producers (Poster 1995) as the convenience of the internet allows them to produce their own contents. It allows for a more flexibility in the creation of media narratives. Study claims that the New Media offers new alternatives on gathering information, as many parts of the society have begun to doubt the credibility of mainstream media (Tsfati 2010).

However, the flexibility also creates issues in fact-checking. The questionable credibility itself is not the only issue, as the New Media is designed in a way that its consumers can tailor the contents they want to receive based on their specific needs (Bharali and Goswami 2018). Additionally, consumers of online media have also exhibited a selective behaviour in fact-checking the media they consumed (Graves 2010). Combining this issue with how fact-checking is an already present issue of the New Media, the society enters the era of 'post-truth,' in which media consumers become selective in the facts they want to hear while ignoring they do not need (Salam 2018).

The most evident issue in the era of post-truth is the spread of fake news or hoax. The phenomenon can be described as the spread of false stories that are deliberately presented as if they are genuine (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). It is noted that the decentralization of mass media and the growing distrust to it, combined with the more polarizing political situation are the causes of the spread of fake news (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017).

The discussion of the instability of information in New Media has been discussed in several literary works. In 1949, George Orwell released his work under the title *1984* (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*). In his novel, Orwell explored the unstable, controllable nature of truth, in which the spread of information can be controlled through the surveillance of people in power, in their attempt to persecute the individuality and independency of public thinking. The novel exploration on the abuse of power regarding the production of knowledge and information makes the novel still relevant in today's century (Boland 2008).

Sabrina, Nick Drnaso's second graphic novel and one of the nominee of 2018 Man Booker Prize, explores the issue of fake news in a contemporary situation. The novel pictures the life of three adults who were affected by the wake of conspiracy theories circling around the murder of their loved one. The main conflict of the story, which borrows a lot of references and allusions to the real event such as Sandy Hook conspiracy theories (Citron 2019), revolves around the way the main characters receive various kinds of abuses in their privacy. The interesting part of this main conflict lies on how the issue does not lie on the way the main characters react towards the wrong news, but on how the main characters

are faced by the situation in which the fake news has been considered more 'real' than them. This situation shows how mediated representation had entered the situation of hyperreality. Another interesting part about this object is its intertextual aspect of the graphic novel, in which it points out towards a real issue in contemporary American society. The novel was released around the time after the US Presidential Election in 2016, which is well-known for the issue of spreading fake news (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). The similarity between the issue brought up in the novel and the issue in contemporary America shows that *Sabrina* has the element of contemporary-ness in its medium and its use on intertexts in order to present a contemporary issue from the society.

While Orwell explored the malleable nature of media as the result of direct control from the people in power, Drnaso's *Sabrina* explores on how the malleability is not only influenced from the people in power who own the production of mainstream media, but also through the way participatory culture react against mainstream media. In the story, most of the main characters receive abuse from people on the internet, and the circulation of the fake news also happen inside that medium. While both Orwell's and Drnaso's novels reflect Baudrillard's concept in the reproduction of factual event, Drnaso explores on how the truth of information in media is still determined by the one who receives it. This is reflecting on the contemporary issues mentioned before, in which the declining trust towards the mainstream media still results in hyperreality, as it is still affected in media receivers' selective fact-checking.

With the hyperreal element being present in the main conflict of the story, this study aims to explore that element in more detail, especially with the way the hyperreal clashed with the real. Using Baudrillard's theory in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), this study aims to identify the process in which the simulacrum of the real is turned into hyperreality. By identifying the process of simulation to hyperreality, the study expects to discover on how the issue of media reception in the age of post-truth is portrayed in the novel.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

Based on the issues explained before, there are several problems that the research is going to cover, that are:

1) How is the process of turning the simulacrum into hyperreality portrayed through the spread of fake news in the novel?

2) How does the hyperreality of the spread of fake news show the unstable perception of truth in the media as portrayed in the story?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Based on the problems presented above, the main objectives of the study can be summarized as the following:

1) The study aims on identifying the process of the simulacrum in turning into hyperreality in the fake news as portrayed in the novel.

2) The study aims on identifying the way the hyperreality of the fake news shows the unstable perception of truth in the media as portrayed in the story.

1.4. Significance of the Study

As mentioned in the background of the study, fake news is the current urgent issue faced by the international community, especially in the wake of New Media popularity. The theme of *Sabrina* deals with this contemporary issue, making this graphic novel worthy of research in the wake of post-truth crisis. It is no wonder that *Sabrina* becomes the first graphic novel which was nominated in Man Booker Prize longlist in 2018 (Flood 2018), which makes itself worthy of attention in literary research. Its nomination speaks volume on the literary status of graphic novel as a medium. The fact that the novel is the first one in the medium to be nominated in a prestigious literary prize is not the only factor that makes the novel an interesting object for literary research, but also the contemporary issue it brings up in its story. In other words, *Sabrina* is an interesting object for contemporary literature research both in its medium form and the topic it brings up.

With the reasons stated above, it is clear that by studying this work, it can contribute to two studies; study in graphic novel as a contemporary literary medium and study in contemporary topic that is the wake of New Media. *Sabrina*'s nomination in Man Booker Prize shows the wake of graphic novel as a literary medium, which shows the ability of the medium to offer perspective on contemporary topics and issues. This study aims to explore the New Media issue which is represented in the story, especially in the way Baudrillard's hyperreality is conceived in the issue. By conducting a study in this work, its presentation of the contemporary issue can be explored through post-modern perspective.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

- Fake news : false information that is presented as if it is genuine (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017).

- Graphic novel : a work of fiction told through sequential illustrations (Abrams and Harpham 2012).

- Hyperreality : a state in which the copy of reality is no longer distinguishable from the real, which is the result of repeated representation of the real through the media (Baudrillard 1994).

- Post-truth politics : a phenomenon in which media consumers become selective in the contents they consume, while ignoring the other facts that are not relevant to them (Salam 2018).

- Postmodernism : the dissolution of meta-narrative, which resulted in the development of narrative varieties (Lyotard 1984).