

Semiotic Analysis in the Music Video (MV) of Bangtan Sonyeondan's Album: The Most Beautiful Moment in Life

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the music videos of the album "The Most Beautiful Moment in Life" by Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS) using a semiotic approach. By applying Roland Barthes' theory, this study identifies the elements of signs, namely signifier and signified, as well as the interpretation of meaning through denotation and connotation. The music videos "I Need U," "Run," and "Epilogue: Young Forever" are the focus of the analysis, which depict themes of emotional struggle, self-discovery, and youth experiences. The results of the analysis show that the visuals in the music videos convey not only literal actions but also deeper cultural and psychological meanings, providing insight into how BTS communicates through complex narratives that resonate with their audiences. This study emphasizes the importance of semiotics in understanding the diverse meanings contained in music videos.

Keyword: Semiotics; Video Music; Visual Analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of signs and symbols in daily life and the meanings they communicate is known as semiotics. The general theory of semiotics covers any phenomenon involving signs and communication. "Film language" is just one aspect of this incredibly varied phenomenon. Codes about taste, scent, and fashion. Formal languages, like those used in chemistry and mathematics. The same is true of the cultural standards that determine how people move. Semiotics examines how these symbols operate in different situations and transmit information and meaning (Sondheim, 2016, p. 180).

Hurwitz is interested in investigating how individual signals work within broader communication systems in this context and how these codes create the structures and guidelines that allow signs to express meaning in various human interaction contexts effectively. Signs are found in all meaningful phenomena, including words and images. Something is interpreted when regarded as a sign (Chandler, 2017, p. 2). Hurwitz is focused on studying signs and codes, among the many subjects covered in semiotic theory. The minor pieces that communicate meaning in communication are called symbols, and code is composed of a group of connected symbols and the rules that govern how they are utilized.

Semiotics, derived from the Greek *semion*, is the study of signs as signs or sign interpreters. A subfield of linguistics known as semiotics relates to the study of signs in communication. Everything is implied by that symbol, which means that all significant things are seen as symbols. Saussure referred to semiotics as semiology. Semiology is a method for analyzing symbols in social interactions (Ramadhani et al., 2019, p. 977). A recent development in semiotics is visual semiotics, which examines the meanings that visual signals and images transmit. The focus of visual semiotics is on the dominant systems and modes of communication that are employed by visuals.

Semiotics can analyze verbal, nonverbal, or both types of messages. Text can be created, captured as audio or video, and conveyed without regard to the "sender" or "receiver." A text is an assortment of semiotically employed signs, such as words, sounds, images, gestures, or other signs. Every sign is created by a genre's norms and communication style. Semiotics is a crucial tool for comprehending or interpreting

research. It looks for the more profound meaning behind the facts and directly explains them. Because semiotic and values-focused research is concerned with understanding and examining the meaning of facts, they are equally significant.

Since the late 1990s, Korean popular culture, known as *Hallyu*, has expanded worldwide. Korean popular music, or K-pop, is a key component of *Hallyu* and has attracted listeners worldwide, from popular K-pop musicians like Psy to recent global music sensations like BTS (Lee, 2018).

The popularity of the K-pop industry has dramatically influenced the global perception of South Korea as an optimistic country. K-pop is a significant industry that needs to grow in some areas of popular culture, including music. Because of this, K-pop is a valuable tool that boosts South Korea's competitiveness abroad. Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS) is a K-pop group that has recently been successful in breaking into the American music industry. Seven members constitute the 2013 debut group BTS: main rapper Suga (Min Yoongi), visual and sub-vocalist Jin (Kim Seokjin), leader and rapper RM (Kim Namjoon), J-Hope (Jung Hoseok), Jimin (Park Jimin) is highly talented as a sub-singer and a dancer, V (Kim Taehyung), and Jungkook, the primary vocalist and dancer. He is also a rapper and a *maknae*.

Music videos are visually significant due to their unique elements. The meaning of the symbols in the video is expanded upon, serving as a basis for the tale and subject development of the song. Grasping music videos requires a grasp of visual signals. Music videos are also subject to semiotic analysis, typically used to evaluate songs, films, and commercials. Viewers can decipher the message the authors of a music video are trying to convey by paying attention to the visual cues in the video. Signs are usually used with symbols, and each sign has a meaning that can be interpreted in various ways.

Few individuals are aware of the semiotic meanings in music videos. For example, if we examine some K-pop singers' music videos more attentively, we would see many signals that show their Korean identity while indirectly propagating their culture or the messages buried or contained within the movies. BTS's album *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* contains semiotic signals and meanings. The album's storyline centers on "youth" and the "most beautiful moment in life," with the members' experiences and emotions as the foundation.

Video clips for albums such as *I Need U*, *Run*, and *Epilogue: Young Forever*. Based on the researcher's observations, this study aims to understand and analyze the visual signs and their meanings in these music videos. This concept is known as the order of meaning, and it comprises both denotation (real meaning) and connotation (extra meaning shaped by culture and personal experiences). In addition, this concept employs the terms *signifier* and *signified*.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

In this study, a qualitative descriptive approach was applied. In qualitative research, data can be collected in various ways, including qualitative descriptive methods. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate when a direct description of phenomena is required. This study aims to comprehensively describe occurrences using everyday language (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336). In other words, this qualitative descriptive method describes facts obtained through observation and document analysis, which explain and depict things precisely as they occur. This research aims to discover sign elements and analyze their significance in music videos.

B. Source of Data

The source of the data was taken from the YouTube platform and BTS's official website. Data were collected from June to July 2024. The research data came from HYBE Labels' official YouTube channel. The BTS music videos from the album *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* served as the research's data source. The YouTube platform was used to compile the music videos for *I Need U*, *Run*, and *Epilogue: Young Forever*.

The official YouTube channel has the music video for *I Need U*:

<https://youtu.be/jjskoRh8GTE?si=hwMoywS9Bgn-oQws>

The *Run* music video is also available on HYBE's official YouTube channel:

<https://youtu.be/wKysONrSmew?si=HILe1Mj4ZEnd6c9G>

The same applies to the music video for *Epilogue: Young Forever*:

https://youtu.be/LbvE0FV_70U?si=yV5JLEKi9hp2EFSx

C. Techniques for Collecting Data

Data collection utilized observation and documentation techniques. As stated by Sugiyono (2016), observation extends beyond people to include various objects. Documentation aids in clarity and simplifies data retrieval (Amiraslani & Dragovich, 2022). The steps included browsing and downloading the videos, capturing documentation, and identifying the five semiotic systems: linguistic, audio, visual, gestural, and spatial.

D. *Techniques for Analyzing Data*

In analyzing the data, three steps based on the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña were applied: data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles et al., 2014).

1) Data Condensation

Data condensation refers to selecting data, focusing on data selection, simplifying data, abstracting data to answer research problems, and transforming data into descriptive qualitative form. The BTS music videos from the album *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* were explained and represented by the semiotic signs gathered as research data.

a) Selecting

The data were selected based on the three music videos in the BTS album.

b) Focusing

Following the data selection process, the researcher concentrated on two research issues: the interpretation of meaning in music videos and sign elements. The *signifier* and *signified* were the main focus of the elements, and the relationship between denotation and connotation was the main focus of the meaning interpretation.

c) Simplifying

The selected data were then simplified by paying attention to sign elements, signifiers, and signifieds in music videos.

d) Abstracting

Roland Barthes's theory was applied in analyzing the three music videos from the BTS album. Sign elements were analyzed into signifiers and signifieds, and denotation and connotation were used to explain how to interpret the meaning of signs in music videos.

2) Data Display

Data presentation is the second central area of analytical activity. Generally speaking, data presentation involves gathering and distilling information to make inferences and recommendations possible. The data are presented in tabular form, making them easier to view and more organized, aiding in understanding the research context.

3) Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

The third step is drawing conclusions and verification. The conclusion of this research is the identification of the semiotic elements of the BTS music video signs in the album *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* and the semiotic way of conveying messages to provide information about the music videos in the BTS album.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyzing three music videos from BTS's *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* album through a semiotic lens reveals numerous sign elements and their intricate meanings. The methodology employed is based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which dissects meaning into two primary classifications: sign elements (*signifier* and *signified*) and the interpretation of meaning (*denotation* and *connotation*).

A. *Sign Elements in the BTS Album Music Videos*

1) Overview of Sign Elements

In the analysis of BTS's music videos from *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life*, various sign elements were identified using Barthes' semiotic framework. This theory classifies signs into two distinct components: the *signifier*, which refers to the tangible representation of the sign (such as images, objects, and actions), and the *signified*, which pertains to the underlying concepts or meanings conveyed by the signifier. Each music video, specifically *I Need U*, *Run*, and *Epilogue: Young Forever*, is rich with signifiers that encapsulate profound emotional and psychological connotations.

2) Music Video: "I Need U"

In the music video *I Need U*, several potent signifiers emerge. The burning of a white lily, for instance, serves as a signifier representing the transition from innocence to emotional pain—the signified. This imagery evokes themes of fragility and loss, highlighting the journey from youthful idealism to confronting harsher realities. Additionally, the portrayal of a solitary figure, either sitting in contemplation or weeping, conveys deep anguish and sorrow, emphasizing the struggle with personal demons.

The representation of the seven individuals walking together symbolizes a strong sense of unity and intimate companionship, illustrating how collective support can mitigate individual suffering. The visual interplay of solitude and togetherness underscores the duality of human experience, where moments of loneliness are often juxtaposed with the strength found in community.

3) Music Video: “Run”

Moving to the music video *Run*, the act of submerging oneself in a pool or the imagery of drowning serves as a powerful signifier of being overwhelmed by emotions—the signified. This visual metaphor captures the feeling of being engulfed by one’s emotional state, reflecting the struggles that accompany personal growth. The scenes of joyful camaraderie among friends further symbolize freedom and companionship, offering a counterbalance to the theme of isolation.

Moreover, the symbolic act of building and demolishing a house of cards represents the fragility of relationships and the effort to maintain connections despite inevitable challenges. The incineration of Polaroid photographs signifies a desire to forget painful memories, encapsulating the struggle between holding on to the past and moving forward. Together, these signifiers in *Run* create a complex tapestry of emotional narratives that resonate with the audience.

4) Music Video: “Epilogue: Young Forever”

In *Epilogue: Young Forever*, the aerial view of a labyrinth emerges as a significant signifier, representing the challenging and often convoluted journey of life—the signified. This labyrinthine imagery evokes feelings of confusion and a search for direction, reflecting the complexities faced by youth as they navigate their paths. The act of burning photographs symbolizes a strong inclination to relinquish or erase memories from the past, highlighting the desire for renewal and a fresh start.

The depiction of the seven individuals sprinting toward the setting sun serves as a powerful metaphor for determination and hope. This imagery reflects their collective vigor in pursuing a promising future, emphasizing themes of resilience and aspiration. The interplay of light and shadow in the visuals further enriches the narrative, highlighting the contrasts in their journey toward self-discovery and fulfillment.

B. Interpretation of Meaning in BTS Album Music Videos

1) Denotation and Connotation

The interpretation of meaning in these music videos encompasses both denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the literal meaning of the visuals, while connotation encompasses the symbolic or cultural meanings that arise from these images. This dual analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the emotional and cultural contexts embedded within the music videos.

2) Music Video: “I Need U”

In *I Need U*, the denotative aspects of the visuals refer to explicit actions and scenes, such as the solitary figure or the gathering of friends. These elements can be easily understood at face value. However, the connotative meanings delve deeper into the emotional landscape presented. The video explores themes of personal emotional challenges, emphasizing the importance of supportive relationships in overcoming hardship. It intricately portrays concepts such as loss, grief, introspection, and the quest for tranquility, resonating with viewers who may have experienced similar struggles.

3) Music Video: “Run”

Similarly, in *Run*, the denotations relate to the literal events depicted, such as the act of running or swimming. However, the connotations reveal a rich tapestry of emotional and cultural significance. The video explores the concepts of freedom, companionship, and self-expression, effectively representing a multifaceted emotional journey. Through visual symbolism, BTS conveys the complex interplay of joy and sorrow, reinforcing the idea that growth often involves navigating through both light and darkness.

4) Music Video: “Epilogue: Young Forever”

In *Epilogue: Young Forever*, the denotative elements highlight the literal imagery of a labyrinth and individuals running. Yet, the connotative interpretation reveals a profound commentary on the challenges of youth and the relentless pursuit of dreams. The burning of photographs and the sprint toward the sunset symbolize a desire for renewal and the courage to embrace the future despite the weight of past experiences. This duality of meaning enriches the viewer’s understanding of the journey toward self-acceptance and fulfillment.

4. CONCLUSION

The semiotic analysis of BTS's music videos from *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life* reveals a rich tapestry of sign elements that convey deep emotional and psychological meanings. Utilizing Roland Barthes’ framework, the study identifies the interplay between *signifiers* and *signifieds*, as well as the distinctions between *denotation* and *connotation*. Each video, particularly *I Need U*, *Run*, and *Epilogue: Young Forever*, encapsulates themes of youth, emotional struggle, and the quest for self-discovery. The visuals not only depict literal actions but also evoke broader cultural and personal significances, illustrating how BTS effectively

communicates complex narratives that resonate with their audience. This analysis underscores the importance of semiotics in understanding the multifaceted meanings embedded in music videos, highlighting their role in shaping cultural perceptions and emotional connections.

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