

A Semiotic Approach to BTS English Music Video: A Verbal and Visual Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: November 19, 2025

Revision: March 25, 2026

Accepted: March 26, 2026

Keywords:

Audience Perception

BTS

English Music Video

Semiotics

Sign Language

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the signs in three BTS English music videos: "Dynamite," "Butter," and "Permission to Dance." Through the lens of Semiotic Analysis and how signs influence audience perceptions of information by the media, this research examines verbal and visual elements. Signs, grounded in social and cultural life, are objects or gestures that convey meaning and represent a message. Data was collected from screenshots of the music videos on YouTube and analyzed using the semiotic triangle by Peirce (2007) and the four dimensions of Audience engagement by Steesen, et al. (2020). The analysis focuses on how signs work together to convey messages and influence audience perceptions. The results reveal that signs interrelate to convey messages easily to the audience. Furthermore, the results highlight how audience comments reflect emotional feelings, the application of positive messages in music videos, and their use as standards and inspiration for everyday social and cultural life in the future.

INTRODUCTION

YouTube is currently the world's largest video-sharing platform, and it is changing how people consume digital content, often surpassing television as an advertising platform (Senarathna & Wijetunga, 2023). The diversity of easily accessible content makes YouTube an effective social communication tool, allowing content creators to express themselves and reach a global audience. For instance, HYBE Corporation, which manages the South Korean male vocal group *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS), utilizes YouTube to brand its artists, reaching a global audience by sharing content, including music videos, on its channel.

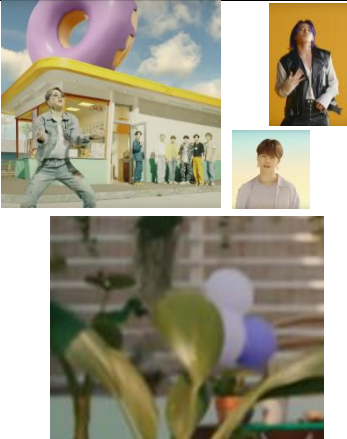
BTS has become a global idol, known for their popularity and significant global achievements, including an economic impact comparable to major corporations like Samsung and Hyundai in South Korea (Lyu, 2024; Abramovitch, 2019). The group's success proves their ability to attract and influence an audience, with their official YouTube channel boasting over 80 million subscribers. BTS frequently uses visuals, body language, and objects as signs to convey messages in their music videos.

Semiotics is the study of signs, which can be words, images, symbols, gestures, or even objects. Semiotic analysis aims to understand signs in various contexts, including cultural and social environments (Kobyshcha, 2024). This study examines the semiotics of three English-language BTS music videos, "*Dynamite*," "*Butter*," and "*Permission to Dance*," as English serves as a global communication tool allowing BTS to connect with an international audience. The study focuses on how the verbal content (lyrics) and visual content (non-verbal signs) interrelate to create the message. For example, the use of the color *purple* and specific *body gestures* complements the songs and lyrics to convey messages of joy, peace, and solidarity.

Initial analysis, using Peirce's semiotic triangle theory (2007), shows that the purple color, which is a sign for BTS's fans (ARMY), appears in various scenes to represent fan support. For instance, the purple doughnuts on a rooftop in "Dynamite," accompanied by the lyrics "*Shining through the city with a little funk and soul*," signifies that BTS's success in America is due to their hard work and fan support. The connection to the fans is also shown through the two trapezoid shapes on the elevator buttons in "Butter" and the body gestures that form the word "ARMY,"

strengthening the meaning of connection and participation in BTS's career. The use of verbal and non-verbal signs demonstrates an effective semiotic strategy for conveying meaning and expressing the group's bond with their fans.

The preliminary data collected highlights various semiotic signs present in the three music videos. The data shows that the music videos have various semiotic signs, categorized by their forms. These signs like the color purple (in clothing, donuts, hair, and balloons) which refers to meaning of the ARMY fandom, the BTS/ARMY logo (like the shape on the elevator buttons), and body gestures (such as forming the word "ARMY" or the "Peace" sign and celebration) which collectively convey the meaning of support, the group's history, and messages of happiness and togetherness.

NO.	Picture	Sign	Meaning
1		Purple color	The color of BTS fandom
2		Logos on the elevator buttons	the BTS/ARMY logo
3		ARMY Boddy Gesture	BTS's dedication to their Fandom, which is ARMY

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method. The researcher focused on the semiotic interpretations in BTS's music videos—*Dynamite*, *Butter*, and *Permission to Dance*—to determine the meaning and messages conveyed through signs and symbols. The data analysis technique involved: (1) Categorizing all signs/symbols based on the components of Peirce's semiotic triangle model ('representamen, object, and interpretant'); (2) Describing the meaning and realization of the signs; and (3) Analyzing audience comments based on the four dimensions of audience engagement with media (technical-behavioral, emotional, normative, and spatial-temporal-behavioral) by Steensen et al. (2020).

FINDINGS

The research found two major points after analyzing the signs in the three music videos and the corresponding audience comments:

- 1) The meaning contained in the music videos was realized by analyzing and categorizing semiotic objects into Icons, Index, and Symbol. Each sign was carefully selected and used in specific contexts to convey messages related to support, enthusiasm, social relationships, experiences during the COVID-19 era, BTS's journey, and the group's close relationship with their fans.

- 2) The analysis of audience comments, using the four indicators of audience engagement with media (Steensen et al., 2020), showed strong engagement that was able to influence audience perceptions toward their future behavior in a social cultural environment.
 - *Technical-behavioral and Emotional*: Audiences left comments indicating the strong emotional feelings they experienced after watching the videos.
 - *Normative*: Emotional expressions led the audience to use the messages received as a standard for themselves, showing a positive shift "from not being confident, not loving themselves, and not having spirit in life, to being confident, loving themselves, and having spirit in life".
 - *Spatiotemporal-behavioral*: This normative change proves the audience's entry into the spatio-temporal phase, where the shift in perception influences their application of the information to their future social and cultural lives.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the data findings, the collection of signs in the three English-language BTS music videos played a significant role in shaping the audience's interpretation and conveying messages. Through Peirce's (2007) triadic semiotic process, the signs do not stand alone but complement and interact with each other to produce a coherent and consistent meaning.

Furthermore, audience comments represent new forms of interpretation that are then translated into their daily social and cultural lives, aligning with the four indicators of audience engagement (Steensen et al., 2020). The audience demonstrates technical-behavioural engagement (leaving comments), emotional engagement (expressing feelings), normative engagement (using messages as self-standards), and spatiotemporal-behavioral engagement (applying messages in future lives). This demonstrates that popular music videos can serve as an effective medium for conveying messages and encouraging a wide audience.

Future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of their analysis by examining signs in other music videos on platforms like YouTube, accompanied by an analysis of the lyrics for a more comprehensive understanding of the messages. Moreover, integrating music videos into discussions and learning activities can be a strategic alternative to facilitate the understanding and completion of abstract ideas.

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