

Analysis of Mental Health Messages in BTS' "Zero O'Clock" Song Lyrics Using Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotic Approach

Dina Juniar Anggraini¹, Pisca Dara Apnaza², Septian Dwi Putri³, Maria Maria⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Gunadarma

Email: dinajuniaranggraini@staff.gunadarma.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the meaning of mental health messages in the lyrics of BTS's song "Zero O'Clock" using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. This research applies a descriptive qualitative method with a constructivist paradigm. The data were collected through lyric observation, interviews, and literature studies, then analyzed by identifying signifier and signified elements in selected lyric fragments. The results show that "Zero O'Clock" represents mental health messages related to emotional pressure, self-reflection, hope, and the opportunity to start over. The phrase "Zero O'Clock" symbolizes a new beginning, while lyrics such as "And you're gonna be happy" reflect optimism and emotional recovery. Therefore, this song can be understood as a form of popular music that communicates messages of self-acceptance, resilience, and mental health awareness to its listeners.

Keywords: Semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure, Mental Health, Song Lyrics, BTS, Zero O'Clock.

Introduction

Communication is an inseparable part of human life. In general, each individual has language skills that are used to communicate in conveying and receiving messages, such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Bernard and Steiner explain that communication is the transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, and so on that are conveyed through symbols, words, pictures, figures, graphics, and so on (Mulyana, 2007). Communication also has several types, one of which is mass communication. According to Bittner (in Romli, 2016), mass communication is a message conveyed through mass media to a large number of audiences. It can be concluded that mass communication is the delivery of messages through mass media aimed at reaching a wide audience.

Mass media is a means of disseminating information to the public, according to Bungin (2006:72) mass media is defined as a communication and information media that disseminates information massively and can be accessed by many people, viewed in terms of meaning, mass media is a tool or means to disseminate news content, opinions, comments, entertainment, and so on. Initially, mass media was divided into two types, namely print media and electronic media. Print media includes newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets, and more, while electronic media

includes television, radio, and so on. However, as the times develop, new media such as online media have emerged, which has developed along with the progress of the internet in Indonesia.

New media is a term used for various digital-based communication technologies with their wide availability for personal use as a means of communication (McQuail, 2011). The presence of new media has made mass communication easier and wider in reach. One example of new media that is popular today is Spotify, a music streaming platform that allows users to listen to songs online anytime and anywhere.

The music available on platforms like Spotify not only serves as entertainment, but it also has various benefits for its listeners. One of them is as a source of motivation. Music can evoke certain feelings that are able to trigger enthusiasm and encouragement to face challenges (Ramadhanti, 2021). In addition, music also acts as a communication tool to convey messages and inspiration in life. Songs with deep lyrics often give their own meaning to their listeners, such as the song "Zero O'Clock" by BTS.

BTS, or Bangtan Sonyeondan, is a South Korean music group under Big Hit Entertainment that has gained global recognition through songs that often address social and emotional issues. Since their debut in 2013, BTS has been known not only for their musical achievements but also for lyrics that discuss youth struggles, self-acceptance, identity, emotional pressure, and hope. One of their songs, "Zero O'Clock," presents a message of comfort and renewal by describing difficult emotional experiences and the possibility of starting again when a new day begins.



Figure 1. Zero O'Clock Song Streaming Data on MelOn!

Mental health is one of the most common problems faced by people around the world, It is a condition in which a person can thrive and thrive mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually so that they can live and thrive with awareness of their abilities and overcome pressures and problems in a healthy way (Febrianto et al, 2019).

Health related to a person's emotions, psychiatry, and psyche is called mental health, or also called mental health. Please be aware that events in life that have a significant impact on a person's behavior and personality can have an impact on their mental health.

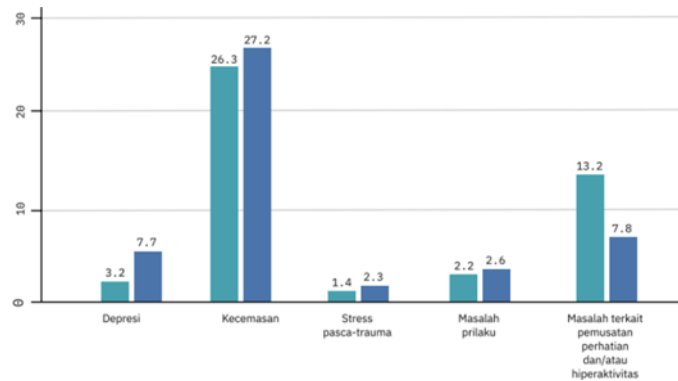


Figure 2. Diagram of mental health problems among adolescents aged 10-17 years

Based on the results of the survey above (Wahdi & Wilopo, 2022), younger adolescents experience concentration or hyperactivity more often (13.2%) compared to older adolescents (7.8%). However, older teens also experience depression more frequently (7.7%) than younger teens (3.2%). A survey conducted in 2022 by Baihaqi found that about 33.3% of adolescents in Indonesia, or about one in three adolescents, had mental health problems, and one in twenty adolescents in Indonesia had experienced mental health problems in the 12 months before the survey was conducted. The survey above shows that one of the impacts of a person experiencing mental health and the main cause is the lack of knowledge and literacy about mental health. In the end, the stigma against mental health disorders in society becomes bad. This also results in poor quality of handling mental health problems in Indonesia. In simple terms, mental health literacy can strengthen public understanding and trust about mental disorders and can help in the recognition, control, and prevention of mental health problems.

The condition of low mental health literacy in the community not only affects the perspective of mental disorders, but also has an impact on the quality of treatment received by individuals who experience mental health problems. In the survey above, a person affected by Depression got the third position. Depression is a common mental disorder characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, guilt, low self-esteem, difficulty sleeping, decreased or increased appetite, feelings of fatigue and lack of concentration (Rahmi Sari Kasome, 2020). Depression can encourage a person to feel hopeless, lose motivation, and withdraw from the surrounding environment. In this condition, a person needs support, both emotionally and psychologically, from those closest to him. Even small things like words of encouragement, hugs, or just the presence of someone listening can have a positive impact.

In this context, various media, including art and culture, can be an effective means of improving public understanding. One of the art forms that is often used is music, which not only has an entertainment function, but also acts as a medium of communication and motivation. Music can bridge this understanding gap by conveying deep and inspirational emotional messages, as seen in BTS's song "Zero o'clock".

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BTS's song "Zero O'Clock" raises the concept of hope and new beginnings. This song describes feeling tired and hopeless after a hard day, something that many people often experience. However, through the lyrics, BTS conveys the message that every 12 o'clock (zero o'clock), the day will change, giving the opportunity to start over. The main message of this song is that it's okay to feel sad or tired, but don't forget that there is always hope for tomorrow. This song reminds listeners that everyone has hard times, but time goes on, and we can try again in a new day. With a gentle melody and meaningful lyrics, this song is like a warm hug for those who are feeling down. "Zero O'Clock" provides a sense of comfort and calm, as if BTS wants to convey that no one is truly alone in facing life's difficulties.

Ferdinand de Saussure's analysis is used in understanding the song Zero O'Clock through the concepts of signifiers and signifieds. The phrase Zero O'Clock not only indicates the time of 12 o'clock at night, but also symbolizes new beginnings and hope after a hard day. Lyrics like "And you're going to be happy" have a connotative meaning as a message of optimism that sadness won't last forever. The time change to 00:00 also symbolizes self-reflection and an opportunity to start over. With Saussure's semiotic approach, the song not only conveys a message through its lyrics, but also through emotionally interpretable symbols, making it meaningful for listeners looking for hope and serenity.

Relevant research was conducted by Gabrielle Victory Nathania, Daniel Kurniawan S, and Jacky Cahyadi (2023) with the title "Analysis Of Mental Health Messages In The Music Era BTS Video "Love Myself and Love Yourself". This study uses the same methods and problems, namely qualitative methods and mental health problems of a person. On the other hand, their research has a different object than this study. They analyzed the songs Fake Love and Singularity, while the study used the song Zero O'clock by BTS.

The next relevant research was conducted by Verisa Rizki A, and Rina Sari K, with the title "Semiotic Analysis of Mental Health Disorders in the Lyrics of BTS Magic Shop Song". This study has similarities with previous research. Both use the same qualitative methods, objects and issues. However, both have the same theory for analyzing problems. Both use semiotic theory. Several previous studies have analyzed mental health messages in BTS songs using qualitative and semiotic approaches. However, most of these studies focused on other BTS songs, such as "Fake Love," "Singularity," and "Magic Shop." Therefore, this study offers a different focus by analyzing the song "Zero O'Clock," which specifically emphasizes emotional recovery, self-acceptance, and hope after experiencing mental pressure. This research is expected to contribute to the study of popular music as a medium for communicating mental health messages, especially through Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic perspective. Related to the things that have been explained above, the researcher is interested in using a song from BTS's Map of the Soul album titled "Zero O'clock" as the object of research in writing this article because the researcher can find problems related to mental health and social problems in the BTS song.



Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm to analyze the meaning of mental health messages in the lyrics of BTS's song "Zero O'Clock." The object of this research is the song lyrics, while the informant in this study consisted of one person who was selected purposively based on specific criteria, namely being a BTS listener or fan and having Korean language skills to support the interpretation of the lyrics. Data were collected through observation of the song lyrics, interviews with the informant, and literature studies related to semiotics, mental health, music, and BTS. The data analysis was carried out using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory through several stages: identifying important lyric fragments, classifying them into signifier and signified aspects, interpreting the mental health messages contained in the lyrics, and confirming the interpretation through source triangulation. This process was conducted to ensure that the meaning of mental health messages in the song could be interpreted more accurately and academically.

Results and Discussion

Biography

BTS, or Bangtan Sonyeondan, is a South Korean music group under Big Hit Entertainment that has gained international recognition through music that often addresses social, emotional, and youth-related issues. The group consists of seven members, namely RM, Jin, Suga, J-Hope, Jimin, V, and Jungkook. In the context of this study, BTS is relevant because their lyrics often contain messages of self-acceptance, emotional struggle, hope, and motivation, which are closely related to the issue of mental health analyzed in the song "Zero O'Clock."



Figure 3. BTS Group Portrait

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Song "Zero O'clock"

The song "Zero O'clock" sung by BTS is one of the works that touches the heart and brings a message of comfort to the listeners, especially ARMY, the fans of the Boy Group. The song was released as part of the album Map of the Soul: 7 in 2020 and is sung by four members of the vocal line: Jin, Jimin, V, and Jungkook. The lyrics tell of the calm of the struggle in the face of hard days and feelings of helplessness, but at the same time bring hope for a new beginning when the clock shows 00.00 or "Zero O'clock"

The song "Zero O'clock" has become one of the most popular songs among its listeners, as of January 14, 2025, the song "00.00" (Zero O'clock) by BTS has been played 257,995,901 times on Spotify. Since then, the song has gained a significant population among global listeners.



Figure 4. Map of the Soul Album Cover: 7 & Song Playback via Spotify

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Informant Profile

As a researcher, I have interviewed one of the listeners who is a fan or listener of BTS music and an individual who has Korean language skills, namely Anisa Sapriyani S.Ikom who is 24 years old. The interview with the informant was conducted on January 23, 2025. The interviews are conducted in person or face-to-face. Anisa Sapriyani has been a fan of BTS or ARMY for 11 years and has the ability to speak Korean since she became K-poppers to interact with idols and learn Korean Culture.

Analysis Results

BTS's song "Zero O'clock" is one of the songs full of emotional meaning, depicting one's journey through frustration and sadness to hope and happiness. The phrase "Zero O'clock" symbolizes the time of 00:00, which becomes a symbol of a new beginning or emotional "reset".

Through the lyrics, this song conveys the message that every day is a new opportunity to release burdens and seek happiness. With a reflective atmosphere, BTS invites listeners to remain optimistic despite facing challenges, because happiness can still be achieved over time. The main message of this song is hope and belief that positive change is always possible, even in the midst of life's difficulties.

The song "Zero O'clock" was released as part of the album Map of the Soul:7 on February 21, 2020. The album is BTS's major project that explores the members' emotional journey and self-reflection. "Zero O'clock" was sung by BTS's vocal unit (Jin, Jimin, V and Jungkook) and became one of the heartwarming with a message full of hope. The album combines themes of psychology, personality, and the search for identity, making it one of BTS's most profound works.

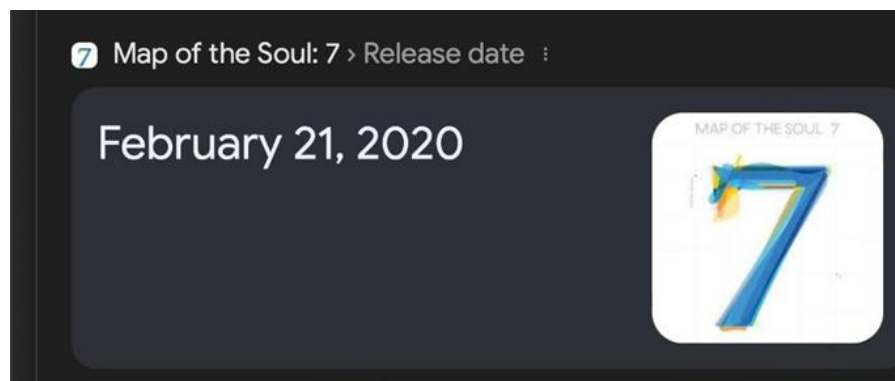


Figure 5. Album Release Date Map of the Soul: 7

Saussure's semiotic approach is used to dissect meaning in song lyrics. Signifiers are identified as language elements (words or phrases) that appear in lyrics, while signified is interpreted as the meaning or concept communicated by the sign. The following is an analysis of semiotic theory based on the concept of Ferdinand de Saussure.

Table 1. Signifier and Signified Aspects of the Lyrics to the Song “Zero O’Clock”

Stanza	Signifier	Signified	Meaning of Mental Health
Stanza 5	"Will something change?", "Maybe it won't", "But it's coming to an end someday"	Doubt, pessimism, and hope that the hard day will be over	It depicts anxiety, mental exhaustion, but there is still hope to survive.
Stanza 6	"Let's breathe like the first time", "Turn all this upside down", "Zero O'Clock"	Calm down, change circumstances, and make new beginnings	Represents a process of emotional recovery and an opportunity to start over.
Stanza 7	"Hope tomorrow I laugh more", "Hopefully I'll be happier"	Hope, prayer, and positive affirmations	Showing the desire to get out of sadness and achieve happiness.
Stanza 8	"Hold your breath for a minute", "Cheer me up today", "Turn all this around"	Emotional control, support needs, and recovery expectations	Describes the struggle of coping with mental distress and the need for emotional comfort.

Based on the table of signifier and signified, the lyrics of BTS's song "Zero O'Clock" show a mental health message that moves from a depressed state to hope and recovery. In the fifth stanza, markers in the form of expressions of doubt and questions about change describe the condition of a person who is experiencing anxiety, inner pressure, and pessimism about the situation at hand. However, the lyrics still give rise to a sign in the form of hope that the hard day will end and there is still a chance to survive. In the sixth stanza, markers such as "Sumeul swija cheoeumcheoreom", "Turn this all around", and "Modeun ge saeroun Zero O'Clock" show an invitation to calm down, change circumstances, and start over at a new time. The signs of this verse lead to a process of emotional recovery and the belief that a person still has a chance to improve after experiencing mental stress.

Furthermore, the seventh verse reinforces the message of hope through markers related to prayer and the desire to be happier. The lyrics can be interpreted as a form of positive affirmation that even though a person is in a difficult situation, there is still hope to gain calm and happiness the next day. Meanwhile, the eighth verse shows a person's efforts in controlling emotions and seeking emotional support. Markers such as "Aju jamkkan sumeul chamgo", "Oneuldo nareul todangnyeo", and "Turn this all around" represent the struggle to stay calm, the need for comfort, and the desire to rise from adversity. Thus, this table shows that the lyrics of "Zero O'Clock" not only describe mental distress, but also convey a message of optimism, self-acceptance, emotional support, and an opportunity to start over.

Discussion

Based on Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis, the lyrics of BTS's song "Zero O'Clock" show that mental health messages are constructed through the relationship between signifier and signified. The signifiers in the lyrics appear in the form of words and phrases such as "Is this my fault?", "Even if I talk to myself, it's not easy," "Zero O'Clock," "Breathe like the first time," and "I wish I was happier." These expressions become important signs because they represent emotional pressure, self-blame, loneliness, hope, and the desire to recover.

The signified meanings found in these lyrics indicate the psychological condition of individuals who experience sadness, stress, anxiety, and mental exhaustion. For example, the phrase "Is this my fault?" signifies self-blame, while "Even if I talk to myself, it's not easy" signifies inner conflict and emotional loneliness. These lyrics reflect the condition of someone who is struggling with mental pressure but still trying to understand and overcome their feelings.

Furthermore, the phrase "Zero O'Clock" becomes the central signifier in the song. Literally, it refers to midnight or the beginning of a new day. However, in the context of the song, it signifies a new beginning, emotional reset, and hope after experiencing a difficult day. This meaning is strengthened by lyrics such as "Breathe like the first time" and "I wish I was happier," which signify calmness, positive affirmation, and the desire to achieve emotional recovery.

Thus, the relationship between signifier and signified in "Zero O'Clock" shows that the song does not only describe sadness or mental pressure, but also conveys messages of optimism, self-acceptance, and resilience. Through Saussure's semiotic perspective, the song can be understood as a medium that communicates mental health messages by encouraging listeners to believe that difficult moments can pass and that every new day offers an opportunity to start again.

Data Source Triangulation

Based on the results of triangulation with Anisa Sapriyani, S.I.Kom., the song Zero O'Clock by BTS represents the emotional journey of someone who experiences mental stress, stress, and the hope of getting back up. Anisa explained that this song describes how a person often feels trapped in their own thoughts, has difficulty expressing emotions, and has a tendency to blame themselves when facing life pressures.

"Lyrics like 'Is this my fault?' and 'Even if I talk to myself, it's not easy' show the feelings of a person experiencing stress and alienation. This often happens to individuals who feel mentally tired and don't know how to deal with it," said Anisa. In addition, he highlighted that this song not only depicts sadness, but also conveys the message that there is still hope for change.

The concept of Zero O'Clock in the lyrics of this song, according to Anisa, serves as a symbol of a new beginning. "The lyrics 'Where everything is new, at 00:00' give the impression that every change of day is an opportunity to start over. It can be a reminder for someone who is experiencing stress that even though today is hard, there is still hope for a better tomorrow," he explained.

Lyrics like "Breathe like the first time" and "I wish I was happier" also contain positive affirmation elements that can help a person change their mindset. Anisa emphasized that this song

gives a deep meaning about mental health, not only describing feelings of depression but also encouraging listeners to remain hopeful.

Through this triangulation analysis, it can be concluded that the song Zero O'Clock manages to capture the feelings of individuals struggling with mental distress. With meaningful lyrics, the song depicts a journey from adversity to hope, as well as conveying the message that after a hard day, there is always a chance to bounce back.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, the lyrics of BTS's song "Zero O'Clock" represent mental health messages through the relationship between signifier and signified in Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis. The song describes emotional pressure, sadness, self-reflection, and the hope to start over. The phrase "Zero O'Clock" symbolizes a new beginning, while lyrics such as "Breathe like the first time" and "Wish I were happier" reflect messages of calmness, optimism, and emotional recovery. Therefore, this song can be understood not only as entertainment, but also as a medium for conveying mental health messages and encouraging listeners to remain hopeful in difficult situations.

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