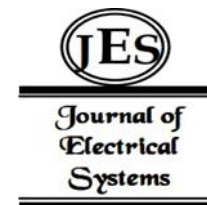


¹ Gabriella Novianty
Soedjarwo

² Emerentia Ivana
Retnoningsih

The Meaning of Emoticon Used by K-Pop Fans



Abstract: - K-pop has influenced people globally. The fans of K-pop idols are everywhere. The news about k-pop idols is usually swarmed by emoticon. The emoticon is used to enhance the message to their idols. Emoticon is chosen to enhance the meaning since the popularity of emoticon is increased. This study was conducted to explore the meaning of the emoticon used by the k-pop fans. There are 150 comments using emoticon analysed which were taken from the Instagram. The data were analysed using the semiotics from Roland Barthes. This semiotics theory was chosen since the analysis went to finding the myth of the emoticon used. The result of this study is the emoticon used shows how close the relationship is between the k-pop fans and their idol. It is shown on most of the emoticon used are related to love, kiss, and hug which means k-pop fans see their idol as someone they love the most and always root for them. The result of this study supports the idea that k-pop fans often indulge in the romantic fantasy with their idols.

Keywords: emoticon, k-pop, meaning in use, semiotics

BACKGROUND

K-pop is the giant in entertainment industry. The raise of its popularity is due to the global fame of K-pop idols. They have become not only the singer but also the fashion icon and even political and humanity campaigns. K-pop idols have gained numerous numbers of fan; each K-pop group has its own name for the official fandom. The fans show their adoration and support to their idols. Their support is expressed through words and emoticon. As the range of emoticon is wider and the use becomes more frequent, K-pop fans use emoticon a lot. This study wants to answer the question about the meaning of the emoticon used by K-pop fans.

The theory implemented in this study to answer the research question is semiotics by Roland Barthes. Barthes's semiotics concerns language as a sign system reflecting particular society. Griffin explained Barthes was interested in analysing the symbol accompanying the language expression (Griffin, 2012, p. 332). In using Barthes's semiotics, the analysis of myth is always done. It is because Barthes believes myth cannot be understood without understanding the structure of the sign (Griffin, 2012, p. 333).

Furthermore, Barthes wrote that sign cannot stand alone; it is a part of a system. The system here means the symbol cannot stand alone; the symbol is always embedded in the context of society. In analysing sign using Barthes's semiotics, the discussion of myth is always present. Myth refers to the dominant values existing in certain period of time. Myth, in order to carry the meaning, must be present in written communication (Wijayanto & Iswari, 2021, p. 104)

The idea that Barthes's semiotics, especially because it focuses on myth, belongs to critical discourse is such an interesting discussion. Pezzini poured her idea on her writing brilliantly explained that myth can be expressed differently in different group. Regarding this, the study of myth in the use of sign or symbols is actually the critical study on the discourse (Pezzini, 2017, p. 358). Her idea is in line with the discussion in this paper which focuses on how certain group of people, K-pop fans, gives meaning in the use of emoticon.

Denotation is defined as what all people see without relating it to the society, culture, or ideology (Bouzida, 2016). It can be said that denotation is the basic meaning of the sign or symbol. The next element is connotation. Fisk defined connotation as the interaction happens when the sign meets the feelings or emotions or the users and the values of their culture (Fisk, 1990). Specifically, Barthes mentioned that connotation is a system that comprises signifier, signified, and the process that unites both (Barthes, 1968).

^{1,2} Communication Science Study Program, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Komunikasi dan Sekretari Tarakanita, Jakarta, Indonesia

info@starki.id, gabriella.novianty@starki.id, emerentiana.ivana@gmail.com






Gabriella Novianty Soedjarwo ORCID ID 0009-0000-5981-5907

Copyright©JES2024on-line:journal.esrgroups.org

METHOD

This study implemented the qualitative method. The data was analysed using Barthes's semiotics and the analysis was delivered in description using words. There are many methodologies under the umbrella of qualitative. In particular, this study chose document analysis. In document analysis, the researcher gathered the data and analysed them using the appropriate theory (Bowen, 2009).

Discussion

no	emoticon	frequency
1		61
2		55
3		18
4		10
5		5
	TOTAL	150

Source: Researcher's Processed Data

Text citation: (Table 1, Soedjarwo & Retnoningsih, 2023, p. 3)

a. Emoticon love

As the most occurrence based on the data, this emoticon also the most interesting one to discuss. There are two types of fandoms who use this emoticon: BTS fan and non-BTS fan. It can be concluded that way since all BTS fans use purple love while others use the red one. The purple love represents love for BTS since the official colour for BTS is purple (as an additional information, each K-pop group has its own significant colour). As explained in the article written by Roberts et al, each colour in love emoticon represent a special meaning. Red heart represents romantic emotion. This red heart emoticon is also used to show positive emotion such as affection, gratitude, and appreciation. Purple heart is used to show sensitivity and compassionate love. It can also be used to represent wealth.

It has been known that in social media especially among K-pop fans, this purple love represents BTS. As additional reference, it is interesting to know that purple love is the only emoticon that has been "officially" known to address a certain K-pop group, while, of course, other colour can be the official colour for other K-pop group for example red as the official colour of CLC and iKON or blue (and its gradation) as the official colour for BTOB, CNBLUE, and Super Junior. Even there is other K-pop group named ASTRO which uses violet (close to purple) as its official colour, but the online fandom never refers to ASTRO when they use purple love emoticon. It is interesting to find out that the original meaning of the emoticon can change due to the massive use in the internet.

b. Emoticon love eyes

This emoticon carries the meaning of deeply and madly in love with someone or something. This kind of emotion is manifested in such a way is plausible to get inspired by anime or cartoon. The example of an old anime is Pokemon. There is a scene where Brock was drawn with love eyes when he met Joy. In Dragon Ball, love eye comes together with nose bleed which indicates that the emotion is so strong and can make blood sprout from the nose and the sense, interestingly, is associated with being a *hentai* (pervert) person. The example is Master Roshi in Dragon Ball is depicted as pervert old man and.

Picture 1: Brock and Joy in Pokemon



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/brock-proposing-to-nurse-joy-when-is-this-nibi-city-gym-leader-ever-gonna-get-married-pokemon-advanced-challe--377950593710380105/>

K-pop fans use this emoticon to express their love and adoration for their idol's achievement and physical traits or special thing done for the fans. The example of adoration they show is the adoration towards the idol's smile or handsome face. There is one fan who used this emoticon to show how happy she is when her idols only sing a certain song on front of the fandom, not in other occasion.

Picture 2: Master Roshi with love eyes and nose bleed in Dragon Ball



Source: <https://gifdb.com/gif/anime-nose-bleed-master-roshi-heart-eyes-q219cev208goex3q.html>

c. Emoticon fire

Throughout the history, fire has dual meaning: good and bad, death and birth. A certain mythologic creature, phoenix, is told to be rebirth after burning itself in the fire (despite this bird is depicted as bird with fire). Since then, phoenix symbolizes as rebirth after suffering and often becomes the encouragement for those who are in a low position now to expect the good result later after their suffering; the birth from the ash (The Legendary Phoenix, 2023).

In Greek Mythology, fire is brought to the earth by Prometheus. Mark Catwright told the story of Prometheus in World History Encyclopedia. Catwright mentioned that Prometheus gave fire to human because he felt sorry that human was weak. Prometheus taught human to use fire so human could be skillful in metalwork. Zeus was angry

and punished Prometheus (Catwright, 2013). From this story, fire symbolizes the most powerful element because it can make something or someone stronger. It is plausible that the term *semangat beryala-nyala* or *berapi-api* and the torch relay during Olympic is the remembrance of fire as the source of power and spirit to win the battle.

Picture 3: Phoenix



Text citation: Sagaya, 2023, <https://www.thehansindia.com/life-style/story-of-phoenix-bird-reborn-stronger-and-wiser-789426>

Looking at the history of fire symbolism, it is pretty shocking that this emoticon is quite popular among K-pop fans. With 18 times of occurrence, this emoticon is usually used to express their hot love and rage in pride of their idol's performance. This emoticon is used alongside the emoticon heart or love eyes most of the times. It can be understood that the fans want to express a flaming adoration to their idols.

This meaning is slightly different from the meaning of emoticon flame which is used to show everything related to flame and hotness. It can be used to express attractively hot and excellent. There are two occurrences of this emoticon which was used with the word *maksimalll* (*Emang ganteng maksimalll*) and *gak ada obat*. Usually, the double letter used in the word which is not officially stated in the dictionary (in this case is in Bahasa Indonesia) carries a meaning of very. For example, *buanyak* (as the variation of *banyak*) which means abundant in number. The same case with *maksimalll* with triple L and *gak ada obat* which show how excellent the idol's beauty is.

It is common for fans mentioning that their idol is the most handsome or talented one, which means fans are in constant battle to show that their idol is the best one. That is why the emoticon is used to show the ultimate beauty of talent their idol has compared to other idols.

d. Emoticon hug

Emoticon hug represents appreciation in a return of one's kindness or the expression of love and support. Psychologically, hug is a gesture of physical and emotional bonding. Based on research done by Bowlby in 1969, as cited in Forsell and Åström, hug is an important factor during early age to increase intimacy. This kind of attachment can make a child become more confident (Forsell & Åström, 2012). In term of greeting gesture, hug is considered to be closer than just hand-shaking.

Hug among K-pop fans, actually in general online communication, is used to deliver "a virtual hug". This term refers to giving support to someone far away; even though they do not meet and be able to give hug in real life, they can support each other virtually by sending emoticon hug. K-pop fans want to do the same to their idols. They concern with their idol's health or other psychological state, especially the sad or negative ones, so by sending a virtual hug, the fans want to transfer their energy to their idols.

e. Emoticon kiss

Becomes the least occurrence, emoticon kiss has clear meaning. Kiss as the gesture to show love is used as the same meaning of K-pop fans show their love to their idol. It is often to see kissing as a sexual activity between a couple and kissing is beneficial to increase arousal. Because of this reason, kissing can increase attachment between couple and maintain a healthy relationship (Busby, Hanna-Walker, & Leavitt, 2020).

K-pop fans often regard themselves having a romantic relationship with their idols. They often refer their idol as my husband/wife, my love, or my boyfriend/girlfriend. Seeing theses references, it can be seen that the fans have a romantic fantasy with their idol and that is why the emoticon kiss is also used in the comment.

CONCLUSION

This study found out there are five emoticons that appeared the most in the comment section; they are heart, love eyes, fire, hug, and kiss. These emoticons were used to show how deep K-pop fans' adoration and love is towards their idols. The emoticon also manifests their mind which full of romance, love, and support for their idols. This finding can support the phenomenon that K-pop fans are willing to spend much money to buy the CD or official merchandise as the token of their support towards the idols' works.

Most of the emoticon express the same meaning with the common understanding of the meaning of the emoticon. The unique usage here is the emoticon heart. There are two types of K-pop fandom using this emoticon: BTS and non-BTS fandom. For BTS fandom, they called in an ARMY, the purple heart is used because the colour represents their idols. While other fandoms (non ARMY) use other colour such as red or yellow. This choice of colour does not in line with the common meaning of the colour; they chose the colour that represent the official colour of their idols.

REFERENCES

1. Barthes, R. (1968). *Elements of Semiology 1st ed.* New York.
2. Bouzida, F. (2016). The Semiology Analysis in Media Studies -Roland Barthes Approach. *proceeding in SOCIOINT 14 International Conference and Social Science and Humanities*, 293-303.
3. Bowen, G. (2009). The Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 27-40.
4. Busby, D. M., Hanna-Walker, V., & Leavitt, C. E. (2020). A kiss is not just a kiss: kissing frequency, sexual quality, attachment, and sexual and relationship satisfaction. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 1-19.
5. Catwright, M. (2013, April 20). Prometheus. *World History Encyclopedia*, p. 1.
6. Fisk, J. (1990). *Introduction to Communication Studies 2nd Edition*. New York: Routledge.
7. Forsell, L. M., & Åström, J. A. (2012). Meaning of hugging: from greeting behavior to touching implications. *Comprehensive Psychology*, 78-84.
8. Griffin, E. M. (2012). *A First Look at Communication Theory*. New York: McGraw Hill.
9. Pezzini, I. (2017). Semiotics as a critical discourse: Roland Barthes' Mythologies. *Sapienza University of Rome*, 351-360.
10. (2023). *The Legendary Phoenix*. Seattle: BirdNote.
11. Wijayanto, C. S., & Iswari, F. (2021). Semiotics Analysis of Roland Barthes' Theory on Pocari Sweat's "Sweat for Dream" Advertisement. *Cultural Syndrome*, 100-108.