



SIGNS BEYOND: A SEMIOTIC READING OF TRANSCENDENCE IN “STUCK IN THE MIDDLE” BY BABYMONSTER

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<p>Info Article</p> <p>Received : 16 Mei 2025</p> <p>Revised : 20 Juni 2025</p> <p>Accepted : 23 Juli 2025</p> <p>Publication : 30 Juli 2025</p>	<p>Abstract: <i>This study explores the representation of transcendental themes in the music video <i>Stuck in the Middle</i> by K-pop girl group BABYMONSTER using Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic framework. Through qualitative analysis, six visually rich scenes were examined to uncover how signs—icons, indexes, and symbols—convey deeper meanings related to self-reflection, emotional isolation, aspiration, and the human connection with the cosmos. The research finds that visual elements such as cosmic landscapes, symbolic colors, lighting contrasts, and fantasy-inspired settings serve as metaphors for emotional and spiritual journeys. These scenes construct a layered narrative that combines fantasy aesthetics with existential themes, reinforcing K-pop’s capacity to deliver profound messages beyond entertainment. By analyzing these transcendental signifiers, the study highlights the role of visual semiotics in shaping the cultural and philosophical depth of Korean popular music in a global context.</i></p>
<p>Keywords: <i>Semiotics, K-pop Visual Culture, Music Video Analysis.</i></p> <p>Kata Kunci: Semiotik, Budaya Visual K-pop, Analisis Video Musik.</p>	<p>Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi representasi tema-tema transendental dalam video musik <i>Stuck in the Middle</i> oleh girl group K-pop BABYMONSTER dengan menggunakan kerangka semiotika dari Charles Sanders Peirce. Melalui analisis kualitatif, enam adegan visual yang kaya dianalisis untuk mengungkap bagaimana tanda-tanda—ikon, indeks, dan simbol—menyampaikan makna yang lebih dalam terkait refleksi diri, isolasi emosional, aspirasi, dan hubungan manusia dengan alam semesta. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa elemen visual seperti lanskap kosmik, warna simbolik, kontras pencahayaan, dan latar bergaya fantasi berfungsi sebagai metafora untuk perjalanan emosional dan spiritual. Adegan-adegan tersebut membangun narasi berlapis yang menggabungkan estetika fantasi dengan tema eksistensial, menegaskan kemampuan K-pop dalam menyampaikan pesan yang mendalam melampaui hiburan. Dengan menganalisis penanda transendental ini, studi ini menyoroti peran semiotika visual dalam membentuk kedalaman budaya dan filosofis musik populer Korea di tingkat global.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of global music, Korean music—often referred to as K-music—has emerged as a powerful cultural phenomenon, captivating audiences worldwide. Beyond its catchy melodies and visually striking performances, Korean music serves as a rich semiotic and linguistic tapestry that invites deeper engagement with issues of cultural identity, social dynamics, and human experience. The global rise of Korean music, particularly K-pop, is largely attributed to the strategic digitalization of the industry, which has revolutionized the production, consumption, and distribution of music. The seamless integration of audio-visual elements and the strategic use of social media platforms have enabled K-pop to transcend geographical boundaries and foster a deeply engaged global fanbase (Maulidita et al., 2024; Maulidita & Darmanto, 2024). This global influence has also opened new avenues for academic inquiry, particularly in the fields of media studies, cultural analysis, and semiotics.

A compelling example of this phenomenon is the music video “Stuck in the Middle” by the girl group BabyMonster. This video offers rich insight into human experience and meaning-making through a semiotic lens. Formed by the renowned Korean entertainment company SM Entertainment, known for producing iconic groups such as Girls’ Generation and Red Velvet (Fendler, 2019)—BabyMonster quickly rose to prominence as one of the most viral K-pop girl groups. The members are recognized for their exceptional talents in singing, dancing, and rapping, as well as their multilingual fluency in Korean, English, Japanese, Chinese, and Thai. Dubbed “Monster Rookies,” the group has gained international attention and chart success, with many of their songs going viral on social media.

One of the most striking aspects of “Stuck in the Middle” is its transcendent quality, reflecting a search for meaning and spiritual connection (Parc & Kim, 2020). Through visual and melodic symbolism, the video explores philosophical themes such as alienation, uncertainty, and the existential quest for purpose. The use of dark, contrasting colors and restrained choreography can be interpreted as representing emotional entrapment and confusion. In contrast, symbolic geometry and mystical lighting evoke the transcendent aspects of human experience. The lyrics, which express inner conflict and the pursuit of clarity, further reinforce the video’s spiritual dimension.

This study draws on Larasati & Indriyani (2022) research, which uses a semiotic approach to examine the representation of moral messages, Islamic symbols, and

religious values in media such as film and literature. Their findings underscore how semiotic elements—both explicit and implicit—can convey deeper meanings to audiences. A similar semiotic reading applies to “Stuck in the Middle,” where visual symbols and lyrical narratives reflect the individual’s struggle for identity and meaning. As seen in *Serat Darmasonya* by KPH Suryaningrat, media symbolism can communicate profound existential and spiritual messages, and this concept is mirrored in BabyMonster’s use of dim lighting, restricted movement, and geometric forms.

Similarly, Pradana & Didik (2024) conducted a semiotic analysis of the song “OMG” by NewJeans, highlighting how K-pop media utilizes symbolic language to construct deeper meanings and convey powerful messages. Their work illustrates how visual and linguistic elements coalesce to engage with philosophical, social, and cultural dimensions—pushing the boundaries of entertainment into the realm of identity discourse. This parallels the semiotic construction in “Stuck in the Middle,” where layered visual storytelling explores themes of transcendence and existential inquiry.

To analyze these elements, this study adopts Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic framework (Hoopes, 2014), a foundational theory in the field of semiotics. Peirce identifies three categories of signs based on their relationship with their object: icons, indexes, and symbols. Icons resemble the object they represent; for instance, a hand reaching outward in the video symbolizes a search for hope or direction. Indexes have a direct, causal link to their referent; dim lighting and shadows, for example, index feelings of isolation or uncertainty. Symbols derive meaning from social convention, such as the use of bluish-grey hues to denote sadness or ambiguity—aligning with common visual art associations (Wibowo, 2013).

Semiotics, defined as the study of meaning through the interpretation of signs and sign systems, offers a powerful lens for analyzing how K-pop videos encode messages both verbally and visually. In the context of “Stuck in the Middle,” semiotics allows for a deeper understanding of how elements of design, movement, and lyricism convey existential concerns and spiritual symbolism. This approach highlights the role of K-pop not only as a form of global entertainment but also as a medium for exploring identity, cultural values, and transcendent human experiences. This study, therefore, seeks to analyze how the concept of transcendence is represented through semiotic elements in “Stuck in the Middle.” It identifies and categorizes the signs within the video and

explores how they contribute to meaning-making in the context of spiritual and existential reflection.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative semiotic approach based on the framework developed by Charles Sanders Peirce to analyze the realities embedded within the symbols and signs present in the music video “Stuck in the Middle” by the K-pop girl group BabyMonster. According to Moleong, as cited in Harahap (2020), a qualitative approach is a research method centered on observation to understand phenomena experienced by subjects, encompassing their actions, perceptions, motivations, and other related elements. This approach allows for a comprehensive view of the research object, presented through descriptive language and conducted within a natural context using techniques suited to the phenomena being studied.

Data collection in this study was carried out through documentation techniques aimed at gathering relevant materials such as notes, transcripts, advertisements, articles, and other documents (Arikunto, 2018). Two types of data collection techniques were used: primary and secondary. For the primary data, the researcher conducted direct observation by watching the official “Stuck in the Middle” music video by BabyMonster, with a duration of 4 minutes and 17 seconds, available on YouTube via the official BABYMONSTER channel. The documentation process focused on scene shots within the video that feature transcendental symbols. Secondary data was obtained through literature review, including academic journals, books, and credible internet sources. The analysis of the “Stuck in the Middle” music video was conducted through in-depth observation, selecting specific scenes that reflect the essence of the K-pop industry. Once these relevant scenes were identified, they were examined through Peirce’s semiotic lens to deconstruct the meanings embedded in the signs. This process aimed to uncover hidden messages and understand how signs function within the cultural context of the K-pop industry.

The study employs a descriptive method combined with critical discourse analysis. Its primary focus is to explore how symbols and signs in “Stuck in the Middle” convey transcendental messages through both lyrics and visuals. Through this approach, the research seeks to reveal how semiotic elements—such as color, lighting, and choreography—represent deeper philosophical and spiritual concepts, and how they

contribute to the construction of broader social and cultural realities. Critical discourse analysis is used to highlight the ideological and social constructs embedded in the media's messaging, offering a nuanced understanding of how the music video engages with its audience emotionally and intellectually. The analysis follows the structured steps of Teun A. van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (Mukhlis et al., 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

BABYMONSTER Profile

BABYMONSTER is a South Korean girl group formed by YG Entertainment. The group consists of seven members: Ruka, Pharita, Asa, Ahyeon, Rami, Rora, and Chiquita. They officially debuted on April 1, 2024, with the release of their extended play (EP) titled "BABYMONSTER." The lead single from the EP, "Sheesh," achieved commercial success by reaching the top ten on Korea's Circle Digital Chart. "Stuck in the Middle" is a pre-release single from BABYMONSTER's debut mini-album, officially released on February 1, 2024, by YG Entertainment. The song was written by Jared Lee and Dan Whittemore, who also served as composers alongside Dee.P. In contrast to their energetic and high-powered debut track, "Stuck in the Middle" showcases a more emotional tone through a pop ballad style that highlights the group's rich and expressive vocals.

In the lead-up to its release, YG Entertainment shared a video teaser on January 25, 2024, followed by a concept poster on January 26. The poster featured the members dressed in elegant white gowns against a fantasy-themed backdrop, offering a striking contrast to the sporty and vibrant image previously associated with the group. The song resonated with fans for its deeper emotional tone and heartfelt lyrics. Following its release, "Stuck in the Middle" received a positive response from listeners and charted at number 45 on South Korea's Circle Download Chart during the fifth week of 2024.

The music video, released simultaneously with the single, visually reinforces the song's emotional message. With soft lighting and scenes portraying emotional confusion in love, the video enhances the lyrical and melodic content. Through "Stuck in the Middle," BABYMONSTER demonstrates artistic maturity and versatility, proving their ability to convey a broad emotional range in their music. The track captures the bittersweet feelings of romantic uncertainty through deeply emotional vocals, supported by expressive visuals that evoke a heartfelt atmosphere. The combination of gentle

melodies, meaningful lyrics, and powerful vocal interpretation further amplifies the emotional impact the song aims to deliver.

The Concept of Transcendent Elements

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his seminal work *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 2022), explores the concept of transcendence by asserting that human consciousness is inherently transcendent—it constantly moves beyond itself toward the external world and the objects within it. Sartre emphasizes that "consciousness is a being whose existence implies a relation to something other than itself." This statement highlights the idea that consciousness is neither closed nor isolated, but always in relation to external reality.

Further, in his earlier essay *The Transcendence of the Ego* (de Coorebyter, 2020), Sartre argues that the ego is not the fundamental core of consciousness, but rather an object that appears within consciousness itself. He famously states that "consciousness is non-egological in its essence," suggesting that it lacks a fixed center or essential ego. Instead, the ego is constructed through acts of self-reflection.

Through these ideas, Sartre presents human consciousness as dynamic and inherently transcendent—constantly surpassing its own limits and engaging with the world beyond the self. This indicates that human subjectivity is not a static entity but one that evolves through its continuous interaction with external reality. The concept of transcendence refers to a form of reality that exists beyond the boundaries of empirical human experience. In philosophical discourse, this term is used to describe entities or modes of being that cannot be fully grasped through rational thought or sensory perception. Etymologically, "transcendence" derives from the Latin word *transcendere*, meaning "to go beyond" or "to surpass," pointing to a state of existence that lies outside the limitations of worldly phenomena.

In the realm of art and literature, transcendence often serves as a profound source of inspiration. Artists and writers seek to articulate deeper meanings by representing experiences or realities that transcend the empirical aspects of daily life. Through creative processes, they introduce spiritual or metaphysical dimensions into their artistic and literary expressions. Thus, transcendence holds relevance not only within philosophical discussions but also plays a significant role in the development of art and literature.

Semiotic Analysis and Interpretation of Signs in BABYMONSTER’s Music Video

This section analyzes the semiotic signs found in the music video “Stuck in the Middle” by the girl group BABYMONSTER to describe the implicit meanings behind them. Based on the researcher’s observations, five scenes in the video are identified as being associated with themes of transcendence.



Source: BABYMONSTER’s MV “Stuck in the Middle” (minute 0:09)

Figure 1. Visual Representation of Aspiration and Transcendence

Scene 1 employs cultural references, symbolism, and visual aesthetics to convey a profound message. Through the contrast between a cold cosmic background and warm human elements—represented by a female figure and a white flower—the scene evokes universal themes of hope, transcendence, and humanity's connection with the universe. The lightning icon draws attention and emphasizes the core message with visual intensity.

Icon (Visual Resemblance)

Planets and stars refer to visually resemble the outer space environment and act as icons that directly signify a cosmic theme. Their presence suggests transcendence and the exploration of meanings beyond the material world. In addition, woman in a red dress depicts the striking red outfit serves as a visual icon of strength, individuality, courage, or passion. Her prominent presence signals the central role of the female figure within the visual narrative.

Index (Causal or Indicative Relationship)

White rose on a planetary surface means the appearance of a delicate flower in an unnatural setting, such as a planet or moon, indicates a juxtaposition between natural life and alien environments. This indexically suggests the presence of hope or continuity in unlikely places, symbolizing harmony between life and inhospitable surroundings. In addition, Girl seated on a planet portrays her calm and composed posture in the vast, harsh cosmic setting functions as an index of emotional or spiritual connection between the human self and the universe. It implies humanity's ability to find belonging in a vast and unfamiliar world.

Symbol (Cultural or Conventional Meaning)

Cosmic background is symbolically; outer space represents transcendence, spiritual seeking, and self-exploration. In popular culture, it is often associated with boundless freedom, limitless possibilities, and deep existential reflection. This element adds a metaphysical layer to the visual narrative. Red clothing is related red color which symbolizes bravery, emotional intensity, energy, or passion to cultural semiotics in cultural semiotics. Within this context, the red dress signifies the emotional weight and strength of the central figure, affirming her as both a narrative and visual focal point.

Interpretative Findings

The cosmic landscape in the music video serves as a powerful symbol of modernity and existentialism. It reflects existentialist thought by positioning the human subject as central within a vast, indifferent universe, emphasizing the individual's freedom to define meaning within infinite space. In contemporary visual culture, outer space is often used to signify the human desire to transcend physical and conceptual boundaries—highlighting both technological advancement and philosophical exploration. Similarly, the white rose on the planet adds emotional depth to this setting. In Korean visual aesthetics, particularly in the portrayal of girl groups, flowers often represent emotional and spiritual journeys. The presence of a white rose—universally associated with purity, peace, and hope—on a barren planetary surface symbolizes humanity's pursuit of harmony and meaning, even in environments that seem cold and inhospitable.

The woman in red introduces a rich layer of cross-cultural significance. In Eastern cultures such as Korea, red is traditionally linked to vitality, celebration, and good fortune, whereas in Western contexts, it often symbolizes love, passion, or danger. This

dual symbolism reflects the global nature of K-pop aesthetics. In popular media, female figures are frequently portrayed as embodying both beauty and strength. The striking red dress not only communicates emotional intensity and courage but also asserts the figure's role as a symbol of empowered femininity. Through this lens, the woman in red becomes a central narrative force—visually commanding and deeply symbolic within the larger cosmic and philosophical framework of the video.



Source: BABYMONSTER's MV "Stuck in the Middle" (minute 0:31)

Figure 2. Visual Representation of Aspiration and Transcendence

Scene 2 presents a visually evocative composition that invites viewers to reflect on the concept of transcendence and the emotional relationship between humans and the cosmos.

Icon (Visual Resemblance)

The full moon and night sky serve as powerful visual icons, immediately evoking a sense of calm, natural beauty, and introspection. These celestial elements establish a melancholic and contemplative atmosphere. The presence of a woman standing alone on a balcony, gazing quietly at the moon, reinforces this mood. Her stillness and pensive posture function as visual cues for solitude and inward reflection. The blue dress she wears further symbolizes emotional calm and introspection, reinforcing the contemplative tone. Meanwhile, the soft indoor lighting behind her, contrasted with the cool night outside, creates a visual index of inner emotional warmth juxtaposed with the vast, mysterious world beyond.

Index (Causal or Indicative Relationship)

In this scene, the moon's dominant position in the night sky serves as an indexical sign, drawing attention to its symbolic role as a source of inspiration and reflection for the female figure. This relationship suggests an emotional or spiritual connection between the character and the vastness of the universe, reinforcing the theme of transcendence. Complementing this is the contrast in lighting between the warm glow from the interior of the building and the cold, dark atmosphere outside. This visual juxtaposition highlights the tension between inner comfort and the unknown external world, symbolizing the interplay between domestic security and the human impulse toward exploration and self-discovery.

Symbol (Cultural or Conventional Meaning)

In cultural semiotics, the full moon is often seen as a symbol of beauty, self-reflection, and mystery. Across various cultures, it also represents cyclical change and a spiritual connection to nature. Complementing this imagery, the woman's blue attire carries symbolic connotations of calmness, peace, and introspection—enhancing the contemplative atmosphere of the scene. The setting further incorporates elements of classical European architecture, with its ornate, curved iron balcony design, symbolizing elegance, traditional beauty, and romanticism. These stylistic choices add cultural depth to the visual environment.

Interpretative Findings

This scene effectively combines icons, indexes, and symbols to construct a visual narrative imbued with introspection and melancholy. The interplay between the human figure, the moon, and the architectural setting communicates themes of self-reflection, emotional connectedness with nature, and the fusion of cultural aesthetics. It illustrates how visual and symbolic elements can be woven together to evoke deeper philosophical and emotional meanings.



Source: BABYMONSTER's MV "Stuck in the Middle" (minute 1:51)

Figure 3: Visual Representation of Aspiration and Transcendence

Scene 3 presents powerful symbolism centered on the journey toward enlightenment, freedom, and spiritual purpose. The cosmic backdrop reinforces themes of self-exploration and the profound connection between humanity and the universe.

Icon (Visual Resemblance)

Visually, the scene is anchored by the image of a woman in a flowing pink dress—a striking icon of femininity and softness. Her upward-reaching posture conveys a sense of aspiration and hope. In her hand, a glowing star appears as an object of desire, symbolizing a pursuit of something precious or meaningful. Surrounding her is a shimmering environment filled with sparkling particles, evoking the image of a galactic pathway and creating a magical, transcendent atmosphere.

Index (Causal or Indicative Relationship)

Indexical elements further support this symbolism. The woman's act of reaching for the glowing star establishes a cause-and-effect relationship that links her physical gesture to emotional or spiritual longing. The illuminated path beneath her suggests a journey—both literal and metaphorical—toward a goal or higher state of being. These visual cues point to transformation and the pursuit of a greater purpose.

Symbol (Cultural or Conventional Meaning)

Symbolically, the star represents hope, dreams, and ambition—universally understood motifs across cultures. The pink dress emphasizes emotional depth, tenderness, and feminine strength, while the galaxy-like setting enhances the theme of infinite possibility and introspective exploration. Together, these elements weave a narrative of transcendence, expressing the desire for self-realization and the beauty of striving for something beyond the material world.

Interpretative Findings

Scene 3 illustrates a powerful visual narrative about the search for meaning, aspiration, and the human connection to something greater than oneself. It portrays a symbolic journey that blends emotion, imagination, and spiritual longing into a visually transcendent experience.



Source: BABYMONSTER's MV "Stuck in the Middle" (minute 2:11)

Figure 4. Visual Representation of Aspiration and Transcendence

Overall, this scene represents a magical and dreamlike atmosphere, with the glowing bridge serving as the central element that connects various components within the scene.

Icon (Visual Resemblance)

The glowing bridge in the scene visually represents a real-world bridge, but with a magical touch enhanced by radiant lighting effects, giving it a dreamlike quality. The starry sky above closely resembles an actual night sky, reinforcing a sense of realism

within the fantastical setting. Positioned on the bridge is a piano player, whose form and posture clearly resemble a person engaged in playing the piano, making it an easily recognizable icon. Surrounding the scene are vividly colored trees and plants; although their hues—such as pink leaves—are stylized, their shapes and structures still resemble natural vegetation. Altogether, these visual elements combine realistic forms with imaginative enhancements, creating a setting that feels both familiar and otherworldly.

Index (Causal or Indicative Relationship)

The reflection of the bridge on the water's surface indicates the presence of calm, still water, contributing to the serene atmosphere of the scene. The lights illuminating the bridge suggest a source of energy—possibly electricity—used to create the glowing effect, emphasizing a sense of wonder and enchantment. Meanwhile, the starry night sky signals that the setting takes place during nighttime or twilight, adding to the overall mood of quiet introspection and subtle magic. These indexical elements help anchor the visual narrative in a specific time and emotional tone, enhancing the viewer's experience.

Symbol (Cultural or Conventional Meaning)

The glowing bridge may symbolize a journey or transition—representing a passage from one state of being to another, or a connection between reality and fantasy. Placing a piano at the center of the bridge adds emotional depth, as music is often associated with creativity, emotional expression, and inner reflection. Its position suggests a balance between two worlds or emotional states. The presence of pink and purple trees and plants—colors rarely found in nature—reinforces the dreamlike and fantastical quality of the scene, commonly used in fantasy aesthetics to evoke a magical or surreal atmosphere. Additionally, the people surrounding the scene, dressed in attire resembling traditional or fantasy costumes, suggest cultural influences, fairy-tale elements, or a romanticized setting, enriching the narrative with symbolic and imaginative layers.

Interpretative Findings

This image, from a semiotic perspective, presents strong elements of fantasy through a combination of realistic icons, indexes that indicate environmental conditions, and symbols that construct deeper layers of meaning.



Source: BABYMONSTER's MV "Stuck in the Middle" (minute 2: 56)

Figure 5. Visual Representation of Aspiration and Transcendence

Scene 5 conveys a melancholic yet magical atmosphere, where the figure inside the bubble appears suspended between the real world and the realm of imagination.

Icon (Visual Resemblance)

The transparent sphere, resembling a soap bubble or glass dome, symbolizes protection or isolation—suggesting a boundary between the individual and the outside world. The surrounding elements, such as the sea and the night sky, closely resemble real-world environments, grounding the scene in physical reality. Meanwhile, the image of a woman sitting inside the bubble introduces a surreal quality; although she is a realistic human figure, her placement within this fantastical context evokes a sense of emotional distance, introspection, or being caught between reality and imagination.

Index (Causal or Indicative Relationship)

The dim lighting and deep blue tones suggest that the scene takes place at night or within a calm, introspective atmosphere. The transparent bubble floating above the water indicates that the character exists in a fragile, isolated space—separated from the outside world. The vast sky and still ocean further evoke a sense of silence, peace, and perhaps even emotional detachment or loneliness, reinforcing the scene's melancholic and contemplative mood.

Symbol (Cultural or Conventional Meaning)

The transparent bubble can symbolize protection, isolation, or a personal world that is difficult for others to penetrate. It may also serve as a metaphor for emotional boundaries or a barrier shielding the individual from the external world. The vast ocean and night sky enhance this symbolism—where the sea often represents mystery, emotional depth, and spiritual journeys, while the night sky suggests tranquility, introspection, and solitude. The character’s futuristic blue outfit introduces elements of fantasy or modernity, adding a unique visual layer to the scene. Her calm, seated posture conveys a sense of self-reflection, patience, and subtle melancholy, deepening the emotional resonance of the moment.

Interpretative Findings

Scene 5 contains numerous semiotic elements that illustrate themes of fantasy, introspection, and emotional isolation. The transparent bubble, as the visual focal point, carries symbolic meaning related to protection and boundaries—suggesting a personal space shielded from the outside world. Meanwhile, the vast ocean and night sky reinforce feelings of solitude and serenity, enhancing the contemplative and dreamlike atmosphere of the scene.



Source: BABYMONSTER’s MV “Stuck in the Middle” (minute 3: 25)

Figure 6. Visual Representation of Aspiration and Transcendence

Scene 6 conveys themes of fairy tales, dreams, and a journey toward something better. It evokes a sense of hope and transformation, where visual elements guide the viewer through an imaginative and emotionally uplifting narrative.

Icon (Visual Resemblance)

The grand staircase with its classic design resembles the architecture of a palace or castle, evoking imagery commonly found in fairy tales such as *Cinderella*. This element creates a sense of fantasy and nobility, transporting viewers into a dreamlike world. The star-filled night sky above enhances the magical atmosphere, suggesting infinite possibilities and adding depth to the visual narrative. At the center of the scene stands a woman in an elegant white gown—an image traditionally associated with purity, grace, and the archetype of a princess. Together, these elements construct a visually enchanting setting that reinforces themes of fantasy, transformation, and the pursuit of something greater.

Index (Causal or Indicative Relationship)

The star-filled sky suggests that the scene takes place at night or within a fantastical setting, reinforcing a dreamy and otherworldly mood. The upward-leading staircase serves as a powerful symbol of a journey or progression—both physically and metaphorically—representing a path toward dreams, goals, or personal growth. The woman's pose, as she ascends the stairs, further emphasizes this sense of movement and aspiration, suggesting that she is in the midst of a transformation or significant transition within the visual narrative.

Symbol (Cultural or Conventional Meaning)

The staircase in the scene symbolizes a journey and personal advancement. Frequently associated with the idea of ascending to something higher, stairs represent not only physical movement but also metaphorical progress—whether that be spiritual enlightenment, personal growth, or the pursuit of a greater purpose. The woman's elegant white gown further enriches this symbolism. In Western culture, white dresses are commonly linked to purity, innocence, and new beginnings. In this context, the gown may indicate that the character is undergoing a meaningful transformation or entering a significant new phase in her life.

The star-filled night sky above acts as a powerful symbol of dreams and aspirations. Its vastness, combined with the presence of stars, often evokes the idea of reaching for

something beyond one's current reality—something filled with hope but not yet attained. Together, these elements suggest that the woman's upward journey is not only one of movement but also of emotional and spiritual evolution, guided by a vision of something greater that lies ahead, even if the path may be uncertain or filled with challenges.

Interpretative Findings

Scene 6, from a semiotic perspective, illustrates themes of journey, dreams, and transformation. The upward-leading staircase symbolizes progress or achievement, suggesting a path toward personal growth or a higher purpose. The star-filled night sky in the background evokes a sense of hope and fantasy, reinforcing the idea of reaching beyond the ordinary toward something extraordinary. The female character in a flowing white gown conveys purity and elegance, enhancing the impression that she is on a destined path—moving forward to fulfill a significant dream or embrace a transformative moment in her story.



Source: BABYMONSTER's MV "Stuck in the Middle" (minute 3: 58)

Figure 5: Visual Representation of Aspiration and Transcendence

This scene conveys a message of beauty, exploration, and a journey toward something greater—both within the context of a fantastical world and as a metaphor for spiritual growth or the search for self-identity. It invites viewers to interpret the visual narrative not only as a dreamlike adventure but also as a symbolic representation of personal transformation and inner discovery.

Icon (Visual Resemblance)

A group of elegantly dressed women visually resembles noblewomen or fairies from mythology, evoking a sense of grace and ethereal beauty. The backdrop—a starry night sky with a large planet in the distance—resembles outer space and adds a cosmic, otherworldly dimension to the scene. Surrounding vegetation in shades of purple and blue, while structurally similar to real plants, features unnatural colors that enhance the fantastical setting, making the environment feel like it belongs to a dream world or an alien planet. Together, these elements create a surreal and enchanting atmosphere, blending myth, fantasy, and cosmic wonder.

Index (Causal or Indicative Relationship)

The starry sky and the presence of a large planet in the background suggest that the scene takes place in an environment beyond Earth or within a setting rich in fantasy elements. The elegant white attire worn by the characters enhances the magical or celestial tone, possibly portraying them as mythical beings or otherworldly figures. The purple and blue vegetation further emphasizes the surreal quality of the scene, signaling that this world is not grounded in reality but belongs to an imaginative or futuristic realm. These elements together create a visually immersive atmosphere that blends fantasy, mythology, and science fiction.

Symbol (Cultural or Conventional Meaning)

The white clothing worn by the characters symbolizes purity and spirituality. Often associated with holiness, enlightenment, or transformation, white garments may suggest that the figures represent celestial beings or fairies from another realm. The starry sky above serves as a symbol of wonder and dreams; its vast expanse, dotted with stars and planets, evokes feelings of adventure, exploration, and the search for deeper meaning. The large planet visible in the background further intensifies this mystical atmosphere. As a symbol of the unattainable, it may represent distant ambitions, dreams beyond reach, or an unknown future, adding a sense of cosmic mystery and aspiration.

Meanwhile, the purple and blue vegetation enhances the surreal and otherworldly quality of the scene. These unusually colored plants, often used in science fiction and fantasy art, signify a setting that exists beyond Earth—perhaps on an alien planet or within a magical dimension. Altogether, these symbolic elements construct a richly

imaginative world, suggesting that the scene unfolds in a place far removed from ordinary reality—one shaped by fantasy, longing, and spiritual exploration.

Interpretative Findings

This scene, from a semiotic perspective, portrays a fantastical world filled with wonder and mystery. Visual elements such as the white garments, starry sky, and massive planet contribute to a mystical, elegant, and imaginative atmosphere. Together, they construct a symbolic landscape that invites viewers into a realm beyond reality—where beauty, magic, and the

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the music video “Stuck in the Middle” by BABYMONSTER is rich in semiotic elements that communicate themes of transcendence, emotional introspection, and spiritual aspiration. Through Peirce’s semiotic framework, the research identifies and analyzes iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs embedded within key scenes. These include cosmic imagery, architectural motifs, emotionally expressive settings, and stylized characters—all of which contribute to constructing a layered narrative that extends beyond the literal and into metaphorical and philosophical realms. The recurring use of visual metaphors such as glowing bridges, vast skies, transparent bubbles, and celestial staircases illustrates the group’s artistic engagement with ideas of transformation, self-discovery, and reaching toward something greater than oneself.

The findings suggest that BABYMONSTER’s visual storytelling aligns closely with existentialist and transcendental concepts, particularly through symbolic representations of the individual’s journey through uncertainty, longing, and inner growth. The consistent use of night skies, stars, and otherworldly landscapes reflects the desire to surpass earthly limitations and seek emotional or spiritual clarity. Additionally, color symbolism—such as white for purity, red for courage, and blue for introspection—supports the emotional tone and depth of the video, helping to shape audience interpretations in ways that resonate across cultural boundaries. By situating familiar human emotions within fantastical or surreal contexts, the video invites viewers to reflect on their own aspirations, vulnerabilities, and internal struggles.

Overall, this research demonstrates that K-pop, as exemplified by BABYMONSTER, functions not only as entertainment but also as a meaningful site of

cultural expression and philosophical inquiry. The fusion of high-quality production emotionally charged visuals, and culturally embedded symbolism enables a unique form of visual discourse that transcends language and geography. The “Stuck in the Middle” music video stands as a testament to how popular music can be used to explore and express transcendental themes, making it a compelling subject for further interdisciplinary research in media studies, semiotics, and cultural philosophy.

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