

REINFORCING AGENCY FROM ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF DOJA CAT'S "ATTENTION" MUSIC VIDEO

Jeu Lael Liora, Sisilia Setiawati Halimi

Universitas Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia
E-mail: sshalimi@gmail.com, jeulaelliora@gmail.com

Received: 2024-07-29

Accepted: 2024-12-10

Published: 2024-12-20

Abstract

Celebrities in the entertainment industry frequently engage in impression management, a practice driven by the commodification of their personas. This study explores Doja Cat's music video *Attention*, examining how she balances impression management with expressions of personal agency as a celebrity. Employing Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis and Erving Goffman's impression management theory, the study analyzes the visual signs embedded in the music video. The findings reveal that Doja Cat strategically performs impression management to align with stakeholder expectations, ensuring her continued marketability and perceived value within the entertainment industry. However, she also challenges these expectations by introducing symbols of agency, asserting her individuality and creative autonomy. This dual approach reflects the complexities of navigating societal pressures and personal expression in celebrity culture. Future studies could extend this analysis by examining *Attention* through a gender studies lens, focusing on themes such as female objectification and exploitation within the broader context of celebrity culture and the entertainment industry.

Keywords: *celebrity; impression management; agency; semiotics; music video; Doja Cat*

1. Introduction

For decades, the concept of celebrity has become a popular topic worldwide. A celebrity is characterized by the massive public attention they inevitably generate (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006), thus their proposed value increases correspondingly with the scale of public recognition. Ultimately, their following serve as the pillar for their perceived value and marketability (Suvittawat, 2022), thus, celebrity is defined by the relationship between the individual and their audience instead of their own personal qualities (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006).

However, a celebrity's nearly omnipresent audience makes up for the abnormally long durations of impression management and therefore, can cause constraint in self-expression. In light of these situations, there have been instances of celebrities protesting their lack of agency. A recent case is Doja Cat, an American singer-rapper, with the release of her leading single "Attention" in June 2023. A corresponding music video was released the same day, showcasing symbolic visuals illustrating experiences of a celebrity under public attention with Doja Cat as the subject. Subsequently, online discourse followed suit with

emphasis on the singer's new direction in music and visualizations in the video (Wang, 2023).

An analysis of the visual signs in the "Attention" music video holds significance due to the lack of studies utilizing this video as their data set, especially in the context of entertainment industry-imposed impression management. In light of this paper's importance, the proposed research question is as follows: how does the "Attention" music video by Doja Cat illustrate the impression management experienced by celebrities and articulate agency?

2. Literature Review

In his work "Mythologies", Roland Barthes introduced the concept of myth, which refers to a communication system carrying messages that undergo signification, which is the relationship between the signifier and the signified (Barthes, 1972). Barthes formulated a model to dissect the processes of signification.

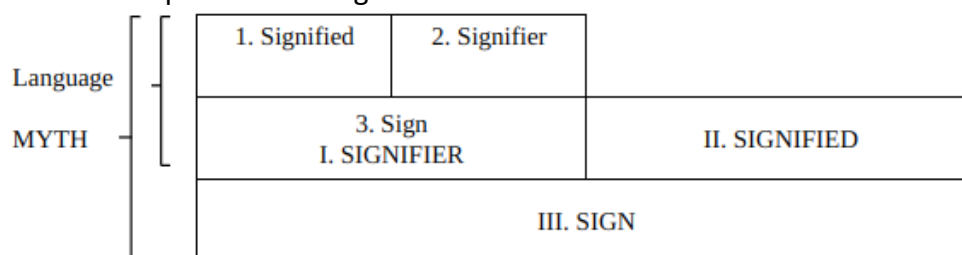


Figure 1. Roland Barthes' Map of Sign Adapted from "Mythologies: Roland Barthes" by R. Barthes, 1972.

As seen in the figure above, the first stage of signification (denotation) encompasses the "1. Signifier" as the denotative signifier and "2. Signified" as the denotative signified, which produces the denotative sign, indicated by "3. Sign". The denotative sign is subsequently included in the second stage (connotation) in order to create the connotative sign. "I. SIGNIFIER" as the connotative signifier utilizes the denotative sign to produce "II. SIGNIFIED", which is the connotative signified. This ultimately results in the connotative sign, indicated by "III. SIGN" (Sagimin & Sari, 2019).

Furthermore, Erving Goffman's (1959) impression management theory states that individuals try to evoke a certain response from their audience by intentionally managing the impressions they present. Goffman's theory is demonstrated in celebrities, since their perceived value is defined by the relationship with their audience (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006). Celebrities must adjust and filter their behavior and appearance to sustain the relationship (Wang, 2023). Therefore, celebrities must enact a consistent persona through impression management.

While previous studies have explored the intersection of Goffman's impression management and Barthes' semiotic theory on celebrities, none have been specifically conducted on a female artist music video, let alone by Doja Cat. Sukmayadi, et al. (2024) examine the impacts of online impression management on Indonesian TikTok celebrities, identifying that mass attention entails pressure and constraint in self-expression. Kováčová (2022) analyses the driving factors of social media celebrities' impression management strategies, revealing competence, relatability, authenticity, and likeability as the pillars of their self-presentation. Lastly, thematically similar in the topic of celebrity culture, Moore (2022) investigates celebrity pastors' clothing choices with the impression management

theory and semiotic analysis. The research reveals how fashion choices solidify the position of pastors as performers for their audience, driving a loyal following. Therefore, in light of the absence of studies merging the respective theories on a female artist music video, this paper aims to investigate how Doja Cat illustrates impression management and present symbols of agency.

3. Research Method

Regarding the visual symbols in the video, “Attention” was chosen for its representation of celebrity experiences under mass attention, thus highlighting the dynamics between the celebrity and their audience. To examine the video, this study will use a descriptive qualitative approach to conduct a semiotic analysis on the video based on the Barthes model and Goffman’s impression management theory. The signs evident in the music video will be itemized and analyzed based on Barthes’ Map of Sign. The elaborative analyses’ output will be displayed in essay form that shall identify connections between the semiotic elements in the video with the context of celebrity, impression management, and agency. The discussion will then be performed following Goffman’s impression management theory as the framework. However, this study’s narrow scope of one data set may lack representation of broader celebrity image management practices.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Analysis


Signifier	Signified
A woman in a car, driving by a crowd of spectators	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Doja Cat is receiving mass attention, but her facial expression is flat.	Alienation, public attention
SIGN	
Doja Cat, as a celebrity, experiences mass attention in public spaces even while doing mundane activities such as driving.	

Table 1. Doja Cat Experiences Mass Attention

The initial scene features Doja Cat driving her car, passing by a crowd of spectators and paparazzi parading her arrival that is explicitly disregarded through Doja Cat’s lack of outward expression. This scene signifies the feelings of alienation and mass attention a celebrity encounters in everyday life.

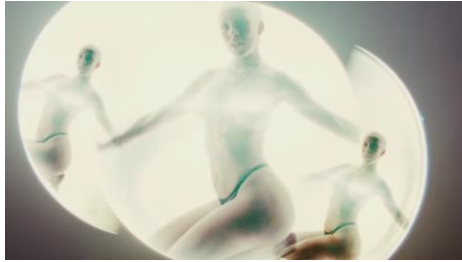
Signifier	Signified
A woman posing in reflections of a camera flash bulb	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Doja Cat's near-naked figure is captured in camera flash bulbs.	Objectification, overexposure
SIGN	
Doja Cat, as a celebrity, experiences sexualization, overexposure, and a lack of privacy in the public eye, but has to become accustomed to it, as shown by her compliance through posing for the camera.	

Table 2. Doja Cat Experiences Sexualization and Overexposure

The shot shows Doja Cat's figure within circular flashbulbs, dressed only in underwear. This signifies the phenomena of sexualization, and the compliance that takes place in order to sustain a celebrity's marketability and appeal towards their audience (Aruguete et al., 2014).


Signifier	Signified
Faces of people in a crowd and reaching out	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
The spectators are screaming in response to Doja Cat's presence. Some faces are skewed in an unnatural manner.	Fanaticism, surrealism of celebrity
SIGN	
Doja Cat is surrounded by fanaticism as a celebrity.	

Table 3. Spectators with Distorted Faces

The video cuts to close-up shots of the crowd of spectators that scream in adulation for Doja Cat, but some faces appear to be skewed unnaturally, signifying the surrealism of celebrity life when one encounters fanaticism. McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran (2002) state that the events which unfold in a celebrity's life are able to evoke profound responses from their observers and followers.


Signifier	Signified
Two women standing side by side on a sidewalk in a city	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Two women appear shocked and in disbelief from what they see.	Disbelief, surprise
SIGN	
Doja Cat is recognized by people passing by.	

Table 4. Two Women Recognize Doja Cat

The artist then encounters two women also walking on the same sidewalk with shocked expressions upon seeing her. This scene highlights the reality of being a celebrity, where receiving attention in high frequency is commonplace, the potential of getting recognized by surrounding people is significantly higher than those without the level of fame.


Signifier	Signified
A woman smiling and being followed by two other women behind her with upset expressions	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Doja Cat is being followed by the previous women who intercepted her. They express dissatisfaction and anger over Doja Cat's nonchalance and ignorance of their interaction.	Discontent over a deviation from a managed impression, broken expectations over a celebrity's unfiltered behavior
SIGN	
Doja Cat persists in reclaiming her freedom of normalcy by remaining unfazed by the women's angry reactions.	

Table 5. Doja Cat is Followed

Doja Cat continues walking past the previous two women, who both look displeased in the background. It is normal for people to expect reciprocation in social interactions

(Mahmoodi, Bahrami, & Mehring, 2018), where in this case, Doja Cat opts against reciprocating the two women's greetings, therefore not meeting their expectations. Fan expectations hold strong influence in their behavior and decisions related to the celebrity, as Suvittawat (2021) explained. Consequently, the celebrities' response to these expectations has significant implications on their image.


Signifier	Signified
A woman standing and a man spreading his arms in front of her	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
As Doja Cat walks, she is intercepted by a man.	Invasion of privacy
SIGN	
Doja Cat is recognized by another passerby.	

Table 6. Doja Cat is Intercepted by a Man

Once again, a passerby attempts to disrupt Doja Cat's stroll by spreading his arms as if to block her. The recurring occurrences of people trying to stop Doja Cat demonstrates the consequence of fame, which is widespread recognition.


Signifier	Signified
A man spreading his arms	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
A man appears dissatisfied and in disbelief when Doja Cat dismisses him.	Discontent over a deviation from a managed impression, broken expectations over a celebrity's unfiltered behavior
SIGN	
Doja Cat's act of maintaining her agency is met with backlash.	

Table 7. The Man Expresses Dissatisfaction

Similar to the previous women’s response, the man reacts angrily when his actions are dismissed by Doja Cat. This also demonstrates discontent over a celebrity’s deviation from their usual managed impression and unmet expectations during a social interaction.


Signifier	Signified
A woman’s reflection in water looking upwards	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Doja Cat appears to be trapped under the water.	Constraint, entrapment
SIGN	
Doja Cat experiences confinement of free expression with her celebrity status.	

Table 8. Doja Cat is Trapped Underwater

Doja Cat’s reflection in the water signifies entrapment highlighted in her upward gaze, as if looking beyond the surface. Celebrities can experience constraints in self-expression and alienation due to the continuous attention and predisposed fan- and industry-generated expectations (Sukmayadi, et al., 2024).

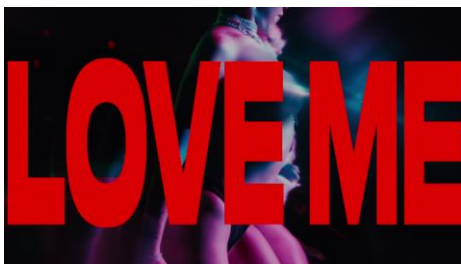
Signifier	Signified
Red text in all caps superimposed on a nearly naked female body in a liminal space	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Red text saying “LOVE ME” in front of Doja Cat’s near-naked body.	Need for devotion
SIGN	
In the context of celebrity, “Love me” is presented as a plea, signifying the need to evoke devotion from their audience to maintain their perceived value.	

Table 9. “LOVE ME” Superimposed on Doja Cat

“LOVE ME”, as an imperative for a second party to actively “love” the demander, signifies the importance of devotion from a celebrity’s audience or fans. Having a devoted following translates to better purchasing behaviors, loyalty, and better publicity (Suvittawat, 2022). The particular placement of the text in front of Doja Cat’s near-naked body highlights nuances of objectification and exploitation of female celebrities in the entertainment industry, as mentioned by Aruguete et al. (2014).


Signifier	Signified
Red text in all caps superimposed on a woman's head and neck in a liminal setting	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Red text saying "HUNGRY" superimposed on a close-up of Doja Cat.	Insatiability
SIGN	
In the context of celebrity, "HUNGRY" signifies the insatiable desire or need of recognition from their audience in order to maintain their perceived value.	

Table 10. "HUNGRY" Superimposed on Doja Cat

This scene signifies a celebrity's need for recognition from their audience to sustain their perceived value and marketability, as Suvittawat (2022) has stated. This exemplifies the "addiction" stage of fame, as proposed by Rockwell and Giles (2009), where a celebrity begins to form an intense attachment to public adoration that comes with the circumstance of fame. This desire for fame, if not regulated, can become insatiable as the video illustrated.


Signifier	Signified
A woman's full body covered in the color red standing on a sidewalk	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Doja Cat's naked body is covered in blood.	Overexposure, eeriness, rebirth
SIGN	
Doja Cat reveals her macabre alter ego.	

Table 11. Doja Cat's Alter Ego Appears

This bloody figure is the introduction of "Scarlet", Doja Cat's alter ego, which she mentioned in her Harper's Bazaar interview in August 2023. The artist claimed this alter ego to symbolize "rebirth" and a "reimagination of the self" (Harper's Bazaar, 2023). Therefore, this signifies an initial step towards reinforcing her agency: the alter ego accommodates Doja Cat's individual interests instead of complying to industry demands.

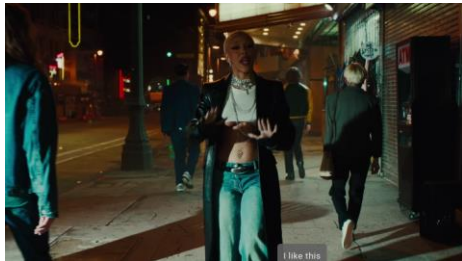
Signifier	Signified
A woman walking on a sidewalk with people walking in the opposite direction	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Doja Cat continues her walk without interruption, moving against the flow of the more crowded sidewalk.	Independence, defiance
SIGN	
Doja Cat defies the general public's expectations of her as a celebrity, asserting her independence and agency.	

Table 12. Doja Cat Walks on a Crowded Sidewalk

Doja Cat continues her walk on the now more crowded sidewalk, being the only person walking in the opposite direction, this time uninterrupted. Her contrary direction from everyone else signifies her defiance of public expectations towards her and reinforced agency as an individual.


Signifier	Signified
A crowd of human-like figures walking	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
The faces of the people walking on the sidewalk seem to have eyes that appear blinded and mouths that appear to be silenced.	Loss of individuality, dehumanization
SIGN	
In the world of celebrity, people now lose individuality, conforming to a herd of followers or spectators of celebrities, dehumanizing them and themselves	

Table 13. A Crowd of Blinded and Silenced Human Figures

The shot displays a close-up of the people on the sidewalk who all appear to have blinded eyes and silenced mouths. The alteration of facial features of each individual signifies the dehumanization that society predisposes towards the general public in comparison to celebrities, eliminating individual identity while practicing aggrandizement of celebrity personas.


Signifier	Signified
A woman walking on an empty bridge with fireworks shooting by	
Sign → SIGNIFIER	SIGNIFIED
Doja Cat walks alone on an empty bridge with fireworks setting off near her.	Agency, solitude
SIGN	
Doja Cat finally experiences solitude in the absence of other individuals yet in a turbulent scene. She achieves agency in this solitude.	

Table 14. Doja Cat Walks on an Empty Bridge

Doja Cat then walks across an empty bridge as fireworks blast near her. This scene juxtaposes the absence of other people with the dynamic scene of erupting fireworks, highlighting the unconventionality of solitude in the context of celebrity, where one commonly encounters the public mass without intention. Doja Cat solidifies her agency as a celebrity, free from the public eye.

4.2 Impression Management in the Music Industry: Doja Cat's Celebrity Image

The function and value of a celebrity are becoming more commodified to fulfill the demands of the entertainment industry. Celebrities are required to accommodate expectations and yield favorable responses from the public which translates to increased marketability and value (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006). To achieve this, they are obligated to exhibit a likeable and consistent persona by conducting impression management (Kováčová, 2022). Based on the findings above, Doja Cat conducts industry-imposed impression management to maintain her celebrity image.

Firstly, Table 1, 6, and 9 indicate that constant mass attention and frequent recognition by surrounding individuals act as key drivers for celebrity impression management. The findings reinforce the inference of Rindova, Pollock, and Hayward (2006) that celebrities unavoidably generate massive public attention. The near-omnipresent trait of a celebrity's audience sustains Goffman's (1959) argument that individuals manage their impressions with regard to an audience. Not only extreme in scale and frequency, a celebrity's audience can also pose aggrandized judgments of the individual, as Doja Cat demonstrates in Table 4 and 16. Therefore, celebrities are driven to comply with stakeholder expectations that are likely to exceed their own capacity.

Table 2, 12, and 13 signify Doja Cat's compliance to her stakeholders' expectations. Compliance with social norms and expectations act as indicators for celebrity marketability, as stated by Rindova, Pollock, and Hayward (2006). This also aligns with Moore's (2002) inference: curating one's appearance and presentation advances audience engagement and audience loyalty. Table 11 which signifies Doja Cat's confinement of expression within her celebrity status indicates the consequence of industry-imposed impression management,

aligning with the findings of Sukmayadi, et al. (2024). This also supports Wang's (2023) inference that celebrity impression management includes filtering of certain traits that deviate from stakeholder expectations. Nonconforming celebrity behaviors contribute negative impacts to one's celebrity value in the form of bad press.

4.3 Asserting Agency through Deviations from Predisposed Impression Management

Celebrities are driven to comply with stakeholder expectations that are likely to exceed their own capacity. Fan expectations ultimately set the standard for a celebrity's value (Suvittawat, 2022), and the way that celebrities respond have vast impacts on their reputation. The constant audience for impression management can trigger restraint in self-expression (Sukmayadi, et al., 2024). The findings indicate that Doja Cat asserts her agency by conducting deviations from stakeholder expectations in the context of celebrity impression management.

As seen in Tables 8 and 10, Doja Cat's fans display discontent over her deviation from her usual managed impression. By not exhibiting reciprocity in the situation, Doja Cat fails to meet fan expectations. Table 14 signifies a new persona that caters to her own desires instead of audience preferences. The power shifts from her audience to Doja Cat as the definer of her own physical appearance and behavior. Table 15 signifies Doja Cat's reinforcement of agency through her contrary direction from everyone else present in the scene. Lastly, Table 18 indicates Doja Cat solidifying her agency: the absence of spectators indicates no more necessity for impression management since her audience is not present. She acts according to her own will, thus reinforcing her agency from predisposed impression management and stakeholder expectations.

5. Conclusion

The commodification of celebrities in the entertainment industry has led to stakeholder expectations becoming the standard individuals must meet to maintain their value and marketability. This study analyzed Doja Cat's music video *Attention* using qualitative methods to examine the processes of celebrity impression management and expressions of agency. Utilizing Barthes' semiotic analysis and Goffman's impression management theory, the findings reveal that Doja Cat strategically manages impressions to align with stakeholder expectations, ensuring her marketability, while simultaneously asserting her agency by deviating from those expectations. By integrating semiotics with impression management theory, this study contributes valuable insights into celebrity studies in popular culture, particularly in analyzing a female artist's music video. It highlights the complexities of navigating societal demands and personal autonomy in the entertainment industry. Future research can build on this intersection of theories to explore emerging phenomena in celebrity culture, with an emphasis on gender dynamics and creative expression.

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