

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Yeonjun's "No Labels Part 01" Album Promotion: Human Billboard as Hybrid Advertising on Instagram Reels

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Abstract

This study examines the use of multimodal resources in Yeonjun's No Labels Part 01 album promotion through a human billboard campaign disseminated via Instagram Reels. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, this research applies Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) to analyze the interaction of linguistic, visual, auditory, and kinetic modes within two official promotional videos released by @txt_bighit. The findings reveal that the campaign constructs meaning through strong multimodal cohesion, where minimalist typography, symbolic color choices, controlled bodily movement, and ambient urban soundscapes work together to convey the ideology of "No Labels." The absence of spoken language and background music emphasizes authenticity, artistic autonomy, and resistance to conventional K-pop promotional practices. Visual contrasts between Yeonjun's exposed album imagery and the anonymity of the performers further reinforce themes of individuality and self-definition. This study concludes that hybrid promotional strategies combining offline street performance and online digital circulation function as effective multimodal discourses in contemporary music marketing, contributing to the expansion of MMDA within performative and digital advertising contexts.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis; Instagram Reels; K-pop Promotion; Human Billboard; Brand Identity; Multimodality



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1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of digital media has transformed music promotion from static print ads to dynamic, interactive multimodal campaigns that integrate language, image, sound, and motion across digital platforms. In today's entertainment industry, audiences engage with content that integrates various semiotic modes such as language, image, sound, and motion through digital platforms that allow both passive viewing and active participation (Cenni & Vásquez, 2025). Social media, in particular, has become a crucial site for meaning-making and identity construction, as it allows artists to communicate visually, verbally, and performatively (Wang & Feng, 2021). Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels enable artists to engage audiences through short videos combining visual effects, music, text overlays, and

movement, fostering immediate emotional connections and active fan participation (Cao, 2025). Transmedia marketing campaigns, such as those studied in Taylor Swift's album release, strategically choreograph fan engagement across multiple platforms and physical spaces, leveraging platform algorithms and temporal coordination to maximize reach and impact (Bengtsson & Edlom, 2025).

Within this shifting media landscape, K-pop artists have been among the most innovative in adopting and experimenting with multimodal promotional forms. Their marketing strategies often blend visual performance, narrative construction, and social media interactivity to extend the artistic concept of an album beyond music into visual storytelling (James, 2025). In November 2025, Tomorrow X Together's (TXT) member Yeonjun, under BigHit Music, introduced a groundbreaking promotional method for his first solo album No Labels Part 01. The campaign featured a human billboard street performance in the Seongsu area of Seoul, recorded and distributed through the official Instagram account @txt_bighit. This event represented a new kind of hybrid advertising where the physicality of street performance met the viral reach of digital media (Lauerer & Beckert, 2024).

The campaign consisted of two Reels that visually and symbolically represented Yeonjun's No Labels concept. The first Reel showed a group of men dressed in black hoodies and sunglasses walking through Seongsu street while carrying a portable billboard. The billboard displayed Yeonjun's topless album cover, with minimalist typography: the phrase "No Labels" positioned on the left, Yeonjun's central image as the focal point, and the phrase "Part 01" on the right. The second Reel featured the same group carrying large black rectangular blocks forming the words "No Labels Part 01 Yeonjun", followed by the numerical date and time "251107 14.00 KST / 00.00 ET." The stark contrast between the performers' anonymity and the explicit, minimalist album imagery created a striking visual tension that drew online attention (Bigne et al., 2020).

This promotion generated widespread discussion for its unconventional fusion of live performance art and digital dissemination. Unlike typical teaser videos or online posters, the human billboard method physically embodied the promotional message, using the urban environment as part of the advertising space while Instagram extended its visibility to a global audience (Campbell et al., 2022). Such a multimodal approach transcends traditional boundaries between public space and digital platforms, effectively turning everyday city life into a site of artistic and commercial spectacle. Therefore, this study applies Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) to analyze how the linguistic, visual, auditory, and kinetic modes in Yeonjun's No Labels Part 01 promotion collectively construct meaning. The analysis aims to uncover how these multimodal resources reinforce Yeonjun's personal brand identity,

communicate the conceptual theme of “No Labels,” and achieve persuasive impact through hybrid performance and digital circulation.

Although a growing number of studies have applied Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) to examine advertising and entertainment content, most existing research has primarily focused on traditional or digital promotional materials such as television commercials, YouTube video ads, or beauty product campaigns (El-kanash & Al-khatib, 2025; Kenalemang, 2022; Z. Zhang & Zhang, 2025). These studies have explored how multimodal resources like color, composition, and typography interact to construct brand identity and persuasion. However, there remains a limited scholarly focus on hybrid or performative marketing strategies that blur the boundaries between offline performance and online digital distribution, particularly in the context of K-pop album promotions.

Moreover, prior research in K-pop media discourse has often examined idol representation, fandom communication, or music video aesthetics, but seldom the semiotic processes behind unconventional marketing acts like the use of human billboards as mobile, performative advertisements (James, 2025; Yoo et al., 2025). Yeonjun’s No Labels Part 01 campaign offers a unique case in which the artist’s message such as freedom from categorization and artistic autonomy—is communicated not through conventional visual teasers, but through an embodied performance recontextualized for digital sharing on Instagram Reels. This convergence of street performance, minimalist linguistic design, and digital virality represents a new multimodal phenomenon that has not yet been systematically analyzed within MMDA frameworks. Thus, there is a methodological and contextual gap in understanding how physical human performances can function as multimodal discourse when mediated through social media platforms..

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design employing Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MMDA) as the primary analytical framework. MMDA enables detailed examination of how these modes combine to create meaning in various contexts, such as media discourse, educational settings, and digital communication (Alejandro & Zhao, 2024). According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), multimodal discourse analysis explores how diverse semiotic resources function together to produce coherent meaning in a communicative event. This design allows for an in-depth interpretation of how Yeonjun’s No Labels Part 01 album promotion which is executed through human billboard performance and circulated via Instagram Reels in constructing the meaning, identity, and persuasion through multimodal cohesion.

The descriptive approach emphasizes a systematic and contextualized observation of phenomena as they naturally occur (Paul et al., 2024). Rather than manipulating variables,

the researcher functions as an interpreter and observer, describing how the four primary modes such as linguistic, visual, auditory, and kinetic that are organized to construct Yeonjun's brand narrative and convey the No Labels ideology.

3. RESULT

Linguistic Mode

The linguistic mode of Yeonjun's campaign appears entirely through typography rather than spoken language. The written phrases "No Labels," "Part 01," "YEONJUN," "251107. 14.00 KST," "251107. 00:00 ET," "SEONGSU," "#NOLABELS_PART01," and "@yawnzzn" appear across billboards, blocks, and video captions. The text is rendered in bold, sans-serif typography which creates high visual salience and readability. The white background of the album cover suggests clarity and openness, while the red billboard carrying only text connotes intensity, energy, and defiance, and the orange blocks in the second Reel evoke creativity and warmth (Machin, 2013).

The phrase "No Labels" acts as the verbal anchor that encapsulates the campaign's ideological message of artistic freedom and authenticity. In Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) terms, this phrase fulfils both representational and interactive metafunctions, simultaneously describing Yeonjun's concept and positioning the audience to perceive him as an independent artist. The color contrast and typographic minimalism exemplify compositional harmony which is a balanced visual-linguistic structure that enhances interpretive focus. Furthermore, the inclusion of hashtags and tags (#NOLABELS_PART01, @yawnzzn) extends intertextuality, inviting digital engagement and participation (O'Halloran, 2011). Thus, the linguistic mode contributes to Yeonjun's brand identity through verbal economy, typographic precision, and symbolic color design, where brevity and balance embody artistic control (Royce, 2007).

Visual Mode

The visual mode dominates both Reels, offering the most direct representation of Yeonjun's "No Labels" theme. In Reel 1, men dressed in black hoodies and sunglasses carry two types of billboards through Seongsu, a cultural hub in Seoul. The first billboard features Yeonjun's topless album cover with a white background, flanked by "No Labels" on the left and "Part 01" on the right, while the second billboard with a red background displays textual release details. In Reel 2, the performers carry orange blocks printed with the same text, placing them in various urban locations such as shopfronts and crosswalks. The performers' anonymity contrasts with Yeonjun's exposed figure, visualizing the dialectic between personal vulnerability and collective invisibility.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), composition and color function as semiotic resources that create information value and salience within the image. Here, Yeonjun's central

placement and direct gaze evoke idealized focus, while the surrounding textual and color variations frame him as both subject and symbol. The black attire of the performers neutralizes individuality, shifting viewer focus toward the brand message rather than the people. The chromatic sequence—white to red to orange—represents a visual evolution from purity (white) to resistance (red) to creativity (orange), reflecting emotional progression (Machin, 2013). The use of Seongsu as a backdrop, known for its street art and creative atmosphere, embeds the visual text in a culturally meaningful setting, supporting Jewitt's (2009) argument that spatial context in multimodal texts adds socio-cultural depth. The visual mode, therefore, conveys artistic autonomy through controlled contrast, structured framing, and culturally resonant color symbolism.

Auditory Mode

The auditory mode in Yeonjun's campaign departs from conventional music promotion by replacing music or narration with naturalistic street sounds, such as footsteps, ambient chatter, bicycle wheels, and camera shutter clicks. The absence of background music eliminates emotional manipulation, allowing the raw auditory environment to speak for itself. This restraint exemplifies what O'Halloran (2011) terms auditory minimalism, where silence and natural soundscapes enhance realism and authenticity.

The recurring camera shutter sound serves as a metaphor for fame and observation which is an aural signifier of Yeonjun's status as a public figure under scrutiny. The ambient urban noise situates the performance within a real, unscripted environment, reinforcing social authenticity (Bateman et al., 2017). This minimalist approach demonstrates that meaning in multimodal discourse can emerge through the absence of music which is a technique that redirects attention toward the visual and kinetic narratives (Machin, 2013). Consequently, the auditory mode contributes subtle persuasive power: it conveys sincerity, transparency, and grounded artistry, supporting the broader ideology of "No Labels" by rejecting artificial spectacle in favor of sonic realism.

Kinetic Mode

The kinetic mode comprises both human movement and camera motion, shaping the temporal rhythm and emotional pacing of the campaign. In Reel 1, the video opens with an upward shot of the sky and the Seongsu street sign before smoothly transitioning to scenes of buildings and pedestrians. The camera then follows the performers carrying the billboards through sidewalks, crossing streets, and performing everyday actions—walking, drinking coffee, or sitting beside the billboard. In Reel 2, the camera focuses on the performers' footsteps and the movement of orange blocks, intercut with dynamic shots of city traffic and architecture.

These smooth transitions and unhurried gestures reflect what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) describe as compositional rhythm, where pacing and visual balance influence emotional tone. The performers' synchronized and deliberate movements create a calm tempo that communicates confidence and control, embodying Yeonjun's brand as self-assured yet restrained. The absence of rapid cuts or exaggerated gestures aligns with Royce's (2007) notion of temporal cohesion, ensuring that visual and kinetic sequences flow seamlessly to maintain coherence. Moreover, the interplay between movement and stillness aligns with O'Halloran's (2023) view that kinetic modes can express identity through embodied performance. Here, the performers' measured motion symbolizes inner steadiness and intentionality which is the core traits of the "No Labels" ideology.

4. DISCUSSION

Multimodal Cohesion and Intersemiotic Orchestration

The findings show that all four modes which are linguistic, visual, auditory, and kinetic work cohesively to convey the ideology of "No Labels." The interaction among typography, color, motion, and ambient sound constructs a unified meaning of authenticity, self-definition, and minimalism. This reflects what O'Halloran (2011) and Bateman et al. (2017) call intermodal orchestration, where semiotic resources operate synergistically rather than hierarchically. Each mode complements rather than competes with the others, achieving multimodal cohesion as described by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

Unlike conventional K-pop marketing, which often relies on high-energy soundtracks, vibrant color saturation, and direct artist narration, Yeonjun's campaign strategically reduces multimodal density. Yeonjun's campaign's strategic reduction of multimodal density contrasts with conventional K-pop marketing, which typically features high-energy soundtracks, vibrant colors, and direct artist narration to create rich, layered sensory experiences. Multimodal density refers to the complexity and intensity of combined semiotic modes such as visual, auditory, and textual elements in marketing content. Research shows that high multimodal density can enhance consumer engagement by leveraging multiple modalities like visuals and speech text, which are key drivers of attention and persuasion in short video advertisements (Zhang & Zhang, 2025). However, reducing multimodal density, as in Yeonjun's campaign, may create a minimalist aesthetic that emphasizes authenticity and self-definition by avoiding sensory overload and allowing each mode to stand out more clearly (Jia et al., 2025). This approach aligns with findings that effective multimodal marketing requires balancing the interplay of modes to maintain coherence and targeted messaging rather than overwhelming the audience (Zhang et al., 2021). This also exemplifies what Machin (2013) terms aesthetic economy, where fewer signs carry greater ideological weight.

Furthermore, the campaign's compositional rhythm such as smooth transitions, calm pacing, and typographic balance translates No Labels into a lived aesthetic experience. This finding resonates with Royce's (2007) notion of intersemiotic complementarity, where verbal and non-verbal elements reinforce shared conceptual meaning. While previous MMDA analyses focused on visual-verbal reinforcement in corporate advertising (Al-Subhi, 2022; Kujur & Singh, 2020). The *Seongsu* setting, a site of youth culture and creativity, thus becomes part of the semiotic ensemble, symbolizing a transition from corporate performance to street-level authenticity.

Persuasive Communication and Ideological Construction

Yeonjun's multimodal strategy constructs persuasion through embodied authenticity rather than direct verbal appeal. The concise linguistic elements—"No Labels," "Part 01," "YEONJUN"—operate as declarative statements of identity, mirroring Rofiq et al. (2025), who found that brevity in corporate campaigns heightens authority and focus. The white-red-orange color transition enhances emotional resonance, aligning with Salain (2025), who demonstrated that color gradients across frames can symbolize psychological transformation in brand storytelling.

The campaign's visual duality between the exposed Yeonjun and anonymous performers creates an interpersonal contrast that invites reflection rather than directive persuasion, similar to how Efendy and Yanti (2023) observed relational engagement in kinetic, non-verbal advertisements. The ambient auditory design such as street noise and camera clicks conveys authenticity and immediacy, reinforcing what Putri (2025) identifies as a major persuasive force in Instagram-based branding: realism over theatricality.

Collectively, these strategies embody what Wang and Taabaldiev (2025) call affordance-based persuasion, where platform features (looped Reels, ambient sound, natural rhythm) construct believability. The ideology of "No Labels" thus operates multimodally through absence, restraint, and bodily expression to invite audiences to identify with sincerity and independence rather than consumption alone.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Yeonjun's No Labels Part 01 human billboard campaign effectively functions as a cohesive multimodal discourse that communicates artistic identity, authenticity, and freedom from categorization. The analysis shows that linguistic, visual, auditory, and kinetic modes are strategically orchestrated to construct meaning through minimalism rather than sensory excess. The linguistic mode, characterized by concise and bold typography, serves as a verbal anchor that reinforces the ideological message of "No Labels." The visual mode dominates meaning-making through symbolic contrasts in color,

costume, and composition, particularly the juxtaposition between Yeonjun's exposed figure and the anonymous performers.

Furthermore, the auditory mode, marked by ambient street sounds and the absence of music, enhances realism and sincerity, while the kinetic mode conveys calmness and control through deliberate movement and smooth camera transitions. Together, these modes demonstrate strong intersemiotic complementarity, producing a persuasive message grounded in embodied authenticity rather than explicit verbal persuasion. The findings highlight how hybrid promotional strategies that merge physical performance with digital platforms can transform public spaces into globally circulating semiotic texts. Overall, this research contributes to the expansion of Multimodal Discourse Analysis by illustrating how performative, minimalist, and hybrid marketing practices can effectively construct brand identity and ideological meaning in contemporary digital culture, particularly within K-pop album promotion.

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