

Representing Interfaith Love in *Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman*: A Peircean Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract: Interfaith relationships remain a socially and emotionally complex issue in Indonesia, where love often collides with religious boundaries. Despite the prominence of interfaith themes in popular culture, few studies have examined how such tensions are represented semiotically through audiovisual media. Addressing this gap, the present research analyzes Petrus Mahendra's lyric video "*Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman*" using Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotic model to explore how signs convey meanings of interfaith love, conflict, and moral negotiation. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed through transcription, coding, and interpretation of selected lyrical and visual segments. The findings reveal that qualisigns (emotive phrases), sinsigns (symbolic acts), and legisigns (ritual practices) express struggles between affection and doctrine. Interpretants emerge as emotional empathy, moral reflection, and acceptance, showing how audiences may internalize interfaith dilemmas through music. The study contributes a novel perspective by extending Peircean semiotics into the moral and cultural domain of popular music, demonstrating how audiovisual texts mediate intersections of love, belief, and identity in Indonesia's plural society.

Introduction

Romantic love is a common theme in popular music, often presented as an idealized emotional experience (1-3). However, the complexities of love, especially when confronted with sociocultural and religious barriers, are seldom explored in depth (4-6). One such complexity arises in interfaith relationships, which remain a socially sensitive issue in Indonesia, a country with rich religious diversity yet deeply rooted in traditional values (7, 8). The 2021 song "*Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman*" by Petrus Mahendra captures this dilemma, portraying a love that is emotionally synchronized ("seamin") but religiously incompatible ("tak seiman") (9, 10). This thematic juxtaposition has drawn public attention but remains underexplored in academic discourse, particularly through the lens of semiotics.

The urgency of such research is underscored by increasing instances of interfaith relationships in urban areas and the societal tensions they provoke (11). Based on previous reports, interfaith marriage remains legally and religiously contested, with Muslim women, in particular, facing institutional prohibitions (12, 13). The emotional burden of navigating love across religious lines often results in internal conflict and social ostracism (14, 15). Despite music being a powerful communicative medium, few studies have critically analyzed how it encodes and communicates such nuanced issues (9, 10, 16, 17). Furthermore, while popular songs frequently depict heartbreak and longing, they rarely address theological incompatibility, making this study

timely and relevant.

Previous semiotic studies on popular music have primarily examined gender representation, nationalism, and social critique, yet have rarely explored interfaith dynamics (18). For instance, Budiman (2024) applied Barthesian and Ecoan semiotics to Indonesian songs, focusing on symbolic meaning and ideological framing, but neither addressed religious value conflict as a central theme (19). This study, therefore, extends the semiotic inquiry to a moral spiritual dimension by analyzing how interfaith love is symbolically negotiated through audiovisual cues.

Unlike discourse or content analysis, Peircean semiotics allows for a deeper interpretive approach by examining the triadic interaction between representamen, object, and interpretant (20). Compared with Saussure's dyadic signifier-signified model or Barthes's cultural myth framework, Peirce's triadic process emphasizes how meaning evolves dynamically between sign, referent, and interpreter a critical advantage for audiovisual materials where words, sound, and imagery coexist. This framework uncovers not only the surface meanings but also the processes of signification through which emotional, cultural, and theological tensions are encoded and interpreted.

This research addresses that gap by applying Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic model to analyze the lyrics of "*Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman*", investigating how signs, symbols, and interpretants construct the representation of interfaith love. This study contributes a novel, state of the art

perspective to media and communication scholarship, emphasizing music as a reflective cultural artifact. The aim is to unpack the emotional, ideological, and cultural layers embedded in the lyrics, identifying how meaning is constructed through the triadic relationship between representamen, object, and interpretant. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study offers insights into how popular music mediates personal struggles within a multicultural and religiously plural society. This study offers a novel application of Peircean semiotics to the analysis of interfaith romantic narratives in Indonesian popular music, a topic rarely explored in academic discourse. By situating Peircean semiotics within Indonesian cultural context, this article contributes to a broader understanding of how media texts negotiate emotional and theological discourse across faith boundaries.

Methodology

Study Design and Rationale

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design grounded in Peircean semiotic analysis to interpret the meaning embedded in the lyrics of the song “*Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman*” by Petrus Mahendra. The design was chosen to allow for in-depth exploration of emotional and ideological representations through signs, symbols, and interpretants using Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic model of semiotics. This approach was considered appropriate for understanding complex sociocultural messages encoded in audiovisual media. Peirce’s semiotic model was preferred over alternative frameworks (e.g., Saussure, Barthes) due to its processual triadic structure, which is better suited for capturing dynamic emotional and symbolic shifts in audiovisual media.

Sample and Data Sources

The primary data source was the official lyric video of “*Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman*”, published on the Indo Semar Sakti YouTube channel (duration: 3 min 36 s). The video was selected based on its popularity and thematic relevance to the study’s objective, namely, the representation of interfaith romantic conflict. Secondary data included academic publications, religious texts, journal articles, and previous semiotic studies that informed the analytical framework.

Ethical and copyright considerations were addressed by ensuring that the data were sourced exclusively from publicly available material on an official YouTube channel, used for academic purposes under fair use provisions.

Materials and Analytical Tools

The main analytical tool was the semiotic framework of Charles Sanders Peirce, which consists of three core components: representamen (sign), object (referent), and interpretant (meaning). Each lyrical line and visual element was manually coded and categorized according to Peirce’s sign typology: qualisign, sinsign, legisign (representamen); icon, index, symbol (object); and rheme, dicisign, argument (interpretant).

For instance, the lyric “Kita seamin tapi tak seiman” was coded as a legisign (representamen) symbolizing a cultural norm, while its visual pairing a shot of separated hands was interpreted as an index of emotional distance. This example illustrates how lyrical and visual signs were analyzed in tandem to extract layered meanings.

Procedures

The methodological procedure of this study unfolded in four sequential stages to ensure analytical rigor and clarity.

First, data acquisition was carried out by retrieving and transcribing the official lyric video of “*Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman*” in its entirety. The transcription process was conducted verbatim, capturing not only the lyrical content but also relevant visual cues such as facial expressions, color tones, and iconography. The material was then segmented into thematic units based on shifts in musical tone, lyrical emphasis, and accompanying visuals.

Second, the coding framework was developed using Charles Sanders Peirce’s typology of signs. A preliminary codebook was constructed, categorizing representamen (qualisign, sinsign, legisign), object (icon, index, symbol), and interpretant (rheme, dicisign, argument). Each lyrical and visual element was manually coded, and the classification was refined through multiple iterations to improve consistency and interpretive accuracy.

Third, semiotic analysis was conducted on each thematic segment. Signs were interpreted within Peirce’s triadic structure to uncover how they represent emotional, religious, and cultural tensions. This analysis involved mapping the dynamic relationship between signs, their referents, and their potential meanings to diverse audiences within Indonesia’s socioreligious context.

Finally, validation was ensured through researcher triangulation. Interpretive results were independently reviewed by multiple coders, then discussed collaboratively to minimize bias and increase analytical credibility. The triangulation team consisted of three researchers with backgrounds in linguistics, media studies, and cultural communication. Each independently coded 20% of the data set, followed by a consensus meeting where discrepancies were discussed until 90% inter-coder agreement was achieved. This collaborative process also served as reflexive validation, encouraging each researcher to articulate how personal experience, belief, or disciplinary background shaped interpretive judgments.

Data Analysis

This study employed Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic framework to analyze the lyrical content of the song “*Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman*.” Lexical elements such as “*seamin*” and “*tak seiman*” function as signs that symbolize complex emotional and spiritual dimensions of love. These signs were interpreted within cultural and religious contexts, allowing for the extraction of both explicit and implicit meanings.

Peirce’s triadic model of the sign, comprising the representamen (the form of the sign), the object (the referent), and the interpretant (the inferred meaning), served as the analytical lens. This approach enabled a nuanced reading of symbolic representations embedded in the lyrics, revealing how audiences might construct meaning based on their own sociocultural and emotional frameworks. By including both textual and visual sign systems, the analysis allowed for a cross-modal understanding of meaning construction how sound, imagery, and language reinforce or contradict each other.

This methodological stance aligns with interpretivist epistemology, wherein meaning is co-constructed between cultural signs and the interpreter’s worldview, while acknowledging the researcher’s positionality in the interpretive process.

Table 1. Explanation of qualisign, sinsign, and legisign in the lyric of Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman.

Qualification	Explanation	Song Lyrics
Qualisign	In the 0.34-second short film, Nisa speaks softly to Nuel because he hasn't eaten his dinner yet. Nisa says, "Why aren't you eating?" and Nuel immediately eats the food.	<i>cinta menyatukan kita yang tak sama</i>
Sinsign	At 3:15 min, Nuel opens Nisa's gift: an LED light bulb with a picture of a couple inside. Nuel is happy but a little sad.	<i>Oh tuhan ternyata hanya temukan tak satukan</i>
Legisign	At 3.43 min Nisa was performing the prayer service, then after praying Nisa communicated with Nuel.	<i>Aku yang mengaduh dan tangan yang engkau genggam</i>

Results and Discussion

Representamen Analysis of the Lyric Video "Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman"

The representamen analysis of "Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman" applies Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, focusing on three sign types: qualisign, sinsign, and legisign, to unpack the symbolic construction of interfaith love (see **Table 1**).

Qualisign emerges in emotionally charged lyrics such as "*cinta menyatukan kita yang tak sama*", which evoke a universal and inclusive message of love. The choice of tender and poetic language conveys sincerity and emotional depth, portraying love as a unifying force that transcends religious differences (21). This meaning is visually reinforced in the scene where Nuel and Nisa sit side by side under soft orange lighting, symbolizing emotional warmth and harmony despite doctrinal barriers. The integration of lyrical emotion and warm visual tone demonstrates how verbal and visual signs coalesce into a unified affective expression of spiritual longing.

Sinsign is observed in the scene where Nuel gives Nisa a symbolic LED bulb gift depicting a couple. This act functions both as a material sign of affection and a marker of emotional ambivalence, juxtaposing joy with underlying uncertainty about the relationship's future (22). The glowing bulb becomes a visual metaphor for fragile hope the light of affection shining within an atmosphere of spiritual doubt. Through this cross-modal interaction between image and gesture, the song highlights the emotional instability and restraint that often define interfaith relationships.

Legisign is embodied through religious rituals, such as Nisa performing sholat and the presence of Christmas symbols during a shared meal. These scenes signify contrasting religious norms and values, highlighting the everyday tensions faced by couples from different faiths (23). By placing these contrasting rituals within one visual frame, the video foregrounds institutional boundaries as lived emotional experiences, transforming faith into an enacted social code. The juxtaposition invites critical reflection on how religion shapes interpersonal interactions, constructing love not merely as emotion but as a moral negotiation.

Interpretant Analysis of the Lyric Video "Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman"

In Peircean semiotics, the *interpretant* refers to the meaning or mental effect generated by a sign (24, 25). In the context of this lyric video, interpretants are shaped not only by the narrative and visuals but also by the emotional and sociocultural contexts of the viewer. This analysis identifies

three core interpretive dimensions: emotional conflict, love and sacrifice, and hope in adversity. Each corresponding to different interpretant levels: immediate, dynamic, and final interpretant.

Emotional Conflict

The song reflects a deep emotional struggle within an interfaith relationship, particularly from Nuel's perspective, who questions the future of their bond. The lyric "*Jika cinta tak direstui, adakah salah hati ini?*" ("If love is not blessed, is this heart to blame?") immediately generates empathy and sadness. Visually, this meaning is reinforced through Nisa's averted gaze and muted facial expression, which intensify the viewer's spontaneous emotional recognition. The interpretant here arises instantly, before conscious reflection signifying the spontaneous sorrow evoked by love denied divine approval.

Love and Sacrifice

One of the song's pivotal moments occurs when Nisa continues her religious practice while Nuel patiently waits. This act conveys respect and mutual acknowledgment of faith differences. The interpretant for some may be a recognition of the emotional compromises required in interfaith love, balancing devotion with understanding. In Peircean terms, this reflects a dynamic interpretant meanings that evolve through observation and ethical reflection. Viewers are invited to perceive love not as defiance but as self-restraint, where patience becomes an act of faith.

Hope and Courage

Despite acknowledging their religious differences, the characters express hope and commitment to remain together. The dialogue, supported by uplifting music, creates an interpretant of optimism. For some listeners, this serves as emotional encouragement to persist in difficult relationships. For others, particularly those who have experienced failed interfaith unions, it may appear overly idealistic. The final interpretant here is moral reconciliation the realization that love's endurance may lie not in union but in acceptance. The fade-to-light effect visually seals this interpretive closure, symbolizing transcendence beyond earthly differences.

Collectively, these interpretants demonstrate how popular music operates as a reflective medium that resonates with personal and collective experiences. Through emotional nuance and cultural symbolism, the song fosters awareness of the psychological and social challenges embedded in interfaith relationships. It underscores the role of music not only as entertainment but also as a catalyst for empathy, introspection, and social consciousness.

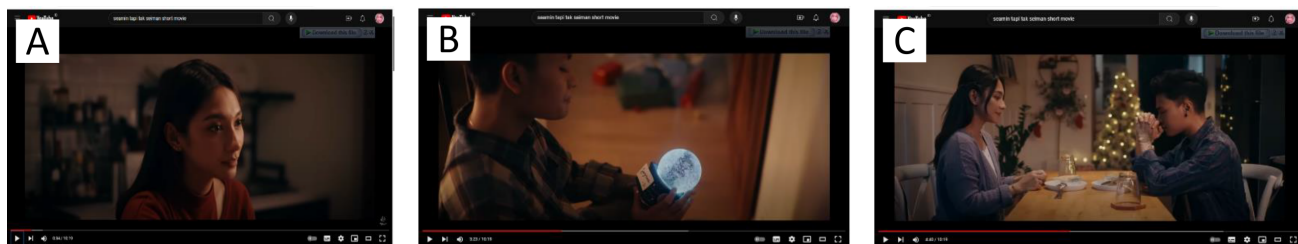


Figure 1. Qualisign, sinsign, and legisign in Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman music video.

Object Analysis of the Lyric Video “Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman”

In Peircean semiotics, the *object* represents the referent to which a sign points, what the *representamen* stands for and what the *interpretant* interprets (25). In the music video “Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman” (see **Figure 1**), the object encompasses core thematic realities related to interfaith romantic relationships. This analysis identifies three primary objects: interfaith love, value conflict, and emotional tension.

Interfaith Relationship

The song centers on the relationship between Nuel, a Christian, and Nisa, a Muslim. This pairing highlights the sociocultural and religious challenges faced by couples from differing faiths, particularly within a society where familial and communal pressures often discourage such unions. The object here reflects not just the romantic bond but also the external forces that influence its stability. The visual repetition of distance framed doorways, fading light, and separated silhouettes visually encodes these social barriers.

Value Conflict

Throughout the narrative, the clash between religious values and emotional attachment is evident. Nuel and Nisa’s bond is tested by doctrinal and ritualistic differences, illustrating how faith can serve both as a barrier and a potential foundation for mutual respect. The song urges listeners to consider the difficulty of reconciling love with religious obligations, and the importance of open dialogue in navigating such conflicts. Here, symbolic objects like prayer mats, church ornaments, and the act of waiting silently function as cultural indices of internal struggle.

Emotional Complexity

The video conveys a range of emotions, uncertainty, longing, sacrifice, and hope. These emotional states add depth to the characters and amplify the real-world emotional stakes involved in interfaith love. The object here extends beyond abstract theological difference to encompass human vulnerability and resilience. Listeners are drawn into the internal struggles of the characters, fostering a deeper emotional connection. By combining lyrical repetition with visual fading, the video aligns musical rhythm with emotional rhythm, achieving semiotic harmony between sound and sentiment.

Overall, the object analysis of this lyric video illustrates how interfaith relationships are fraught with intersecting layers of identity, belief, and emotional burden. The narrative invites audiences to reflect on the tensions between love and doctrine, while also affirming the possibility of connection through empathy, compromise, and mutual understanding.

Love as Conceptualized in “Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman”: A Semiotic and Theological Analysis

The lyric video “Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman” by Petrus Mahendra offers a layered narrative that encapsulates the complexities of love confronted by religious boundaries. Through Peirce’s semiotic lens, analyzing *representamen*, *interpretant*, and *object*, the song constructs love as both emotionally empowering and psychologically destabilizing. It reflects a tension between emotional desire and religious constraint, highlighting the bittersweet nature of unfulfilled love.

The lyrics and visuals present love not merely as romantic attachment but as a moral, emotional, and spiritual negotiation. Nuel and Nisa’s story reveals that love, while genuine and profound, may be insufficient to overcome faith-based barriers. This semiotic tension can also be interpreted through moral semiotics, wherein love functions as an ethical discourse balancing personal longing and religious duty. This aligns with the perspective of Islamic theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, who characterizes love as a potent force marked by longing, sacrifice, and internal conflict. In his view, love devoid of spiritual legitimacy is ultimately incomplete and may become a source of suffering (26). The song’s narrative parallels this concept: love becomes both light and burden, offering joy but also deep sorrow when constrained by doctrinal incompatibility.

Theologically, Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim distinguish between permitted (*ḥalāl*) and forbidden (*ḥarām*) forms of love (27). Love is permitted when it is aligned with religious duty, such as love within marriage or love that brings one closer to God. Conversely, obsessive or illicit love that distracts from divine obligation is considered morally corrupt. In this framework, Nuel and Nisa’s relationship exemplifies a love that is emotionally real yet religiously unsanctioned. The pain they experience reflects a broader moral discourse on how love must be governed by spiritual discipline.

In essence, the song presents love as a multidimensional force, capable of fostering empathy, emotional growth, and introspection, but also constrained by cultural and religious doctrines. It challenges listeners to reflect on the limits of love and the sacrifices it often demands, especially in interfaith contexts where personal desire collides with theological absolutes. Through this interdisciplinary lens, “Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman” operates as a cultural mirror revealing how music becomes a medium for moral reasoning, emotional negotiation, and interfaith understanding.

Conclusion

The lyric video “Seamin Tapi Tak Seiman” illustrates how popular music serves as a semiotic arena where emotional,

cultural, and theological dimensions of interfaith love are symbolically negotiated. Through Peirce's triadic model representamen, object, and interpretant the study demonstrates that meaning in audiovisual texts emerges through the interplay of lyrical and visual signs that encode empathy, restraint, and moral reflection. The analysis reveals that qualisigns (lyrical emotion), sinsigns (symbolic gestures), and legisigns (ritual practices) collectively articulate the tension between personal affection and doctrinal boundaries, situating interfaith love within the moral landscape of Indonesia's religious pluralism. By extending Peircean semiotics beyond linguistic interpretation, this research contributes theoretically to understanding how music becomes a moral communicative medium that mirrors and mediates social realities marked by faith-based differences.

Building on these insights, future research could explore audience reception to examine how listeners from different religious backgrounds emotionally and morally interpret interfaith narratives in music. Comparative analyses across other cultural or theological contexts may also deepen understanding of how interfaith love is portrayed and received globally. Furthermore, incorporating digital ethnography or discourse analysis could establish a more comprehensive framework for studying how such media texts circulate and transform meaning within online spaces. Together, these directions would extend the semiotic approach toward a broader interdisciplinary dialogue on how popular music fosters empathy, reflection, and coexistence in religiously diverse societies.

Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicting interest.

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The unpublished data is available upon request to the corresponding author.

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Not applicable.

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Additional Information

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