



The Representation of Emotional Framework in Nicole *Album by NIKI* (2022)

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Abstract

This research investigates how emotions are represented in song lyrics by analyzing six chosen tracks from NIKI's album Nicole (2022), utilizing Paul Ekman's Basic Emotions Theory. By adopting a qualitative descriptive methodology and content analysis, the study emphasizes linguistic elements such as word selection, metaphor usage, repetition, and narrative tone as indicators of emotional expression. In light of the insufficient focus on album-level emotional narratives, especially in the context of Southeast Asian artists, the findings indicate that the selected songs collectively create a coherent emotional journey, evolving from vulnerability and attachment to emotional conflict and eventual acceptance. The results imply that Nicole serves not just as a compilation of individual songs but as a cohesive emotional narrative. Through the application of Ekman's psychological emotion framework to lyrical analysis, this research enhances the scholarship on emotions in lyrics by illustrating the significance of basic emotion theory within literary and musical discussions. Although the data scope is limited, the study offers valuable insights into how contemporary popular music constructs emotional meaning.

1. Introduction

Song lyrics have long been acknowledged as a distinctive form of literary expression that combines linguistic creativity, emotional depth, and narrative construction. Similar to poetry, song lyrics employ figurative language, imagery, and stylistic devices to articulate human experiences and emotional states, positioning them as legitimate objects of literary analysis Zyga (2020). As literary texts, lyrics enable scholars to investigate how language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a medium for emotional and aesthetic meaning.

Emotion plays a crucial role in literary interpretation, shaping both the production of texts and their reception by audiences. Previous studies have demonstrated that emotional meaning in texts can be explored through stylistic, psycholinguistic, and linguistic approaches, highlighting how word choice, metaphor, and sentence structure contribute to emotional expression Narisa & Erni (2023).

These findings confirm that emotion is deeply embedded within linguistic and literary structures. In the field of music studies, increasing scholarly attention has been directed toward the emotional dimensions of song lyrics. Research has shown that emotions in music are conveyed through metaphorical language, tonal variation, and thematic development, emphasizing the importance of lyrics in shaping emotional interpretation Pannese et al. (2016). However, much of the existing research tends to analyze songs as isolated texts, focusing on individual tracks rather than considering emotional continuity across an entire album Agrawal et al. (2021).

Analyzing albums at a holistic level offers a broader literary perspective by treating a collection of songs as a cohesive narrative rather than independent units. This approach allows for the identification of emotional progression, thematic shifts, and narrative coherence across multiple songs. Despite its analytical potential, album level emotional analysis remains relatively underexplored, particularly in studies addressing Southeast Asian artists and contemporary popular music. NIKI, an Indonesian singer-songwriter with an international audience, exemplifies the relevance of such an approach. Her album *Nicole* presents deeply personal narratives involving intimacy, vulnerability, emotional conflict, and self-reflection, making it a compelling subject for literary inquiry.

Prior research has acknowledged the emotional richness of NIKI's lyrical works, particularly in relation to psycholinguistic and emotional interpretation Bahow et al. (2025). The album's lyrics demonstrate extensive use of figurative language and tonal variation, reinforcing their value as literary texts.

This study addresses the existing research gap by examining emotional representation in selected songs from *Nicole* as a unified emotional narrative rather than as standalone lyrical texts. Drawing on Paul Ekman's Basic Emotions Theory as an analytical framework, this research focuses on how emotions are linguistically constructed and developed throughout the album, extending previous

emotion based lyric studies that predominantly emphasize classification rather than narrative progression Revathy et al. (2022).

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What categories of basic emotions, as proposed by Ekman, are evident in the selected song lyrics from *Nicole*?
2. How are these emotions articulated through linguistic and literary elements within the lyrics?
3. How do the selected songs collectively construct an emotional trajectory at the album level?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to literary scholarship on song lyrics by demonstrating how album level emotional analysis can reveal narrative coherence and emotional complexity in contemporary popular music, particularly within a Southeast Asian context.

2. Method

The present study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to analyse emotional representations in song lyrics. Qualitative research is predicated on verbal and contextualized descriptions, as opposed to numerical data. It is considered suitable for the examination of linguistic phenomena, including words, phrases and sentences Malheiro et al. (2016). The primary data for this study consist of lyrical units that is to say, words, phrases, lines and sections from six selected songs in NIKI's *Nicole* (2022) album.

The following compositions have been selected for analysis: Backburner, Oceans & Engines, The Apartment We Won't Share, Autumn, Anaheim, and Take a Chance with Me. These elements, when considered as a whole, provide a foundation for the identification of a range of emotional expressions, including grief/sadness, anger, fear, disgust, happiness, and surprise. Secondary data sources encompass previous studies, journal articles, online interviews, critiques, and theoretical discussions pertinent to the themes of emotion, song lyrics, and NIKI's artistic perspective Revathy et al. (2022).

Qualitative research aims to comprehend a specific phenomenon rather than identifying cause and effect correlations. As a result, this study focusses on determining how emotional categories are expressed throughout the album. The *Nicole* album's emotional classification provides descriptive data for the entire analysis.

The selection of the six songs was based on three criteria. Firstly, the songs exhibit robust narrative structures and abundant linguistic features, including metaphor, repetition, and tonal variation, which are indispensable for emotional analysis. Secondly, the selected tracks represent different emotional stages within the album, enabling the examination of emotional progression from attachment and vulnerability to emotional conflict and eventual acceptance. Thirdly, these songs play a pivotal role in the album's overall narrative, rendering them suitable for album level emotional analysis as opposed to isolated song interpretation.

The present study employs content analysis as its primary analytical technique, a method that facilitates the systematic categorization of textual data into meaningful units.

The classification of lyrical expressions into emotional categories is enabled by content analysis, which is based on Paul Ekman's Basic Emotions Theory. The latter comprises the following emotions: grief/sadness, anger, fear, disgust, happiness, and surprise. The objective of this study is to utilize the aforementioned approach in order to provide a comprehensive description of the manner in which emotional expressions are constructed and conveyed across the album, whilst also ensuring that the analysis is conducted in a structured manner Dahary et al. (2025).

The data analysis procedure was conducted in several stages. Initially, the researcher engaged in repeated listening of the selected songs with the objective of comprehending their emotional atmosphere and narrative flow. Secondly, the lyrics were subjected to repeated reading in order to gain a more profound understanding of the narrative context and emotional nuances. Thirdly, the identification and coding of lyrical segments indicating emotional expression was conducted according to Ekman's emotional categories.

The coding process was based on three key concepts: semantic meaning, metaphorical implications and narrative context. In an attempt to minimize the impact of subjective interpretation, the analysis was conducted through repeated readings and consistent application of predefined emotional criteria derived from Ekman's theory. This approach ensured a systematic and theoretically grounded interpretation.

3. Result

The basic emotional categories found in the lyrics such as *grief, wrath, fear, disgust, happiness, and surprise* are identified using this theory. The researcher can evaluate how the songwriter linguistically conveys internal states by using Ekman's framework to identify how emotional clues appear through word choices, metaphorical language, and narrative tone.

Backburner

Data 1.

"I mean you gotta admit the history's kind of unmatched" (line 1)

In Backburner, the line "I mean you gotta admit the history's kind of unmatched" The lyrics express a blend of pride and sorrow, as the speaker clings to the distinctiveness of their shared history, accompanied by a subtle frustration in her demand for its worth to be recognized. It illustrates a persistent yearning and a quest for emotional affirmation following the conclusion of the relationship.

Data 2.

"Maybe I'm just not better than this, I haven't tried"

In Blackburner, The speaker expresses the emotion of grief by recognizing her halted emotional healing, which exposes her vulnerability and an inner struggle between releasing her pain and holding onto what is familiar. This lyric emphasizes how lingering heartbreak keeps her tethered to her past.

Data 3.

"But I'm the one you think to call"

In Blackburner, the line "But I'm the one you think to call" The feeling of happiness manifests as a subtle affirmation in being recalled as a source of solace, yet it is interwoven with sorrow stemming from no longer being a focal point. The lyrics emphasize the enduring emotional connection and the distressing conflict between being desired and not being entirely selected.

Data 4.

"It's pathetic, but at least you are, too"

In Blackburner, the line "It's pathetic, but at least you are, too." The feeling of disgust is conveyed through the speaker's realization of the undignified bond she holds, coupled with a sense of ironic solace in acknowledging the other person's similar imperfections. The lyrics intertwine bitterness and authenticity, illustrating a mutually harmful relationship where both parties stay emotionally intertwined, even though they are aware of the suffering it brings.

Data 5.

"After everything you put me through, I somehow still believe in you"

In Blackburner, the line "After everything you put me through, I somehow still believe in you" The feeling of surprise arises from the speaker's astonishment that she continues to have faith in someone who has inflicted pain upon her. The lyrics express a conflicted understanding where hope endures despite feelings of disappointment and betrayal. This moment encapsulates her recognition that her enduring belief is no longer in harmony with reality, emphasizing the emotional struggle between attachment and the acknowledgment of harm.

Oceans & Engines

Data 6.

"I'll always love you that's why"

In Oceans & Engines, the line "I'll always love you that's why" The feeling of grief manifests as a lasting love that drives the anguish of separation, representing emotional sacrifice and acceptance, articulated in a soft yet poignant manner.

Data 7.

"I guess this is where we say goodbye"

In *Oceans & Engines*, the line "I guess this is where we say goodbye" expresses a deep sadness, signaling the moment when the two characters step across a metaphorical boundary from their shared past into separate futures. The goodbye feels quiet and unavoidable, like witnessing something slowly slip away for the last time. The lyric captures a moment of realization when denial dissolves and the reality of the ending becomes clear.

The sadness shown here is calm and fatigued, the kind that emerges after a long emotional struggle. This statement reflects the transition from holding on to finally choosing to let go, revealing a gentle but painful acceptance that the relationship has come to its conclusion.

Data 8.

"And I'm not okay, but I'm letting go"

In *Oceans & Engines*, the line "And I'm not okay, but I'm letting go" The feeling of disgust is expressed through the metaphor of "letting go," symbolizing the rejection of a detrimental attachment and the acceptance of emotional liberation, even in the face of residual pain.

Data

"Tonight, was the first time i started into seas of beguiling sepia two years ago."

In *Oceans & Engines*, the line "Tonight was the first time I stared into seas of beguiling sepia two years ago" The feeling of surprise is articulated through the abrupt re-emergence of a cherished memory, in which "seas of enchanting sepia" represent a romanticized past, expressed in a contemplative tone of yearning and soft melancholy.

Data 10.

"Plunging into all kinds of diversions like blush wine and sonorous soirées"

In the line "Plunging into all kinds of diversions like blush wine and sonorous soirées," The feeling of surprise is expressed through the abrupt understanding that glamorous pursuits act as fleeting reprieves from emotional turmoil, uncovering an unforeseen recognition of deep seated loneliness.

The Apartment We Won't Share

Data 11.

"The girl I won't be is the one that's yours"

In the line "The girl I won't be is the one that's yours," the emotion Grief emerges through the metaphorical portrayal of identity and belonging. The phrase

“the girl I won’t be” refers to an imagined or expected version of herself that she realizes she can never embody, while “the one that’s yours” symbolizes a role shaped by someone else’s expectations rather than her true self.

Data 12.

“I hope you shortly find what you long for”

In the line “I hope you shortly find what you long for,” the emotion Happiness appears through the metaphor of seeking something deeply desired. The phrase conveys not simply a search for something tangible, but the pursuit of emotional fulfillment, meaning, or inner peace. It reflects a sincere wish that the other person will eventually reach the love, clarity, or sense of purpose they have been yearning for.

Data 13.

“Two years and some change isn’t it strange?”

In the line “Two years and some change, isn’t it strange?” The feeling of surprise is communicated through the abrupt realization of time’s passage, articulated in a contemplative manner characterized by subdued amazement and a sense of nostalgia.

Data 14.

“The story we won’t tell is my greatest fantasy”

In the line “The story we won’t tell is my greatest fantasy,” The feeling of grief is articulated through the metaphor of an unfulfilled narrative, representing a envisioned future that did not come to fruition, expressed in a reflective and melancholic tone.

Data 15.

“The passion I won’t feel again isn’t lost on me”

In the line “The passion I won’t feel again isn’t lost on me,” The feeling of grief is communicated through the acknowledgment of unique passion, articulated in a contemplative and subtly serious manner.

Autumn

Data 16.

“Since now all I can think about is when will we stop trying”

The feeling of fear is articulated through the metaphor of “trying,” symbolizing delicate emotional exertion and the apprehension of a potential conclusion, communicated in a strained and fatigued tone.

Data 17.

“All you do is blindside me, it’s hard to be brave, but when the night cuts into the day, it’s your love I crave”

The feeling of fear is expressed through metaphors of emotional upheaval and uncertainty, where phrases like "blindsided me" and "night cuts into the day" indicate a sense of vulnerability, whereas "it's your love I crave" uncovers a conflicted attachment, articulated in a candid and unguarded manner.

Data 18.

"I must've thanked my lucky stars too much, they left me sitting in too much dust" The emotion of grief is expressed through metaphors of lost fortune, where "thanked my lucky stars" signifies past optimism and "left... in too much dust" represents emotional abandonment, conveyed in a subdued and reflective tone.

Data 19.

"And I love you but with you it's heartache I breathe"

The emotion of grief is conveyed through the metaphor *"heartache I breathe,"* which signifies constant emotional pain within the relationship, expressed in a tender and deeply sorrowful tone.

Data 20.

"Oh, my love, is this the end for us? maybe we've had enough"

The feeling of fear is articulated through metaphors of relational disintegration, where the phrase "is this the end for us?" indicates emotional disarray, and "we've had enough" signifies fatigue, expressed in a soft yet distressing tone of reluctant acceptance.

Anaheim

Data 21.

"I can tell, you mean it when you kiss me slow but please, don't ask me, the answer's no."

The feeling of fear is expressed through the juxtaposition of love and uncertainty, where the "slow kiss" represents genuine emotion, while phrases like "don't ask me" and "the answer's no" indicate a reluctance to engage in emotional commitment, articulated in a conflicted and tense manner.

Data 22.

"In a perfect world, I'd love you the loudest, but all I do is live to hurt you soundless"

The feeling of grief is conveyed through opposing metaphors that juxtapose idealized love with emotional reality. Phrases such as "in a perfect world" and "love you the loudest" represent an unattainable level of devotion, whereas "hurt you soundless" indicates a recognition of subtle, unintentional emotional damage.

Data 23.

"But I'd give anything to stop time and drive around Anaheim at sundown and teach my mind to put you first."

The feeling of grief is expressed through nostalgic imagery and a sense of regretful longing, with metaphors like "stop time" and "drive around Anaheim at sundown" illustrating a wish to maintain a deteriorating relationship, all underscored by a reflective and melancholic tone.

Data 24.

"Here you are, a hero"

The feeling of surprise is illustrated by the metaphor "hero," symbolizing an unforeseen acknowledgment of the person's emotional importance, articulated through a tone of wonder and subdued respect.

Data 25.

"Cause I am lost, but not in you, yes, I am lost, but not in you"

The feeling of grief is articulated through the metaphor of being "lost," which represents emotional disorientation and a transition from reliance to separation, expressed through a tone of bewilderment that is paired with a growing sense of clarity.

Take a Chance with Me

Data 26.

"Doesn't know that I'd stop time and space just to make him smile"

The feeling of happiness is expressed through the exaggerated metaphor "stop time and space," which represents deep love and emotional commitment, conveyed through a tone of tender devotion and selfless care.

Data 27.

"In the end we only regret the chances we didn't take"

The feeling of grief is articulated through the metaphor of "chances," representing unfulfilled emotional risks and lost opportunities, communicated in a reflective tone that embodies a subdued sense of loss.

Data 28.

"Oh, why can't we for once say what we want, say what we feel?"

The emotion of grief is conveyed through metaphors of suppressed expression, where the inability to articulate true feelings signifies emotional restriction and unresolved tension within the relationship, marked by disappointment and vulnerability.

Data 29.

"Oh, why can't you for once disregard the world, and run to what you know is real?"

The feeling of grief is conveyed through metaphors that juxtapose external pressures with true emotional authenticity. The phrase "Disregard the world" indicates a defiance against societal limitations, whereas "run to what you know is real" symbolizes the desire for a sincere emotional bond.

Data 30.

"Take a chance with me"

The feeling of happiness is expressed through the metaphor "take a chance," which represents emotional openness and the readiness to seek a significant relationship. Instead of suggesting a literal risk, the expression embodies hope and a genuine aspiration for mutual commitment, articulating the speaker's yearning for authenticity and emotional bravery in selecting the relationship.

4. Discussion

This section discusses how the researcher applies Paul Ekman's Basic Emotions Theory to interpret emotional representations in NIKI's *Nicole* (2022) album, and how the findings contribute to emotion-in-lyrics studies. The analysis demonstrates that the album forms a consistent and systematic emotional pattern when examined through Ekman's theoretical framework. Rather than presenting emotions as isolated expressions, the songs collectively construct an emotional trajectory that progresses from attachment and vulnerability to inner conflict, rejection, acceptance, and self-reflection.

This finding corroborates earlier studies suggesting that emotional recognition in song lyrics plays a crucial role in music analysis and emotional categorisation Ara et al. (2021). By applying Ekman's theory to linguistic data, the researcher identifies how emotional states are signaled through word choice, metaphor, and narrative tone.

Therefore, the presence of linguistic cues in music demonstrates that emotions are not merely psychological experiences, but also linguistic occurrences rooted in word selection. Earlier studies indicate that understanding lyrics plays a crucial role in how people interpret emotional meaning in music, reinforcing the idea that language directly affects emotional interpretation Cañón et al. (2019). Moreover, metaphorical language has been shown to significantly contribute to the emotional depth of the album.

This discovery matches up with research indicating that conceptual metaphors in song lyrics enhance or change emotional potential, serving as cognitive tools for understanding emotions Zyga (2020). The metaphors used not only act as literary embellishments but also function as cognitive tools that aid in visualizing the psychological state of the lyrical character. The metaphors related to drowning, autumn, empty spaces, or time standing still imply that emotions are often expressed through abstract symbols and images.

This aligns with the cognitive approach in linguistics, which posits that metaphor serves as a mental mechanism for grasping complex emotional experiences. Therefore, the use of metaphors in this album illustrates how language can depict psychological conditions that cannot be explained in a literal sense. The album's narrative tone illustrates the gradual evolution of emotions.

The transition from an optimistic to a doubtful, then angry, and finally resigned tone indicates that emotions are not isolated elements but instead form a unified emotional narrative. This observation is in line with ecolinguistic and psycholinguistic views that see narrative as the main way to structure human emotional experiences. Moreover, recent progress in the field of music emotion research corroborates these conclusions.

Research indicates that the lyrical content by itself is frequently adequate to categorize emotional states, suggesting that language inherently possesses powerful emotional signals even in the absence of musical composition (Bhattacharya & Kadambari, 2018). Further investigations into the emotional valence of musical chords reveal that words significantly affect how audiences perceive emotional significance in music, thereby strengthening the linguistic foundation of emotion representation Kolchinsky et al. (2017).

Therefore, *Nicole's* album should be seen not merely as a set of songs, but as a full emotional narrative that employs story structure to convey an individual's psychological journey. This study shows how Ekman's theory can be applied to modern music, especially when it comes to understanding the emotional flow of an entire album Patil et al. (2025). While Ekman is mostly recognized for his work on facial expressions and biological reactions, this research highlights that his way of categorizing emotions is still useful for analyzing language.

In general, the research results indicate that the feelings expressed in this album are linked together, creating a rich emotional narrative. Through her choice of words, metaphors, and tone, *Nicole's* album paints an emotional picture that mirrors the inner feelings of the lyrical character and illustrates a psychological journey that many can relate to Agrawal et al. (2021). From a theoretical standpoint, this study makes a significant contribution to the field of scholarship concerning emotion in lyrics.

It demonstrates that the emotional meaning in popular music functions as a continuous narrative at the level of the album, rather than as isolated expressions within individual songs. This demonstrates that analyzing language through the lens of emotion theory can uncover how contemporary music communicates profound emotional experiences, while also enhancing our understanding of the connections between language, music, and psychology Febriansyah (2020).

5. Conclusion

This research illustrates that the emotional expressions presented in Nicole (2022) do not arise arbitrarily rather, they create a structured and coherent emotional journey throughout the album. By utilizing linguistic elements such as word selection, metaphor, and narrative tone, the songs collectively embody essential emotional states specifically grief/sadness, anger, fear, disgust, happiness, and surprise which mirror the psychological evolution of the lyrical persona.

These results validate that language serves as a fundamental medium for expressing emotional experiences and that emotional significance in music can be systematically discerned through textual analysis.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research broadens the application of Paul Ekman's Basic Emotions Theory beyond its conventional psychological realm by illustrating its significance in the linguistic and literary examination of song lyrics. By employing an album level perspective, this study enhances the scholarship on emotion in lyrics by revealing that the emotional significance in popular music functions as a cohesive narrative rather than as separate expressions found within individual songs.

Nonetheless, this research is confined to six chosen tracks and concentrates solely on linguistic components, disregarding musical characteristics, performance elements, or audience interpretation. Future research is recommended to explore a broader array of songs and include multimodal aspects such as instrumentation, vocal expression, production techniques, and listener feedback.

Such methodologies would facilitate a more thorough comprehension of how emotional significance is created and perceived in contemporary music. In summary, this study illustrates that the combination of emotion theory and linguistic analysis presents a fruitful framework for examining emotional representation in modern musical texts and lays the groundwork for additional interdisciplinary inquiry.

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