



Audience Reception Analysis of Bullying in the Korean Drama the Glory

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ABSTRACT

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Audiences actively interpret and generate meaning, influenced by their backgrounds. With technological advances from traditional media to new media, audiences can now choose messages and become producers of meaning, not just passive recipients of content. The K-drama *The Glory* addresses the issue of bullying in South Korea through encoding that represents injustice and the lack of sincere apologies from the perpetrators. This drama depicts bullying at school by a group of teenagers caused by social and economic disparities. Victims suffer materially, physically and psychologically, while perpetrators do not receive adequate punishment. A preferred reading from this drama suggests that the victims have the right to seek revenge to obtain lost justice. The aim of this research is to explore how the audience reception bullying in the K-drama *The Glory*. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with five audiences from various backgrounds. The method used is qualitative reception analysis using Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding theory approach. The selection of informants in this research used a purposive sampling technique. The results of this research are that the five informants were categorized in a negotiation position. The researches found that *The Glory* was generally accepted by the informants, but negotiated in certain situations. As a result, the drama is negotiated as a moral value by informants who had experienced similar situations. From an ethical point of view, this is seen as an ethical violation, because it goes against their religion and ideology. Informants also worry that the drama could perpetuate bullying, especially because of the uncensored brutal scenes on Netflix. However, this is considered to encourage social change based on social conditions in Indonesia. Lastly, the drama was received as supporting gender equality.

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1. Introduction

Reception analysis focuses on the audience's experience when consuming media and how that experience creates meaning. In the creation of meaning, audiences are influenced by contextual factors such as identity, audience perception, background and experience (Hadi, 2009). The assumption of this theory is that audiences play an active role in interpreting media messages. This cannot be separated from technological advances from traditional media to new media. In the traditional media model, audiences are considered passive recipients because at that time communication tended to be one-way.

However, the new media model considers the audience to play an active role in choosing messages and using what media to use. Audiences can determine what content they think is worth consuming and which content is not (Nasrullah, 2018). In addition, audiences are also active producers of

meaning, not just recipients of media content (Fathurizki, 2018). This is particularly relevant in the new media era, where OTT platforms such as Netflix allow audiences to access and respond to content in a more personalized and interactive way.

Stuart Hall (1980) considers that the audience's reception or interpretation of media messages adapts the encoding-decoding model. Encoding is the process of creating messages by media production by raising social phenomena. While decoding is the process when audiences consume media messages. media messages are interpreted differently by audiences, this is due to the existence of different audiences.

Drama series that will be the object of research is the Korean drama *The Glory*. The encoding of this drama represents injustice and the absence of a sincere apology from the perpetrator. Kim Eun Sook, the author of *The Glory*, conducted research through social media as her understanding in writing this drama. From the research, she found that victims of bullying often suffer from serious mental disorders and mostly only expect a sincere apology from the perpetrator. Through *The Glory*, Kim Eun Sook illustrates how bullying not only damages physically, but also robs the victim of their dignity and self-esteem. The drama takes up the theme of revenge not only to regain what was lost, but also to show the importance of justice and a sincere apology from the perpetrator.

Preferred reading in this drama wants to show that victims of bullying can take revenge on the perpetrators to get justice for themselves. While decoding this drama the audience brings a variety of responses based on their background. Such as getting carried away with the bullying scene, appreciating the storyline and good acting of the cast, and feeling sympathy to seek justice for the victim.

The researcher sees that in *The Glory* drama, victims of bullying have the right to take revenge. This is interesting to study because usually revenge is considered a crime and even causes someone to become a criminal. But in this drama, victims of bullying are given the space to do so. The assumption arises because the perpetrators of bullying do not get the punishment they deserve. Meanwhile, the victim must bear the impact, such as emotional impact, physical injury, quitting school to feeling isolated.

The research aims to find out how the audience's reception of bullying in the series *The Glory*. The researcher assumes that the audience's reception of this message is not homogeneous, but rather diverse depending on their background, experience and perception of the media message. This research aims to find out how the audience's reception of bullying in the movie *The Glory*. In the new media era, audiences not only consume messages, but also play an active role in interpreting and reproducing these messages according to their respective values and experiences, thus creating diverse and dynamic meanings.

Similar research was conducted by Afkarina and Aminuddin with the subject of K-drama *The Glory* 2023. The Theory used is Roland Barthes Semiotic analysis and qualitative method. This research aims to reveal violence through signs such as beating, treats, and insults. Although both analyze the K-drama *The Glory*, this study differs in its theoretical approach, which uses Stuart Hall's Reception and Encoding Decoding Theory. This approach aims to deepen the understanding of how audiences interpret the messages in the drama.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Encoding Decoding Stuart Hall

The encoding-decoding theory, invented by Stuart Hall, explains the role of senders and receivers in the process of delivering and interpreting messages. The communication process occurs when the sender (encoder) composes a message in a certain code, then the message is interpreted by the receiver (decoder). In his book entitled "*Encoding and Decoding*", Stuart Hall (1980) brought significant innovation in the field of communication. Hall developed the one-way linear concept into a more dynamic pattern, taking into account the roles of all parties involved in the process of producing and disseminating messages.

Stuart Hall (1980) explains that both encoding and decoding of media messages are influenced by three main factors, namely the knowledge framework, production relations, and technical infrastructure. The following is his explanation:

1. Technical Infrastructure

Technical infrastructure is the media infrastructure and technology when producing drama series that determines how the quality and quantity of media messages produced, such as the quality of sound, images, and maximum dramatization effects will produce interesting shows. Meanwhile, low quality will produce poor impressions, so that the resulting media messages are limited. In addition, technology and infrastructure determine the audience's interpretation of media messages. Like the audience watching a movie in a movie theater with clear pictures and sound is very interesting. However, if the technology and infrastructure are inadequate, then the viewing access becomes uncomfortable.

2. Relation of Production

Production relations relate to the policies and ideologies of media institutions including social and political relations that determine the production process of drama series. In addition, the production of message meanings by audiences is influenced by who they access, watch or discuss media messages with.

3. Framework of knowledge

The next factor that influences audience meaning-making is background knowledge. In the process of media message production, media institutions are influenced by education, knowledge, beliefs, ideologies, values. Meanwhile, when audiences receive media messages, they are also influenced by education, knowledge, beliefs, ideologies, values that each individual has (Annisa et al., 2023).

These three main factors are the key elements of how producers construct certain messages. In the encoding process, media institutions determine the meaning structure, namely the meaning offered (preferred reading). This then results in the formation of a discourse that contains meaning, which is referred to as meaningful discourse in the diagram. This discourse then continues the decoding process which produces meaning structure 2.

Hall divides three audience positions in interpreting a media message, which are as follows:

1. Dominant-Hegemonic Position

Hall argues, "the media produce messages; the masses consume it. The audience's reading is in accordance with the preferred reading." That is, the media conveys a message, the audience receives it. What the media conveys is coincidentally also favored by the audience. This position is a position where the audience fully accepts the meaning given by the message maker through codes because they have the same ideology.

2. Negotiation Position

In the negotiation position, the audience basically accepts the meaning given by the message maker, but with certain limitations and modifies some of the meaning according to their personal position and interests. This reading occurs when the reader's ideology has a greater role in interpreting and negotiating the meaning of the message. As Stuart Hall states it, "the audience assimilation the leading ideology in general but opposes it application in specific case."

3. Oppositional Position

This position is where the audience rejects the meaning given by the message maker and forms its own view in interpreting the message. This occurs when the reader's ideology conflicts with the ideology of the author of the text. Oppositional readers are generally characterized by feelings of dislike and incompatibility with the discourse texts they consume.

3. Method

This study uses a qualitative method with reception analysis and Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding theory to explore audience interpretations of the Korean drama *The Glory*. Data were collected through three techniques, namely in-depth interviews with five informant used purposive sampling technique, documentation, and observation. The data were then analyzed through interview transcripts, documentation, and field notes. Finally, Stuart Hall's Encoding Decoding theory was used to interpret the findings, focusing on how the audience positioned themselves towards the bullying messages in the drama, whether dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional.

4. Result and Discussion

The Glory is produced by Studio Dragon, in collaboration with OTT platforms such as Netflix. Netflix, as a global platform, gives Kim Eun Sook creative freedom to depict brutal scenes. These scenes include physical violence, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and even uncensored murder. Netflix delivers the best viewing experience, offering sharp 4K HDR resolution and high-quality, immersive cinematic audio across various devices (Netflix TechBlog, 2023). These features enhance the visual and auditory experience, making audiences more engaged and emotionally invested in the film or series. Thus, these factors contributed to its diverse audience reception.

The first phase of the encoding process is discourse production, which is triggered by the fundamental reason for creating *The Glory* show by choosing the phenomenon of bullying in South Korea. Preferred reading is the dominant meaning to be accepted by the audience. The message Kim Eun Sook wants to convey is that victims of bullying are allowed to take revenge to regain justice for themselves. In the press conference of *The Glory*, Kim Eun Sook explained that she wrote this drama as an effort to support victims of bullying to recover from trauma (Netflix Korea 넷플릭스 코리아, 2023). Thus, Dong Eun's character in this drama is portrayed as a person who dares to seek justice for herself, namely through revenge against the perpetrator.

The second phase is delivering messages packaged in the form of impressions. The production process uses advanced cameras, strong dramatic effects, and intense background music and audio. The storyline put together by Kim Eun Sook feels very realistic, with everyday dialogue that succeeds in provoking the audience's emotions, making every scene feel alive and real.

The process of distributing ideas through the media has many forms and one of them is the Netflix OTT platform series. Netflix is an Over The Top (OTT) streaming service that can be accessed via the internet. Netflix allows audiences around the world to watch *The Glory* anytime and anywhere, in contrast to traditional television which follows a fixed schedule and is limited to certain regions (Murpratiwi, 2022). Audiences from diverse cultural and geographic backgrounds can enjoy these stories, with a convenient viewing experience offering the option of subtitles or dubbing in a variety of languages (Cobb, 2017).

In general, it is not easy to conclude this research as all five informants are in a negotiation position. That is, the informants accepted the messages in the drama *The Glory* in general, but negotiated in certain situations. After identifying the positioning, the researcher will describe the findings in this report, which are divided into five main points, which will be explained as follows:

4.1. Perspective of Ethical Values in Informant's Acceptance of the Drama *The Glory*

The results showed that informant 1 and informant 3 felt that the scenes of violence and revenge in *The Glory* went against their religious values and ideology. Playwright Kim Eun Sook designed the drama to show how victims of bullying try to get justice in an extreme way, namely revenge. However, from the audience's point of view, Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 3 are in a negotiated reading position, where this drama, revenge is an incorrect way because it is contrary to the teachings of Islam which emphasizes peace and forgiveness.

The depiction of revenge in the drama *The Glory* often contradicts the religious teachings of some informants. In religions such as Islam, Christianity and others, forgiveness and showing compassion are considered more virtuous than carrying out revenge. For example, in Islam, there is a principle of forgiving others' mistakes and rebuilding harmonious relationships, whereas in Christianity,

forgiveness is a core value. Informants who are religious believe that revenge perpetuates the cycle of hatred, which is contrary to religious teachings that teach peace.

The drama also raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding its depiction of extreme violence. Depictions of physical violence, emotional abuse, and psychological manipulation are considered to violate ethical and moral norms. This caused discomfort and sparked debate about the limits of freedom of artistic expression. From an Indonesian cultural perspective, the values of Pancasila as a state ideology prioritize unity, humanity, justice and deliberation, all of which are represented in its symbols. Pancasila prioritizes reconciliation and harmony, so that acts of personal revenge are not in line with these values as a means of resolving conflict. Conflicts should ideally be resolved through a more peaceful and harmonious approach, emphasizing the importance of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and deliberation (*musyawarah*) to reach a common solution.

In various regions in Indonesia, such as Java, cultural values emphasize manners, social harmony and self-control. These values are reflected in concepts such as “*rukun*” (harmony), “*tepo seliro*” (tolerance), and “*mengalah*” (Being open-hearted for the greater good). Javanese people tend to avoid direct conflict and prefer a calm approach to problem solving. In this context, the narrative of revenge in the drama *The Glory* is considered to be contrary to this principle because it carries the idea that victims of bullying can seek justice through revenge. This action was considered violent and contrary to the cultural norms of Javanese society.

Informants with a Javanese cultural background generally expressed their discomfort with the extreme actions carried out by Dong Eun in the drama. The informant assessed that the act of revenge was not in line with the values of patience and *nrimo* (accepting the situation sincerely) which had been instilled since childhood. In their view, conflict or injustice should be resolved by maintaining social harmony, so this drama seems inconsistent with cultural norms which prioritize self-control and peaceful resolution.

In addition, informants from harmonious and non-violent environments view this drama as a negative show. There are many scenes of violence, both physical and emotional, which are considered to have a negative impact on audiences, especially those who are struggling with the issue of bullying. This is a mismatch between the message the author wants to convey and an audience from a more peaceful environment.

4.2. Informant's Perspective on Social Change

For the informants 1, informant 2, informant 4 and informant 5, *The Glory* succeeded in making the public aware of the issue of bullying which has been neglected. This drama is considered to help society pay more attention to victims of bullying. Through this drama, many victims finally dared to speak up about their experiences, thereby creating space for them to speak and seek justice. This contributes to social change and uncovers previously hidden cases of bullying.

In Indonesia, bullying continues to occur in school environments, with many cases poorly addressed. The informant saw that the school chose to cover up this case because the perpetrator was from an influential family. This is similar to what happened in *The Glory*. This experience makes them feel that this drama is very relevant to the reality that occurs in their environment.

Researchers found that informants' acceptance of bullying in the Korean drama *The Glory* was influenced by the surrounding environment, including school, society and the government. The informants felt there was relevance between the depiction of school bullying in the drama and the reality in Indonesia, where social hierarchy, family status, and gaps in law enforcement often prevent victims from getting justice. *The Glory* is interpreted as the failure of the authorities, especially schools, to protect students from physical and psychological violence, an experience also felt by victims in Indonesia.

The Glory, which consists of 16 episodes of less than 60 minutes each, manages to maintain interest until the end. The play conveys a message about the injustices that occur in cases of bullying. It aims to give voice to victims, and criticize the weaknesses in social law enforcement that often favor perpetrators. After *The Glory* aired, many victims dared to speak out about their experiences that were previously ignored. This shows that the messages of the drama were positively received by the audience.

4.3. Gender Role Perspective in the Reception of The Glory

Four of the five informants were female, and one was male. All informants considered this drama as a significant change in the way women were viewed, depicting them not only as objects of patriarchy to be looked down upon, but also as a strong and empowered individual. This drama challenges traditional gender stereotypes, which often position women as weak.

Women often become victims of violence due to various factors, such as stereotypes that depict them as weak and helpless. These stereotypes often target women as targets for physical and psychological violence, because they are deemed unable to defend themselves or fight back.

Informant 2 added that men are often expected to show greater strength and emotional response than women, this is driven by gender norms that teach men to be strong and assertive, while women are often seen as soft and submissive. However, Informant 2 also agrees that *The Glory* also highlights the struggle for gender equality.

Writer Kim Eun-sook successfully portrayed the character Moon Dong Eun as a woman who uses intelligence and determination to fight injustice. Despite her weak social position, Dong Eun continues to fight for her destiny, demonstrating feminine strength in fighting the patriarchal system. This message was received as a positive representation of women's empowerment. Interestingly, gender played an important role in shaping the reception of this drama; both male and female informant agree that *The Glory* supports gender equality.

This drama rejected traditional stereotypes about women, showing that women are able to face conflict and challenges with courage and intelligence. Traditional perceptions of gender power are often skewed towards men, but *The Glory* shows that women can also hold power. Dong Eun, who has experienced violence, finally reverses the power dynamic by taking control of her life.

4.4. Informant's perspective in accepting the drama *The Glory* as normalizing bullying

This drama features many violent scenes. Audiences need to interpret this carefully to avoid misunderstandings regarding the depiction of oppression. Without good understanding, the message of violence conveyed can be considered negative. Informants expressed concerns that without proper understanding, the play could inspire audiences to imitate the violent behavior depicted.

In the drama *The Glory*, the explicit scenes of violence raised concerns among the informants. They felt that without proper understanding, the violence could be misinterpreted and even considered as normal behavior. Netflix as an OTT platform gives producers the creative freedom to show uncensored violent scenes, which has the potential to normalize violent behavior. Some informants were concerned that viewers, especially those who are vulnerable, could be inspired to mimic the violence. This risks reinforcing a culture of violence if not interpreted carefully.

The drama features scenes full of emotional tension and internal conflict. The use of high-quality cameras allows small facial expressions, such as tension around the eyes or wrinkles on the forehead, to be seen very clearly. When Dong Eun confronts the bully, small details such as a faint smile or a blank stare become very sharp, adding a meaningful sense of stillness and allowing the audience to feel the tension without the need for excessive dialog. These expressions emphasize the pent-up hatred and pain experienced, affecting the audience's acceptance of the character's emotional complexity.

4.5. Moral Value Perspective in *The Glory*

After watching *The Glory*, informants 2, Informant 3, and informant 4, interpreted the drama as a moral message for a struggle against injustice. Dong Eun's character is described as strong, tough, and determined to improve her life. This inspires the audience not to give up, even though they don't get support from those around them.

The drama was received as a moral value because informants felt inspired not to give up when facing similar experiences and to continue seeking justice for positive change in their lives. This moral message serves as an encouragement to face injustice with courage, perseverance and resilience. It is also a reminder that even if there is no support from the surrounding environment, determination and personal effort can seek justice for oneself.

Informant 2 personal experience of experiencing oppression influenced his interpretation of the message of the drama. Facing a similar situation and feeling unsupported by his environment,

informant 2 sees Dong Eun as a symbol of the struggle against injustice. Her experiences and the moral message in the play complement each other, illustrating how individuals can find the strength within themselves to face challenges, and inspire positive change even in seemingly unfavorable circumstances.

This drama has the potential to re-traumatize audiences who have experienced similar cases. Emotionally charged bullying scenes can evoke painful memories of personal experiences. A narrative structure with flashbacks and complex plot developments allows audiences to understand character motivations from multiple points of view, which can be triggering for those who have previously felt the effects of bullying.

Education plays an important role as well in shaping a person's values and morals. Informants with a higher level of education tend to be more critical in interpreting media messages, especially sensitive issues such as bullying. Research shows that highly educated individuals have broader access to knowledge, allowing for a deeper understanding of social and moral issues. After watching *The Glory* Several informants criticized educational institutions and the government for enforcing stricter laws against bullying, showing how education shaped their understanding of justice.

One of the interesting aspects of *The Glory* is the use of high-quality camera technology, such as ARRI and Red, which provides an enjoyable viewing experience. These cameras capture images in 4K UHD resolution, allowing audience to experience the depth of emotion and fine visual details. Each character's facial expressions, background textures and intricate lighting are clearly visible, creating an immersive viewing experience. The informants stated that they felt angry emotions when they saw the oppression Yeo Jin and her friends inflicted on Dong Eun, and sad emotions when Dong Eun began to despair.

5. Conclusion

Based on data analysis, the researcher concludes that the five informants are in a negotiated position regarding the message conveyed by the drama *The Glory*. In general, they accept the drama's message but negotiate it within certain situational contexts. The diverse backgrounds of the audience, such as education, personal experiences, as well as ideological and religious values, influence their decoding process of the media's message. The encoding process by Kim Eun-sook in creating this drama, driven by the social situation in South Korea, which often neglects bullying victims, and the high-quality production technology, also shapes the audience's reception. Some informants view revenge as conflicting with religious values that prohibit such actions. Meanwhile, personal experiences of some informants, who had gone through similar situations, allow them to interpret the drama as a moral message about the struggle against injustice. Thus, these findings open up opportunities for further research on audience reception of media content.

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