

# RECEPTION ANALYSIS OF *BROMANCE* IN “*RUN BTS!*” VARIETY SHOW ON VLIVE VIDEO PLATFORM

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## ABSTRACT

This study entitled reception analysis of *bromance* in “*Run BTS!*” variety show on vlive video platform. This study was a qualitative research with reception analysis method. The findings showed that the meaning was categorized in three positions of meaning i.e dominant, negotiation, and opposition. In this study, the meaning of *bromance* in general, nine out of eleven informants were in a dominant position. While in the position of negotiating, four informants interpreted that not all *bromance* interaction of *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) boy band members were pure and spontaneous, the four informans assessed there were some interactions that were parts of the program script to satisfy fans who mostly like *bromance* interactions that showed closeness among *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) members. In the position of opposition, five informants interpreted that the *bromance* interaction in the *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) boy band was very excessive and inappropriate for fellow men.

**Keywords:** reception analysis, *bromance*, variety shows, vlive video platform

## INTRODUCTION

Friendship among men initially had obstacles because of stereotypes and hegemonic concepts of masculinity. Men are always associated with the concept of masculinity both in terms of appearance and behavior. According to Donaldson in his research entitled “What is Hegemonic Masculinity?”, men were associated with power and wealth. Heterosexuality and homophobia were the basis of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Men are encouraged to become homophobic and given awards in the form of social support. In other words, heterosexual male identities are affirmed on the basis of hatred and fear of gays.

As the time goes by, the culture of homophobia in the community began to disappear. This allowed men to express emotions, physical contact and intimacy with their male friends without worrying about being seen as homosexuals (Craig, 1992: 25).

One of the effects of starting the loss of homophobic culture in society is the emergence of the *bromance* phenomenon. In a study conducted by Adam White, heterosexual men no longer relied on traditional homosexual boundaries that had previously restricted same-sex friendship. *Bromance* concept is used to describe a new form of friendship between men based on intimacy (White at all, 2017: 2) .

The word *bromance* itself in the Oxford Dictionary has the meaning of a nonsexual close relationship between two men. According to Chen in Nills Hammar én and Thomas Johansson’s research entitled “*Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy*”, in popular culture, the concept of *bromance* (which combines the words *brother* and *romance*) has been introduced, discussed and debated. *Bromance* refers to close and intimate nonsexual and homosocial relationships between two (or more) men (Hammar én & Johansson, 2014: 6).

*Bromance* emphasizes love, exclusive friendship, and intimacy that are not based on competition and are often described as “shoulder-to-shoulder friendship”, for example,

watching football, playing golf, or practicing a marathon together. *Bromance* provides a more intimate space for friendship between men (Hammar é n & Johansson, 2014: 6).

*Bromance* is a popular culture in several Asian countries, one of which is South Korea. In Korea, *bromance* is a part of popular culture that characterizes Korean culture, known as “*cheong*” which is used to express affection between individuals who are like brothers. Korean people are also more expressive in expressing emotions to their friends because they consider intimacy in a friendly relationship is important to be established (Alexis, 2003: 11-12).

In this study, the writer chose the *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) boy band as research objects because *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) has become a big phenomenon not only in South Korea but also in many countries. *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) is a boy band which has several *bromance* pairs that are made and their interaction favored by their fans. This can be seen from the social media fans that even made a special base or account to share interaction between two of BTS favorite members.

*Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) has become a phenomenon and won many awards in several awards shows because they have a good relationship with their fan base. *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) has a strong engagement with fans, they pamper fans with a variety of content available on platforms such as YouTube, Weverse and Naver Vlive.

One of the content produced by *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) and favored by fans is *RUN BTS!* variety show. *RUN BTS!* (Korean: 달려라 방탄!; RR: *Dallyeora Bang-tan!*) is a free Variety Show program that airs every Tuesday at Vlive. *RUN BTS!* is a collaborative variety show between *Big Hit* Entertainment and Naver Vlive, starring a BTS boy band which is a shade boy band on *Big Hit* Entertainment. The first episode aired on August 1, 2015 ([https://bts.fandom.com/wiki/Run\\_BTS!](https://bts.fandom.com/wiki/Run_BTS!)). This first episode has been watched 5.730.995 times and got 69.034.090 likes (<https://www.vlive.tv/video/1037>).

In the *BTS RUN!* show there is interaction between two members of *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) who are *bromance* pair. This interaction can take the form of hugs between personnel or when one person feeds the food to other personnel, and other *bromance* interaction.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Interpersonal Communication

Deddy Mulyana defines that interpersonal communication is communication between two people face to face, which allows each participant to catch the reaction directly both verbal and non verbal. In addition, the quality or intimacy of interpersonal communication is determined by each participant (Mulyana, 2011: 81).

According to Diana, interpersonal communication is communication that takes place between individuals. In interpersonal communication the personal elements are fully involved with one another in the delivery and reception of real messages. Each communication participant not only pays attention to the contents of the message but also pays attention to the level of the relationship between individuals. Each party (person) can act as both a communicator and a communicant (two way model) (Diana, 2016: 27).

Hardjana in his book stated that interpersonal communication with each person was different in the level of depth of communication, the level of intensive and extensive level. Interpersonal communication is dynamic communication (Hardjana, 2007: 85).

De Vito in his book defines interpersonal communication as the process of sending and receiving messages between two or more people, formal or informal. Interpersonal communication is feedback that is interrelated with one another, with the aim of helping someone to improve personal effectiveness and interpersonal effectiveness. Interpersonal communication requires principals to meet face to face between two or more people by bringing verbal and nonverbal messages, so that they can understand each other and interact effectively (Vito, 2013: 5-7).

### **Bromance**

The term *bromance* was first used by Dave Carnie, editor of the *Big Brother* skateboard magazine in the mid-1990s to describe the relationship between skateboarders who often spent time together. Since then, *Bromance* has entered the vocabulary dictionary. According to the Oxford Dictionary, *Bromance* is a very close relationship between two men who are non-sexual in nature - *a close but non-sexual relationship between two men*. This definition is in line with Merriam Webster's dictionary that defines *Bromance* as "*a close non-sexual friendship between men*". In addition, one of the literatures defines *Bromance* as "*any relationship between straight relationships borders on intimacy typically associated with romantic relationships between those of opposite sexes*" (Stegall & Edward, 2009).

Dainty Smith in his book mentioned that in the last ten years people who observe pop culture will see a dramatic change in the representation of friendship between heterosexual men. The term *bromance* refers to a close friendship relationship between two heterosexual men who have the same interests and emotional closeness.

This changed culture and shifted competition between men as alpha-male in the past, *bromance* has been reflected in English as well as films and television shows. Movies with popular *bromance* themes are *I love you man*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and *The Hangover* (Smith, 2012: 16). According to Michael in his book, *Bromance* shows an emotionally intense bond between normal men (straight male) but not sexually. This intimacy can occur on condition that other matters relating to sexual desire between men do not occur (De Angelis, 2014: 1).

In *homosocial* relationships (same-sex social interaction), indeed relationships between women can be more accepted and society in general allows them to show mutual affection and emotion for each other. However, men also have a tendency to show that they also need to interact like women. However *bromance* is actually a complicated relationship, because the rules and code are not written in it. It also reaffirms the idea that *bromance* is also governed by behavior which is part of male identity which is carried out in the context of heterosexual friendship.

Soresca added that the most important thing in the *bromance* concept, which writer believe also becomes a *bromance* conflict in any culture in the world, is how to maintain loving friendships and at the same time maintain heterosexuality and masculinity by those involved in it (Soresca, 2013: 68-84). Geoffrey L. Grief described *Bromance* is that when men gather, they tend to want to do something that keeps them side by side. Like sitting side by side at the bar while telling stories or relaxing enjoying a soccer match - where women are more interested

in face-based activities (<https://mashable.com/2016/04/20/bromance-male-bonds-brandspeak/>).

Findings on *Bromance* published in the journal *Men and Masculinities*. 28 of the 30 men who participated in the study said they would rather discuss personal issues with close male friends than with lovers. Another finding of the study is that the existence of *bromance* helps men find solutions to the conflicts they are currently facing. More interestingly, *Bromance* is also said to be more satisfying than romantic relationships (Robinson, 2018: 13).

### **Shipping**

*Ship* is a situation where fans like a romantic relationship between two people, both fictional and idol characters in the real world. Fans will make couples of their idols. *Shipping* is usually done by fans if they feel suitable and interested in the interaction between two of their idols. *Shipping* is a unique phenomenon among k-pop fans. *K-pop* fans not only like to pair favorite actresses with their favorite actors, k-pop fans also like to pair their idols with the same sex. The person who carries out this activity is called a *shipper*.

The phenomenon of pairing idols of the same sex is called *slash pairing*, from this *slash pairing* an OTP (*One True Pairing*) and *bromance pair* will be formed. Unlike a *bromance pair* that does not have a romantic context between two people who are paired up, *One True Pairing* is a pair made in the context of a romantic relationship. Although *OTP* couples or *bromance pairs* are made at the will of fans, it is not uncommon for some of the *shipper* to believe that the idols they pair have romantic or *gay* relationships (Sulianti at all, 2018: 148). Many couples are made by fans of a *k-pop* boy band. *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) was one of the boy bands that had quite a lot of *bromance* pairs made by fans.

In *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS), it has many *bromance* pairs involving 7 members. *Bromance* couples who have many fans and are popular include “TaeJin” (Taehyung and Jin), “NamJin” (Namjoon and Jin), “TaeKook” (Taehyung and Jungkook), “JiKook” (Jimin and Jungkook), “JinKook” (Jinjook and Jin) and Jungkook), “VMin” (Taehyung and Jimin), “YoonMin” (Suga and Jimin), “SoPe” (Suga and J-Hope).

### **Naver VLIVE**

*V LIVE*, also known as *V App*, is a global entertainment platform created by the South Korean IT company, NAVER, which connects Korean artists with their fans via live broadcast video that allows fans to send messages through the live chat feature to idols who are doing live broadcast and the opportunity to be read by his idol.

### **Reception Analysis**

The basic assumption of reception analysis is the concept of active audiences. Active audiences are audiences who have the autonomy to produce and reproduce the meaning that is in the show of a film or drama series they watch, and also the story of the novel they read. Stuart Hall wrote about the theory of “*encoding* and *decoding*” as the process of consuming audiences and producing meaning in the process of receiving the mass media content it consumes (Ida, 2014: 161).

This communication model focuses on the relationship between media discourse, as constructed (encoded) by the producer, and how the discourse is interpreted (decoded) by the audience. The encoding process takes place when the text is produced by the manufacturer. Before reaching the audience, the producers first string the text with certain values to produce complex discourse.

The discourse can also be constructed with certain goals, for example to influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade the audience who consume them. When the text is consumed by the audience, the process of meaning (encoding) takes place. In this process, the audience will interpret the text in accordance with their respective sociocultural contexts.

Furthermore, Hall (1980) categorized the audience's meaning of media texts into three categories. The category also showed the position of the audience of the text; whether in a dominant, negotiated, or oppositional position.

- **Dominant reading**, the audience is in a situation that is almost the same as the message manufacturer will tend to be in a dominant position. They are in line with the codes used by producers in the text (eg values, attitudes, or ideologies) so that the discourse offered by producers will be fully accepted by the audience.
- **Negotiated reading**, basically, the audience is in line with the discourse delivered by the producer through the text, but within certain limits. Not merely accepting the raw text, they also modify the meaning by involving the socio-cultural context in which the audience is located.
- **Oppositional reading**, the codes used by the audience in contrast to the dominant code used by the manufacturer. As a result, the audience does not agree with the discourse offered by the producers in the text. They tend to make sense with a personal alternative framework.

Reception analysis focuses on how the text is interpreted by the audience who consume it. The audience is considered as an individual who actively carries out the relevant text. They have the ability to reconstruct media discourse into meaning that they fully believe in.

The sociocultural background has a big part in this process. As the researchers have explained above, the more differences between producers and audiences, the greater the possibility of differences in meaning between the audience and what is intended by text producers (Hall, 1980: 128-138).

## METHODOLOGY

The paradigm used in this research is the constructivism paradigm with a qualitative approach. The constructivist paradigm confirms the assumption that individuals always try to understand the world in which they live and work by developing subjective meanings of their experiences directed at certain objects (Creswell, 2014: 11-13). The importance of experience in this knowledge process makes the construction process requires the ability to recall and express experiences, the ability to compare and make decisions, and the ability to prefer one experience to another (Sabena, 2020: 3).

The study used a reception analysis method to answer the research problem statement. Reception analysis was chosen because this study focused on audience reception as media users of *bromance* in a variety show, where the audience can produce meaning from the text they consume.

In this study, the writer involved 11 (eleven) informants who were divided into *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) fans and non-fans, consisting of 5 (five) female fans and 6 (six) non-fan men as research subjects.

Researchers chose female fans as subjects of research based on the number of female fans who liked the interaction between two *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) personnel in various media. This can be seen in the number of Twitter accounts created to share their fun with certain *bromance* couples. The age range of *fangirl* and non fan chosen as research subjects is 14-25

years. Selected informants are required to have watched all episodes of *RUN BTS!* Until the last episode of the third season, episode 93, and is expected to remember the contents of *RUN BTS!*. Informants are not required to be a *shipper* of a certain *Bromance* couple and are domiciled around Jakarta and Tangerang. Thus it can be concluded that the criteria for informants in this study are as follows:

1. Fans of BTS (*fangirl*) and non-fans
2. Aged between 14-25 years.
3. Domiciled in Jakarta and Tangerang.
4. Had a job as a student, employee and housewife.
5. Watched all episodes of *RUN BTS!* until the last episode that aired in the third season (episode 93).

## DISCUSSION

In this study the writer interviewed five speakers and conducted focus group discussions (FGD) with six participants, three of the interviewees were non-fans and two others were *Bangtan Sonyeondan* fans, while in focus group discussions (FGD) three participants were non-fans and the other three are fans.

*Bromance* is a very close relationship between men but has a non-sexual nature. That is, *bromance* is a very close friendship with various interactions ranging from verbal to very intimate physical interaction but not accompanied by feelings of love like men to women.

Interview with the speakers after watching *RUN BTS!* episodes 36, 38, 40, 53, 51, 66, 67, and 86. While the focus group discussion was held after the resource person watched the *RUN BTS!* program episodes 51, 53, 56, and 57. From the results of the above research data, the data was in the form of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions are categorized into three *bromance* characteristics.

### **Bromance Characteristics**

#### **Shared Interests**

Sharing the same interests is one of the main factors in *Bromance*. A *bromance* will work well if the parties involved have the same interests and personalities. *Bromance* interaction was more often established between two men who are the same age or who are not too far apart. In addition to age equality, *bromance* is also intertwined because of similarities in the same hobbies or personalities. As expressed by Angel and Vinda, they saw *bromance* in the *Bangtan Sonyeondan* group (BTS) because of the similarity in age and personality, especially their favorite *bromance* pair. Vinda considered the *bromance* between Taehyung and Jungkook to be very good and adorable because both have the same personality, so whatever they did created a *bromance* interaction that was loved by fans. Whereas, Angel liked *bromance* interaction between Taehyung and Jimin because both of them were born in the same year, so they looked very cohesive and supported one another.

#### **Emotional Intimacy**

*Bromance* is different from friendship relationships that usually seen from emotional closeness and also the expressions and emotions expressed by one another. *Bromance* includes sharing stories and secrets exclusively told only to *bromance* friends. *Bromance* which is intertwined because of emotional intimacy can make physical interaction between the two men

become more intimate. One of them is to always support each other in all situations. As said by Nabila, Jin and Yoongi are roommates and have their own ways to show affection between the two, such as praising each other but in a unique way of not informing directly but through other members. But it showed that the bond between the two is very close but they show it in a way that only the two of them understand. Same as Jin and Yoongi, according to Nabila, Namjoon and Yoongi have a stronger emotional intimacy than the other members because both of them have lived together longer, so they can understand each other, one of their intimacy is by showing the same gesture when given a word by the team *RUN BTS!* production. Because they have lived together for a long time, *Bangtan Sonyeondan* members are not ashamed to express their affections to one another.

### **Physical Intimacy**

Aside from being emotionally close, physical intimacy is also one aspect of *Bromance*. Although physical intimacy is considered not very important in maintaining a *bromance* bond, intimacy or physical closeness is something that is routinely done in *Bromance*. *Bromance* interaction that very visible is physical interaction. The speakers mentioned the physical interaction between *Bangtan Sonyeondan* members they saw in *RUN BTS!* and they think of as *bromance*. This interaction included members of *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS), in this case Taehyung and Jimin who held hands when riding a vehicle because Jimin was afraid and would feel safe holding Taehyung's hand. Another interaction was when Taehyung was not ashamed to feed Seokjin and when Seokjin was paired up with Jimin in a team, he always hugged when he felt happy. This interaction showed that in *bromance* physical interaction was very often done as a way to express more real affection to his friend.

### **Dominance, Negotiation, and Opposition**

Stuart Hall wrote the theory of “*encoding and decoding*” as the process of consuming audiences and producing meaning in the process of receiving the mass media content it consumes (Ida, 2014: 161). This communication model focuses on the relationship between media discourse, as constructed (encoded) by the producer, and how the discourse is interpreted (decoded) by the audience. The encoding process takes place when the text is produced by the manufacturer. Before reaching the audience, the producers first string the text with certain values to produce complex discourse. The discourse can also be constructed with certain goals, for example to influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade the audience who consume them. When the text is consumed by the audience, the process of meaning (encoding) takes place. In this process, the audience will interpret the text in accordance with their respective sociocultural contexts. Based on the results of interviews with eleven informants, the author can analyze based on the answers submitted by the informant, using the Stuart Hall Reception, there are at least three types of meaning positions that the writer found i.e. Dominance, Negotiation and Opposition.

#### **Dominant**

The position of dominant meaning is where the audience is in a situation that is almost the same as the message producer will tend to be in a dominant position. They are in line with the codes used by producers in the text (eg values, attitudes, or ideologies) so that the discourse offered by producers will be fully accepted by the audience. In this case the writer wanted to know the responses of informants to treat *bromance* in general. In this case Adinda, Nabila, Lutfi, Aslan, Bayu Bintang and three FGD participants, all of whom were fans, were in a

dominant position. From the answers they delivered, they considered that *bromance* was a pure relationship of friendship between men. Then in the next statement about their views on *Bromance* as Korean culture, Adinda, Nabila, Bintang, and three FGD participants who were fans showed a dominant meaning. They did not mind the *bromance* as one of the South Korean cultures because they are accustomed to seeing intimate interaction between men, especially k-pop idols and while the context was still a friend, it did not matter. For the interpretation of the informants on the *bromance* interaction, Adinda, Nabila, Lutfi, Bintang, and three FGD participant fans were in a dominant position by saying that the *bromance* interaction was a normal interaction between male friendships. Furthermore, in the interpretation of informants on *bromance* in *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) boy band, Adinda, Nabila, Aslan and the three FGD participants were in a dominant position because they considered that *bromance* interaction on *Bangtan Sonyeondan* boy band was still reasonable and not excessive, one of the speakers said that interaction between *Bangtan* members *Sonyeondan* (BTS) was somewhat adorable. Then for the meaning of *bromance* on *RUN BTS!* variety show, Nabila, Lutfi and Bintang were in a dominant position because they assessed *bromance* on *RUN BTS!* variety show was purely because of the friendship that exists between all its members.

### **Negotiation**

The process of meaning of negotiation is where the public generally accepts the dominant ideology but rejects its application in certain cases. In this case the public is willing to accept the dominant ideology of a general nature, but they will make a few exceptions. In his statement about *bromance* as a South Korean culture, Aslan was in a negotiating position, according to Aslan, he had no objection to *bromance* as a culture in Korea, but had to look again into segmentation or target markets if he wanted to include *bromance* in his entertainment products or program. Then in the interpretation of the *bromance* interaction, Aslan and three non-fan group FGD participants were in a negotiating position. According to Aslan, *bromance* interactions could be tolerated if there are on the right shows, for example specifically for countries that are open to such cultures, but if it was in Indonesia, it was misused and would collide with culture in Indonesia. Whereas three FGD participants agreed to see from how the intonation used in interacting, if the emphasis was more seductive would lead to other meanings. Furthermore, in the meaning of *bromance* in *RUN BTS!* shows, four FGD participants consisting of three fans and one non-fan included in the negotiation position because they were of the opinion that the *bromance* in the *RUN BTS!* show was not entirely pure because of friendship, but rather part of the content and script that has been created by the show's production team to attract the fans who are watching.

### **Opposition**

The codes used by the audience are contrary to the dominant codes used by producers. As a result, the audience does not agree with the discourse offered by the producers in the text. They tend to make sense with a personal alternative framework. In the general interpretation of *bromance*, three FGD participants who were non-fans stated that *bromance* was too excessive interaction between men because they did taboo things that were not done by other men in general and showed a deviant sexual orientation. Lutfi is in an opposite position because he considered that *bromance* as a Korean culture was something that made it uncomfortable because it was not pleasing to see. Similar to Lutfi, three non-fans FGD participants were also

in a position of opposition because assessing *bromance* as Korean culture was very taboo and if it practiced in Indonesia, it would lead to unfair prejudice. Then in the interpretation of *bromance* interaction on *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) boy band, Lutfi and Bintang are in opposition because judging *bromance* on *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) was considered excessive and looked like a pair of lovers. Three non-fan group FGD participants also said the same thing, that the *bromance* interaction carried out by the members of *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) were things that normally do by a pair of male and female lovers. Next, the meaning of the *bromance* in the *RUN BTS!* program, Aslan and two non-fan group FGD participants stated that the *bromance* in the *RUN BTS!* was planned in advance to see the fans response, and when the fans response was good, the production team continued to write the script by including *bromance* interaction in the *RUN BTS!* program.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion that have been obtained from in-depth interview data collection techniques and focus group discussions (FGD) that have been conducted with six resource persons for in-depth interviews and five resource persons for focus group discussions, it can be concluded that referring to Stuart Hall's theory, meaning is categorized in three positions of meaning i.e. dominant, negotiation, and opposition. In this study, the meaning of *Bromance* in general, nine out of eleven informants were in a dominant position. While in the position of negotiating, four informants interpreted that not all *bromance* interactions of *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) boy band member was pure and spontaneous interaction, they considered there were some interactions that were parts of the script of the program to satisfy fans who mostly like the *bromance* interaction which showed the closeness between *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) members. In the position of opposition, five informants interpreted that the *bromance* interaction in the *Bangtan Sonyeondan* (BTS) boy band was very excessive and inappropriate for fellow men.

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