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The Effects of Mass Communication On NCT Dream Fans (NCTzen) through YouTube Content: A Case Study of "Dream in Jakarta #2"

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the effects of mass communication on NCT Dream fans (NCTzen) through YouTube content by applying an encoding–decoding analysis to the video "Dream in Jakarta #2." As YouTube has become a dominant platform for global cultural circulation, K-pop idols increasingly utilize platform-based media to communicate with fans and sustain fandom engagement across national and linguistic boundaries. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how meanings encoded in YouTube content are interpreted, negotiated, and internalized by audiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with NCTzen, non-participant observation of YouTube comment sections, and documentation of audiovisual elements, subtitles, and platform features. The findings indicate that the content produces multiple mass communication effects, including the strengthening of emotional bonds between idols and fans, increased cultural curiosity toward Indonesian food and local identity, and the formation of collective meanings within the fandom. Most audience interpretations align with dominant and negotiated readings, suggesting a high level of congruence between encoded messages and fandom expectations. The study also demonstrates that platform affordances such as subtitles, algorithmic visibility, and interactive comment spaces play a significant role in stabilizing and amplifying these interpretations. By extending the encoding–decoding model into a digital fandom context, this study contributes to the understanding of how mass communication effects are co-produced by media texts, platforms, and interpretive communities in the contemporary digital era.

KEYWORDS: Decoding, Digital fandom, Encoding, Mass communication effects, YouTube

I. INTRODUCTION

YouTube has emerged as one of the most influential platforms in contemporary mass communication due to its ability to distribute audiovisual messages globally through algorithm-driven infrastructures that shape visibility, attention, and audience engagement (Min, 2024). As a platformized media environment, YouTube does not merely function as a neutral channel for content dissemination but actively structures how messages are produced, circulated, and interpreted by audiences across national and cultural boundaries (Jin, 2024). The rise of YouTube as a dominant communication medium has significantly transformed cultural industries, particularly music, by enabling artists to communicate directly with fans while bypassing traditional gatekeepers (Kim, 2022). Consequently, the effects of mass communication on digital platforms must be understood as multidimensional processes involving technological mediation, audience participation, and symbolic meaning-making (Valkenburg, 2022).

Within this digital ecosystem, K-pop represents a prominent example of how global popular culture operates through platform-based mass communication. The global expansion of K-pop has been closely linked to the strategic use of YouTube, where music videos, behind-the-scenes content, and travel-based narratives circulate intensively among transnational fan communities (Gutierrez-Jauregi, 2025). Scholars argue that K-pop fandoms function as active cultural agents who amplify, reinterpret, and redistribute media texts rather than merely consuming them passively (James, 2025). Through practices such as coordinated streaming, content clipping, subtitling, and online discussion, fans play a central role in sustaining the visibility and relevance of idols within platform economies (Park & Park, 2025). These practices highlight that the effects of mass communication extend beyond persuasion to include community formation, affective attachment, and collective action (Mirzamurodova et al., 2025).

Theoretically, Stuart Hall's encoding–decoding model remains highly relevant for analyzing contemporary digital media phenomena because it emphasizes the active role of audiences in interpreting mediated messages (Oh, 2022). In platform-based communication, messages encoded by content producers—such as entertainment companies or artists do not guarantee uniform interpretation among audiences, as viewers may adopt dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings depending on cultural background and contextual knowledge (Liang, 2025). Recent studies on social media communication indicate that the interpretive gap between encoding and decoding is often shaped by platform affordances, such as subtitles, comment ranking systems, and

algorithmic recommendations (Arczewska, 2025). As a result, mass communication effects on YouTube cannot be reduced to message transmission alone but must be examined as interpretive processes embedded within technological and social contexts (Yesilada et al., 2022).

In the context of K-pop, parasocial interaction plays a crucial role in strengthening the perceived closeness between idols and fans. Research has shown that repeated exposure to idol-generated content on platforms like YouTube can foster emotional bonds that resemble interpersonal relationships, despite the absence of direct interaction (Lee, 2025). These parasocial relationships contribute to higher levels of fan loyalty, engagement, and willingness to support promotional messages conveyed by idols (Balaban et al., 2022). Moreover, fandom activities mediated through YouTube have been linked to positive emotional outcomes, including happiness and a sense of belonging among fans (Choi, 2024). This indicates that mass communication effects operate simultaneously at cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels within fan communities (Ansari et al., 2024).

The YouTube content "Dream in Jakarta #2" produced by NCT Dream presents a compelling case for examining mass communication effects through an encoding–decoding lens. Unlike conventional promotional videos, this content combines concert-related narratives with cultural exploration, showcasing Indonesian food and local experiences to a global audience. Such content encodes multiple messages, including entertainment, cultural appreciation, and relational closeness with fans, which may be decoded differently by viewers depending on their cultural proximity and fandom identity (Lim, 2023). Subtitling and translation features further mediate these interpretations by enabling cross-linguistic accessibility while simultaneously shaping meaning through selective representation (Jung & Hwang, 2023). Studies on audiovisual translation emphasize that subtitles are not neutral conveyors of meaning but actively influence how messages are understood and evaluated by international audiences (Park et al., 2022).

Additionally, algorithmic systems on YouTube play a significant role in amplifying specific interpretations by curating content visibility and highlighting particular comments or engagement metrics. Research on recommendation drift suggests that prolonged exposure to related content can reinforce dominant readings and stabilize audience interpretations over time (Cakmak, 2024). Similarly, the prioritization of certain comments may shape perceived social norms within fandom spaces, influencing how fans collectively respond to and discuss idol-generated messages (Nam et al., 2024). In ambiguous communicative situations, audiences often rely on social cues and communal interpretation to make sense of mediated messages, reinforcing shared meanings within fan communities (Sidharta, 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study seeks to examine the effects of mass communication on NCT Dream fans (NCTzen) through the YouTube content "Dream in Jakarta #2" by applying an encoding–decoding analysis. By focusing on how messages are encoded by NCT Dream and decoded by fans within the YouTube platform environment, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of mass communication effects in contemporary digital fandoms. Specifically, it highlights how meaning, engagement, and cultural interpretation are co-produced through the interaction of content, platform affordances, and fan communities.

II. METHOD

A. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive–interpretive approach to examine the effects of mass communication on NCT Dream fans (NCTzen) through YouTube content, specifically *"Dream in Jakarta #2."* A qualitative design is considered appropriate because the research aims to explore meaning-making processes, audience interpretations, and subjective experiences rather than to measure causal relationships or statistical generalizations. Qualitative inquiry allows for an in-depth understanding of how media messages are interpreted by audiences within specific social and cultural contexts. The study is theoretically grounded in Stuart Hall's encoding–decoding model, which conceptualizes communication as a process in which messages are encoded by producers and decoded by audiences through dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings. This framework is particularly relevant for digital media research, where platform affordances and audience agency play a central role in shaping communication outcomes.

The research employs an encoding–decoding analysis as an analytical lens to bridge the relationship between media production and audience reception. The encoding dimension focuses on how meanings are constructed within the YouTube content *"Dream in Jakarta #2,"* including narrative structure, visual representation, language use, and cultural symbols. The decoding dimension examines how NCTzen interpret, negotiate, and internalize these meanings based on their fandom identity, cultural background, and interaction with the YouTube platform. This approach positions fans not as passive recipients of media messages, but as active interpreters whose readings are shaped by both textual features and socio-cultural contexts. The primary object of this research is the YouTube content "Dream in Jakarta #2" published on NCT Dream's official YouTube channel. This content was selected because it combines entertainment, cultural representation, and fan-oriented communication within a single media text. The **units of analysis** include:

1. Media text elements: visuals, dialogue, subtitles, narrative sequences, and representations of Indonesian culture.
2. Audience interpretations: fans' perceptions, emotional responses, and meaning-making related to the content.
3. Platform mediation**:** the role of YouTube features such as subtitles, comment sections, and algorithmic visibility in shaping message reception.

B. Research Subjects and Sampling Technique

The research subjects consist of NCT Dream fans (NCTzen) who have watched the YouTube content "Dream in Jakarta #2." Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with the following criteria:

1. Self-identified as NCTzen.
2. Actively consume NCT Dream content on YouTube.
3. Have watched "Dream in Jakarta #2" at least once.
4. Willing to articulate their interpretations and experiences.

This sampling technique ensures that participants possess sufficient contextual knowledge and engagement with the research object, enabling rich and relevant data collection.

C. Data Collection and Analysis Technique

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure data triangulation:

1. In-depth Interviews
2. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected NCTzen to explore their interpretations of the content, emotional responses, and perceived impacts. Open-ended questions were designed to capture dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings of the messages presented in the video.
3. Observation
4. Non-participant observation was carried out by examining audience interactions in the YouTube comment section, including recurring themes, expressions of fandom identity, and responses to cultural representations. Observation focused on how fans collectively construct meaning in digital spaces.
5. Documentation Study
6. Documentation included screenshots of the video, subtitles, official descriptions, and relevant comment threads. These materials were used to support the encoding analysis and contextualize audience interpretations.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative thematic analysis integrated with the encoding–decoding framework. The analytical steps included:

1. Data Familiarization
2. Transcribed interviews, observational notes, and documentation were read repeatedly to gain an overall understanding of the data.
3. Encoding Analysis
4. The YouTube content was analyzed to identify dominant messages encoded by NCT Dream, including representations of cultural appreciation, fan engagement, and relational closeness.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that *"Dream in Jakarta #2"* operates as a multilayered mass communication text whose effects extend beyond entertainment into affective bonding, cultural interpretation, and collective meaning-making among NCT Dream fans (NCTzen). Field data reveal that fans do not consume the content passively; rather, they actively interpret, negotiate, and reinforce meanings through individual reflection and communal interaction on YouTube.

Three dominant empirical patterns emerged from the data:

1. Strengthening of parasocial closeness between NCT Dream and NCTzen,
2. Cultural curiosity and positive re-evaluation of Indonesian food and local identity, and collective reinforcement of meaning through platform-mediated interaction
3. These patterns correspond closely with Hall's encoding–decoding positions and demonstrate how mass communication effects unfold within a platformized fandom environment.

From the encoding perspective, "Dream in Jakarta #2" presents a carefully constructed narrative that combines concert documentation**,** culinary exploration**,** and casual interpersonal interaction**.** The video encodes Indonesia not merely as a concert location but as a culturally meaningful space that invites curiosity and appreciation.

Several encoded messages were identified:

1. Relational intimacy: informal speech, laughter, and unscripted reactions position the idols as approachable and emotionally present.

2. Cultural appreciation: Indonesian food is introduced with curiosity rather than judgment, framing difference as something enjoyable rather than exoticized.
3. Implicit endorsement: verbal statements such as recommendations to try certain foods function as indirect promotional messages.

These encoded meanings are reinforced visually through close-up shots, reaction-focused editing, and subtitled dialogue, which together invite viewers to share the experience rather than observe it from a distance. Analysis of interview data and YouTube comments shows that NCTzen decode the content through three primary reading positions**.** Most participants demonstrated a dominant reading by accepting the encoded meanings as intended. Fans interpreted the content as evidence of NCT Dream's sincerity, cultural openness, and respect toward Indonesia. Emotional expressions such as happiness, pride, and excitement frequently appeared in both interviews and comments. Fans perceived the idols' enjoyment of Indonesian food as validating local culture, leading to a strengthened emotional bond and a sense of shared identity. This dominant decoding amplified the intended mass communication effect: reinforcing fandom loyalty and positive affect toward both the idols and the represented culture.

Some participants exhibited negotiated readings by accepting the overall message while adjusting its meaning to their personal or cultural context. For example, fans acknowledged that not all foods shown were universally liked by Indonesians, yet they still appreciated the idols' willingness to try them. In this reading, the content was understood as symbolic rather than representative. Fans recognized the constructed nature of YouTube content but continued to value it as meaningful interaction. This negotiation reflects audience awareness of media production while maintaining emotional engagement. Oppositional readings were limited but present. A small number of fans questioned the depth of cultural representation, suggesting that the content primarily served promotional purposes rather than genuine cultural exploration. However, even these readings did not reject the content entirely; instead, they critiqued specific aspects while remaining within the fandom's interpretive boundaries. This indicates that oppositional decoding did not undermine the overall mass communication effect but instead contributed to internal discourse within the fandom.

Table 1. Encoding–Decoding Analysis of "Dream in Jakarta #2"

Encoded Message	Dominant Reading (Fans)	Negotiated Reading	Oppositional Reading
Idol–fan intimacy	Feeling emotionally close to NCT Dream	Aware of media construction but engaged	Seen as performative intimacy
Indonesian food representation	Pride and cultural validation	Symbolic appreciation, not total accuracy	Considered superficial promotion
Verbal recommendations	Trusted endorsement	Entertainment-oriented suggestion	Marketing-driven message
Casual interaction & humor	Authentic personality	Partly scripted but enjoyable	Entertainment strategy

Beyond individual interpretation, YouTube as a platform significantly shaped how meanings were stabilized and circulated. Comment sections functioned as interpretive arenas, where dominant readings were reinforced through repetition, emojis, and collective agreement. Highly liked comments often echoed sentiments of pride, affection, and gratitude, contributing to a perceived consensus. Subtitles played a crucial mediating role by enabling cross-linguistic understanding while also guiding interpretation. Fans frequently referenced specific translated phrases when expressing emotional responses, indicating that subtitles acted as interpretive anchors. Algorithmic visibility further amplified these effects by continuously recommending related NCT Dream content, sustaining emotional engagement and reinforcing dominant meanings over time. The findings demonstrate that the effects of mass communication in this case are not linear but relational and cumulative. Rather than producing a single attitudinal change, "Dream in Jakarta #2" generated multiple effects: emotional reinforcement, cultural curiosity, and collective affirmation. From an encoding–decoding perspective, the dominance of hegemonic and negotiated readings suggests that the encoded messages aligned closely with fandom values and expectations. This alignment allowed mass communication to function effectively despite cultural and linguistic differences. Importantly, the study shows that effects emerge through interaction between text and audience, between fans themselves, and between users and platform affordances. YouTube thus acts not only as a channel but as a co-producer of meaning, shaping how mass communication effects are realized in contemporary digital culture.

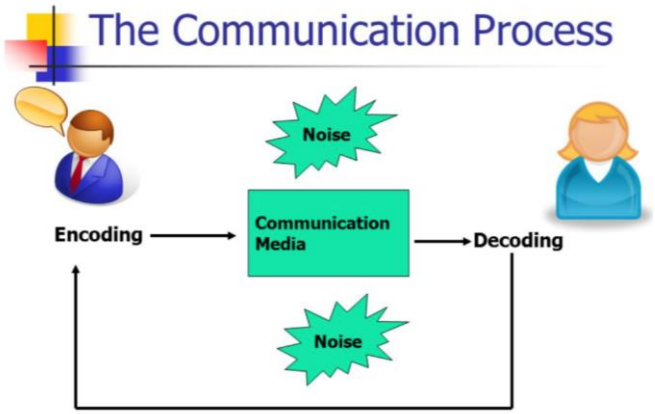


Figure 1. Mass Communication Effects through Encoding–Decoding on YouTube

This image represents the conceptual flow of the research, starting from the encoding process by NCT Dream in the content of "Dream in Jakarta #2", which was then mediated by the YouTube platform (through subtitles, algorithms, and the comment column), before finally being decoded by NCTzen into three reading positions: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. This process produces mass communication effects in the form of strengthening emotional bonds, cultural appreciation, and the construction of collective meaning within the fandom.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the YouTube content "Dream in Jakarta #2" functions as an effective form of mass communication that generates multiple, interrelated effects on NCT Dream fans (NCTzen). Rather than producing a singular or linear impact, the communication effects emerge through a layered process of meaning-making in which emotional attachment, cultural appreciation, and collective identity are simultaneously reinforced. The dominance of hegemonic and negotiated readings among fans indicates that the encoded messages relational intimacy, cultural openness, and symbolic endorsement were largely aligned with the interpretive frameworks and expectations of the fandom. This alignment allowed mass communication to operate effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries, demonstrating that YouTube-mediated content can sustain fandom engagement while fostering positive interpretations of local culture. From a theoretical perspective, the findings reaffirm the continued relevance of the encoding–decoding model in analyzing contemporary digital media phenomena. The study demonstrates that audience interpretation on platform-based media is not solely determined by textual content but is co-produced through interaction with platform affordances such as subtitles, algorithmic recommendations, and comment visibility. The presence of negotiated and limited oppositional readings further illustrates that audience agency remains central, even within highly structured platform environments. By situating mass communication effects within a relational and interpretive framework, this research extends encoding–decoding analysis beyond traditional broadcasting contexts and contributes to a deeper understanding of how meaning circulates within digital fandom ecosystems.

Practically, the results offer important implications for cultural industries, content producers, and communication practitioners. For K-pop agencies and digital media strategists, the findings suggest that culturally situated, experience-based content can strengthen fan relationships while simultaneously promoting local identity in a non-intrusive manner. The study also highlights the strategic importance of platform features particularly subtitling and audience interaction spaces in shaping how messages are received and sustained. For future research, these findings open avenues for comparative studies across fandoms, platforms, or cultural contexts, as well as mixed-method approaches that combine reception analysis with computational metrics. Overall, this study underscores that the effects of mass communication in the digital era are best understood as dynamic processes shaped by content, platforms, and interpretive communities working together.

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