

THE REPRESENTATION OF IDEAL DOCTOR-PATIENT COMMUNICATION IN THE KOREAN DRAMA 'HOSPITAL PLAYLIST' SEASON 1

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ABSTRACT

*Communication between doctors and patients is a crucial aspect of healthcare services, as it influences understanding, trust and the success of the healing process. Popular media, such as television dramas, also shape public perceptions of how ideal communication in the medical world should occur. This study aims to examine the portrayal of ideal doctor-patient communication in the Korean drama *Hospital Playlist* Season 1. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The subjects of this study are scenes and dialogues depicting interactions between doctors, patients and patients' families in the drama. Data collection was carried out through observation and documentation of relevant scenes. Data processing techniques include data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique employs Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, which focuses on three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation and myth. The results of the study show that at the denotative level, doctor-patient communication is represented as a hierarchical relationship, where doctors hold medical authority and power, whilst patients are positioned as recipients of medical instructions and decisions. At the connotative level, *Hospital Playlist* portrays doctor-patient communication as empathetic, dialogical and humanistic, as reflected in doctors' attitudes towards understanding patients' emotional states, employing persuasive approaches, and fostering a sense of security and trust. At the mythical level, the drama normalises the ideology of patient-centred care, which emphasises that the healing process is not solely focused on medical treatment but also on the quality of communication, interpersonal relationships and human values. In conclusion, *Hospital Playlist* Season 1 functions not only as entertainment but also as a representational medium that shapes the public's understanding of ideal doctor-patient communication, emphasising the importance of empathy, openness and a patient-centred approach in medical practice.*

Keywords: Health Communication, Hospital Playlist, Ideal Communication, Doctor-Patient

I. INTRODUCTION

Korean dramas, also known as *K-Dramas*, are a form of audio-visual programme produced by the South Korean television industry and presented in the format of a serialised story comprising a specific number of episodes. Television dramas are essentially mass communication products that convey messages through a systematic combination of narrative, visual elements, dialogue and symbols. According to Mulyana, television programmes such as dramas function as a medium for representing social reality that has undergone a process of selection and interpretation by the message creators; consequently, what is depicted is not reality as it is, but rather a constructed reality (Mulyana, 2017, p.95).

The development of Korean dramas as part of global popular culture cannot be separated from the *Korean Wave* or *Hallyu* phenomenon, which has reached various countries, including Indonesia. Korean dramas are known for their high production quality and narrative strength, which emphasise emotional aspects and interpersonal relationships. Popular media play a significant role in shaping social perceptions, as the messages conveyed through the media are often accepted by the audience as an idealised portrayal or a behavioural reference (Rachmat, 2018, p.52).

In line with this, Morissan explains that television dramas have the power to construct meaning because they combine emotional narratives with characters that resonate with viewers' lives, thereby ensuring that the messages conveyed are received in a more persuasive manner (Morissan, 2018, p. 213).

Thus, Korean dramas can be understood as a medium of communication that serves not only as entertainment but also as a means of conveying values, norms and social messages to a wide audience. In this context, Korean dramas serve as an effective medium for representing various aspects of life, such as family, friendship, work, and professional issues, including the medical world. Such representations have the potential to influence public perceptions of certain professions and the social relationships within them.

One Korean drama that explores the medical world is **Hospital Playlist**. This drama tells the story of five doctors who have been friends since their university days and now work at the same hospital. Unlike most medical dramas, which emphasise the tension of medical cases or extreme conflicts, **Hospital Playlist** places greater emphasis on the human side of medical staff, including the interpersonal interactions between doctors and patients. The mass media often represents certain professions through symbols, dialogue and plotlines that shape a particular image in the minds of viewers (Sobur, 2019, p.88). In **Hospital Playlist**, the hospital is portrayed not only as a clinical space, but also as a social space where communication, empathy and human relationships between doctors and patients take place.

Medical dramas such as **Hospital Playlist** are of particular interest for analysis as they present a representation of healthcare communication that is closely tied to everyday life. Healthcare communication is the process of conveying and exchanging health-related information between healthcare professionals and patients, with the aim of enhancing understanding, trust and the quality of healthcare services.

Health communication emphasises the importance of effective interpersonal relationships between healthcare professionals and patients, where empathy, clarity of information, and a respectful attitude towards patients are key elements in this communication process (Surya, 2021, p.34). Good communication not only helps patients understand their medical condition but also plays a role in building a sense of security and trust in healthcare professionals.

In the doctor–patient relationship, ideal communication is one of the key determinants of the success of medical care. The doctor–patient relationship is no longer viewed merely as a hierarchical one, but rather as a participatory interpersonal relationship. According to Rusmana, ideal doctor-patient communication is characterised by openness, the ability to listen actively, empathy towards the patient’s emotional state, and the use of language that is easily understood by the patient (Rusmana, 2022, p.61).

In practice, doctor-patient communication still frequently faces various obstacles, such as differences in social background, limited consultation time, and the use of medical terminology that is difficult for patients to understand. These conditions have the potential to cause misunderstandings, reduce patients’ trust, and affect their adherence to treatment. Therefore, it is important to examine the ideal representation of doctor-patient communication not only in the context of real-world medical practice, but also in the media consumed by the general public.

The drama **Hospital Playlist** consistently features scenes of communication between doctors and patients that are imbued with empathy, care, and respect for patients as whole human beings. These scenes not only serve to drive the plot forward but also act as symbols representing the ideal values of communication within the medical world. According to Sobur, symbols in the media are never neutral; rather, they always carry specific meanings that can be analysed to understand the ideological messages hidden behind them (Sobur, 2019, p.102). Therefore, the doctor-patient communication scenes in **Hospital Playlist** can be understood as representations of the ideal values the programme seeks to convey to its audience.

Thus, the doctor-patient communication scenes in **Hospital Playlist** can be understood as a representation of the ideal values intended to be conveyed to the audience regarding communication practices in healthcare. Popular media such as television dramas play a strategic role in shaping the public's perceptions, expectations and understanding of the medical world. Based on this analysis, this study focuses on the representation of ideal doctor-patient communication depicted in *Season 1* of the Korean drama **Hospital Playlist**. *Season 1* was selected because it features a number of emotionally powerful doctor-patient communication scenes rich in empathy. By employing Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, this study aims to uncover the denotative, connotative and mythical meanings contained within these representations of communication, thereby making an academic contribution to the fields of health communication and media studies, particularly regarding representation of Medical professions in television dramas.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Ideal Model of Communication*

Ideal communication in healthcare is interpersonal communication that emphasises equality, openness and mutual understanding between doctors and patients. This communication aims not only to convey medical information, but also to build a therapeutic relationship that supports the healing process. According to Lestari, ideal doctor-patient communication is characterised by the doctor's ability to explain medical information clearly, to listen actively to the patient's complaints, and to demonstrate empathy and concern, thereby creating a collaborative and humanistic relationship (Lestari, 2020, p.135). Empathy is a key element in this communication as it enables doctors to understand the patient's emotional and psychological state, in addition to the physical symptoms they are experiencing. Sabri explains that empathy is the ability of healthcare professionals to put themselves in the patient's position, understand their experiences and feelings, and respond appropriately through both verbal and non-verbal communication, thereby building trust, reducing anxiety, and increasing patient engagement in the treatment process (Sabri, 2021, p.88).

In communication studies, the representation of empathy is not only present in real-life interactions, but is also constructed through the mass media, including television dramas. According to Dewi, representations of empathy in visual media are realised through facial expressions, vocal intonation, symbolic gestures, and storylines that depict emotional closeness between characters, enabling the audience to implicitly grasp the meaning of empathy (Dewi, 2020, p.52). Such representations of empathetic communication have the potential to shape public perceptions of the ideal doctor as a humane and communicative figure. Mukuan et al. emphasise that empathetic communication, when portrayed

can influence public perceptions of the quality of healthcare services as well as patients' expectations of doctors' behaviour in the real world (Mukuan et al., 2019, pp. 1–9). Therefore, the concepts of ideal communication and the representation of empathy form the basis for analysing how the Korean drama **Hospital Playlist** represents empathetic doctor–patient communication through visual and verbal cues, whilst constructing social meanings regarding expected healthcare communication practices.

B. *Interpersonal Communication*

Interpersonal communication is a direct communication process between two or more people that enables the exchange of information, emotions and meaning through both verbal and non-verbal messages. This process is reciprocal, allowing each party to receive immediate feedback, build shared understanding, and influence one another's attitudes and perceptions (Neonbeni, 2023, pp. 1–11). In the context of healthcare, doctor–patient interpersonal communication plays a vital role in enhancing patients' understanding of their medical condition, building trust, and supporting therapeutic decision-making. Effective communication is characterised by the doctor's ability to convey information clearly, listen actively to the patient, and tailor the message to the patient's needs. Khairiyah et al. explain that good interpersonal communication contributes to patient satisfaction and the quality of care, as patients who feel listened to, valued and understood tend to respond more positively to the treatment process (Khairiyah et al., 2023, pp. 1–11).

As well as serving as a means of exchanging medical information, interpersonal communication also fosters a therapeutic relationship based on trust, openness, emotional support and empathy between doctors and patients (Khairiyah et al., 2023, pp. 1–11). Consequently, interpersonal communication forms a vital foundation for establishing ideal and empathetic healthcare communication. In this study, this concept is used to analyse how the Korean drama **Hospital Playlist** represents doctor–patient interpersonal communication through dialogue, facial expressions, voice intonation and body language, which together shape the meaning of ideal communication.

C. *Patient–Doctor Healthcare Communication*

Doctor–patient healthcare communication is a process of exchanging information, feelings and meaning within healthcare services, aimed at building a shared understanding of medical conditions and treatment options (Larasati, 2019, p.160). In this communication, doctors do not merely convey medical information but also attend to patients' psychological and cultural needs through a *patient-centred communication* approach. According to Larasati, this approach emphasises understanding the patient's perspective—such as their concerns, hopes and needs—so that healthcare provision can be more comprehensive (Larasati, 2019, p.160). Furthermore, doctor–patient communication is a form of interpersonal communication involving both verbal and non-verbal aspects that influence patients' perceptions of the quality of healthcare. Febriantoro states that the quality of doctor–patient interactions contributes to health education, motivation to seek treatment, and the creation of a sense of security, trust, and patient involvement in clinical decision-making (Febriantoro, 2020, p. 8).

Ideal healthcare communication does not merely focus on conveying medical information, but also takes into account patients' emotional needs, as well as the doctor's ability to explain health conditions and treatment plans clearly and empathetically (Wulur et al., 2019, pp. 1–9). Thus, doctor–patient communication forms the basis for a relationship grounded in trust and *shared understanding*. In this study, this concept is used to analyse how the Korean drama **Hospital Playlist** represents doctor–patient healthcare communication through verbal and non-verbal interactions that construct the meaning of ideal healthcare provision.

D. *The Korean drama *Hospital Playlist**

Television dramas, as products of mass culture, function as cultural texts that represent, interpret and communicate social values and realities to the audience. Wurjanti explains that in the digital age, the medical profession is no longer viewed merely as a provider of healthcare services, but is also constructed as a media commodity that shapes public perceptions of the profession (Wurjanti, 2025, p.11).

In the context of medical dramas, such as **Hospital Playlist**, the narratives presented not only serve as entertainment but also construct ideas regarding the humanistic doctor, ideal doctor-patient communication, and harmonious professional relationships. Putri emphasises that the Hallyu phenomenon in Indonesia has also influenced the way audiences understand social values and practices through Korean dramas (Putri, 2022, p.49), whilst Purwati demonstrates that **Hospital Playlist** portrays warm, assertive and collaborative interpersonal communication amongst doctors as an ideal model of communication (Purwati, 2022, p.27).

These findings are supported by Abidah, who states that the portrayal of friendship and emotional interaction in **Hospital Playlist** fosters a positive perception of social dynamics within the medical environment (Abidah, 2023, p. 33). In line with the concept of *Patient-Centred Care*, Rosa emphasises the importance of empathy, collaboration and two-way communication between doctors and patients as the foundation of high-quality healthcare (Rosa, 2018, p.7). Consequently, **Hospital Playlist** is a relevant subject of research as it not only represents the values of healthcare communication but also constructs meanings regarding ideal doctor-patient communication practices, thereby warranting analysis using a semiotic approach.

E. Roland Barthes' Theory of Semiotics

Semiotic studies in Indonesia emphasise that the media constitute a construction of meaning steeped in ideology, whether visual, verbal or gestural. Ningsih (2020, p.45) explains that signs in the media operate through layers of denotative and connotative meaning, where connotations often contain implicit cultural values and social norms, thereby shaping public perceptions of professions and social relations.

Furthermore, Putra (2021, p. 33) emphasises that in television dramas, visual and gestural signs (such as facial expressions, hand gestures, or interpersonal distance) serve to create 'meaning clusters' that construct character images, such as that of a compassionate doctor who is close to their patients. Moreover, Hidayati (2022, p.27) asserts that popular media often naturalises certain ideologies through the repetition of narratives and visual symbols, leading viewers to accept specific professional representations and moral standards as 'natural' or normal.

In the context of medical dramas such as **Hospital Playlist**, close-up shots of doctors' faces, warm dialogue and supportive gestures are not merely aesthetic elements, but serve to shape a myth about the ideal doctor: empathetic, communicative and professional. Marlina (2022, p.44) adds that these representations function as social constructs that enable viewers to interpret doctors' interpersonal actions as the desired standard of clinical communication.

Consequently, contemporary semiotics in Indonesia emphasises three stages of analysis: the description of signs (denotation), the interpretation of cultural values (connotation), and the reading of normalised ideological constructions (myths). This approach enables researchers to examine how **Hospital Playlist** constructs the image of the 'ideal, empathetic doctor' through the repetition of interpersonal gestures, emotional dialogue, and visual symbols that foster a communicative and humanistic doctor-patient relationship.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design to understand the portrayal of ideal communication and doctor-patient empathy in the Korean drama **Hospital Playlist**. A qualitative method was chosen as it is capable of explaining a phenomenon in depth through the interpretation of both verbal and visual data, thereby yielding a comprehensive understanding of the research subject (Purba et al., 2021, p.2; Sujarweni, 2024, p.20).

The research design employed was library research, which relies on the critical analysis of various scholarly sources—such as books, journals, articles and relevant documents—to establish a theoretical framework and support the analytical process (Abdurrahman, 2024, p. 3). The research was conducted from October 2025 to February 2026 in the city of Pekanbaru, with the object of study being scenes from the Korean drama **Hospital Playlist** that depict ideal doctor-patient communication, as streamed on Netflix.

The object of this research is scenes that represent ideal communication in the Korean drama **Hospital Playlist**, whilst the research subjects include representations of doctor-patient empathy manifested through dialogue, gestures, expressions, and audiovisual symbols. The research object was defined to ensure the research focus was clear and well-directed (Sugiyono, 2019, p.10), whilst the research subject is understood as the unit of analysis targeted for observation, whether in the form of media text or other forms of representation (Nuryaman et al., 2015, p.43). Consequently, this study focuses on how verbal and non-verbal cues construct the meaning of ideal health communication within drama programmes.

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data comprises all episodes of the drama series **Hospital Playlist**, including dialogue, scenes, symbols and plotlines, which serve as the main source of analysis (Supriadi, 2021, p. 65). Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various supporting literature, such as books, scientific journals, articles, and other documents relevant to health communication, interpersonal communication, media representation, and semiotics (Supriadi, 2021, p.70). Data collection was carried out through non-participant observation by repeatedly watching the scenes without becoming involved with the research subjects (LPM Penalaran UNM, 2016, pp. 1–9), as well as documentation in the form of collecting scene clips and academic references to support the data interpretation process (Kriyantono, 2020).

Data analysis was carried out using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach to interpret both verbal and visual signs representing interpersonal communication between doctors and patients in the drama **Hospital Playlist**. The analysis was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method through the stages of sign identification and the interpretation of denotation, connotation and myth contained within each scene. To ensure the credibility of the data, this study employed source triangulation by comparing the findings obtained from the drama series with various supporting sources, such as documentation, archives and relevant scientific literature, thereby ensuring a higher level of validity for the interpretative results.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of a number of scenes in the Korean drama **Hospital Playlist* Season 1*, this study found that the drama consistently represents ideal communication in doctor-patient relationships through verbal and non-verbal signs. These representations are constructed across three levels of meaning—denotation, connotation and myth—which are interrelated in shaping a humanistic and patient-centred ideology of healthcare communication.

At the denotative level, doctor-patient communication in **Hospital Playlist** still reflects common and realistic medical practices. Doctors are positioned as figures possessing medical authority, clinical knowledge and decision-making power, such as forbidding patients from eating before surgery, explaining organ transplant procedures, or instructing patients to adhere to their treatment. At this level, patients and their families are portrayed as those who receive medical instructions, express gratitude for

the success of an operation, and expressing anxiety, resistance, or non-compliance with procedures. Thus, the denotative meaning that emerges reflects the reality of medical communication, which is hierarchical and focused on the safety of clinical procedures.

However, at the connotative level, **Hospital Playlist** presents a significant shift in meaning. The doctor's authority is not portrayed as rigid or oppressive, but is instead negotiated through empathy, dialogue and a persuasive approach. This is evident in scenes where doctors reassure a patient's parents following surgery, where doctors reignite the will to live in patients who refuse treatment due to emotional conflict, and where doctors use humour and promises of a better future to convince patients to comply with pre-operative fasting. These scenes suggest that ideal communication relies not only on the conveyance of medical information, but also on the doctor's ability to understand the patient's psychological and emotional state.

This approach is also clearly evident in scenes depicting interactions with paediatric patients, where doctors use puppets or play-based approaches to foster a sense of security. Connotatively, these actions represent communication that is adaptive, creative and oriented towards the patient's needs, rather than merely towards the efficiency of medical procedures. Thus, **Hospital Playlist** portrays doctor-patient communication as a two-way process that emphasises trust, comfort and interpersonal relationships.

On a mythical level, the drama constructs and normalises an ideology of the ideal doctor as a humanist figure who not only cures illness but also preserves patients' hope, sense of purpose, and human values. Doctors are mythologised not as 'sole saviours', but as part of a collective healing process involving families, organ donors, and the patients' own emotional resilience. The hospital is represented not merely as a clinical space, but as a space of humanity where empathy, sacrifice and solidarity form part of medical practice.

Another myth that has been normalised is the idea that recovery is determined not only by the success of medical interventions, but also by psychological well-being, life motivation, and the quality of communication between doctor and patient. Communication is positioned as an integral part of the therapy itself. This ideology aligns with the principle of *patient-centred care*, in which patients are understood as whole individuals with physical, emotional and social dimensions.

Overall, the results of the analysis show that **Hospital Playlist** Season 1 not only represents doctor-patient communication practices but also actively shapes perceptions of how ideal communication should be conducted within the healthcare sector. Through a series of visual cues, dialogue and gestures, this drama constructs a model of medical communication that is empathetic, equal and humanistic. Thus, **Hospital Playlist** functions not only as a form of entertainment, but also as a medium of representation and education with the potential to influence public perceptions of doctor-patient relationships in the real world.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study on the ideal doctor-patient communication model in the Korean drama **Hospital Playlist**, it can be concluded that the ideal communication depicted in the drama is grounded in the principles of humanistic, empathetic and patient-centred *communication*. Doctors do not merely act as providers of medical care, but also as communicators capable of building good interpersonal relationships with patients and their families.

The ideal communication model identified in this study comprises several key elements. Firstly, empathy, which is the doctor's ability to understand the patient's emotional state and provide psychological support according to the patient's needs. Secondly, openness of information, demonstrated through the honest, clear and easily understandable communication of medical information to both patients and their families. Thirdly, active listening, whereby doctors give patients the opportunity to express their complaints, concerns and

questions without feeling judged. Fourth, adaptive communication, which is the doctor's ability to adapt their communication style according to the patient's age, psychological state and background. Fifth, respect for the patient as an individual who has the right to understand and be involved in decision-making regarding their healthcare.

Through the various scenes analysed, it is evident that ideal communication is not built solely on medical authority, but rather through a relationship grounded in trust, respect and care for the patient. Such communication is capable of fostering a positive therapeutic relationship between doctor and patient, enabling patients to feel more comfortable and secure, and to accept their treatment more readily.

Consequently, the ideal doctor–patient communication model depicted in **Hospital Playlist* Season 1* is a model of interpersonal communication that combines professional competence with humanistic values. This model places the patient at the centre of healthcare and demonstrates that the success of medical care is determined not only by the doctor's clinical skills, but also by the quality of communication established throughout the course of treatment.

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