



## Audience Reception Analysis on the Phenomenon of 'Nonsense' Lyrical Meaning of *Asmalibrasi* by Soegi Bornean

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### Abstract

*This article discusses the prevailing debate regarding the phenomenon of 'nonsense' lyrical meaning of Asmalibrasi, a song released in 2020 by Soegi Bornean, in the scope of audience reception analysis. The analysis focuses on how the audiences interpret the process of meaning making and how they perceive the aesthetic of the song amidst the backlash to its lyrical meaning which is deemed as meaningless and nonsense. This research used qualitative approach and collected the data through semi-structured interview and virtual observation. The data are the combination of primary data collected from semi-structured interview and virtual observation on twitter and secondary data gathered from online news and online articles. The discussion of the audience's reception is based on encoding and decoding model by Stuart Hall to analyse the audience responses. Furthermore, the overall findings were synthesized and analysed according to the concept of characteristic and aesthetic of postmodern artworks, music, by Jameson. From the study, it is shown that the aesthetic of the song Asmalibrasi is not predefined and subject to fixed perception. It is rather more varied according to the listener's individual perception. Moreover, the song Asmalibrasi maintains its aesthetic through emanating a vibe. The vibe emanated by Asmalibrasi is also what matters for the song to be enjoyed by the listeners. In other words, listeners have their personal perspective and consideration aspects in decoding the meaning which further define how they perceive the aesthetic of the song.*

### Keywords:

*Autobiographical, lyrics,  
pop, music, Indonesia*

## INTRODUCTION

Audience reception is a field of study which refers to the way audiences respond to and interpret media (Kitzinger, 1999; Schröder, 2019). In this study, the forms of media which are the subject to respond and interpret are in various forms, such as films, television shows, music, books, and advertisement (Hall, 2007; Hodgkinson, 2017). These various types of media are to be referred as 'text' which bear the intended meaning or message by the producers, which further is the subject to audience reception (Hodgkinson, 2017). The approach considers how a range of factors such as personal experience, socio-cultural background, economic background, social environment, and personal habit and beliefs influence how audiences respond and interpret the message consisted in media. Thus, it reveals how the audiences understand the media message, how the audiences interpret and accept the message, and how the meaning and process of meaning making is attached to or engaged with the audience.

The vast development of media allows the study on audience reception to be more varied both in terms of theoretical approach and methods. One pivotal approach to the study of audience reception is Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model which classified the meaning of media message in regards to how the audience responds to the message (Hall et al., 1980; Hodgkinson, 2017). According to the encoding and decoding model, Hall (1980) explains that the message of media may have different meaning than initially encoded by the media producers, which he refers to as decoded

meaning, the meaning accepted by the audience. Furthermore, he explains that this difference of intended and accepted meaning is the subject to the different socio-cultural perspectives of the audiences and socio-cultural contexts (Hall, 2007).

Within the scope of audience reception analysis, this article discusses the prevailing debate regarding the phenomenon of 'nonsense' lyrical meaning of *Asmalibrasi*, a song released in 2020 by Soegi Bornean. The analysis focuses on how the audiences interpret the process of meaning making and how they perceive the aesthetic of the song amidst the backlash to its lyrical meaning which is deemed as meaningless and nonsense. This study examines music reception on a trending and attention-sparking song entitled *Asmalibrasi* (Anggraini, 2023b). *Asmalibrasi* is a song released by Central Javanese indie pop music group, Soegi Bornean, in 2020. The song was initially infamous due to viral dancing videos on TikTok using the song as the background (Anggraini, 2023b). It is further played more frequently even in public places such as café, restaurants, and stores. The song is easily accepted for its delicate and ear catchy musical harmony and unique lyrical stylistic (Irviani, 2022; Suwaryo, 2022). However, due to its lyrical characteristic in which there is plethora stylistic through using various figurative language (Noviasari & Rahma, 2022; Suwaryo, 2022), it faces such backlash and prompted debates on whether lyrical meaning matters in defining the aesthetic of music. In extent, the lyric is mocked as illogical, confusing, and nonsense in social media platforms such as *twitter*, in which many of the users express their perception toward the aesthetic

of *Asmalibrasi*. It further becomes a trending discussion in various national news sites, such as *detikHOT*, *KapanLagi.com*, *Prambors*, and multinational magazine such as *Vice* (Anggraini, 2023b; KapanLagi.com, 2023; Nadya, 2023; Sulistya, 2023).

Several related studies have been conducted in related to music reception and examining the characteristics of *Asmalibrasi* song and Soegi Bornean. The band Soegi Bornean, is known for their songs about romance and delivered in charming and delicate melodies which often emanate romantic atmosphere and tranquil vibe (Noviasari & Rahma, 2022; Puspitasari, 2022). The song *Asmalibrasi* is based on romance themes and enriched with stylistic and figurative language (Irviani, 2022; Suwaryo, 2022). Furthermore, the lexical choice in the lyrics mainly consisted of words which contain connotative meaning, which indeed makes it more complicated to be interpreted (Irviani, 2022; Suwaryo, 2022). Despite the debate on the lyrical meaning which deemed as nonsense, the research by Sopianti and Firmansyah (2023) showed that the rich of stylistic in *Asmalibrasi* has educative implication in terms of Indonesian language comprehension, multicultural value, and literary comprehension.

Considering the stylistic aesthetic of the song lyric which, conversely, prompted backlash on its logical meaning, the discussion proceeds to the audience's perception of whether it is enjoyable among listeners, despite the debate on its illogical lyrics. Regardless of the so-called nonsense lyrics, the music is enjoyable in terms of its rhythm and

melody which sparks particular vibes and emotional sensation for the listeners. Therefore, the analysis focuses on how the audiences interpret the different meaning of the aesthetic of the song and process of meaning making on how they perceived the song, which become the main focus of the article, in spite of the backlash to its lyrical meaning which is deemed as meaningless and confusingly nonsense. The analysis is conducted to explain the spectrum on how the audiences perceive the meaning differently through the audience reception analysis based on Hall's encoding and decoding. Furthermore, in regard to music reception, the study lies its premise on Fredric Jameson's concept on the characteristic and aesthetic of postmodern artworks.

## METHOD

This research is conducted based on a qualitative approach, in which the data is analysed descriptively in discussing the issue. A qualitative approach is an approach that explores attitudes, behaviour, or experience to gain in-depth understanding (Dawson 2007). Therefore, the qualitative approach is suitable for research that attempts to explore the complexity of social phenomena to gain comprehensive ideas or meaning. Therefore, it is in line with this research which the main focus is to examine the audience's reception about the aesthetic of music according to the listener's perception and experience on how they engage and perceive the meaning and aesthetic of the song. In this case, the article analyses the phenomena within the scope of Jameson's perspective on the characteristic of postmodern artworks

and Hall's encoding and decoding to examine the audience's responses.

This study combines semi-structured interview and virtual observation as the instruments in collecting the data. These methods were integrated to obtain the comprehensive understanding about the perspective of audiences in the prevailing debates about the song *Asmalibrasi* which is the subject to controversy as its lyric is deemed as nonsense. The data are the combination of primary data which collected through semi-structured interview along with virtual observation on social media, *twitter*, and secondary data in form of news and online articles that discuss song *Asmalibrasi* in general, their lyrical meaning, and the ongoing debates.

The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews to 7 respondents regarding their perception to the song in aiming the answer and perception about their experience in listening to the song and whether they find it enjoyable, aesthetic, or in contrary. Moreover, to gain more multifaceted perspectives on the music reception, the participants are chosen both from non-musicians and musicians. Furthermore, the secondary data were collected from various online sites, namely *detik.com*, *KapanLagi.com*, *Vice*, *Prambors*, and *Tribun* in observing the ongoing debate and discussion to synthesize the opinions regarding song *Asmalibrasi* in general and debate on their 'nonsense' lyrical meaning.

To analyse the data, the research discusses the audiences' reception based on encoding and decoding model by Stuart Hall (1980) to classify and analyse the responses

by the audiences. Furthermore, the overall findings were synthesised and analysed according to the concept of characteristic and aesthetic of postmodern artworks, music in particular, by Jameson (1991, 2015).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Audiences' reception on the aesthetic of Asmalibrasi*

The findings were sourced both from virtual observation on the various online news and sites along with synthesized points from opinions on *twitter* and interview the song listeners, which come both from nonmusician and musician community. According to the findings, the main points which provoke the debate is to accept whether the lyrical meaning is a sole defining factor of the aesthetic of music or lyrics is not solely the aspect to define the music aesthetic. Generally, opinions regarding the song were found to be varied, in which some audiences value the song as having the delicate musical tone, but has nonsense lyrics, conversely, some show appreciation on stylistic language of the lyrics, and the emotional or mental atmosphere the song creates. Furthermore, this article classifies these findings according to Hall's encoding and decoding model on how the audience responses to the song. These classification of responses are, according to Hall (1980), dominant-hegemonic position, negotiated position, and oppositional position.

The participants who are non-musicians admits that *Asmalibrasi* is an easy listening song with its enjoyable harmony, instrumentation, and

rhythm. However, when it comes to lyrical sense, the lyric is argued as “*belibet*” which means complicated or difficult to understand the meaning and logical syntactic sequent of the lyric. Furthermore, it is explained that the difficulties in understanding the lyrical meaning is due to the song lyric consisting of lexical choice which uses uncommon language. The difficulties in understanding the lyrics are not solely attributed to the choice of words in syntactic level, but the logical sequence of each line is also deemed as questionable and barely legible. In this sense, the audiences’ response as according to Hall (1980) is classified as the negotiated position, in which he explains that the audiences accept the intended message by the creators, but with some specific ‘rejection’. Hall (1980) further explains that some specific point of message is not accepted due to the audience’s personal interpretation, therefore, it is rather modified than rejected. Delving into the research findings, in this case of the audience’s perception, they accept and enjoy the aesthetic of song as intended by the artist. It is the melody, harmony, and the beauty of the music they accept, but not the lyrics, which they deemed as barely understandable.

Regarding the barely sensible lyrics, the lyrics of song *Asmalibrasi* is considered complicated even for some participants who understand literary language. Those who are both musicians and nonmusicians agreed on one point in regard to the lyrical logic, which is said as nonsense. However, this might be due to their choice of uncommon words, which is the song is not only in Indonesian, but there are also Javanese and Sanskrit words written in the lyrics. Therefore, it feels strange to them and difficult to

understand the lyrical cohesion and meaning, even just to accept the logical sequence of the lyrics. To some extent, the audiences even express that they feel inconvenience when the song is played in public places. They claim that the nonsense lyrics and the fact that it is overplayed, due to its popularity, makes them feel bored or even more irritated while listening to the song. To a further extent, some people are even making a video parody of the song, in which they simplified the lyrics in response to the original one which is deemed as complicated (Anggraini, 2023a; KapanLagi.com, 2023). The responses, in this manner, is regarded as the oppositional position, which according to Hall (1980), oppositional decoding is when the audiences reject the intended message as encoded by the media producers. In response, the audiences interpret the meaning in a different way which counter the intended meaning of aesthetic of the song by the artist.

Despite the oppositional position shown by the audiences in accepting the song, let alone the prevailing sceptical public opinion toward the song *Asmalibrasi*, the findings show that the negotiated position is found to be more dominant taken by the listeners. It appears that the uncommon choice of words and seemingly illogical cohesion of the lyrical sequence is deemed as the backfire to an already easy listening and ear catchy song. Nevertheless, the finding shows that some listeners appreciate the stylistic creativity of the song lyrics, in which some say it as “*indah sekali*” or very beautiful in talking about the lyrical composition of its lexical choice. They admire the beautiful words which combined along with delicate harmony and tone

sung by such a beautiful voice of the singer. At this point, the listeners admit that they indeed do not comprehensively understand the lyrical meaning of the song, regardless, they enjoy the song as a whole artwork which is composed with such an aesthetic combination of lyrics, harmony, tone, instrumentation, and the voice of the singer which they deemed as ethereal, regardless barely comprehensible.

Furthermore, whilst there is seemingly no consensus in the debate on the listeners' perception to the song, particularly on the lyrical meaning and the sense of the song, the acknowledged aesthetic of the song as a whole is seemingly conceivable. For its message about romantic love story, the song is not only created upon stylistical lyrics, which prompt the debate, but also along with charming harmony, melody, tone, and delivered by the delicate voice of the singer. Despite the sparked arguments on whether the lyric is sensible or logical, the listeners, the participants, agree that the song emanates a tranquil atmosphere while they listen to the song. In other words, regardless of the lyrical meaning, both listeners who understand and accept the lyrics aesthetic and those who do not understand and find it illogical find the song amusing as a whole artwork. They find it creates a peaceful atmosphere while they listen to it, especially in particular situations, such as when someone has to rest after a long day or work or college. Listeners claim that it transmits what they called as a 'vibe', which refers to emotional feeling or atmosphere in certain spatial or temporal situations.

### *The aesthetic of Asmalibrasi: amalgamations of musical and non-musical elements*

According to the research findings, both from the negotiated position and oppositional position shown by the audiences, the discussion comes up to the question, does lyrical meaning is the only one thing that matters? And which elements actually prevails in enjoying the aesthetic of *Asmalibrasi* song? In this discussion, the article aims to discuss the answer which relies on the premises by Jameson (1991, 2015) about the characteristic and aesthetic of postmodern artworks, in this case, music. Furthermore, the discussion recalls the reception from audiences and synthesizes the overall findings on how the audience defines and enjoy the aesthetic of *Asmalibrasi* with Hall's (1980) encoding and decoding model.

As one of the elements that construct a song, it is true that lyric is one aspect that draws people interested to enjoy a musical artworks (Kivy, 1989), such as giving a relatable sensation when the listeners find it meaningful or even reflects their personal experience. As argued by McClary (1991), lyrics are significant aspects in shaping the meaning of music, especially when it comes to the notion that music express message and allow the exchange of ideas. Regardless, lyric is not the only one aspect as an entry-point to appreciate the music. In enjoying music, people are also fond of the musical elements, such as the compelling and catchy tone, melody, or rhythm; some listeners may be fascinated by the complexity and delicate harmonies and competence in the use of instrumentation and the voice of the singer (Madsen & Geringer, 1990).

Furthermore, there are also listeners who are fans of more non-musical elements in appreciating and enjoying a music. It emphasises on how the music emanates a particular mood or emotion that resonates with them personally.

In regard to non-musical elements, which become the focus of this articles to define the aesthetic of music, this article focusses to explain how the music is enjoyable because of its ability to affects and transmits atmosphere to the listeners. The discussion rely on the premise by Fredric Jameson who argues that music is perceived beyond tangible sensation, such as mood or atmosphere it evokes (Jameson, 1991, 1998). As a literary critic and Marxist philosopher, Jameson has written extensively on postmodernism artworks which includes contemporary literature, films, and music (Akmal, 2013; Jameson, 2015). He states that postmodern artworks are closely related with its societal setting and explain how both are closely interrelated (Goodwin, 1991; Jameson, 1998; McHale, 1992). Moreover, he contends that postmodern music as the product of capitalist society which is characterised by its lack of originality which he refers as 'pastiche' (Jameson, 1983, 1991, 2015). In other words, postmodern music emphasises on the orchestration of effect and recycling existing styles. Therefore, postmodernism music is deemed as rather creating atmosphere or mood than becoming meaningful of its own.

To put into perspective, Hall (1980) argues that the model of encoding and decoding highlights that the meaning of message transmitted by media is not static. It is rather

dynamic due to the fact that the meaning is subject to audiences' interpretation and negotiation. In this extent, different from the semiological approach, Hall (1980) highly considers the significance of socio-cultural context in which the message is produced, distributed, and consumed. In other words, it regards the audiences' response to define meaning and how their different socio-cultural background plays an important role in determining the interpretation and reception. Therefore, the meaning of a media message is not predetermined or there is no fixed meaning of a particular text or sign, rather it is subject to audiences' negotiation and interpretation to define the decoded meaning.

The research finds that regardless of the illogical meaning of the lyric of *Asmalibrasi*, the finding shows that according to the listeners' synthesized perception, the song is undeniably enjoyable in regards to its multifaceted aspects. According to the findings on listeners' reception on *Asmalibrasi*, logical lyrics which further define the meaning of the song does strongly determine how the song is perceived. However, it is, in fact, not the sole aspect which determine the listeners' perception to appreciate the aesthetic of the song. It is due to the musical elements of the song, which orchestrated the reflection of harmony, rhythm, tone, instrumentation, and vocal which are also focal points in music reception.

Moreover, the non-musical elements, which formerly described according to Jameson (1991, 2015), does affect the music value in creating aesthetic experience for the listeners to the song *Asmalibrasi*. It is the *vibe* which emanates from the song and

gives them the atmosphere, mood, or vibe of tranquility, even though the lyric is not fully and necessarily understood. Therefore, as defined by Hall (1980) that the oppositional and negotiated reading by the audiences act a pivotal role in the contestation against the hegemonic dominant order. In this case, the encoding and decoding model not only emphasises the role of predefined or fixed meaning which further shapes dominant interpretations of particular meaning of the *Asmalibrasi* song which further define how it is enjoyed or accepted by the listeners. However, the discussion on encoding and decoding model which categorised the responses by audiences, to the negotiated and the oppositional position, allows the possibility of more diverse audience reception from the listeners on the aesthetic of the song.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study examines the phenomena of several negative reactions referring to the aesthetic value of *Asmalibrasi* song by highlighting the aspect of its lyrical logic. According to the study, the findings show the main point that music is not the subject which is confined predefined meaning to be enjoyable. In other words, it has its own way to emanate its aesthetic. Most importantly, the findings prove that through audience reception, the decoded meaning is defined by the listeners according to their own perspective and experience to define the aesthetic of the song, whether it is enjoyable or not. Therefore, the aesthetic of the song *Asmalibrasi* is not predefined and subject to fixed perception in determining the aesthetic of music. It is rather more

varied according to the listener's individual perception.

Moreover, the finding show that *Asmalibrasi* maintains its aesthetic through non-musical elements by emanating a vibe. Which according to Jameson, postmodern music is characterised as pastiche, it is not necessarily meaningful rather it evokes an atmosphere which affects the emotional state or mood of the listeners which is referred as *vibe*. In other words, the *vibe* emanated by *Asmalibrasi* is also what matters for the song to be enjoyed by the listeners. Thus, the listeners have their personal perspective and consideration aspects in decoding the meaning which further define how they perceived the aesthetic of the song.

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