

Representation Of *Toxic Positivity* In *Clash Of Champions* Shows On The Ruangguru Youtube Channel (Case Study at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar)

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Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the representation of toxic positivity in the Clash of Champions broadcast on the Ruangguru YouTube Channel (Case Study at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar). The research method used was qualitative with a descriptive approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation with students at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar. The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. The results show **a representation of toxic positivity**. According to students of SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar, the message that appears in the Clash of Champions broadcast on the Ruangguru YouTube channel is manifested through a narrative that emphasizes the importance of always thinking positively, not giving up, and continuing to fight without a balanced depiction of emotional realities such as sadness, failure, or fatigue. The broadcast tends to simplify the process of achieving success, as if it only requires passion and motivation, without considering social, psychological, or economic obstacles. **The meaning contained behind the narrative and visuals of the broadcast** Clash of Champions represents toxic positivity in the form of pressure to always appear strong, cheerful, and never give up under any circumstances. According to some students, these messages can be uplifting, but can also be burdensome when under pressure, because they feel they are not allowed to show vulnerability or failure. The consistent visuals of success and happiness reinforce the construct that negative emotions are a form of weakness that must be avoided. **The responses of students at SMA Negeri***



1 Tumijajar to the representation of toxic positivity in the Clash of Champions show varied. Some students accepted the motivational messages as constructive (dominant-hegemonic), others interpreted them critically (negotiated), and still others felt the messages actually created emotional pressure (oppositional)

Keywords: Representation, *toxic positivity* , *Clash of Champions*, Ruangguru Youtube Channel.

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought significant transformations in the field of education, with the presence of various digital *platforms* that not only support learning but also introduce various forms of interesting and interactive academic competitions. One innovative *platform* that exists to meet the needs of education in the digital era is Ruangguru, which offers a variety of online learning solutions that can be easily accessed. One of their flagship programs is "*Clash of Champions*," a digital-based competition program broadcast through their YouTube channel. This program is designed to motivate students to achieve academic success through exciting challenges that test their knowledge and skills, while providing a fun and energetic learning experience. By using digital *platforms* like Ruangguru, students can not only learn but also compete healthily in a more flexible and open environment, which can increase their interest and motivation to continue learning (Ruangguru, 2024).

The "*Clash of Champions*" program aims to motivate students to achieve in an interactive and fun way through digital-based competitions. This program offers students the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in various fields, with the hope of encouraging a spirit of learning and healthy competition. However, behind these benefits, there are indications that this program has the potential to foster the phenomenon of *toxic positivity*. *Toxic positivity* refers to an excessive drive to maintain a positive attitude, even though participants may face negative feelings, stress, or fatigue. This can lead to ignoring the actual emotional state of participants, thus negatively impacting their mental health (Taufik and Wijayanti, 2020).

Toxic positivity is a psychological phenomenon in which individuals or groups feel pressured to display a positive attitude, even under difficult circumstances. This often overlooks genuine emotional needs, potentially leading to stress, anxiety, or decreased motivation. In an educational context, this phenomenon can arise from excessive social expectations or motivational content, such as those found in academic competition programs (Sutrisno and



Purnamasari, 2019).

Several previous studies have examined *toxic positivity* in the educational context. Smith and Johnson (2022) found that *toxic positivity* has a significant impact on students' mental health, particularly when they are in a competitive environment that demands high achievement. Their research explains that the urge to maintain a positive attitude without considering one's true emotional state can trigger chronic stress, anxiety, and even *burnout*. This occurs because students feel pressured to meet unrealistic social expectations, thus ignoring negative feelings that should be managed healthily.

Rahman and Sari's (2021) research notes that digital education *platforms* often fail to consider the psychological impact of excessive motivational content, especially on students experiencing academic stress. They found that the drive to achieve through motivational narratives can leave students feeling overwhelmed and unable to express their negative emotions in a healthy manner. Consequently, this can negatively impact students' mental well-being, increasing stress levels and feelings of inadequacy, which is counterproductive to the very purpose of education.

These two studies demonstrate the importance of adopting a more humanistic approach to supporting students, one that focuses not only on academic achievement but also on their emotional and psychological well-being. This approach involves recognizing the diversity of students' emotional experiences and providing space for them to express any negative feelings they may be experiencing without feeling pressured to always think positively. In this way, education can become more inclusive and supportive, creating an environment that fosters not only achievement but also good mental health for students.

This research differs from previous studies (*gap research*) because it uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with a focus on a case study at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar. The goal is to analyze the representation of *toxic positivity* in more depth, not only from the program content but also from the perspective of students' experiences who have watched *the Clash of Champions program*. This is expected to provide a more specific and contextual picture of the phenomenon. This research is relevant not only for educators and digital educational content developers, but also for parents and students. The results are expected to provide an understanding of the emotional impact of digital-based competition programs and provide input for *platform managers* like Ruangguru to create more emotionally inclusive content. Thus, this research contributes to the development of education that is not only oriented towards achievement, but also towards students' mental well-being.



This research is important because it provides an opportunity to identify the potential negative impacts of *toxic positivity representations* in digital educational content. Amid the popularity of programs like "*Clash of Champions* ,"it's crucial to ensure that the motivation provided to students isn't excessive and negatively impacts their mental health. This research can also provide a foundation for educational content developers to create more emotionally balanced programs that support student well-being while also encouraging academic achievement.

Students at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar have shown high interest in the "*Clash of Champions*" program, with many expressing great enthusiasm for participating. The program is designed to enhance students' enthusiasm for learning and academic achievement, as well as to provide a more interactive and enjoyable learning experience. However, despite its clear positive goals, some students reported significant emotional distress. This pressure stems from the unspoken demand to consistently project a positive attitude, regardless of their true emotional state. Students feel compelled to maintain an optimistic and happy appearance, even when facing challenges such as failure in competitions, declining academic performance, or mental fatigue that arise during the learning process. This pressure is exacerbated when they perceive that failure or inability to remain positive will result in negative evaluations from classmates or others involved in the program. This leads to feelings of anxiety and stress that can negatively impact psychological well-being, particularly among students already vulnerable to academic stress (SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar, 2024).

Based on initial interviews with 10 students involved in the program, 6 of them revealed that they felt burdened by the expectation to always appear optimistic, even though they were feeling hopeless or frustrated. Some students also reported feeling alienated or uncomfortable in an environment that constantly emphasized the importance of "always being positive" without allowing them space to express negative feelings. This phenomenon leads to greater concerns about the psychological impact of *toxic positivity* , which is beginning to emerge through the program's representation. These impacts can include a decline in students' mental health, where they feel compelled to constantly pretend to be happy and optimistic even when they don't truly feel that way, which can ultimately affect their overall emotional well-being (Preliminary survey at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar, 2024).



DISCUSSION

Toxic Positivity Representation that Appears in the *Clash of Champions Show* on the Ruangguru YouTube Channel According to Students of SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar

Based on in-depth interviews with Sisca Marya Susanti, a teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar, and 15 students in grade XI I 6 IPA , it was found that the *Clash of Champions show* on the Ruangguru YouTube channel displays quite dominant forms of *toxic positivity*. The show explicitly emphasizes the importance of fighting spirit, relentless hard work, and success as the main indicators of success, but ignores the representation of human emotions such as fatigue, doubt, or failure. This kind of representation is considered to have a psychological impact, especially for students who are under academic or emotional pressure. Instead of feeling inspired, some students experience feelings of guilt or inadequacy when they are unable to meet the excessively positive standards displayed.

Ms. Sisca explained that while the show has a good intention, namely to raise morale and provide inspiration for students, the narrative tends to focus too much on success, fighting spirit, and resilience continuously, without allowing enough space for a realistic representation of emotional processes. Not showing doubt, fatigue, or failure as part of the journey can actually give the impression that negative feelings should be hidden or avoided. This has the potential to create hidden psychological pressure for students, especially those who are in a vulnerable mental state, because they feel they must always be strong and achieve without being allowed to feel tired or sad. According to her,

"This content is indeed very motivating and full of positive energy, but on the other hand, it can also create hidden pressure, as if every individual must always appear strong and resilient in facing every situation. This kind of narrative does not always align with the psychological reality of every child, especially those who are in a fragile mental state. Instead of feeling helped, they can actually feel isolated or failed because they are unable to meet the excessively positive expectations displayed. "

From the perspective of **representation theory** proposed by Stuart Hall, the show *Clash of Champions* can be understood as a form of meaning construction that is not neutral, but rather represents social reality from a particular perspective , in this case a narrative about success achieved through relentless fighting spirit. This representation does not simply depict successful figures, but also forms a certain understanding in the minds of the audience about how someone "should" face life's challenges. When realistic emotional aspects, such as feelings of failure,



fatigue, or disappointment are not shown, it creates an unequal picture and has the potential to give rise to inhumane expectations of oneself.

Meanwhile, through **reception theory**, also developed by Stuart Hall, we can see that messages in media are not always received in their entirety according to the creator's intent. Audiences have the active capacity to interpret messages based on their respective social, psychological, and cultural backgrounds. In this context, although the show was intended to be motivating and inspiring, some students interpreted it as containing hidden pressure or emotional burdens. This demonstrates the difference between *preferred reading* (the dominant reading expected by the creator) and *negotiated* or even *oppositional reading* from audiences experiencing certain mental states.

Meanwhile, based on interviews with 15 students, the majority stated that the show *Clash of Champions* portrayed characters who consistently appeared optimistic, strong, and successful in facing life's challenges. Ten students stated that the show provided positive encouragement and motivated them to be more enthusiastic in learning and facing difficulties. However, eight of the same students also admitted to feeling a hidden pressure because the show's narrative seemed to leave no room for failure, fatigue, or negative emotions such as sadness and disappointment. This indicates an ambiguity in the message's reception: on the one hand, it is inspiring, but on the other hand, it has the potential to form unrealistic expectations of oneself, especially for students who are mentally unstable or experiencing academic pressure.

These findings can be further analyzed through Stuart Hall's **theory of representation**, which states that media do not objectively reflect reality, but rather shape it through the way it presents characters, events, and values. In the context of the *Clash of Champions show*, success and fighting spirit are portrayed as the only ideal narrative, making negative emotions such as failure or fatigue invisible and seemingly unworthy of representation. This creates an incomplete representation and can influence how students interpret their own experiences.

Furthermore, Hall's **reception theory** also highlights that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages, but rather have an active capacity to interpret meaning. While broadcasters may intend to convey an inspirational message (*preferred reading*), some students respond with a different reading (*negotiated* or *oppositional reading*), feeling depressed because the broadcast does not reflect their emotional reality. Furthermore, when viewed through George Gerbner's **cultivation theory**, repeated exposure to similar shows featuring strong, successful, and consistently optimistic characters can shape long-term perceptions of what the world should be like. Over time, this can create *mean world syndrome* in various forms. namely the view that



the world demands a person to always be strong and positive, so that individuals feel inadequate when experiencing weakness or negative emotions.

One of the students of class XI I 6 IPA stated,

"Initially, I felt incredibly motivated by the content because it conveyed positivity and a drive to keep moving forward. However, over time, I began to feel guilty whenever I felt tired or stressed, as if those negative feelings were invalid and should be suppressed. There was an indirect pressure to always appear energetic and strong, when in reality, I wasn't up to it. This created a psychological burden, as I felt like a failure simply by showing my vulnerable side."

This statement reflects a form of *toxic positivity* that appears through repeated messages in shows such as: *"Don't give up!"*, *"You can do it if you want to!"*, and *"It all depends on your passion!"*, without taking into account real obstacles such as family pressure, economics, or emotional distress. This reflective statement from a 12th-grade science student demonstrates the complex emotional dynamics resulting from exposure to motivational content that overemphasizes the positive. Expressions such as *"feeling guilty whenever I feel tired or stressed"* and *"there is an indirect pressure to always appear enthusiastic and strong"* indicate a phenomenon known as **toxic positivity**, which is an excessive social pressure to only display positive emotions, while suppressing the expression of negative emotions that are actually psychologically normal.

This statement can be explained through *Stuart Hall*'s **theory of representation**. In this context, motivational content broadcast on platforms like YouTube creates an idealized representation of success, resilience, and a relentless fighting spirit. This representation does not reflect a complete and human emotional reality, but rather constructs the image that a good or successful person is someone who is always strong and positive, regardless of the situation they face. This kind of representation is hegemonic, establishing certain social standards that are considered universal truths, when in reality they are cultural constructs.

Furthermore, reception theory is also relevant to explaining how students interpret messages in the content they consume. According to *Stuart Hall*, audiences do not always receive media messages as intended by the creator (*preferred reading*). In this case, students experience what is called *negotiated reading* or even *oppositional reading*, where they acknowledge the motivational side of the content but at the same time also criticize its impact on their personal emotional state. They do not reject the content completely, but modify its meaning based on their own experiences and mental state.



Additionally, through the lens of *George Gerbner* 's cultivation theory , the feelings of guilt felt by these students could be linked to the long-term effects of exposure to homogenous content. In this case, a positive narrative devoid of emotional realism. According to this theory, the more frequently a person is exposed to certain representations in the media, the more likely they are to form a perception of the world that aligns with the narrative they consume. If the dominant narrative is one of striving, with no room for failure, students may internalize the belief that feelings of weakness or failure are aberrations, not a natural part of human life.

Thus, the students' subjective experiences demonstrate how content that appears superficially positive and inspiring can actually cause hidden psychological distress when not balanced with a comprehensive representation of emotional reality. This is an important reflection for educational content creators to pay closer attention to the complexity of audience reception and ensure that motivational narratives also allow for vulnerability, failure, and the healing process.

Additionally, six other students explicitly stated that the show *Clash of Champions* portrayed the characters' successes in a linear and overly simplistic manner. They argued that the show framed the main characters' achievements as if they were driven solely by determination, passion, and positive thinking, without depicting the failures, doubts, or emotional obstacles that naturally occur in real life. In their view, this created an unrealistic perception of the journey to success and instilled the false belief that failure was the result of a lack of passion or negative thinking. not as a natural part of the learning and growing process.

This phenomenon can be explained through the theory of the social construction of reality proposed by Berger and Luckmann. According to this theory, social reality is formed through interaction processes, especially through the media, which plays a crucial role in constructing shared meaning. Shows like *Clash of Champions* contribute to shaping the social understanding of "success" by simplifying its complexity and creating the construct that success is the absolute result of personal mental strength. This kind of narrative can give rise to what is known as *false consciousness* , where individuals begin to internalize the idea that all achievements are solely personal, ignoring the structural, social, and emotional factors that contribute to it.

Furthermore, through *George Gerbner* 's cultivation theory , such shows, when consumed continuously, can have a long-term effect on students' worldview. Repeatedly showing successful figures who never fail, never look sad, and are always full of motivation will create a cultivated reality *where* students feel that the real world should be like that too. When reality does not match



this narrative , for example when they experience failure or fatigue , feelings of guilt, shame, and even loss of self-confidence arise because they consider themselves "abnormal."

In other words, instead of providing healthy motivation, overly perfect representations of success can actually create unrealistic and psychologically burdensome standards. This highlights the importance of engaging content producers to frame narratives in a more balanced way—not just showing the end result, but also showcasing the ups and downs, doubts, and recovery that shape a whole person.

The visuals in *Clash of Champions* were also considered to reinforce the message of *toxic positivity* through cinematic elements such as the use of upbeat, uplifting music, characters' almost always smiling facial expressions, and editing techniques that consistently emphasized achievement and *happy endings*. These visual elements created a monotonous emotional atmosphere and did not allow for the expression of other emotions, such as sadness, doubt, or despair, which are also valid and human. Several students stated that the lack of representation of these vulnerable moments made them feel compelled to mask negative feelings in real life to maintain their perceived "strong" or "champion-minded" image.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through Stuart Hall's theory of representation , which emphasizes that media not only conveys information but also shapes meaning through specific cultural codes. In this case, the broadcast constructs a narrow understanding of "mental strength," namely only through the visualization of enthusiasm, smiles, and success. This kind of representation creates a false emotional standard, where expressions such as crying or feeling like a failure are not given space, so that the audience indirectly absorbs that these emotions are inappropriate to display.

Furthermore, using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach , visual elements such as cheerful music, smiles, and transitions to happy endings can be seen as forms of signification *that* construct *the myth* of success. In this construction, these signs contain a latent message that someone who is not always happy or does not display emotional strength is weak. This *myth* then works as a cultural mechanism that covers the complexity of human life with a single narrative: success means always being strong, always happy, and never giving up. When broadcasts do not present symbols of failure, sadness, or crisis, these emotions are symbolically "removed" from the social reality constructed by the media. As a result, students feel compelled to engage in *emotional masking* , hiding their negative emotions to conform to media standards. This can create hidden psychological burdens and undermine healthy emotional processing, especially during adolescence, a crucial phase of emotional development.



From the overall interviews, it can be concluded that the representation of *toxic positivity* in the show *Clash of Champions*, according to students at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar, includes excessive motivational narratives, unbalanced emotional visualizations, and a simplification of success factors. While not all students interpreted this negatively, most felt the show could trigger hidden emotional stress, especially for those who are mentally fragile.

According to Stuart Hall, representation is how media constructs meaning through culturally produced language, symbols, and narratives. Research shows that the *Clash of Champions program* constructs meanings about the "ideal student" as a strong, resilient, and optimistic individual. In this context, *toxic positivity* is represented through visuals and narratives that portray success as the only emotion worthy of expression, while negative emotions such as failure or sadness are concealed. This representation is not neutral, but carries ideological content that can shape students' perceptions of how they should behave when facing pressure.

Berger and Luckmann explain that social reality is shaped through a continuous process of interaction and the absorption of meaning. The show *Clash of Champions* contributed to the social construct that to be successful, one must always be positive, strong, and not show weakness. This narrative was then internalized by some students as an ideal standard, even though in reality not everyone is able to survive without showing a vulnerable side. Therefore, the reality formed by the show becomes a pseudo-construction that does not always align with the psychological dynamics of adolescents, but is still perceived as social truth by some viewers.

In Barthes's semiotic theory, signs in media consist of **a signifier** and **a signified**, which together form meaning. Based on the research results, visual signs such as happy facial expressions, bright colors, and optimistic music in the *Clash of Champions show* function as signifiers that form signs of "success" and "fighting spirit." However, this denotative meaning has a deeper connotative meaning, namely the pressure to hide negative feelings to conform to the ideal image in the show. This explains how media symbols can form meanings that are not always psychologically positive.

Agenda Setting Theory : McCombs & Shaw state that the media does not tell the public what to think, but what is important to think about. The *Clash of Champions broadcast* established an agenda that "fighting spirit," "boundless positivity," and "success at a young age" were important and worth fighting for. As a result, students began to value a positive attitude as the only way to deal with problems, making the emotional distress of failure or feelings of inadequacy a private matter that must be hidden. This demonstrates how the media can shape students' thinking through the repeated emphasis of certain themes.



Gerbner states that long-term exposure to media can shape a person's perception of reality. In this study, shows like *Clash of Champions*, which consistently portray positive narratives and success, when consumed repeatedly, can create a positive version of "mean world syndrome," namely "bright world syndrome"—the perception that everyone should always be cheerful and successful. Students who are constantly exposed to such content begin to believe that expressions of sadness or failure are a form of weakness, when in fact, they are a natural part of the learning process. This demonstrates the cultivation effect in shaping students' long-term perceptions of emotion and achievement.

Stuart Hall stated that media messages are encoded by the creator and decoded differently by the audience, resulting in three possible positions: **dominant-hegemonic**, **negotiated**, and **oppositional**. The results of this study indicate that students' responses to the *Clash of Champions* broadcast were divided into these three positions. Some students accepted the motivational message in its entirety (*dominant*), others agreed with some and rejected some (*negotiated*), while the rest rejected the content of the message because they felt emotionally burdened (*oppositional*). This proves that the meaning of the broadcast is not singular, but is highly dependent on the psychological background and individual experiences of each student.

Based on the research and discussion, it can be analyzed that the representation of *toxic positivity* that appears in the *Clash of Champions* show on the Ruangguru YouTube channel, according to students of SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar, is manifested through a narrative that emphasizes the importance of always thinking positively, not giving up, and continuing to fight in any situation. This show consistently features success stories that glorify fighting spirit and high optimism, but does not provide sufficient space for the representation of more complex human emotions, such as sadness, failure, frustration, or mental exhaustion. In the students' view, this type of content presents an unrealistic emotional standard, because it ignores the reality that in adolescent life, especially amid academic and social pressures, negative feelings are normal and need to be validated. This overly one-sided representation tends to simplify the process of achieving success, as if enthusiasm and motivation are sufficient without considering various structural obstacles, such as economic limitations, family pressure, or individual psychological conditions. As a result, some students feel compelled to suppress their negative emotions to conform to the narrative constructed in the show, which in turn can cause its own psychological burden.



The Meaning Contained Behind the Narrative and Visuals of *the Clash of Champions* Show in Representing *Toxic Positivity* According to Students of SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with Sisca Marya Susanti as a teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar, as well as 15 students from class XII 6 IPA, it was found that the *Clash of Champions* broadcast on the Ruangguru YouTube channel had various psychological impacts on students. This broadcast was initially received positively because it presented a motivational spirit and inspirational stories that sparked a passion for learning, however, in the process of further acceptance and interpretation by students, indications emerged that the broadcast also conveyed forms of *toxic positivity* hidden behind the narrative and visuals displayed such as the glorification of relentless enthusiasm, simplification of the process towards success, and obscuration of negative emotional experiences such as fatigue, failure, or disappointment, which ultimately created psychological pressure for students who felt unable to adjust to the standards of optimism displayed.

Mrs. Sisca Marya Susanti said that:

"I see the intention of this show as being good, namely to inspire students to persevere. However, the narrative tends to glorify success and the spirit of never giving up, without allowing for failure or negative emotions. This could set too high a mental standard for students."

The results of this interview indicate an active decoding process by the audience as explained in Stuart Hall's **Reception Theory**. In this theory, the audience does not passively receive messages as intended by the content creator, but rather critically interprets the meaning based on their social background, experiences, and psychological conditions. In this case, students are able to understand that the messages conveyed by the broadcast are not entirely realistic and can actually create mental stress. Furthermore, when viewed from **the Social Construction of Reality Theory** by Berger and Luckmann, the repeated narrative of success and an attitude of never giving up forms a social reality that is perceived as a general truth, namely that success can only be achieved by always thinking positively and not complaining, without considering the context of struggle and failure as a natural part of the process. This view is also in line with Stuart Hall's **Representation Theory**, where the broadcast forms a representation of the "ideal student" who is mentally and emotionally strong, which then becomes the dominant standard among viewers, even though not all students have the same mental condition.

Most students also expressed similar sentiments. One student, R (initials), said:



"Initially, I felt incredibly motivated by the content because it conveyed positivity and encouragement to keep moving forward. However, over time, I began to feel guilty whenever I felt tired or stressed, as if those negative feelings were invalid and should be suppressed. There was an indirect pressure to always appear energetic and strong, when in reality, I wasn't up to it. This created a psychological burden, as I felt like a failure simply by showing my vulnerable side. "

R's statement reflects how the motivational messages in *Clash of Champions* not only shape perceptions of success but also influence how individuals understand and evaluate their own emotions. Within the context of George Gerbner's **Cultivation Theory**, repeated exposure to narratives that emphasize relentless passion and extraordinary achievement can shape a symbolic reality, where the world is perceived as a place that only allows room for persistence and success, with no tolerance for failure or vulnerability. The impact, as experienced by R, is the emergence of unhealthy internal pressure to conform to the reality created by the media. Furthermore, within the framework of Roland Barthes's **Semiotic Theory**, this show conveys the denotative meaning of a success story, but connotatively embodies the myth that "success belongs to those who are always strong and think positively." This myth creates a new meaning for emotions: that weakness or sadness is not only not shown but also not acknowledged. As a result, students like R feel the need to hide negative feelings in order to maintain a self-image that aligns with the idealized construct created by the show. This can also be interpreted through McCombs and Shaw's **Agenda Setting Theory**, where media like *Clash of Champions* not only conveys what to think, but also *how* to think—namely, that positive thinking is the only correct option. This dismisses alternative narratives such as openness to failure and the importance of emotional support.

Meanwhile, six other students explicitly stated that *Clash of Champions* portrayed the characters' successes in a linear fashion, as if all achievements were driven solely by determination and passion, without realistically depicting the process of failure. This creates the perception that failure is due to a lack of passion or determination. In this context, a subtle form of *toxic positivity emerges*: success is positioned as the result of hard work alone, while failure is seen as a form of personal weakness.

The statements of these six students demonstrate how the narrative of success presented in the *Clash of Champions* show tends to simplify the complexity of life's struggles. This linear and simplistic representation aligns with Stuart Hall's **Theory of Representation**, which explains that media does not simply reflect reality but actively shapes meaning through a process of selection, editing, and repetition. In this case, the *Clash of Champions* show represents success as something



that can be absolutely achieved with passion and hard work, without showing the dynamics of failure, doubt, or structural obstacles that its characters may face. This can also be read through the lens of Berger and Luckmann's **Theory of the Social Construction of Reality**, which states that social reality is shaped and legitimized through repeated symbolic interactions, in this case, the motivational narratives repeated in the show. When such narratives are continuously consumed by students, a structure of thinking forms that assumes failure is solely caused by personal weakness, rather than a natural part of the learning process or the result of external factors. Furthermore, this condition reinforces a form of **toxic positivity** that subtly infiltrates, requiring every individual to always think positively and eliminating space for valid negative emotions. Within the framework of Stuart Hall's **Reception Theory**, the students' responses demonstrate a *negotiated* or even *oppositional reading position*, which is when the audience does not simply accept media messages, but resists the dominant meaning by critically interpreting the messages based on their personal experiences.

Furthermore, the visuals in the show reinforce this narrative. The heroic background music, the characters' ever-smiling faces, and the storyline's consistently happy ending emphasize that negative emotions have no place in life's struggles. Several students noted that:

"There's not a single scene where the characters cry or feel down. Everyone is always cheerful. So it seems like if we're sad, it's not normal. We have to stay enthusiastic." (A, female student in grade XII 6 science)

The student's statement demonstrates how the visual and audio codes in the *Clash of Champions show* indirectly shape unequal emotional standards. The heroic background music, the characters' constantly smiling facial expressions, and the storyline that always ends happily are semiotic elements that create certain meanings about how someone "should" face life's challenges. In this case, it can be analyzed through Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory, that signs such as the characters' smiles and inspirational music are not merely aesthetic elements, but also carriers of ideological messages about success and how to face life. Barthes stated that denotative meaning (what is seen) often masks connotative meaning (the ideology or values hidden behind it). This show connotatively instills the value that negative emotions such as sadness, fear, or despair are considered invalid or even taboo. In other words, this visualization becomes a form of representation of *toxic positivity*, namely the tendency to reject or push away negative emotions in order to maintain the illusion of happiness and success. The student's statement that "if we're sad, it's not normal" reflects the impact of internalizing this narrative, which can then trigger feelings of distress and rejection when experiencing sadness. This also strengthens the argument



that media plays a significant role in shaping the emotional perceptions of viewers, especially adolescents who are still developing their identities and understanding of reality.

Overall, the interview results align with Stuart Hall's **Theory of Representation**, which explains that media does not simply reflect reality but also constructs meaning through symbolic presentation. In this broadcast, success is represented by visual symbols such as medals, applause, and consistently displayed expressions of happiness. This representation constructs a meaning that only positive emotions are valid, obscuring the emotional complexity of the struggle to achieve goals.

Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann's **Social Construction of Reality Theory** suggests that social reality is shaped through interactions and shared meaning routines. Shows like *Clash of Champions* can be part of this construction process, where students internalize the view that "success = boundless enthusiasm" as normal and socially expected. As a result, feelings of fatigue, confusion, or even sadness become suppressed to meet these social expectations.

From **Roland Barthes's semiotic perspective**, this show contains a myth constructed through visual and narrative signs. This myth is that success can only be achieved through high spirits and tireless effort. Signs such as upbeat music, smiling characters, and motivational quotes are part of a signifying system that conveys the message that strong individuals are those who do not show sadness.

According to George Gerbner's **Cultivation Theory**, persistent exposure to motivational content can foster long-term, distorted perceptions of reality. In this case, students frequently exposed to shows like *Clash of Champions* tend to believe that the real world demands a constant attitude of never giving up, and that negative feelings are a form of personal failure. This creates cognitive dissonance when their lived reality doesn't align with this idealized image.

Meanwhile, according to McCombs and Shaw's **Agenda Setting Theory**, the media has the power to shape public priorities. These shows overemphasize narratives of success and enthusiasm, while neglecting topics that represent failure, doubt, or mental limitations. Thus, audiences are led to focus more on one side of the life narrative—success and mental strength—while the other side is marginalized.

Based on Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, specifically the concept of *encoding/decoding*, it explains that audiences do not always receive messages as intended by the creator. In this case, students as audiences engage in *negotiated reading* and even *oppositional reading*, that is, accepting some motivational messages but rejecting the implication that failure or sadness are



forms of weakness. They interpret the broadcast based on their own experiences and find that the narrative is not entirely realistic or representative of their emotional state.

In conclusion, the meaning of the *Clash of Champions* show not only promotes fighting spirit but also implicitly promotes a form of *toxic positivity* that has psychological impacts, especially for students under academic or emotional stress. The show creates a social construct of success that is not inclusive of the full range of human emotional experiences, such as failure, sadness, and mental exhaustion.

Based on the research and discussion, it can be analyzed that the meaning behind the narrative and visuals in the *Clash of Champions* show represents *toxic positivity* in the form of hidden pressure to always appear strong, happy, and never give up in all life circumstances. This show symbolically conveys that success can only be achieved through a consistent positive attitude, without showing human sides such as doubt, mental fatigue, or failure. The dominant motivational narratives imply that negative emotions are not worth showing, as if being vulnerable is a sign of weakness that must be covered up. For some students at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar, this message can indeed be a source of encouragement, but in certain circumstances it can feel psychologically burdensome because they feel they don't have a safe space to express feelings of sadness, stress, or fear of failure. The consistent visuals depicting confident, cheerful characters who have overcome obstacles reinforce the social construct that success is the result of a positive attitude alone, without considering the accompanying emotional complexities. As a result, students under pressure tend to feel isolated and push themselves to appear fine, which can actually have a negative impact on their mental health.

Students of SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar Respond to the Representation of *Toxic Positivity* in the *Clash of Champions* Show on the Ruangguru YouTube Channel

The responses of students at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar to the depiction of *toxic positivity* in the show *Clash of Champions* revealed diverse interpretations. Interviews with 15 students revealed that some students perceived the show's motivational message well (*dominant-hegemonic*). One 11th-grade student stated,

"I felt very motivated after watching the show. The messages it conveyed, such as the importance of hard work, an unyielding spirit, and positive thinking, really resonated with me. The show showed how someone can overcome various obstacles in life and ultimately achieve success through perseverance and consistent effort. I became convinced that if I too was willing to work hard and not give up easily, I would definitely achieve good results."



It made me even more enthusiastic about learning, because I felt that what I was doing now would have a big impact in the future."

This statement reflects how the narratives of "never give up" and "stay positive" in the show were fully accepted as a form of learning motivation. Informants not only grasped the explicit meaning of the show but also internalized the messages into their daily lives, particularly in the context of education and personal achievement. Media messages conveyed through visuals and inspiring stories have been shown to influence individuals' perspectives on struggles and hopes for the future.

However, not all students responded uniformly. Some students expressed a *negotiated response*, understanding the positive intent of the show but also criticizing its simplification of reality. One 12th-grade student said,

"I think motivation is important, especially when we're facing difficult times. But the reality is, life's problems can't always be solved just by hearing encouraging words like 'you can do it' or 'stay strong.' Sometimes we actually feel even more stressed because we feel like we have to stay strong, even when our circumstances are truly difficult. What we really need are real solutions, concrete help, tangible support, and a space to be honest about our feelings without being judged. So, it's not just being told to be patient or being encouraged, but also being given understanding and taking appropriate action based on the circumstances we're facing. "

This statement demonstrates resistance to purely symbolic or verbal forms of motivation. Informants criticized approaches that emphasize only mental strength or apparent positivity without considering the real contexts individuals face. This also highlights the importance of noting that overly generalized motivational narratives can neglect a person's emotional and practical needs in facing life's difficulties. This view reflects that students still assess the value of the show, but do not accept it completely. Meanwhile, some students demonstrated an *oppositional response*, rejecting the show's main narrative because they felt the message was unrealistic and even stressful. One 11th-grade student stated:

"If I'm constantly told to think positively, I eventually start to feel guilty when I feel sad or disappointed. It's as if negative feelings aren't allowed, even though it's perfectly human to feel tired, sad, or angry from time to time. I end up suppressing my emotions for fear of being seen as weak or ungrateful. But I think I also need space to feel disappointed, to be honest with myself about how I feel. Only then can I bounce back. Positivity is important,



but that doesn't mean suppressing or denying all negative emotions. "

This statement reflects the side effects of social expectations of an "always positive" attitude, which can suppress the validity of negative emotions. In this context, the informant highlighted the importance of a healthy emotional space, where sadness and disappointment are recognized as part of the healing and growth process. The push to constantly think positively can actually be a form of hidden emotional pressure that inhibits authentic self-expression. For this student, the narrative of *toxic positivity* actually masks legitimate emotional needs. Students' responses to the representation of *toxic positivity* in the *Clash of Champions* show were not singular. Their interpretations were heavily influenced by personal experiences, psychological distress, and the social context in which they found themselves. This suggests that media messages are not passively received but are reinterpreted by audiences based on their individual frames of reference.

Ms. Sisca Marya Susanti also shared her views as a key informant. According to her, *"Motivational messages are important, especially for students facing challenges in their studies or personal lives. However, if these messages are conveyed excessively and unrealistically, they can have a negative impact. Shows that only show success without showing the ups and downs, or that depict characters as always strong and happy, can create inhumane standards. As a result, students can feel like failures simply because they can't always be as strong or positive as portrayed. After all, everyone has limits, and feeling weak doesn't mean not fighting. Instead, representations of success should be accompanied by narratives about struggles, failures, fears, and how someone bounced back. This way, students will be more realistic in viewing themselves and won't be pressured by false and perfect standards of happiness. "*

This statement highlights the importance of balance in delivering motivational messages, preventing them from falling into ahistorical or emotionally incomplete glorification of success. By showcasing the human side of struggle, educational or motivational shows can be more empathetic and build realistic expectations, rather than simply creating the illusion of instant, painless success.

Based on the results of research on the responses of students of SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar to the *Clash of Champions* broadcast on the Ruangguru YouTube channel, it appears that the representation of *toxic positivity* in the broadcast can be analyzed using several communication theories. First, Stuart Hall's Representation Theory explains that media does not reflect reality objectively, but rather shapes it through language and symbols. The broadcast represents success



as the result of a consistent optimistic attitude, without showing emotional complexities such as failure and fatigue, thus forming a certain meaning of the ideal "success." Second, Berger & Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality Theory supports the understanding that the reality of success depicted is a social construction created repeatedly through narratives and visuals that glorify enthusiasm without room for negative emotions. Third, Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory allows us to unravel the implicit meanings in the broadcast, such as the characters' smiles, bright colors, and motivational music that serve as signifiers of success and happiness, while the implied meaning (*signified*) forms the myth that success belongs only to those who are always cheerful and never give up.

Furthermore, within the framework of McCombs & Shaw's Agenda Setting Theory, this broadcast plays a role in establishing certain issues and perspectives in the minds of students, namely that positive thinking is the only path to success, thus eliminating the discourse on the importance of dealing with negative emotions healthily. The repetition of this message resonates with George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, which states that long-term media exposure can shape viewers' perceptions of social reality. In this case, students who frequently watch similar content tend to believe that life should always be full of enthusiasm and that failure is a personal fault. Finally, Stuart Hall's Reception Theory explains that students' responses are divided into three decoding positions: some accept the broadcast's message as a whole and positive (*dominant-hegemonic*), some negotiate with their personal experiences (*negotiated*), and others reject the message because it is considered to add emotional burden (*oppositional*). Thus, these theories enrich the understanding of how messages of *toxic positivity* are represented, constructed, disseminated, and received by students in the context of educational media.

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be analyzed that the responses of students at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar to the representation of *toxic positivity* in the *Clash of Champions* show a diversity of perspectives that reflect different decoding processes. Some students occupy a **dominant-hegemonic position**, where they accept the motivational messages conveyed in the show as something that builds enthusiasm and provides positive inspiration in facing life and educational challenges. Meanwhile, another group of students occupy a **negotiated position**, meaning they recognize the positive values of the show, but also criticize some messages that are considered unrealistic or oversimplify personal struggles. Students in the **oppositional position** actually expressed that messages that emphasize too much enthusiasm without room for sadness or failure create their own stress, because they feel they are not allowed to get tired, give up, or express emotional vulnerability. These differences in responses indicate



that educational shows are not received completely and uniformly by all audiences, but are interpreted subjectively based on the psychological background, life experiences, and social conditions of each student. Therefore, it is important for educational content producers to consider the diversity of audience experiences so that the messages conveyed do not have a negative impact on students' mental health.

CONCLUSION

1. **the toxic positivity portrayed** in the *Clash of Champions* show on Ruangguru's YouTube channel is manifested through a narrative that emphasizes the importance of always thinking positively, not giving up, and continuing to fight without adequately depicting emotional realities such as sadness, failure, or fatigue. The show tends to simplify the process of achieving success, as if it only requires passion and motivation, without considering social, psychological, or economic constraints.
2. **The meaning contained behind the narrative and visuals of the show** *Clash of Champions* represents *toxic positivity* in the form of pressure to always appear strong, cheerful, and unyielding under all circumstances. Some students said these messages can be uplifting, but they can also be burdensome during times of stress, as they feel they shouldn't show vulnerability or failure. Consistent visuals of success and happiness reinforce the notion that negative emotions are a form of weakness to be avoided.
3. **The responses of students at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar to the depiction of toxic positivity** in the *Clash of Champions* show varied. Some students perceived the motivational message as constructive (*dominant-hegemonic*), others interpreted it critically (*negotiated*), and still others felt the message actually created emotional distress (*oppositional*). This suggests that understanding and interpretation of educational shows are not uniform and are influenced by each student's psychological condition and personal experiences.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Ruangguru recommends a more balanced presentation of motivational narratives, including stories that highlight ups and downs, doubts, and negative emotions as a natural part of the struggle. This way, audiences, especially students, won't fall into the illusion that passion and happiness are the only pathways to success.

Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers and other educational staff at SMA Negeri 1 Tumijajar need regular psychological support to provide students with a safe space to express



their negative feelings without guilt. Emotional literacy is crucial for balancing the effects of programs containing *toxic positivity*, the impact of which often goes unnoticed.

Students are advised to be critical when consuming motivational content and to be able to distinguish between healthy positive reinforcement and the pressure to always appear happy. It's important for them to understand that negative emotions are not weaknesses, but rather a natural part of life that needs to be accepted and managed healthily.

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