

## Dramaturgy of identity and K-Pop's fan community communication behaviour in Bone Regency

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**How to Cite This Article:** Wandi. *et al.* (2025). Dramaturgy of identity and K-Pop's fan community communication behaviour in Bone Regency. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi*, 9(2). doi: 10.25139/jsk.v9i2.10174

Received: 03-05-2025, Revision: 31-05-2025, Acceptance: 30-06-2025, , Published: 31-07-2025

**Abstract** The Korean Wave (Hallyu) phenomenon has formed a new communication pattern among K-Pop fans in Indonesia, including the ARMY Bone community in Bone Regency. This study examined the communication behaviour of the ARMY Bone community through Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory, focusing on the formation of formalist and ritualistic impressions, as well as identity dynamics through the concept of front stage and backstage. This study used a qualitative method of a phenomenological approach, with observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and documentation of seven informants selected purposively. The results of the study show that ARMY Bone's communication behaviour is formed through verbal symbols (Korean terms, BTS songs, the word 'Borahae') and nonverbal (dress style, dance, facial expressions) that form a collective identity and impression as loyal fans. In the public space (front stage), members present themselves according to the role of the community, while in the private space (backstage) they show a more authentic personal identity. These findings strengthened the concept of dramaturgy that social identity is formed through performative and contextual self-presentation strategies, along with the dynamics of the community and popular culture they adopt. The implications of these findings suggest that fan communities such as ARMY Bone play a role in shaping young people's social identities through symbolic communication and self-presentation strategies, while also being social spaces that support local expressions of global culture.

**Keywords:** army bone community; communication behaviour; dramaturgical theory; identity formation; k-pop fans

### INTRODUCTION

Korean culture has become a powerful factor in shaping individual behaviour, speech patterns, and fashion choices (El-Yana, 2021), as seen by the emergence of various fan communities. One of the largest fan groups in Indonesia is Adorable Representative MC for Youth (ARMY), the official fandom of global K-Pop group Bulletproof Boy Scouts (BTS). According to an article published on the Goodstats website, the most frequent idols discussed on Twitter by Indonesian fans in 2022 were BTS, a seven-member boy group, followed by other prominent acts such as NCT, ENHYPEN, EXO, Blackpink, TXT, Treasure, SEVENTEEN, ATEEZ, and Stray Kids (Alifah, 2022). An article on the online portal beritasatu.com stated that in 2023, BTS had the largest number of fans in Indonesia, followed by Blackpink, Twice, and EXO (Sari, 2023).

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While there is no specific data on the exact number of fans of a particular K-Pop boyband, the popularity of a group can serve as an indirect indicator of its fandom size. One common measure of popularity is the number of followers on official social media accounts. BTS' official Instagram account, @bts.bighitofficial, has 75.5 million followers, while their official X (formerly Twitter) account, @bts\_bighit, has 44.9 million followers. In addition, some of ARMY Indonesia's fanbase accounts on social media also have significant followings for example, @armyindonesiia2 on X has 175.8k followers, and @army.indonesia\_01 on Instagram has 145k followers. These social media follower statistics were recorded in April 2025. This research involves the ARMY community in Bone Regency, which is one of the active fan communities that shows unique social interactions among its members. Of course, the presence of social media is interpreted as an appropriate source of fulfilment by its audience, which in this case is the ARMY community (Hanifah et al., 2023).

In addition to their active presence on online platforms such as social media, ARMY Bone also regularly organises offline activities such as gatherings, movie nights, humanitarian projects, and celebrations of major events. These activities provide valuable insights, especially on how many ARMY members exhibit more prominent or expressive behaviour when amongst fellow ARMY Bone members, in contrast to their more reserved appearance in everyday social settings. This observation can be seen from several contexts in the form of symbols that can be conveyed in various ways, both verbal and nonverbal (Trihastuti et al., 2022). Furthermore, ARMY Bone not only shapes perspectives among its members, but also provides a stimulus through the content presented. This tendency will shape them into subscribers (Agung et al., 2021). Indeed, the role of media here significantly and consequently affects the audience in various aspects (Sya & Marta, 2019).

Previous research, such as a study titled 'Korean Pop Fan Behaviour (Descriptive Study on Rawasari Community)' conducted in 2023 (Pamungkas et al., 2023), mainly focused on communication behaviour. According to Salastia et al., humans are basically social creatures who cannot live in isolation, they need interaction, communication, and socialization with others. In addition, they emphasise that communication does not occur in a uniform way; each region or context has a unique communication style (Nurhuda & Karimah, 2023). This is reinforced by the idea that communication is originating from a primary source or multiple recipients that has an impact on changing the audience's lifestyle and understanding, whether it is instantly or progressively (Kurniawati et al., 2023). Thus, the appropriateness for each region to have different communication styles is highly dependent on the main source. Therefore, further exploration is needed.

This study examined the communication behaviour of the ARMY community in Bone Regency, especially their social interactions and identity formation, using Goffman's concept of front stage and backstage. This angle of study is motivated by the existence of technology, especially online systems that have an advantage in the form of flexibility (Chinmi et al., 2021), where each community member can interact more quickly and efficiently, resulting in absolute behaviour that connects the front stage, namely when interacting using media and the backstage, such as showing quiet behaviour in everyday social life.

In this study, the researchers sought to investigate the communication behaviour of K-Pop ARMY fans in Bone Regency through the lens of Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory. The selection of this theory is based on the part of the Social Interaction Theory under the realm of Communication Science. This theoretical approach assumes that individuals socially construct their relationships and interactions through communication, which is seen as a situated and multi-sided achievement. The theory states that the social self is always engaged in interactions with others; thus, the relationships that connect individuals to the social world become the focus of analysis (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009).

The theory conceptualises social interaction as a theatre performance, where individuals play certain roles depending on the social context by managing impressions in order to be accepted and understood by others, which is divided into front stage and backstage. In his theory, the front stage refers to the social arena where individuals perform expected roles before an audience, using appearance, setting, and manner to project a particular identity, while the backstage represents a private space where individuals can leave the performance, relax norms, and prepare themselves for future interactions. Moreover, dramaturgy is crucial in understanding social interactions because people constantly negotiate how they want to be

perceived, and maintaining a coherent self-presentation is key to maintaining social order (Goffman, 2023). This theory offers a unique perspective to understand how K-Pop fans construct impressions, form identities, and engage in social interactions within their communities.

This dramaturgical approach is particularly useful for unpacking the performative construction of fan identity and the strategic communication behaviours adopted by K-Pop fans in both offline and online spaces. In offline contexts, such as fan gatherings or public events where fans meet face to face, the front stage is manifested through various performative acts. Fans may wear costumes or outfits inspired by their favourite idols, adopt makeup and fashion styles associated with the idols, and even replicate body gestures or mannerisms. These performances are intended to meet the expectations of the fan community and to strengthen one's identity as a devoted follower of a particular idol.

Meanwhile, in online spaces such as social media, fans actively manage their digital self-presentation to project enthusiasm, knowledge, and aesthetic taste. This may involve posting fan art, engaging in discussions, sharing updates, or interacting with fellow fans, fan bases, or even the idols themselves. In this context, the front stage also includes fans who primarily express their fan identity through social media visibility, crafting a public persona that is recognised within the broader fan network.

At the same time, Goffman's concept of backstage is particularly relevant for investigating how fans may express more intimate or ambivalent feelings—such as doubt, fatigue, or personal conflicts with fandom norms—in private or closed group chats, away from the public gaze. These less visible spaces, often found in group chats or limited audience features such as 'close friends' on Instagram, allow fans to relax social expectations and engage in more candid conversations. This framework enables us to explore how fan communication shifts across different levels of visibility and trust, and how the boundaries between public and private identities are continuously negotiated within the fan community.

This is reinforced by the study on young social media users who often use group chats as a means of personal communication (Menayang & Marta, 2020), revealing the backstage of fan life. As such, dramaturgy offers a powerful lens to analyse how fans navigate group expectations, express identity and maintain a sense of belonging in a highly performative cultural space. Such problems can occur when reality has been reconstructed or framed and seems to interpret a certain meaning based on the subjective nature of social reality (Sya & Marta, 2019).

Based on the description of the phenomenon, the researcher is interested in studying how the communication behaviour of ARMY Bone is used in building the impression of formality and rituality because it contains symbolic processes and representations of group identity, as well as how to understand their social interactions and identity formation through the concept of front stage and back stage dramaturgy as it adds interest and importance to this study because it dissects the dimensions of social 'appearance' that are deliberately constructed by ARMY Bone members to create a certain image in public spaces, and how they behave more naturally and authentically when in more private spaces.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018), to understand the subjective experiences of ARMY Bone community members in building identity and undergoing social relations. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it focuses on the meaning experienced by informants directly. To enrich the analysis, Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy Theory is used which explains how individuals present themselves like actors on the 'front stage' and hide other sides on the 'backstage'. This approach allows researchers to interpret communication dynamics as a form of impression management and identity representation in the ARMY Bone fan community.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation techniques (Rukajat, 2018). Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven informants who were selected purposively based on their active involvement in all activities and were not multi-fandom (having K-Pop communities other than the ARMY Bone community), seven informants were selected based on the representation of variations in experience and this number is considered sufficient because during the interview process the data has reached saturation. Interviews were conducted directly at an agreed location, also online (WhatsApp media), with a duration of between 40 - 60 minutes and were conducted several times if the data

was incomplete. Questions focused on their experiences when performing in the community's public space and in private interactions. Non-participant observation was conducted for one month to ensure that the ARMY Bone community was active in offline and online activities and to identify appropriate informants.

**Table 1.** List of informants

No	Name (Abbreviation)	Job	Start Join	Type of interview
1	Feni Mardila Arif (FM)	Businessman	2020	Offline
2	Febriani (FB)	Teacher	2019	Offline
3	Adrian (AD)	Businessman	2019	Offline
4	Dian Sri Yuninda (DS)	Employee	2020	Offline, online
5	A. Nurfaidah (AN)	Employee	2021	Offline
6	Dina Nandina (DN)	Student	2021	Offline, online
7	A. Siti Zakira Aura (ZA)	Student	2020	Offline, online

Source: Processed by the researcher (2025)

Data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman model (Agustini, 2023) data reduction, data presentation, and concluding. The analysis process was carried out by linking informant narratives to dramaturgical concepts, such as impression management and shifting social roles, in order to produce a deep understanding of communication behaviour and social dynamics in the community.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The communication patterns among members of the ARMY Bone community include both verbal and nonverbal communication, which function to create impressions of formality and ritual within the community.

### Verbal communication

Verbal communication is defined as communication conducted through spoken or written language between individuals. All symbols that utilise one or more words are considered verbal messages or symbols. Language is one example of a verbal coding system (Kusumawati, 2019). Through verbal communication, members often engage in discussions about the BTS group, sing BTS songs, and use specific terminology unique to the fan culture.

Discussion is a common form of verbal communication among ARMY Bone members, especially when preparing for various activities or events, both in person and via social media. One of the functions of language is to connect individuals with their surrounding environment. For instance, within WhatsApp groups, members can engage in online conversations, share photos, videos, or files with others (Butar, 2023). Face-to-face communication also occurs, where members talk about a range of topics such as their favourite BTS songs, idol performances, and more.

ARMY Bone member, Feni, stated:

"Every time we want to organise an event, we gather to discuss the concept—what dress code we'll use, the budget, and how many people we expect. We also often share and exchange information about where to buy merchandise or anything related to BTS." (FM, Businessman, 2020, offline)

Feni's statement shows that discussions within this community cover both technical aspects necessary for event coordination and the sharing of idol-related information.

Similarly, Adrian expressed:

"Whenever there's a project, we often discuss with each other what needs to be prepared before the event. Apart from that, of course, we talk about our idol, BTS—whether about their works or their daily lives." (AD, Businessman, 2019, offline)

These discussions are not limited to event planning but also serve as a platform for members to exchange information and talk about the everyday lives of their idols. The form of discussion was also carried out through online media to gain more detailed and in-depth insights into the views, perceptions, or experiences of the participants regarding the topic being discussed. Online discussions have become commonplace due to the development of communication and information technology (Nopermen, 2024).

In the case of ARMY Bone, online communication is primarily conducted via WhatsApp. Through this platform, the spontaneous use of Korean vocabulary by fans emerges, with words such as *annyeong*, *gomawo*, and *kamsahamnida* commonly used.

Aside from discussions, singing is also a form of verbal communication that occurs when ARMY Bone members gather. Singing BTS songs together becomes a form of collective expression and fosters a sense of unity. As expressed by Nur:

*"Since becoming a BTS fan, I often sing and even dance to their songs. When we hear a BTS song, we spontaneously start singing along." (AN, Employee, 2021, offline)*

This statement shows that BTS's music has a strong appeal that encourages fans to sing and express themselves, especially when they are with fellow community members.

Within the community, certain special terms are frequently used as a form of verbal communication that distinguishes ARMY members from non-ARMYs. One member, Dina, shared:

*"We have many habits like using words that only ARMYs understand, such as 'Borahae,' which means 'I love you' or 'I purple you.'" (DN, Student, 2021, offline-online)*

The term *Borahae* is a unique expression understood among BTS fans and serves as a symbol of their loyalty and affection for their idols. This language functions not only as a communication medium but also helps to construct a collective identity as ARMY.

### **Nonverbal communication**

Nonverbal communication refers to communication in which messages are conveyed without the use of words. In practice, nonverbal communication is almost automatically integrated into interactions. For this reason, it is ever-present and holds significant importance. Often, verbal communication becomes ineffective due to the communicator's failure to employ appropriate nonverbal cues simultaneously (Prabowo et al., 2022). Within the ARMY Bone community, nonverbal communication is observed through clothing that resembles K-Pop idols, body movements, facial expressions, and emotional closeness.

One form of nonverbal communication displayed by ARMY Bone members is their choice of clothing, which reflects their identity as BTS fans. One member, Aura, demonstrated this nonverbal expression through her attire when attending community activities, stating:

*"When it comes to how I dress, it depends on the individual, but I go for a casual look that matches the theme of the event." (ZA, Student, 2020, offline-online)*

Aura chooses casual clothing that aligns with her personal style while still adhering to the event's theme, showing her identity as an ARMY member.

Dance is also a key component of nonverbal communication within the community. As BTS fans, ARMY Bone members often mimic the choreography of BTS songs. Nur shared:

*"I also enjoy dancing to BTS songs. If you check ARMY Bone's social media, like Instagram, you'll see a lot of dance covers we participate in and upload." (AN, Employee, 2021, offline)*

Through dance, members not only express their admiration for BTS but also strengthen bonds with fellow community members. Some members also display greeting gestures during interactions, such as raising a hand while saying

*"Annyeong" (hello), a greeting from Korean culture. Dina explained: "When we gather, we often greet each other by raising our hands and saying thank you while bowing." (AN, Employee, 2021, offline)*

By adopting these gestures, ARMY Bone members not only show cultural affinity but also reinforce their identities as K-pop and BTS fans.

In addition to dancing, members of this community also often engage in watching BTS videos together as a form of nonverbal communication. One member, Feni, explained:

"When we hold events, we also watch together with other ARMY members to feel the euphoria of enjoying BTS songs together." (FM, Businessman, 2020, offline)

Through these watch parties, ARMY Bone members can feel emotional closeness and collective euphoria, which serves as a form of nonverbal communication that strengthens relationships between members.

Facial expressions shown when meeting fellow community members are another form of nonverbal communication that demonstrates happiness and familiarity. Facial expressions are a response to the surrounding situation. A person's face will always show their feelings and emotions—whether sadness, joy, or happiness—reflecting human psychological conditions nonverbally. Facial expressions vary depending on how the other person interprets what they see and can represent someone's emotional state. For instance, a sad person usually wears a gloomy expression, while a happy person will show cheerful expressions (Susilo, 2020).

Febriani shared, "Because ARMY Bone has a WhatsApp group for communication, when we meet in person, we feel really close and laugh together." Smiles and laughter are common facial expressions in this community, showing that members feel comfortable and happy during their gatherings. (FB, Teacher, 2019, offline)

Meet-ups or in-person gatherings are one of the activities often held by ARMY Bone. These events are intended to help members get to know each other better and strengthen their bonds. One member, Dian, emphasised the importance of meetups in this community, stating: "Our community activities focus on celebrating important days for BTS and ARMY, such as the members' birthdays or anniversaries. The usual celebration activities include watching BTS concert videos together, meet-and-greets with fellow ARMYs—especially in Bone Regency—and humanity projects." (DS, Employee, 2020, offline-online)

Meet-ups serve as a space for members to share stories and experiences about their admiration for BTS. Moreover, Febriani elaborated on the role of meetups in the community, saying:

"Our activities include meetups, birthday parties, and donations for people in need. Recently, we've often organized donations to support our brothers and sisters studying in Islamic boarding schools." (FB, Teacher, 2019, offline)

Through these meetups, they not only discuss BTS but also carry out social activities involving community members.

Humanity projects are one way ARMY Bone shows its concern for others. They often organise donations for fundraisers to help those in need.

Nur shared, "Actually, there are many activities carried out by ARMY Bone, one of which is helping others—like organising fundraising for boarding school students and sharing about our bias (the K-pop group members we admire)." (AN, Employee, 2021, offline)

These humanity projects strengthen the sense of solidarity within the community while serving as a positive form of community support for society. Additionally, another member, Aura, added:

"We focus on major celebrations for BTS and ARMY, such as the members' birthdays and anniversaries. Our celebrations usually include watching BTS concert videos together, meet-and-greets with ARMYs—especially in Bone—and humanity projects." (ZA, Student, 2020, offline-online)

These activities show that ARMY Bone is not just a fan club supporting BTS but also an active participant in social initiatives. Birthday parties are held to celebrate BTS members' birthdays and other important occasions within the ARMY community. These events are usually intended to strengthen the bonds between members through fun activities. Adrian explained:

"We have birthday parties, humanity projects, and charitable giving. Some of these activities are done annually, like distributing free snacks during Ramadan." (AD, Businessman, 2019, offline)

These events highlight the spirit of sharing and togetherness among community members, especially during special moments like birthdays. Furthermore, Feni reinforced the importance of birthday parties in the community by saying:

“The activities include celebrating the birthdays of BTS members, and we also do social activities like visiting foundations to donate. Not only that, during Ramadan we regularly distribute snacks, and this is done every year.” (FM, Businessman, 2020, offline)

These celebrations are not only to honour their idols but also to provide opportunities for members to share joy with others, including through social activities like distributing food during Ramadan.

Formality within the ARMY Bone community is reflected in mutual respect among members, orderly participation in regular activities, and engagement in WhatsApp group conversations. Rituals like donations, reminders to worship, and compliance with community rules indicate communication patterns that support shared values and norms. This sense of formality aligns with the concept of the front stage, where members display behaviour that is publicly accepted within the community.

### **Formality manifestation in ARMY Bone**

One component of social structure is formal organisation, which includes the rules, procedures, and official routines of the organisation, as well as authority relationships that establish roles among its members. Moreover, a formal organisation also defines how these rules are used to regulate the behaviour of its members. The formal mechanism used to manage the organisation is the organisational structure. This structure indicates a consistent arrangement of relationships among functions, sections, and responsibilities within an organisation (Irawan, 2019).

However, ARMY Bone is not a formal organisation; rather, it is simply a community that serves as a gathering space for fellow BTS fans. It is run by admins who organise the activities of the members. The impression of formality is reflected through respectful attitudes, regular participation in activities, and active communication in the WhatsApp group.

One form of formality embodied in the ARMY Bone community is mutual respect among members, which creates a harmonious atmosphere despite differences in age and background. Respect is a value that everyone must possess. To respect others means to value, honour, acknowledge, and regard them as important. Respecting oneself means upholding one's own and others' fundamental human rights.

In an organisation, a basic principle is that people communicate and cooperate to carry out certain tasks. Because members engage in humane interactions, mutual respect and appreciation are essential. Therefore, individual and group behaviour must be regulated to create a harmonious atmosphere (Gultom & Sihombing, 2024).

Dian stated, “When it comes to formality, we're not overly strict, because essentially, we believe everyone here is equal. But the attitude of respect is something we always maintain.” (DS, Employee, 2020, offline-online)

This mutual respect forms the foundation of interaction among members, even though formal hierarchy is not strongly emphasised.

Additionally, Aura shared a similar sentiment about maintaining respectful communication:

“As for formality in communication, I treat everyone the same—with kind words and good behaviour towards those older, my peers, and those younger than me.” (ZA, Student, 2020, offline-online)

By speaking politely and behaving respectfully, especially towards older members, Aura emphasises the importance of formality rooted in respect within the community.

Participation in routine activities is another manifestation of formality within the community. Many members feel that engaging in community events is a way to honour the values of togetherness upheld by ARMY Bone.

One member, Feni, explained, "We regularly carry out activities or events, one of which is distributing free takjil (food for breaking fast), which we do every year." (FM, Businessman, 2020, offline)

These regular events not only foster a sense of community but also show their dedication to maintaining the values within the group.

Similarly, Febriani mentioned, "We often hold celebrations for BTS's important dates such as members' birthdays and anniversaries—those we always commemorate". (FB, Teacher, 2019, offline)

By consistently celebrating these significant moments, ARMY Bone members demonstrate their commitment to upholding the formality that has become a tradition within the community. The WhatsApp group serves as the primary medium of communication used to share information and maintain connectivity among ARMY Bone members. Regular communication in the group is considered a form of formality that demonstrates active participation in the community.

Dina shared, "I often join and communicate in the ARMY Bone WhatsApp group, updating each other and discussing everything related to BTS." (DN, Student, 2021, offline-online)

By actively participating in the WhatsApp group, Dina shows her appreciation for the community by staying involved in discussions and keeping up with the group's developments. People may use impression management to create a positive public image for a particular purpose. According to Felly, Goffman describes dramaturgy as an individual's effort to present themselves in the most accurate way. In interactions, individuals want to present a self-image that is acceptable to others. The use of a 'performer' to generate a certain impression of a situation helps achieve specific goals (Girnanfa & Susilo, 2022). Everyone attempts to manage messages as best as possible to reach their goals. Impression management means creating a self-image that others can accept. When managing impressions, one's social context must be considered—including how individuals (actors) craft specific impressions to achieve their goals. Impression management includes all the qualities and elements used during self-presentation (Putri et al., 2019). The sense of formality displayed by ARMY Bone members aligns with the concept of the front stage in Goffman's dramaturgical theory, where members perform behaviours deemed acceptable by the community's public.

Ritual activities are those carried out regularly to evoke memory and elicit certain emotions. A ritual is an expressive activity that is repeated, formal, serious, and profound, often involving symbols. One of the key representations of human life is the use of symbols, which reflect human understanding of their own world—comprising values and goals that portray desires, norms that regulate behaviour, and understanding of one's power and capabilities (Ernaningsih, 2016) In ARMY Bone, ritual impressions are reflected through acts such as donating, reminding each other to pray, and obeying community rules, all of which show a communication pattern that supports the values and norms upheld by the group.

ARMY Bone regularly organises social activities as a form of ritual within their community. These include donations and fundraising to help those in need.

Febriani expressed the importance of donation activities, saying, "We often help those in need through fundraising or donations, which are then given to those who need them." (FB, Teacher, 2019, offline)

Febriani emphasised that these rituals are a crucial part of the community, reflecting ARMY Bone's social concern.

Aura also added that their community is involved in more sustainable donations, stating, "The ARMY Bone community is a regular donor to one of the Islamic boarding schools in Bone Regency." (ZA, Student, 2020, offline-online)

These donations not only demonstrate their commitment to social causes but also strengthen the impression of ritual through repeated and consistent actions.

Within the ARMY Bone community, members remind each other to perform prayers, especially when gathering for activities or events. This becomes part of their ritual practice in maintaining religious values among members.

Adrian shared, "When it comes to religion, we in ARMY Bone remind each other to pray when the time comes. Whenever we gather or have an event, someone always reminds others to pray." (AD, Businessman, 2019, offline-online)

This shows that ARMY Bone is not only focused on their admiration for BTS but also maintains religious values by encouraging one another to worship.

Dian also emphasised the importance of prioritising religion, stating, "What matters to us is mutual respect and not sharing things that involve sensitive issues such as ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations in the group. As for religion, it's our priority—hobbies or fandoms are just for fun or a personal form of healing." (DS, Employee, 2020, offline-online)

By prioritising religion, members of the community preserve their ritual by putting worship above all, even when gathering to celebrate K-Pop-related matters. In ARMY Bone, every new member is required to introduce themselves using a specific format, which reflects a ritual impression in welcoming new members. Feni explained, "In the ARMY Bone community, there's a rule that new members must introduce themselves by sharing their name, LINE ID, and bias. Although they're already ARMY, because they're now residing in Bone, they're part of ARMY Bone. Then, if we hold an event, new members are welcome to join, but there's no pressure. This community is a place for sharing and expressing feelings with one another." This introduction ritual serves as an adaptation process for new members to understand the norms and values within ARMY Bone.

Nur also emphasised the importance of introductions for new members, saying, "Every new member who joins must introduce themselves first, such as their name, date of birth, address, hobbies, and bias (a favourite or idolised member of the K-pop group)." This introduction rule reflects a community ritual that helps new members feel welcomed and better connect with others in ARMY Bone.

When viewed from a dramaturgical perspective, the execution of rituals is also a form of social drama. According to Goffman, interactions are like religious ceremonies filled with many rituals and elements of behaviour, often overlooked but critically important. There is something called etiquette, which refers to the respect that underlies what is appropriate and inappropriate to do (Musta'in, 2010). This suggests that in a ritual impression, there are value-based rules and norms within a community that must be accepted by all members of ARMY Bone.

The impression of ritual in communication is realised through activities that are periodic (repetitive) in nature, aimed at recreating the sense of membership and reinforcing sacred symbols that represent group belonging. Someone who participates in a ritual can feel renewed enthusiasm, as if their confidence is revitalised, making them more assured of their capabilities. Rituals can be seen as energy-generating machines that strengthen individuals and can be applied in everyday life. Ultimately, rituals arouse a sense of virtue toward the actions of others (Lufiana, 2023). The ritual impression created by ARMY Bone members in reminding each other of positive things becomes an act that energises and inspires fellow members.

### **Social interaction and identity formation**

One component of social structure is a formal organisation, which includes the rules, procedures, and official routines of the organisation, as well as authority relationships that establish roles among its members. Moreover, a formal organisation also defines how these rules are used to regulate

The front stage is the space where individuals present themselves in line with social expectations or the ideal image they want to project to the public. When on the front stage, a person presents themselves with an ideal concept that aligns with the audience's expectations through lifestyle choices. Several components managed on the front stage include appearance, attitude, and behaviour (Amelia & Amin, 2022). As K-Pop fans, ARMY members in Bone Regency have roles and statuses that are pre-set and must be maintained and managed to meet the prevailing societal values and expectations. In the context of ARMY Bone, the front stage becomes a platform for members to showcase their identity as BTS fans through specific

attributes and behaviours typical of their community. On the front stage, members tend to maintain their image as ARMY Bone, wearing BTS-themed clothing or accessories, and displaying supportive behaviour toward the community.

One form of front-stage interaction is the development of friendships with fellow ARMY members.

Feni, a member of ARMY Bone, stated, "I think I have more friends among fellow ARMYs. For example, every Saturday night we go out, and our conversations flow easily – we share the same taste in music and are on the same wavelength. It's different with everyday friends who don't like it when I play Korean music during gatherings, and they sometimes say things like, 'Why always Korean stuff?'" (FM, Businessman, 2020, offline)

This shows that joining the ARMY Bone allows her to find like-minded friends and share mutual interests. This reflects how members present themselves in line with the expected role within the ARMY community on the front stage.

When on the front stage, ARMY Bone members often use Korean words or terms, creating a sense of exclusivity and collective identity as BTS fans. This language becomes a symbol of loyalty and helps strengthen the bonds among members. Febriani shared that among fellow ARMYs, she tends to use Korean greetings to build rapport and show her identity as an ARMY. She said, "I'm more open with my environment, and among ARMYs, my speech style changes, like using specific greetings such as 'annyeong chingu' and 'kamsahamnida'". Using greetings like 'annyeong chingu' (hello, friend) and 'kamsahamnida' (thank you) reflects how members integrate Korean into their communication, creating a K-Pop cultural nuance in daily community conversations.

Beyond basic greetings, there are also special terms like 'Borahae', which means "I purple you" or "I love you," used to express love and support for BTS.

Dina, another ARMY Bone member, explained, "We have many habits like using words that only ARMYs know, like 'Borahae,' which means I love you." (DN, Student, 2021, offline-online)

Using such terms strengthens emotional bonds within the community and creates an internal culture that solidifies their identity as BTS fans.

On the front stage, members also frequently wear BTS-themed items such as clothing or official merchandise, reinforcing their identity as part of the ARMY Bone community. This appearance symbolises their love and loyalty to their idols, as seen in their choice of clothing or accessories during community events.

Febriani explained that she likes K-Pop fashion but still adjusts it to the local cultural context, saying, "I like Korean-style fashion, but we have to know the time and place. We can't wear K-Pop clothes everywhere. For instance, during Eid, it's not appropriate to wear those styles." (FB, Teacher, 2019, offline)

Febriani stated that even though she wants to show her K-Pop fan identity through fashion, she still considers the situation and local culture when choosing her outfits. In addition to clothing, ARMY Bone members also collect BTS merchandise such as albums, photocards, and stickers.

Dian mentioned, "I'm more into collecting albums. Not all of them, though, because I have a wish list and I adjust it to my financial capability." (DS, Employee, 2020, offline-online)

Dian emphasised that collecting merchandise is done based on personal means but remains an essential part of her identity as a BTS fan.

The backstage is where individuals can be themselves without social pressure to maintain a certain image. According to dramaturgical theory, behaviour can be seen through overt behaviour, which is observable and visible (e.g., walking, eating, running, writing), and covert behaviour, which cannot be directly observed by others but involves internal activities such as thinking, daydreaming, or imagining (Asri & Suharni, 2021). On the backstage, ARMY Bone members are freer to express their personal identities, which may differ from their front-stage roles as ARMY, and exhibit overt behaviour that can be observed and seen directly.

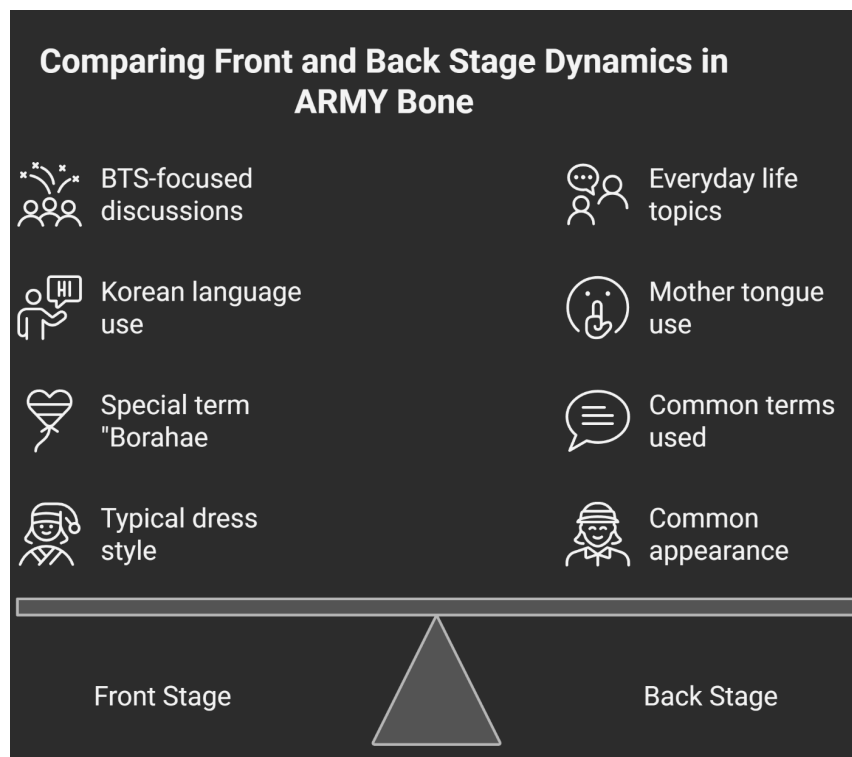
Aura, one of the members, stated, "I remain myself; in terms of language, I still use my local dialect, and I continue my daily life as a student." (ZA, Student, 2020, offline-online)  
So, in the backstage, she continues her life as a student and uses her native language. She noted that in the backstage, she can be herself without needing to display ARMY attributes.

Likewise, Feni said, "In daily life, I just stay myself. My lifestyle becomes normal like most people. I eat as usual, hang out as usual, and listen to the music that regular people listen to too." (FM, Businessman, 2020, offline)

This shows that on the backstage, she often appears more natural and follows a regular routine like the average person. Some members, like Febriani, display a different personality backstage. In her daily life, she tends to be introverted and quiet.

She said, "In daily life, I'm the type of person who finds it hard to communicate with others. I become shy and quiet". (FB, Teacher, 2019, offline)

This contrasts with how she feels more comfortable and open in the ARMY environment. Febriani admitted that joining the ARMY Bone community has helped her adapt and become more confident when interacting with new people. This experience shows how her front-stage role influences her actual personality backstage.



**Figure 1.** ARMY Bone community's impressions and identity  
Source: Processed by the researcher (2025)

The findings of this study align with Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, which conceptualises social interaction as a stage where individuals perform different roles depending on the situational context. Within the ARMY Bone community based on figure1, members utilise communication as a strategic tool to construct impressions and identities that align with the front-stage setting of the community environment. Conversely, outside of this community, they revert to their authentic identities in the backstage context.



**Figure 2.** ARMY Bone community's identity performance cycle in social context  
Source: Processed by the researcher (2025)

The communication behaviour of ARMY Bone members shows a pattern that combines both verbal and non-verbal elements. Verbal communication can be seen in the use of K-Pop terms, singing BTS songs together, and having discussions about their idol group. Non-verbal communication includes using K-Pop-themed accessories and showing expressions that reflect their community identity. A sense of formality and rituals in the community is shown through rules and values that members follow faithfully.

This shows that communication in the ARMY Bone community (Figure 2) is a dramaturgical strategy to create and maintain a social identity that is in line with community expectations. The use of verbal symbols (fandom terms, song lyrics) and non-verbal (BTS attributes, clothing style) becomes a tool to manage impressions on the front stage. When outside the community (backstage), members tend to show personal identities that are not always related to fandom identity, supporting Goffman's idea that identity is performative and situational.

## CONCLUSION

The communication behaviour used by ARMY Bone is shown through verbal and nonverbal communication. Verbal communication includes discussions about BTS songs, their idol's appearance, etc.; using Korean language styles such as *annyeong*, *gomawo*, and *kamsahamnida*; singing BTS songs; using the special term "Borahae" as a symbol of loyalty and affection. Nonverbal communication includes ARMY Bone's typical appearance or way of dressing; BTS's typical dance (body movements); facial expressions; and emotional closeness. The communication behaviour carried out builds an impression of formality and ritualism, which is a symbolic process and representation of group identity.

The communication behaviour shown by ARMY Bone can be analysed through the perspective of Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory, such as the use of Korean terms (*annyeong*, *gomawo*, *kamsahamnida*), the mention of 'Borahae', to discussions about BTS, typical appearance, BTS dance moves, facial expressions, and emotional closeness, are part of the 'front stage' where community members display their identity as solid and loyal BTS fans. These symbols reflect the construction of a collective identity that is consciously and symbolically constructed, in order to create an impression of togetherness and appreciation of the Korean cultural values that they adopt. They are not only consumers of popular culture but also social actors who play roles in the 'drama' of the global K-pop community. On the other hand, in everyday life outside the community (backstage), they can let go of these roles and return to being ordinary individuals. Thus, the communication they do is not only a means of expression, but also a strategy for self-presentation and the formation of social identity.

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