

A Virtual Ethnography of Male K-Drama Fans on the Social Media X Account @kdrama_menfess

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ABSTRACT

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi motif-motif laki-laki pecinta K-drama dalam menggunakan media yaitu akun @kdrama_menfess untuk mengikuti tren yang berkembang tentang K-drama dalam perspektif teori Uses and Gratification yang membagi empat indikator kebutuhan menggunakan media, yaitu diversion (pengalihan), personal relationship (kebutuhan integrasi sosial), personality identity (kebutuhan identitas pribadi), dan surveillance (pengawasan). Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam artikel ini ialah kualitatif dengan pendekatan etnografi virtual. Penelitian ini mengambil lima informan laki-laki dengan memiliki rentang usia 19 hingga 25 tahun. Teknik pengumpulan data yang akan dilakukan pada penelitian ini yaitu observasi dan wawancara melalui online. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Uses and Gratification yang dikemukakan oleh Elihu Katz didefinisikan bahwa individu secara aktif mencari media dan konten tertentu untuk mencapai kepuasan atau hasil tertentu. Hasil temuan ini secara keseluruhan, dari keempat motif utama yang diidentifikasi berdasarkan teori Uses and Gratification, motif diversion atau pengalihan merupakan motif yang paling dominan di antara kelima informan laki-laki pecinta K-drama. Bagi mereka, K-drama bukan sekadar hiburan, tetapi juga media untuk melepas penat, mengisi waktu luang, dan mengurangi kesepian terutama saat jauh dari rumah. Lebih dari itu, K-drama berperan sebagai sarana psikologis yang membantu mengatasi stres di waktu penat.

Abstract: This study aims to explore the motives of male K-drama lovers in using media, focusing on the @kdrama_menfess account and the growing trend of K-drama. The research uses the Uses and Gratification theory, which divides media use needs into diversion, personal relationship, personality identity, and surveillance. The method used is qualitative with a virtual ethnographic approach. Five male informants aged 19 to 25 years participated in the study. Data was collected using online observation and interviews. Uses and Gratifications theory, proposed by Elihu Katz, states that individuals actively seek specific media and content to achieve certain satisfaction or outcomes. The findings show that, among the four main motives identified, diversion is the most dominant for the five male informants who enjoy K-dramas. For them, Korean dramas provide entertainment, a way to relax, fill leisure time, and alleviate loneliness, especially when far from home. Additionally, Korean dramas help them cope with stress during difficult times by serving as a psychological tool.

Keywords:

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I. Introduction

The current development of communication technology cannot be separated from the internet. The rapid advancement of communication and information technology has led to many changes, such as the emergence of various online media that make it easier for people to access unlimited information and content. One of the cultural phenomena that has entered due to the internet is

South Korean culture, commonly known as the Korean Wave. Indonesia is one of the countries affected by this phenomenon. The Korean Wave phenomenon has been present in Indonesia since 2004 and continues to generate tremendous enthusiasm. Based on Nielsen research results, the number of K-drama viewers continues to increase significantly, with a percentage of 45% in 2019, 56% in 2020, 62% in 2021, and reaching 71% in 2022 (Safitri et al., 2024). According to data reports from the website goodstats.id, the majority of K-drama viewers are women, with a proportion of 68%, followed by men at 32% (Angelia, 2022). Although the proportion of women dominates, it cannot be denied that men's interest in K-dramas is also significant. This Korean Wave can be said to be the origin of various types of culture in South Korea, including music, K-dramas or Korean dramas, cuisine, and fashion, which have become a trend among the public (Aditama, 2023). The entry of the Korean Wave into Indonesia was preceded by the arrival of the Korean drama series titled "Endless Love," which sparked the Korean drama craze in Indonesia (Shafwa & Sudrajat, 2023). Korean dramas are one of the popular and widely loved types of dramas by teenagers, parents, students, and workers alike. Starting from here, fans, commonly referred to as K-drama fandoms, were formed (Amalia & Tranggono, 2022).

Behind the popularity of Korean dramas or K-dramas, young generations are shifting from their local indigenous culture and are turning toward and becoming interested in learning foreign cultures (Tarsiah et al., 2023). This phenomenon can lead to the erosion of local cultural elements due to the influence of foreign cultures. In the context of men who love K-dramas, this process is evident in changes that begin with lifestyle, food, dress or fashion, and even the way they socialize. This, of course, has the potential to displace local culture (Ramadhan et al., 2022).

According to Kustiawan (2023), the spread of the Korean Wave has sparked interest in Korean culture, leading to acculturation among Indonesian teenagers. Three aspects were found: 1) Mass media is closely intertwined with the lives of teenagers and adults, forming the foundation of Korean culture in Indonesia. 2) Korean culture in Indonesia is largely presented thru dramas, fashion, music, food, and language. This material is found thru diffusion and culturalization, with only a small amount reaching assimilation. 3) Teenagers and adults accept all the spread of cultural diffusion and culturalization materials, but teenagers tend to be more enthusiastic about music culture.

Meanwhile, Fatihah (2023) observed both positive and negative impacts of Korean Wave culture, as well as the factors causing cultural acculturation between Korean and Indonesian cultures. Positive impacts include the Korean Wave becoming an inspiration in the fashion world, self-image awareness, providing motivation and enthusiasm, and emotional benefits as entertainment and stress relief. Negative impacts include excessive fan behavior, the emergence of fanaticism, wasting time and money, and the emergence of inappropriate clothing styles that contradict Indonesian culture.

The final study was conducted by Musrin (2022), which examined the impact of Korean drama viewing intensity on the behavior of the Korean fan community. Musrin (2022) divided the focus into four areas: impact on language, impact on appearance, impact on social interaction, and impact on media application. The impact on language includes speaking using Korean terms, writing captions on social media using Korean, and adopting a Korean accent. The impact on appearance includes Korean-style clothing, accessory use, and Korean-style hairstyles. The impact on social interaction includes only socializing with fellow Korean fans, only socializing with fellow community members, and not actively participating in communities outside of the Korean community. The impact on media application includes excessive social media use and spending time solely watching Korean dramas.

Based on the current research developments, previous studies on K-drama lovers in Indonesia have primarily focused on female fans and their impact on their social lives. Research on the satisfaction motives sought by male fans in watching K-dramas is still limited. Therefore, this study focuses on the motives of male K-drama lovers in using media to meet their needs in their lives, based on the perspective of Uses and Gratification theory. Uses and Gratification theory, proposed by Katz (1974), is defined as individuals actively seeking specific media and content to

achieve certain satisfaction or outcomes. Additionally, it was explained that individuals can not only determine which media they want to use, but also their personal values regarding each medium they use. This shows that media not only fulfills positive needs but can also influence the balance of individuals' social and psychological needs (Maulana & Dharma, 2025). Katz (1974) Uses and Gratification theory has four simple indicators for media use needs. These needs include diversion, where media users use media to divert their attention from daily routines, problems, or simply seek entertainment; personal relationship, where media users use media to maintain or build social relationships or interactions with others; personality identity, where media users use media to strengthen or express their personal identity; and surveillance, where media users use media to obtain information about their surroundings.

In this context, the media used by male K-drama lovers as a necessity is social media X. In social media X, many autobase accounts have emerged to facilitate the interests of X users. One of the accounts that discusses K-drama is the @kdrama_menfess account. @kdrama_menfess is an account that provides a service for sending tweet messages anonymously with topics related to K-drama. With this account, users can send and reply to messages, facilitating the exchange of information between users (Safitri, 2025). This shows that people, especially men, who are interested in K-dramas will definitely need a medium to get what they want. Therefore, Uses and Gratification theory provides a relevant framework for the phenomenon of male K-drama lovers on the @kdrama_menfess account on the social media platform X.

Based on the explanation that has been described above, this study aims to explore the motives of male K-drama lovers in using media, namely the @kdrama_menfess account to follow the growing trend of K-drama in the perspective of the Uses and Gratification theory which divides four indicators of media use needs, namely diversion, personal relationship, personality identity, and surveillance. Based on this background, an interesting problem to be studied is how the motives of male K-drama lovers in fulfilling their needs through social media, especially on the @kdrama_menfess account. This study focuses on four main needs, namely diversion, personal relationship, personality identity, and surveillance, and is expected to contribute to the development of cultural studies in the field of communication science.

II. Research Method

The research method used in this study is qualitative with a virtual ethnographic approach. Virtual ethnography is a methodological approach used to explore user interacting in the virtual world using the internet (Cahyono & Dharma, 2023). Hine, (2001) defines the virtual ethnographic approach as an approach used to examine social phenomena and cyberculture in the virtual world. This can be interpreted as observing individual activities that occur in the virtual world, not the real world, which is described as "ethnography in, of, and thru the virtual," thus eliminating the need for face-to-face interaction. The steps in virtual ethnography involve participation and observation by utilizing online platforms on the internet, such as social media, smartphones, and computers (Ana & Dharma, 2024).

The subjects in this study were male account users who followed the @kdrama_menfess account on social media X. The researcher used purposive sampling, which involves selecting informants according to the researcher's needs, namely, with the characteristics of liking K-dramas for at least 3-5 years. The researcher conducted participant observation in a virtual scope by observing and observing male users who were active on the @kdrama_menfess account, so that these users would be the informants in the study. This study took five male informants with an age range of 19 to 25 years.

The data collection techniques that will be used in this study are online observation and interviews. Data was obtained thru online interviews via direct message on X. After the data was obtained from the informants, it was analyzed using four indicators of media needs based on Uses and Gratification theory to gain a deeper understanding of how male K-drama lovers fulfill their needs thru social media on the @kdrama_menfess account, which includes diversion, personal relationship, personality identity, and surveillance.

III. Discussion

The analysis results in this study reveal how media use, particularly in the form of K-dramas, serves to meet various individual needs based on Uses and Gratification theory. One of the most dominant needs in this study is diversion. In Uses and Gratification theory, one of the reasons individuals use media is for diversion. Diversion is defined as a category of satisfaction derived from media use, involving escape from daily routines, distancing oneself from stressful situations, or simply seeking entertainment (Wakas & Wulage, 2021). Many people seek distraction through media such as movies, music, or video games. One popular form of escapism today is watching K-dramas. Watching K-dramas has become a highly popular form of escapism across various demographics, especially among men. K-dramas offer captivating storylines, complex characters, and high-quality production, which can capture viewers' attention and transport them to a different world (Putri et al., 2024). For male fans, watching K-dramas is a way to fill their free time. Even some of them sometimes binge-watch K-dramas as a way to forget something that's bothering them. This demonstrates the media's function as a means of fulfilling emotional needs, as explained in the Uses and Gratification theory. The use of media for entertainment has become even more relevant during the pandemic, as many people seek ways to fill their free time and combat loneliness. As Rivo's informant said,

"At that time it was during the pandemic, I was bored and just wanted to try watching a K-drama because a friend recommended it. So, I ended up watching Crash Landing on You, and I thought it was fun, so I kept going until now. Sometimes when I'm stressed with work, I choose to binge-watch K-dramas on the weekends, finishing 12 to 16 episodes in a day. I think watching K-dramas can neutralize a bad mood." (Rivo - 24 years old, March 14, 2025)

The informant's answer represents the dominant opinion of most other informants. This shows that K-dramas play an important role as a form of entertainment used to fill leisure time and reduce boredom. This finding aligns with Tumiwa (2024) research, which revealed that K-Pop and Korean dramas have evolved into a form of entertainment capable of accompanying various moods, whether individuals are feeling happy, sad, cheerful, or confused. The phenomenon of binge-watching K-dramas also shows how media can be a primary choice for filling leisure time, especially during the pandemic when outdoor activities are limited. In that situation, K-dramas are not only entertainment but also a means of diverting attention from things that are bothering the mind. This indicates a shift in media consumption patterns, where media serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a tool to meet emotional needs and provide comfort.

Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that K-dramas serve as an effective distraction or diversion in overcoming feelings of loneliness, particularly for individuals who are far from home or have migrated. With emotional involvement in the complex plot and characters, viewers feel as though they are in the world depicted in the drama. This experience creates a "sense of companionship" with the characters in the story, even though they are not physically real. This finding aligns with the Uses and Gratification theory proposed by Katz (1973), which states that media is used not only for entertainment but also to build emotional connections that can provide psychological comfort. Thus, K-dramas not only serve as passive entertainment but also as a psychological process for coping with stress, loneliness, and emotional pressure.

The statement made by Rivo's informant shows how K-dramas serve as a form of escapism in daily life, both for coping with work-related stress and for reducing feelings of loneliness, especially while living abroad. In this context, K-dramas are not just entertainment, but also provide emotional satisfaction by taking viewers out of their reality, creating a sense of connection with the fictional world, and helping to overcome negative feelings arising from certain situations. Uses and Gratification theory, this phenomenon of watching K-dramas demonstrates how individuals use media to fulfill their emotional needs. This diversion serves as a means to momentarily forget daily routines, overcome feelings of stress or loneliness, and find comfort (Katz et al., 1974).

This phenomenon of diversion is also closely related to the need for personal relationships or social integration. One of the basic needs fulfilled thru media is the need for social integration. This motive is based on the desire to use media as a means of creating, enhancing, and maintaining social interaction in both real and virtual life (Katz et al., 1974). This need for integration often takes the form of parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships are viewed as one-way relationships because fans, especially those aged from adolescence to young adulthood, feel an emotional bond with their idol figures, even tho the idol figures themselves are unaware of their existence (Perbawani & Nuralin, 2021). The parasocial relationship in this K-drama is created when fans become fanboys of Korean actors or actresses. Beside being fanboys, fans also join fan groups of Korean actors or actresses. In fact, fans also attend fanmeeting events of Korean actors or actresses. With this involvement, fans can feel closer to their idol figures, creating a deep sense of connection even tho the interaction is one-way and the figures don't know them. This was experienced by informant Agung, who stated the following,

"At that time, I had already joined the Lee Je Hoon Indonesia fan group, Kak. After joining the group, I made friends who had the same interests. Then, I only attended his fanmeeting event in Jakarta in 2023. Fanmeetings are more about having fun, but there's a hi-bye session with the actors. I was noticed back then, even tho it was just a smile and a wave. I feel really happy, Kak, because he knows I'm alive hahaha."
(Agung - 25 years old, March 12, 2025)

According to Katz (1974), the informant's statement above shows how media and popular culture, such as K-dramas, become effective means of fulfilling social integration needs. Katz (1974) also stated that individuals often use media to meet their psychological needs, such as feeling accepted in a group or feeling close to a certain figure even tho the interaction is one-way. This indicates that media is not consumed passively, but is actively utilized by individuals to meet their psychological and social needs. This aligns with research conducted by Suciati (2024), which discusses fan meetings or fan events on the TikTok media platform as a unique and intimate presentation that fosters parasocial interaction between actresses and fans. In this context, fanmeetings held thru the TikTok media platform provide a more interactive and personal experience for fans. This shows that the event is not just a meeting, but also a form of presentation that allows fans to feel close to their idols, even within the boundaries of a one-way parasocial relationship. This is also experienced by fanboys like Agung, who felt a sense of closeness to their favorite actor during the fanmeeting. This parasocial relationship is one-way, as the actor does not personally know the informant. Simple actions like a smile or a wave from the actor make Agung feel noticed and valued as a fanboy. This reinforces the role of parasocial relationships in fulfilling social integration needs, where fans feel connected to their idol figures thru these experiences. Additionally, the involvement of Agung, the informant, in the Indonesian Lee Je Hoon fan group also demonstrates how social media and fan communities serve as a means to expand social interaction, both in real life and virtual life.

This shows that even tho the parasocial relationship between fans and idols is one-way, it still fulfills the need for social integration or personal relationships. Thru social media, specifically fan communities, fans can feel connected and build social bonds with individuals who share similar interests (Katz et al., 1973). Thus, media plays a role in expanding social interaction, both in the real world and the virtual world.

Then, the media also serves to meet the need for personality identity. According to Katz (1974) within the Uses and Gratification theory framework, personal identity is one of the needs that must be met thru media. The need for personal identity is met thru several processes involving an individual's interaction with media and the social environment. These processes occur dynamically and allow individuals to strengthen, express, or shape their personal identity (Wardani & Azwar, 2024). One of the factors influencing individuals in forming their self-identity is identifying with characters or figures in the media, such as Korean actors and actresses in K-dramas (Hakim et al., 2021). This phenomenon can be considered an exploration of identity, where individuals, especially K-drama fans, try to imitate the clothing styles or personalities of

certain characters as part of expressing their self-identity (Azizah et al., 2023). In this case, media not only serves as a place for entertainment or information, but also as a means for K-drama fans to express, reinforce, and maintain their personal identities. Dika reports,

"Ever since I started watching K-dramas, I've become good at matching outfits, Kak. I always have to dress really well, be neat, and smell nice to look like the actors in K-dramas. Beside that, the outfit styles in K-dramas match my personality, simple but still casual, so that makes me more confident when I go out anywhere." (Dika - 19 years old, March 15, 2025)

In Katz (1974) view, the informant's statement above is a need that arises thru several processes involving the individual's interaction with the media and social environment. This process is dynamic, allowing individuals to strengthen, express, or shape their personal identities. This aligns with research conducted by Muhaditia (2022), which found that fashion is considered a way for teenagers to communicate because the clothing style they are wearing is a form of personal identity or self. For K-drama fans, especially young ones or individuals seeking self-discovery, wearing Korean-inspired outfits can be a form of experimenting with their identity. They might be interested in Korean fashion or culture as part of their personal identity search process. Thru fashion, they try to experiment with new looks and styles, and this helps them understand more deeply who they are and how they want to be seen by others. This falls under the category of identity achievement, which is the development of identity where individuals have explored various options and values, and finally made a strong commitment to those choices (Frismadewi & Darminto, 2022).

The statement made by informant Dika shows how this exploration of identity occurs in the form of adjusting clothing styles according to the characters they admire from K-dramas. The clothing styles worn by the characters in K-dramas, which appear neat and casual, become models of behavior that are emulated and adopted by fans, especially among teenagers who are seeking to form their own identities. Informant Dika also feels more confident when wearing outfits like those seen in K-dramas, demonstrating how clothing style and self-appearance can be tools for boosting self-confidence, while also reinforcing the need for personal identity. In the context of Katz (1974) Uses and Gratification theory, media not only provides entertainment content but also serves as a means for individuals to express themselves, express their personalities, and reinforce the values they consider relevant to them.

The final media need, surveillance in the aspect of information or monitoring, refers to the need to find out what is happening in the surrounding environment, understand what is present in the surrounding environment, and identify popular or emerging trends. According to Katz (1974) in his theory of Uses and Gratification, the need for media arises to obtain information, insights, and understanding about something. This need is also driven by curiosity and a desire to learn more by engaging in activities such as reading news, following current trends, and accessing content that aligns with individual interests (Katz et al., 1973).

In this context, there is a K-drama community that can channel information related to K-dramas, one of which is the account @kdrama_menfess. This autobase account, which has a million followers, is a platform for male K-drama lovers to find K-drama-related information. Besides being a place to find information, this account also sometimes serves as a source of entertainment, where followers sometimes respond to tweets with memes depicting K-drama characters. Informant Adfi said,

"I've been following this menfess for quite a while now, I think since 2020. Well, sometimes beside looking for information about K-dramas and up-and-coming Korean actresses and actors, I also look for memes in the comments, Kak. Seriously, it makes me laugh out loud. Once I find a meme, sometimes I make a sticker on WhatsApp and send it to my friends for fun." (Adfi - 25 years old, March 12, 2025)

In Katz (1974) view, the media is an important tool in fulfilling this need, with individuals actively seeking information through various media channels such as news, digital content, or the latest trends. Not only as an information channel, media also becomes an interaction space where users can share information, discuss, and even engage in light forms of entertainment such as memes. In line with research conducted by Doko (2024), discussing the activities of the @ARMY_Kupang account community, which not only shares information but also shares visual content. The activity of sharing this visual content is sharing images or videos of the boy band BTS which include clips or video clips edited by fans for entertainment purposes only. Therefore, if related to the informant Adfi's statement above, in addition to obtaining information about K-dramas and Korean actors, the @kdrama_menfess community also serves as a space for entertainment and creative expression for its fans. Through interactions such as sharing memes or funny reactions to uploaded content, followers of the @kdrama_menfess account not only fulfill their information needs, but also their social and emotional needs. This shows that the K-drama community provides a more holistic experience, where fans can share laughter and create bonds through shared interests and humor (Qorib & Olievia, 2023).

Thus, this community is more than just a platform to get information about the latest dramas, the career developments of actors and actresses, or the growing K-drama trends; the @kdrama_menfess account also provides a place for fans to release their excitement and entertain themselves. Fans like informant Adfi can find a way to combine the world of entertainment with enjoyable social interactions, through things like creating and sharing memes. This shows that in the context of the Uses and Gratification theory proposed by Katz (1974), fans are not only looking for surveillance or information, but also entertainment.

Overall, the use of media, especially K-dramas, demonstrates how media serves as a tool to meet various psychological needs of individuals, ranging from distraction from stress and loneliness to personal identity formation, the occurrence of parasocial relationships, and as a source of information. In this context, the phenomenon of watching K-dramas not only reflects changes in how people consume media but also how media can function more complexly, fulfilling the emotional, social, and identity needs of its users.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the above findings, the research results indicate that men's attachment to K-dramas is driven by four main motives within the Uses and Gratification theory. First, diversion is the most dominant motive, where K-dramas help men cope with stress, fill leisure time during the pandemic, and reduce feelings of loneliness in a foreign land. Second, personal relationships (the need for social integration) are created thru parasocial relationships between male fans and K-drama actors, which are strengthened by fan meetings and fan communities. Third, personality identity (the need for personal identity) emerges when men imitate the clothing styles of K-drama characters to express their self-identity and boost their self-confidence. Finally, surveillance (the need for information) is also one of the reasons why male fans are drawn to K-dramas. Mereka memanfaatkan media sosial, seperti akun @kdrama_menfess, untuk mendapatkan informasi terkini, berbagi pendapat, hingga menikmati hiburan tambahan berupa meme dan reaksi lucu terkait K-drama. Overall, diversion is the most dominant motive. For them, K-dramas are not just entertainment, but also a medium to unwind, fill leisure time, and reduce loneliness, especially when far from home. K-dramas not only serve as passive entertainment but also as a psychological tool that helps men cope with stress during tiring times and overcome loneliness.

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