

Korean Dramas and Construction of Career Woman Symbols

ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study aimed to explore how the simulacra that occur in the practice of binge-watching and uncover symbols constructed in career woman fans of Korean Dramas.

Study design: The critical constructivist approach was used by applying Baudrillard's Simulacra Theory, which looks at simulations that occur in career women and construct symbols from sign receptions through the media.

Place and Duration of Study: Jakarta, Indonesia, from January – June 2023.

Methodology: This study used critical reflection. The interviews were conducted with ten informants who are career women in Jakarta, have worked for at least three years, have at least one child who is a maximum of 12 years old, and like to watch Korean dramas for at least 2 hours a day.

Results: Career women who allot their time to watching Korean dramas continuously interpret shows based on the emptiness and deficiencies that exist in their lives. They then read the signs through unreal impressions and assume that if they want what they expect in the real world, then they must be the same as the characters in the story. Meanwhile, Korean Dramas as media have a magic formula to engage their audience. Career women seem to be enchanted so they are unable to see what is not real and what their actions in the real world are to become what is not real. Career woman symbols are constructed through a simulation space in binge-watching practice.

Conclusion: Korean Dramas have become a simulation space in the practice of binge-watching by career women. Career woman symbols that are constructed through the media are career women who have the beauty standard constructed and relations that can elevate their social status.

Keywords: *simulacra, binge-watching, Korean dramas, career women*

1. INTRODUCTION

Media convergence that exists because of internet support makes it easier for people to enjoy Korean dramas. Through gadgets with internet, people can watch (Korean dramas) anywhere and anytime. This then creates a practice of continuous watching known as binge-watching. In the preliminary study conducted by researchers on women after work, it is known that on the way home, on public transport, they admit that they will allot their time to watching Korean dramas to relieve fatigue until they become immersed in the story and ignore their surroundings. Including preferring to watch advertisements and waiting while there is a break in the show.

Watching is an activity that Indonesians are most interested in during their spare time. This has been proven in a survey conducted by JakPat entitled "Isi Waktu Senggang, Ini Kegiatan yang Disukai Orang Indonesia" ("Enjoy Your Spare Time, These Are Activities That Indonesians Like). The survey shows that 70% of respondents or Indonesians mostly like to watch movies to enjoy their spare time followed by other activities carried out, including

listening to music, watching serials/dramas, reading news online, and doing other hobbies. This reality is shown in the following Table 1.

No	Activities	Score
1	Watching movies	70
2	Listening music	68
3	Watching drama series	51
4	Reading online news	40
5	Doing hobbies	38
6	Reading online books/comics	38
7	Watching vlog	32
8	Watching news	31
9	Reading books/comics	28
10	Watching reality show	27

Table 1. Survey JakPat, 2022. Activities in leisure time.

Furthermore, associated with the phenomenon that occurred at the beginning of 2020, namely the COVID-19 pandemic where Indonesians were required to carry out activities at home in order to reduce the transmission rate of this virus, there was a significant increase in viewing rates. Data usage traffic for streaming has increased by 193% (Pasaribu, 2020). In the following year, Chriswied et al. (2021) conducted a study involving 1,034 respondents in Indonesia. The study shows that 43% of respondents have a high level of intensity in online streaming. This is in line with a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association (APJII), that there is an increase in internet usage from year to year, namely 202.6 million people in 2020, 210.03 million people in 2021, and 215.63 million people in 2023.

Kristanty et al. (2022) reveal that during the COVID-19 pandemic, watching Korean Dramas was one of the choices chosen by Indonesians. This is in line with a study conducted by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), which is now referred to as the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), in 2020, that 842 out of 924 respondents watched Korean Drama during the COVID-19 pandemic. This indirectly shows that Korean Drama fans in Indonesia are still dominating and continue to grow.

One of the driving factors for this to happen is the existence of streaming services such as Netflix and Viu, which make it easier for Indonesians to access Korean Dramas (Kristanty et al., 2022). A survey conducted by JakPat discussing the frequency of Indonesians watching Korean Drama shows that the majority of respondents, namely around 29%, watched Korean Drama every day. Then 28% of respondents watched Korean Dramas 2 to 3 times a week. On average, respondents in the survey watched Korean Dramas 4 times a week.

The practice of watching many episodes of serials/dramas in one sitting is known as binge-watching (Elyan & Irwansyah, 2020). Wheeler (2015) describes binge-watching as the behavior of watching episode after episode (consecutive) of the same title or series in one sitting (Asgher & Gohar, 2022). Now, with the increasingly advanced times, the practice of

binge-watching can be done by everyone through streaming using online media platforms such as Youtube, Netflix, and others. With the support of many movie streaming services and the ease of accessing the internet, it helps users to enjoy watching movies online anytime and anywhere (Al-shufi & Erfina, 2021). Here, the user has the power to set the speed and time of watching (Elyan & Irwansyah, 2020).

In the end, technological advances can create a new world for human life by providing many things through the internet. It is clear that technology has become an inseparable part of human life so this has caused society to experience "social transformation", anything that can be done in the real world today can also be done in digital space (cyberspace) (Saumantri & Zikrillah, 2020). The convenience and comfort offered by technological advances indirectly change the behavior of the audience.

According to Jean Baudrillard, in his work entitled "Simulacra and Simulations (1985)," today's society lives in a simulated world where they are constantly surrounded by absurd signs, symbols, and codes. Baudrillard calls this phenomenon "simulacra", in which model and reproduction are of paramount importance. In the world of simulacra, humans are no longer in the presence of actual reality but live in the imagination and delusions that occur in the space where the simulation takes place. This causes difficulties in distinguishing between right and wrong, reality and fantasy—because the distance between the two feels very far and difficult to distinguish (Saumantri & Zikrillah, 2020).

Baudrillard's notion of simulation refers to the process of creating reality through abstract models or concepts, namely those that cannot be felt directly and are often related to "myths" that are difficult to prove in reality (Azwar, 2014). Simulacra makes people believe that things that are not real seem to be real. As a result of the presence of technology, a new world is formed and categorized as a simulation world by Baudrillard, where this world is built by signs and codes. The signs consist of fact signs (reality) that are constructed through the process of reproduction, and pseudo signs (images) that mix or overlap into one unit (Astuti, 2017).

Jean Baudrillard states that today's culture is the postmodern era. The idea of the postmodern era is also determined by the emergence of remote technologies, the emergence of globalization and post-industrial society, and the power of image and simulacra in consumer culture (Habib, 2018). In his view, Baudrillard argues that this culture is marked by plurality, diversion, intense fragmentation, and deception. According to him, the mass media plays a role in creating demand and attraction for objects that ultimately transform society into a strong consumer society. In the context of postmodern media and consumer society, everything becomes an image and a sign (Habib, 2018).

In "The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects (1967)," MacLuhan describes a world reproduced by electronic media, in which individuals are continually impacted by a never-ending flow of information. He argues that television and telephone have a greater effect in transmitting something to the people who communicate than in producing the communication itself (Habib, 2018). Therefore, postmodern culture is characterized by the existence of symbols, simulacra, and images that play an important role in determining human behavior. Thus this study wanted to see a simulation that occurs through the practice of binge-watching, especially in Korean dramas performed by career women.

The involvement of women in dual roles, as workers and housewives, causes heavier demands than normal (Rezekika, 2014). In the end, this does little to make career women tend to have the pressures of life. If they run out of energy, their mental balance can be

disrupted, which can cause stress. Stress in question is a condition which can cause psychological tension or suffering, causing anxiety (Rezekika, 2014)

This study wanted to see the simulacra that occurs in the practice of binge-watching and what symbols are constructed through simulacra in the practice of binge-watching in career woman fans of Korean Dramas.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 APPROACHES AND METHODS

This study is research using the critical constructivist approach with the aim of exploring simulacra that occurs in the practice of binge-watching and determining the symbols that occur in the practice of binge-watching in career woman fans of Korean Dramas. This study used critical reflection. This type of study refers to the interrogation of a data set through insights that identify ideological biases and the implications of biased power relations (Baxter & Babbie, 2004).

The interviews were conducted with ten informants who are career women in Jakarta who have children of school age. Women of this characteristic are those with a high level of activity because part of their life is spent working and taking care of children, but they still have time to watch Korean dramas for hours. Then, the literature searches are also sources for researchers to analyze critically.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 MAKING SENSE OF LIFE THROUGH KOREAN DRAMAS

A movie is one among many media present. A movie, which is included in audiovisual media, is a combination of music, images, and sound (Robertson, 2015). Movie, which is part of the mass media, is present in society, not only to entertain but also to provide information and even touch the emotions of the audience. Bordwell & Thompson (2009) add that a movie must contain a meaning because the audience will associate a movie with a meaning.

Therefore, the audience cannot think of meaning as simple content that can be extracted from a movie. Sometimes the movie maker guides the audience to reach a certain meaning, or sometimes the audience will find a meaning that is unwanted by the movie maker. Most people choose movies that can immerse them in the plot, making them feel everything that the characters and events in the movies do.

N1 (34) is one of the informants (in this study) who likes Korean Dramas, especially those played by Choi Ji-Woo. N1 revealed in her interview "She (Choi Ji-Woo) often plays characters of career women in Korean dramas. In her life as a career woman, she often falls (crumbles) but she is tough in facing all problems of her life". Then N1 adds that "I see her as a woman, who can face all problems of her life well, whatever her problems are, she can handle them and solve them really well". From N1's statement, it can be concluded that N1 relates the meaning of watching Korean Dramas to the career and work she has.

Likewise, N2 (30) who interprets Korean Dramas as a relationship with a partner (of life). In her interview, she stated "Of course, it (Korean drama) makes you imagine how it feels to be in a relationship with a man, who is not only handsome but also rich, while you are an ordinary woman with ordinary family background, but his parents accept you. Everyone will definitely want that, right? However, in the real world, the handsome one wants the beautiful

one and vice versa. The rich want the rich. But, in Korean (drama), a handsome and rich man can be attracted to an ordinary woman.”

N2's statement is in line with N5's statement that “Two people (a man and woman) who met in a condition that they are not familiar with. The woman is from a city, in which she is familiar with urban life. Then she met a village man, whose job is selling goods every day—his life is far different from urban life. That is called a very different personality, right? But in the end, they met in one place and fell in love with each other”.

Acceptance is the process by which social agents produce an understanding and significance of what they consume in the context of consumption formation and habits (Jeong et al., 2017). Individuals will (only) see messages related to themselves when they watch dramas/movies, even though, in fact, dramas/movies may contain many other messages. This is done to fill the void in their life.

3.2 SIMULATION IN BINGE-WATCHING

A movie, which is part of the media, becomes a simulation space where individuals can experience things that they may not be able to experience in everyday life. According to Jean Baudrillard, in his work entitled “Simulacra and Simulations (1985),” today's society lives in a simulated world where they are constantly surrounded by absurd signs, symbols, and codes. Baudrillard calls this phenomenon “simulacra”, in which model and reproduction are of paramount importance.

In N1's statement regarding career and work, she simulates a successful career woman as a woman who is attractive (beautiful), has an ideal body, dresses neatly, and becomes the idol of many men. “Furthermore, in movies/dramas that I have watched, Choi Ji-Woo's character is always depicted as a career woman who is beautiful, thin, and tall, and wears nice clothes. Also, she is loved by many rich men. It's like a definition of perfect.” From watching Korean Dramas, N1 symbolizes that a good appearance can support the success of a career woman at work.

Likewise, N2 simulates an attractive appearance as one of the keys to gaining social status. “You're an ordinary woman and then you meet a man who's really rich, so you date him. In the real world, it is usually impossible to do something like that, right? I want to be like that, but in the real world, it is all just imagination, right? If only my husband can be like that—handsome and rich. And me, I wish I am beautiful, thin like today's girls—especially with my body type which is chubby, so it's like... duh, I want to have a body as thin as those girls, as fair as those girls. So, of course, I have that imagination.”

There is a symbol error that is read by career women when they watch Korean Dramas. Movies that should have a function as a means of entertainment, in fact, do not function as intended. They (career women) simulate themselves from the symbols they get through Korean Dramas. This simulated world no longer cares about reality or truth, lies, representations, facts, images, productions, or reproductions—because they all come together in a chaos of symbols. Essentially, humans in simulacra are not present in actual reality but are always trapped in imaginary thoughts and trapped in delusions when they see the reality in which the simulation mechanism operates (Saumantri & Zikrillah, 2020).

Through simulation, humans inhabit a reality where the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, the real and the fake—become very blurred. This is due to the existence of a

magic formula that bewitches individuals so they are unable to see the real and the unreal. A movie is often referred to as a role-playing art in which various elements of work are contained. In a movie, several intrinsic elements are analyzed, including themes, plot, characters, characterizations, settings, language, and moral messages (Hanum et al., 2022). This is what makes the audience enchanted and simulates the symbols they see when watching Korean Dramas. N5 stated this in her statement "Just like the things in the movies/dramas. We're just happy to watch them. Sometimes we get immersed, our brains are simulated". In fact, when individuals use media, they not only use the media but also there is something constructed by the media in their minds.

3.3 "Real" actions for the reception from the "Unreal" media

The ideology of symbols as conveyed by Jean Baudrillard, in his work entitled "Simulacra and Simulations (1985)," is to make people believe in all the falsehoods that make them content, rich, happy, and liberated. This is what makes career women follow up on the symbols they find when watching Korean Dramas to fulfill their feelings.

This shows that the Korean Drama phenomenon is accompanied by certain symbolic power that is structured at the micro level where individuals use, exploit, and adapt (Jeong et al., 2017). The power of Korean Dramas can then transform society. This is in line with N2's statement, "Yes, it definitely becomes standards for women now, for example, I become hesitant to eat instant noodles, rice—I want to be thin, as thin and beautiful as Korean women, but it's hard to be as beautiful as Korean women. For me, I even think that if I had the money I would I want to undergo plastic surgery in Korea, for example, I want to have a sharp nose, a beautiful face, and fair skin. I think this is why lots of people go to aesthetic clinics, they want to look like Korean women. Because in today's society, Korean beauty is the standard. It is like, if you want to be seen as beautiful, you have to be thin like Korean women, if you are fat, you are not beautiful, you are ugly".

There are cultural forces that have been able to change individuals. Now, an attractive woman is constructed as someone who has standards like a Korean actress. They are described as someone who has a sharp nose, a beautiful face, fair skin, and a thin body. It is the depiction of this appearance that will make someone (woman) have a life partner with a high social level so that it will increase their status indirectly.

"Actually, this is one of the things that make me feel motivated at work. Whenever I'm down or stressed, I remember Choi Ji-Woo, so I get motivated again." Interestingly in N2's statement, she feels more resilient in facing her work as a result of the symbols she simulated in watching Korean Dramas. This is what Baudrillard means when people actually want entertainment. Messages have been conveyed to them through the shows, causing them to grasp at the symbols, and idolize the play of the symbols.

The models created are only symbols, which are specifically referred to by Baudrillard as signs of reality. In the context of simulation, these signs are not representations of a reality outside of them but they refer to themselves, as pure copies (simulacrum) (Yasraf Amir, 2003). Baudrillard explains how signs can be made into commodities in the discourse of capitalism, which demands appearance, fascination, and surprise. The appearance of the sign is more attractive to everyone than the message or meaning it is trying to convey. As a result, people are lulled into the passion for the sign's appearance through simulation (Fitrianti, 2018).

Lee (2018) states that Korean dramas are 'an escape, a fantasy that is known to take one away from one's own life for them to participate in another world.' Beautiful people, clothes,

and stories. Jean Baudrillard sees that in the contemporary era, women always use symbols or consume symbols continuously, which in turn causes them to become consumptive and hedonic individuals

3.4 CAREER WOMAN SYMBOLS

Baudrillard's thoughts regarding sign-value refer to a regime of symbols when humans live and enjoy life by consuming symbols—referring to the exchange value of an object, which is based on "image," "symbol," and "sign."

Career women who watch Korean Dramas consume symbols that they associate with their daily lives. There are three symbols formed by career women as a result of watching Korean Dramas. The first is a symbol of unnatural beauty. The visuals of Korean actors and actresses reinforce Korean beauty trends by showing beauty through the appearance of actors and actresses in Korean dramas. They display handsomeness, beauty, good body proportions—tall and slim, fair skin (no pimples, mustache, or beard), rosy lips, and a variety of hairstyles, as well as clothing styles with branded goods.

This creates a lingering image of Korean actors, actresses, and idols in the eyes of the audience. The image of Korean stars is constructed because appearance, in Korean society, is the main focus of attention—and is considered to be able to influence individual success in both domestic and non-domestic contexts (Choi, 2019).

The second is a symbol of recognition of social status. In Korean dramas/movies that look like fairytales, they describe relationships formed by couples with different social status backgrounds. A person who is described as perfect in appearance even though they come from a lower social class can have a life partner from an upper social class.

In Korean Dramas, romance is not focused on sexual scenes, but rather on a journey towards a happy life. This is demonstrated through the dynamics of the relationship between the characters in the story, with an emphasis on harmonization as a representation of traditional Korean values. In this context, romance in Korean dramas focuses more on efforts to create a life full of happiness rather than sexual aspects (Bandasak, 2021).

Finally, the third is a symbol of optimism. They see the character in Korean dramas as someone who is capable, solutive, tough, and has outstanding abilities. As time goes by and the production of Korean dramas and movies increases, the role of women depicted in them undergoes a transformation. Many Korean dramas and movies feature female characters who are brave, tough, strong, and don't give up easily. This becomes a contrast to the view of traditional society which tends to see women as weak, motherly, and in need of protection (Hasanah & Ratnaningtyas, 2022).

The symbols that occur in the practice of binge-watching in career woman fans of Korean Dramas are constructed according to the characters that each individual refers to based on themselves. They take actions based on these symbols because of encouragement from the dramas/movies, not because of the awareness that arises from them. In the end, Baudrillard state that in the postmodern era marked by technological advances, people buy or use something no longer because of its

function but because of the symbolic meaning attached to the object (Baudrillard, 1983).

4. CONCLUSION

Korean Dramas succeed in creating a simulation space, which then construct symbols for career women who allot their time to watching. Career woman symbols in this advanced modern era look like what is constructed by Korean dramas and perceptions of social status.

CONSENT

The authors of this study declare that written consent was obtained from the patients (or other approved parties) for publication of this case study along with accompanying images. A copy of the written consent is available for review by the Editorial office/Chief Editor/Editorial Board members of this journal.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The authors of this study hereby declare that all experiments carried out have been examined and approved by the competent ethics committee and have therefore been performed following the ethical standards specified in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

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