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Exploring the Psychological and Social Impacts of K-drama Binge Watching among College Students

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Abstract

The binge-watching phenomenon has become a trend when one of the online streaming television platforms, Netflix, offers a variety of series genres. The phenomenon of binge-watching has become a common practice among spectators and students are one of them and binge-watching activities are part of student activities in their daily lives. This study aims to describe the motives, patterns and implications of binge-watching through descriptive qualitative approach using semi-structured interview in obtaining primary data with 20 college students (students from Faculty of Communications at Universitas Mercu Buana) as informants. The results of the study found that there are (1) the motivation of students to binge-watch is to spend time, entertain, escape, and relax (2) the implications of watching marathons are in the form of physiological and social implications.

Keywords: *Binge-watching, K-drama, College student*

Abstrak

Fenomena binge-watching telah menjadi tren ketika salah satu platform streaming televisi online, Netflix, menawarkan berbagai genre serial.

Fenomena binge-watching telah menjadi praktik umum di kalangan penonton, termasuk mahasiswa, di mana aktivitas ini telah menjadi bagian dari keseharian mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan motif, pola, dan implikasi dari binge-watching melalui pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan menggunakan wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk memperoleh data primer dari 20 mahasiswa Fakultas Ilmu Komunikasi Universitas Mercu Buana sebagai informan. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa: (1) motivasi mahasiswa untuk binge-watching adalah mengisi waktu, mencari hiburan, melarikan diri dari rutinitas, dan bersantai; (2) implikasi dari menonton maraton mencakup dampak fisiologis dan sosial.

Kata Kunci: *Binge-watching, K-drama, Mahasiswa*

A. Introduction

Technological developments from year to year almost always change how we consume broadcast media. The remote control makes it easy to channel surf, while being private, the video recorder keeps people away from watching in real time. Binge watching, also known as "marathon viewing" or "binge viewing", has grown in popularity recently. According to a Deloitte survey (2016) conducted in 2015, 70% of their respondents had watched excessively, and 31% of all respondents did it every week. To some extent, binge viewing owes its popularity to the digitization of media. The recent digital revolution, and broadband communication, have significantly changed our TV viewing patterns. Today, a program can be delivered on demand in any digital medium, such as the Internet and mobile. With technological advances, binge watching can now be done through many devices.

The internet of things as part of the development of communication technology changes the interaction between humans and the media and media convergence makes the boundaries between one technology and another blur, resulting in new concepts and definitions such as the concept of television which was initially included in the category of mass communication experiencing significant changes to online video streaming services. The online video streaming service was started by Netflix in 1997 as an online-based DVD rental service (Jenner, 2016) at first, most of its business was still streaming content previously shown in theaters or on television.

The term Binge" is a term generally associated with an intense and time-consuming experience that usually results from depression and loneliness; However, in the case of binge-watching, it is argued that it may have positive effects rather than only negative ones (Sung et al., 2018). Jenner (2016) argues that binge-watching is a personalized act; binge behavior is likely to differ from one person to another. Film is a summary or description to convey stories, ideas, points of view, appearance, taste, atmosphere, and reflections of everyday life, which are considered to reflect or describe the reality of the message, so that it looks more alive. The phenomenal state of society often becomes an inspiration for filmmakers to turn it into works. It is this ability that makes films have a significant role in conveying messages, and can directly reflect everyday life (Nafida, 2021).

For students, the opportunity to watch dramas is at night and on holidays. At first, they only watched one or two episodes for about two hours, but watching dramas is like an addiction, where each episode keeps the audience watching until the episode ends. Students have a study schedule and attend lectures and they can watch all night long and as a result they are sleep deprived and sleepy during class hours, the plan is to go home from college and go straight to sleep but in reality Korean drama stories are still in their heads and cause when they come home from college not to sleep but to continue watch (Amri & Herpina, 2017). A study from Yolie and Hastuti (2024) found a strong positive correlation between binge-watching behavior and academic procrastination. Another study revealed reasons for binge-watching include mood enhancement, distraction, entertainment, habit formation, and relaxation. Other motivations identified were the sense of

completion, catching up on content, and narrative immersion. Despite users acknowledging the negative impacts, they perceive the benefits to outweigh the drawbacks. In general, the convenience offered by technology plays a significant role in binge-watching activities (Zahara & Irwansyah, 2020). Thus, this study aims to describe college students' activity in binge-watching Korean drama patterns and their implications.

B. Methods

Qualitative researchers collect data where participants experience the issues or problems under study. They don't bring individuals into the lab (a contrived situation) or typically ship instruments for individuals to complete. Up-close information gathered by speaking directly to people and seeing them behave and act in their context is a key characteristic of qualitative research. In natural settings, researchers have face-to-face interactions, often over time (Creswell, 2014).

The research subjects in this study were informants or respondents who were selected or predetermined. The research subjects were selected using a purposive sample, namely samples selected based on specific characteristics, quality, and criteria. Through this purposive sample technique, the sample is selected based on pre-existing knowledge, namely knowledge about the elements that exist in individuals and the purpose of the research to be carried out (Morissan et al., 2012). There are 20 students (from the faculty of Communications Universitas Mercu Buana) as informants who meet this study criteria: college students, 18 to 24 years old, K-drama fans, and binge-watchers.

This study conducted face-to-face interviews with participants in November 2024. These interviews involved a semi-structured interview, a flexible method commonly used in social sciences for qualitative research or collecting clinical data. Although it follows a pre-established guide or framework centered on a central topic, it also provides room for exploration. This approach allows the interviewer to adapt and follow new directions as the discussion progresses (Magaldi, D., Berler, 2020). In secondary data, researchers do not collect data directly, but rather data "taken" from other parties. The secondary data collection process, is the collection of the necessary data in the form of historical evidence or reports compiled in published archives. Before processing secondary data, the author needs to identify the needs first. Identification can be done by compiling various questions related to the source in solving the problem under study. Collect existing data about the situation by reading and searching for research-related literature, to support research. In this case, library research is done through books, magazines, newspapers, the internet, etc.

C. Results and Discussion

The objective of this study is to describe college students' activity on binge-watching Korean drama—patterns and implications, and to meet the study

objective, interviews were conducted with 20 informants who are college students, K-drama fans, and K-drama binge watchers.

The results of the study will be described in two sections: patterns and implications. The patterns section describes the reasons why informants engage in binge-watching, the specific genres and content preferences that attract them, and the time spent binge-watching, which includes the number of episodes involved in one binge-watching activity. The implications section describes how binge-watching affects informants' physiology and social life.

Table 1. Theme and Categorization of Binge-Watching

Theme	Motives	Patterns	Implications
Categorization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal External 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streaming service platform Genre and content preference Number of episodes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physiology Social Addiction

Source: adapted from own elaboration & Mahmoud&Wahab (2021)

Binge-watching Motives

According to the APA dictionary of psychology, a motive is a reason offered as an explanation for or cause of an individual's behavior.

Table 2. Motives

Internal	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free time and entertainment (AAS) (YLS) (RPW) (MR) (AN) (VAR) (Y) Escapism (MFM) (VNS) (IAP) (TMS) Story engagement (F) (MD) (AMS) Self-reward (OPM) Mood changer (AAS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer influence (H) Fear out missing out (LAF) (NAZ) (TA)

Source: Interview, 2024

Internal motives come from within, while external motives come from external sources. Most of the informants' internal motives are to fill their free time and for entertainment. Not all of the informants have an internal motive in doing binge-watching, five informants have external motives affected from outside, such as having peer influence and fear of missing out.

"I watch K-Drama marathons to fill my free time and for entertainment (AAR)".

"I watch K-Dramas to reduce the fatigue of living this tough life (MFM)".

"There are many reasons, and each time I want to watch, the reason is different. Most often, it's just to fill my free time and to combat boredom. But sometimes, it's because it's trending and being widely discussed, so I watch to stay updated. Other times, I watch dramas to release emotions when I'm sad or confused (LAF)".

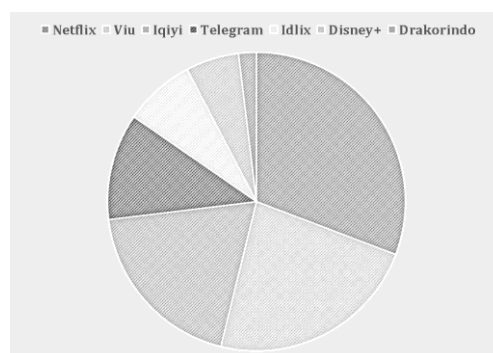
"To overcome sadness or to improve a bad mood (AAS)".

"Just to fill my free time and for entertainment (YLS)".

Binge-Watching Patterns

Media consumption refers to engaging with or using various forms of media content. Media consumption habits can vary greatly depending on age, culture, technology access, and personal interests, influencing how people spend their time and the information they receive. Binge-watching patterns are about the informants' streaming service platform, genre, content, and number of episodes.

Figure 1: Streaming Service Platform Preferences



Source: Interview, 2024

Since web dramas are designed for viewing on mobile devices, especially smartphones, industry professionals justify their focus on the younger generation—specifically those in their teens and twenties—because this group is highly familiar with digital technology (Kang, 2017). Streaming service platforms enable the audience to watch their favorite movies through internet-connected devices. The informants use more than one platform to binge-watch their favorite K-drama, and the most popular platform is Netflix.

The expansion of digital platforms has greatly impacted viewers' binge-watching preferences for Korean dramas. Netflix is a leading global platform for Korean content, attributing its popularity to a vast library, user-friendly interface, and personalized recommendations (Park & Hong, 2023). Social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram further amplify engagement through viral marketing and fan interactions since they emphasize social media's role in boosting Korean drama has gained popularity (Ahmed et al., 2022). Kang (2018) also discusses web

dramas designed for online consumption and catering to younger, mobile-first audiences. The synergy between digital platforms and social media has transformed the accessibility and appeal of Korean dramas worldwide.

Table 3. K-drama Genre

Genre	Informants
Comedy	OPM
Romance	H, AAS, NEZP, YLS, OPM, VNS, AN, AMS, TMS
Romance comedy	LAF, MD, YLS
Horror	AAS
Thriller	AAR, MFM, F, RPW, IAP
Crime	AAR, TA, Y
Action	NEZP, RPW, MER, IAP, VAR, Y
Drama	RPW, Y
Mystery	RPW, Y
Fantasy	TA, Y

Source: Interview, 2024

This section delves into the patterns of binge-watching behavior among college students. It examines why students engage in binge-watching, the specific genres and content preferences that attract them, and the social dynamics that influence their binge-watching habits. Additionally, the role of binge-watching during weekends, holidays, and academic breaks is explored to understand how leisure time affects students' media consumption.

Implications

The implications of binge watching are divided into three, namely physiologically and socially, as well as addiction. The physiological implications are the physical implications felt by the informants after watching the marathon while the social implications mean that the informants feel socially whether their interactions with the people around them have a certain impact. Then, addiction is the result of binge-watching activities.

Table 4 Implications of Binge Watching

Physiology	Social
Sore Eyes	Social Isolation
Body Aches	Indifference

Dizzy/Headache
Sleepy

Temporary Social Avoidance

Source: Interview, 2024

Informants have their own way of dealing with the implications above, such as stopping temporarily if they feel physically disturbed and will continue when things get better and also diverting attention not to watch marathons for a long time and can potentially interfere with other activities, especially activities as a student.

The physiological implications caused by binge-watching activity vary between informants, as described below:

"Usually, if I watch dramas for too long while lying down, it will cause my vision to blur, or sometimes my vertigo will recur (AMS)".

"The main complaint after watching dramas is blurred vision, due to staring at the screen for too long (VNS)".

"Sometimes my eyes feel strained and my head aches when watching dramas for a long period (RWP)".

"Usually blurred vision and headaches (AAS)".

"My body feels sore from sitting for too long, or I get a headache if I lie down for too long" (LAF).

"I don't have physical problems except feeling sleepy if the storyline is boring (MFM)".

Social implications are the social effects experienced by informants from binge-watching.

"...when I'm doing a marathon, I feel like I become someone who wants to isolate myself in my room and spend time only watching K-dramas. I become indifferent when marathon-watching K-dramas, especially towards my friends at college. If a friend talks, I nod and respond minimally because I'm focused on following the drama I'm watching (MFM)".

"I'm just slower to respond when contacted via social media, but I can still interact well... I usually apologize in person if I forget to reply to messages when I'm watching dramas (H)".

"If I have plans with friends in the morning but watch dramas at night, I often wake up late and sometimes end up late for the meeting (AMS)".

The informants have their ways of managing these implications, such as pausing when they experience physical discomfort and continuing when they feel better. They also divert their attention to avoid binge-watching sessions that could disrupt other activities, especially their student responsibilities. For social implications, informants realize that binge-watching affects their interpersonal relationships since they tend to isolate themselves for a while for direct or social media interaction.

Technology has changed how people consume TV content, enabling them to customize their viewing in terms of time of day, content, location, and device used. Video-on-demand services offer a feature that allows users to save TV shows for later viewing, enabling them to rewatch specific scenes as desired (Novianty & Sari, 2023). The popularity of the use of the internet in every aspect of human activity is now a necessity. Platform services such as Netflix, Disney+, Viu, and others that offer multiple genres of content make an individual an active audience as they will choose the content they will use, as these platforms provide more complex story production and have contributed to the popularization of specific modes of TV viewing – it's called binge-watching. Engaging in this behavior that 'blends culture and technology' means extending the viewing experience and engagement with the narrative world, emphasizing the story world over lived experience (Perks et al., 2021).

Students as informants in this study enthusiastically follow the trend of binge-watching K-dramas. Many students find solace and entertainment in the complex storylines, relatable characters, and dramatic plots offered by K-dramas. Amid tight academic schedules and the challenges of university life, these dramas provide a way to escape and relax (Steiner & Xu, 2020). As a motive for binge-watching, this study illustrates intrinsic and extrinsic motives. As previously mentioned, escaping and relaxing are inherent motives, and in this study, they include filling free time, entertainment (Ummah et al., 2024), stress relief (Elkholy et al., 2024; Gafoor, 2024), reducing fatigue, self-reward, overcoming sadness, and improving mood. Meanwhile, the fear of missing out (FOMO) is the only extrinsic motive, driven by the desire to stay connected, be part of a group, and not be excluded from experiences that seem appealing or valuable.

Motivation is essential to control oneself from K-drama addiction. The most powerful motive is the motive that is the leading cause of individual behavior. Motivation and learning are two things that cannot be separated. In learning activities, motivation is needed to support student learning. Learning based on strong motivation will provide better learning outcomes. As is known, learning is a process whereby people acquire various skills and disciplines that need to be applied. Learning brings about changes in behavior, in the form of changes in behavior that are permanent and potentially occur as a result of learning efforts (Muhammad, 2016).

Although binge-watching is an everyday leisure activity, it can have notable physical and emotional effects. Castro et al. (2021) suggest that extended screen time may cause eye strain, poor posture, and sleep disturbances. On an emotional level, binge-watching can contribute to guilt, anxiety, and depression, mainly when used as an escape from real-life challenges. Its highly engaging nature may also lead to social isolation, as individuals prioritize screen time over social connections. These insights emphasize the importance of moderation and mindfulness regarding the potential drawbacks of excessive binge-watching.

Because the activity of watching Korean dramas that is done excessively can lead to addiction to watching, so that without realizing it, it can affect learning motivation, which has an impact on learning outcomes. In addition, the potential for addiction to binge-watching can affect interpersonal communication (Nawawi et al., 2021), which in this case has social implications. In addition, this can also cause serious academic problems for students, such as difficulty completing homework and studying, and spending time browsing the internet and social media (Subagja et al., 2021).

Binge-watching refers to the intentional viewing of serialized content for three or more consecutive hours in a single session, at a time and location chosen by the viewer (Roy & Mathias, 2022). Binge-watching is typically an individual activity carried out on weekdays, particularly at night (in the bedroom) and in the afternoon (in the living room) (Castro et al., 2021; Roy & Mathias, 2022). Additionally, they spend more time binge-watching during semester break periods. Despite engaging in binge-watching sessions, most informants demonstrated the ability to manage their time effectively for studying, as evidenced by the consequences of self-control (Flayelle et al., 2017). This balance underscores their awareness of the importance of academic responsibilities alongside their entertainment preferences. Thus, it implies there is no negative impact on their academic performance (Nafida, 2021; Roy & Mathias, 2022) even though one informant did miss their primary task.

While moderate binge-watching can promote social interaction (Bastos et al., 2024). It can also lead to social interaction anxiety (Rosli & Mahudin, 2024). Excessive use of it as a means of escaping reality carries the risk of students developing an addiction. Technological advancements have facilitated this behavior, such as the widespread availability of TV shows on various media platforms (e.g., tablets, laptops, computers, and televisions). With easy access to a variety of TV content, students are no longer limited by location or space, allowing them to engage in binge-watching from anywhere (Steiner & Xu, 2020). Consequently, this accessibility has led to an increase in the amount of time students spend on binge-watching activities (Panda & Pandey, 2017).

The findings of this study indicate a tendency for K-drama binge-watching addiction among students. A study in 2024 found that there was a relationship between binge-watching and academic procrastination, such as neglecting their assignment (Yolie & Hastuti, 2024). However, they can overcome it by setting time preferences. By dividing their schedules, they allocate specific periods for studying and binge-watching. This conscious time management approach reflects their determination to maintain academic performance while enjoying entertainment. It demonstrates the adaptability and discipline of modern students who carefully navigate the demands of education and entertainment.

The impact of dependence on Korean dramas on student behavior such as affective responses (narrative transportation) seen from the emotional impact that the informants admit that they are often carried away when watching Korean dramas. irritated, happy and excited, to annoyed or angry (Castro et al., 2021; Perks

et al., 2021; Starosta et al., 2021; Thomas, 2022). The informants unintentionally expressed this emotional impact when they were watching Korean dramas, that tell many stories that are not much different from life. Thus, promoting healthy media habits becomes essential (Saladino et al., 2024).

D. Conclusion

The accessibility of technology supports this trend, extending viewing time. Research shows that college students are inclined toward K-drama addiction, but they can overcome it by setting specific viewing times aside from their studies, as this reflects their adaptability and discipline in managing education and entertainment. Students are suggested to plan and limit their binge-watching activity while teachers/lecturers encourage them to be more responsible in for managing their time to always meet their assignment deadlines. In brief, the conclusions of this study are as follows (1) the motivation of students to binge-watch is to spend time, entertain, escape, and relax (2) the implications of watching marathons are in the form of physiological and social implications as well as suggestions in the form of further research that can be carried out quantitatively by using the concept of active audience and the uses and gratification theory and the possibility of narrative transportation study on binge-watching for Indonesian youth.

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