

MEN & KOREAN DRAMAS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF AMONG MALE VIEWERS OF LAGUNA

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ABSTRACT

Television dramas are one of the most commonly known sources of entertainment and information that influence people with stories where certain values and beliefs are attached. Tuk (2014) suggests that Korean dramas are the most consumed and exported source of entertainment nowadays. Korean popular culture is distributed all over the world. Korea became one of the most significant cultural forces in Asia as it was successful in influencing other people through introducing their culture in different forms, one of which is through dramas. This study examined how male Filipino viewers construct their sense of 'self' through Korean dramas. Specifically, it aimed to explore the meaning-making and the negotiation of those meanings to the participants and its concrete presentations and manifestations to their everyday living. The researchers utilized one-on-one interview. Grounded theory's open, axial, and selective coding were performed in examining the data. This study reveals that the construction of self among male viewers of Korean drama varies from emotions elicited, genres, personal views, experiential motives, preferences, exposure, changes, discourse, and acquired values.

Keywords: *Korean drama, popular communication, Goffman, self-presentation, gender*

INTRODUCTION

Television dramas are one of the most commonly known sources of entertainment and information that influence people with stories where certain values and beliefs are attached. The consumption of television dramas vary from how the story is written and how it is presented to the audience. Each country has a different approach and technique when it comes to making their own television dramas. One good example is Korea, which is the focus of this study. Korea became one of the most significant cultural forces in Asia as they were able to be successful in influencing other people through introducing their culture in different forms. South Korea emerged to be the leading country for spreading popular culture by dominating other countries with its television dramas and movies, music, food, and fashion (Joo, 2011).

According to Tuk (2014), Korean dramas are the most consumed and exported Korean popular culture distributed all over the world. With this, the viewership of Korean dramas has reached and influenced the Philippine media industry. Alanzalon (2011) suggests that the acceptance of the said dramas in the local media industry instigated the favorable reception of Filipinos to international media products (in the likes of Korean dramas) that gave birth to the domination of ‘Korean wave’ in the country.

The infiltration of Korean dramas in the Philippine television became the most consumed piece of Korean popular culture in the Philippine’s media industry (Sanchez, 2014). With this, individuals actively explore the role of constructing their own self and interpreting their lives. The influences they pick up from watching such dramas enable them to re-frame their understanding in order to construct themselves (Choi, 2013).

Furthermore, meanings and self-construction is a continuous process in people’s lives (Kellner, 2009). With the endless creation of meaning and self-presentation within people, it is significant to investigate how male Filipino viewers depict their life in relation to watching Korean dramas. Thus, it has motivated the researchers to make a study about the construction of self among Filipino male viewers through watching Korean dramas.

The researchers solely focused on Korean dramas and would not examine other dramas like Chinoramas (Chinese) or Jdramas (Japanese). It also included the viewing habits, preferences, and impressions of the male Filipino viewers in watching Korean dramas, but it did not dwell on the cultural and moral impact of watching Korean dramas in the Philippines, as it requires expertise in another field of research.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design. Through this design, it helped the systematic analysis of understanding how male Filipino viewers construct themselves by watching Korean dramas. The study was conducted in the province of Laguna in Region IV-A CALABARZON. A total of 17 male Filipino viewers of Korean dramas from Laguna were interviewed.

The researchers used snowball sampling (also known as chain-referral sampling) under a non-probability sampling technique. A total of 21 questions were developed in order for the researchers to gather information from the participants. In terms of gathering the data, the researchers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews where the researchers interviewed the participants on a one-on one basis. Before conducting every interview, the researchers asked the participants to sign a consent as a form of permission to conduct and document the interview. The researchers gathered the data in a span of one to two months. When it comes to the data analysis of the study, the researchers used the Grounded Theory of Glaser and Strauss.

To complete the research, proper ethical considerations were applied in order to protect the participants from unnecessary hazards, harm or mental and physical distress that may be acquired during the research procedure.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Engagement in Korean Dramas

Emotions

The results of the data gathered shows that the participants' engagement in watching Korean dramas varies depending on their purpose. Some participants watch Korean dramas to feel romantic excitement. For example, Participant 9 claimed that romantic excitement is not just for girls to feel when watching Korean dramas because boys can feel it too. According to the Korean Culture and Information Service (2011), Korean dramas provide entertainment while mixing in sugary, romantic plots, and social mobility angles to keep viewers emotionally invested.

“It’s not only girls that can feel the romantic excitement (kilig), it’s also for guys to feel when we watch Korean dramas.” – Participant 9

Another reason that arise on why the participants watch Korean dramas is because they feel bored and curious. The participants wanted to try something that they never get to see themselves being engaged to.

“I wanted to watch something out of my fixated perspective so I watched Korean dramas.” – Participant 7

The emotion of being overwhelmed is also shown in terms of the reason why the participants watch Korean dramas. They were overwhelmed by the exposure of their friends, family members, and acquaintances. Thus, it opened them to accept Korean drama into their lives.

“My mom, my sister, and my girlfriend are Korean drama fans so I have no choice but to watch too.” – Participant 6

In Correa's (2012) study, most interviewees started watching K-dramas because of the suggestions made by their relatives and friends who are also into K-dramas.

Fashion

When it comes to fashion, most participants said Korean fashion is stylish in a way that they are pretty, trendy, and unique.

"Koreans are highly fashionable. They wear really good clothes." – Participant 3

Furthermore, the participants also see Korean fashion as a way to change how other people see them. Participant 5 said that your sense of fashion reflects your personality and through Korean fashion, it gave him a sense of positive vibe to present himself according to how Koreans style themselves.

"Your fashion reflects your personality; Korean fashion gives off a positive vibe so I try to adapt it so I'll be a positive person too." – Participant 5

This shows that fashion exposes a great deal of who we are and can indicate a sign of socially important things to others. Hence, fashion influences a diverse kind of impression about the bearer of the style (Howlett, 2015).

Language

In the likes of language, the reason why the participants watch Korean dramas is because they were able to understand their language and feel that they were sincere as it gets translated.

"Although you don't understand the language you can feel the sincerity in the translation and in their faces." – Participant 17

Moreover, Filipino viewers have also been fascinated by the degree of formality that is present in Korean language. Participant 8

even said that their formality is somehow akin to the Philippines' traditional 'po' and 'opo.' Korean language is widely known for its elaborate system of honorification (Sohn, 1999).

"It's noticeable that they follow certain rules in terms of language. They use the formal, informal, and slang language." – Participant 6

According to Igno & Cenidoza (2016), the industry actively seeks to make Korean dramas more acceptable to global audiences by overcoming language barriers.

Food Consumption

When it comes to the reason of the participants in watching Korean dramas because of food consumption, a participant says that he appreciated how the food was presented aesthetically and how the shots made it look delicious to watch and look at.

"The way they present their food is appetizing, the aesthetics in the camera makes it so delicious to look at"- Participant #11

According to Hwang (2009), Korean dramas serves as an expansion of introducing the food, fashion, travel and living in their culture.

Life views

Korean dramas do not only constitute the 'self' in terms of physical aspect, but it can also draw meanings associated with their moral views in life. Some participants had a change of heart in a sense that they obtained a different notion in terms of how they view Korean dramas. A participant also said that Korean dramas are forms of diversion in a way that it distracts them from reality in terms of stress and daily routines of life.

"It's a sweet escape." – Participant 8

Participant 6 said that Korean dramas are like anime. Like Japanese animations, Korean dramas do not have complicated and long narratives and plots because it's airing time is limited. Most Japanese dramas only involve characters who will make significance to the simple story produced; thus, making the drama relevant (Fann, 2012).

“For me Korean dramas are like anime.” – Participant 6

“It's like an extension of myself because when they laugh, you laugh with them, when they cry, you cry with them.” –Participant 17

Consequently, it gives the participants a sense of belongingness not only with the fans who share the same interest, but also with Korea and its culture. According to Huat & Iwabuchi (2008), culture entangles a set of practices which are the outworking of a worldview that helps to create a sense of belongingness and identity.

Negotiation of Meanings

Emotions

The emotions elicited on the experiences of male Filipino viewers from watching Korean dramas vary based on what they feel after watching a particular drama. One example is how the participants feel optimistic as they see Korean dramas to be their source of happiness. Participants said that with their exposure to Korean dramas, they felt festive, it gives them high hopes on fighting with life.

“You manage to be happy like you see in dramas because you feel festive, you have high hopes, and you keep on fighting.” – Participant 5

According to the Korean Culture and Information Service (2011), the main purpose of Korean dramas is to make the audience feel warm and happy. With this being said, it is prevalent that most participants negotiated happiness as they watch Korean dramas

because for them, it means that they find simple joys in watching Korean dramas.

Fashion

The participants were able to adapt Korean fashion into their system of styling. Participant #11 even said that he allotted money just to buy himself some Korean clothes.

"I am allotting money to buy Korean clothes."- Participant #11

Since most K-dramas, especially the most recently produced ones, portray modern aesthetic styles, it creates an impression of lavish cosmopolitan lifestyle (Lin & Tong, 2007). Young (2005) adds that a lot of young individuals are enthusiastic to learn and practice Korean lifestyles, fashion, and make-up.

Language

In terms of looking at the negotiation of meanings when it comes to language, the participants were able to distinguish how Koreans use their language. Being exposed to Korean dramas enabled them to notice that Koreans follow an etiquette when using their language formally or informally. A participant even noticed that Koreans have rules in terms of speaking their language.

"So when I started watching I didn't notice that I am starting to learn and adapt Korean language and expression." – Participant #5

According to Samovar and Porter (2002), language is the primary component that grants access for a person to be familiar with their culture. They also added that it is an important tool of communication to present emotions and ideas. Iwabuchi (2001) even claimed that language serves to play a dominant role in cultural proximity.

Food Consumption

Korean drama manifests Korean culture in different cultural factors, one of them is seen in the case of Korean food. Due to cultural disparity between here in the Philippines and in Korea, the participants have mixed emotions regarding their Korean food consumption. Most participants expressed their desire to try and accept Korean food. Media played a vital role in the way how they were exposed to Korean food. With this, most of the participants indulged themselves in trying out Korean food. Participant 15 said that he was surprised as to how he liked Korean food when he tried it.

“I tried Korean food and surprisingly, it was good and spicy.” – Participant 15

Thus, how the food is presented helps the audience to persuade them into accepting it as a cultural norm. Korean food is a symbolism of Korean culture in terms of aesthetics namely harmonization, patience, care, and beauty (Chung, 2016).

Life Views

There are drastic changes to the participants when it comes to attitude, morals, and outlook in the way they see and present themselves. Participant 7 said that he feels like he is a Korean. On the other hand, another participant cited that he is confused if there is a term for a half Korean, half Japanese because he likes both Korean dramas and anime; thus, they both discarded the idea that they are Filipinos in their statement. Do-Goan said that Korea’s broadcast of Korean dramas mirrors national character expressing a particular political philosophy that touches cultural identity.

“I feel like I am a Korean now.” – Participant 7

“If there’s a person called half Korean, half Japanese, that’s how I view myself.” – Participant 6

In addition to this, the researchers also found out that the participants have accepted moral values from Korean dramas in terms of respect for people around them. Briandana & Ibrahim (2015) said that Korean dramas are able to emphasize other Asian values like

courtesy, respect, solidarity, and loyalty, which are portrayed in the modern setting that is why a lot of audiences watch it.

“Respecting other people is what I always try to apply. That’s what I accept and learn in watching Korean dramas.” – Participant 3

Gendered Self

With their exposure to Korean dramas, it has helped one of the participants in expressing who he really is without reservations. A participant showed fearlessness in presenting his feminine side.

“I became a bit soft or more feminine than I usually am but I am still a straight guy.” – Participant 6

According to Wulantari (2012), although Korean dramas are known to be women’s genre. His study proves that it is okay for men to display their soft emotion. Wulantari suggests that being sensitive and melancholic over a drama does not make you less of a man because as for the results in his study, it is a natural emotion that a person feels regardless if it is feminine or masculine.

Concrete Presentation

Through the social interaction of male Filipino viewers with their friends who share the same interest, it became a source of topic within the course of communication which acted as an avenue for Filipino viewers (actors) to build bonds and connection with each other. Thus, this helps them in maintaining their relationship with one another. According to Hoffner & Buchanan (2005), individuals have an essential need to create connections with other people, and television dramas offer the viewers to access a wide range of other human beings to connect with.

“Since you have the same interest with your friends you can talk about it and value friendship.” –Participant #5

There are also those who said that they have unconsciously adapted values in Korean dramas when it comes to how they socialize with their (Korean drama fan) friends. Other participants said that the lack of interest and criticism of their non-Korean drama friends is a factor why they have a different way of socializing with them.

“My interaction with my non-Korean drama fan friends is different since they show no interest with K-drama.” – Participant 1

As they interact with their friends (non-Korean drama fans), they are constantly engaging in the process of ‘impression management’ in which the actors (participants) try to present themselves and behave in a way that will prevent them from embarrassing themselves in their performance. This is done by putting on a different social front (Goffman, 1959).

Familial relationship displays a different kind of interaction when contrasted to their interaction with friends. Participant 9 stated that watching Korean dramas is a way to improve their relationships with their families.

“With my mom, we actually get to make it as a serious bond because we’re able to share our insights with the drama we’re watching.” – Participant 4

This means that although particular performances, even particular parts or routines, may place a performer in a position of having nothing to hide, somewhere in the full round of his activities there will be something he cannot treat openly (Goffman, 1959).

A participant stated that through Korean dramas, his social interaction with his family has improved in terms of showing intimacy. This implies improved relationship within the socialization of each member of the family with one another.

“Korean dramas helped me not to be aloof with my family anymore since my mom and my sister watch it also” – Participant 6

However, in the case of their social interaction with a stranger, social anxiety and uncomfortable communication occurs. A participant stated that he finds interacting with a stranger disturbing.

“To an acquaintance, maybe I can interact with them; but with a stranger, no because that would be outward creepy.” – Participant 8

Personal characteristics of the participants also became an element as to how they would interact with strangers. The participants said their timid attitude and social anxiety became a hindrance for them to interrelate with a stranger.

*“I’m actually too timid that’s why I don’t interact with others, especially strangers.”
– Participant 7*

Participant 7 demonstrated apprehension on how society would perceive him. It turns out to be uncomfortable for him when it comes to mingling with new people. According to Goffman (1959), the performer’s anxiety can spread and affect his performance. In this sense, the participant’s worry is the thing that holds him back which makes him uncomfortable to socialize with other people.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the researchers conclude that the dynamics that shape the self-presentation of male Filipino viewers constitute not only to Korea’s culture as present in Korean dramas in terms of its language, values, fashion, and food, but also in their personal views and social interaction. Another dominant factor is the family and peer stimulus that is considered as one of the basic elements of collective identity construction which assists in an effective presentation of self in society. The researchers found out that male Filipino viewers are drawn to romantic comedy Korean dramas because most of them see Korean dramas as a form of stress reliever. This serves as a motivation for the participants to apply and adapt to the content of Korean dramas to their self-presentation considering that

the said dramas appeal to their emotions; thus, creating a temporary escape to reality.

As the participants immersed in watching Korean dramas, the longer and more frequent they are exposed to Korean dramas, the more dynamics they accept and apply in the presentation of their self. However, due to mixed cultural content, the participants as the performer to an audience, present themselves in a combination of different. Criticisms and challenges played a big role as to how the participants present themselves. This implies that even though there is a perceived shaping of the self, one cannot present himself to the audience if he cannot get pass through the impending criticisms and challenges.

Study findings highlighted that people use self-presentation differently depending on the relationship they have with the audience. As performers seek personal recognition from its audience, it leads them to adjust his self-presentational behavior depending on its audience. This validates Goffman's front region control wherein the performer controls his behavior according to which front region is appropriate for him. In our case, a participant presents himself differently with his friends who share the same interest, they exchange thoughts and use Korean dramas as a form of topic in contrast to the laid-back communication with a friend who is not a Korean drama fan. Although it elicits different behavior, both showcased a great deal of self-presentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the future researchers, they should do a compare and contrast study about the presentation of self among both male and female perspectives. Another recommendation that the researchers would like to suggest is to explore other generations as possible participants for examining the presentation of self with exposure to Korean dramas since this study is only fixated on the male viewers. Moreover, future researchers should invite participants outside the borders of Laguna since this study is only limited in that specific locale.

This will help in understanding how individuals present their sense of self in a wider scope.

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