

Compensating affection deprivation through K-drama

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Abstract – K-drama is arguably one of the most popular media businesses of the century. Affection deprivation, characterized by a lack of meaningful communication and affectionate relationships, can lead to adverse psychological states, including anxiety, stress, and depression. This phenomenological study investigates how affection deprivation influenced K-drama addiction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 23 female Indonesian K-drama fans, the study identifies several key themes: the role of K-drama in alleviating affection deprivation across parental, marital, and romantic contexts; its function as a compensatory strategy for negative emotions such as loneliness and low self-esteem; and its contribution to cycles of addiction via escapism, parasocial relationships, and referential reflection. The findings reveal that K-dramas provide short-term psychological benefits while simultaneously reinforcing unmet affection needs, creating a bidirectional cycle of addiction. This study is among the first to connect K-drama addiction with compensatory consumption theory, offering insights into the psychosocial dynamics of media consumption and its implications for viewers' well-being.

Keywords: Affection Deprivation, Addiction, Compensatory Consumption, K-drama, Indonesia

Introduction

Hallyu or Korean Wave is a term used to describe the popularity of South Korean pop culture that has been gaining widespread popularity since the mid-1990s (Kang, 2017; Turnbull, 2017; Ryoo, 2019; Yates-Lu, 2021). The Chinese press popularized the term when South Korean entertainment products started to gain popularity in China (Hogarth, 2013). The Hallyu itself includes various aspects of Korean culture such as Korean music (K-pop), drama (K-dramas), food, tourism, beauty-related products (e.g. skincare, makeup), and K-fashion styles. The majority of Korean TV drama viewers in Indonesia were female, ranging from teenagers to those in their forties (Jeong, Lee, and Lee, 2017) who adored and fantasized about the peerless “white” beauty of Korean celebrities (see Park and Hong, 2021). According to Nadila *et al.* (2020), K-drama viewers increased in the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, when citizens were advised to stay at home to prevent the virus from spreading. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people will resort to consumption activities that give them a sense of security and peace (Syahrivar *et al.*, 2021).

K-drama has gained popularity among Asian viewers, such as Indonesians, for several reasons. According to Hogarth (2013), appealing shots and angles, cultural similarities to Asian viewers, attractive actors and actresses, beautiful costumes, the portrayal of male and female leads, and a relatively short storyline were all factors that drew people to watch K-drama. Meanwhile, Ju (2019) argued that K-dramas captivated viewers because of the emotional connection they felt with the fictional characters (or K-drama celebrities) and the characters' romantic love lives. Lee (2020) discovered that there were foreigners who moved to Korea willingly to pursue their romantic desires, such as dating Korean men who were portrayed in K-dramas as caring and romantically expressive.

Individuals with a lack of affection would find a way to cope with their issues, such as consuming pornography to reduce loneliness and having a parasocial relationship

(Hesse and Floyd, 2019). It is in line with Woodruffe's (1997) argument on compensatory consumption; when people experience certain lacks or self-deficits, they would resort to products that symbolically compensate for their perceived weaknesses. In this study, we argue that K-drama viewing is a form of compensatory strategy and an addictive consumption because it follows the same binge-watching patterns whereby viewers watch many drama episodes in a single sitting and struggle to quit, affecting their everyday life (Panda and Pandey, 2017; Ju, 2019).

This study proposed the following research question: How does affection deprivation influence K-drama addiction during the COVID-19 pandemic? Specifically, this study attempted to explore this phenomenon through the life experiences of K-drama lovers or fans. Although there have been comprehensive studies on addictive consumption, to our best knowledge, K-drama addiction as a form of compensatory consumption has never been discussed before. Furthermore, internationalizing celebrity studies and studying the receptions of certain celebrity cultures (e.g., Korean celebrities) and their depictions in popular media beyond their ecosystem are becoming increasingly important. In this regard, our study offers new insights into the fans' behaviors of K-drama celebrities outside South Korea.

Compensatory consumption refers to symbolic consumption activities individuals engage in to cope with self-deficits or negative affective states (Woodruffe, 1997; Woodruffe-Burton and Elliott, 2005; Syahrivar, 2021; Syahrivar *et al.*, 2022). Affective states, encompassing moods and emotions, often trigger compensatory behaviors such as retail therapy, compulsive buying, and self-gift giving (Frijda, 1994; Cohen, Pham, and Andrade, 2008; Koles, Wells, and Tadajewski, 2018). While these behaviors have been well-documented, the application of compensatory consumption theory to media behaviors, especially in narrative-driven formats like K-dramas, remains underexplored.

K-dramas present a distinct form of compensatory consumption through their ability to engage viewers in idealized and emotionally satisfying narratives (Ju, 2019; Park and Hong, 2021). For instance, viewers may align with fictional characters to symbolically address gaps in their own lives (Schramm and Hartmann, 2008). The phenomenon of binge-watching, often associated with compulsive media consumption, aligns with patterns seen in other compensatory behaviors, as it offers temporary emotional relief (Panda and Pandey, 2017). While compensatory consumption can provide immediate psychological benefits, it may also hinder self-repair by perpetuating reminders of perceived deficiencies (Lisjak *et al.*, 2005). This study advances the literature by specifically examining K-drama addiction as a compensatory mechanism for affection deprivation, addressing a notable gap in prior research.

Affection deprivation, characterized as the perceived insufficiency of affectionate exchanges, has been linked to various adverse psychological states, including loneliness, low self-esteem, and depression (Floyd, 2016; Floyd and Hesse, 2017). The sociometer hypothesis posits that individuals are highly motivated to maintain stable self-concepts and may turn to external mechanisms to address perceived deficits in social connections (Leary *et al.*, 1995). Studies suggest that individuals with unmet affection needs often turn to alternative coping mechanisms, such as pornography consumption or conspicuous consumption, to mitigate these deficits (Hesse and Floyd, 2019; Koles *et al.*, 2018). However, the role of narrative media, particularly K-dramas, as a compensatory strategy remains largely unexplored.

K-dramas provide immersive narratives, romanticized depictions of relationships, and culturally resonant themes that make them particularly appealing to viewers experiencing affection deprivation (Hogarth, 2013; Jeong *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the

parasocial relationships developed with fictional characters or actors amplify their compensatory value (Schramm and Hartmann, 2008). For individuals with threatened self-concepts, self-verification motives may further drive preferences for media that symbolically address their deficits (Brannon, 2019). By addressing the psychological motivations behind K-drama consumption, this study bridges a critical gap in understanding how media consumption serves as a mechanism for alleviating affection deprivation.

While existing research has extensively examined the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of K-dramas (Ryoo, 2009; Turnbull, 2017; Yates-Lu, 2021), limited attention has been given to their psychosocial impact. Notably, studies have yet to explore how K-dramas function as a coping mechanism for affection deprivation or as a trigger for addictive consumption patterns.

This study uniquely positions K-drama addiction within the framework of compensatory consumption, highlighting its dual role in alleviating psychological distress and perpetuating cycles of dependency. Integrating theories of compensatory consumption, affection deprivation, and parasocial relationships, contributes a novel perspective to both media and consumer behavior literature (Goodman, 1990; Rubenking *et al.*, 2018; Sood, 2002).

Method

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design outlined by Groenewald (2004). The epistemological position of a phenomenological study can be summarized as follows: Data are contained within the perspectives of informants who are knowledgeable about and affected by the phenomenon under investigation (e.g. K-drama addiction); therefore, we engaged with the informants by gathering their perspectives to unravel the phenomenon.

This study focused on female audiences because of their openness to share and reveal the elements of love and romance in K-drama (Ju, 2019). This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020 until April 2021) There are also more female audiences than male audiences of K-drama in Indonesia (Nadila *et al.*, 2020). To answer the research question, the study employed purposive sampling. To be deemed suitable for the study, informants must meet the following criteria: 1) female 2) self-proclaimed “K-drama lovers” who watched K-drama (genre: romance) regularly 3) reported addiction symptoms in the context of K-drama, and 4) experienced affection-related issues. We recruited a total of 23 informants and a total of 46 interviews (at least twice interviews for each participant). Their profile can be found in **Table 1**.

Table 1 Informant Profile

No.	Participant (Pseudonym)	Age	Status	General Indicators and Codes
1	Ana	35	Md.	- Never missed new K-dramas. - Devote her time to watching two K-dramas at once.
2	Caca	21	S	- “K-drama is a must!” - Often procrastinates her assignments due to K-dramas.
3	Eve	20	S	- Need K-drama to fulfill her need for affection. - Watch K-drama almost every day.
4	Iin	20	Rel.	- Watch K-drama while doing her chores, as a companion,

					and self-gift giving.
5	Kay	20	S	-	Watch K-drama to fulfill her need for affection due to being single. - Watch K-drama very often and finish one K-drama in just 3 days.
6	Nadia	20	Rel.	-	Often she neglects her priorities due to K-dramas.
7	Nur	21	Rel.	-	Struggle to stop watching a K-drama once she started the first episode (binge-watching).
8	Oliv	28	Md.	-	Often neglects her role as a wife which causes some conflicts with her husband due to binge-watching K-dramas.
9	Shaf	21	S	-	Can finish one K-drama in just 2 days. - Feel uneasy about not continuing the K-drama that she watches until the very end.
10	Wilda	21	Md.	-	Struggle to stop watching K-drama. - Can finish one K-drama in just 2 days after which she moves on to another K-drama.
11	Emma	21	S	-	Escape her real life through K-drama to cheer her up.
12	Sophia	20	S	-	"Happy that I become addicted to watching more and more."
13	Mia	21	S	-	"1 day 1 episode." - Escape boredom and loneliness through K-pop and K-drama.
14	Effie	21	S	-	Escape loneliness through K-dramas, movies, variety shows, etc.
15	Bella	20	S	-	Watch K-drama almost every day. - Watch K-drama to cure her sadness, loneliness, and lack of parental affection.
16	Ari	21	S	-	Want to watch again and again once she gets into the K-drama. - Procrastinate her schoolwork and watch K-drama.
17	Lucy	22	S	-	Use K-drama as a me-time and distraction from stress. - Feel affection through K-drama.
18	Tia	21	S	-	Watch K-drama almost every day and all night long. - Re-watch a K-drama after it is finished.
19	Linda	20	S	-	"1 day 4 episodes per day, especially during the pandemic." - Re-watch favorite scenes multiple times.
20	Momo	21	S	-	"I want to watch another drama after I finished one."
21	Put	20	S	-	Procrastinate her main work to watch K-drama. - Re-watch favorite scenes multiple times.
22	Nina	21	S	-	"I must watch K-drama every week. MUST," - Neglects her duties to watch K-drama. - Do chores (e.g. washing dishes) while watching a K-drama to not feel alone.
23	Fiona	21	Rel.	-	"I cannot stop watching K-drama." - Neglects her schoolwork for K-drama

Md. = Married, S = Single, Rel. = In a Relationship

Some of the informants were recruited from the K-drama enthusiasts' community page on Facebook. Others were from Twitter using related keywords and hashtags (e.g. K-drama, love, affection). We then made initial contact via private message features and emails. Their participation was voluntary and no money or gift was involved. We ensured that the informants were comfortable during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. All informants were interviewed either face-to-face or online through online meeting platforms (e.g. Zoom and Google Meet). We made notes and recorded the interviews. Informants who had difficulties having several online meetings would be asked to write their personal experiences (narratives) about K-dramas. The primary language for interviews was Bahasa Indonesia (unless informants were comfortable communicating in English). We conducted text analysis and generated important codes and themes from the excerpts or texts of the interviews. We constantly compared each participant with one another in search of recurring themes or key concepts. We finished our recruitment process after deciding that the data saturation had been achieved (Groenewald, 2004). We interviewed each participant at least twice via in-depth interviews and group discussions for accuracy and consistency, hence a total of 46 interviews. Lastly, we checked the validity of our paper by consulting it with a psychologist and returning the results to the informants. We also used previous studies to justify our findings.

The semi-structured interview questions we used during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions are provided in **Table 2**.

Table 2 Semi-structured Interview Questions

Section	Items
Introduction / Filter questions	1. Please introduce yourself. (e.g. age, latest education, current occupation, status) 2. Do you consider yourself a K-drama lover? Please explain! 3. Have you ever felt somewhat lonely or lack of affection and/or attention from your significant others (e.g. parents, spouse, love partner)? If yes, how often do you experience this kind of feeling?
Experience in K-drama consumption	1. How did you first come to know about K-drama? 2. How many K-dramas have you watched and completed? 3. How often do you watch K-dramas? 4. What is your favorite one so far? 5. What do you like the most about K-drama? 6. Are there specific events/situations/circumstances where you crave to watch K-drama? 7. What is your favorite character in K-drama whom you feel relatable or attached to? 8. Can you describe your experience while watching K-drama? 9. Have you neglected your main activities for K-drama? If yes, can you tell me about it? 10. How do you normally feel after you watch a K-drama/ after you complete a K-drama? 11. Are there specific elements in the K-drama that are relatable to / missing from your life/love life? 12. Does being addicted to K-drama accurately define your current circumstance?
Affection	1. Do you consider yourself a romantic person? Why? 2. Does watching K-drama make you feel romantic? How? 3. Can you tell me more about your love life? How do you describe your relationship with your partner? 4. Can you think of any ways that K-drama may help your love life? 5. How do you describe your relationship with your parents?

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6. Can you think of any ways that K-drama may help you get closer to your parents?
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Results

The results of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions reveal several important themes and key concepts (see **Table 3**). The selected themes explain how people with affection deprivation use K-drama as a compensatory strategy.

Table 3 Themes and Key Concepts

No	Themes	Key concepts and codes
1.	Affection deprivation	Parental relationship, marital relationship, romantic relationship
2.	Negative affect	Stress, anxiety, loneliness, depression, low self-esteem
3.	Compensatory strategy	Watching romantic K-Drama
4.	Perceived benefits	Tension reduction/relaxing, escapism/distraction, parasocial relationship
5.	Enabling factors	Age, gender, time flexibility, genre, social influence, occupation, economy, life stages, approval from significant others
6.	Cycle of addiction	Binge-watching, K-drama post-watching information search, reminiscing favorite K-drama, re-watching favorite K-drama

Affection deprivation, negative affect, and compensatory strategy

Informants in this study explained how they experienced or were experiencing affection-related issues in three contexts (Parental, Marital, and Romantic), causing them to feel anxious, lonely, stressed, etc. Some informants also reported having low self-esteem.

Parental Relationship. During the coding analysis, several informants shared their issues with their parents. For example, Shaf (21) explained her issues with her parents:

"I have toxic parents. I think everything that I do is wrong in their eyes. Even if I followed their will, I would be still wrong and compared with others.... people's lives and mine are different. Small things become problematic to the point that they physically abuse me sometimes. It hurts because it made me think that everything I do is always wrong, feeling like, "What am I living for? Am I only the place for them to vent?" I feel pointless to live if everything I do is never right. I feel like crying but I hold it, when I'm alone in the house I just burst out for hours while thinking about everything that went wrong..." (Shaf, 21 years old, single)

Shaf mentioned "pointless to live" after being abused by her parents supporting De Araújo and Lara's (2016) findings that suicidal ideation is strongly connected with emotional abuse. Psychological trauma due to parental abuse is also one of the triggers of compensatory consumption (Syahrivar, 2021). Shaf indicated that she experienced sadness and upset feelings due to being underappreciated by her parents. Hale *et al.* (2005) explained that rejection from parents could cause the children to be depressed. Meanwhile, Caca (21) had a different problem with her parents:

"[I'm] feeling lonely because there are no friends to talk to but once I attempted to talk with them, the topic just didn't match... and because I live alone, from high school I've lived alone, so here and there I often feel lonely. It's actually my fault because sometimes I don't talk to my parents, I don't talk to my brothers at home, I think "ah if I call, I'd disturb them" and if I don't call, I'd feel lonely and when I feel lonely, I'd cry." (Caca, 21 years old, single)

Caca mentioned that she would feel lonely due to the lack of meaningful communication with her parents. Nur (21) also stated that she did not have meaningful communication with her parents, which caused them to be unable to understand what she was going through. As a result, Nur believed she was unloved by her parents.

Marital Relationship. During the coding analysis, several informants shared their issues with their spouses. For instance, Ana (35) voluntarily explained how she had many conflicts with her husband:

"Mostly misunderstandings... but we got angry at each other for days, in silence for days. That's where I feel unloved, so instead of seeing each other every day and not talking to each other, which was very uncomfortable, we mostly avoided each other..."
(Ana, 35 years old, married)

Romantic Relationship. During the coding analysis, several informants shared their issues with their romantic partners. As Nur explained her problem with her parents, she also explained how her boyfriend failed to understand her:

"Because... I'm not the typical person who tells someone else if I have a problem, so... if I have a problem, I feel it myself, because I don't interact with other people. I just feel lonely. Then he [her boyfriend] is not that sensitive, so if for example when I'm upset, I'm struggling with myself and it's hard for me to talk about it, and he doesn't understand that, so I keep it to myself and then drown myself into my own problems..."
(Nur, 21 years old, in a relationship)

Geller (2020) mentioned that loneliness was closely related to the idea that no one completely understood them. In this case, Nur felt lonely and lacked affection/love from her boyfriend because she thought he would not understand her. Instead, she chose to keep her problem to herself.

Caca, who was not attached to anyone yet, sometimes felt a longing to have a romantic partner due to her surroundings' subjective norms:

"Over time, sometimes we, as humans, are like 'I want to have a boyfriend like the others'. Many of my friends have boyfriends, so when they discuss topics about their boyfriends, I feel like 'Oh my, why don't I have a boyfriend?' and like 'Who would ask me 'Have you eaten yet?''", plus sometimes we have toxic friends, right? For example, 'You just need to have a boyfriend', they would tease me like 'Oh, you have never been like that? (e.g. kissing)'." (Caca, 21 years old, single)

Due to her being single, the way her friends teased her status would lower her self-esteem and drive her into thinking that she longed for a boyfriend and affection despite what she initially valued.

Perceived benefits

The informants in this study explained that they received some benefits from watching K-dramas, such as feeling relaxed and reducing tensions, escaping from the harsh reality of life, having parasocial relationships, and gaining life lessons (referential reflection).

Escapism. Several informants admitted that they engaged with K-drama because they wanted to escape from the harsh reality of life and distract their minds from negative thoughts. Nur explained her reason as follows:

"Most of the time, when I'm going through stress, I just use the time to sit by myself, having me-time. It is as simple as watching K-dramas for days or watching YouTube videos. It's impossible to ask for other people's attention; maybe they have their things, right? It'd only burden them, so if I really need someone but I don't dare to say, I'd be like "Ah, let's look for other activities" other than thinking over it all the time. I just feel better. It's nice because there is a way to distract my mind [from negative thoughts] so I feel less stressed." (Nur, 21 years old, in a relationship)

Hartmann, Klimmt, and Vorderer (2010) argued that people felt the necessity to escape from their real-life problems or prevent their minds from thinking unwanted thoughts. Meanwhile, Shaf used K-drama as a way to distract her mind from her abusive parents. Fitzpatrick *et al.* (2019) mentioned in their study on domestic abuse that one of the coping mechanisms of abuse was creating "mental spaces" that victims utilized to escape and refine self-efficacy and self-esteem. In the marital setting, Ana distracted her mind from thinking about her conflicts with her husband through K-drama. The similarity of their case is that they did not solve the real issues. Escapism behavior aims to decrease the importance of the discrepancy rather than fixing it (Mandel *et al.*, 2017). In a slightly different context, Kay (20) who had never experienced a romantic relationship stated as follows:

"K-drama really can fulfill my need for affection because watching it can make me feel like I'm dating someone, even though I'm single. Moreover, the thrill of every cute scene with attractive characters really makes me happy, although sadly it won't happen in real life. Well, not exactly fulfilling affection, but rather, I watch some romance dramas to fulfill my desire about how to be in a relationship, how to feel butterflies in my stomach." (Kay, 20 years old, single)

Ju (2019) argued that K-drama offered an alternative realm for the viewers to fulfill their desire for romantic love and escape from reality. Also, it hints at a form of parasocial relationship. Additionally, the testimony from Oliv (28) supports the concept of compensatory consumption:

"Sometimes I feel lonely because my parents are far away, and my husband is also busy at work, and the way I handle it, usually I hang out with friends, and watch K-drama..." (Oliv, 28 years old, married)

Parasocial Relationships. The informants in this study were shown to have developed parasocial interaction with characters in K-drama. A parasocial relationship is a one-sided 'imaginary' interaction with media characters (or actors/actresses) where viewers are emotionally involved with them (Schramm and Hartmann, 2008). Parasocial interaction during the exposure of K-drama can be overserved from Ana's testimony:

"Feeling happy... especially when it's an ongoing K-drama, it feels like I'm having a romantic date [every week], like what I've been waiting for finally comes. I'm not a romantic person, but I like things romantic, that's why I like watching K-drama because there are a lot of romantic scenes like I just want to be treated romantically... just having to imagine it I guess..." (Ana, 35 years old, married)

Ana was happy and emotionally involved when watching K-drama because of the romantic relationship she had with the K-drama character(s). It indicates that having a parasocial relationship could lead to an emotional response. Some of the ways people are emotionally involved are through parasocial interaction, identification, and empathy (Kim

and Kim, 2017). Moreover, parasocial interaction leads to the identification stage where one imagines being one of the characters and feels like they experience those feelings depicted in K-drama in one's imagination and indicate that one wants to be the character (Chory-Assad and Cicchirillo, 2005; Brown, 2015). Caca shared her parasocial relationship experience as follows:

"K-dramas are like a place of imagination. If I watch it, it feels like the guy is next to me like he's real, like "Ah tomorrow I'll meet him for sure" as if he was real and we often meet. Since I put myself in the position of the female lead so I like to think, "Oh he's my boyfriend" "All this time he has been my boyfriend". It's a happy experience, increases my imagination, obviously, and... I become so happy that it affects my mood. I sometimes dance at night [while watching] because it brings me joy. If the ending is sad, it makes me cry and I just get carried away by the vibe." (Caca, 21 years old, single)

Ju and Lee (2015) argued that female viewers were attracted to watch K-drama (especially romance) because of the love sensation and the "emotions" depicted in it. Their perceived enjoyment could lead them to continue to perform the behavior (Singh *et al.*, 2021). According to Baumgartner (1992), once people were involved with something that affected them emotionally, they would feel the same feeling toward another thing related to it. For example, Kay claimed that she would cry when listening to the OST (Original Sound Track) of the K-drama.

According to Caca, the loneliness that she experienced decreased after watching K-drama because she felt like there were people around who talked to her. According to Rubenking *et al.* (2018), one feels companionship by involving oneself with the characters while binge-watching. Lin (20) also experienced a similar sense of everyday companionship:

"When the K-drama is over, sometimes I feel sad because I used to do my thesis with K-drama or K-drama keeps me company in my everyday life. So, it's like I've been living with the K-drama." (Lin, 20 years old, attached)

Referential Reflection. This concept consists of responses and narratives from the informants where they could relate their real lives or experiences to K-drama, including comparing and connecting themselves and other people in their lives with K-drama (Kim and Kim, 2017). Nur explained her experience with regards to comparing her boyfriend to the K-drama male character:

"Sometimes after watching K-drama that has a romantic element, I suddenly texted my boyfriend, "Let's eat". For example, in a scene where the guy is like... as simple as he carries his girlfriend's bag, I suddenly remember "oh my boyfriend also often does that, aw really romantic" or the girl cooks food for the guy. I suddenly thought, 'Eh, should I cook something tomorrow for my boyfriend?'" (Nur, 21 years old, in a relationship)

Nur's testimony demonstrates how viewers and their significant others can replicate the portrayals of the K-drama characters. Shedlosky-Shoemaker, Costabile, and Arkin (2014) relate it to parasocial interaction with media characters that could offer a broad range of experiences or perspectives. Similarly, Nadia expected her boyfriend to be like certain K-drama characters. According to Derrick, Gabriel, and Tippin (2008), one creates parasocial interaction with the characters they desire to guide one toward the ideal self and reduce self-discrepancy (actual-ideal). Meanwhile, Ana could relate her marriage life with the narrative told in *the World of the Married* (TWOM), a 2020 K-drama:

"When I was watching TWOM (a K-drama), I was bawling because I understood how the pain the doctor felt being lied to by her husband... my feelings were all over the place... many things I've learned from this K-drama... even though I've lied to, betrayed like that doctor... and oddly enough, even though my husband has a second wife, our relationship is getting closer and more intimate, like a newlywed all over again. After I watched TWOM... I don't feel alone, I shouldn't be selfish as long as my husband loves me and fulfil his responsibility... so I can say that it can fix my marriage life..." (Ana, 35 years old, married)

According to Hoffner and Buchanan (2005), People were drawn to watch TV series because of the insights they provided, such as how to solve their daily difficulties. From the perspective of people with no partner, Caca said that she could take some life lessons from K-drama, especially regarding the characteristics of the opposite gender. Meanwhile, Wilda claimed that K-drama allowed her to enhance herself (e.g. "I think more rationally, more logical, more mature..."). According to Riles and Adams (2020), one compares oneself to others to improve oneself, resulting in a stable self-identity or serving ego goals. In this regard, media characters serve as the embodiment of the ideal self. They further mentioned that parasocial relationships could enhance the audience's well-being.

Enabling factors

Several informants admitted that they would watch K-dramas depending on several factors such as their time availability, social influence, occupations, life stages, and approval from their significant others. These factors somewhat hindered (or enhanced) the informants' willingness to watch K-dramas as a compensatory strategy.

Time Availability and Life Stages. Some of the informants explained how they needed to find free time to watch K-drama. It follows the theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1991), particularly perceived behavioral control which refers to the ease or difficulty of performing a behavior due to external or situational factors. Oliv, a housewife, explained that watching K-drama might depend on the availability of her time as well as her life stage:

"... Even though I'm addicted to K-dramas, I usually watch them at night when my child is asleep. But I also admit that whenever I have free time, I will watch it. Maybe in one day, I'd watch 2 to 3 episodes." (Oliv, 28 years old, married)

One of the motives for watching TV series is to relax and have a pastime (Flayelle, Maurage, and Billieux, 2017). Feijter, Khan, and Gisbergen (2016) also mentioned that having free time relates to the amount of time spent or the number of episodes of binge-watching. In this context, Nur also shared her struggles:

"Hardly stop unless there is something I should do; it doesn't stop. Eating, sleeping - even I'm having lunch while watching, once I watch [K-drama]. Usually, I watch it in my spare time, for example on weekends, [with] no assignments, no work, just watching. And I would stop when I finished the [Korean] drama. So, I don't want to have that intention of quitting because I want it finished. I really hate watching K-dramas and I have to stop due to work or maybe I have something else to do, so I always try to watch it at the time when I know two or three days ahead, I have no other activities besides watching, so I can finish it right away. And I... avoid dramas that just aired, those that are still ongoing, so I always watched those that have finished, so I don't need to stop." (Nur, 21 years old, in a relationship)

Social Influence. Some informants claimed that they watched K-dramas due to the influence of others. Caca explained how her surroundings (e.g. family members) also influenced her decision (or addiction) to watch K-dramas:

"It depends on people's recommendations, too. At first, I didn't watch it too often because of the environment. Back in the old dorm when the homework wasn't too pile up and many of my friends liked K-dramas, so I also loved K-dramas, but when I moved to the rented house and lived alone, I didn't have much motivation to watch. I just watched it when I wanted to watch it. Because of COVID-19 which forced me to return to my house in Medan, I found that my brothers liked K-drama and so I began to watch it again continuously." (Caca, 21 years old, single)

Cycle of addiction

We argue that there is a bidirectional effect between watching K-drama and feeling a lack of affection or negative affective states. Hesse and Floyd (2019) argued that a two-way relationship could happen in pornography consumption as a substitution for affection deprivation; consuming pornography could make people feel lonely, and people consume pornography due to feelings of loneliness or dissatisfaction.

According to Sood (2002), after one has been emotionally invested in media characters, one will be unhappy if one's favorite character suffers a setback. It means that watching K-drama could also create negative emotions such as sadness or being loveless. Most of the informants, such as Caca, felt sad when the K-dramas that served as their weekly companions ended; therefore, they decided to watch another K-drama to cure their sadness. According to Jones, Cronin, and Piacentini (2018), this is called 'post-binge malaise' where one feels a sense of loss or mourning feelings after binge-watching. The act of searching for more information about the K-drama or reminiscing about it is an attempt to keep the favorite K-drama and its characters alive in Caca's imagination. Meanwhile, Eve (20) explained that she was feeling loveless and empty after watching K-drama:

"Sometimes there is a feeling of needing affection when watching K-drama when I get deep into the story, so it gets too emotional. I feel empty [after watching K-drama] ... like what else should I do?" (Eve, 20 years old, single)

Eve's testimony was intriguing because, unlike Kay, Eve claimed that watching K-drama had caused her to experience a lack of affection and that she required more love and attention from her significant others during the exposure. This finding supports Lee's work (2020), which suggests that K-dramas that were primarily romance or melodramas projected an intimate idea that viewers could not find in their real lives, causing them to become intimately immersed in K-drama and desire to experience the sensations of love shown in K-drama in their real lives. As a result of being reminded of their loveless status or less than satisfactory love lives, the bidirectional effects experienced by the informants established a cycle of addiction toward K-drama.

Discussions

Many parts of this study have emphasized the need for love and affection as a precursor to K-drama addiction. A lack of affection, also known as affection deprivation, indicates that one receives less love and caring than desired from their significant other (Floyd, 2016). People with self-deficits, such as a perceived lack of affection, would look for a way to compensate for their lack or weakness through symbolic consumption (Woodruffe,

1997). This study explored the addiction to K-drama as a potential compensatory strategy for lack of affection.

The first theme is “affection deprivation” which shows informants’ narratives relating to their experiences of affection deprivation. The category was further sub-categorized into parental, marital, or romantic relationships. Based on the in-depth interviews, informants had problems in one or more categories.

The second theme is “negative affect”. We contend that the informants’ negative affective states, such as sadness, loneliness, depression, and low self-esteem, are linked to the affection deprivation they experienced (see Floyd, 2016; Floyd and Hesse, 2016). Moreover, negative affective states, such as low self-esteem, are often linked to compensatory consumption (Woodruffe, 1997; Koles *et al.*, 2018; Syahrivar, 2021; Syahrivar *et al.*, 2022).

The third theme is “compensatory strategy” which suggests how informants dealt with their negative affective states through the consumption of K-dramas. Based on the in-depth interviews, watching K-drama was the most preferred mechanism because of cultural similarity and cultural personality (Asian cultures; patriarchal society), relatable storylines, character depictions, and the physical appeals from the actors and actresses (e.g. tall, beautiful, and smooth skin). As a result, K-drama and its cultural and communication elements are more appealing to Indonesian viewers, similar to how people choose tourist destinations (also see Gyulavári and Malota, 2019).

The fourth theme is “perceived benefits” that the informants claimed to receive from watching K-drama, such as escapism, parasocial relationships with media characters, and referential reflection. Based on the in-depth interviews, informants expressed that they experienced various feelings when exposed to K-dramas, such as happiness or sadness. However, because most K-dramas have happy endings, the outcome is that the informants will rejoice knowing that the relatable characters get the conclusions that they deserve.

The fifth theme is “enabling factors” that influence the informants’ degree of addiction to K-dramas, such as occupation, time availability, and social influence. Even if informants experience negative emotions (for example, loneliness), if they do not have much free time, they may hesitate to engage in K-drama binge-watching. Therefore, we argue that time availability enables the intention to watch K-drama as a form of compensatory consumption. Additionally, social influence plays a significant role in the informants’ addiction or engagement with K-drama. It can be in the form of 1) a significant person’s opinions or approval toward one performing the behavior, 2) friends’ or relatives’ recommendations, and 3) reviews. This view is supported by previous studies, such as Yu *et al.* (2019) regarding extrinsic motivation caused by social influence and Ajzen (1991) regarding normative beliefs.

It is crucial to further explore the bidirectional relationship between affection deprivation and K-drama addiction (Hesse and Floyd, 2019). On one hand, the consumption of K-dramas offers temporary emotional comfort and compensates for a perceived lack of affection by providing a vicarious experience of idealized romantic relationships. The characters’ experiences often align with the viewer’s longing for affection, which brings them temporary emotional satisfaction. This reinforces the desire to continue watching K-dramas as a coping mechanism, establishing the first part of the cycle. However, as the viewer becomes emotionally immersed in these fictional relationships, it can reinforce self-discrepancy, where viewers compare their own affection needs to those of the characters depicted in K-dramas. For instance, viewers may become reminded of their own perceived shortcomings in love and relationship satisfaction, which exacerbates their emotional deprivation. This creates a negative

affective response (e.g., sadness, loneliness), leading to further consumption of K-dramas in an attempt to compensate for those feelings. Thus, the consumption of K-dramas results not only in temporary gratification but also in a deepened sense of emotional longing, perpetuating the cycle of addiction. According to Koles *et al.* (2018), addictive consumption offers short-term rewards that could exceed the negative consequences that come with it; therefore, the motivations to perform the addictive behavior are much higher.

While K-drama addiction shares similarities with other types of media addiction, such as social media or reality TV, it is distinct in its emotional and cultural appeal. K-dramas provide more than just entertainment; they offer a sense of emotional connection and belonging that may be less pronounced in other media forms (Jeong *et al.*, 2017; Ju, 2019; Lee, 2020; Park and Hong, 2021). The romanticized portrayal of relationships and the idealized Asian family structures in K-dramas uniquely position them as a compensatory medium for affection deprivation. In contrast, other media forms, such as reality TV or social media, often focus on individualism and self-promotion, which may not fulfill the same emotional needs.

This study offers several academic contributions. First, to our knowledge, this is the first study that links K-drama addiction to compensatory consumption theory. Secondly, this study reveals the compensatory strategy through K-drama addiction by exploring several themes related to K-drama addiction and its consequences. In this regard, this study creates pathways for future research in this area. Lastly, this study offers insights into the behavior of Indonesian K-drama viewers, which we believe are still underrepresented.

This study offers several managerial implications. First, companies that use K-dramas and K-celebrities as platforms to market their products should tailor their messages to appeal to K-drama lovers with affection deprivation issues. Products that tackle love or relational issues might be appealing to K-drama lovers. Secondly, production houses of K-dramas can boost their worldwide viewers' engagement by taking into account affection deprivation as one of the motivations. In a sense, K-drama can provide meaningful closures and emotional support to those who perceive they are loveless or undesired by their significant others. Lastly, in the health context, the moderating factors in this study could be keys to reducing K-drama addictions.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between affection deprivation and K-drama addiction, it is not without limitations. First, the sample size of 23 informants, recruited from specific online communities, limits the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on participants from online platforms may introduce selection bias, as these individuals are likely to be more engaged with K-dramas than the general population. Future research could address this limitation by including a more diverse participant pool. Second, the study heavily relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or memory recall errors. Although we took measures to ensure participant comfort and openness during interviews, we acknowledge that these factors could affect the accuracy of the responses. To ensure the validity of the findings, several strategies were employed. Data saturation was determined when no new themes or concepts emerged from subsequent interviews, indicating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Groenewald (2004). Additionally, member checks were conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Expert

consultations were also performed, with a psychologist reviewing the themes and findings to ensure they were grounded in established theories. Finally, the context of the study—conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic—may have amplified the psychological states of participants, such as loneliness or anxiety, influencing their engagement with K-dramas. Future studies might explore whether similar patterns are observed in non-pandemic contexts or among different cultural groups.

Conclusion

This study suggests that K-drama addictive consumption may arise as a compensatory strategy for affection deprivation. People who lack affection often experience negative emotions, such as anxiety, loneliness, stress, and depression, which drive them to seek relief through K-drama consumption and the development of parasocial relationships with K-drama celebrities and fictional characters. This behavior reflects compensatory consumption, where K-dramas provide emotional fulfillment and temporary satisfaction, such as comfort, escapism, and companionship. Furthermore, K-dramas particularly appeal to Indonesian viewers, who relate to the cultural and emotional themes portrayed in these shows. However, watching K-dramas can also have a bidirectional effect: while viewers seek to compensate for affection deprivation, their emotional states may worsen as they compare their love lives to the idealized portrayals in K-dramas, thus reinforcing their feelings of emotional inadequacy. Several factors, such as time availability, social influence, and life stages, enable K-drama addiction, emphasizing the role of external and situational elements in fostering this behavior. Lastly, K-drama addiction reflects broader cultural and social dynamics within Indonesian society. It highlights how media consumption, particularly K-dramas, can address emotional needs that may not be fulfilled in real-life relationships. This has significant implications for understanding emotional well-being in a collectivist culture where family and societal expectations play a major role in shaping individuals' emotional states. The study also underscores how media content can influence the mental and emotional health of viewers in culturally specific ways, with K-dramas offering both comfort and emotional distress.

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