

THE DYNAMICS OF FAN COMMUNICATION ON A K-DRAMA MENFESS TWITTER ACCOUNT: A NETNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the role of the K-Drama Menfess Twitter account as a medium for communication and virtual discussion among Korean drama fans, as well as to identify patterns of interaction and the motives behind media use among its followers. This study employs a netnographic approach to understand the dynamics of social life in cyberspace through the observation of naturally occurring online activities. Specifically, it examines interactions, activities, and menfess content that reflect patterns of communication, expression, and engagement within the K-Drama fan community. This research is grounded in the Uses and Gratifications theoretical framework, which emphasizes that media users actively seek out media to fulfill specific needs. A qualitative method is employed, with data collected through participatory observation and content analysis of tweets published by the K-Drama Menfess account over a specified period (May–September 2025). The findings reveal five categories of gratification obtained by followers: information needs, entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, and escapism. The account plays a significant role in fostering an interactive virtual community, functioning not only as a space for sharing information and opinions about K-Dramas but also as a means of strengthening a sense of togetherness among its members. This study contributes to the advancement of digital communication research, particularly in understanding netnographic practices and the use of social media within fan-based communities through the Uses and Gratifications perspective. The findings further highlight the role of social media as a dynamic virtual communication space that fulfills users' psychological and social needs.

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1. Introduction

The global phenomenon demonstrates that South Korean culture has a significant influence on the international entertainment industry, particularly through Korean dramas (K-Dramas). These cultural products function not only as a form of entertainment but also as

a medium for disseminating values, lifestyles, and representations of Korean culture to a global audience.

The spread of Korean culture to various countries, including Indonesia, is known as the Korean Wave or Hallyu. The term “Hallyu” was first introduced by a Beijing journalist in response to the growing popularity of K-Pop in China (Toding, 2021). The development of this phenomenon has been further strengthened by the presence of K-Dramas, which offer compelling narratives and well-developed characters (Shafir & Haq, 2019). In Indonesia, early exposure to K-Dramas through national television broadcasts contributed to the increasing public interest in Korean culture.

Alongside advances in digital technology, patterns of media consumption have undergone significant changes. Social media no longer functions solely as a means of entertainment but also as a space for social and cultural interaction. K-Drama fans are no longer passive audiences; instead, they actively build communities, share experiences, and produce as well as distribute content independently. This indicates that participation in popular culture has evolved into an interactive and collaborative communication practice in the digital space.

One notable phenomenon in this context is the emergence of anonymous autobase systems on social media, particularly on the platform X (Twitter). This system allows users to send messages (menfess) anonymously via Direct Message (DM), which are then published by the account administrator. This mechanism creates a unique communication space where user identities are concealed while social interactions remain active. Such anonymity enables fans to express opinions, emotions, and experiences without personal identity constraints, thereby shaping distinct communication dynamics compared to typical social media interactions.

In this study, this phenomenon is analyzed using the Uses and Gratifications theoretical framework, which positions users as active agents who select and utilize media to fulfill specific needs. Specifically, this research examines how K-Drama fans use anonymous autobase systems to satisfy their needs for information, entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, and escapism, as well as how these needs influence communication patterns within virtual communities.

The X account @kdrama_menfess serves as one of the largest autobase examples, with more than one million followers. This account functions as a virtual discussion space where K-Drama fans exchange information, share experiences, and build social relationships within a digital community. The high level of interaction within this account indicates a strong demand for an alternative communication space that is both anonymous and participatory.

Although previous studies have examined the Korean Wave and fan communities, a research gap remains in understanding how fan communication operates within anonymous autobase systems and how media user needs, as explained by the Uses and Gratifications theory, are manifested in such communication practices. Academically, this study is significant as it offers a new perspective in digital communication research, particularly concerning anonymous communication practices, media need fulfillment, virtual community formation, and the construction of cultural meaning within social media contexts.

Based on this background, the research problem of this study is to examine how interaction patterns and communication processes occur within K-Drama fan communities through anonymous autobase systems, how fans utilize the menfess feature to fulfill their needs for information, entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, and escapism, and how these communication dynamics reflect the processes of acceptance and construction of Korean cultural meanings among Indonesian fans.

This study aims to analyze the interactions, activities, and forms of communication within K-Drama fan communities on social media, particularly through anonymous autobase systems, while also identifying the fulfillment of user needs from a Uses and Gratifications perspective, and understanding how these communities construct identity and solidarity in virtual spaces.

Netnography is a qualitative research method that adapts the ethnographic approach to study online communities through the internet. This method enables researchers to understand the behavior, interactions, and culture of virtual communities through participatory observation and digital content analysis. Kozinets argues that netnography is used to examine online communities using an ethnographic approach (Nurfadillah Hanafi Astri, n.d., 2020).

In contrast to conventional ethnography, which studies communities in direct, physical settings, netnography focuses on interactions that occur within digital spaces (Sulianta, n.d., 2022). In the context of this study, netnography is employed to analyze the activities and interactions of K-Drama fans on social media platforms.

In addition, virtual communication is a key concept in understanding this phenomenon. According to Werner J. Severin, virtual communication refers to the process of exchanging messages within an interactive digital environment (Umilasari, 2020). In practice, this form of communication not only mediates interaction but also constructs new social realities in cyberspace, including within autobase-based fan communities.

This study contributes academically to the development of digital communication studies by highlighting anonymous communication practices within autobase-based fan communities. Furthermore, it enriches netnographic research by positioning social media as a dynamic space for cultural meaning production and social interaction in the digital era.

2. Method

The researcher employs a qualitative or naturalistic approach, as the study is conducted within a natural setting. Qualitative research, as described by Bogdan and Taylor, is a type of inquiry that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observable behavior from the object of study. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena. Qualitative research encompasses various approaches, including phenomenology, ethnography, case studies, and grounded theory, among others. Variations of qualitative methods include case studies, phenomenology, and ethnography within the context of communication (Haryono, 2023).

Robert Kozinets was the first to introduce netnographic research in 1995. His study focused on the analysis of online fans of the Star Trek brand and has since become a milestone for various forms of research that continue to evolve today. In general, digital

ethnography includes the practice of netnography. Netnography itself is a combination of the terms “internet” and “ethnography,” representing an extension of ethnographic approaches applied to investigate life and activities in the virtual realm mediated by internet networks (Sulianta, n.d., 2022).

In this research approach, there is a strong connection with netnography, as both aim to examine the dynamics of communication occurring in cyberspace, particularly on the Twitter (X) account K-Drama Menfess. Netnography involves the collection and analysis of data from digital platforms through active observation and online interactions. The data in this study were collected over the period of May to September 2025, consisting of approximately 500 tweets published by the account along with relevant user interactions. The data were selected purposively based on interaction intensity, topical relevance, and the level of user engagement in discussions.

The data analysis process was conducted through coding procedures, beginning with open coding to identify meaningful units within the tweet content, followed by axial coding to categorize data into related themes, and concluding with selective coding to develop the main research themes. These themes were derived from patterns of interaction, forms of communication, and users’ media usage purposes, which were then interpreted within the context of virtual communication. This approach ensures that the findings are systematic, valid, and comprehensive.

In its implementation, this study also considers ethical aspects of research. Although the data were obtained from publicly accessible platforms, the researcher ensured user anonymity by not disclosing account identities. The principle of informed consent was applied implicitly by only utilizing publicly available data without interfering with user activities. In addition, data privacy was maintained by excluding sensitive information and paraphrasing quoted content. These ethical considerations are essential to ensure that the research does not harm participants and respects users’ rights within digital spaces.

The Uses and Gratifications model examines how social and psychological needs arise from expectations of mass media or other sources that can fulfill those needs. Research adopting this model focuses on how media content is utilized to satisfy various needs or achieve gratification. This model is used to explain how the reception process occurs in mass communication, as well as how individuals or groups make use of media. It also provides a framework for various studies, including those by Katz and Gurevitch, which apply the Uses and Gratifications model to explain similarities and differences among media based on their functions and characteristics. This research produced a simple pattern demonstrating similarities across different types of media (Nurfadillah Hanafi Astri, n.d., 2020).

The Uses and Gratifications theory model begins with environmental factors that influence individual interests. This social context includes group characteristics and personal attributes. Individual interests are classified into cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and release or escapism needs (Nurfadillah Hanafi Astri, n.d., 2020). The explanations of these needs are as follows:

1. Cognitive needs: needs aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of the surrounding environment, driven by the desire to comprehend and control one’s environment, as well as to satisfy curiosity and the urge to explore.

2. Affective needs: needs aimed at obtaining pleasurable, entertaining, and emotionally engaging experiences.
3. Personal integrative needs: needs related to strengthening individual status, self-confidence, credibility, and stability, driven by the desire to enhance self-esteem.
4. Social integrative needs: needs related to strengthening relationships with others, such as friends and social networks, driven by the desire to connect and maintain social bonds.
5. Escapism (release) needs: needs related to efforts to avoid pressure, discomfort, and various life demands or problems.

3. Results and Discussion

K-Drama Menfess is a community account that operates virtually (online). K-Drama Menfess provides a space for communication, discussion, and recommendations focused on discussing various aspects related to drama, movies, public figures, and television programs. The Twitter account (X) K-Drama Menfess was first created in June 2018 by a 23-year-old woman, as the owner and admin of the K-Drama Menfess account. The owner of the account is in Medan, North Sumatra. The K-Drama Menfess account is used anonymously or other people do not know who the owner and admin behind the K-Drama Menfess account is. K-Drama Menfess has been operating for six years.



Figure 1. (X) K-Drama Menfess Twitter Account

The purpose of the K-Drama Menfess presence on Twitter (X) is not only to attract followers but also has a meaningful goal behind the creation of the account. Initially, the creation of the Korean drama Menfess account was intended to establish connections with people who have a deeper interest in the Korean film industry. Although there were peers to discuss with in real life, their knowledge was limited to popular Hallyu artists, such as Lee Min-ho, Song Joong-ki, and Song Hye-kyo. A preference for films over dramas led to a focus on actors who are more well-known in the film industry, such as Jung Woo-sung, Jeon Do-yeon, Kang Dong-won, and Kim Nam-gil. Through the existence of this account, opportunities also opened up to gain promotional support from other parties, which previously could only be done independently.

Analysis of the Uses & Gratifications Theory K-Drama Menfess account

This study found that K-Drama Menfess can improve virtual communication and discussion by fulfilling five main needs. These main needs are as follows:

1. Cognitive needs

Menfess functions as a source for fulfilling cognitive needs, namely the need for information and understanding. From the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory, users actively choose menfess as a medium to acquire knowledge about dramas, films, and Korean popular culture. However, a deeper analysis reveals two important aspects that must be considered: information credibility and the process of knowledge construction.

In terms of information credibility, menfess within the autobase system operates anonymously, meaning that sources of information often lack clear identity. This condition implies a lower level of assurance regarding the validity and accuracy of the shared information. Users tend to rely on collective community trust (social trust) rather than on source verification. Consequently, credibility is not established through individual authority but through community responses such as the number of likes, retweets, or supportive comments. In this context, cognitive gratification is still achieved, but the quality of information remains relative and is sometimes vulnerable to misinformation.

From the perspective of knowledge construction, menfess functions not only as a medium for information dissemination but also as a discursive space where knowledge is collectively constructed. Initial information posted through menfess often evolves through user interactions in the form of comments, discussions, and corrections. This process indicates that knowledge within the community is not static but is socially negotiated through digital interaction. Within the Uses and Gratifications framework, this suggests that the fulfillment of cognitive needs is derived not only from information consumption but also from active participation in sharing and validating information.

Therefore, although menfess is capable of fulfilling users' cognitive needs, the quality of such gratification is highly influenced by community dynamics, users' levels of digital literacy, and informal verification mechanisms embedded in interactions. This finding highlights that in anonymous media environments, the fulfillment of informational needs does not necessarily correlate with credibility, but rather depends on the social construction of knowledge within the community.



Figure 2. The Latest Information Related to Drama

2. Affective needs

The fulfillment of affective needs in this context is not merely general, but can be specifically observed through the characteristics of the menfess content posted. For instance, tweets featuring emotional scenes from K-Dramas, such as farewell moments or love confessions are often accompanied by captions like “this scene made me cry so much” or “I can’t handle this ending,” which subsequently generate high levels of engagement in the form of replies, quote tweets, and likes. This indicates that visual content combined with emotional narratives is capable of creating strong affective experiences for users.

Furthermore, menfess posts containing drama recommendations with descriptions such as “looking for a light but emotional drama?” or “any healing drama recommendations?” demonstrate how users actively seek specific emotional experiences. Responses from other users typically include lists of drama titles accompanied by emotional justifications, such as “this one is really sad but so good” or “this one will make you laugh a lot,” indicating that interactions are not solely information-based but are also driven by affective expectations that users aim to fulfill.

Discussions surrounding characters also reveal more complex emotional dynamics. For example, tweets criticizing antagonistic characters often generate comments expressing anger or frustration, while discussions about protagonists tend to evoke empathy and emotional support. This pattern suggests that users’ emotions are shaped through their engagement with narrative elements, which are further amplified through interactions in the comment section.

From the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory, this condition highlights that entertainment gratification is derived not only from content consumption but also from participation in discussions that reinforce emotional experiences. At the same time, informational gratification remains present, for instance when users obtain drama recommendations that align with their emotional preferences. Therefore, the gratification

achieved is simultaneous—integrating both cognitive and affective dimensions—emerging when menfess content aligns with users’ emotional needs, expectations, and personal goals.

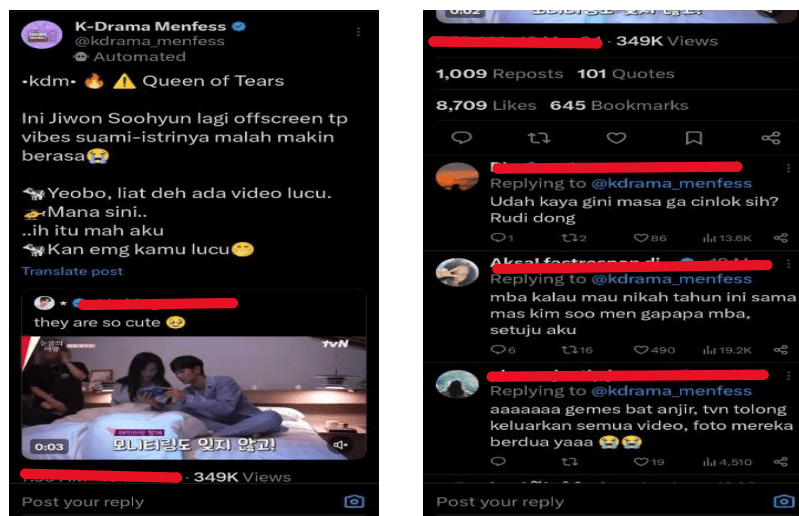


Figure 3. Entertaining and Sentimental Context

3. Personal integrative needs

Personal integrative needs in this context relate to users’ efforts to gain recognition, enhance credibility, and build self-confidence through active participation in menfess. This phenomenon is not merely general in nature, but can be observed through interaction patterns within tweets. For instance, menfess posts containing drama recommendations or in-depth reviews, such as “this drama is really underrated, a must-watch because of its strong plot twist,” often receive responses like “totally agree, this is really good!” or “thanks for the recommendation, I ended up watching it,” indicating recognition of the user’s knowledge.

Moreover, users who consistently provide recommendations or analyses that are perceived as accurate tend to generate higher engagement, reflected in significant numbers of likes and retweets, and are frequently referenced by other users in subsequent discussions. This pattern suggests that credibility is gradually constructed through repeated contributions that are considered valuable by the community. In some interactions, other users explicitly express trust through responses such as “I trust your taste” or “your recommendations are always good,” indicating the formation of interpersonal trust within the digital space.

On the other hand, identity stability is reflected in how users maintain consistent styles or preferences in the menfess they submit, thereby constructing a recognizable self-image within the community, despite operating under anonymity. From the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory, the fulfillment of personal integrative needs is therefore derived not only from content exposure, but also from social recognition obtained through interaction, community validation, and the consistency of contributions within ongoing discussions.



Figure 4. Feel Recognized and Valued for Their Knowledge

4. Social integrative needs

Social integrative needs in this context are not only related to efforts to strengthen relationships among users, but can also be analyzed through the network structure and intensity of interactions formed within the K-Drama Menfess account. User interactions do not occur randomly; rather, they form communication network patterns centered on menfess as the starting point of discussion, which then develop through replies, reply chains, and quote tweets.

For example, a single menfess post containing a question such as “any recommendations for thriller dramas?” can generate dozens to hundreds of responses from other users, who interact not only with the original sender but also with one another. This pattern indicates a multidirectional interaction network, where communication is not merely one-way but evolves into more complex social relationships. The intensity of interaction can be observed through the frequency of comments, retweets, and ongoing discussions within a single thread, reflecting a high level of engagement within the community.

Furthermore, the formation of social relationships is evident from the recurring presence of users who repeatedly engage in particular topics, thereby creating closeness based on shared interests. In some cases, users begin to recognize each other through communication styles or viewing preferences, despite operating within an anonymous system. This suggests that social connections are not solely built on personal identity, but also on active participation and interaction intensity within digital communication networks.

Thus, from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory, the fulfillment of social integrative needs occurs not only through the existence of a community, but through the dynamics of interaction networks that enable users to build, maintain, and expand social relationships virtually. Interaction intensity and interconnectedness among users serve as

key indicators in explaining how social media—particularly the menfess system—functions as a space for the formation of active and sustainable social relationships.



Figure 5. Social Relationships with Individuals who Have Similar Interests

5. Escapist needs

Escapist needs in this context are not merely related to efforts to avoid pressure, but can be understood as an active strategy by users in selecting content that diverts their attention from everyday realities. From the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications theory, users consciously utilize media to obtain distraction and relaxation as a form of escape from stress and routine.

This phenomenon can be specifically observed in the characteristics of menfess content that features light and humorous material. For instance, tweets sharing comedic scenes with captions such as “this random scene is so funny” or “needed this after a long day” tend to generate responses with similar tones, such as “this made me laugh so much” or “my mood instantly improved.” This pattern indicates that users not only consume content but also collectively construct a lighter emotional atmosphere through interaction.

Furthermore, menfess posts featuring humorous photos of actors/actresses or behind-the-scenes moments often receive high engagement because they provide entertainment that does not require complex cognitive involvement. Such content functions as a “micro-escape,” a brief form of diversion that allows users to shift from stress to more pleasurable experiences within a short time. Unlike affective needs, which emphasize emotional depth, users in this context tend to seek fast, light, and repetitive forms of distraction.

Moreover, the intensity of humorous content consumption in menfess tends to increase at specific times, such as in the evening or after working hours, indicating a pattern of media use as a coping mechanism for fatigue. The resulting interactions are generally not focused on extended discussions, but rather on spontaneous responses such as emojis, laughter, or brief comments, which reinforce the function of escapism as an immediate release.

Thus, the fulfillment of escapist needs within the menfess system is determined not only by the type of content, but also by patterns of consumption and interaction that are rapid, light, and repetitive. This highlights that social media, particularly menfess, functions

as a micro-escape space that enables users to manage psychological pressure through simple yet effective entertainment experiences.

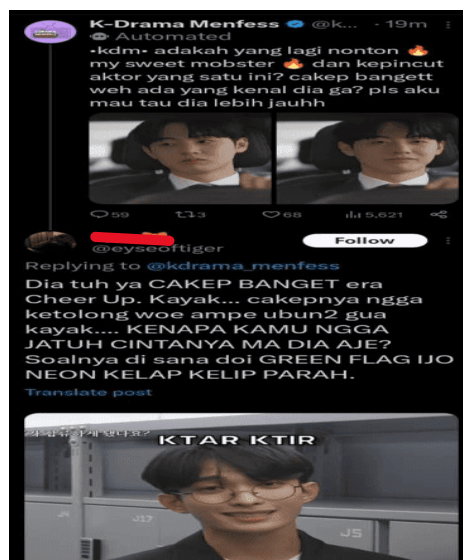


Figure 5. Social Relationships with Individuals who Have Similar Interests

Korean dramas are not only used as entertainment, but also have a major influence beyond the screen due to their ability to realistically and beautifully depict Korean society through various aspects such as customs, traditions, cuisine, and fashion, while highlighting social values such as friendship, respect for parents, and a strong work ethic. thus encouraging fans in various countries to learn more about South Korean culture by studying the language, listening to K-Pop music, trying traditional cuisine, following fashion trends, and even visiting the country to experience the culture firsthand.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the K-Drama Menfess account functions not merely as a space for information sharing, but as a communication mechanism that shapes patterns of collective interaction within the fan community. The primary original contribution of this research lies in demonstrating how the anonymous autobase system transforms audiences from passive consumers into active participants engaged in the ongoing production, distribution, and negotiation of meaning. The resulting interaction patterns reveal that communication dynamics are no longer centralized around the admin, but instead evolve into a discursive network sustained by user contributions.

From a practical perspective, the consistently managed menfess mechanism generates a participatory cycle that strengthens user engagement. The publication of user-submitted content fosters a sense of ownership over the communication space, which in turn increases interaction intensity and expands the community's reach. This suggests that content management strategies based on anonymous participation can serve as an effective model for building and sustaining active digital communities, particularly on social media platforms.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the development of the Uses and Gratifications framework by positioning anonymity as a significant variable in the fulfillment of user needs. The findings demonstrate that gratification is not solely determined by the type of content, but also by the communication structure that enables users to participate without identity constraints. This expands the understanding that media gratification is not purely individual, but is socially constructed through collective interaction and community validation within digital environments.

Furthermore, the broader implications of this study highlight that social media functions as a dynamic space for cultural production, where users not only consume content but also shape discourse and shared experiences. The menfess system illustrates that anonymous communication can create an inclusive yet highly interactive environment for the exchange of ideas, while simultaneously presenting challenges related to information validity and relational dynamics among users. Therefore, this study contributes to advancing perspectives in digital communication by elucidating how technology, anonymity, and collective participation interact in shaping sustainable communication ecosystems.

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