

## THE PROCESS OF AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE MEDIA PERSONAE ON THE FILM OF “DESCENDANTS OF THE SUN” AMONG YOUNG FEMALE INDONESIAN VIEWERS

Desideria Lumongga Dwiheadiah Leksmono  
Communication Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences  
Universitas Pelita Harapan  
Tangerang – INDONESIA  
dery\_leksmono@yahoo.com / desideria.leksmono@uph.edu

---

### ABSTRACT

The brand new product of Korean Pop Culture Industry which becoming the latest part of Hallyu (Korean Wave), is a drama series called “*Descendants of The Sun*”. The film instantly reach its popularity since aired in February 2016 and ended in April the same year. Some countries in which *Descendants of The Sun* gained its popularity are China, Hongkong, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. The main characters of the series also becoming the new idols or media personae for their audiences. It has been long known that idols or media personae are figures who gain popularity from their appearance in mass media have strong influence toward their audiences in which audiences are not the ordinary ones. Audiences on the other hand involve themselves with everything relating with their idols. Their involvement make the relations look like a real ones and this kind of involvement called Audience Involvement. There are four processes of Audience Involvement: Transportation, Para social interaction, Identification and Worship. This paper is based on a research which will see how the processes of Audience Involvement happen to the viewers especially those who are female viewers since they are the main audiences of Korean Drama. Therefore the methodology of this research is qualitative, and since this drama series are new therefore this research intended to give description and analysis of how the process of involvement happen among the viewers.

Key words : Audience involvement, media personae, viewers.

---

### Introduction

In the early of 2016, the public of Korean pop culture around the world has been entertained with the newest Korean Drama (K-Drama) miniseries called “*Descendants of the Sun*” (DOTS). This drama series produced by Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) and aired in the same channel from February to April 2016 and spread through some special digital platforms and make it more popular within very short time along with the famous actors and actresses of the drama gained huge popularity among its viewers. Its popularity especially reach China and Japanese as well as Hongkong, Indonesia and Singapore (Koreatimes.com, 2016; Straits times, 2016). This drama series has marked the new era of *Hallyu* (Korean Wave) since its long absence after (Hai, 2016)

K-drama series have been long popular for their romances plot and DOTS is actually having the same story but what makes it different is the military setting that other dramas have not. The romance in this drama involving a captain of special force in Korean Army and a surgeon. The leading figures played by Song Joong Ki and Song Hye Kyo have been captivating the audiences across Asia ( And not only that, the President of South Korea has been praising the drama and said that it can help spread the Korean Culture and boosting tourism to their country (Wong, 2016). Even Song Joong Ki has been declared as the ambassador of Korean Tourism for the year of 2016 and his fame has increased sharply.

The leading figures in a particular product of entertainment industry such as in film or music, have been famous through his/her appearance in mass media. They are known as media personae. Media personae according to C.G. Jung in Brown (2015) is a person’s perceived or evident personality as famous official, actor, celebrity, personal image, public role. While Horton and Wohl in the same article explained that personae (plural form of persona) refer to the television personalities with whom viewers related. Some experts like Henry Jenkins, Cornell Sandvoss, equate the term media personae with idols.

Audiences on the other hand have long been an important part of entertainment industry which use the logic of popular culture and since the beginning they have the power to define whether the actors, athletes, celebrities or personal image can be media personae or not (Sullivan, 2013). Therefore whether liked or not, leading figures such as actors, athletes, celebrities won’t be popular without the support of audience.

The main characters of DOTS also gained more popularity from this mini drama TV series, and it becomes the newest product of *Hallyu*. DOTS become the next Korean influence’ success in the Asia region (Strait Times, 2016). The producers conceptualize the plot and casts early on in order to qualify Chinese Regulation and able to be simulcast (aired in several countries on the same time) in China and South Korea. Nielsen Korea as the branch of Nielsen Consumer Research International reported that the rating of DOTS was 31,9 percent higher than the expected 30 percent mark for a successful drama production characteristic and 3 trillion won or 2,6 billion US Dollar that has been to the South Korea’s economy (Asiaone.com, 2016; Soompi.com, 2016).

The success of DOTS has marked the new era of Korean Drama (K-Drama) because of its different approach to an ordinary love story between the main casts (Strait Times, 2016). Unlike the ordinary plot in Korean Dramas, this series didn't tell about the imbalance social economy class between the casts which made them difficult to maintain their romance, but in this series the emphasis of the story more to the dynamics between the characters due to the nature of their professions. Korean Drama is a very first product of Korean pop culture and most featured part of Hallyu which known around the world.

Korean pop culture products spread all over the world using several kinds of media including new media and gain popularity because through the use of new media especially by using social media as the platform, they can reach more young audience (Sun Jung, 2011). The popularity of a song called *Gangnam Style*, by Psy is the proof of this. DOTS also gain its popularity through video streaming from website such as Viu in Singapore, iQiyi in China.

*Hallyu* is the term to describe the increasing of South Korean culture popularity around the world in the form of TV drama series, films, popular music through mass media according to Chua & Iwabuchi (2008) The wave began from East Asia, to America especially Latin America, the Middle East and some part of Europe (Ravina, 2009; Lee, 2011). Through the spread of Korean Culture people around the world started to know more about this country and the popularity of its cultural products help this country to boost its image in international scope (Hong, 2014).

As previously described what experts describe about fans are those who are loyal viewers and become the regular audience of DOTS. Fans are a type of audience who think that they have strong connection with the media personae(s) as in this case are the character of Captain Yoo Si Jin (played by Jong Ki) and doctor Kang Mo Yeon (played by Song Hye Kyo), with the rising popularity of DOTS, the fame of its casts also enhanced. And they become the most favorite actor among Hallyu fans.

Figure 1. Descendants of the Sun's Leading Characters



The word fans itself is the abbreviation of the word *fanatic* has already described as the nature of relations between fans and their idols. Fans are not ordinary audiences, since in this term we can refer them to audience who develop a deep feeling of involvement with the figure shown by the media, include the deep feelings of admiration, love and adore everything related to the figures that they are. Because of the deep feeling that fans as audience of the media figures shown in the media so they can also be easily affected and influenced by these (public) figures. Fans who are loyal audiences of the media personae have the imagination of being closer to their idols.

The intense feeling of involvement between fans and their idols (media personae) are suspected by the general public as beyond normal and fans are seen as those who have social problems or people who fail to distinguish between real life and fiction. This is also happened with the fans of DOTS in which the success of the drama has grown the actor's fan base and drag more curiosity from the fans into the actors' private life. The difference between regular audience and fans is on the intensity of enjoying to a particular product of culture, wherein the aspect of involving the fans' emotional and intellectual capacity is the most important point (Jenkins, 1992).

Research on the influence of media on the audience as well as the influence of figures that appear in the media both imaginative figures like a cartoon character or a character in a novel and public figures such as celebrities and artists on the audience has been much discussed over the years by many scholars who interested in pop culture industry as well as media studies. But, research into how audiences engage with the characters shown in the media and how the audience understood and prepared a spectacle as something interesting and provide benefits according to the audience itself, has not widely observed in studies of communication, studies such as this starts from the study of audience (Audience Studies). Because of that reason, then the research on audience involvement to the media personae will be an important contribution to the field of audience studies as well as media studies.

And based on that reason then, this research paper is made based on the research on how the audience involvement to the media personae of DOTS. There is a model of audience involvement proposed by Brown (2015) and extended by Moyer Guse (2015) which offered that there are four processes in the audience involvement which will describe how the audience involve and influenced by the figure which shown in the mass media (media personae) according to Brown (2015), he and Guse (2015) in two different papers discussing the processes of audience involvement with media personae which consist of Transportation, Parasocial Interaction (PSI), Identification and Worship. These four processes will be discussed in this paper with the loyal audiences of DOTS as the object of the research.

### Research Design

According to Brown (2015) the idea of audience involvement primarily focuses on individual experiences of consuming media. Therefore with rooted in Audience Studies, the concept of Audience Involvement is actually talking about three aspects of cognitive, affective and behavior participation of audience because of media exposure (Rubin & Perse, 1987). In audience studies

the discussion mostly about how the audience receive, consume and engage to the (content) of mass media. Further Brown explained that audience involvement is the rate of psychological response from someone to a mediated message or mediated personae or character. In audience involvement there is a dynamic process which relate the activity between consuming media and co creation of the media.

The consumption of media has been done collectively in recent years with the audience actively expressed their feelings to the media personae using their creativities through new media with the platform of social media like Facebook, Youtube or Twitter and other similar platforms (Leksmono, 2015; Stever & Lawson, 2013). The creativity of the audiences which spread through social media also known as user generated content. On the other hand, media personae also using social media for publicity as their values (Eipstein, 2005).

Media personae who for some experts in media and audience studies known as celebrity (practitioners) reveal what appears to be personal information to create a sense of intimacy between participant and follower, publicly acknowledge fans, and use language and cultural references to create affiliations with followers (Marwick & Boyd, 2011) and selling a narrative especially about young peoples' life (Ruddock, 2013). Basically media personae have the function to describe *joie de vivre* to the audience through the media. Therefore, we can say that through new media the involvement between audience and media personae are built further more rather from both parties. However, in this paper the two ways of involvement is not going to be discussed further, because it is going to focus merely on the audience involvement to the media personae. The process of audience involvement includes :

#### **A.Transportation**

In the process of transportation, the audience is involving in the narration which performed by the media personae. The term transportation referring to the process when audience feel as if they are taking part in the narrative. In this process the audience feel as if media personae is fulfilling the audiences' fantasies (Epstein, 2005).

In transportation audiences are involving their emotion and psychology to the narrative and the figures inside the story. Audiences are imagining that they exist along with the media personae inside the narration.

#### **B.Parasocial Interaction**

If we see from denotative meaning of the term parasocial interaction, we find that para- means not or outside/beyond, while social means a group of people. So Parasocial Interaction (PSI) refer to relationship outside group of people or a relations which form not with people.

Horton and Wohl in 1956 for the first time introduced the concept of Parasocial Interaction (PSI) to the field of communication science and media studies. According to both experts the understanding of SPI at first is like the face to face interaction that can occur between the characters in the media with the audience. It is a special type of mediated relationship that had been made more prominent through the medium of television (Stever, 2013).

Characteristics of PSI among others are one-way communication / non-dialectical, controlled by the figures that appear in the media, the audience can withdraw at any time from this relationship and are free to choose a different form of relationship offered (Laken, 2009). Different form of relationship can be in the nature of friendship, family, romance or even as opposition and/ or enemies.

Relation in the case between media personae and audience is not a real relationship but more to one way of communication from the media personae who perform a narration and control the narrative which send via mass media. As a result, media personae who appeared in the media becoming real in the sense that audience can feel that the figure is closer to them as if real.

#### **C.Identification**

Social influence happened in the process of Identification, in which audience adopt the attitudes, values and beliefs that use to maintain the desired connection with the object of identification. The object of identification is the media personae. There is internalization of values, beliefs of others which contribute to self-identity of the audience (Brown, 2015). Identification also leads to role modelling the beliefs and behaviors of the personae.

The process of identification happened when the audience imagine that (s)he is taking part in the story and merge into its character and change his/her personality accordingly and repetition of taking personality to the narrative may lead to long term behavioral changes.

#### **D.Worship**

In this process the involvement between audience and media personae is very strong in which audience see the media personae as if they are gods. The devotion, commitment, love and adoration shown by the audience happened during and after they consume the very media.

McCutcheon, Lange and Houran (2002) and Maltby, Giles, McCutcheon (2005) described that there are three levels of scale for celebrity worship: first level which considered to be the low level of worship consists of individualist behavior, involving watching or reading individually as well as learning about the celebrities. The second level characterized by social activities with other people who like the same media personae. Activities during this level is involving watching together, finding information and talking about celebrities. The highest level of worship presented with two different descriptions, one is when the audience

identify themselves with their media personae's success and failures, and the other is about extreme and obsessive behavior which can be considered harmful for both the media personae and the audience

### Findings and Discussion

By using qualitative approach, this research was done to find a clear description on each processes of audience involvement. Data collection is done through in-depth interviews and observations non participant with five informants in this study who are all female with the age range from 17 – 25 years old, since Korean dramas are mostly attract female viewers. All of the informants are fans of DOTS and have been watching the mini series for several times. The informants of this research are fans of the main characters in DOTS (Song Joong Ki and Song Hye Kyo). Descriptions of the informants of this research will be elaborated as follow with their names abbreviated :

#### 1. IRN

She is 24 years old and already work for an education institution as assistant to the director. She earned her bachelor degree from a private institution in Jakarta, Indonesia and now she's continuing her master degree. She was introduce to Hallyu by her junior high school friends who already became the fans of Korean drama series. IRN is a loyal audience of Korean drama series. During her break time at the office or her free time at home and whenever she has time during her office hours, IRN watch Korean drama series through her smartphone. IRN likes to find news about Korean actors and actress via website and has been followers of some Korean artists' social media accounts. IRN intention to follow artists' social media is to find first hand information and every stories about her idols. IRN is the fan of both casts of DOTS.

#### 2. NAL

NAL is a high school student on her 12<sup>th</sup> grade and live in Jakarta. NAL has been a K-Pop fans since she was in her third grade of elementary school when she first listened to the song of Super Junior. NAL knows about Song Hye Kyo and Song Joong Ki (the casts of DOTS) from their ads and news of Korean stars in the internet and social media. NAL is a regular audience of K-Pop concerts in Jakarta and she actually quite selected when it comes to watching Korean dramas. She said in the interview that she doesn't like to watch long series of Korean dramas. NAL started to watch DOTS from the first episode when she heard the news in social media. She has been watching the series of DOTS for several times and admitted that she never get bored of the story and the characters. NAL is a devoted fans of K-Pop and likes to watch Korean drama especially when her K-Pop idols become the stars of the drama.

#### 3. DL

DL is in her third year at a private university in Jakarta and she is 20 years old. DL has become a fan of Korean drama since she was a junior high school student in Malang. She was introduced by her sister who knew about Korean drama earlier than her. The first drama series that she liked was *Boys Before Flowers*. And since then on DL always buy Korean drama series. DL usually try to find information about new Korean drama before she watch the series, especially when she hears the reviews about a particular drama considered to be good by audiences. Websites which are opened by DL to find info about her favorite media personae are soompi, allkpop, dramafever.

#### 4. YA

She is a high school student and a friend of NAL in the same school. She is now in her XI grade at a private school in Tangerang Selatan. She became a fan of K-Pop since she was in elementary school. YA has come to many K-Pop concerts in Jakarta. YA likes DOTS from NAL and she became the fans of Song Joong Ki. At first she didn't know what kind of story DOTS was until she completed the first episode. YA even dedicated one social media account to accommodate memes and posters she made for Jong Ki. YA and NAL always talk about their favorite artists every time they meet each other such as when they meet during school break. Even their school friends called them *Korea* because of their love to K-Pop and drama.

#### 5. CS

CS is a 25 years old secretary to marketing manager in a private company in Jakarta. She likes everything about Korean Culture since 10 years ago. CS accidentally watched a Korean drama in Indonesian TV channel when she waited for doctor's appointment and from that time she collected many series of Korean drama series. CS knew about DOTS from a newspaper article and then bought it in DVD. CS is a fan of Song Joong Ki whom she has a complete collection of his films.

Guidelines of interview with the informants consist of identification questions including their knowledge about the casts, reasons why they like the casts, what aspects which they think as the best qualities of the casts, whether they think the casts have the same characters as the persons in film and so on. From the interview result then coding made based on the model of audience involvement process.

The result showed that involvement of the audience with media personae over the process of transportation, identification and parasocial interaction happened, while in the process of worship, informants only show low level of worship. The informants fell that what happened between Captain Yoo Si Jin and Doctor Kang Mo Yeon is possible to happen to them as well, and the story of DOTS is very close to real life. Informants also

The informants describe that they believe the scenes in the movie DOTS are highly possible happen in the real world, because they portray what happen in the real world recently with international conflict, illegal drugs dealer and regional military cooperation. And informants believe that in the real world there are many people who have the same characters like captain Yoo Si Jin and doctor Kang Mo Yeon, even the informants feel that more or less they have the same characters with Kang Mo Yeon. This is the characteristics of transportation process.



- Maltby, J, Giles, DC, Barber, L & McCutcheon, LE. (2005). *Intense-Personal Celebrity Worship and Body Image.: Evidence of A Link Among Female Adolescents*. British Journal of Health Psychology, Vol. 10, p. 17-32
- McCutcheon, L. E., Lange, R., & Houran, J. (2002). *Conceptualization and measurement of celebrity worship*. British Journal of Psychology, 93, 67\_87.
- Ravina, Mark. (2009). *Introduction: Conceptualizing the Korean Wave*. Southeast Review of Asian Studies. Vol. 31, 3-9
- Ross, Karen & Nightingale, Virginia. (2003). *Media and Audiences: New Perspective*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Rubin, RB & Perse, EM. (1987). *Audience Activity and Soap Opera Involvement : A Uses and Gratifications Involvement*. Human Communication Research Vol. 14, 246 -268
- Ruddock, Andy. (2013). *Youth and Media*. London : Sage Publications
- Ruddock, Andy. (2007). *Investigating Audiences*. London: Sage Publications
- Stever, Gayle S. (2013). *Mediated vs Parasocial Relationships: An Attachment Perspective*. Journal of Media Psychology, Vol. 17, No. 3
- Stever, Gayle & Lawson, K. (2013b). *Twitter as A Way for Celebrities to Communicate with Fans: Implications for the Study of Parasocial Interaction*. North American Journal of Psychology, Vol 15, 339 -354
- Sullivan, John L. (2013). *Media Audiences: Effects, User, Institutions, and Power*. London: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Sun Jung. (2011). *Race and Ethnicity In Fandom: Praxis*. Artikel dalam Jurnal Transformative Works and Cultures, Vol. 8 tahun 2011
- Venkat, Anusha. (2016). *Descendants of The Sun Star Song Joong Ki Everywhere!* Asia Times. www.atimes.com. May 9, 2016
- Williams, Kevin. (2003). *Understanding Media Theory*. New York: Arnold Publisher
- Wong, Tessa. (2016). *Descendants of the Sun: The Korean Military Romance Sweeping Asia*. www.bbc.com. March 27, 2016. Retrieved May 8, 2016
- , *Audience Reactions to Media Personae*.  
www.uky.edu/CommInfoStudies/.../Audience\_identification.pptx. Retrieved May 22, 2016
- , (2016). *"Descendants of the Sun" ends this week: Here Why It's So Popular*. The Strait Times. April 14, 2016. Retrieved April 28, 2016
- , (2016). *Descendants of The Sun Impressively Breaks Its Own Record Once*. http://www.soompi.com/2016/03/30. Retrieve April 30, 2016
- , (2016). *Korea's "Descendants of the Sun" TV Series Rakes in Chinese, Japanese Cash*. http://atimes.com/2016/03. Retrieved April 26, 2016
- , (2016). *Song Joong Ki Says House Broken Into, Upset At Loss of Privacy*. http://news.asiaone.com/news/showbiz. Retrieved April 26, 2016