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## DYNAMIC OF K-POP AND SOCIAL MEDIA POTENTIAL FOR FAN ACTIVITIES: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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### Abstract

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In today's digital era, social media in particular, allows us to get and share informations very quickly. Not only information but also entertainment needs that we can get from various countries, K-pop is one of them. K-pop is currently spread in almost the entire global music world, there are many fans from all over the world. This phenomenon, which is usually called the Korean Wave, has finally resulted in an online-based fan community whose members like K-pop, or commonly called K-Pop Fandom or K-Pop Stan. This study aims to determine the characteristics of K-pop fandom on social media in supporting their idols and how they interact with other fans or with their favorite idols. As a literature review this study review previous research with a certain set of processes. The results found that social media has a major impact on K-pop fandom starting from how they communicate, identity, happiness, sharing interests, building interpersonal relationships among fans. There, they have an online fandom hierarchy with different fan activities and roles. The way K-pop fandom interacts to get closer to their idols is to become an authentic K-pop fan or have an impact on their lives after getting to know K-pop.

**Keywords:** Fandom, K-Pop, Social Media

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Korean popular music, known as K-pop, is a musical genre consisting of electronic music, hip hop, pop, rock, and R&B, originating in South Korea and sung in Korean. K-pop has boomed in the United States and Europe since 2012 when Psy's "Gangnam Style" ran around the world via YouTube. Although live performances increased in 2019 as K-pop gained a greater presence in the global music scene, for the most part, American and European fans haven't had the chance to see their K-pop "idols" (a common term used by fans and in the K-pop industry to portray K-pop artists/musicians/stars) directly. In contrast, fans said that their main access to K-pop is by accessing live streaming videos and actively interacting with their idols or with fellow fans on social media.

In today's era, cyberspace has enabled people to communicate across linguistic barriers, geographic boundaries, and physical distances (Type et al., n.d.). People interact online, especially young people (Xu et al., 2019). This practice has given rise to different types of online communities, both official and informal, where shared interests and passions are the binding force between community members (Carter, 2018). One popular online domain is fandom activity, where fans of celebrities, idols, musicians, models, or TV shows come together to be enthusiastic about their favorites (Kloet & Zoonen, 2007). It is a way for fans to express their admiration and affection for the celebrities. However, the practice of fandom has been associated with negative connotations such as hysteria, obsession, and addiction (Kloet & Zoonen, 2007) and therefore, along with several other reasons, has led to negative perceptions of online activity (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008).

The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize the literature on the characteristics of K-Pop fandom on social media from various articles that discuss the K-pop phenomenon from different

perspectives. This article is divided into 3 main parts, namely Method, Result and Discussion and Conclusion.

## 2. METHOD

This section will describe the extraction method from the article to identify factors related to the topic of discussion. The author collects and screens articles from trusted academic sources with the eligibility and exclusion criteria selected for this article, with a systematic review, including identification, screening, and eligibility; abstraction data; content analysis.

Resources for this article came from the journal databases SAGE Journals, Wiley, and Taylor and Francis. In this article SAGE Journals is the main database used for this article because Sage journals has a lot of journals that are relevant to the topics discussed and updated from the last 5 years. Sage journals Founded in 1965, SAGE is a global academic publisher of books, journals, and an ever-growing range of library products and services. And a leading international provider of innovative, high-quality content publishing more than 900 journals and 800 new books globally each year, and library resources spanning archives, data, case studies, videos, and technology for discovery, access, and engagement from a wide range of academic fields such as Social Sciences & Humanities, Health Sciences, Life Sciences, Materials Science & Engineering. Taylor & Francis, publishes academic books and journals and is one of the largest open access research publishers in the world. More than 800 journals and more than 1,800 new books every year, covering various fields of study in communication science, education, law, science, technology and many more. Wiley was founded in 1807 with a focus on academic publishing and teaching materials. The company produces books, journals and encyclopedias, in print and electronic form, as well as online products and services in various academic fields such as astrology, Economics, Physiology or Medicine, Physics, Chemistry and so on, Wiley publishes more than 1,500 peer-reviewed journals and 1,500+ new books per year.

**For Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.** First, only reliable scientific articles from Sage Journals, Wiley, and Taylor and Francis were selected for this review. Review articles, books, book series, book chapters, and conference proceedings are not included. Second, the search uses only English. with the keyword search term "K-pop". Fields of study are not limited to psychology, business, and economics because the word "K-pop" is used in various other fields, by applying the publication age limit of the last 5 years (from 2017-2022). Finally, the screening process involves reviewing the titles of the identified articles to sort out unrelated articles from those that match the purpose of this literature review. This process separates the discussion on the topic of K-pop. This article review is not limited to any specific region or country.

**For Systematic Review Process.** First, a preliminary search was conducted through the Sage Journals, Wiley, and Taylor and Francis databases with the search term "K-pop". The field of study is not limited to psychology, business, and economics because the word "K-pop" is used in various other fields, By applying the publication age limit of the last 5 years in conducting a preliminary search to identify streams and research on the research subject. A total of 44586 articles were found in Sage Journals, then there were 7910 based on Research Articles, 7913 based on publication date 2017-2022 filters and then selecting journals sort by relevance, then Wiley found 103.943. Filter based on journals 85,603, filter based on publication date 2017-2022 to 6,567 journals. Then choose the journal sort by relevance. For Taylor and Francis, there were 89,165, then the filter based on publication date 2017-2022 was 19,161. Then choose the journal sort by relevance.

Next, the screening process involves reviewing the titles of the identified articles in order to sort the unrelated articles from those that match the purpose of this literature review. This process separates the discussion on the topic of K-pop. Although the field of study is set to research articles for the last 5 years, there are many articles about K-pop with different views and are not appropriate or relevant, unfortunately there are not many articles that discuss K-pop in the realm of social media phenomena, so this resulted in 60 articles identified as relevant competitors for the selection process. The abstracts from the remaining articles were reviewed in the selection process to select suitable articles for this literature review.

The selection found articles that focused on K-pop, social media, Korean wave phenomena, fandom, K-pop fans activity as many as 8 articles were selected and reviewed in the next step. Of the 8 selected articles carried out to identify the literature that can be included in this review study. This review consists of a final process to find only the appropriate articles that match the research objectives. The review process identified a total of 6 articles on which to base this research. Sixty articles were fully examined and analyzed. These results were obtained by reading the abstract and then browsing through the entire article to get the theme and sub-theme of articles related to K-pop.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISSCUSSION

Based on articles that have been collected from the three main databases in searching for articles with the main discussion, namely K-pop fandom with social media. The affiliation of the researchers or author are mostly from South Korea, but also people from South Korea who has an education and settled in other countries such as the United States, Canada and Pakistan. Each of these articles uses the same qualitative research method by conducting interviews and observations, and this article mostly discusses how the K-pop fandom communicates both on social media and in the real world, be it with fellow K-pop fans or their real social life. and how the K-pop community builds relationships with their idols or artists.

This several articles mostly wants to examine the characteristics of K-pop fandom in supporting their idols on social media. The results of the study of several articles assume that social media has a major impact on kpop fandom starting from the way they communicate, identity, happiness, self-esteem and social connect. The results of this article also mostly assume that the way K-pop fandom interacts to get closer to their idols is to become authentic K-pop fans or have an impact on their lives after getting to know K-pop. The following is an explanation of the online characteristics of K-pop fandom from the point of view of the Community of Practice (CoP) and the socio-emotional organization of online interaction orders in K-pop fan communities:

#### **Online K-Pop fans as a working CoP (Community of Practice) Social Media And K-Pop**

The K-Pop phenomenon has recently experienced massive growth, expanding to engage a wide audience, including the United States, United Kingdom, Turkey, Egypt, Asia, Southeast Asia, and so on (Choi et al., 2014). As a result, K-Pop fandoms are formed and spread across various countries and continents. The increasing availability of K-pop on social media is a very significant factor that allows fans to access K-pop freely. K-pop fans in this study tend to be exposed to K-pop through their friends and/or social media. K-pop music videos, circulating and linked through social media, 'hooked' his fans. The technology architecture of social media allows young people to navigate across various genres of music, videos and events

In fact, this fandom has become a major contributor and Twitter is growing in popularity as a social media platform (Park, 2019). One popular mode of online activity is the practice of fandom, a domain largely dominated by young people. The Cambridge Dictionary defines fandom as a group of people who are all fans of someone or something and are passionate about the object of their fandom (Fandom, 2019). Fandom ties, when consolidated in and around the popular online platform Twitter, form a community referred to as a twitter stan. A twitter stan is defined as a vibrant community of fans on Twitter (Bellos, 2018), a rating-free zone where people can gather and talk about their favorite shows, music, books, and so on (Tony, 2017). It is a place where various users from all over the world gather to shock their favorite celebrities (Krishna, 2018). In the twitter, music fans from various countries are also given different labels, such as Korean pop music (K-Pop) fans calling themselves part of the K-Pop twitter community. In K-Pop fandom, fans are created based on the idol or group they belong to.

Not only twitter, one of the social media that the K-pop fandom also enjoys is V Live, V Live is a Korean video streaming application owned by the parent company NAVER. Starting in 2015, V Live has become one of the dominant platforms in the K-pop industry in terms of success, reversing the trend of social media apps flowing from the United States to Asia, they are now streaming from Korea to the

United States and Europe (Yong Jin, 2017). As of January 2019, V Live reported having 29 million monthly active users, up 40% from 2018. The majority of its users are non-Korean and under 25 years old and international, audience is mostly Asian, with a strong presence in Vietnam, Japan, China, Taiwan, and Indonesia, but also, more recently, in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the United States (Jun, 2019). According to V Live, they "emphasize real time communication (live streaming) with idols, where you can chat with your stars and send hearts (likes).

V Live is available in Korean, English, Thai, Spanish, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Indonesian, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), and Japanese. Fans know V Live is based in Korea and uses close company connections to coordinate with K-pop production companies to ensure that there is a steady stream of content on the app for fans to view. The V Live app is dynamic as idols can see fan comments from around the world, live, on screen, as they are broadcast and can and often do respond, to multiple comments in real-time. In socio-technical terms, there is a different sequence of interactions for the K-pop V Live show, which is well-finished and written, but in a unique way (King-O'Riain, 2021). Many of the shows on V Live are "TV Like Performances" where the idols sit on stage and the interactions are very similar to what we see on terrestrial television (King-O'Riain, 2021). K-pop idols interact at these shows as studio productions with a decidedly professional quality and very little interaction with live fans via the app, but a more passive audience response.

### Shared Interests and Interpersonal Relationships

Community of Practices (CoPs) are formed out of necessity and are ubiquitous in the world, both outside and within defined organizational structures (Wenger, 2000). They are formed naturally due to the needs of a group of people (Liedtka, 1999) so they evolve over time and are created and destroyed (Johnson & Squire, 2000). Important characteristics (Brooks et al., 2020); (Wenger, 2000) of CoP are the shared domain (shared interest), practice (activities that involve members as a community), and community (creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships). Learning in CoPs occurs in the background of all community activities (Wenger, 2000). As members work together and communicate with each other, they learn from each other in the process.

The twitter K-pop stan community loves interpersonal interaction. The main reason to join a community is to "talk to other people who have the same interests as me" because it is difficult to find people with similar interests in real life. This community is based on common interests, and its members help each other in finding out favorite idol activities, stage schedules, concerts, photoshoots and more, and knowing the official/unofficial fandom event schedules and gathering more information. This results in a kind of reciprocal engagement, where people from diverse backgrounds come together and interact, share personal and professional information, and work towards societal goals having "tight knots of interpersonal relationships" (Wenger, 2000). Therefore, one of the main reasons communities stand alone so well and function like well-oiled machines is close interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, every member of the community works together towards their main goal of joining the K-pop fandom community on twitter, which is to strengthen the bond between members in supporting their favorite idol girl group or boy band, "we all want the same thing for our fav to be successful, happy and healthy, and that is why we are united here and that is why we are all one we are united" Therefore, this community contains a domain of shared interests and common goals. Working towards a goal, twitter K-pop stan members build personal relationships. Some of them even insist that they are closer to their online friends than their offline friends, compared to offline life where a period of correspondence is required to establish commonalities, the twitter stans allows people to automatically recognize fellow members, as is usually written in their bio their twitter profile or username usually hints at the idol they like. Therefore, finding people with similar interests and making friends here is easier. The clash of likes and dislikes in real life seems to be the driving force for many online friendships. People come to twitter to fill the void they have in their real life caused by the negative perception of their fandom activity.

Twitter K-pop stan community as a "minority" even if they are fans of some of the most famous K-Pop idols, people are afraid to express their feelings openly because of the negative connotations attached to fandom activities. Moreover, K-Pop in particular is even more "marginalized". This is

because first, the language of the song is Korean. Second, the cultural values and habits of K-Pop artists are very different from other people in the world, such as the fact that male idols wear makeup and sometimes wear a feminine clothes. Naturally, this received a lot of criticism from anti-K-Pop fans. Because of that, people who love K-Pop and express it in their offline life face “criticism and judgment, therefore twitter becomes a special place for K-pop fans, and for some of them their bond online is much stronger than their bond offline. The phenomenon of strong interpersonal relationships has been demonstrated as well where many twitter members who like K-pop idols are seen expressing their love and affection for their online friends.

### **Fandom Roles and Activities**

K-pop fan accounts on twitter all perform different tasks with no clear distinction between the roles performed by the members. For example, sometimes fan sites also share the latest idol photo updates from fansites (paparazzi), fans who are painters/animators can also share GIFs, or videos, photos of paintings, and so on, even fans can act as translators of reality shows or events. Because sometimes other idol activities that have no translation then they re-update on twitter with an English translation. Moreover, just because an account performs a certain role doesn't mean they can't act like a regular twitter account. For example, Fansites, Fanart, Fanartist, AU writers (short stories with their favorite idols as character characters), and booths on twitter also reply to tweets of official idol accounts with expressions like those posted by other small account holders. Having said that, just because an account takes on a role doesn't necessarily imply that they're just doing a role so everything gets mixed up and no one has a clear role or role obligation in the fandom. Thus, this is in accordance with the CoP (Community of Practice) idea which consists of: members with various skills and the consequent manifestations of these skills in various sub-domains (Carter, 2018). The following is an explanation of K-pop fandom role online according to (Malik & Haidar, 2020):

Table 1: Division of fandom accounts based on roles

<b>Fandom Role</b>	
<b>Fanwork Account</b>	
Fansites	Follow idols in real life to take pictures and videos; sell their high-quality photographs as merchandise
Fanartists	Make picture edits of the idols; share sketches, chibi (cartoonish caricatures) drawings, photos edited through software, and water paintings based on the idols.
GIF makers	Share Graphic Interchange Format clips; 2–3 s clips taken from any official video, slowed down or fast forwarded.
AU Writers	AU: Alternate Universe; meaning the author creates an alternate universe for their story; these are FanFictions written as mobile texts shared between the characters (the idols); shared as screenshots in the form of Twitter threads.
<b>Service Accounts</b>	
Counselors	Provide help to struggling fandom members; share messages of hope and positivity; usually in a small amount.
Event Guides	Provide guides to official idol events sponsored by company, or arranged by fans themselves; also provide guides for voting processes for potential awards
Updaters	Provide updates about the idols' lives as well as careers.
Translators	Translate official news and posts from Korean to various languages, but most commonly to English; translate official messages shared during official events such as album-signing, and the like.
GA/GO Holders	GiveAway (GA) holders hold polls to select a winner who gets the GA item for free, it can be an album or any other official or unofficial



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Archivers	merchandise; GroupOrder (GO) holders order albums and merchandise in bulk, and are usually localized. Keep a record of idol pictures, videos, and any other updates, with the date and venue of the picture, video, or other updates mentioned.
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(Source: Malik & Haidar, 2020)

To support their idols in a way that is more tangible than just tweets, fans organize certain events and activities. There are various types, such as gathering together to celebrate birthdays, both virtual and in person, trending hashtags, selca days (posting selfies of fans to Twitter), and mass streaming. The activities were promoted and coordinated through the twitter booth and the members gathered in large numbers to make it happen. V Live became part of the daily cycle of digital apps that fans would check in early each day to see and check in with their idols. For many fans it is the fact that the content feels authentic and is always positive, happy, and upbeat, that keeps them coming back every day to watch V Live.

### **Hierarchy within fans in social media**

Hierarchy is an implicit or explicit difference in the ranking of individuals based on some collectively decided social dimension (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). There are clear hierarchies, such as organizational positions, and there are hidden hierarchies, such as hierarchies within groups of classmates. Hierarchies also exist in online platforms but are expressed differently on social media. On social media, users get recognition based on the content they share and the amount of feedback they get rather than an official position of authority or power (Levina & Arriaga, 2014). One of them is the hierarchy in K-pop fandom on Twitter, which is formed from the number of followers on the accounts created, regardless of the content created, these large accounts are usually very influential on fandom activities or activities they can do to increase togetherness. Due to their influential status, large accounts are also responsible for organizing and/or promoting fandom events. No event can have many attendees if it is not promoted by a large account because such accounts can reach a large audience easily. Small accounts, however, cannot reach a significant audience and therefore, remain largely unnoticed regardless of the novelty or importance of their shared content. Along with this, large accounts are also responsible for sending reminders to the fandom about scheduled official events, fandom activities, meetings, official or unofficial news that have been revealed by Korean media but have not yet reached international fans. Therefore, these accounts contribute to the fandom, and this helps to strengthen and maintain their popularity. Small accounts are actively trying to increase their follower count and are very active serving content for followers. They are relentlessly working to retweet and share valuable content so that their contributions might be noticed and lead to a higher status in the K-pop fandom community on twitter, they actively interact with big accounts in hopes of getting noticed by big accounts followers.

### **The Socio-Emotional Organization Of Online Interaction**

#### **Consistency and emotionality**

Fandoms are very happy when they can interact not only with their favorite idols but also with fellow fans, one of the interactions that can be done is watching videos of their favorite K-pop idols dancing, singing, eating, playing games, exercising, or just chatting almost every day making fans feel more comfortable, emotionally close to them. They feel that daily contact makes it more difficult for idols to "fake" their image, especially with the live streaming being done spontaneously so of course there are some deviations in professionalism, which fans interpret as a glimpse into the "real" self of the idol. Building on this chain of experiences seen on digital media is the way fans explain that they know the idol's personality and often discuss their "bias" (which band member they like the most) and how that choice is often based on the personality type of the idol himself. They explained to them that they know the personalities of the boys in the band, and feel that certain personalities are similar to them, which is why they chose certain members to be their "bias" (favorites).

One of the driving forces behind K-pop's success. Emotional action and investment are critical to the success of this platform. The consistent presentation of K-pop Idols across platforms, combined with their "live" experience on V Live, results in a growing emotional bond between fans and idols and among fans themselves. This has also resulted in the fans' strong belief in the authenticity of the idols' emotional actions. (King-O'Riain, 2021). This, in turn, is reinforced by access to multiple platforms, participation in fan communities, and experiencing direct access to Korean culture. This emotional closeness motivates fans to engage more frequently with digital media and has been the basis of K-pop bands winning "social media" awards, setting new viewing records on YouTube and world records for the most Twitter engagements (King-O'Riain, 2021).

### **Interaction "Au naturel"**

The interaction order of V Live is distinguished, in part, by the "liveness" of its online interactions between idol broadcasters and fan viewers. V Live elevates fan comments to "real time" on-screen comments during the stream (much like Tiktok or Instagram Live). K-pop idols on V Live read and respond as viewers are watching, sometimes with subtitles in English. Viewers can also see other fan comments and build on the comments being streamed, (as well as see the level of engagement with a particular band through their Chemi level) as well as the K-pop idol speaking and talking to fans directly in real time. (King-O'Riain, 2021). Through daily streaming of (sometimes) live content from Korea on a Korean developed app like V Live, they say that they "feel emotionally closer" to their K-pop favorite idols. Some micro idols try to appear like celebrities on social media including consumption of luxury items, which Marwick (2015) finds, actually makes them into celebrities in their own right.

In contrast to face-to-face interactions, one of the things that like the most about V Live is the historicity of the order of the interactions. They feel that is key to the experience, feel safe knowing they have footage they can come back to again and again to watch and re-watch. They also like being able to compare old V Lives with new ones, to see the "growth and development" of their favorite idols. Fans also take screenshots of certain parts of V Live to create memes for twitter or to use as inspiration for their artwork. Most say that "au naturel" type shows have more significant emotion. impact on them. Fans say they feel emotionally "closest" to their K-pop star when they watch their idol live stream in real time. This "au naturel" interaction command is characterized by appearing in an individual and private format like a chat, situated in intimacy that is carried out in a room (usually a hotel room, recording studio, rehearsal room and etc).

As for the live streams that are carried out by idols like they are on video calls with fans, where usually this live stream is done spontaneously by idols without any scripts or properties like shows in general. And this live streaming is done in the idol's spare time and sometimes they do live streaming at their dorm or recording studio space. Fans acknowledged they experienced emotional action, in this case a sequence of interactions as a two-way communication, with the possibility that the live-streaming idol could read their comments. Reade (2020) argues that fans of fitness vloggers like the "real talk" as it offers a sense of comfort to viewers. For K-pop fans, the discussion of self-love and mental health (although notably avoiding topics such as dating, money, or poor working conditions) was comforting in part because of the content but also because they were consistently available through saved and regular new content. Many of the comments during the broadcast were requests for idols to answer their questions or respond to their comments as well as expressions of fans' emotions such as "I love you!" The relation that fans in live streaming content is like on video calls is not as passive as traditional television shows, as they can interact with each other between idols and fans through comments more than during shows such as "TV" with fans stating "Have you all seen it?" that? Isn't she/he so cute?" etc. A sense of access to authentic (backstage) emotions is generated by this sense of "activity", but has the added bonus of being recorded and thus accessible in the future to relive or replay the experience emotionally and to refine "real" interactions. which passes quickly. (King-O'Riain, 2021).

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The K-Pop stan twitter community is more than just a group of fans gathered together. It is a platform where they are actively collaborating and coordinating their efforts towards a goal. In the

process, they are learning from fellow community members. Therefore, this platform carries the potential to be considered a Community of Practice, fulfilling the three requirements outlined by (Brooks et al., 2020) and (Wenger, 2000) in their theorization of a Community of Practice. The affordance of emotional investment through the fan community is central to the success of both K-pop and V Live. Fans take their transcultural knowledge and their emotional investment (Han, 2017) and apply it to their local, everyday lives, sometimes challenging the status quo. The claim to an authentic tie between artist and fans is presented as part of the appeal and one of the driving forces of the success behind K-pop. Emotional action and investment is central to the success of these platforms. The consistency of the presentation of K-pop idols across platforms, combined with the “live” experience of them on V Live, generated ever closer emotional ties between fans and idols and among fans themselves. This also generated a strong belief by fans in the authenticity of the emotional action of the idols (King-O’Riain, 2021).

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