

## **My President, My Idol!**

*The K-Popification of Indonesia's 2024 presidential candidates on X/Twitter*

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ON X/TWITTER

**ABSTRACT**

In the global expansion *Hallyu* wave of that has eventually reached Indonesia in various sectors, Korean pop culture has established its name in the country. From Korean idols and actors as local Indonesian brand ambassadors to the increasing number of Korean restaurants across the country, it looks like there is no stopping for this Korean wave. The integration of Korean culture in the form of K-Pop fandom engagement has also blended into fans political participation, specifically during the 2024 presidential election period. The three pairs of candidates uniquely tried to target K-Pop fans by imitating similar element of K-Pop fandom activities. Either it was done organically or planned thoroughly, this phenomenon was a distinctive experience compared to previous elections that tend to be tensed and focusing on older generation of voters. Due to the growing number of K-Pop fans that were formed during covid pandemic, which happened just a year after the previous presidential election, it is intriguing to see to what extent could K-Pop fandom culture be implemented and replicated into political issues as such. This thesis explores the effect of this phenomenon on Indonesian K-Pop fans, especially those who are active on X/Twitter as it was the main platform for this so-called *K-Popification* of presidential candidates. Qualitative primary data through interviewing ten related respondents were conducted to explain how and to what extent does K-Pop fans as the participant of fandom culture react to the phenomenon. Firstly, participants were asked about their digital activism on the platform as a K-Pop fan. In addition to that, fan labor is also elaborated to examine the fandom perspective towards this voluntary fan support. Based on the study, it can be concluded that the overall respondents perceived this phenomenon positively, especially the campaign strategy that was done organically and not intentionally using K-Pop fans and idols as political tools. As long as the *K-Popified* candidates do not explicitly mention a certain group or persona, it is considered acceptable. However, when an idol is used side by side directly with the candidate, the opinions shifted to seeing it as something unacceptable, as they are aware that this interest in K-Pop fandom is only a mobilized strategy that will happen during certain period of political event and will not fully affect the fandom positively in the long run.

**KEYWORDS:** *Presidential candidates, K-Popification, fandom culture, digital activism, fan labor*

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## 1. Introduction

It is inevitable not to mention how big K-Pop music scene in the past years and the success of this musical genre to surpass what was considered impossible even for Western artists. Of course, one of the barometers to identify the success of certain idols is through how big their fandom is. K-Pop fans are known to be highly dedicated and proactive in their own fan activism and beyond what was just a merely cultural participation. They have ventured to other purposes like political activism, such as participating in the Black Lives Matter movement (Cho, 2022, p. 271) and have established their own stance of being not only consumer of these cultural products, but also partaking in producing various societal statements (Kim, 2023, p. 83). K-Pop fans who were previously stigmatized for having a parasocial relationship with their idols and willing to go beyond simply listeners of K-Pop main product, which is the song itself, have also established themselves for having such creative direction by creating contents in the purpose to support the success of their idols. Moreover, the product that they created should not be taken for granted as it is something that is exhibited in a professional approach just like any other media and cultural products.

Furthermore, by combining their engagement as active consumers and also the possibility of being producers too, and integrating these factors into social and political participation, K-Pop fans are known for their mobilized digital activism that in many occasions have proven their 'power' as agent of change. Black Lives Matter movement might be only one of the various powerful mobilized digital activisms that K-Pop fans have participated in a global context, however similar movement on social media could also be found in local context. An interesting phenomenon that happened in the past months in Indonesia, is how K-Pop fans are organically organizing various K-pop-like activisms for the 2024 presidential election. This nationwide event has always been a sort of sensitive political celebrations, where in past elections, heated debates, demonstrations, divisions of supporters happened, and the tension is still found in some areas or communities until today.

For the past editions, presidential election in Indonesia is something that seems only targeted for the elite politics, especially the older generation that holds power in the system. However, in today's era of social media, this year's election feels a bit different with the campaign organizers trying to fit into a more creative and fun approach. With three candidates running for this year's election, voters who were still trying to figure out who to choose, were exposed to unique campaign strategies, which did not solely involve billboard, banners, or flags, and other form of conventional advertisements. One candidate created an AI cartoon version of themselves (The

Jakarta Post, 2023) to portray a cuter and more approachable image, the other went live on social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, and the other published their advertisements in a similar template like K-Pop idol's birthday advertisements

One way or another, it would be fitting to argue that all these campaign strategies were done based on the engagement on X/Twitter. With around 24 million X/Twitter users in Indonesia (Kharbanda, 2023), this platform provides a swift and broader up to date information about the election. This elevates quickly as many of the young K-Pop fans engaging on X/Twitter may have not decided their choice yet, and some are even first-time voters, so it is interesting to see the political participation of these fans on Twitter and how they voluntarily 'devote' the creative production side of the general cultural participation of being a fangirl towards producing similar pattern for political matter.

By implementing similar elements that are commonly used in K-Pop fandom culture into campaign strategy to promote the presidential candidates, pros and cons might arise from the fandom itself. All in all, the *K-Popification* of each candidate have shifted the nuance of this year's presidential election and garnered younger voters' attention as they perceive this phenomenon as a new experience that might differ contrastingly to the tensed image of campaign period that they had in mind. Therefore, in order to better understand Indonesian K-Pop fans understanding and perspective towards this unique phenomenon, this study will be conducted qualitatively through semi-structured interviews to garner more in-depth knowledge from the respondents. Hence, to create a analysis foundation for this research, this study will be analyzed based on the research question of ***"How does the K-Popification of Indonesia's 2024 presidential candidates construct Indonesian K-Pop fans fandom digital activism on X/Twitter?"***

Moreover, this research wants to analyze Indonesian K-Pop fans motivation behind their participation within their fandoms, their use of social media, in this case X/Twitter, and their digital activism especially in the context of the recent presidential election. Building upon Waeterlooos et al. (2021, p. 3) theory of fan activism and their social media participation which elaborates various forms of fans engagement in the context of social and political stance, the sub-questions to support the main research questions are:

- 1. How does digital activism in K-Pop fandom affect the political circumstance of Indonesia's 2024 presidential election?***
- 2. What does this phenomenon mean for the Indonesian K-Pop fans?***

Through these two sub-questions, this phenomenon is analyzed in two point of view; one in which explains the impact K-Pop fans active participation in the campaign period and the other

discusses whether this phenomenon affect the Indonesian K-Pop fandom at all.

### **1.1 Scientific Relevance**

Since this phenomenon has only happened recently, this topic has not been discussed in much formal academic research, thus this paper is written in hope of contributing and adding value to the existing literature on K-Pop fandom culture and digital activism, especially in the realm of political context. Thus, as seen later in the following section of the paper, theoretical references regarding this issue will mostly be compromised by news articles instead of academic journals or articles. In addition to that, academic research regarding Indonesian K-Pop fans and their political participation tend to focus on the examples of particular fandoms, and them using their idols to attract wider audience to participate in mobilized fandom activities. However, in this specific case, a different angle is drawn, whereas elements of K-Pop idols and their fandom culture are being imitated and implemented unto the presidential candidates. Hence, this new perspective adopts different point of view of digital activism compared to previous studies.

Furthermore, by conducting semi-structured interviews with the respondents, this research could provide more exploration on the fan's opinion towards the issue and different outcomes from each respondent could be expected. Differently than quantitative research through surveys, this type of research allows the researcher to raise follow up questions based on the respondents' answers which is the main purpose and angle of this study, which is to better understand the fans general opinion towards this issue, regardless of whether they are casual participant, active consumer, or even producers within their respective fandom. Nevertheless, the integration of fandom concepts, social and political participation, and digital activism, this study could further be explored through different branch of knowledge base.

### **1.2 Societal Relevance**

This study reveals the unique success of increasing active participation of Indonesian K-Pop fans during the election period which shifted and created a new societal and political atmosphere that has never happened previously. It indicates the motivation behind K-Pop fans usage of social media, especially X/Twitter, as a platform of their fandom engagement and how this led to a new mobilized campaign strategy. This could benefit towards further research for possible political circumstances in the future as it is proven that K-Pop fans are able to be active 'agent of change' who are experienced enough to mobilize their members to be vocal and aware of nationwide and even global issues.

Additionally, aside from filling up the academic gap, as mentioned above, this research is also compromised of various interdisciplinary approach. Although this particular paper does not

draw its focus on the impact on the result of the election itself, the discussion on the fandom engagement would be interesting to be observed thoroughly based on the context of digital activism in the era of social media. Hence, whether taking the perspective of social media or politics in this discourse, it will then be intriguing to see how the probable blurred line between cultural entertainment and politics in the era social media is found in this year's Indonesian presidential election. Furthermore, this blurred line could also be applied to other context of political discourses in the era of digital era, whether what the political system offers is truly a justification of their actions or simply a competition of media contents.

### **1.3 Overview of the Thesis Structure**

To present the findings of this research, which is analysed based on the research question and its sub-questions above, this paper will be structured into five sections. Firstly, the introduction addresses the main subject or topic of the study and its scientific and societal relevance. The second chapter presents supporting previous research on the concepts of K-Pop fandom in Indonesia, their engagement on social media, political participation and digital activism, and highlights the main phenomenon discussed in this paper, which is the *K-Popification* of the 2024 Indonesia's presidential candidates.

In order to further analyse the topic, the study's methodology is presented in the third chapter, which includes the justification for the chosen general research method, the description of the data analysis, and research design used to conduct the research. After finishing up the research, the results will then be discussed in the next chapter, presenting the main analysis and answers to the research question. Finally, the thesis is concluded in the last chapter with discussion of the key findings, implications, limitation and suggestions for future research.



## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 K-Pop / Hallyu Wave

In the past decades, the Korean or Hallyu wave has spread exponentially. Music, dramas, movies, reality shows, and other form of cultural products have all contributed to the success of this concept of Korean/Hallyu wave. One product of Korean wave that many would agree to be the strongest drive is K-Pop. Shortened for Korean pop, K-Pop is a genre of popular music (Hartong, 2006, p. 15) that is considered to having its own unique sound that is distinguished from other popular music. In recent years, K-Pop as a music genre has progressed to variety of modern forms of South Korean pop music, such as R&B, jazz, reggae, dance, and other incorporated genres that are influenced by world wide's styles (Grammys, 2023).

Retrospectively, the emergence of K-Pop has started in the early 1990s, particularly in 1992. One of the most prominent figures would be *Seo Taiji and Boys*, whose music was considered revolutionary at that time. During the respective period, South Korea also 'borrowed' elements of American popular culture and were heavily influenced by its global images and values. However, in order to cater to its own market, it is crucial to adapt within a certain degree of transformation that is fitting for its local issues and values. Local Korean youths then adapted similar global pop music styles, modifying it in the context of local social and aesthetics needs, with the purpose of trying to get the attention of the older generation's overpowering authority, especially as a social critic towards the educational system. Here, they acknowledged *Seo Taiji and Boys* as their representative who could voice out their concerns. This particular generation is commonly identified as the *sinsedae* (new generation), which comprised of those born during the early and mid 1970s (Jung, 2017, p. 143).

The trio is considered a pioneer of a new transformation of Korean pop music genre by integrating Euro pop, African-American hip-hop and rap, with vocal Korean lyrics criticizing the high-powered government and politically tensed society (Vincent, 2019). Their revolutionary debut song, "Nan Arayo"(I Know), in 1992 then changed the dynamic of the Korean music scene subsequently. Their success inspired the establishment of other entertainment agencies in South Korea in the year 1995 – 1998. A few of these agencies that are still prominent until now are SM Entertainment, JYP Entertainment, and YG Entertainment which was created by Yang Hyun-suk, one of the members of *Seo Taiji and Boys*. These powerhouses are commonly known as the 'Big Three'. Accordingly, in 1996, SM Entertainment debuted the first idol group, H.O.T., consisting of five singers and dancers whom according to SM founder, Lee Soo-man, represents a modern pop group that potentially generates the traits of today's idol groups with a combination of singing, dancing,

rapping, and distinctive personalities of each member (Romano, 2018). H.O.T. hit it big and became a sensation by selling approximately 1.5 million copies for their debut album, *We Hate All Kinds of Violence* (Jung, 2022, p. 11).

However, the rise of idol groups were challenged when South Korea was faced with Asian financial crisis (IMF – International Monetary Fund) in 1997 which eventually invigorated these agencies to search for new markets outside of its local market. This strategy was succeeded by H.O.T, who released a Mandarin language album to penetrate to the Chinese market (Sin, 2018). By then, they became the first K-Pop group to hold a concert in China, garnering around 13,000 people and this breakthrough paved the way for the successful future of other K-Pop artists by creating a blueprint of international market strategy (Kim, 2013, p. 80; Jung, 2022, p. 11).

Later, in 2000s SM Entertainment debuted its female artist, BoA, who was the first Korean artist who sold millions of album copies in Japan in 2002 (Poole, 2009). BoA who was in particularly a very young age of 13 years old at that time, was trained in Japan for a long time to adapt and prepare her as a localized idol, which also include learning the foreign local language. According to Lee Soo-man, this strategy was highly successful and thus configured a new formula with the purpose of entering foreign music market by exporting music which is specifically made for that particular international market. Once again, BoA established her name in the music scene with the support of SM Entertainment's local subsidiary in the United States which was established in 2008, which made her the very first K-Pop idol to have its album in the Billboard 200 (Garcia, 2008).

However, entering the US market was not easy as it looks and has always been challenging due to the language limitations and cultural context differences. Therefore, closer regions were targeted and showed great development of the expansion of Hallyu wave. Southeast Asia was considered one of the most profitable markets for this advancement. Based on the closer cultural proximity, Southeast Asia is a great example of transnational cultural flow. Hallyu wave spread out significantly to countries in the region such as Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia to name a few (Shim, 2013, p. 281). This expansion was also reinforced with the spread of other forms of Hallyu products, such as Korean dramas. Dramas such as *Winter Sonata* (2002), *Dae Jang Geum* (2003), and *Full House* (2004) were few of the most popular pioneers of successful K-Dramas in Southeast Asia. In particular *Full House* which was played by singer and actor, Rain, successfully played a significant role in his growing title as the first Korean solo artist to hold a concert in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2009 (The Jakarta Post, 2020).

Due to the progressive growth of globalization, Hallyu wave keeps on expanding and reaching global audiences. It is then inevitable to discuss the success of K-Pop without addressing

the global phenomenon of Psy's Gangnam Style that went viral in 2012 and became the first billion view video on Youtube at that time (Billboard, 2022). In recent years, the boy group BTS would be number one in mind when people discuss about K-Pop. The group has achieved what might never been imagined in the K-Pop industry. They established their name through their proactive fandom, which eventually resulted in the success of entering the Western market, making them one of the top idol groups as of now (Belmis, 2021).

Starting from H.O.T, which was identified as the 1<sup>st</sup> generation of K-Pop idols, until what recently debuted groups have now been considered as 5<sup>th</sup> generation, K-Pop continues to progress and expanding to international market that was once hard to reach. The tremendous success of Hallyu wave that was previously only contained locally in South Korea, is now found in different areas and genres around the world, either through music, dramas, movies, culinary, or beauty items and other forms of cultural products. One way or another, this magnificent existence of Hallyu wave would not be possible without the participation of its target audiences, the fans as the consumers.

## **2.2 Fandom Studies**

The success of K-Pop is none other thanks to the contribution of its massive and proactive fans. The term 'fan' is identified as "serious enthusiasts of particular performers, actors, comic books, movies, television, and arts" (Abdul Rahim, 2019, p. 66). These fans that belong to their respective fandom are defined as a sociocultural phenomenon, which is associated with capitalist societies, digital media, mass culture, and public performance (Duffet, 2015, p. 16). The general image of fandom is often seen as having parasocial relationships with their idols, and is stigmatized as obsessive, manipulated, disempowered, and subordinated consumers (Bailey, 2005, p. 98). However, as time progresses, scholars proposed new perspective to replace this negative connotation of fandom. In the early 1990s, they tried to switch the paradigm of fandom to a more resistant, productive, and creative community (Fiske, 1992, p. 30).

According to Giles (2002, p. 280), parasocial interaction is defined as fake conversational behaviour between audiences to the related media actors. Furthermore, parasocial relationship refers to the fantasies and intimate relationships that fans build up with their favourite celebrities (Dibble et al., 201, p. 6; Giles, 2002, p. 280). This formed socio-emotional bond with media figures or fictional characters is one way or another a reflection of the social relationships offline, with the exception of the possibility of the intimacy felt by the fans is not reciprocated by the media figures (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019, p. 311). Thus, parasocial relationship between media users, in this case the fans, and the media actors are seemingly a one-way relationship where most of the time fans would know the activities, attitude, and any anecdotes of their favourite celebrities, whereas

on the other hand the celebrities are most likely know nothing about their fans personally (Xu et al., 2022, p.367).

Henry Jenkins (1992, p. 93) introduced the concept of fandom participatory culture which highlights the activeness and creativeness of this audience, that is no longer only about consuming, but also producing and sharing the product-related creations with the other fans within and outside the fandom. Nevertheless, this new understanding of participatory activity blurred the line between production and consumption, breaking down the concept of how fandom culture is only a one-way directional communication, but the fans are now both consumers and producers. With that, modern scholarly research even appreciates fans' creative participation both for their passion and self-expression, and most importantly the possibility of these fans' goal of consequently working in the creative and entertainment industry (Duffett, 2015, p. 13; Yang, 2009, p. 527).

Additionally, Jones et al. (2022) explained that celebrities, through its many form of brands, human brands (Thomson, 2006), people-brands (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019), or celebrity brands (Kerrigan et al., 2011) are able to become a source of entertainment for their consumers, also as a catalyst for inspiration that eventually created a certain form of illusion of friendships (Wohlfeil et al., 2019). Fans are willing to go beyond the standard virtue of consumption, both in terms of personal and financial matters, which consequently could be seen as a fitting chance by celebrities in the context of celebrity brands by not only seeking out transmedia products, performances, and endorsements, but also actively engaging in meaning making (Kerrigan et al., 2011). Being a fan in this participatory culture once again highlights the stance of not only consuming media but also using these media content to recreate their own content (Jenol & Pazil, 2020).

In recent fan studies, modern fandom culture has shifted with the focus on digital communication, involving new technologies, such as social media. This provides an easier participatory culture, allowing a faster and broader fan-made distribution through online platform (Lee, 2011, p. 1135). This is also clearly seen in K-Pop industry, where has now shifted its priority to new digital technologies. With the development of the so-called *Hallyu 2.0* which focuses on social networking sites (SNS) and user generated content (UGC), K-Pop has provided a platform for its fans to interact with their idols, and within its fandom in a more proactive environment (Jin, 2016, p. 113). According to Kang et al. (2022, p. 3319 ), fans usually identify themselves as a member of a certain fandom and would join a fan community to receive the latest updates and also as a medium to communicate with other fans. In addition to that, these fandoms usually consist of passionate fans who also accordingly share their own culture (Duffett, 2015, p. 13).

Due to the development of online media platforms in this globalization era, fandom

practices are currently experienced in a much broader spectrum, where fans are no a vital part of the idols' promotion activities, playing the role as sponsors, co-creators of value, stakeholders, investors and filters (Jenol & Pazil, 2020, p. 338). Within the context of K-Pop fandom, in recent years there has been a growing development of various fan community platform. With the advancement of digital media technologies, fan community platforms were established in South Korea by leading management agencies, such as SM Entertainment and HYBE Label, or even by game providers, attracting fandoms both local and globally. Weverse, Bubble, and Universe are considered the largest and most used actively (Kim et. al, 2023, p. 3).

Additionally, as these communication platforms are managed and operated by the management companies, album release announcement or information about concert ticket sales is easily shared within an effective and broader coverage. For example, Weverse which was initially created under HYBE Label, has its own feature of Weverse shop where fans could purchase albums and merchandise of artists under its sublabels and partner agencies whose artists also are using the community platform. All in all, these fan community platforms work as a supporting foundation in enhancing fandom participatory culture, especially in reaching out to international fans who previously might face hard barrier in joining earlier fan cafes scheme (Kim et.al, 2023, p. 3 ).

### **2.3 From Fan to Creator: Fandom Creative Labour Participation**

As elaborated by Jenkins (1992, p.93), fans have now attached emotions to the objects of their fandom and include cultural meanings to their fan practices (Fiske, 1989, p. 30). In many ways, as the industry produces objects of fandoms, fans are highly connected to the creative industries (Sun, 2020), and that would eventually push them to actually have a vision to work in the entertainment industry (Baym & Burnett, 2009, p. 439; Duffett, 2015, p. 500). Creative industry in this case explains the sector where the driving force is individuals or groups' creativity with cultural products, such as arts, design, and media products are produced and distributed. In addition to that, creative labour is defined as the work in the related creative industries.

Interestingly, fans, in this particular case, K-Pop fans practice various activities that hugely influence the K-Pop industry (Tai, 2018). They create alternative discourses, that most of the times are immaterial labour to help maintain the popularity of their favourite K-Pop idols. Although in some cases, these works are sold, for example photograph exhibition by fan sites, but all in all fan labour is very much voluntary and immaterial with a lot of effort being put into it. Nevertheless, not merely participating in fandom culture as consumers, K-Pop fans are known for being passionate and creative with high levels of engagement with one another through various activities like creating fan art, organizing fan events, and purchasing merchandise. They have shifted towards being entrepreneurs as active creators and distributors of K-Pop content (Ranieses, 2023, p. 245).

This form of creative participatory culture within a fandom is also highly supported with the use of social media platform, such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube. Here, they are able to connect and create community of fans with shared identity (Galuszka, 2015, p. 31) and further make use of these platforms to facilitate and promote their fan-made K-Pop merchandise (Amri, 2019), from handmade keychains, custom-designed apparel to phone cases, which are commonly sold on online marketplaces or personal online stores (Ranieses, 2023, p. 254). Through fandom culture, entrepreneurship is built through community of similar-minded individuals who are passionate about a particular subject, which subsequently acts as a starting ground to the establishment of their own distinctive and successful business (Ranieses, 2023, p. 255).

## **2.4 Fans' Civic or Political Participation**

Tracing back to the history of the rise of K-Pop in the early 1990s, civic or political participation have always been a part of the fandom culture. The pioneer of K-Pop, *Seo Taiji and Boys* as explained above is a clear example of how media products, media actors, and the consumers all are tied together for the same values. The critical notion that lies within *Seo Taiji and Boys'* music in their lyrics are what made them distinct at that time, as the youths, or the so-called *sinsedae* felt represented. Due to the South Korean political repression until the late 1980s, tension between the public and government enhanced rapidly with many civilians being imprisoned or even killed (Kim, 1999). Although at some point the national economy grew rapidly after a few transitions in the administration, Korean educational system that was previously oppressive still continues. Then, the country saw a rise of a new generation, the *sinsedae* in the early 1990s, who carried fundamentally different values, mindset, and even lifestyles compared to the older generation, the *kisongsedae* (Jung, 2017, p. 143). Later, in 1994, *Seo Taiji and Boys* bravely released a song '*Kyosil Idea*' (Classroom Ideology), which has provocative message of the dehumanizing educational system. The idea of being represented by the artists, fans would feel attached and build a sort of connection at some extent, which would later grew into loyal and devoting fandom culture.

In modern K-Pop, as previously mentioned, BTS who is notably considered the top K-Pop group in the past years, have established their own loyal and proactive huge fandom, called the ARMY. They have partaken in various social and political participatory culture, with the BLM Movement being considered their biggest activism yet. The Black Lives Matter movement was initially started as a form of support against police brutality in relation to the death of George Floyd in 2020. This case went viral internationally with the video footage of the brutal act being shared on social media platforms, which resulted in various community showing their concerns and voicing their opinions against police brutality. Surprisingly, not only social community that took part in this

process. The BTS'ARMY fandom took the society by surprise with their organized and structured activism through social media. From, spamming the Dallas police app, trending hashtags, and raising millions of dollars in a parallel donation with BTS and Big Hit Entertainment (Kim, 2023, p. 84).

These are just a few examples of the many other civic or political participation done by fandoms, especially K-Pop fans. These fans that were initially stigmatized in a negative point of view, has proven themselves that fan activism is no longer a one-sided relationship where they are merely a consumer. But, they have the ability to drive the society through positive movements that are so dynamic and collective participatory. Through the creative fan labour that they have established to support the idols, they would easily dispose similar techniques for other purposes, including civic or political participation. Here then lies the intersections of creative or cultural participation and civic or political participation within fandom culture.

## **2.5 Indonesian K-Pop Fans Digital Activism on X/Twitter**

Just like in any other countries, K-Pop fandoms in Indonesia also revolve around social media platform as a tool for their cultural participation. Although there has been different communication platform established by each agency, for example *Weverse*, *Bubble*, but one social media platform that have been there since the beginning in providing communication platform between the idols and their fans would be X/Twitter. In 2019, Indonesia was named as the third country that contributed the most to K-Pop related tweets (Kim, 2020). From Twitter trending hashtags to Space feature, X/Twitter can provide a wider platform for the fans to interact with one another without having to be friends who follow each other's account. In addition to that, Twitter's recent update of a For You page allows users to get into the top hit tweets without following them, so they are always up to date with the current trends based on the algorithms of their activities on the platform. Furthermore, the distribution of K-Pop contents through social media contributes to the increasing K-Pop popularity amongst Indonesian teenagers (Jung & Shim, 2013, p. 489).

Due to the worldwide covid-19 pandemic, digital media as a tool of fandom participatory culture also shifted its purpose to not merely for the purpose of the movement of their idols, but also as a way to participate in digital activism revolving social actions (Syfa, 2023, p. 296). This activism via online media enables the transition to be more fluid, effective, and formed a democratic media environment (Jung & Sun, 2012, p. 486). Nevertheless, fans see this activism as a way to improve their idol's reputation (Syfa, 2023, p. 298). For example, during the pandemic, K-Pop fans raised funds to donate to the affected and marginalized. Fandoms like BTS' ARMY, and EXO's EXO-L, actively organized fundraising strategy on social media, especially Twitter and they managed to collect hundreds of million Indonesian rupiah. Aside from that, it is common for K-Pop

fans to also donate for environmental purpose, such as forest protection by donating trees to be planted under the name of their idols, which usually is done as a celebration of the idols' birthday.

In regards to political participation, Indonesian K-Pop fans have been very vocal in supporting several movements that voices concern against problematic governmental law. One of the most prominent social issues in Indonesia was the 2019 *Gejayan Memanggil* (Gejayan is Calling) movement which revolves around the resistance against structural problems under president Joko Widodo administration. Aside from protesters, who were mostly university students, that are spread out in many cities of Indonesia, the movement was also successfully motioned on social media especially Twitter with the hashtag *#ReformasiDikorupsi* (*#CorruptedReformation*) (Selma, 2021, p. 1) When the movement arise, initially K-Pop fans, in particular the younger ones, did not fully understand the importance and discussion of the issue, however it was then elaborated via Twitter threads and went viral. Afterwards, they participated in this movement by retweeting and sharing it to fellow K-Pop fans by using the same pattern and strategy that they have commonly used to trend issues related to their idols for this social movement (Syfa, 2023, p. 301).

Later, similar digital activism on Twitter by K-Pop fans related to social and political issues rose again with the public concerns against the implementation of Indonesian Omnibus Law. Data showed that within the top 60 most influential accounts that was active in the movement against the Omnibus Law on Twitter, many of these profiles are actually K-Pop fan accounts with thousands of followers (The Jakarta Post, 2020). This once again proves how Indonesian K-Pop fans have always been actively vocal in participatory culture that is not only related to their idols, but related social and political issues, especially by using social media platform such as Twitter as a medium to gather and organize a sort of digital troops and practising the same technique that they have advanced experience in promoting their idols for various form of digital activism.


## **2.6 Indonesian Presidential Election 2024**



On February 14, 2024, Indonesia held nationwide elections not only to vote for a new president and vice president, but also parliamentary and local representatives. More than 204 million out of 270 million Indonesians are registered to vote. As world's third – largest democracy 'party', this quinquennial event showcases the candidates, especially who are in the run for president and vice president. This year's election is joined by three pairings with various background ranging from a former military general, former governor, and academics. The first presidential candidate is 72-year-old former military figure, Prabowo Subianto, who is currently serving as Indonesia's Minister of Defence. This is his third time running for the election after previously was lost to President Joko Widodo in 2014 and 2019. Interestingly, for this election he has chosen 36-year-old Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who is none other than Joko Widodo's eldest son.



The second pairing comes from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), a political party led by Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, which was also the party that backed Joko Widodo for previous presidency in 2014 and 2019. The party now sponsored Ganjar Pranowo, a former governor of Central Java, and his running mate, Mahfud MD, who previously served as coordinating minister for political, legal, and security affairs. This particular pairing dubbed themselves a men with humble image with close understanding towards the people of Indonesia, a similar portrayal that was brought up by President Joko Widodo in his previous campaigns (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Lastly, former governor of Jakarta, Anies Baswedan, was also in the running as independent and 'opposition' candidate, together with Muhaimin Iskandar, the leader of the National Awakening Party (PKB), the largest Muslim political party in the country. For this particular pairing, an interesting phenomenon in support of the candidates were created by young supporters, especially K-Pop fans. On an article reported by Reuters (2024), it all started with a TikTok live that was done by candidate Anies, which he did from his car and attracted young K-Pop fans who saw that as a similar live-streams conducted by most K-Pop idols after performing in music shows. Afterwards, support for Anies began to pour in with young K-Pop fans organizing similar events imitating K-Pop fandom culture, such as creating banners, websites with up-to-date schedule like a fan cafe, and also cup sleeve event where cut-outs of the presidential candidates are exhibited for them to take a photograph with. This phenomenon then raises the question of how creative aspects of K-Pop fans could enhance political participation (Reuters, 2024).

Candidates	Implemented K-Pop Elements	Pictures
1. H. Anies Rasyid Baswedan and H. A Muhaimin Iskandar	Live streaming, Cup-sleeve event, lightstick, banners, translator account on Twitter	

<p>2. H. Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka</p>	<p>AI image, 'cute or <i>gyeowo</i>' persona and dance, finger hearts to represent number 2</p>	
<p>3. H. Ganjar Pranowo and H. Mahfud MD</p>	<p>Jingle using K-Pop song (<i>After School – Weekly</i>), Ganjar's son being active on X/Twitter as K-Pop fan.</p>	

**Figure 2.6** – Overview of the K-Popification of Indonesia's Presidential Candidates

### 3. Research design and methods

#### 3.1 Research Design

For this particular research which focuses on fan activism, in this case the users of X/Twitter who are specifically Indonesian female K-Pop fans, a thorough and deeper analysis should be done. Based on the research question of *“How does the fan activism of Indonesian female K-Pop fans on X/Twitter intersect between its cultural and civic or political participation in regard to the 2024 presidential election?”*, this study will observe how fans interact within and beyond their own group fandom, and further participate in civic or political activism, in particular the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. In order to analyze this question, a qualitative research method would be best appropriate to give out the answer of this topic, as this method is intended to generate knowledge based on human experience (Sandelowski, 2004).

Through qualitative method, instead of numerical interpretations, the related sample's elaborated interpretations will be taken into account, providing a broad range of possibilities of answers and perspectives that the quantitative method could not provide (Ghauri et al., 1995;; Bryman, 2016). It will be highly beneficial for this research, as it could further provide a deeper understanding of the fandom willingness in this political activism beyond the texts that are written on the social media platform, in this case X/Twitter. There are several methods within qualitative research that could be used to conduct this research, however for this particular case, semi-structured interview will be chosen as this data collection method is proven to both versatile and flexible (Kallio et.al, 2016) and it enable reciprocity between the interviewer and participants (Galletta, 2020 ), which could further allows the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on the participant's responses and lead to a broader understanding and verbal expressions (Bryman, 2006 ). Although the topic is based on fan activism on X/Twitter, it is impossible to obtain datasets from the platform as the process has to be done through X/Twitter APIs (Application Programming Interface) (Twitter, 2024). Hence, as mentioned, this research will focus on the user perspective, in this case the female Indonesian K-Pop fans on the reason for using X/Twitter, and their engagement on the platform.

#### 3.2 Sampling of Participants

In relation to the sampling procedure, participants will be chosen purposely as correlated to the research question. In this case, the participants should fall under several requirements, which are female Indonesian K-Pop fans, users of X/Twitter, voters for the upcoming presidential election. In order to obtain these participants, a snowball sampling method will be conducted. Snowball sampling is defined as a random sample of individuals who are drawn from a given finite population

(Goodman, 1961). In snowball sampling, each individual in the sample is required to name different individuals in the particular population. These recommendations propose other participants with the same or similar backgrounds and experiences towards the topic (Bryman, 2016). Based on the requirements for the purpose of this particular research, 10 interviews were conducted. Firstly, the interviewer will choose the initial participant through the chosen social media platform, which is X/Twitter, and moving forward the next interviewees will be indicated based on the proposed names of the previous interviewee.

In particular, the variable of these respondents were justified to be as controlled as possible, considering their engagement on the specific social media platform, which is X/Twitter, and gender which is female user. Although based on the related theoretical background above which also discussed the possibility of linking the research question to the creative industry factor of fan labor, the interviewees were mostly done with respondents who fall under the category of consumers of K-Pop, and not as producers of its creative contents. The occupational background of the respondents also vary, which later highlight the different perspective of their opinions, where for example due to the nature of their job in the government sector, there are some boundaries towards their political participation on social media, whereas interestingly the other respondent would show high interest in the creative side of fan labor for future career endeavor due to the creative educational background.

### **3.3 Operationalization**

Based on the topic of analyzing fan activism regarding their social media political participation, an instrument is needed to measure this scale. Waeterloos et al. (2021, p. 3) have designed a scale that can be applied to validate this analysis, which was structured to three different themes and followed by various subthemes. The initial themes are categorized to latent engagement, expressive forms of engagement, and system forms of engagement. Latent engagement is described as for example simply visiting and reading the politicians social media platforms. Whereas expressive forms of engagement indicates whether users has ever posted or shared something related to the political or social issues across different media platforms. Lastly, system forms of engagement shows a more proactive approach in which the users is asked if they have contacted the politicians or political party through a private message on the social media platform. In this previous research, the social media platform discussed was mostly Facebook and was done quantitatively through questionnaires. However, due to the nature of this new study, X/Twitter will be the focus on the discussion and interviews will be done to gain a more explorative perceptions from the users.

In addition to that, due to the feasible sighting of similar forms of K-Pop fan labor that was

also imitated in this particular campaign strategy, discussion about this topic will also be elaborated and taken into account. Fan labor itself is categorized into three different types, specialized, managerial, and unskilled labor. Specialized labor explains those who excels in specific skills, such as photography, webmaster, graphic designer, etc. Whereas managerial labor specifies fans who are into organizing event, such as birthday celebration and cup sleeve event. Lastly, unskilled labor defines those who might not have any specific skills, but are also actively contributing into the fandom activities by voting or streaming. Based on these examples of mobilized fandom engagement, the case of *K-popification* of Indonesia's presidential candidates will then be compared and analysed through the lens of the respondents.

Aside from their engagement with political issues, their involvement with their fandom itself will be inquired to further analyze the possible relationship and similarity between both engagements, whether being active in their fandom with all the fandom activities in supporting their idols would be similarly implemented when they are exposed to social and political issues that are brought up by the fandom.

Therefore, the research interview will be structured firstly on their general knowledge of K-Pop which includes their background in encountering K-pop in the first place and their opinions about the growing and developing Korean contents in Indonesia. This is followed up by questions regarding their fandom culture and how they see their fandoms. The topics about fan labor discussed above will then follow under this section of the interview, as they will be asked to identify themselves as either merely a consumer or an active producer within the fandom. Furthermore, even though almost all of the respondents are not producers, they will still be asked about their perspective on those other fans who are willingly and voluntarily support their idols by participating in a more active fan labor.

The next part of the interview will dwell into X/Twitter as the main platform of fandom engagement in most K-Pop fandom culture. This section will observe their participation on the platform on whether they have ever contributed in any mobilized fandom activities, such as trending hashtags to support their idols birthday or a new album release. This will then continue to how this social media platform, X/Twitter, is also commonly used to accommodate discussion involving social and political issues, and moreover as K-Pop fans themselves who are also actively contributing to the discourse.

Lastly, the main topic about Indonesia's presidential election that highly implemented similar elements of K-Pop will be discussed. The respondents' opinion are analyzed based on their answers towards the question of whether *K-Popification* of the presidential candidates are

acceptable. Furthermore, to answer the two sub-questions, this part will also question their perspective on whether this campaign strategy will also be successful in other political discourse in the future and lastly, if this phenomenon ever has an impact on Indonesian K-Pop fans.

### **3.4 Data collection and analysis**

As required, each interview lasted for 45 – 60 minutes, with 10 participants that was selected through snowball sampling. After selecting and confirming the interviewees that falls under the participant profile requirements, an interview guide will be created. In order to form a semi-structured interview, previous study in the related research topic area should be analyzed, as the questions are formed based on previous knowledge. This will then be the outline of the interview guide, allowing the data collection to be structured within the researched topics. The interview guide will consist of several subtopics, listing out open – ended questions that will be raised during the discussion, and in order to have a controlled variable of data collection, the same questions will be asked to all participants. However, depending on each individual's answers, follow-up questions might be raised to provide better and diverse understanding of the topics.

Each interview will then be recorded per the interviewee's consent. Moreover, to gain a coherent insight for the next process, which is coding, the interviews will be transcribed to texts. With these texts, thematic analysis will be conducted inductively. According to Braun (2006), a thematic analysis approach is defined as a method to identify, analyze, describe, and report themes found in a data set. All transcripts will be openly coded and compared with one another to identify similar themes and later be grouped into code trees. Through code trees, concepts will be analyzed to see the trends or results obtained from the interviews (Lichtman, 2017).

As this research focuses on Indonesian K-Pop fans who are also users of X/Twitter, there is a possibility that some of the participants are not so fluent in English, thus some interviews will be held in Bahasa Indonesia to provide a more convenient, elaborative, and communicative discussion. For interviews that are conducted in the Indonesian native language, an English translation of the interview summary will be provided, however, the transcripts will still be in Bahasa Indonesia. Through the textual transcripts, as mentioned, thematic analysis will be used to observe new perspectives from the data. The software, Atlas.ti, will be used to help with the coding process. After indicating similar themes and keywords, through the software, corresponding relation will be analyzed and structure into a code tree to better observe the similar themes and connection with the subtopics. Moreover, the relation will be categorized to relevant themes based on previous research as described in the theoretical framework as a foundation to further compare and discuss the topics.

### **3.5 Validity and Reliability**

In regards to the research validity, as this phenomenon is something that happened in a specific country, Indonesia, recently, and as the research is conducted within Indonesian context, the results may not be replicated and applicable to other countries. Each countries have their own socio-political discourse and realms and does not necessarily implement similar process in regards to their presidential campaign. Other than that, regarding the interview itself, the author tried to be as unbiased and objective as possible in responding and giving follow up questions to the respondents to hinder any misleading communication and opinion.

To ensure the factual and trustworthy information from the respondents, the author have briefed the respective respondents beforehand, especially asking them about possible terms that they may not understood. In addition to that, as the interviews were mostly done in the native language, Bahasa Indonesia, the author also have prepared a guide in the Indonesian language and translate several terms so that the respondents will have the same understanding about the inquired questions.

## 4. Results

This research aims to analyze and answer the research question: *To what extent does the K-Popification of Indonesia's 2024 presidential candidates construct Indonesian K-Pop fans fandom digital activism?* This chapter explains the analysis obtained from the 10 conducted interviews involving female Indonesian K-Pop fans between the ages of 21 – 33 who are X/Twitter users for their fandom related content. As mentioned, thematic analysis was adopted to analyze the data collected through the interviews. The section will be generated into several themes and sub-themes which derived from the theoretical framework.

Firstly, the discussion will be based on the respondents' background and interest towards K-Pop in general, which will then explain the next theme which is their behavior within the fandom. Furthermore, as the research question specifically revolves around the use of X/Twitter, their social media engagement will also be then observed, and this leads to their political participation as a form of digital activism on the platform. Lastly, connecting all that themes, the relation with the *K-Popification* of campaign during the 2024 Indonesia's presidential election period will then be examined through the perspective of the respondents as the consumers to see the possible integration of political participation and K-Pop fandom culture in Indonesia.

### 4.1 Dynamic of Indonesian K-Pop Fandom

This section addresses the general nuance of K-Pop industry in Indonesia and how the fandom's dynamic would further explain the following discussion about their active and devoted engagement which will lead towards the final discussion of this paper, which is the *K-Popification* of the presidential candidates. It is no doubt that K-Pop (and other forms of Korean contents) have established its existence in Indonesia, but in order to better understand the reason for this, each respondents who became K-Pop fans in different era, or commonly known as 'generation' were asked about which element of K-Pop appeals the most to them and how that further create a certain bond and connection within their respective fandom.

#### 4.1.1 Attractive appeal of K-Pop

When asked how respondents started getting to know about K-Pop, all participant agreed that visuals are the most distinctive appeal of K-Pop for them. In this case, the visuals mentioned are not necessarily physical appeal of pretty and handsome faces, but also in the form of the artistic approach of the performances. Respondent 3 who has been avid K-Pop fans since the second generation of K-Pop idols explains,

"It's the visual of the person, but also their talent because probably what makes (...) I don't



know, it's just an assumption, because they are Asians, probably because we are accustomed to (...) we have the same race and we have a similar culture, because comparing it like to Hollywood is like we're in a different layer of the world, they're on the other side of the world, but Asia feels like somehow reachable to us. So probably maybe there's like a proximity thing".

This interesting take on how there seems to be a certain degree of similar culture in a sense of feeling of having close proximity is something to take into account for further discussion about network fan practices in the era of digital media.

In addition to that, with the increasing number of Korean products in Indonesia, people are well exposed to various Korean contents and in one way or another, it is somehow compulsory to at least know an idol or two to fit in in social setting discussion. In many cases, several of the respondents actually started their K-Pop fangirling journey as haters of K-Pop. From someone who never previously consumes Korean media contents, they eventually became actively involved in the consumption of Hallyu products. In the case of respondent 2, as someone who worked in the marketing department at an e-commerce company which uses *Blackpink* as their ambassador, she ended up being a BLINK due to the exposure she faced in her work.

However, one of the main reasons that is clearly visible as the cause of the increasing number of K-Pop fans in Indonesia in recent years is due to the covid-19 pandemic. Lockdowns for more than a year and having to stay at home forced people to find new form of entertainments and through OTT (Over The Top) media service platform, such as *Netflix*, the general Indonesian public was familiarized with Korean dramas, such as *Crash Landing on You*, *Itaewon Class*, and *Hospital Playlist* to name a few, which became global phenomenon. Through these contents, Indonesian public got to know Korean media products which led them to other media products and further explore deeper into Korean culture. Past survey conducted in 2020 by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) has shown that viewership of Korean dramas increased rapidly in the midst of covid-19 pandemic. Based on 924 respondents, aged between 14 and 68 years old, the research revealed that 91 percent of the participants watched K-dramas regularly, whereas 73 said started watching it after the pandemic hit in March that particular year. The average watch time that used to be around 2.7 hours prior to the pandemic also showed great increase to 4.6 hours per day (The Jakarta Post, 2020).

One interesting pattern that was found in the interviews with some of the respondents who became K-Pop fans during the pandemic is how through these dramas, in particular *Itaewon Class* which was led by actor *Park Seo Jun* who happened to be a close friend of BTS' V, also ended up

being BTS' ARMY. This pattern also happened vice versa, where they encountered BTS first through their English singles released during the pandemic that according to them was very easy listening and did not sound unfamiliar or too 'K-Pop' at all, or through their empowering speech at the United Nations Conference, and after getting to know the members, they searched for the members' drama soundtrack, and later ended up watching the dramas eventually.

In regards to BTS, it is with no doubt that they have played a vital role in attracting more international K-Pop fans during the pandemic. As mentioned, they were still actively releasing music in the midst of lockdown, and that's when people realized that K-Pop could provide comfort through its music and lyrics. This touching and relatable message relayed in their songs was the most appealing according to respondent 7, who is working from home 9 to 5 and got fed up with the uncertainties of the global pandemic and personal struggle, but managed to bounce back and find great comfort in BTS' songs. In addition to that, as the respondents were selected through snowball sampling, most of the participants came from the same fandom, which is BTS' ARMY, and shared similar reasons of their first encounter with K-Pop during the pandemic.

All of the respondents are also fully aware of how the influence of K-Pop has hugely affected Indonesian industry in various sectors, both towards the nation's economy and also creative industry. Respondent 1 brought up how nowadays, anything Korean related is an unique selling point to attract customer,

*"Not only like a specific brand, but there are a lot of brands using (...) let's say it's an ice cream company, they will use like, 'Korean strawberry flavor', like they have the Korean word to attract the buyers."*

The increasing interest of Korean media and cultural products was also mentioned by respondent 4 who happen to encounter a career opportunity in high end fashion brand in Indonesia, but purposively recruiting someone who is fluent in Korean,

*"I saw Louis Vuitton opened like an internship position in Indonesia, like for a PR. And one of the requirements is actually like being fluent in Korean. So, Louis Vuitton in Indonesia, a PR intern in Indonesia, but they require you to be fluent in Korea. So it's like, it's interesting, because you see how big Korea culture is everywhere."*

Based on this subtheme, all respondents agreed that the development of South Korean cultural products, whether it is in the form of media products, or creative labor, and other various entities, will not stop nor decline in any near future. Instead, this will keep on growing and touch upon other unpredictable industry or sector, which has been proven in the main discourse of this paper, where K-Pop elements are integrated and implemented in Indonesian politics, which later will be discussed in the next subthemes of this section.

#### 4.1.2 Active participation as consumer and producer within the fandom

With all the respondents being considered adults of age and seem to be able to wisely positioned themselves within the parasocial relationship with their idols and how they would get involve in their respective fandom, all of the respondents did not consider themselves as producers of fan labor, but merely as consumers. However, drawing back to Sun (2020, p. ) category of typology of K-Pop fan labor, some of the respondents fall under the category of unskilled labor who have previously contributed in streaming and voting for their idols, and with a few of them participated in the managerial labor, by organizing birthday café event. Respondent 4 also shared that she has previously participated in *selca* day and created a giveaway in support of her idol,

*“And also like, in a monthly basis. We also have this like selca moment. I don't know how to like (...), where you post your selfie and then like the guy's selfie and I'm like, you know, just being delusional about it. And I also did one giveaway. I don't know why I spent my own money on a giveaway for like, this guy on X1 because he, he went to like the top 10 that week.”*

Most of the respondents agreed that they salute those fans who actively support their idols within the fandom and tried to organize or even produce things without getting paid. However, once again considering the age range of the respondents who mostly are busy enough with their work and daily expenses, for them buying albums, merchandise, or concert tickets are already something that that have to really think through. They also stated that if one day they already have a stable job or passive income, some would gladly try to learn and enhance new hard skills to support their idols through this fan labor activities.

Interestingly, one participant, respondent 4 who is currently both studying and working in the creative industries, mentioned how it has been a dream of hers to actually work in a company that collaborates with her favorite idol, as she is always amazed with the art direction behind K-Pop industry, and not solely just the idols themselves, but the creative industry as a whole. She expresses,

*“I always like imagining myself working with them. So right now, because like I'm obsessed with Seventeen and Seventeen is from HYBE. It's not even the HYBE itself. It's like every company that I know that work for Seventeen, I always like to try to get myself a job in that company. So like maybe I get a chance to meet them from that because (...) I want to meet them where I'm actually working and they can see me actually being productive because of them, not just like being a fan, you know.”*

## **4.2 K-Pop Fans Engagement on X/Twitter**

According to Yoon (2018, p. ), pop culture fans have increasingly engaged with networked fan practices which resulted to significantly reduced geographical, cultural, and temporal gaps between the media text and the fan. Previously, fandom engagement relied on gathering activity and its social interaction in a closed institution and community (Maros & Abdul Basek, 2022, p. 286). However, due to the development of media communication, in particular the existence of social media help dispose and distribute information, whilst creating a new form of platform for fandom to interact with one another. One of the most prominent social media platform that is commonly used by K-Pop fans both in international and local context is X or Twitter. With the easier user interface by focusing on texts and simple images, X/Twitter has been fan's favorite in sharing and exchanging information about their idols.

### **4.2.1 X/Twitter as the main source of real time updates**

Maros & Abdul Basek (2022, p. 288) explains that on X/Twitter, hashtags feature allows fans to create discussions and facilitates connections, providing strong mobilized fandom activity around topics and shared interests. This argument is highly supported by the answers of all respondents in this research who agree that X or Twitter is their main source of real time updates regarding their idols. Comparing to local newspapers or television channels that are somehow limited and usually delayed in sharing information, online platform such as X/Twitter is their go – to portal.

In addition to that, several respondents agree that the “For You” page feature on X/Twitter has helped them to be more aware of updated information, as they do not have to necessarily follow certain fan accounts, but will eventually been shown related accounts based on their recent activities on the platform algorithm. Respondent 2 notably mentioned how as a fan of Blackpink, without fully understanding the purpose of MET GALA that Jennie recently attended, she could still get a lot of updates about her red carpet looks in real time on X/Twitter. Another example of the usage of X/Twitter as K-Pop fans main source of real time updates was also shared by respondent 6, who usually has to go to work from 9 to 5, and could only able to get a hold of her phone during break time or after working hours. Fortunately, by having a Twitter account, she is able to get on track with her idols' latest whereabouts and updates after her busy days.

### **4.2.2 Using X/Twitter as platform for fandom engagement**

Aside from using X/Twitter as main source of K-Pop idols most updated information, as mentioned previously, the platform also allows fans to interact and mobilized in a closed community without having to be at the same place physically. This helps the spread and exchange

of information globally and catered various fandom activities, such as trending hashtags, voting and streaming. Most of the respondents answered that they do have previously engaged with other fans through X/Twitter, nevertheless of whether the other K-Pop fans are basically their own close friends or strangers they interact with on the platform.

Interestingly, as this paper was analyzed qualitatively through interviews, obtaining the respective respondents through snowball sampling was hardly an issue. For example, in the case of respondent 1 whom the researcher firstly got in contact with, she recommended respondent 7 and 9 who happened to be her close friends in the BTS' ARMY fandom that she met online. All three respondents that came from the same circle of friends similarly mentioned one another and told that they were very glad to have met such nice, fun, and understanding new friends who shared the same interest and dedication towards BTS. They have occasionally met up simply for dinners, attending concerts together, coordinating streaming party by creating shared playlist and other example of fandom mobilized activity that they experienced both in a bigger community, or just within their closed knit group. Respondent 1 shared how X/Twitter first brought them all together,

*"Yeah, I interact with a bunch of friends from online. I even have, like a friend group that we became friends in real life right now. Like there are five of us that started from my fan account Twitter. Yeah, and we started like having (...) Twitter replies to share "Do you have like a playlist for streaming?" Like, we started like that. And then we ended up, creating a Whatsapp group to talk literally every day."*

As a medium for mobilized fandom activity, X/Twitter has been a great contributor to the active participation of K-Pop fans in supporting the success of their idols. For example, as mentioned previously, respondent 4 once joined *selca* day to promote her chosen member on a survival show. The other respondents also shared that they have at least once partaken in tweeting hashtags to celebrate a member's birthday, album release, and even voicing their opinion towards certain issues related to their idols. This particular discourse will further be discussed in the next section below.

#### **4.3 K-Pop Fans Digital Activism in the Context of Social and Political Participation**

From Black Lives Matter movement, to a more local Indonesian context, such as *Gejayan Memanggil*, K-Pop fans have been vocally showing their digital activism through mobilized strategy that they are familiarized with. As they are accustomed with similar strategy on social media platforms as a way to support their idols, they could easily implement similar elements for other purposes, in this case for social and political discourses. Aside from global societal discourses, K-Pop fans have also took part in raising awareness to their own biases and their agency. For example by

criticizing the color representation or cultural appropriation in K-Pop music videos.

Recently, the discourses of genocide happening in Palestine is a hot topic among K-Pop fandoms. One example that was raised up frequently during the interviews is the partnership of HYBE and Scooter Braun. HYBE corporation being the biggest K-Pop agency as of now, which happened to be closely related to Scooter Braun, who is considered a Zionist, has grown concerns among K-Pop fans who does not want their favorite idols being directly related to him. As an ARMY, whose favorite idol group is under HYBE corporation, respondent 1 shared her concerns and understanding about the issue,

*“A lot of ARMYs wanting like HYBE the company to divest from the Zionism like so. It was trending like couple of weeks ago like HYBE divest from Zionism”*

This shows how K-Pop fans is fully aware and present with the current global issues and tried their best as a mobilized community to divert and shift public opinions towards the better resolution of the discourses. They have also tried to share contents about the updated situation happening in Palestine and raise awareness to other fans to boycott certain companies or products who are considered active collaborator and supporter of Israel. Although there are pros and cons about this issue in general, but the way K-Pop fans especially the ones on X/Twitter bravely take their stance within this discourse is something to be appreciated for.

#### **4.3.1 Latent engagement of political participation**

As discussed in previous section, in order to measure fans engagement and their political participation, there are three categories that it can be based upon. However, based on the interviews, it is very likely that the respondents could only fall under the category of latent engagement as they present themselves as not as active and vocal in participating about this issue publicly. Even in terms of closed manner of contacting political figures privately as explained by the system forms of engagement theory, all respondents do not fall under this category. They are by far very closely linked to having latent engagement that goes as far as simply finding information about the political figures or any social or political issues on the internet, especially on social media. Most of them once again agreed that finding this information on X/Twitter is the best way to be updated and kept aware about the discourses.

#### **4.3.2 Active and vocal participation**

Although K-Pop fans are actively involved in social and political discourses, however the respective respondents in question mostly tried to keep it lowkey about their personal and political stance. Respondent 7 who happened to be working in governmental sector as a civil worker shared

that she would rather keep her opinion in private context or just within her close friends and not sharing it on public due to the nature of her work. Having counter argument towards the system and voicing critics against government might put her in danger according to her. However, apparently this is also applicable for the other respondents who are not closely related to the government.

They maintained to draw boundaries between their personal involvement as a K-Pop fans and also having to be present in the political discourses. Respondent 2 shared,

*"I don't like conflict. So if I post it on my public account, I might think that there are, are other people that have my different, more people that have different point of view to mine, right? So I choose to, but if I strongly believe, I post it on my close friend's account. And with a smaller audience, I feel safer, I feel safer to post and to share what, what's my opinion about that issue or political issues. So sometimes I post it, but with a smaller scale, because I don't feel comfortable sharing it to a bigger audience. And I don't think that I'm capable enough to directly message or say things to the political person."*

Similar answer is also shown by other respondents in which the words 'safer' was frequently repeated and stated by these respondents, drawing the conclusion that there seems to be fear of having to be vocal about criticizing social and political issues, especially in the context of Indonesian system. Other respondents also express that they are not the type who are good at expressing their opinions, and would rather to just agree on other's, as shared by respondent 1 about her tendency of agreeing on someone's opinion on X/Twitter by simply retweeting it,

*"I'm not the type of like expressing, like, my own thoughts and words, but if I see something that I agree on, I tend to retweet. Like, that's how I express like, myself. So instead of putting out my own words, I just retweet, like, other people's statement, because I, I'm not the type of like, I don't know...like, it's hard to, like, type in my thoughts, because I don't know. It's just hard for me to find the right word. So whenever I read something like, oh, yeah, I agree on this one. I retweeted it."*

With this tendency that is shared by all of the respondents, the follow up observation about the main research question is then drawn based on the their opinion as a reader or simply a viewer who are not directly participating or contributing to the discourse.

In the case of respondent 9, she shared how the topics of global social and political discourses, specifically about the genocide in Palestine is shared and discussed actively in her own friend group, who as mentioned also consists of respondent 1 and 7 alongside their two other

friends. As a group of BTS' ARMY, they feel like they could not turn a blind eye towards the issue, but at the same time they believe that whatever opinions they tried to express to related parties, in particular the agency, HYBE corporation, would not really make a difference because all in all, business is business and there might be various layers and other undisclosed agreement behind the partnership.

#### **4.4 K-Popification of Indonesia's Presidential Candidates**

Based on the previous concepts discussed above, the relation of K-Pop fandom culture, especially Indonesian fans, their engagement on social media, in this case via X/Twitter, and their digital activism in political issues could be connected to analyze the unique phenomenon of the K-Popification of Indonesia's presidential candidates in this year's election. This section will discuss various point of view of how the dynamic of K-Pop fandom in Indonesia and its increasing number during the covid-19 pandemic hugely created a new community of young fans, and how their existence during the campaign period shifted a rather 'fresh' strategy to promote these candidates. Furthermore, the relevance of this study will be discussed to analyze the impact of this K-Popification towards both the fandom and the Indonesian political nuance to answer the main research question and its sub – questions.

##### **4.4.1 X/Twitter as source of information about presidential election**

Similar to fandom engagement that is created on Twitter and how K-Pop fans rely on the platform to get updated information about their idols, interestingly the respondents also treat X/Twitter as their source of information about the presidential election,

*“Because during the presidential election, like, my timeline is, like my timeline was full of K-pop accounts, talking about the election. So I think it reached a lot of people, I mean, like a lot of Kpopers. And so it made them more interested in the election.”*

This particular impact of how it makes them, the K-Pop fans, more interested in the election is specifically experienced by respondent 4, who happened to be the only first time voter in this study. In addition to that, as a student in the Netherlands, she was not fully aware of the political situation happening back home in Indonesia. Although it is a nationwide discussion, but she only heard and understood it in a very superficial context. However, as an active X/Twitter user, she got to be familiarized with the presidential election that was frequently exposed on her timeline,

*“I'm starting to get back into like trying to know what is happening in Indonesian politics. Yeah and then you being aware from home that kind of like yeah(...) Because if you really want to know about Indonesian politics from like the Indonesian news is just like a bit boring*



*and like K-Pop fandom just make it so fun that you at first didn't even realize that you're actually like reading serious stuff because they're like so fun. You know, I think that's also like the things that it's actually a good thing for them. Yeah. Yeah, like the narration and all the stuff, right? It's making it. They know their mass. They make it like so fun because that's actually what Gen-Z is trying to get."*

She also added the importance of social media as a platform for international students who live away from home and would initially only get information that are spoon-fed to them by their own family that might have their own biased opinion without searching for different perspectives on certain issues,

*"Especially for us like international student where we're so far from home. The social media and also like the internet is the only place we can go to seek for information other than like getting it from our family or our friends which actually sometimes a bit biased because they already have like their opinion but uh talking about that the internet also sometimes being biased. But the thing I love about uh twitter is that you have you've got so many information from like different point of view so that after you get those information you can just you know see and just think about like where you stand on that opinions and I think that's uh actually interesting. I'm also a bit relying on myself to get those information from social media and also like the content from YouTube but yeah I think I choose the right person."*

This previous answer by respondent 4 which mentioned the existence of Gen-Z in this equation, was also linked and discussed by respondent 10. In her interview, respondent 10 came to realization that based on her experience of coming back to K-Pop fandom during pandemic, this might be one of the biggest factor of how younger voters were actively involved in this year's election. Respondent 10 reminded the researcher that the previous presidential election took part in 2019, just a year before the global pandemic hits. Thus, in this year's election, there is a huge possibility of first time voters who happened to be K-Pop fans too as they were getting involved with the fandom through their devotion to their idols during the pandemic. Therefore, this is an interesting take towards the issue of how younger voters, who are most likely voting for the first time, experienced something new and relatable to them through creative contents that are close to their familiar mobilized fandom activity.

This is once again supported by the opinion brought up by respondent 2 that mentioned how young voters have the tendency to prefer social media rather than mass media such as newspaper,

*“there's a lot of young voters who, okay, maybe like a lot of like, again, X users already can vote, right? And based on their like, their behavior is because they're born to like social media rather than like official news or newspaper or something like that. I think they're accustomed to believing whatever they see on the easy, on the convenient media, right? Which is social media and then acts like you don't have to follow some accounts, but you can get whatever, the trending topic, right?”*

As this phenomenon grew during the campaign period, as mentioned previously, with the ‘trauma’ and bad image that was formed as a result of the previous election, initially there was a low interest towards this year’s election, noting how instead of two candidates, we had three pair of candidates that may result in a more heated competition. However, the ‘fun’ and ‘creative’ contents that K-Pop fans brought up during the campaign period, eventually and successfully attracted more audience than they could ever imagined. The debates that were streamed on TV and online were highly discussed on X/Twitter and caught up the attention of the younger users of the social media platform, whilst hand in hand with the K-Pop fangirling elements that were also implemented by the supporters gave them a great boost and engagement to the younger voters.

Although, objectively the first candidate would be seen as the pair with the most K-Popified elements which also started everything organically and would be considered as the most acceptable candidates by the K-Pop fans in Indonesia, but the ‘buzz’ that this candidate created also have an huge impact to the other candidates as mentioned by respondent 1,

*“A lot of K-Pop fans who chose other candidates because they also use the same promotional strategy that the first candidate are doing. So, what candidate one is implementing does not necessarily make everyone choose number one, but it open up more ways for the first time voters to be more aware of all three candidates. So, the K-Popification promotion is making them more aware, and not only specifically for only one candidate.”*

#### **4.4.2 Creative contents of campaign strategy**

In many ways, this year’s presidential election is seen as some sort of creative contents competition between the candidates. One of the most K-Popified candidates would be Anies Baswedan whose fandom are still active until now and was formed organically and according to the fact check that was done by various newspapers shared that the account @aniesbubble who usually translated his live streaming session was a voluntary movement and not part of his official campaign strategy.

When asked about their thought of this type of fan labor that is also found during the

campaign period to promote the candidates done by K-Pop fans, the respondents mostly view this as something justified and still acceptable. As someone who works in marketing, respondent 2 shared,

*"I think ethically, I don't think there's anything wrong. I don't think there's anything wrong with that system. Candidates also pay like KOL (Key Opinion Leaders) or celebrity to be on their side like to be about to be on their side and promoting it. So I think I don't think it's wrong for them to also target fandom but maybe for the fandom itself it may be like destructive for the long term or in the future after the election is done. Maybe not a lot of people believe in the same candidate and also like political issue or presidential election is very sensitive topic in Indonesia right just like choosing, like the religion issue it can break families, it can break friendships and it definitely maybe can break those fandoms as well."*

However, all respondents agreed that this phenomenon is acceptable as it is happened organically and created by the fans themselves and not by the campaign managers of the related parties of the candidates. Respondent 3 shared her encounter with one of the candidates that seem to have noticed the success of integrating into K-Pop fans to gain votes by attending Korean music events,

*"For example, I attend the concert uh, the GDA, the Golden Disk Award in Jakarta, but there's this like certain candidate that also attend the event. Knowing that he doesn't have a background that actually likes K-pop, so that's why some people think that uh, that moment was considered a clout"*

Respondent 3 additionally mentioned how the other candidate really tried to jump on the trend, by not only them being directly involved in the K-Pop fandom activities, but also by the support of their significant relatives, for example the son of candidate number 3 who was actually known to be a K-Pop fan, but have not really been active in K-Pop fandom discourses, nearing the end of the campaign period started to become more engaged with K-Pop fans on X/Twitter by mentioning or replying to these fans.

*"I think in the last two weeks of the presidential election campaign, Ganjar, his son jumped into Twitter and like being active as a Kpop fan. And I think, yeah, and you actually kind of see the difference between like the staged Kpopified campaign and like, which is, and when it's organic. Because at first... people enjoy Ganjar's son being like a K-pop fan and stuff like that, but then building up towards the actual election, they're starting to get a sense of like, oh my god, is he trying to make us choose?"*

She also added how as long as no brands or particular members are mentioned, then K-Popification of presidential candidates are seen as acceptable campaign strategy. By only 'borrowing' similar

elements that are commonly used by K-Pop idols in their persona and not explicitly involving existing idols, then we can see this phenomenon as something fun and in a positive manner that would bring broader attention to the country's politic issues. She once again highlighted,

*"They don't want their idols to be mentioned side by side with the candidates. So probably the name of the group, the name of the members that are associated with the groups, they don't want that to be mentioned side by side with the candidates, or probably also the company and also the songs. They use the method, but in a way, they are also right because the stance is not mentioning any brands, names, but there are like still certain candidates that wanted to be feel seen, similar as members of any particular group. That's what they will say. No, that's the idolization that we don't want, but the K-popification method of supporting the candidates is different to them. So then again, yeah, it's a subject of debate as well."*

#### **4.4.3 Impact on Indonesian K-Pop fans**

According to respondent 1, who was frequently felt misjudged for being K-Pop fans and was in many ways seen as a groupie, she expresses a certain feeling of pride for being a part of the K-pop community,

*"Because of this phenomenon the general public right now kind of see us as like... oh so the K-pop, the K-popers are not only like teenage girls there are a lot of there a lot of adults whose... who live a normal life just like them like it's.. it gave a more...but positive view for us the K-popers"*

Interestingly, one of the respondents, who have been a K-Pop fan since the early years of second generation of K-Pop idols, seemed to be not so welcoming with this phenomenon, as she saw this shift of fandom culture that was very much different with how she started her fandom journey in the past. She mentioned that these days, with the younger fans, who might be less mature, she felt that everything has turned to something too critical and was not as fun and relaxed as it used to be. However, she still see this active participation of K-Pop fans as something that should be appreciated, although she wish to separate political issues and fandom activities.

In addition to that, Respondent 3 once again shared her suggestion during the interview to see this phenomenon as something not as serious as it should be, because in many ways, K-Pop fans are only seen as political tools, and this unique phenomenon although it might happen again in the near future, it does not really bring a huge impact to the K-Pop fandom community in general,

*"Just think that you are a passerby that going through the festival. Think of the K-pop scene*

*as the festival. Probably you will see that there will be some people that will fight to be on a merry-go-round. Just see them as a political situation, but yeah, it will pass by, and you will not be like affected anyway. So yeah, just still be rational even and see it as a fun way to get involved in politics.”*

All in all, most respondents believe that they are indeed being used as political tools by the candidates and they are seemingly fine with that. This is still acceptable as long as what was discussed above with only elements of K-Pop are being borrowed and not K-Pop figures being used in this discourse. Additionally, with the upcoming legislative election that is scheduled on November, they also believe that this similar strategy might also be used, but not on a massive scale like this presidential election, and eventually it is not something that will be done organically, but as a part of the initial campaign strategy by the candidates.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Discussion

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that there is a clear relationship between K-Pop fandom and their active participation in social and political discourses. In this case, the unique phenomenon that existed during Indonesia's 2024 presidential election was something that may have not been seen before, at least in Indonesia. Knowing the huge K-Pop fandom in Indonesia and the increasing interest of Korean contents which established a new wave of Korean culture integration into local Indonesian products, it is interesting to see how Korean culture and media are also integrated into political context.

Relating back to the concept of fandom studies, what was happening with Indonesia's presidential election this year, in particular during the campaign period is a fitting example of a sociocultural phenomenon as stated by Duffet (2015, p.16), which explains how they are associated with capitalist societies, digital media, mass culture, and public performance. All these elements were clearly found in the campaign strategy by the three candidates as discussed above.

First, the surge of K-Popification of the presidential candidates were done online and created through digital media, in this case X/Twitter. X/Twitter as one of the most used social media platforms by Indonesian K-Pop fans. Secondly, through this platform, the already established K-Pop fandom were generated and mobilized, where it was first done organically and followed by other presidential candidates and created a new mass culture.

Moreover, the creative content of K-Popification of all these candidates could be considered as public performance. When the first K-Popification of the presidential candidates was done by candidate number one with him doing a live streaming through TikTok and interacting with

the viewers in his car, which according to Indonesian K-Pop fans is closely similar to K-Pop idols doing a live streaming in their vehicles after going home from music shows, this stunt, whether it was organic or staged, can be categorized as a public performance. One way or another, this is a clear campaign method to attract more voters, especially younger ones by using social media as a promotional platform, thus this is very much a public performance in the first place.

Lastly, according to the results of the interviews, as the interviewees were very much aware with the general social and political discourses of the nation, they believe that they were merely used as political tools for the politicians to gain more voters. They are considered a soft target that could be easily mobilized, especially the younger ones who might never voted previously. By experiencing and enjoying these contents, they could easily be swayed to choose for a particular candidate who were positively supported by their fandom. In addition to that, as discussed previously, there were several occasions where the candidates explicitly mentioned particular K-Pop fandoms and even held a special event for them to gain their support. In many ways, this could be seen as an embodiment of capitalist societies. Thus, this has proven Duffet's point regarding the sociocultural phenomenon of fandom culture by relating and applying it to the unique phenomenon of the K-Popification of Indonesia's presidential election.

Furthermore, fandom culture is in many occasions linked to the concept of parasocial relationships with their idols (Bailey, 2005, p.98; Giles, 2002, p.280). This once again can be drawn back to the initial example of the live streaming session that was done by the first candidate. As explained, with that particular strategy being seen as an imitation of live streaming session done by K-Pop idols, this once again created a parasocial relationship between the presidential candidates and their supporters that has been established by K-Pop idols and their fans.

Other interesting insights were also found in this study, in particular with how this phenomenon was created in the first place. As discussed several times, although this promotional strategy was done by candidate number one, and later became a developing campaign strategy, the buzz that was created by this particular candidate successfully gained the public's attention to get deeper understanding of the candidates. Something that was only successful to gain more supporters for one candidate managed to become a domino effect, in which the other two candidates were also taken into consideration.

As mentioned by most of the interviewees, the K-popification of one initial candidate successfully help them to be more aware of the general discourse of the whole campaign period and it indeed has taken their interest to really try to gain more information and dig deeper about the vision and mission that were offered by all three candidates. In particular, the interviewees who

no longer depend on generic mass media, such as print media like newspaper, or even television, and were more of social media users, felt that the online phenomenon helped them in the midst of their busy days to keep updated with the political discourses. In addition to that, interviewees who do not reside in Indonesia stated that they could easily access real time information without having to be in the country.

Indonesian K-Pop fans active participation in the context of social political discourses have also gone beyond being users of the social media platform, but also as active participant by joining in the mobilized forces to raise their voices regarding these issues. One of the most prominent cases would be the participation of these K-Pop fans in the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. Various K-Pop fandoms, especially BTS' ARMY had managed to create social movement online by raising donation for this cause.

In local context, the interviewees also mentioned about the Gejayan Memanggil movement and how they also participated in raising hashtags online for this movement. Most of them who were still university students at that time said that they actively participated in this movement that was mostly mobilized by university students who showed concerns and voiced their critiques to the government.

Nevertheless, with Indonesian K-Pop fans being accustomed with political discourses on social media, they were fully aware about what to take into consideration seriously, and which should not, at least according to the interviewed participants. As discussed, most of the participants stated and understood that this phenomenon only happened because the politicians see them as a fitting target market to gain more votes. Thus, they believe that they were merely political tools and felt that there are no significant impact to the K-Pop fandom in Indonesia in general.

## **5.2 Societal implications**

This study discussed the implications that were constructed through K-Pop fandom digital activism in Indonesia. Based on the results above, it is clearly seen that there is a relation between this activism and political discourses in the country. As this phenomenon only happened recently, there has been no formal academic research about this issue. Aside from that, based on the participants responses, conclusion could be drawn as they positively welcomed this phenomenon as long as it created organically and not merely as a direct campaign strategy. With the research involving more mature fans and voters who were fully aware about the general political context of the country, they were more critical and direct in their answers. Thus, the researcher believes that the result of this study could represent the general notion of Indonesian K-Pop fans regarding this issue.

Furthermore, this study could imply integration to various studies and contexts. By applying the results for political context regarding elections in Indonesia, politicians could clearly see that K-Pop fans are a fitting mass community that could be mobilized to help succeed their promotional strategy. On the other hand, this also could add up to the existing fandom studies research that have previously only mentioned about cases such as Black Lives Movement, or Gejayan Memanggil for its local context. This study would help elaborate more insights and examples about how fandom culture could construct a nation's political discourses.

### **5.3 Limitations**

All in all, this research proved once again the interesting dynamic between K-Pop fandom and its powerful stance within social and political context. As this particular analysis was based on the consumer perspective, which in this case is the K-Pop fans themselves, another angle could be taken into focus for future research. Although it has been mentioned briefly, however discussing specifically about the creative side of fan labor would be something to take into account. During the process of selecting the respondents, the researcher wished to have gained a few K-Pop fans that are also active producer of creative contents within the fandom. However, due to the limitation of number of participants, the gathered respondents were only those who actively consumed the contents, thus extending the research towards the creative industries part of K-Pop fandom was not possible.

Aside from that, with the mention of how K-Pop fandom has been increasing during covid times and some of the participants were first time voters and even considered new in K-Pop fandoms, it would be more fitting if the research variables are more controlled, for example by only involving first time voters.

### **5.4 Future research**

Moreover, with the various creative contents that were created during the presidential campaign period which clearly 'imitated' similar style with what fans have been doing for their idols, such as banners, cup sleeve event, sending coffee truck support, and translating to name a few, it would be insightful to gather deeper understanding on to what extent does this voluntary labor actually means for the creator. Additionally, this could elaborate further discussion of whether they actually have been doing this for their idols themselves, or if there is a possibility that they were basically idolizing these candidates more than what they have done for their K-Pop fandom.

In addition to that, as mentioned above, with the success of this phenomenon and its



societal implications, it would be interesting to see whether K-Pop fandoms will once again 'be used' as political tools in the upcoming legislative election in November, or the next presidential election 5 years from now. Moreover, if the losing candidates will once again run for the next election, it could be observed whether the fandom he has established this year would actually be loyal and grow even bigger, pushing the possibility of him winning. Furthermore, with this study only focusing on X/Twitter, it would also be interesting to conduct similar research with different social media platforms, such as TikTok, that might have different results compared to Twitter users.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Overview of the Participants' Demographics

Interviewees	Nationality	Age	Occupation
Participant 1 (SCP)	Indonesian	29	Dentist
Participant 2 (KIP)	Indonesian	28	Brand manager/marketing
Participant 3 (RI)	Indonesian	29	Social media manager
Participant 4 (HIS)	Indonesian	21	Student & marketing intern
Participant 5 (VIS)	Indonesian	29	Data analyst
Participant 6 (LFC)	Indonesian	32	Auditor
Participant 7 (AC)	Indonesian	28	Civil worker
Participant 8 (AWI)	Indonesian	29	Civil worker
Participant 9 (AN)	Indonesian	33	Assistant lecturer
Participant 10 (FDT)	Indonesian	29	Auditor

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

*Thank you for taking the time to meet me. As the final requirement for my Master's study in Media and Creative Industries, I am obligated to write a thesis on topics related to these sectors, and for this I have chosen to focus on the relationship of K-Pop fandom culture and its participation in political issues. Furthermore, this interview would like to analyze the phenomenon that happened during the campaign period of Indonesia's presidential election where K-Pop fans actively took part and mobilized in an imitated strategy from their commonly K-Pop idols event. As this issue happened only recently, there has not been much formal academic research regarding this topic, thus your honest opinions and perspectives would be very much appreciated. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, as they would be based on your related experience in the field. All in all, you are always allowed to express discomfort to answer any questions.*

### Introduction

1. Before we dive into the topic, could you first tell me a bit about yourself?
2. As a K-Pop fan yourself, do you mind sharing how did you first encounter K-Pop?
3. What was the distinctive element of K-Pop that you found attractive and interesting?
4. Based on your perspective, could you share the general dynamic of K-Pop fandom culture in Indonesia?
  - a. In recent years, especially during and after the pandemic, Korean wave, either K-Pop, K-dramas, movies, food, or beauty products, has been growing rapidly and attracted more fans in Indonesia. Do you think this trend will continue for the next years?

### Fandom Culture Engagement

5. How would you say your participation in K-Pop fandom culture in general looks like?
  - a. Do you think you are an active participant, or merely as a consumer of the products?
6. If we're talking about K-Pop fandom culture, what kind of activities come to mind? Could you mention some examples?
  - a. What kind of fandom culture engagement and activities have you took part in?
7. Fandom culture in K-Pop has shifted from merely consuming the contents as products, but also as active participant by integrating various type of labors in support of their idols. A previous study categorized the typology of K-Pop fan labor to specialized, managerial, and unskilled labor. Specialized labor is for those who mastered in particular knowledge or



skills, such as a webmaster, fan sites, and photographer. Managerial labor is defined to categorize fans who can organize various event related to the idols, such as café cheering event, birthday celebration event. Lastly, unskilled labor explains those who do not have any specific skills, but still actively participate voting or video streaming to help boost the idols' engagement on social media and help them win awards.

- a. Does your participation in a fandom fall in any of these categories? Which one would that be?
- b. Have you ever considered enhancing your skills or learning new skills to actively support your idols through any of these labors?

#### Fandom Media Engagement on X/Twitter

8. How often do you use social media, especially X/Twitter to gain updates or information from your idols?
9. Have you ever engaged with other fans through X/Twitter?
10. Have you ever participated in any fandom mobilized activities on X/Twitter, for example trending hashtags to celebrate your idol's birthday or promoting their new album?

#### Political Participation

11. Have you heard of any cases of K-Pop fans participation regarding social or political stance on X/Twitter (for example the #BlackLivesMatter movement)?
  - a. Did you also take part in it?
  - b. How did the engagement created by K-Pop fans affect your awareness or understanding on the issue?
12. Based on previously conducted research, distinct behavior of fans tailored to social media could be categorized in three themes of engagement: latent forms of engagement, expressive forms of engagement, and system forms of engagement.
  - a. Latent engagement refers to cognitive behavior through information – seeking and consumption, for example visiting the social media profiles of politicians or public figures and reading posts related to any social or political issue on social media. Have you ever done any of these? If yes, what was it?
  - b. Expressive forms of engagement refers to various expressive and visible behaviors aimed at the digital audience such as posting or sharing something related to social or political issue on social media in different forms, either in publicly visible or closed group setting; or even changing your profile picture to support a certain

social or political cause. Have you ever taken part in any of these activities? If so, do you mind sharing it?

- c. System forms of engagement refers to behaviors aimed directly at the political system, for example contacting and communicating directly to a politician through private message on social media, or by provoking counter system engagement such as spreading someone's personal information without their permission on social media in the context of a certain social or political cause. Have you ever done any of these?

#### K-Pop Fans Engagement in Indonesia's Presidential Election 2024

13. In this year's presidential election, you may have noticed the rise of K-Pop fans participation, especially on social media by not only through expressive forms of engagement, but also producing the promotional content for their chosen candidates voluntarily. In many occasions, they imitated the same strategy that commonly used to promote their idols.
  - a. Could you elaborate more on this phenomenon based on your understanding?
  - b. What is your opinion on this phenomenon?
  - c. From which source do you usually seek information of the three pairing of candidates?
  - d. Have you ever rely on any presidential's election related information updated by K-Pop fan account on X/Twitter?
  - e. Do you think by gaining information shared by these K-Pop fans you're able to have easier and more efficient access and information about the candidates?
14. As mentioned, K-Pop fan supporters voluntarily created promotional content of these candidates.
  - a. What are your thoughts about this issue, especially in regards to the production side of fan labor?
  - b. Do you also participate in these fan labor engagements to promote your chosen candidate?
15. Do you think integrating social or political context, in particular about presidential's election, into K-Pop fandom culture is acceptable?
16. How do you think active engagement of K-Pop fans in this issue would affect their choices in picking their favorite pairing?
17. Do you see this political participation as a good opportunity for K-Pop fans to be more vocal and socially aware of various external issues, whilst enhancing their production skills?

- a. Or do you see it as something that might affect the fandom culture ecosystem negatively?

## Appendix C: Consent Form

### CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

#### FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Maria Natasha Ambun Santosa, 485039ms@eur.nl

#### DESCRIPTION

You<sup>4</sup> are invited to participate in a research about the K-Popification of Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Candidates. The purpose of the study is to understand how does the fan activism of Indonesian female K-Pop fans on X/Twitter intersect between its cultural and civic or political participation in regard to the 2024 presidential election.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed In general terms,<sup>5</sup>

- - in the case of interview my questions will be related to K-Pop fandom culture, your social media engagement, political participation and digital activism within the fandom, and your opinion about the phenomenon of integrating K-Pop elements into presidential campaign strategy.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will make an audio recording of the interview.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS** [alternatives A and B are presented below, but there may be further variations]

A. As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. I will not use your name or other identifying information [such as XXX] in the study. To participants in the study will only be referred to with pseudonyms, and in terms of general characteristics such as age and gender, etc.].

B. I am aware that the possibility of identifying the people who participate in this study may involve risks for ... [Explain potential risks for the participant's reputation, help, social relations, etc.]. For that reason—unless you prefer to be identified fully (first name, last name, occupation, etc.)—I will not keep any information that may lead to the identification of those involved in the study. I will only pseudonyms to identify participants.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point. [If participant observation is involved]: Every time I want to accompany you in any activity, I will ask you your permission again.

#### TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 45 – 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

#### PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

#### PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from

the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

### **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish— [contact person in the dept., faculty or university, e-mail address.]

### **SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM**

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be recorded during this study:

Name	Signature
Date	

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name	Signature
Date	

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep. <sup>6</sup>

## Appendix D: Code Book

Theme	Sub-theme	Initial Codes
Dynamic of Indonesian K-Pop fandom	Attractive appeal of K-Pop	Distinctive visual and talents of idols compared to local or Western artists
		Touching and relatable message relayed in their songs
		Increasing number of fans due to highly exposed Korean contents in the country
		Parasocial relationship between fans and their idols
	Active participation as consumer and producer within the fandom (fan labor)	Unskilled labor by voting and streaming their songs and music videos to break records
		Managerial labor through organizing events in support of their idols
K-Pop fans engagement on X/Twitter	X/Twitter as main source of real time updates	Having separate account for fangirling purposes
		Interacting with other fans through X/Twitter
	Using X/Twitter as platform for fandom engagement	Trending hashtags to support and celebrate various occasions, such as new album release, member's birthday, etc.
K-Pop fans digital activism in the context of social and political participation	Latent engagement of political participation	Searching for political issues and information on social media
		Relying on X/Twitter for swifter updates
	Active and vocal participation	Trending hashtags of related issues

		Voicing out their opinions in public setting on social media
K-Popification of Indonesia's Presidential Candidates	X/Twitter as a source of information about presidential election	Exposed to election updates shared by K-Pop fan accounts
		K-Pop fans creating fun contents to help understand the political discourse
	Creative contents of campaign strategy	Young voters with the possibility of first time voters easily intrigued with the phenomenon
		Justified fan labor in support of the candidates
		Acceptable strategy if happened organically by implementing similar element of K-Pop idol culture into the candidate
		Unacceptable if explicitly using real K-Pop idols image to promote the candidates
	Impact on Indonesian K-Pop fans	General public views K-Pop fans in a positive perspective
		Possibility of similar K-Popification strategy being used for future elections

## Appendix E: Code Tree Network

