

Building Online Social Identity and Fandom Activities of K-pop Fans on Twitter

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ABSTRACT

K-pop fans are widely known to use social media as a platform for their activities. Over the years, they have built online communities, which are called fandoms. K-pop fandoms are zealous in fandom activities that some abused were detected, such as spreading false news and provoking fandom wars. These could potentially lead to cyberbullying and damage the quality of online social interaction. The fans are not careful about their actions as they are using the online social identity. Thus their real identity is saved. Hence, the purposes of this study are to analyse the online social identity of K-pop fandom members, how they were introduced to the K-pop world and the purpose(s) of the fandom activities. A total of 30 participants were interviewed online for this study. Thematic analysis of the interview was done based on three stages of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1979) which is (1) characteristic, (2) social identification, and (3) social comparison, and Bennett's Four Areas of Fandom (2014) which are (1) communication, (2) creativity, (3) knowledge and (4) civic power and organisation. The findings of this research revealed six characteristics of the fans' online social identity as K-pop fans, the influential factors that introduced them to K-pop, and details on their fandom activities. This study provides insights into the online social identity of K-pop fans and fandom activities on Twitter. Further research is recommended to explore the language used by the K-pop community for inter- and intra-group communications, which will further enrich the understanding of this online social community.

Keywords: Social Identity; K-pop; Fandom; Areas of Fandom; fandom wars

INTRODUCTION

The Korean wave is a term used for the rapidly growing culture based in South Korea, where people all around the world indulge themselves in their chosen entertainment platform. This emerging pop culture that has driven people crazy, especially teenagers, with their music and drama is seen as a global phenomenon. They exemplify a form of pop perfectionism: catchy tunes, good singing skills and dance movements, attractive looks, interesting fashion and other attractive attributes in a non-threatening, pleasant package (Lie, 2012). As a cultural export, the Korean Wave, which now includes film, music, food, fashion, etc., has become a source of national pride (Um, 2014). The Korean government took full advantage of the national phenomenon and began aiding Korean media industries in exporting Korean pop culture (Lee, 2011). The government started to promote their local products using Korean idols or celebrities as a form of marketing strategy. K-pop's most recent expansion owes a great deal to digital technology and various social media and their associated participatory culture, with Psy's 'Gangnam Style' setting the world

record as the most-watched video, including numerous parodies (Um, 2014). The power of the internet has no limits when it comes to sharing pop culture. Korean Wave has successfully made itself recognised and accepted by the world.

Um (2014) observes that K-pop's easy accessibility makes it almost ubiquitous to many global fans. Fans of K-pop are huge, and this has enabled them to form a fandom, a group, space or region controlled by fans. The term fandom was created using the word fan and the suffix -dom, like the word kingdom (Holubovska, 2016). Etymologist Michael Quinion suggests that "-dom" has two meanings when applied to words; in one usage, the suffix "denotes a rank or an area controlled by a person of that rank" (so a "kingdom" is the area controlled by a king) and in its second usage, "-dom" refers to "a state or condition." For example, "wisdom" is the state of being wise) (Rutherford-Morisson, 2016). Hence, fandom is a newly created word to represent the entertainment group dominated by fans, in this case, the fans of K-pop.

Fans of popular culture express their desires, values, and identity by absorbing the culture, and they sometimes follow whatever their chosen stars do (Jang & Song, 2017). There are specific names for each K-pop idol's fandom that they call themselves. Popular ones are Exo-L (fandom of EXO), BLINKS (fandom of BLACKPINK), and Once (fandom of Twice). EXO, BLACKPINK and Twice are internationally famous idol groups who break several industry records. For example, EXO's pre-order album sales hit 10 Million copies before the release date, making them the first K-pop idols to break the record. BLACKPINK is also famous for its song collaboration with Hollywood celebrities like Dua Lipa and Selene Gomez. Fandoms of K-pop can be an asset to the K-pop idols to achieve their dreams and passion in K-pop. However, this could be harmful if some of the fans of K-pop misuse their right to express their opinion or thoughts by doing so in a negative way. Analysing the K-pop fandom on Twitter is complex as there are many aspects to be considered, and countless fandoms use Twitter as the medium of communication and interaction.

One of the uniqueness of the K-pop fandoms is that they consider themselves as one big family despite their nationalities, gender, and age. Various social media and their associated participatory culture contribute to its wide dissemination online (Um, 2014). Social network services (SNS) have become a common communication medium among fans across national boundaries (Jang & Song, 2017). Some fans have a specific online account to be a part of the fandoms without revealing their real identity leading to a social relationship that is built solely based on mutual interest among the fans. Social networking is essential for all fandoms to show their eagerness in cheering and supporting their idols. This social culture is built based on their mutual interest and opinion about K-pop. However, the dark side of K-pop fandoms emerged when fan wars happened quite frequently on the internet, situations where fandoms attacked each other using inappropriate words.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

K-pop has become one of the most powerful cultural products in East Asia, and it is now gaining popularity around the world, including in Europe (Sung, 2013). The world of K-pop continues to expand yearly, and fans spend most of their time on social media to discover and explore K-pop sites every day. By sharing information with others and forming a community around collective intelligence invites fans' participatory engagement with media content, management, and even production (Lee, 2019). Collective intelligence is the collection of knowledge gained and grew out of a group as a result of working and searching for knowledge and information together. There are

fans of K-pop who share spiteful and malicious posts that bring discomfort to the fandom society. Fans' emotional involvement with a media text is significantly strong (Zhang, 2011). As a consequence, the negative post on social media about K-pop could fall into the category of cyberbullying as the intention of using harsh language is to hurt the other party's feelings and to make them feel inferior. Given that there are more than 300 K-pop groups that dominate the K-pop industry, creating strong and consistent competition among the idols and the fandoms are inevitable. One of the ways to make the other fandoms feel subservient is by being disrespectful and using spiteful language with the intention to position their idols one step ahead of the rest and to compare their favourites with other idols.

Media helps shape our attitudes, beliefs, and standards and influences how we evaluate them (Vojtiskova, 2017). As the studies of the online community increase, the concept of the online community has also become important and more accepted as a social construct (Mohd Jenol et al., 2020). Having another identity online or cyber identity could be a problem as the user will feel a sense of fearlessness to use merciless language to 'protect' their favourite idols or celebrities or to put their fandom above other fandoms. For the youth, the negative aspects of the internet include problematic internet use as well as online risks such as exposure to online harassment (Jung et al., 2014). Problematic internet use is characterised by excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges, or behaviours regarding computer use and internet access, which result in subjective distress and functional impairment (Jung et al., 2014). Most of fandoms feel the need to stay loyal to their group and the idols they are supporting in order to show the spirit of the fandom. The image of the K-pop fans community can be tarnished by the judgement and the stereotypes that result, and as a result, the anti-K-pop community emerges. Some fandoms are overly sensitive and believe that people are aiming to attack them whenever there are minor or controversial issues regarding their fandom or their idols. This sets the fandom war or cyberbullying within this speech community.

A little twist of words or text in social media, mainly on Twitter, could bring several misunderstandings. Different from other readers, fans develop a special mechanism of interpretation when dealing with texts that they are interested in (Zhang, 2011). Their interpretation could be negative since the impression they have of the anti-K-pop community is negative. Members refer to each other as "moot", a backformation from the word mutual, in this case indicating camaraderie and mutual interest from belonging in the fandom community. The communication and connection between the fans all around the world intensify the power of K-pop fandom. This power has grown stronger with the emergence of subcultural K-pop groups through various forms of social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Choi et al. (2014) study supported that, in general, SNSs are defined as digital media that create and strengthen social relationships based on communication between users. The strong bonds among the fandom members have also taken the relationships among the members beyond that of just fans of a particular group. They are also friends outside the community. The fans of K-pop need to understand the problem of using harsh language, which could lead to cyberbullying and that this matter has been recurring on a daily basis. The language used in online fandom wars could lead to psychological situations, and it might affect the mental health of the fans as obsessive behaviour could be crucial in this matter. Identifying the social identity of the fans and studying the quality of fandom could be one way to give more knowledge and solve this problem. Hence, it is interesting to study how relationships were formed and how the members characterise their online social identity via fandom activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TWITTER

There are no restrictions on the language used on Twitter, and a user can write anything they want to the tweet. A tweet is another form of text that does not have sound, tone, and intonation, so the phrases or sentences written on Twitter could be misinterpreted, and that could result in miscommunication. If miscommunication occurs among fandom members, it could lead to a fan war. This situation is not considered a healthy internet environment, and the image of K-pop fans can be tarnished due to the misuse of the internet by irresponsible K-pop fans. The lack of accountability in social media interaction has also created a new form of online aggression known as cyberbullying (Noor & Abdul Hamid, 2021; Shahrul Nazmi Sannusi et al., 2019). Hale (2014) analysed the global connectivity of the Twitter retweet and discussed the network and the role of multilingual users in engaging with content in multiple languages. He claimed that these multilingual users play an important bridging role in the global connectivity of the network. The role of social media in the efforts of Korean Wave transnationalization is interesting because it opens access to many and more people to acknowledge and enjoy Korean popular culture (Saraswati & Nurbaity, 2021).

The language used by the fans to communicate might contribute to miscommunication or misunderstanding among the fans, considering the different cultural backgrounds and hence, the triggering factor for the fan wars. Furthermore, Hale (2014) also mentioned that the English language does play more of a bridging role than other languages, but the role played collectively by multilingual users across different languages is the largest bridging force in the network which could connect the internet users from all over the world despite their differences in cultural backgrounds. K-pop fans are no better than any other community of Twitter users. There are a lot of tweets that contain hatred and bashing toward K-pop individuals or groups on Twitter that will only bring harm to the community. Hate comments and tweets seem to have more responses from the other accounts of K-pop fans in order to show their opinion of the tweet.

Hu, Tamaladupula & Kambhampati (2013) found that the language of Twitter is highly dynamic and that, depending on the measure that is used, it shows similarities to other media forms. They believed that Twitter is rich, evolving from the language of more formal media like news and blogs into a space restricted by size. In fact, they claim that Twitter has become the de facto information sharing and communication platform in this cyber era. With greater help from social media interaction dynamics, fans nowadays actively produce and circulate information about their idols and, at the same time, produce products, like fanfictions, fan videos, fan arts, fan social movements and many more in associate with the idols (Saraswati & Nurbaity, 2021). Twitter also is said to be a popular medium used by fans to be updated with official information from producers, companies, and idols (Trzcinska, 2018). The above claims have motivated this study to adopt Twitter as its source of primary data. The growing fandom on the K-pop planet must be well-organised in order to reach fans in every corner of the globe (Aznur Aisyah & Nam, 2017).

K-POP FANDOM

Korean Wave or “Hallyu” refers to the world of South Korean pop culture that has been growing massively since the early 90s. The global popularity of the Korean Wave has set an example of transnational cultural flow (Saraswati & Nurbaity, 2021). Korean Wave is specifically referred to as the Korean culture that consists of language, dramas and movies, food, music and other cultural

products (Mohd Jenol & Ahmad Pazil, 2020). Pop culture fans, in particular, have increasingly engaged with networked fan practices. Thus, the geographical, cultural, and temporal gaps between the media text and the fan have been reduced significantly (Yoon, 2018). In 2019, Nurudin mentioned in his study that fandom counts heavily on gathering activity and emphasises social interaction for a specific culture, closed institution, and community whose members are pledging in a subcultural group context. Fandoms gathered and interacted with each other to show their power and enthusiasm for what they mutually liked. The sociological approach to identity does not address the psychological or cognitive processes of identity but rather how identity is presented and re-presented within the social situation (Mohd et al., 2020).

Leung (2012) in Abd Rahim (2019) acknowledged that Hallyu, or Korean Wave is a global phenomenon that marks the spread of Korean popular culture by distributing South Korean pop music, dramas, and films through the power of social media. K-pop has frequently been described in academia as a means to empower fans and provide them with a sense of purpose (Kim & Hutt, 2021). The role of social media is immense in garnering support for everything K-pop. In Abd Rahim's (2019) study, she mentions that fans participate in multiple fandoms because several websites are easily accessible to public audiences. The problems arise when the fans within a fandom start to compete about who among them is more knowledgeable about the celebrity they are supporting and their fandom history. The reason behind this competition has to do with validating self-existence and identities within the fandom. In the K-pop community, the fan who knows more and has more accurate information about K-pop will be followed by many fans as he/she is considered a true figure by the K-pop fans.

K-pop attracts teenagers and young adults since they are of the age that seeks entertainment as escapism. Williams's (2016) study, for example, has shown this tendency among Singaporean youths. His study concluded that the self as a music fan is continually developing within a complex variety of social processes, from the circulation of global mass media representations to inter- and intra-personal interactions. Parasocial relationships- particularly those between celebrities and their fans, might be especially appealing to an insecurely attached person because such relationships make few demands and have little risk of rejection (Collisson et al., 2018). Being a fan of a subject matter can be from what a person is attracted to or being influenced too. The Korean Wave could rapidly spread through the participation of its fans in the world, and social network service became a common communication medium of the fans (Jang and Song, 2017).

Kang et al. (2019) also stated that the K-pop industry has rapidly expanded due to the strength of K-pop fandoms. Their study investigated the current practice of fandom collaborations in K-pop. Fandom collaborations among K-pop fans could be in many ways to support their idols, such as in funding, donation, and charity works. Their findings show that the amount of collaboration between two fandoms is often unfair as it always turns out to benefit the bigger fandom more than, the smaller fandom. The analysis of the study further reveals that despite this, collaborations among fandoms are common.

Fandoms normally prefer to collaborate to support their celebrities or artist. However, the fandoms of every celebrity are not of the same level, and there will be a fandom that will dominate the other fandoms. This situation will define which fandom has more fans and will influence other people. Fandom collaborations are not necessarily something physical. It can be an event online where they gather all the fans to tweet on Twitter with a designated hashtag (#). For example, fans of Zico (unofficial: Zicova) and fans of Kang Daniel (Danity) collaborate to tweet about their idols' collaboration for the commercial of Pepsi Korea with #PepsixStarship. The reason for such an online event collaboration is to support the idol's new song and promote it at the same time. This

trend happens almost every single day on Twitter, and there must be at least one K-pop-related thing trending worldwide on Twitter.

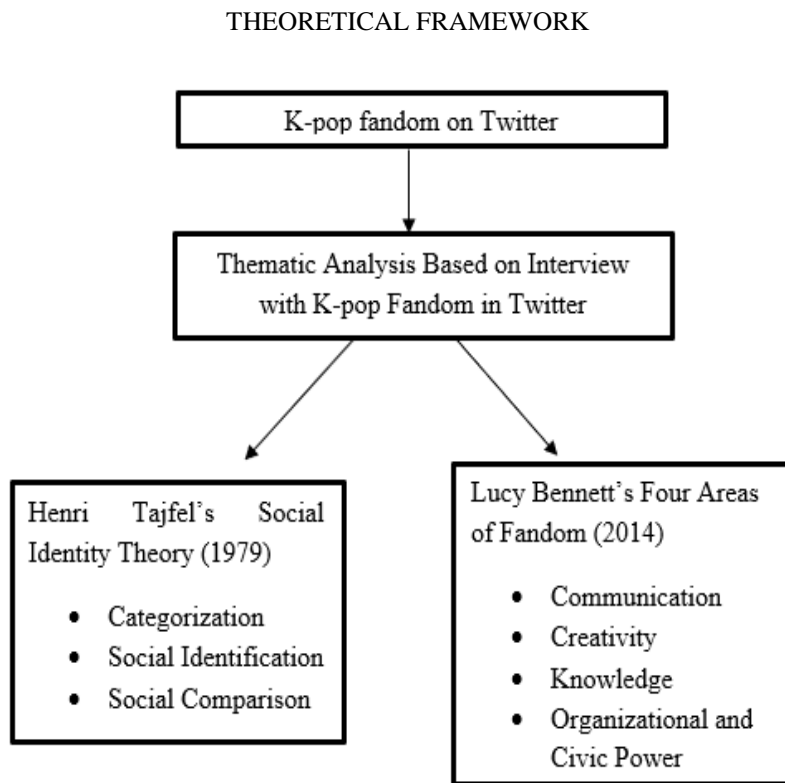


FIGURE 1. The Theoretical Framework

To conduct this study, Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1979) and Bennett's theory of four areas of fandom (2014) are combined and used to explain the findings with regard to areas of fandoms and social identity of K-pop fandom on Twitter.

Henri Tajfel (1979) has proposed three stages of social identity, which are categorisation, social identification, and social comparison. Tajfel believes that groups give us a sense of social identity, which is a sense of belonging to the social world. According to Karjaluoto & Leppaniemi (2012), social classification comprises two functions which are (1) it gives the means for a person to define others by cognitively segmenting and ordering the social environment surrounding them and (2) it helps individuals to define themselves in the social environment. A person categorises objects to understand them and classify them. In a similar situation, we also categorise people, including ourselves, in order to derive meaning from the social environment.

In social identification, which is the second stage of Social Identity Theory, we adopt the identity of the group to which we have categorised ourselves. For example, as K-pop fans, the individual in the group needs to adapt themselves to the group by doing things that the other existing members are doing. Normally, K-pop fans watch the videos of the idol online and participate in the conversations on social media. Hence, the norm of how one group operates must be followed by the members of the group. The social identity perspective (SIP) explains how people organise themselves into and within groups and how they treat both members of their groups and members of other groups (Seering, Ng, Yao & Kaufman, 2018). People adjust

themselves to the group they belong to by making the norm of the group as their daily practices. The group characteristics play an important role in shaping the group members' personalities and mind-set. The third stage of Social Identity Theory is social comparison. This stage is where the social groups compete with each other to protect their good image and reputation. Once people have categorised themselves as a part of a group or community, they tend to compare their group with other groups both in a good way and in a defensive way. Thus, the motivational aspect addressed in SIT (Social Identity Theory) lies in the aim of the individual of the group to evaluate the in-group positively, reach a positive social identity, and attain goals such as positive self-esteem or self-actualisation (Trepte & Kramer, 2008). To attain the self-esteem of the group, the members of a particular group will be motivated to improve their reputation and learn how to outshine the other group so that they will be a model to the other group.

In 2014, Bennett came out with four areas of fandom, which are: (1) communication, (2) creativity, (3) knowledge, and (4) organisational and civic power. In her study, she stated that the internet and social media have allowed for the development and fragmentation of networks and communities comprised of fans even further. As the name suggests, social media or social network functions to connect people all around the world. On Twitter, for example, discussions surrounding hashtags have facilitated new connections (although not all communication through this medium results in conversation), offering strong possibilities for mobilisation around topics and fan interests (Bennett, 2014; Highfield et al., 2013; Kalviknes et al., 2013; and Deller 2011). As for creativity, Bennett (2014) mentioned that this area is a remarkable practice strongly highlighted within Textual Poachers, a term popularised by a scholar of fandom Henry Jenkins, which is used to describe the processes by which dedicated fans respond to popular media. Such processes include fans composing and performing songs, creating artwork and writing fan fiction. These processes can operate either on collective or individual levels.

As Textual Poachers demonstrates, shared knowledge and its exchange is a central facet of fan culture (Bennett, 2014). Most K-pop fans get involved in the Korean Wave culture after being exposed to the culture via online search on the internet and interactions among the fandom members on social media platforms. Other than that, peer influence also plays an important role in this matter. Furthermore, news and updates from the local newspapers or television channels are very limited, and some of the time, they are delayed. Fans get into online sources such as portals, social media and other related websites to get more information about their favourite celebrities. The last area of fandom proposed by Bennett (2014) is organisational and civic power. Within the fan activist landscape, the use of social media has further heightened and facilitated the scope of fan studies by allowing them to gather in these active efforts, through self-organisation, to achieve a shared goal that goes beyond the actual fan text into civically charged areas and concerns (Bennett, 2014).

This study aims to analyse the social identification adopted by K-pop fandom members, investigate the purpose of activities and language features used by K-pop fandom members and explore the interaction and communication features among K-pop fans on Twitter. Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1979) and Bennett's Four Areas of Fandom (2014) are used to analyse the data. Firstly, Tajfel's Social Identity Theory draws the characteristics, social identification and social comparison among the K-pop fandom members. Next, three areas of fandoms from Bennett (2014), which are communication, knowledge, and organisational and civic power, are used to answer the second research question and give an insight into what is happening in K-pop fandom.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach for the research design. A set of open-ended interview questions were designed based on the theories applied for the purpose of answering the research questions. Purposeful sampling was used to identify 30 active fandom accounts and the participants.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The accounts of K-pop fans were selected by the researcher through the researcher's Twitter account. The participants were chosen based on two criteria which were; (1) being active on Twitter for tweeting about K-pop-related matters and (2) being involved directly or indirectly in a K-pop fandom war. The researcher used the search tool on Twitter to identify and approach the participants using hashtags made by the fandom related to fandom war, such as #BLINKSapologisettoBTS and #ApologisettoMINO and asked for their permission to have an interview. The interview sessions were conducted in Direct Message (DM) on the Twitter application as well. The reason why this interview was not face-to-face was that the participants lived in various countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Brunei, and Thailand.

DATA COLLECTION

All answers from the participants were copied, arranged, and coded according to the sequence of the participants' responses. For example, the first participant who agreed to participate in this study will be marked as P1, then followed by P2 until the thirtieth participant as P30.

DATA ANALYSIS

The participants' responses were grouped and combined as one sequence if they answered more than one chat box per question. Then a thematic analysis of the data was applied. The process involved identifying key terms such as repeated words and similar phrases that the participants wrote. For example, Sample 1 to Sample 6 show responses containing the word “streaming”.

Sample 1: “Streaming and voting for the idols in different platforms plus the interactions with others who ‘stan’ the same group I support.” (P1)

Sample 2: “Maybe because I always streaming their MV and join their ‘live’ and always RT, like when they post something on social media.” (P3)

Sample 3: “I join streaming teams, mass mentioning, trending, mass mentioning on media platforms like YouTube, Spotify, Naver TV, Wikipedia and more like mass searching and mass cleaning, some reporting and voting too.” (P14)

Sample 4: “Oh, ha. I followed the fanbase project, streaming party, and I know our inside jokes” (P2)

Sample 5: “I feel when I’m giving my time to them and support them such as streaming their MVs, waiting for updates and when I give the love that I don’t usually give to other groups” (P13)

Sample 6: “Yeah, I join the streaming party like streaming the videos on YouTube, streaming songs on Spotify, and also join cup sleeve event.” (P23)

From the samples, the word ‘streaming’ is mentioned by the participants, and the word is identified as one of the themes for analysis. The word is then counted to record the frequency and percentage. Table 1 below illustrates the end-process of content analysis and notation of results:

TABLE 1. Content analysis and notation of result for the word ‘streaming’

Participants that mentioned ‘streaming’	Frequency	Percentage (%)
P1, P2, P3, P13, P14, P17, P23, P26, P28, P30	10	33.33

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present results characteristics of the fandom members based on the member’s perceptions. The data were online in-depth interview responses from thirty fandom members and are analysed based on Tajfel’s (1979) Social Identity Theory and Bennett’s (2014) Four Areas of Fandoms.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

The social identity of the fans believing their membership in fandom in this study can be summarised as characteristics of fandom members. The set of characteristics of fandoms is recorded based on the responses given by the 30 participants to the question “What makes you think you are in the fandom?”. 33.33% of them claimed that they already became part of the fandom when they spent their time streaming the idols’ music videos or songs on any digital music service platform. 30% of the participants answered that as long as they have a deep affection towards the idols and support them, they were already considered a member of the fandom. 26.67% of the participants stated that to be a member of the fandom, the fans must interact with the fandom members and must join the fandom activities. The other characteristics found are; possessing detailed information about the idols, spending time on social media for updates on the idols, and believing the idols reciprocate their deep affection. Each of the latter three characteristics represents 3.33% of the data collected.

The characteristics perceived by the fans which eventually identified them as belonging to a certain fandom can be listed as the following:

1. Streaming the idols’ music videos or songs
2. Possessing deep affection towards the idols and supporting of them
3. Interacting among members and joining fandom activities
4. Possessing detailed information about the idols
5. Spending significant time on social media watching for updates on the idols
6. Believing their deep affection towards the idols was reciprocated.

These findings show that fans have different views on how a fan can be considered a member of the fandom. Some suggested that to be part of the fandom, they need to be constantly involved with various types of fandom activities such as streaming, voting and participating in the fan projects. The internet makes it possible for fans to virtually exist as a group based on their love for the same media object (Zhang, 2011). Some of the fans indicated that as long as they adore and support their idols, they are already considered members of the fandom. The interaction among the fandom members and joining the fandom activities are also taken into account as one of the characteristics that make K-pop fans think they belong to the fandom. The factors are varied according to how the person perceives K-pop and how obsessed they are with K-pop. To some K-pop fans, supporting Korean music and Korean idols is not just their interest or hobby. It becomes their part of life where they must do something related to K-pop as their daily routine. Media here serves not only as entertainment but also as free labour for fandoms (Khachatryan, 2017). Fandoms grow bigger because K-pop fans build up relationships among them, and they share almost everything they know about K-pop with each other. Social media has become the bridge to connect all fans from all over the world to communicate with each other. Fandom activities are unlimited, and they always gather to promote their idols.

As for the second stage in Social Identity Theory which is social identification, two groups are found which are; fans who adopted the fandom social identification and fans who do not adopt the fandom social identification. Almost all (90%) of the participants stated that after joining a fandom, they adopted the fandom's identity as given above. Only 10% of them claimed that they did not adopt any identification of the fandom as they have a "strong self-character" (P17, P21, P22), meaning they admired and followed the development of the idols but did not fall into deep devotion as other members did. These findings indicate that a fandom member's identity can be influenced by fandom social identification. It could also be the factor and the reason behind the collective fandom behaviour on social media. K-pop fans from all over the world build friendships online without knowing the real identity of the person they are communicating with through the internet because they have a similar background or interest. The internet has also dramatically broadened the scope of fan communities, promoting communicative exchanges between fans around the world (Zhang, 2011). K-pop fans delivered the Korean Wave content through mostly YouTube, Facebook and online fan pages to share the content with and build cultural ties with the Korean Wave fans in local and global areas (Jang & Song, 2017).

The third stage in Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1979) is a social comparison, where two or more social groups compare against each other in order to maintain their self-esteem and to compete with each other to prove that they are better than others. K-pop fandoms compete with each other to prove that their idols are better than others, so a comparison between fandoms could be happening to retain their good images. There are fans who compare the fandoms to improve their fandom activities, as K-pop fans could be really competitive in promoting their idols. However, comparing the fandoms or idol groups could be harmful if the fans use social media to express their thoughts. Some fans use social media to write about their opinion stating their favourites are better than the other idols, and that definitely will bring flame to begin a fan war. For this stage, there are also two groups of fans found in this study which are fans who compare the fandoms and fans who do not compare the fandoms. 66.67% of the participants admitted to comparing the fans because, as fandom members, they felt competitive, and the feeling of wanting to be on top was strong enough to make them do anything for the idols and the fandom. However, 33.33% of the participants stated that they did not compare the fandoms as they claimed that every

idol group is special on its own and attracts a certain kind of crowd towards their fandom. They prefer to respect other fandoms as people are subject to individual preferences.

AREAS OF FANDOM

In K-pop, communication and connection between people are considered important as they can influence and attract more fans to join the fandom. The first area of fandom is communication, and there are four factors found in this study on how the participants can get involved in K-pop. Fans are much more active than ordinary media consumers in that they try to transform their experiences of interpreting a text into a sharing culture where other members of the fan community are welcomed to participate (Zhang, 2011). Fandoms are not built in a day, fandoms are built due to the connection between people all around the world, and the process of knowledge and information dissemination are taken into account as well. There are limited and insufficient sources of K-pop news and updates on television, so the fans decided to have themselves updated with K-pop news through the internet as they can browse anything they want to know. The first factor found is peer influence which topped the responses with 43.33%. Some participants stated that friends introduced them to K-pop, and it attracted them to be involved. People spend most of their youth with friends that they met in school, and what they do in school could be a great impact on their daily lives. Growing up could be a complex thing for teenagers. However, finding an interest or hobby with friends could help a lot to ease the process. The second highest factor is media, with 36.67%. Media plays an important bridge in connecting K-pop with the fans as it portrays the process and the art of K-pop consistently. These two major factors were often cited in any K-pop discussions as the reasons for its popularity and influence. The third highest factor, which made up 13.33% of responses, is family members. This is not surprising since family members who are K-pop fans can easily influence each other due to their close proximity to each other, especially among Asians. Last but not least, the fourth factor was a combination of both media and peer influence. The response was given by 6.67% of the participants. This proves that interactions with people they are close to and the information provided by the media are the main factors in influencing the participants into K-pop. Fans are not only good at finding the information they need, but they often share found data with others, in particular new fans, but also with broader groups if their opinion and sources become respected; in such a situation, they can become information gatekeepers (Trzcinka, 2018).

The next area is identification, where this study discovered two information sources that the fandom members use to get themselves updated. The first one is social media, the dominant source, with a total of 70% of the participants using it. Fandom members are active social media users who use social media like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to express their opinion about K-pop. Turning on notifications means that if the account that we choose to get notified when they post a tweet, there will be a notification straight to the phone or the laptop. This way, the fans will be updated seconds after the news gets posted. Fans also use social media to search for information and update about K-pop as there is also K-pop news account on social media such as @Allkpop and @soompi. The remaining 30% of the participants mentioned that they used both social media and web browsers to get updates about K-pop. The information on social media could be insufficient for some K-pop fans, so they searched for more information using various internet browsers.

The last area of fandom used to analyse the data is organisational and civic power. Two groups of fans are identified, and they are fans who have been involved in fan wars and fans who

have never been involved in fan wars. Twitter is one of the recognised platforms for the fans or fandom to use in spreading the news or sharing their thoughts with the other members of the fandom. Fandom is an important mediating factor in the relationships between fans and the object fans, their fanaticism, and between individual fans themselves (Atiqah Abd. Rahim, 2019). Fandom is an online organisation that connects fans all around the world intending to achieve their goals of rooting and promoting K-pop idols. 70% of the participants admitted that they used to get involved in fan wars mostly because they wanted to protect their idols' names and reputations. Fans claimed that they put their trust in the idols and that any wrong accusations about the idols would be censured and criticised. Involving in fandom wars was a cyber activity using their online and fandom identity; hence, they could not be identified personally. It made them believe that their safety is guarded in the real world. The other 30% of the participants stated that they were never involved in fan wars because they believed that the acts of bickering and arguing over K-pop matters were childish and immature regardless of it being online and their real selves being unidentified. Fan wars could bring harm to the fans of K-pop and the idols because they could jeopardise K-pop's popularity and support. Fans use social media to express their judgement and point of view, sometimes oblivious to or purposely ignoring other users' feelings and emotions. Provoking other fandoms could also lead to stress and other ill feelings among the fans. This may affect the joy of admiring and favouring the art of K-pop which is escapism and a way to destress from their real-life experiences.

CONCLUSION

The connection of the fandom members is seen as an important factor in keeping their positions in the fandom so they would feel accepted in the group. Most K-pop fans adopt the characteristics of their fandom group for social networking and their individual personal well-being. For example, being a fandom member is escapism and a way of destressing. Peers, family members, and the media are the main influential factors that draw the members into the K-pop world. This research also reveals that fandom members are active in fandom activities, and fan war is one of the activities justified as defence and protective measures of the group. It also discloses the fact that even though fan war is necessary when called for, fans or fandom members are aware that it is an activity that could cause more harm than good to them, their idols, and the internet community. However, as their online social identity is generalised to the fandom's identity, it will take a strong concerted realisation to reduce cyber hostility through fandom wars.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will reach K-pop enthusiasts and have the potential, to deliver the message that fan wars could be harmful and could lead to cyberbullying. This owes to the fact that most of the fans shared information without checking the source of the news, and some fans posted malignant twisted information on social media just to provoke other fandoms. The cases of cyberbullying are widespread these days, and it affects the emotion of the people using the internet and social networks. Cyberbullying could lead to mental health issues such as depression and being socially withdrawn. Hence, the writers hope the findings of this research will raise such awareness among the existing and new K-pop fans and perhaps put a halt to this socially and psychologically harmful fandom activity.

This study has employed the Social Identity Theory and Four Areas of Fandom in analysing the social identity of the K-pop fandom on Twitter and the areas of fandom among K-pop fandom on Twitter as well. The mentioned theory and concept were used to analyse the interviews with K-

pop fans on Twitter. The specific reasons and intentions for provoking and prompting on Twitter by some K-pop fans are still unknown. When the fans were interviewed, all agreed that the activity, particularly fandom war, caused more harm than good to the fandom and their idols. Further studies could investigate the occurrences and reasons for linguistically hostile and harmful remarks among fandoms in social media. Detail enquiries on this sociolinguistic issue could be explored through various research methods and theoretical constructs that may provide new insights into the nature of K-pop fandoms' identity and linguistic behaviours.

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