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K-Pop fan solidarity in Indonesian social discourse: Activism and power resistance

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ABSTRACT

Fandom activism refers to the ways fans engage with social, cultural, and political issues that affect their daily lives. Over time, social media has reshaped fan activism by altering fans' roles within the entertainment industry and amplifying their presence in society, including in Indonesia. Using digital ethnography, this study focuses on key moments in the K-pop fandom in Indonesia, such as the DAY6 and ELF conflicts with a concert promoter and the protest against the 12% VAT increase. This study demonstrates how fandom activism serves as a framework for resisting dominant powers, overcoming the negative stigma of a patriarchal society, and adapting to evolving patterns of activism across generations. These findings highlight the complex interplay between the internal and external dynamics that shape K-pop fan activism in Indonesia. Fans continually renegotiate their identities and roles within fan communities and society at large.

Keywords: fan activism; Indonesian K-pop fans; intimacy; digital ethnography; renegotiating identities; transnational proximity

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1. INTRODUCTION

Amalia N. in her article, “‘Lightstick’ and Politics: The Power of K-pop Fandoms to Mobilize the Masses and Voice Resistance,” published in *The Conversation*, [Andini \(2025\)](#) demonstrates that K-pop fandoms have become influential socio-political actors. An example of how fandoms organized collective action and voiced resistance is the public protests leading to the impeachment of Yoon by the South Korean Parliament on December 14, 2024. Protesters carried and waved K-pop lightsticks during these demonstrations, which fans usually use at concerts. These lightsticks have become a visible symbol of solidarity. Fans' practices in this sense are projecting resistance toward the authorities through the use of the colorful lights from multiple fandoms, along with K-pop songs such as Girls' Generation's “Into the New World.” In Indonesia, K-Pop fans start to show their identity as part of the K-Pop fandom while joining mass protests against the government or raising funds for disaster victims. The normalization of hashtag activism by fandom accounts and symbols in protest spaces reflects the growing political visibility of Indonesian K-pop fandoms in recent years.

This phenomenon illustrates that fan activism can develop when fandom values intersect with fans' sociopolitical contexts. K-pop fans embody this convergence particularly well in their online activities. Fan communities function as alternative social spaces that foster communication, belonging, and collective identity through shared engagement with popular culture. Over time, these communities have expanded their activities beyond entertainment, increasingly confronting social issues and converting participatory practices into civic and political engagement that transcends fan boundaries.

In the practice of K-pop fandom globally and in Indonesia, fans use social media to renegotiate fan positioning in the structure of the entertainment industry ([Lee, 2015](#)). Fans utilize social media to redefine their role in the entertainment industry while monitoring parties that may potentially harm their idols or exploit the fandom. Social media serves as a platform for fans to engage with and address local and global issues affecting both their idols and sustainability of the fandom. This form of activism demonstrates fans' financial power and cultural capital while simultaneously merging participatory culture with community engagement ([Lu, 2024](#)).

Previous research reflects the ambiguity of fan activism as a political force. [Jenkins \(2012\)](#) describes fan activism as a form of political and non-political participation within fan culture, which reflects the collective interests of fans. Fan communities engage in activism and are often regarded as participatory popular cultures. Fan activism is commonly associated with fans lobbying to ensure that a program still runs, to maintain the continuity of a program, or to influence outcomes related to its content ([Brough & Shresthova, 2012](#)), how minorities are represented, particularly those concerning race and gender ([Brough & Shresthova, 2012](#)), or the socialization of social themes in a program's content ([Brough & Shresthova, 2012](#)). On the other hand, Earl and Kimport (in [Brough & Shresthova, 2012](#)) consider fan activism rare and have received little attention from social movement scholars because it is not seen as a mixture of political and cultural interests but rather as actions that resemble political activism but are actually aimed at non-political goals. We would argue that this argument cannot be used as a basis for analyzing fan activism, especially in Indonesia, in recent years. This is because fans are increasingly realizing that the position of fandom extends beyond idols to encompass their society, where political conditions can impact the freedom of fandom activities.

In Indonesia, K-Pop fans, as a marginalized group in a patriarchal society, are beginning to recognize the pressures they face and the potential collective power they wield. Fan activism is not only related to participation in popular culture but also becomes a space for resistance against dominant authorities. This awareness has led to the formation of resistance forums that support fan activism and social resilience. This study examines the concept of fan activism in relation to the dynamics faced by Indonesian K-pop fans in a social and political context. Furthermore, this article discusses how fan activism in Indonesia is utilized to maintain the sustainability of idols and advocate for the rights of fans. The analysis first explores how fans resist the dominance of certain authorities to support their idols' sustainability and assert their rights. Second, it examines how active involvement in social and political activism is perceived within a patriarchal context. Third, it highlights how activism patterns vary between

different generations of idol fans. Furthermore, this study offers a critical perspective on Indonesian K-pop fan activism by showing that fans from different idol generations employ different modes of activism. It also examines imitation in protest practices and situates Indonesian K-pop fans as a marginalized group shaped by the feminization of fandom. By highlighting these issues, this study contributes to a better understanding of fan activism in the Indonesian context.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research begins with an understanding of fan activism, grounded in the concept of cyberactivism, related to the use of social media for political and social change (Joyce, 2010). Ethnography, as a tool for studying how human groups shape and maintain specific cultures, will be applied as a data collection method in this study. Ethnographic research is used to understand cultural contexts that exist in everyday life and in the digital or virtual world (Boellstorff et al., 2024). Therefore, this study employs digital ethnography as the primary data source from fans' digital practices.

To answer the questions in the research formulation, several activism events were studied. First, the conflict between DAY6 (MyDay) fans and concert promoters regarding the 3rd World Tour Forever Young concert on May 3rd, 2025; second, the conflict between Super Junior (ELF) fans and concert promoters regarding the Super Show 9 concert on September 17, 2022; and third, the protest against the increase in Value Added Tax (VAT) to 12% in December 2024. Notably, there is a generational difference between Super Junior and DAY6, where Super Junior is a second-generation idol and DAY6 is a third-generation idol.

Data collection from both online and offline sites is necessary because understanding the research process is difficult if virtual space is used as the sole data source (Hine, 2017). Observations in research are typically based on research objectives and questions, where researchers observe the setting, participants, activities, interactions, and ongoing conversations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As this study emphasized qualitative data collection, the researchers participated in the participants' activities, observing their subjective perspectives. The data from offline sites were taken from both Super Junior's Super Show 9 concert on September 17, 2022, at ICE BSD Jakarta and DAY6's 3rd World Tour Forever Young concert on May 3, 2025, at Stadion Madya GBK Jakarta.

In addition to data from offline fieldwork, digital data were collected from Twitter or X, the social media platform most frequently used by K-pop fans to interact with other fans, idols, and in relation to community activism. Data were mainly taken from @elfindonesiacom and @mydayberserikat, including fans' personal accounts that interacted with both accounts related to the concerned issues. @elfindonesiacom was selected because of its active engagement in collaborations with concert promoters to organize fan projects during idols' visits to Indonesia and its direct involvement in disputes with these promoters. Meanwhile, @mydayberserikat was selected because of its active role in advocating for the rights of other fans when concert promoters engaged in unfair practices. Data was captured using screenshots, which is a crucial aspect of the data collection stage (Boellstorff et al., 2012). Data captured through screenshots and participatory observations were combined in field notes and then sorted and categorized into functions and values for the analysis. The analysis was conducted in accordance with the theories and approaches to be applied to each group, aiming to obtain a clear picture and answers to the questions that arise from the formulation of the research problem.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research findings reveal the various strategies employed by K-pop fans in Indonesia to resist oppression, exploitation, and violations of their rights by the dominant party. Digital activism, including fan activism, has reconstructed Indonesia's political landscape, transforming it from a marginal activity to a central arena driven by young people's participation (Nugroho, 2025). Tulloch and Jenkins (in Jenkins, 2012) refer to fans as a powerless elite, who, although unable to influence the most influential decisions

regarding their cultural activities, possess the discursive power to expand their voices beyond fandom, forming alliances with other groups and thereby increasing their persuasive power.

3.1. The Strategy of “Virali” (Make Something Viral) to Negotiate Power: Fans VS Concert Promoters

The findings show the ongoing dynamics of power relations between fans and industry actors in the digital realm, including disputes between K-pop fans and concert promoters. This is a common occurrence, especially since the pandemic, when K-pop concerts have been held almost every week in Indonesia. Various problems often arise before concert announcements are released. Protests can occur due to unsatisfactory venues, disappointing seating arrangements, complicated or rejected fan projects, poor ticketing systems with prices significantly higher than those in other countries, and rampant ticket scalping. When promoters are perceived as prioritizing profit over the experience and safety of their audiences, fans mobilize collectively to voice their protests using social media as a platform to fight for justice.

The first form of resistance that fans engage in is reporting injustices they experience with their idols or their agencies. Here, fans mention the idol's personal account and the agency's official account along with a pre-agreed hashtag, as the chance of getting noticed is greater if the hashtag used becomes a trending topic. The same thing happened with the slow refund of concert fees by the promoter who brought DAY6 to the stage on May 3, 2025. One fan posted her protest on X:

THIS IS WHAT THE PROMOTER DIDN'T SHOW YOU @jypnation @DAY6official @LiveNation @LiveNationKpop

FANS LEFT OUTSIDE THE VENUE. NO REFUND AFTER THE CONCERT WAS MOVED FROM JIS TO MADYA. M***** STILL OWES AROUND ₩330,000,000 TO 1,900 FANS — AND COUNTING.

A CONCERT SHOULD NOT BE THIS STRESSFUL. WE RESPECT OUR IDOLS, OUR MUSICIANS. RESPECT US TOO. LISTEN TO US. DON'T STAY SILENT.

#DAY6inJakarta #DAY6_3RD_WORLDTOUR_Jakarta #DAY6_3RD_WORLDTOUR #M*****_NOT_Professional #JusticeForMy DayINA #My DayTagihM*****

(Source: X <https://x.com/switjchaos/status/1918676172298432881>) (Switjchaos, 2025)

These tweets reflect how fans attempt to reverse their subordinate position by forcing industry actors to listen to and publicly respond to their concerns. In this context, social media platforms such as Twitter and X serve as digital public spaces where fans can build solidarity and amplify their collective voices.

In addition to hashtag mentions, fans sometimes directly report mistreatment through comments they post during live broadcasts after concerts. To foster intimacy with fans, idols often hold live broadcasts on their personal social media accounts such as Instagram, YouTube, or Weverse. These live broadcasts are often held before or after concerts, allowing fans who have watched the concerts to interact and foster communication with those who did not attend.

On this occasion, fans use the opportunity to report irregularities related to concert promoters through the platform. This is intended to quickly reach idols who may have been previously less informed about the cases. However, the risk of these messages going unread remains due to the numerous comments that typically appear during the idols' live broadcasts. Furthermore, fans send direct messages to idols' and their agencies' social media accounts or email them. For example, during the chaos surrounding ticket sales for the 2024 Seventeen concert, fans urged Seventeen's agency through the paid app Weverse to stop using the promoter for future concerts (Tersianinta, 2025). In a fan-idol relationship that is typically heavily mediated by agencies and industry protocols, this moment serves as a way for fans to connect directly with their idols, as they feel their voices are more likely to be heard and responded to by them. In conclusion, fans position themselves as crucial actors in the continued success of their idol.

Second, grassroots resistance to the capitalist power wielded by concert promoters is carried out through social media bullying. Fans use agreed-upon hashtags to make their unpleasant treatment viral.

They continued to upload, retweet, and like similar posts until they reached trending topics on social media platforms such as X or Twitter to obtain the desired response. Observations show that when conflicts arise regarding DAY6 concerts, promoters not only suddenly change the concert location but also relocate fans to seating areas that do not match the ones they originally purchased. Because of this, some fans even demand a refund option for fans who decide to cancel attending the concert because it no longer meets their expectations.

Along with the rise of the hashtags #DAY6inJakarta and #DAY6_3RD_WORLDTOUR_Jakarta, the hashtags #*****_NOT_PROfessional and #JusticeForMyDayINA were also attached to each post. In addition, fans agreed to wear black through social media. This color, which symbolizes mourning, was used in contrast to the concert promoter's recommended attire colors, such as dark teal, light mint, and bright turquoise. Although this agreement was made for a special group of fans who would attend the concert, many fans still wore costumes as recommended by the promoter. Wearing black during this concert is an example of the third type of fan resistance, namely a symbolic protest carried out at the concert venue during the event. See [Figure 1](#)



Figure 1. The atmosphere of the queue to exchange DAY6 concert tickets, May 3, 2025

Source: researchers' documentation

Another observation was made at Super Junior's concert, Super Show 9, in Indonesia in September 2022. From the beginning, there was a tug-of-war over permission for a project planned by one of the ELF fandoms. The project aimed to distribute handbanners to fans attending the concert, which would be held aloft during certain songs as a gesture of appreciation for the idols' work. Ultimately, the fanbase project was rejected, and the concert promoter became the party that carried out the project by providing fan banners. Ironically, the fan banners that fans should have prepared were taken over by the promoter for their own capitalist agenda. The protests were sparked when the promoter held a project that fans considered plagiarism of the ideas and designs of the rejected fanbase project. At the end of the concert, many fan banners were scattered on the ground after being trampled by the audience as they left the venue. One fan tweet on X even revealed that the handbanners were used as footwear by fans. This can be seen as an act of protest against the promoter's decision, considering that fans usually take home the fan banners they receive at the concert venue as memorabilia.

A similar incident occurred at the DAY6 concert in May 2025. A fan project, in the form of a hand banner and video, prepared by fans, was rejected after a lengthy communication process. Instead, the promoter became the authority that prepared the hand banner and video project that was displayed at the concert. In addition to the fan project issue, the change in concert location, expired snacks, and the promoter's disregard for fans' voices led to more confrontational fan actions during the concert. During the concert, instead of shouting chants as they should, fans shouted protests such as "***** disband!" and

“not from us!” to prohibit their idols from using the hand banner prepared by the promoter during the group photo session.

The two examples above demonstrate the differences in protest patterns among second- and third-generation K-pop fans in Indonesia. ELF, as second-generation idol fans, and other second-generation fandoms, do not protest in a massive, structured manner on social media or openly at concert venues. High ticket prices, unclear ticket sales for specific seating areas, disproportionate membership benefits, unjustified rejection of fan projects, and, most recently, concert promoters’ interference in separate fanbase exhibitions have long been topics of fan protest. However, discussions about the arbitrariness of promoters have mainly been held within closed spaces, such as WhatsApp fan groups accessible only to paid members. Social media at the time focused on calls for order during concerts and preparations for mini exhibitions held concurrently with the concerts.

Meanwhile, fans of third-generation idols have been more open in voicing their protests on social media. They have been actively and systematically posting about the issues they have encountered with concert promoters on both their fanbase and personal accounts. This not only gathers support but also encourages other fans to consider solutions to their problems and serves as a warning to those who have not yet purchased concert tickets to exercise caution.

Another problem faced by second-generation K-pop fans is the lack of solidarity between fandoms. When ELF’s raise issues they face on social media, instead of receiving support, they receive horizontal pressure from other fandoms. These fandoms accuse ELF’s of causing their problems because of their own lack of discipline. They also consider ELF’s ungrateful for the promoter bringing their idols to Indonesia. At that time, concert promoters were still seen as the protagonists who had the power to bring fans together with their idols. One ELF posted a complaint regarding this case on May 18, 2025, “hehe.. hehehe 😊 elf 'argued' with ***** about the ss9 project before, it even made it onto the idntimes/kompas news portal (cmiiw). It was even a big deal at the base. But what? Other fandoms didn't care about ELF. So, the news died down after the concert.” It was due to the lack of support and collaboration between fandoms that led to a lack of exposure on social media, and these issues quickly faded after the concert.

This differs from the experience of fans of third-generation idols. My Day’s success in protesting was supported by the strength of digital communities and the involvement of collective fan accounts. One such community was the formation of a community on the X platform "DAY6 WORLD TOUR IN INDONESIA" with 28.4 thousand fans. This community was created to share all information related to the DAY6 concert, where fans shared details about the concert, including refunds, freebie distribution, concert organization complaints, and even photos and videos taken at the event. Accounts such as @mydayberserikat also fought for refunds and regularly monitored and shared information on their progress. Fans collaborated to support the smooth operation of this effort by voluntarily filling out forms provided by this account online and providing the required information. See Figure 2

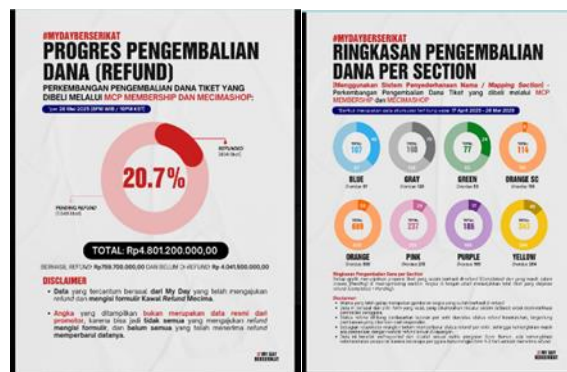


Figure 2. Refund progress data uploaded by the @mydayberserikat account on platform X May 26, 2025

Source: <https://x.com/MyDayberserikat/status/1927044165512183825>

Thus, the differences in handling problems between concert promoters and second and third-generation idol fans lie in the use of social media for digital communities and the strength of solidarity between fandoms. The lack of visibility on social media and horizontal support among fans, particularly among second-generation idol fans, prevented them from challenging the dominance of concert promoters. On the other hand, the massive use of social media, solidarity from different fandoms, and collaboration on collective fan accounts gave third-generation idol fans a bargaining position. These factors became part of the hierarchical contestation held by concert promoters. They were even able to pressure the National Consumer Protection Agency (BPKN RI) to intervene in the issue of fan refunds. With the help of collective fan accounts, they consolidated their efforts to respond to the promoters' summons issued to some fans without acceding to their demands. This result also shows how the differences in using social media between generations also affects their manners and values in using the social media itself.

This shift in fan solidarity manifests as collaboration between fandoms. While this has not eliminated fan wars on social media, when one fan group experiences difficulties, other fandoms step in to provide support. In addition to My Day, Carat, who was due to enjoy Seventeen's concert in 2024, also had an unpleasant experience. Several issues, including an unfair ticket sales system, confusing ticket exchange system, and hazardous ticket exchange area, prompted other fandoms to intervene. Several fandoms, such as ELF, Blink, and Exo-L, have also provided support and assistance to the stranded Carat and My Day, such as donating food and uploading videos of their protests. This, coupled with the massive hashtags that soared on social media, made this conflict a hot topic of discussion on various online news portals.

Adapting the concept of collaborative survival by [Tsing \(2015\)](#), it can be interpreted that, in this event, fans from different fandoms formed a collaborative survival network. Collaborative survival here embodies the formation of coexistence between fandoms in the face of disruptions to both their survival and their well-being as citizens. This collaborative survival also represents the collapse of the hegemony of the dominant party, in this case, the concert promoter, over the fandom as a marginalized party. Collaborative survival, carried out between fandoms to maintain their continuity, according to [Tsing \(2015\)](#), requires a process of working beyond differences and naturally gives rise to the exchange and blending of ideas. Each intersection, interaction, and collaboration between fandoms shifts the established system within a fandom, creating a space for positive communication with other fandoms. This is a process of resilience as a means of survival and resistance to pressures from the dominant party.

Without collaborative survival, the financial exploitation of fans and their idols' intimacy without providing commensurate services in return will continue, as has been the case for years. This horizontal collaboration between fandoms has the potential to encourage fans to critically engage as active participants in the consumption of popular culture. Indirectly, this collaboration also influences the culture fostered within fandoms.

3.2. Imitation in Protests against the 12% VAT Policy and Responses to Patriarchal Structures

In recent years, even before the pandemic, Indonesian K-Pop fans have been active in various political activism campaigns related to government policies and humanitarian tragedies. Dayan (in [Brough & Shresthova, 2012](#)) argues that for audiences to transform into a public, they need to appear openly in public spaces, express their affiliation with certain issues, and establish themselves as a collective entity. In this regard, K-Pop fans are shifting from mere audiences to publics by displaying a collective identity in public spaces. This identity is not merely constructed as part of fandom, but more significantly, formed through engagement with real-world social issues.

[Maher \(2022\)](#) reveals how fans within fandoms engage with participatory politics in several ways. First, they use fictional works such as fanfictions to explore alternative political, social, and technological systems, as a medium by inserting values to be conveyed. This aims to shape specific political ideas and beliefs. Second, fans within fandoms provide a non-political pathway to civic and political participation, with many integrating elements of civic engagement into fandom culture. One such way is by promoting hashtags with political activism nuances through fandom accounts.

This is evident in their participation in raising the hashtags #MosiTidakPercaya and #TolakOmnibusLaw, which became global trending topics in 2020 (Kurniawan et al, 2022). Another example is the rise of the hashtags #KawalPustusMK #TolakPilkadaAkal2an #TolakPolitikDinasti on August 21, 2024, where one of the proponents was a large K-pop fanbase account in Indonesia. The hashtags were uploaded with an image of Pancasila on a blue background, accompanied by the words "Emergency Warning". The rise of these hashtags was a reaction that emerged following indications that the law regarding the age limit for Pilkada participants would be changed, which was suspected to benefit certain parties. In addition to promoting hashtags, these K-pop fanbase accounts also halted all activities, such as hype or hashtagging their idols' comebacks, in order to focus on achieving their goal of pressuring the Constitutional Court. These accounts announced and appealed to their followers to temporarily refrain from posting any content related to their idols and focus on their protests until their demands were met.

A different protest took place in December 2024. Following the decision to increase VAT (Value Added Tax) to 12% as of January 1, 2025, various elements of society staged large-scale protests, including K-pop fans. These protests, conducted both online on social media and offline, raised multiple narratives about the rising prices of essential goods and services. However, these increases were primarily discussed for luxury or premium goods, given that the definition of premium in this context remains unclear.

The problematic aspect of this street action is the imitation process carried out by Indonesian K-pop fans of the protest action conducted by Korean K-pop fans in early December 2024. In this action, K-pop fans, along with the parliament and other Korean citizens, responded to the declaration of martial law by the South Korean president at the time, Yoon Suk-yeol. At that time, they not only used lightsticks but also played and sang their idol songs, such as "Crooked" (G-Dragon), "Whiplash" (AESPA), "Into the New World" (SNSD), "The First Snow" (EXO), "Future Perfect" (ENHYPEN), and "Fire" (BTS). These songs were chosen because their meanings were considered to represent what they were fighting for or describe the country's condition at that time.

This type of protest culture has been practiced in South Korea since the 1980s and 1990s, where demonstrators played traditional Korean musical instruments and sang traditional songs to encourage one another (kim, 2017). This peaceful action is known as a candlelight protest, where demonstrators use candles as a symbol of resistance. South Korean K-pop fans, who are primarily women, then use their own lightsticks to replace candles, not only to express their identity as fans but also to demonstrate how fandom activities can be leveraged in protest actions (kim, 2017).

This peaceful action was then imitated by Indonesian K-Pop fans regarding the 12% VAT issue, which occurred not long after the protests against the announcement of martial law by President Yoon Suk-yeol. First initiated by the X account @humaniesproject to bring their respective fandom lightsticks in the protest, the fans coordinated with each other to gather at a certain point and use their lightsticks as proof of their respective fandom's concern for national issues. @humaniesproject itself is a social movement account that was initially formed by several K-Pop fans who, through their kpopfication, supported one of the presidential candidates in the 2024 presidential election. After the election ended, @humaniesproject remained active in activities related to humanity, social inclusion, and politics, and was independent of any fandom (Figure 3) (Humanies Project, 2024).



Figure 3. Left: A demonstration invitation with lightsticks. Right: Fans of various fandoms gather for a demonstration with their respective lightsticks

Source: X. Left: <https://x.com/humaniesproyek/status/1869021495441371519>
 Right: <https://x.com/humaniesproyek/status/1869674356596768855>

During this demonstration, several K-pop fandom accounts and individual fans even exchanged banner designs not only to identify themselves as K-pop fans but also to avoid accusations of being paid protesters. Some fanbases also opened fundraisers to support this protest, such as the NCT fanbase account @nctzenhumanity, which collaborated with @humaniesproject to provide ambulances and health posts at the location. See Figure 4

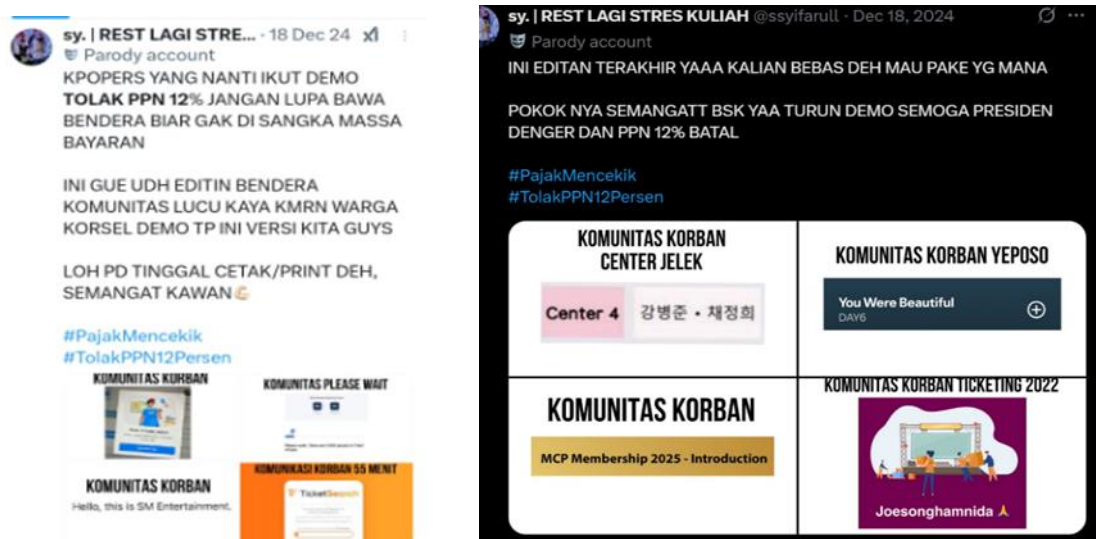


Figure 4. Sharing community flag designs via social media

Source: X <https://x.com/ssyifarull/status/1869173466689421508> (ssyifarull, 2025)

Protest posts by K-pop fans on social media show how fans from different generations of idols highlight various issues in response to the side effects of the 12% VAT increase. Fans of second-generation idols, such as ELF, raise concerns about Indonesia's highest VAT in ASEAN, while it has the fifth-lowest minimum wage in the world. Meanwhile, fans of the next generation, such as Carat and EXO-L, raise concerns about the impact of the VAT increase on concert tickets, merchandise, Spotify, and YouTube Premium, in addition to rising prices of basic goods.

This imitation of Korean K-pop fan activism by Indonesian fans is fueled by transnational proximity, which emphasizes similar sociocultural experiences within a capitalist society, such as social inequality, youth culture, and captivating choreography (Jin, 2023). Compared to cultural proximity, which emphasizes similarities or proximity in language, values, and other cultural backgrounds, transnational proximity highlights the closeness of young generations globally who experience similar sociocultural issues. In this case, fans in both countries experience gender inequality in similar patriarchal environments and are experiencing turmoil that threatens their social and economic lives. See Figure 5



Figure 5. Illustration of a protest action against 12% VAT by fans, guarded by hundreds of security personnel

Source: X, <https://x.com/joonsickle/status/1869709984780734962>

According to Tambunan (2013), the acceptance of East Asian popular culture, specifically South Korean culture, by Indonesian society is based on three factors: a sense of sharedness, passion or aspiration, and appropriation. These three categories do not contradict the concept of transnational proximity about the formation of closeness between Indonesian and South Korean K-pop fans, especially in the context of fan activism. The sense of sharedness, in which Indonesian fans identify elements that are familiar with what they face daily, is formed from the feeling of being part of the same fandom. This is also related to the second factor, passion or aspiration. Besides the fact that they have an intimate bond with the same idol, in the context of political activism, they can also relate how they raise activism issues similar to what South Korean K-pop fans have voiced some time ago.

Furthermore, Brough & Shresthova (2012) revealed that fans in fandoms can be organized to touch on real-world issues, both political and non-political, through their use and involvement with popular culture content. The synergy between the two elements is demonstrated by the distinctive labeling of each fandom's name, such as the Green Grass Alliance by NCTzen, accompanied by criticism and protests that have become synonymous with their fan activism. One example is ENGENE, where ENHYPEN fans who feel dissatisfied with their agency use the "Beliftlab Misuhin Community Team" on the banners they carry. This writing reflects their protest reaction, as they feel Lab,Belift been ENHYPEN's agency, has always disadvantaged them. Other examples are "YG Entertainment Victims Community" by Teume as a TREASURE fan, "Paguyuban Korban Konser Cancel Belum Dapat Refund" which satirizes concert promoters, and "Community of Victims of the 15% Concert Tax".

However, fans' involvement in political activism does not necessarily free them from the negative stereotypes they have endured. Numerous negative comments have been posted on social media posts about these fans' actions. Two issues stand out among these negative comments. First, they criticize the fans' imitation of the demonstration as shameful and say that singing idol songs is inappropriate. Second, they assume K-pop fans only care about the rising prices of K-pop-related goods, such as merchandise,

albums, or concert tickets. Nevertheless, this phenomenon is unsurprising given that negative perceptions of K-pop fandom persist across multiple national contexts. For example in Poland, K-pop has become entangled in political discourse and is frequently framed as being associated with left-wing ideologies perceived as threatening traditional family values (Trzcińska, 2020). Meanwhile, K-pop fans in Latin America have been subjected to negative treatment (Min et al., 2019; Yoon & Garcia, 2024) and marginalized through racism and gendered stereotypes that associate K-pop with femininity (Trzcińska, 2020; Yoon & Garcia, 2024).

In Indonesia, several factors contributed to these negative responses. First, it demonstrates that some members of the public still do not understand how popular culture can serve as a vehicle or medium for action on local issues. Second, K-Pop has long been perceived as synonymous with a group of female fans who care only about their idols and forget their cultural roots. This perception also positions K-Pop as a feminine and marginalized popular culture within patriarchal Indonesian society. Membership in a K-Pop fandom is viewed as inferior due to its perceived cultural preferences, compared to being a sports fan or a rapper (Harrington and Bielby; Hills; Wilson, in Maher, 2022). This demonstrates how perceptions and stigmas regarding gender and fandom, as portrayed in the media (Silfia & Kurniawan, 2022), influence and shape public perceptions of the K-pop fan community. This factor has led to the negative stigma from the public when K-pop fans openly displayed their identities during this demonstration. They are considered a distinct entity, especially when they utilize their idol songs and lightsticks as symbols, which are perceived as foreign in Indonesia's protest culture.

However, instead of diminishing their actions, fans have not only made fandom a space for fan activism but also a space for gender affirmation and exploration. They no longer have to be included in what (Maher, 2022) calls a masculine space that reduces the visibility of their gender identity. They no longer join and mingle with other elements of society, and show even a fragment of their identity as fans. What is happening here is how female fans who have been marginalized claim what Budiman & Budianta (2023) call the position of women in the public and political sphere, which was previously limited only to the domestic sphere through social construction. They openly utilize the banner of fandom in their involvement in activism in Indonesia, demonstrating that behind this identity, they remain part of the Indonesian nation that cares about the socio-political issues surrounding them.

4. CONCLUSION

Since before the pandemic, K-pop fans have been actively involved in various actions related to power relations, including internal fandom issues and political issues in Indonesia. The findings of this study emphasize the involvement of K-pop fans in political activism in Indonesia, where they not only demand their rights as fans and Indonesian citizens but also criticize policies that demonstrate a disregard for the social conditions of their surrounding communities.

Expressions of solidarity and participation in popular culture by K-pop fans in Indonesia can take the form of involvement in various actions, including digital political actions such as clicktivism. For matters related to idols and power relations, clicktivism is the most effective activism tool for bringing fans' voices to the surface and being heard by their idols or other relevant parties. This participation is carried out both for the survival of idols and for the interests of fans, both personal and collective. In relation to Indonesian social discourse, resistance is carried out to counter oppression, exploitation, and violations of fans' rights by dominant parties. Resistance is not only carried out against parties concerned with fan rights, such as concert promoters. Resistance is also carried out when there is inequality in society, for example, in the case of the increase in VAT to 12%.

Fuelled by a sense of loyalty and intimacy, the complexity of Indonesian K-pop fan activism stems not only from its interconnectedness with the fandom's internal conditions but also from its relationships with external parties. Along the way, fans are reshaping their roles in the entertainment industry and addressing local and global issues through social media. The use of social media has not only shifted the digital fan community system but also reconstructed collaborative survival across fandoms. Collaborative survival extends beyond fans within the same fandom. The more widespread use of social media, the

greater the possibility of collaboration across fandoms in specific activism. In confronting external threats, strategic collaboration in the form of collaborative survival across fandom boundaries is essential. The reason is, the absence of unified resistance enables those in power to systematically target fandoms sequentially, making today's victimization of one fandom tomorrow's reality for another. Moreover, this study also demonstrates how women, through fandoms considered feminine, must carve out their own space through fan roles and activism within a society that tends to be patriarchal. Some of the examples are participating in broader social-politics movements, creating digital safe spaces or forums where female fans may discuss mental health and provide mutual emotional support, and many others. This study also shows how the marginalized fandom is quite effective in mobilization, rapid coordination mechanisms, and sustained collective action. Instead of dismissing them, the government or the society may collaborate with them for social causes like disaster relief, educational access, anti-corruption campaigns, or putting their existing capacity to work for the benefit of the society.

However, this study also has limitations. First, the online data was limited to X (Twitter), which is seen as the most used platform for K-Pop fan activism but may not represent all K-pop fans. Future research should use more social media platforms or multi-platform sampling to gain wider data or generations. Second, this study was limited to one idol group for each generation. Future studies should incorporate multiple groups to more comprehensively examine intergenerational variations in activist practices.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study design.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was not obtained for this study.

Author Contributions

NLN contributed to the conceptualization of the study, data collection through digital ethnography, analysis of fandom activism cases, and drafting of the manuscript. MB contributed to the theoretical framework development, critical analysis of cultural and social contexts, and substantive review of the manuscript. SMGT contributed to data interpretation, refinement of the discussion on activism and identity negotiation, and editorial revision of the manuscript.

Disclosure Statement

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Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author for privacy reasons.

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