

## PHENOMENON OF FANDOM WAR IN K-POP COMMUNITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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**Abstract.** This research aims to discuss the phenomenon of fan wars between fans of a K-pop group and fans of other K-pop groups. Furthermore, it explores the reasons and purposes of this incident among K-pop fans, using the observation method based on Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding theory. This research will analyze several fan war cases that occurred some time ago. The results of this study indicate that the fan war phenomenon has several ways, like replying to each other's comments on social media using insulting and harsh words commonly known as flaming, making tweets that bring down idols from other fans, and making videos containing hoax news. The interference of toxic fans from each fandom is the reason this fan war can happen, and the selfish nature of each fan who wants to show their prowess to other fans is their main goal. Ultimately, this phenomenon is just a form of selfishness from every fan toward their idol.

**Keywords :** fans, fanwar, K-pop, social media

**Abstrak.** Penelitian ini berfokus pada pembahasan mengenai peristiwa terjadi fanwar antara fans dari sebuah grup kpop dengan fans dari grup kpop lain. Lebih dalam lagi, penelitian ini akan menggali alasan serta tujuan dari terjadinya peristiwa tersebut diantara para fans kpop. Dengan menggunakan metode observasi serta berdasar pada teori Encoding-Decoding milik Stuart Hall. Penelitian ini akan menganalisa beberapa kasus fanwar yang sempat terjadi beberapa waktu lalu. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa peristiwa fanwar memiliki beberapa cara yaitu dengan saling membalas komentar di media sosial menggunakan kata-kata hinaan dan kotor yang biasa disebut dengan flaming, saling membuat tweet yang menjatuhkan idola dari fans lain, serta membuat video yang berisi berita hoax. Adanya campur tangan fans toxic dari setiap fandom menjadi alasan fanwar ini bisa terjadi serta sifat egois dari masing-masing fans yang ingin menunjukkan kehebatan mereka kepada fans lain menjadi tujuan utama mereka. Pada akhirnya peristiwa ini hanya sebuah bentuk keegoisan dari setiap fans yang terhadap idolanya.

**Keywords:** fans; fanwar; K-pop; media sosial

### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of popular culture in a society is one of the features of globalization. Popular culture, sometimes known as pop culture, is gaining traction in Indonesian society. In the 1990s, American boy bands such as Backstreet Boys dominated popular culture in Indonesia, making them one of the most prominent pop cultures in Indonesian society, particularly among teenagers (However, as the millennium approached, popular music in Indonesia shifted from Western to South Korean (Sihombing, 2018 pp. 55-56).

In my perspective, one popular culture that is now in demand by the Indonesian people is Korean culture. Many worldwide are obsessed with the Korean wave, often known as Hallyu. The reason is that practically every part of our life now leads to Korean culture. Korean drama, music, beauty products, and culinary origins have become popular. In the previous five years,

Korean culture has gained interest from several countries in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia.

Korean culture has been present in Indonesia since the early 2000s, when Korean dramas such as *Winter Sonata* and *Full House* were broadcast on several Indonesian television stations (Sihombing, 2018: 57). Indonesian people really enjoy watching Korean dramas. There are similarities in emotional elements in Korean dramas, which are the same as films or TV series in Indonesia. As we know, many TV series in Indonesia use romance and emotional elements in their films/series likewise with Korean dramas. I view that this makes many Indonesian people feel familiar with Korean dramas. Not only Korean dramas, but also Korean music, are popular among Indonesians, particularly teenagers. K-pop music is appealing because it combines western pop music with Korean cultural values. Artists or idols fascinate audiences not only through the quality of their music and culture, but also through their appearance.

Based on the research, idols in Korea are highly trained to perform well in music because they are expected to sing and dance well on the music scene. Many of the kpop idols followed the trainee era for 10 years. Jihyo from the girl group Twice for example. She is one of those idols who took ten years to become a trainee. But not a few kpop idols underwent a short trainee period. The popularity of a kpop idol group cannot be separated from the efforts and support of the fans.

According to (Kim, 2015), Korean pop (K-pop) idol fandom is an especially intriguing case study examining how admirers negotiate with the public regarding the socially acceptable use of popular culture. Since the mid-1990s, when the idol music industry rose to prominence, the media has concentrated on exposing the shady side of K-pop idol followers (81). According to (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013), the reporting trend has led the general public to view young female admirers as "out of control, disorganized, and defiant" (39).

In closer observation, (Simmons, 2009) and (Giles, 2013), fans have demonstrated their capacity to be academics and critics, positions traditionally reserved for the dominant group. By introducing their own fan cultures and practices, fans try to challenge the current value system. However, (Bourdieu, 1984) and (Sullivan, 2022) argue that their efforts to alter the social structures of culture are limited in both space and time.

This research aims to understand how the phenomenon of fandom war happened and the impact to the community of kpop in social media. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to identify key factors behind the phenomenon of fandom war. In this study, I will use several theories to analyze the problems that occur. The first theory to be used is the theory of cultural identity put forward by Stuart Hall. Stuart Hall in his work *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* explains that cultural identity (or also known as ethnic identity) can be seen from at least two perspectives, namely cultural identity as a form (identity as being) and cultural identity as a process of becoming (identity as becoming).

To support this analysis, I will use Simulacrum concept from Jean Baudrillard. According to (Wolny, 2017), simulacrum (simulacra, plural) is a term closely associated with the works of Jean Baudrillard and generally denoting resemblance and/or similarity. In closer analysis, (Wolny, 2017) argued that in hyperreality, the "original" version of an object has no actual significance, as it pertains to another dimension and thus loses its symbolic meaning. This is not meant to imply that the universe becomes unreal, but rather that the more rapidly and comprehensively societies begin to integrate reality into a presumably cohesive picture, the more insecure and unstable it appears and the more anxious societies become. In this regard, reality perishes. According to Baudrillard's definition, hyperreality is "the meticulous replication of the real and ideally through a different one, reproducing medium, such as photography" (Wolfreys, Julian, 2006) (52), and this is precisely what occurs in modern consumer culture. The overabundance of signs and meaning in the worldwide culture of the late 20th century, according to Baudrillard, paradoxically led to the erasure of reality. There is no longer belief in liberal or Marxist utopias in this world (Wolny, 2017).

The last theory is Decoding and Encoding from Stuart Hall. According to (Hall, 1973), *encoding* signifies the method by which the medium that delivers of information converts the

signal, significance, purpose, or viewpoint conveyed in spoken or nonverbal structure into an easily comprehensible symbolic representation or data form. As with any other form of interaction or language, the encoding process is structured by codes operating within the semantic chain of a discourse (Zhao, 2014). *Decoding* is the recipient's interpretation of the message and reproduction of the ideology transmitted. Decoder decoding and interpreting operations reflected the intricate nature of the communication method and the wide range of society. Some codes, such as readily recognizable photographs of an object or person, conveyed possible meanings based on established cultural standards (Murdock, 2017). *Encoding* is an aspect of communication through mass media, and its anticipated effects on social behavior are contingent on the decoding efforts of the recipient.

### RESEARCH METHOD

This study will analyze about the phenomenon of war between fans of Kpop idol to fans of other Kpop idols . The reasons and factors that make these Kpop fans express hatred to each other through social media Tiktok. This research was conducted virtually, considering the object of the research was fandom in social media. The data will be collected through research from a social media namely Tiktok. This topic was chosen based on the author's concern that this fandom war phenomenon will often occur in several social media, until it becomes a conversation for some people who don't even know about K-pop.

Observations will be carried out in two stages to collect the necessary data. The first stage, the research will begin with an examination of the elements in the collected social media accounts that contain hate speech. In this case, observations will be made on the TikTok account with the username @lovely\_aespaslay. Data such as username, account name, bio and caption will be collected for analysis. Not only that, several comments and posts that contain elements of hate speech at other idols will be collected for analysis. This is done to find out whether the account is purely a fan account of the Idol or just an account that was deliberately created to spread hoax news.

After taking some data from several comments, a comparison will be made between comments from one account with other comments. At this stage some of the comments that have been collected will be compared whether the words used contain hate speech or not. Furthermore, the data will be analyzed using the theory of encoding and decoding by Stunt Hall. After that we can draw conclusions from the results of the analysis that has been done.

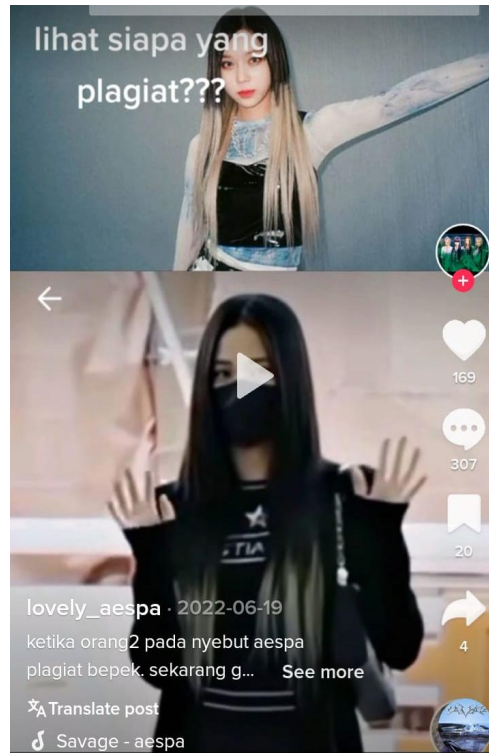
### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Fan studies focus on media text fandom, and many scholars consider the investigation of celebrity admirers as secondary importance (Sandvoss, 2005, p. 8). In fan studies, it is superfluous to differentiate between popular texts and celebrities because the audience consumes both fictional narratives and celebrities as "mediated" texts (Sandvoss, 2005) (8). Due to the similarity of the form at the point of consumption, according to (Sandvoss, 2005) (8–9), scholars concentrate more on investigating followers' negotiation in reading texts. In constructing the fan–object relationship, fundamental distinctions remain between media texts and a performer's fandom (Giles, 2013) (117). Moreover, the emphasis on parallels between fans of various objects may cause scholars to overlook the uniqueness of star fan cultures and practices.

In my point of view. K-pop, or Korean popular music, has rapidly grown in popularity in recent years, garnering a massive following not just in its native country, but across the world. The fan culture surrounding K-pop is unique in many ways, with fans often deeply invested in the lives and careers of their favorite idols. Social media platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram, have become key spaces for fans to connect, share content, and express their love for K-pop. However, the rise of fandom wars on these platforms has become a notable phenomenon in the K-pop community, with fans engaging in intense and sometimes aggressive battles with fans of rival groups.

Fashion is very significant in the Korean industry. This refers to look, which is one of the industry's primary points. Idols are frequently necessary to always look beautiful and

fashionable in order to catch the attention of a large number of people. They are also expected to constantly compete in order to establish new fashion trends that many people would follow. However, some of these artists are frequently seen using styles that are similar to those of other artists. This is quite natural for those who are professionals in the realm of fashion, but not for followers of these artists. They will not accept other artists copying their idol's style. Recently, Blackpink fans engaged in a fan fight with one of the trolls who claimed to be a fan of the girl group Aespa. The fanwar began on June 19, 2022, with an upload by the tiktok account @lovely aespa.



Source: Researcher's personal documentation  
**Figure 1. Posts that spark fanwars;**

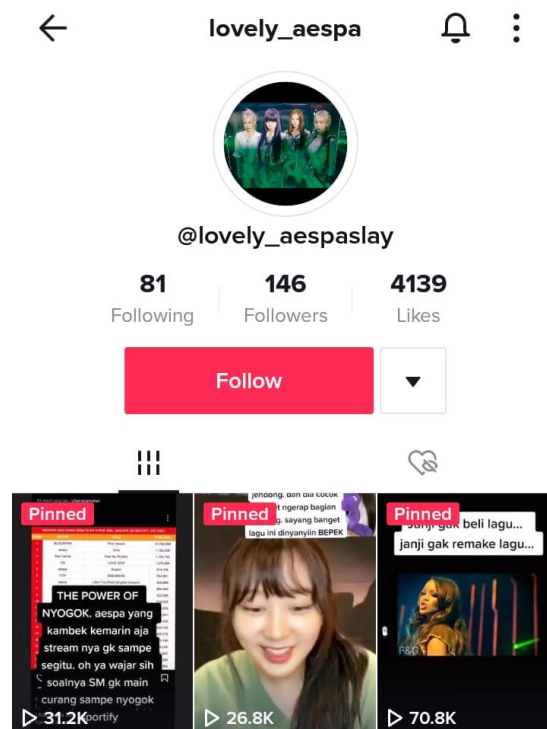
The tiktok account user @lovely aespa claimed in this post that one of the Blackpink members, Jiso, copied the hairstyle of the Aespa member, Winter. The two members of the girl group in the photo have identical hairstyles, particularly. It can be noted that the two people's hair colors, blonde and black, are extremely similar; both are applied on the ends of the hair. Jiso's photo in the post was shot at Incheon Airport on her way to Paris to receive an invitation from one of the city's well-known companies, Dior. Dior just appointed one of Blackpink's members as a worldwide ambassador. Meanwhile, Winter Aespa's photo was used when the group was filming the choreography for the song Next Level at one of Korea's most well-known studios, Studio Choom. In Korea, this haircut is quite popular; many idol girl groups use it when they make comebacks or attend award events.



Source: Researcher's personal documentation

**Figure 2. Hairstyle that looks similar between Jisoo Blackpink and Winter Aespa**

The tiktok account @lovely\_aespa has 146 followers and has posted more than 60 videos while the account is live. The account has received 4139 likes as a result of these posts, as shown in the figure below. We may assume from the account name that the account user is a fan of the girl group Aespa. However, after the researchers investigated the account. Researchers discovered some intriguing findings. We don't know when the account was created, but we do know that it was active on July 19, 2022. This was highlighted by a post on the same date, July 19, 2022, that ignited a fan war between Blackpink and Aespa followers.



source: researcher's personal documentation

**Figure 3. The tiktok account that triggered the Blink and My fanwars**

Many Blackpink fans thought the account was created on purpose to create hoax news or to cause a commotion among kpop fans. It has received 169 likes and 300 comments since it was published. This was the start of the fan war between Blink and My on the social media

platform Tiktok. Many blackpink followers started to visit the tiktok account to view the video, and many left rude comments on the post.



source: researcher personal documentation

**Figure 4. Argument war between Blackpink fans and Aespa fans in the comments column of the tiktok video**

The image above shows that the tiktok account with the username @lovely aespa claims that this hairstyle was used by Aespa sunbaenims such as Girl's Generation and F(x) long before the Blackpink members used it, and the tiktok account with the username @LEO29 also confirms that one member of the girl group F(x), namely Krystal, also used the same hairstyle. Sunbaenim is the same or "senior" according to *90daykorean.com*. The phrase sunbaenim is frequently used as a respectful name for someone who is older and more experienced. According to the comment, sunbaenim refers to the senior girl group from SM Entertainment who debuted before the girl group Aespa, such as Girl's Generation and F(x). Jiso was accused not just of duplicating Winter Aespa's hairstyle, but also of imitating Karina's hairstyle. A TikTok account with the username @ghedhiov exposed this. He claimed that Jiso's hairstyle in the pink venom teaser photo copied Karina's hairstyle in the song "Girls" in his post on August 11, 2022. The user states in this post that Aespa is one of the female groups with trendsetting power at the moment, as proven by the many group concepts, comeback mv's, and hairstyles that copy Aespa.



source: researcher's personal documentation

**Figure 5. Jisoo's hair style, which was accused of imitating Karina's hair style**



This suddenly rekindled the conflict between Aespa and Blackpink fans. Many Blackpink fans disagree, claiming that Jiso has been wearing bangs since 2018. Some fans also think that Karina was the one who stole Jennie's hair style on the comeback single "Kill This Love". In the comments section, there was a disagreement concerning each idol's bangs hairstyle. But, when it comes to hairstyles, the discussion will never end because this hairstyle has been used by many artists, not only the two members of the big group. However, this is due to the swagger image that is perceived when an idol wears this hairstyle. It is uncommon for this hairstyle to be used by many artists in their music videos.



source: researcher's personal documentation

**Figure 6. Blackpink's music video concept which was accused of plagiarism by fans from Aespa**

In another post, the account pointed to the concept performed by Blackpink on the song Ready For Love, which was thought to copy Aespa's concept. Blackpink's song 'Ready For Love' first appeared in the BLACKPINK documentary BLACKPINK: Light Up The Sky in 2020, then PUBG Mobile, a battle royale-themed online, became interested and eventually collaborated with Blackpink on the song. PUBG Mobile has actually partnered with Blackpink several times, since in the 14th season, PUBG decided to use one of Blackpink's songs, "Playing With Fire," as the game's background. The song 'Ready For Love' itself uses a concept that is relatively similar to the concept used by the girl group Aespa, namely the multiverse, whereas the song 'Ready For Love' Blackpink uses a virtual concept in which Blackpink appears using an avatar made by an online game corporation, namely PUBG. PUBG even creates characters and skins based on Blackpink members. The main cause of conflict for the @Lovely aespa tiktok account user is this concept. He thought Blackpink's concept in this song copied the concept used by the girl group Aespa. Aespa is known to have used the Multiverse concept (as shown in the image) since their debut. Each member of the Aespa group is represented by a virtual character. They incorporate their respective virtual avatars in each comeback.



source: *kompasiana.com*

**Figure 7. Aespa's Multiverse Concept**

The tiktok account @Lovely aespa chastised the creative director behind the Blackpink and PUBG cooperation for allegedly duplicating Aespa's concept. Every detail in the concept, according to him, is quite comparable and even appears to follow the Aespa concept. More than 300 people have commented on the post, which has gotten up to 90 likes. The majority of the comments contain mocking or insults directed at the owner of the tiktok account. Fanwar about the concept of the mv doesn't only occur on the social media tiktok, but also occurs on Twitter. The fanwar that happened on Twitter was even worse, opinions from Blackpink fans spread everywhere. Many of them even openly insulted Aespa's agency, namely SM Entertainment, which was considered too obsessed with Blackpink to the point where the artist was constantly attacked by Blackpink fans.



Source: *researcher's personal documentation*

**Figure 8. The song "Ready For Love" which was trending on China's search engine, Weibo**

When the song "Ready For Love" was released, SM Entertainment had limited group activities from Aespa. Another tweet included a screenshot of a piece of news that many kpop fans were discussing at the moment. According to the upload, when "Ready For Love" was



released, it became trending #1 on one of China's search engine applications, especially 'Weibo,' about the Blackpink concept, which was accused of copying Aespa by utilizing Chinese. C-netz (the name for Chinese netizens) suspects that the hashtag was made on purpose to insult Blackpink and restrict the streaming of Blackpink's song 'Ready For Love,' despite the fact that that c-netz actually loves Blackpink. C-netz also suspects that this was done by an agency because such a huge action requires a large sum of money. These rumors made many Blackpink fans suspect that SM Entertainment was the one doing such dirty things. This is due to his obsession with the success of Blackpink, which makes him want to find the same thing. Many fans replied to the tweet with contempt for the group Aespa and SM Entertainment. Not all Blackpink fans reply to these posts by flaming. Some of them responded with more polite and kind words to these posts. However, this still has a significant impact on some people. Some fans who liked the two girl groups were confused about the actions of the two fans, they felt very disappointed with some of their fellow fans who made things worse by blaspheming other artists, even though their idols were friends with each other but their fans were in conflict. There were also many fans from the two groups who were disappointed with the attitude of one of their toxic fans which sparked a fan war between the two fans.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is possible to assume that fanwar events can occur not only between fans and haters, but also between groups of fans. These fanwar cases are frequently caused by the presence of toxic fans from each group who have emotional investment to their idols. Fans often feel deeply connected to their favorite groups and invest a lot of time and emotion into supporting them. This emotional investment can make fans feel defensive and protective of their group, and they may feel the need to defend their group at all costs, even if it means engaging in aggressive behavior towards fans of other groups. This emotional feel that they have, may led them to be more protective about their idols. Fans may perceive criticism of their favorite group as a threat, and may feel the need to defend their group at all costs, which can lead to aggressive behavior towards fans of other groups. This perception of threat can be intensified by the way that the Kpop industry is structured, with groups often competing against each other for chart positions and other metrics of success. Another factor that contributes to the rise of fandom wars is the anonymity of social media. Fans are able to hide behind anonymous usernames and profiles, which can make them feel emboldened to engage in aggressive and abusive behavior towards fans of other groups. The distance provided by social media can make it easier for fans to forget that they are engaging with real people, and the lack of accountability can lead to an escalation of hostility. The impact of fandom wars on both side can be significant. Being involved in a fandom war can be emotionally exhausting and can lead to feelings of stress and anxiety. Fans can feel pressured to defend their group at all costs and may feel attacked if their group is criticized. Additionally, fans who are targeted by aggressive fans from other groups can feel harassed and bullied. The toxic environment created by fandom wars can make it difficult for fans to enjoy the music and performances of their favorite groups without feeling like they have to engage in the online drama.

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