



SOCIAL MEDIA AS THE HEGEMONIC ARENA OF K-POP: THE ROLE OF CONTENT AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION IN SHAPING FANDOM

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Abstract

Social media has evolved into a key space for creating and strengthening the global dominance of K-Pop culture. This study examines the role of digital content and technology innovation in strengthening K-Pop's influence through active engagement between the entertainment industry, digital platforms, and fans. By utilizing algorithms from platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, X (Twitter), and digital media such as Weverse and bubble, the K-Pop industry not only distributes content widely but also builds a participatory ecosystem that encourages fans to engage in the process of content production, distribution, and promotion. This phenomenon shows that fans are no longer passive but have become a key element in expanding the influence of K-Pop culture through practices such as fanbase organization, fan translations, and viral challenges. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach and digital ethnography to analyze K-Pop's dominance on social media, identify the role of content in shaping fandom, and examine the impact of technology on fan interactions. The research findings indicate that K-Pop's dominance on social media is not only built on the quality of cultural products, but also through the use of digital technology that supports content personalization, accelerated information dissemination, and the formation of collective identity among fans. Thus, social media acts as a complex hegemonic space, a place where cultural power is negotiated between producers and consumers in the evolving digital ecosystem.

Keywords: *K-Pop, cultural hegemony, social media, fandom, technological innovation, digital content, fan participation.*

Abstrak

Media sosial telah berkembang menjadi ruang kunci untuk menciptakan dan memperkuat dominasi global budaya K-Pop. Studi ini mengkaji peran konten digital dan inovasi teknologi dalam memperkuat pengaruh K-Pop melalui keterlibatan aktif antara industri hiburan, platform digital, dan penggemar. Dengan memanfaatkan algoritme dari platform seperti YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, X (Twitter), dan media digital seperti Weverse dan bubble, industri K-Pop tidak hanya mendistribusikan konten secara luas tetapi juga membangun ekosistem partisipatif yang mendorong penggemar untuk terlibat dalam proses produksi, distribusi, dan promosi konten. Fenomena ini menunjukkan bahwa penggemar tidak lagi pasif tetapi telah menjadi elemen kunci dalam memperluas pengaruh budaya K-Pop melalui praktik seperti organisasi fanbase, terjemahan penggemar, dan tantangan viral. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dan etnografi digital untuk menganalisis dominasi K-Pop di media sosial, mengidentifikasi peran konten dalam

membentuk fandom, dan mengkaji dampak teknologi terhadap interaksi penggemar. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dominasi K-Pop di media sosial tidak hanya dibangun di atas kualitas produk budaya, tetapi juga melalui pemanfaatan teknologi digital yang mendukung personalisasi konten, percepatan penyebaran informasi, dan pembentukan identitas kolektif di kalangan penggemar. Dengan demikian, media sosial bertindak sebagai ruang hegemonik yang kompleks, tempat di mana kekuatan budaya dinegosiasikan antara produsen dan konsumen dalam ekosistem digital yang berkembang.

Kata kunci: K-Pop, hegemoni budaya, media sosial, fandom, inovasi teknologi, konten digital, partisipasi penggemar.

I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of the South Korean pop industry or familiarly called K-Pop seems to never die. This one industry has not only managed to maintain its existence, but has also been able to compete with the global music industry such as America. South Korea's success in maintaining K-Pop's success is not a mere coincidence, but rather the result of a combination of brilliant marketing strategies, extremely high production quality, and a very loyal fan culture. Quoted from *rri.co.id* wrote that data from April to May 2026, K-Pop has actually entered a new golden era with a global market projection that exceeds \$31 billion by 2033. This shows that K-Pop has a consistent and adaptive growth.

Reporting from various *sources* (*billboard.com*, *tempo.co*, and *optima-education.com*) there are several key factors that make the K-Pop industry still relevant and dominant globally. First, the production system and visual quality presented by this industry are very superior. As in terms of production quality, K-Pop is able to combine elements of pop, hip-hop, and EDM music with catchy melodies, often even involving collaborations with world-class producers. Then in terms of audio-visuals, K-Pop music is not only pleasant to hear, but can also be enjoyed through intricate choreography, *aesthetic music videos* (MVs), and very strong visual concepts. In addition, K-Pop Idols are not only visual, but also have extraordinary talents. This is the result of undergoing a long *trainee* period to achieve perfect dance and vocal synchronization, thus providing a high standard of performance.

Then the second factor is the use of technology and social media which is very massive. K-Pop leverages various *multiplatforms* such as YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and niche platforms (such as Weverse and bubble) to connect directly with fans and create strong emotional bonds. K-Pop also massively and consistently creates unifying content through dance practice and *behind-the-scenes* content that makes it easier to spread content organically on social media. Third, K-Pop has succeeded in creating a loyal and organized fandom culture. Sizable K-Pop fans such as ARMY (BTS fans) or BLINK (BLACKPINK fans) are known to be very active in supporting their idols through *voting*, *streaming*, and buying physical albums. It doesn't stop there, K-Pop fandom is not only consumptive but also organized for social activities and marketing campaigns, which boost the idol's reputation.

Fourth, the key to K-Pop's success in the global arena is that this industry has succeeded in adapting and expanding globally (2026). K-Pop's global collaborations no longer stand alone, but collaborate with international *brands*, western composers, and global producers. K-

Pop also uses the "Silent K" strategy where K-Pop is increasingly merged with global music trends such as the use of English in lyrics, without having to lose its Korean visual and aesthetic identity. This industry proves that with relentless innovation, K-Pop is able to survive and continue to lead popular entertainment trends in the world.

K-Pop content distribution by 2026 has transformed into a highly structured digital ecosystem, combining fan-only platforms like Weverse and bubble with common social media like TikTok, Instagram and X to maximize *engagement* and monetization. This strategy then divides K-Pop content based on the level of intimacy, marketing goals, namely virality and exclusivity. K-Pop has a dedicated platform to form *fandom-hubs* and exclusive content, two special platforms that are very familiar among K-Pop fans are Weverse and Bubble. The platform is focused on two-way interaction, fan loyalty, and exclusive content monetization.

According to Kumi Laila and Faikoh Umairoh in a journal entitled *Weverse Digital Media Framing Strategy by the K-Pop Industry (Building Fan Sympathy and Loyalty in the Digital Age)* said the Weverse platform presents various types of content, such as posts from artists (text, photos, videos) directly to fans, as well as *live streaming* (Weverse Live) where idols interact in a *real-time*. In addition, Weverse also has a Weverse Magazine feature, which contains exclusive articles about K-Pop artists, lifestyles, and the industry. In *platform* It also provides *behind-the-scenes*, *vlog* Rehearsals, concerts, to personal idol content, as well as displaying special notifications, such as announcements, song releases, or activity schedules. Weverse serves as the center of the fandom ecosystem (*Hybrid* social media and *e-commerce*). Because through *platform* The K-Pop industry can distribute content through long live streaming, official variety shows, community forums, and official merchandise sales. (Laila and umairoh et al., 2025). Reporting from *tirto.id* bubble is a paid application where *K-Popers* who want to follow *daily updates* from their idols must have a membership and are charged a certain fee. Each idol account has a predetermined rate. Quoting from *Mashable*, SM Entertainment is an agency that creates bubble applications. This application was created as a form of agency strategy so that idols can connect with fans anywhere. Unlike similar applications, the interesting thing about the bubble application is that it provides other applications that are connected to bubble services, such as bubble *by* DearU, bubble *for* TOP, bubble *for* Play M to bubble *for* FNC. After subscribing to the bubble application, fans will be able to interact with K-Pop idols virtually. Meanwhile, bubble (DearU) focuses on a *parasocial relationship* experience that seems very personal between *fans* and idols that includes chat-style text messages, *daily selfies*, *voice notes*, and short videos that feel intimate. So it's as if it's a direct personal conversation with an idol or group member. Meanwhile, the K-Pop industry is also very massively distributing content through social media to achieve virality and global reach. It is also to attract new listeners, comeback promotions, and viral trends. K-Pop idols, both individuals and groups who are very active on TikTok social media, usually they will do *dance challenges (hooks)*, relaxing short videos, interactive filters, and *quick behind the scenes*. In addition to TikTok, K-Pop also engages in Instagram social media for visual exhibition and *personal branding* purposes. Content distribution is usually done through *the Reels* feature for choreography or aesthetic videos, *Stories (daily updates)*, and *Feeds* (concept photos or *lifestyle*). The goal is, of course, to build the *personal image* of each member and group and *brand* collaboration. Meanwhile, the presence of K-Pop on social media X

(Twitter) is for *real-time* information centers and *fandom mobilization*. The content distribution that is carried out is usually related to *comeback teasers*, news links, *streaming parties*, and direct interaction between fans. X became the fourth fastest to distribute content from Weverse or bubble organically. Culture is very dynamic, therefore it can evolve and always adapt to every change of times. Not without reason, this is because culture is the result of human construction and reconstruction. However, there are still cultural elements that are fixed and even difficult to change. Meanwhile, (Koentjaraningrat, 1982) explained, culture is divided into two, namely material (physical) and non-material (non-physical) culture. (Elma & Pane, n.d.). Cultural dynamics in the world will undergo fundamental changes by opening up new spaces for the exchange of ideas, social practices, and cultural products across countries, this is of course influenced by the flow of globalization. (Salsabila et al., 2024). To see one of the most prominent and massive phenomena of the current of cultural globalization is the presence of *Korean Pop* (K-Pop). In fact, over time, the presence of K-Pop is not just a music genre, but has also developed into a cross-country phenomenon that includes various aspects of popular culture. Since the K-Pop wave began to be known in the early 21st century, the spread of South Korean popular culture has continued to increase rapidly in various parts of the world. (Kinanthi & Adi, 2019)

Reporting from *Harakarsa's Instagram page* in the midst of competition in the world music industry, K-Pop is able to compete and even make history again. Based on data from South Korean Customs authorities, the export value of physical albums in the first quarter of 2026 reached around 120 million US dollars ($\pm$ Rp1.7 trillion), an increase of about 159% compared to the same period in the previous year. This achievement is certainly the highest record in history for the quarterly period. Of these achievements, one of the most striking changes was due to a shift in the main market. If previously Japan was the largest export destination, now the United States has risen to the first position with a surge of more than 500%. The European Union has also seen a significant increase of more than 460%, indicating that K-Pop's influence is getting stronger in Western markets. Meanwhile, Japan and China continued to experience growth, although their positions were shifted by surgeries in other regions. The global power of K-Pop is marked by the historical phenomenon that the K-Pop industry has succeeded in shifting the industry from the West (*West-centric*) to the center of the pop culture world, which has been dominated and controlled by the United States and Europe. The presence of K-Pop shows that the power center of pop culture can be born from non-westerns and be able to compete effectively in the global cultural market (Elma & Pane, n.d.). The increasing interest of the world community in K-Pop is also influenced by the role of social media. Through *various digital multiplatforms* such as Weverse, bubble, social media (Instagram, TikTok and X), K-Pop massively distributes content. Through this social media algorithm, K-Pop content influences the cultural consumption of the younger generation, making the South Korean trend a dominant norm that is global. Through the massive distribution of content through digital, the K-Pop industry has managed to increase their business existence. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic through the distribution of digital content, they were active in creating content and even held virtual concerts. Starting from the distribution of content carried out by the K-Pop industry which is very massive, so that it is able to bind fans' emotional feelings towards their idols. When fans are already attached and

loyal to idols, it will be easy for K-Pop industry players to make any sales. Henry Jenkins defines fandom as a social structure and cultural practice created by highly enthusiastic mass media consumers. Jenkins highlights fandom as a form of participatory culture in which fans not only become passive consumers, but also produce creative work, actively participate, and build community. The involvement of fandoms in content production and distribution is now a major force in the creative industry. Not only liking the idol but has transformed from just a passive consumer to an *active "prosumer"*. Fandoms use social media and digital platforms to produce and disseminate content, which in turn has a significant impact on the popularity and economy of the fandom object. (Elma & Pane, n.d.)

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Previous research serves as a reference for researchers in comparing and finding new ideas for future research. The researcher will present several previous studies by showing the results and topics related to this research, including:

The *first research* by Eka Putri Wardani and Rina Sari Kusuma with the title *Parasocial Interaction of K-Pop Fans on Social Media (Qualitative Study on ARMY Fandom on Twitter)* in 2021 at the University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta. The method used was qualitative with in-depth interviews and observations of social media X (Twitter). The theories used in this study are Parasocial Interaction (PSI) and Media Communication Theory. The results of the study are that social media X (Twitter) strengthens fans' emotional closeness with idols so that fans experience the "illusion of a personal relationship" with idols. Digital interactions form a very strong fandom loyalty and social media technology is accelerating the intensity of K-Pop cultural hegemony. (Wardani & Kusuma, 2021).

The second research by Chyntia Maharani, Viza Juliansyah, Desca Thea Purnama (2025) with the title *The Phenomenon of Korean Wave and Fanaticism of Fans in Social Media (Fandom Study in Pontianak City) Tanjungpura University*. The method of this research is qualitative descriptive, with interviews, observations and documentation. The theories used are Fan Culture Theory, Social Identity Theory (implicit) and Korean Wave Studies (Hallyu studies). As a result of his research, social media strengthens K-Pop fanaticism, forming fandom community solidarity. However, there is also the potential for extreme behavior (excessive fanaticism) and K-Pop digital content plays a big role in shaping fans' emotions and behavior. (Maharani et al., 2025)

The third research by Hesti Amelia Mawardani & Arief Sudrajat (2024) with the title *Cultural Hybridity in K-Pop Fandom: The Construction of Fan Collective Identity in the Indonesian Digital Era*. The method used in this study is qualitative with literature review and cultural analysis. The theory used is *Identity construction*. The results of K-Pop fandom research create a hybrid identity (Korean and local Indonesia), social media becomes a space for the formation of collective identity, K-Pop content forms global aesthetic standards and cultural hegemony occurs through the consumption of symbols and lifestyles. (Mawardani et al., n.d.)

Research conducted by Dessy Elma Syafitri Pane with the title *K-Pop Cultural Hegemony and Cultural Hybridization Dynamics*, shows that K-Pop's dominance is formed through cultural consensus, fan labor, and glocalization strategies that allow South Korean

music to be widely accepted in various cultural contexts. However, this phenomenon also contains paradoxes, on the one hand K-Pop reflects the success of the globalization of Asian culture, but on the other hand it reproduces power relations through cultural nationalism and the remaining global hierarchy. (Elma & Pane, n.d.)

The research conducted by Milatul Zulfa entitled *K-Pop Hegemony in Indonesia: A Critical Analysis of the Cultural Industry from the Perspective of the Frankfurt School*. Explaining that the creation of an active fan community and very high consumption patterns such as buying albums, merchandise to buying expensive concert tickets are the result of the cultural industry strategy on K-Pop. In addition, this culture also affects the hegemony of K-Pop *culture* among teenagers, especially in Indonesia, such as lifestyle, language, and behavior that affect the identity of the local culture itself. Although K-Pop culture provides opportunities for cultural diversification, the dominating K-Pop culture still poses a risk of weakening connections to traditional Indonesian culture. Therefore, critical education efforts are needed to balance global cultural appreciation while preserving national identity. (Zulfa, 2024)

Meanwhile, a research entitled *Korean Pop Culture Hegemony in the Korean Lovers Community (KLOSS)*, written by Afidatul Ulu Al Amroshy and Ali Imron, the results of the research show that the process of hegemonization of Korean pop culture in *KLOSS members* occurred because it was influenced by the media and the influence of *the KLOSS* community itself. The hegemony of the K-Pop industry of power and control over the media is carried out by the media people themselves, while the K-Pop hegemony that occurs in the community is carried out by *the KLOSS* admin. The control carried out on the KLOSS Community is with intellectual and moral hegemony. It is emphasized in the findings of this study that the pattern of intellectual hegemony produces knowledge and changes in the views of *KLOSS members* who are increasingly concerned about Korea, in addition to it also encouraging the high interest of KLOSS members in the use of Korean language and speaking styles. Meanwhile, the pattern of moral hegemony results in the internalization of Korean cultural values, which are adopted in physical appearance, the presence of a taste for the selection of Korean products and consumerism in collecting related to Korean culture. (Ulu et al., 2014)

Hegemonic Theories

Antonio Gramsci introduced the theory of hegemony which was developed around 1929, he said that the dominance of a group in society is not only maintained through physical force or coercion, but also through the approval of society for the values, ideas, and mindset set by the ruling group. Gramsci argues that the dominant group can establish a perspective that is considered reasonable, normal, and correct by society and then the individual feels safe without pressure. This process is known as hegemony, which is a form of power that occurs through moral and intellectual leadership.

Hegemony operates through various social institutions such as education, media, religion, family and popular culture that continuously circulate the ideology of the ruling group. For example, society often believes that success is determined solely by individual hard work, while aspects of social inequality receive less attention. Gramsci also emphasized the importance of the role of intellectuals in spreading ideology, both to maintain power and to resist domination. So that the aspects of the way of thinking that are fought for, be it economic, political, cultural and other social aspects, remain within the limits to form power that has an

important meaning. (George & Theory, 2025). Related to this research, the theory is used to explain how the K-Pop industry builds influence and shapes the way of thinking, behaving, and identity of fans through media and technology.

Social Media and Popular Culture

According to Reka Purnama Sari, Nanang Trenggono, Nina Yudha Aryanti, Abdul Firman Ashaf, and Tina Kartika in a journal entitled "The Role of Social Media in Identity Formation: Cultural Studies Perspectives, Acceleration and Hybridization, social media has evolved into the main stage where culture is produced and disseminated. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are democratizing content creation, allowing anyone to instantly become a creator and distributor of culture to a global audience. This accelerated cultural mixing (acculturation), allowing for the creation of new subcultures that combined tradition and modernity

Fandom dan Digital Engagement

The term *fandom* or fan community is a very well-known concept, especially among K-Pop fans. In his book *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins (2006) explains that fandom is a form of social interaction that allows individuals to share feelings, build a common identity, and carry out various activities collectively. According to Jenkins (2006), there are several main characteristics that make up fandom when fans express their interest, both in online and offline spaces.

1. Shared Feelings

Fandom is formed because there is an opportunity for individuals to connect with others who share similar interests and feelings. The relationship not only serves to validate personal experiences, but also serves as a means to express, develop, and disseminate the emotions they feel. The emotions shared in the fandom are not always positive. Fans can show their anger, disappointment, or sadness together when their idols or figures they admire face problems or experience unpleasant situations. In addition, fandom members also provide support and solidarity with each other in dealing with various life dynamics related to the objects they like.

2. Shared Identity

Fans often form a collective identity that is based on common interests. This identity can be seen through various cultural symbols, such as clothing styles, accessories, or appearances that reflect their preferences for certain groups, genres, or figures. Thus, the fandom's identity serves as a social marker that distinguishes them from other groups while also reinforcing a sense of community among fellow fans.

3. Collective Intelligence

One of the main characteristics of fandom is the strong desire of fans to gain more in-depth knowledge about the objects they are passionate about. Therefore, they actively search, collect, and share various information related to idols, works, and activities that are the center of fandom's attention. The process of exchanging information results in collective knowledge that continues to grow and becomes an important source of information for community members.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach and digital ethnography. In his book entitled *Qualitative Research Methods* (2023), Sugiyono explained that qualitative research is a way to investigate the state of natural objects, with researchers playing the role of the main instrument. Data collection was carried out using triangulation techniques, data analysis was inductive, and the results of the research emphasized more on meaning than generalization. The descriptive approach was chosen because the purpose of this research is to describe and understand the phenomenon of social media as a space for K-Pop hegemony, as well as the role of content and innovative technology in shaping fandom in the digital world, including the impact of technology on fans. A digital ethnographic approach is also applied to understand the cultural phenomenon of K-Pop fandom on social media. (Mawardani et al., n.d.)

This research was carried out from March to June 2026. Observations are carried out online through various digital platforms and social media that are K-Pop fandom interaction spaces, such as Weverse and social media such as TikTok, Instagram, and X (Twitter). In addition, interviews are conducted both in person and through communication media such as Zoom, Google Meet, and instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp. The informant selection technique in this study uses *purposive sampling*. According to Sugiyono, purposive sampling is a method of collecting data based on specific considerations. The criteria for informants are determined as follows: a) Active K-Pop fans, b) Active use of social media, c) Participate in fandom activities such as streaming, voting, and joining fan communities, d) Have an understanding of K-Pop fandom culture. (Sidiq et al., n.d.)

The data sources in this study are divided into two, namely primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source is the main source obtained directly by researchers in the field, which in this study was obtained through in-depth interviews with informants who met the criteria as K-Pop fans and active social media users. In addition, the researcher also made observations on social media. Primary data sources are used as the main source because they are obtained directly from the experiences and views of informants. Secondary data sources are sources that researchers obtain indirectly from sources that are already available, in this case, through literature studies and documentation such as journals, books, and previous research related to digital communication, social media, popular culture, and K-Pop. Documentation also includes screenshots of social media posts, articles, and other supporting data. Data analysis techniques in qualitative research, according to Sugiyono, are the process of finding and compiling data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation systematically so that they can be easily understood and the results of findings can be informed to others. The data analysis technique used is an interactive analysis model from *Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman*, which consists of several steps, starting with data reduction. At this stage, the researcher sorts out data related to K-Pop content, fandom activities, and the use of digital technology on social media, then presents at this stage the reduced data and then presented in the form of descriptive descriptions, tables, and narratives. This aims to make it easier for researchers to understand the phenomenon being studied. Furthermore, the conclusion and verification of the last stage are carried out by drawing conclusions based on the results of the research that has been analyzed.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved four K-Pop fans who actively use TikTok, Instagram, and X as well as other digital media such as youtube and weverse as the main media to access information about their idols. The informants were selected based on the intensity of their social media use and their involvement in fandom activities. The interviews of informants from this study who were interviewed include the following:

Table 1. Characteristics of Informants

They report	Age	Long Time K-Pop Fan	Fandoms that follow	Frequently used platforms
Adine Nadia Salsabilla	24 Years	7 years	BTS (ARMY)	Instagram and Tiktok
Mia Andriani	27 Years	12 Years	EXO (EXO-L)	Instagram, X and Youtube
Fuji	31 Years	7 Years	BLACKPINK (BLINK)	Instagram and X
Wanda Princess Clara	24 Years	9 Years	BTS (ARMY) dan NCT (NCTZen)	Weverse, X, Instagram then Youtube

Based on the results of an in-depth interview conducted on June 8, 2026, and *online* observations from March to June 2026, K-Pop fandom activities on social media are not only used for content consumption, but various forms of active participation. Informants use social media to get the latest information about idols, interact with fellow fans, and support various activities related to their favorite idol groups. The social media most often used by informants are Instagram, X, YouTube, and digital media *Weverse and bubble*. Through the *platform*, fans can access various information such as *comeback* schedules, album releases, concerts, music awards, and idols' personal activities shared through official accounts and fan accounts.

Following and Consuming Idol Content

Of the four informants, this study follows the official accounts of the group, as well as individual idol members. This activity is carried out to obtain the latest information and follow the development of idol careers directly.

"I started to know and follow K-Pop since 2016. At that time I saw one of the BTS members, Kim Taehyung (V), who made me interested in finding out more about BTS". (Adine, June 8, 2026).

"Actually, I have known K-Pop for a long time, but decided to follow K-Pop further, namely from 2014 because of EXO". (Mia, June 8, 2026).

"I started to know and actively follow K-Pop since 2019. The first group that interested me and immediately followed me deeply until now was BLACKPINK". (Fuji, June 8, 2026).

"I started to get to know kpop in the era of BTS' song "GO GO" around 2017. At first I was interested because BTS songs and content often appeared on social media, after which I started actively following BTS. Then, when the song "BOOM" from NCT Dream often appeared on my social media and felt that the song was good to hear so I started to get interested and follow NCT Dream. However, I had stopped following NCT and stayed focused on following BTS. In

2021 I am again actively following NCT and until now I am a fan of BTS and NCT ". (Wanda, June 8, 2026).

This activity shows that social media is the main source of information for fans in following the development of the K-Pop world.

Interact with Fellow Fans

Fans not only interact with the content, but also build communication with other fandom members through comment columns, conversation groups, and online communities.

"I often discuss with fandom friends on X (Twitter) about comeback schedules and music video theories." (Fuji, June 8, 2026)

These interactions form a social network that strengthens a sense of community and identity as a member of the fandom.

Sharing and Producing Fan Content

Some informants are actively recreating content in the form of photos, video edits, *fan art*, and uploading information related to idols. *"I often make idol edit videos and upload them to Instagram because I like to share them with my fellow fans." (Wanda, June 8, 2026)*

The activity shows that fans are not only media consumers, but also content producers.

Participating in Idol Interactive Activities

Features such as *live streaming*, live broadcasts, and Q&A sessions are among the activities that fans are most interested in.

"When idols go live, I feel closer because I can see them live even though it's on the screen." (Adine, June 8, 2026)

The interaction creates an emotional closeness that strengthens the relationship between idols and fans.

Based on these findings, fandom activities on social media show that K-Pop fans not only act as recipients of information, but also as active participants in the process of producing, distributing, and producing K-Pop culture. Social media allows fans to build community, strengthen the group's identity, and maintain their engagement with K-Pop idols and culture on an ongoing basis. This condition is the basis for the formation of a strong fandom and is one of the factors that supports the spread of K-Pop cultural influence in the digital space.

Social Media as an Arena of Hegemony

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, *online* observations, social media, and documentation, as mentioned above, social media has an important role in spreading K-Pop culture to fans. Various social media platforms not only serve as a means of communication and entertainment, but also become a space that allows South Korean values, lifestyle, language, and culture to be massively disseminated to users.

Most of the informants admitted that their involvement in K-Pop culture began from interacting with the content that appeared on social media. The continuous exposure that occurs makes the informant get to know idols, music, and various other aspects of Korean culture.

From the perspective of hegemony theory, social media not only serves as a means of communication and information exchange, but has also become an arena for the battle of discourse, values, business and the interests of various groups in society. As stated by Antonio Gramsci, domination is not always carried out through coercion, but through the formation of the consent of society towards certain ideas, values, and views that are considered to be natural and correct. The rapidly growing social media has changed the pattern of information dissemination from previously centered on conventional media to more open and participatory. However, this openness does not necessarily eliminate the practice of hegemony.

Social media platforms have become a new space for the public, such as governments, companies, public figures, influencers, including the K-Pop industry to build and spread narratives that can influence people's ways of thinking and behavior. In the K-Pop industry, various features such as uploads, comments, short videos, and recommendation algorithms, help the industry gain a wide reach and shape public opinion. Therefore, the competition for the distribution of K-Pop content on social media is fierce. As revealed by Fuji, as (BLINK) who is quite active on social media, he considers the competition for K-Pop content from various *agencies* to be very massive and tight. Each agency competes to create content with high production quality, unique concepts, and structured release strategies to attract the attention of the public and social media algorithms.

"This competition is not only between groups, but also how the agency maintains the engagement of old fans so that they do not switch to new groups," (Fuji, June 8, 2026).

Likewise, according to Adine (ARMY), on social media, various *agencies* compete to create interesting, creative, and published content continuously. *The agency* uses various social media platforms to promote its artists through photos, videos, comeback teasers, live broadcasts, and behind-the-scenes content.

"Due to the growing number of K-Pop groups and each has a strong fanbase, the competition for the attention of social media users is becoming increasingly fierce," (Adine, June 8, 2026).

The algorithms used by social media platforms tend to display content that matches the user's interests, thus strengthening exposure to certain ideas or views. This condition can create the dominance of discourse that indirectly shapes public perception of a social, political, economic, and cultural issue. The fierce competition of K-Pop on social media creates content that continues to appear on the K-Poppers algorithm. Wanda, an NCTzen (NCT Fans) said that K-Pop content often appears on her social media, both those she searches for directly and those recommended by algorithms.

"It continues to appear because I often see and interact with K-Pop content on social media, so similar content continues to appear on my homepage even though it is not content about my idols," (Wanda, June 8, 2026).

Meanwhile, Mia as EXO-L (EXO fans) admitted the emergence of K-Pop content on her social media because almost every time if she has free time, the content she is looking for is K-Pop content compared to other content. Likewise on Fuzi's social media, he said that K-Pop content really dominates his social media timeline. Either because of the intentionally searched or because of social media algorithms that detect their interest in K-Pop.

"Explore Instagram, and my Timeline X always bring up content related to BLACKPINK or the latest K-Pop developments automatically," (Fuji, June 8, 2026).

The results of the study show that in addition to being a tool of domination, social media also functions as a space of resistance to established hegemony. K-Pop fans can use social media to voice criticism, build social movements, and spread alternative narratives that are different from the mainstream. Thus, social media is a dynamic arena, where hegemony and counter-hegemony processes take place simultaneously through interaction between users and ever-evolving content production.

The findings of the study show that social media has become a major arena in the spread and strengthening of K-Pop cultural hegemony. Through *platforms* such as Instagram, X and YouTube K-Pop content can be distributed quickly and widely to fans in different countries. The high intensity of exposure to content makes fans more acquainted, accepting, and even adopting various Korean values, lifestyles, and cultures in their daily lives. The study also found that fans not only act as content consumers, but also as agents who help disseminate K-Pop culture through sharing, commenting, and promoting content on social media. Thus, social media not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a space to produce a culture that strengthens the existence and dominance of K-Pop in the digital realm.

The Role of Content in Shaping Fandom

K-Pop content spread through social media has a very important role in the process of forming and developing fandom. It is undeniable that content on various social media platforms is the main means that connect fans with *fandom objects*. Various forms of content such as photos, videos, live broadcasts, interviews, *behind the scenes* music videos, to uploads of daily activities are able to create emotional closeness between fans and the idols they follow. The more content is produced and shared, the greater the chance of interactions that drive fan loyalty to the fandom. Moreover, the K-Pop industry does not only focus on social media but they have special content that is only uploaded on special platforms such as bubble and Weverse.

In addition to serving as a source of information, content is also a tool for building community identity. Fandom members not only consume content, but also actively produce and redistribute various forms of content such as *fanart*, *fan edits*, *memes*, compilation videos, and reviews. This activity shows that fans have a role as producers as well as consumers of content (prosumers), who actively contribute to expanding the existence of fandom in the digital space. As an ARMY that has been around for 10 years, Adine admits that content on social media has a very important role in strengthening a fandom. One of them is creative fan edit content with Indonesian *subtitles* translated using colloquial language (non-formal) so that fans, especially from Indonesia, can feel and understand what the idols are talking about, thus creating a closer impression of each other.

The large amount of content presented by the agency makes fandoms have many alternative content choices, so they don't create boredom. For Wanda (NCTzen), the most interesting content is music videos, live content, reality shows, and fan edits. This content helps Wanda get to know her idol's personality and daily life better. Through content about her idols that she consumes almost every day, Wanda feels closer to her idols and fellow fans. *"Because*

I can see idol interactions directly and communicate with other fans through comments on social media and other platforms," (Wanda, June 8, 2026).

Content that goes viral and gets a high level of *engagement* also plays a role in attracting new members to the fandom. Through the sharing mechanisms, comments, and recommendations of social media algorithms, a content can reach a wider audience and introduce the object of fandom to people who are not familiar with it. Thus, content not only maintains the existence of a fandom, but also becomes an important factor in the growth process of the fan community.

"Viral content acts as the main gateway for new fans. When a funny edited video clip, a record achievement at a major festival (such as an iconic performance at Coachella), or a dance challenge dominates the layman's timeline, it sparks curiosity. This curiosity prompted them to find out more until they finally decided to enter the fandom (Fuzi, June 8, 2026).

In line with Fuzi's statement, Adine assessed that viral content on social media plays an attraction for non-fans because of social media algorithms or recommendations from fans.

"Like dance challenges that use tiktok sounds from foreign countries and TikTok sounds that are crowded in Indonesia, it not only disseminates our idols, but also introduces fandom from one country to another," (Adine, June 8, 2026).

The findings of the study show that digital content has a very important role in shaping and strengthening K-Pop fandom. Various types of content, such as music videos, live broadcasts, *behind-the-scenes* content, interviews, to idols' daily uploads on social media, are able to create emotional closeness between fans and the idols they support. The intensity of the content consumption makes fans feel closer and involved in idol life and activities.

Research has also found that content that is presented consistently and interactively encourages the formation of a sense of *belonging* to the fandom community. Fans not only enjoy content as entertainment, but also use it as a means to build their identity and show loyalty to their favorite idols and groups. This loyalty is reflected through activities such as following the development of idols, participating in fandom activities, and disseminating content to other users on social media. In addition, digital content serves as a medium that connects fans from different backgrounds and geographic regions. A shared interest in K-Pop content forms an active and solid virtual community. Thus, this study found that digital content is not only a means of entertainment, but also a major factor in the formation of collective identity, loyalty, and the sustainability of K-Pop fandom in the digital era.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that social media has become a hegemonic arena that plays an important role in the spread of K-Pop culture and the formation of fandom in the digital era. Through various social media platforms, agencies, idols, and fans can interact intensively to create a space that allows the widespread spread of K-Pop values, identities, and culture. In the context of hegemony, social media not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a medium that shapes the way of view, preferences, and fan behavior through various content that is consumed sustainably. Content is a key element in the process of forming a fandom because it is able to create an emotional attachment between fans and idols. Various forms of content, such as photos, videos, live broadcasts, and other interactive activities, contribute to building a sense of closeness, loyalty,

and collective identity among fans. Apart from being consumers, fans also play an active role as content producers who help expand the reach and existence of fandom in the digital space. On the other hand, technological innovation also strengthens fan engagement through easy access to information, real-time interaction, and increasingly interactive digital experiences. The use of social media, streaming services, community applications, and technology such as virtual concerts and live streaming has created a new form of relationship between idols and fans that is closer and more sustainable. Technological innovations also allow fandom to grow globally without being hindered by geographical boundaries.

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