

Exploring Youth Political Participation: K-Pop Fan Activism in Indonesia and Thailand

Amalia Nur Andini¹, Ghaziah Nurika Akhni²

Universitas Brawijaya¹, Ritsumeikan University²

ABSTRACT

Since the US fans participation in the BLM campaign and 'sabotaging' of Trump's Tulsa rally, the K-pop fans community has made headlines on mainstream media as part of contemporary political discussion. A similar phenomenon is also encountered in Southeast Asia. One of the fastest-growing K-pop markets globally, where young people call themselves K-pop fans, has participated in various activism forms supporting humanitarian causes through donations, criticizing new laws, or protesting against the government. Indonesia and Thailand were chosen as case studies because K-pop fans in both countries have recently made headlines on national media and took over social media as a worldwide and domestic trending topic. With different levels of democracy, they also allow us to see the dynamics of fan activism in different localities. This paper grouped K-pop fans' political participation in Indonesia and Thailand as charity-based and politically driven. In both categories, young people share collective interests and identities as part of the K-pop fandom and citizens in their respective countries. Further, the samples were analyzed by four key areas of study: the intersection between cultural and civic/political participation, the tension between participation and resistance, affect and collective identity, and impacts. Results show that fandom does influence youth participation in a way that it helps inspire actions and provides young people with the digital skills they need to partake in activism that concerns real-life issues in the era of media convergence.

Keywords: *activism, k-pop, political participation, youth*

INTRODUCTION

To say that *Korean Wave* has swept the hearts of millions is not an overstatement. In 2019, Korean Foundation reported that Korean popular music or K-pop had garnered around 99 million fans worldwide. However, this success did not happen overnight. Korean popular culture (including K-pop and K-drama) was

relatively unknown to the world before 2000. Korean pop cultural products' popularity started as a regional phenomenon in East Asian countries (Japan, Taiwan, and China), especially around 2003 where the Korean drama *Winter Sonata* became a big hit in Japan (Yoshitaka in Iwabuchi, Berry, & Tsai, 2016). From Japan, Korean popular culture expanded its influence in Southeast Asia during the East Asian pop culture boom, a rapid cultural influx from East Asian countries that happened in the late 90s and early 2000s (Iwabuchi, Muecke, & Thomas, 2004). One decade later, K-pop took the global stage as PSY's song *Gangnam Style* became the first music video to reach 1 billion views on Youtube. This phenomenon also became a year that marks the increasing frequency and intensity of K-pop consumption worldwide, specifically in the United States (Longnecker and Lee, 2018). With Korean idols collaborating with American musicians and releasing their album in English, their music is now more accessible than ever to non-Korean-speaking audiences.

Aside from its catchy rhythm and chorus, the success of the Korean popular culture economy or *Hallyu* is indebted to its government's planning, investments, and policies, and also management from the cultural industry itself. But above all, the Korean Wave would not have happened without its fans, who are known to be one of the most active, and many would say 'obsessive' of their Korean idols. Spending thousands of dollars on concerts and albums and going the extra mile to vote for their favorite boy/girl bands are some of the few activities people associate with K-pop fans.

However, in recent years, discourse on K-pop fans in the media is no longer about the stereotyped "groups of squealing teenagers." K-pop fans are now seen as having the power for political mobilization. For example, an excerpt from the Guardian: "K-pop fans have been able to put the online organizational tools they've honed for fandom projects to work on political activism." (The Guardian, 2020). CNN: "They've helped South Korean stars dominate charts and break records on social media. Now, some K-pop fans are claiming another victory: helping foil United States President Donald Trump's return to the campaign trail." (Hollingsworth, 2020)

BLM or Black Lives Matter played a big part in bringing K-pop fandom into a current political discussion. In the event of #BlackLivesMatter protests after the death of George Floyd, the Korean biggest boyband group, BTS, joined the demand for racial justice on Twitter and went as far as donating USD 1 million to support the cause. Twenty-four hours later, their fans, who call themselves ARMY, managed to

raise another million for BLM (Person & Salim, 2021). This narrative became more prevalent after the news broke that low turnouts for Trump's presidential rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, were due to pranks pulled by TikTok users and K-pop fans to sabotage the campaign. The New York Times (2020) also reported that hundreds of thousands of tickets were registered, but more than half of the venue was empty on the day of the event.

BLM and Trump's rallies are not the only instances where K-pop fans could be seen to assert their influence as this phenomenon of fandom-based political mobilization is happening around the world. The movement also occurs in another part of the world, including Southeast Asia, as one of the fastest-growing K-pop markets where K-pop popularity is evident in people's daily lives (Jeong, Lee, & Lee, 2017). Among ten countries in Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Thailand were chosen as case studies because both countries are the second and third highest consumers of K-pop music on Youtube (Statista, 2019). Also, for the past two years, K-pop fans in both countries have made headlines on the local/national media due to their visibility in political movements. They took over Twitter and worldwide and domestic trending topics, discussing recent political debates in both countries.

Additionally, it is also interesting to look at both because, in terms of democracy, Indonesia and Thailand have different levels of democracy. In contrast, the former ranks higher and more developed compared to the latter. Looking at how young people participate in political participation in Indonesia and Thailand allows us to see the dynamics of fan activism in different political situations. In Indonesia, BTS fans advocated planting thousands of trees on their idol's birthday. Earlier this year, 16 K-pop fandoms in the country managed to collect 1.4 billion rupiahs of donations to help those affected by natural disasters and raise more awareness on climate issues. In 2020, these young people also partook on Twitter and offline strikes rejecting the controversial omnibus law through hashtag #TolakOmnibusLaw. Comparatively, in Thailand, K-pop fans' organized tuk-tuk birthday messages and took part in youth protests against the government, demanding curbs of the monarchy power and communicating the issue to the world through #WhatIsHappeningInThailand.

This paper will analyze the situation in Indonesia and Thailand regarding young people's political participation united by their shared interest in K-pop. The authors are looking at the intersection between cultural and civic/political participation. In the tension between involvement and resistance, this paper aims to

explain how fan culture helps inform, influence, and mobilize young people to take action and shape political reality in their respective countries.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Fans and Activism

The word 'fan' that comes from 'fanatic' refers to an individual who has a strong admiration for a particular person or things, be it sports, celebrity, television series, or other media products. A collective group of fans creates fandom, a cultural space whose members share similar interests and collective identities. What differentiates fans and regular audiences is how they consume cultural texts--fans engage in 'active' consumption. They read popular texts and re-read, re-write, and interpret them in forms of new artistic merits (Jenkins, 1992). As a result, fans are often called prosumers--consumers who also produce fan-made writings, videos, music, and so on inspired by their object of interest.

Nowadays, fan practices also include some part of activism. The activism ranges from content-related objectives (such as demanding more air time for their favorite tv shows) to real-world issues with political and social implications or a cultural movement that brings about changes (See Jenkins, 2020). Fan-activism is understood as "fan-driven efforts to address civic or political issues through engagement with and strategic deployment of popular culture content" (Jenkins in Brough & Shresthova, 2012). Jenkins further elaborates fan activism by analyzing Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), a non-profit organization supporting human rights and equality built and organized by Harry Potter fans across the world. This example allows us to move away from activism as traditionally understood to a broader definition that considers the media and cultural convergence--an interconnectedness of media, technology, and information that changes our everyday experience. Because in the era of convergence, "our political struggles often take place through languages and contexts heavily shaped by commercial culture, making the fan and consumer activism central to contemporary social movements" (Jenkins, 2011). Since contemporary fan activism and real activism often overlap and are difficult to be differentiated, fan activism can be broadly defined to include intentional actions conducted by fans or the use of fanlike practices to make a change.

Analyzing Fan Activism and Political Participation

Over the years, the concept of political participation has developed from a narrow understanding of electoral participation to any activities that influence others and decision-making processes related to societal issues (Eckman & Amna, 2012). The internet and new media also expand the definition even further, which includes new political online activities such as e-campaign, group and discussion in social media, and so on (Van Deth, 2016). These new modes of political participation are especially prevalent among younger generations where there is less connection to formal political institutions and more horizontally structured (Jenkins et al., 2006; Ito et al., 2009). Fan activism is seen as part of these new modes of political participation. It is political in a way that influences or changes existing power relations.

Melissa M. Brough and Sangita Shresthova (2012), in their article "*Fandom meets activism: Rethinking civic and political participation*," outlined four key areas of analysis to look at the relationship of fan activism and contemporary political participation that includes:

- *The intersection between cultural and civic/political participation*

In examining how fan activism influences and/or constitutes political participation, we need to examine the relationship between audiences and the public. While audiences are defined as passive consumers or viewers, the public is seen as an active citizenry. But audiences can become public in the political domain. When their concerns over a particular issue occupy more importance over the narrative that they 'view'. In the context of fans, fans stop being an audience when they decide to take action through fan activism, turning them from audiences into a public that has concerns over socio-political matters.

In other words, to figure out the intersection between the cultural space of fandom and political participation regarding fan activism, we need to determine how fans change from audiences to the public. What is the significance of social movements using pop culture references to struggle over power? And how can we better understand why fandom inspires fans—and sometimes even nonfans—to organize protests or rallies?

- *The tension between participation and/or resistance*

While activism is mostly understood as a resistance practice, this notion needs to be examined in the context of fan activism because it is often both. As power circulates through discourse and networks, we need to examine how fans circulate

their voices through the production and reproductions of popular culture narratives in their activism, as well as to whom it is directed. This way, we could examine the power structure of specific fan activism vis-a-vis the issue in which it is resisting against or complying.

- *Affect, collective identity, and authenticity*

It can be argued that affect plays an essential role in forming collective identity and subsequent collective action. Because activism only happens when individuals' needs for affect, communication, and collective solidarity coincide with the collective goals. In other words, we can say that fan activism is fueled by affect, the need to speak up their voice, and their shared identity in fandom concerning certain issues. Here we also look at how fans use narrative from popular culture as a storytelling device that fuels political participation. "Politics, like popular culture, is about creating an 'audience,' a people who will laugh at their jokes, understand their fears, and share their hopes. Both the popular media and politicians are engaged in creating works of popular fiction which portray credible worlds that resonate with people's experiences" (Street in Brough and Shresthova, 2012).

- *Impacts*

To learn the impacts of fan culture on youth political participation, we should look at spaces and forms of participatory culture. To do this, we question the impacts using the broader understanding of political/civic participation. For example, to learn how a certain fandom promotes civil engagement or political participation in the form of fan activism, we should look at how the broader fandom organizes and conducts its fan practices aside from that issue. This paper attempts to explore and examine K-pop fan activism in Indonesia and Thailand.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Charity-based Fan Activism: Narrating Civic Participation

While K-pop fans in Indonesia are often stereotyped as a toxic and emotional group of teenagers, on October 12, 2020, they made headlines for their contribution to environmental conservation efforts. The Jakarta Post reported that Indonesia's BTS ARMY had donated 8,735 mangrove trees to be planted in Bedono Village, Demak, Central Java. This charity-based activism was conducted as a birthday project for one of BTS's members named JIMIN (see Figure 1). After receiving a recommendation from Lindungihutan [Protectingforest, trans.], the site was chosen, a non-profit conservation group that explained the severe corrosion that has plagued

the region for 20 years. Aside from helping to solve environmental issues, one of the fans explained that this project aimed to break the stigma that most Indonesian people hold against K-pop fans by showing a positive image of fan activities on social media (Wira, 2020).

Figure 1. BTS fans mangrove donations for JIMIN's birthday.



(Source: <https://www.hipwee.com/showbiz/jimin-bts-ulang-tahun-mangrove/>)

The same motivation was also mentioned by K-pop fans who participated in a fundraising campaign to help disaster victims. Earlier this year, more than 45,000 K-pop fans managed to raise IDR 1.4 billion (around USD 10,000) within ten days for the Sulawesi earthquake and flood. It is a big number considering many Indonesians earn USD 250 per month only. This fundraising was possible with the help of sites such as kitabisa.com, social media, and K-pop-based environmental organization, Kpop4Planet. One of the organizers said they want to raise environmental awareness and present K-pop more positively to a wider audience. Fans also admitted that they participate in the activism because the idols inspire them. A statement from ArmyTeamKasel translated from Indonesian: "We are not just fans who love BTS, but more than that, we want to become a fandom that cares for the people. Just like BTS who wish to bring hope for everyone through their music" (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

In Thailand, general audiences are generally receptive toward Kpop as many Thai youths took part in the *Wave* itself by becoming Kpop idols, such as Nickhun

from boy band 2PM, Bambam from GOT7, Sorn from CLC, Ten from SuperM, Lisa from BlackPink, and so on. Like fans-driven charity activities in Indonesia, social projects and online fundraising are also prevalent for Thai K-pop fandom. *BTS Thailand* and *CandyClover*, for instance, initiated a blood donation project on their social media accounts as part of BTS 5th anniversary celebration and successfully gathered around 200 liters of blood which can save around 1500 people who need it (Eun Ju, 2018). Quoted from Korea Herard (2018), one of Thai BTS fans said, "Just like BTS delivers love through their songs, we will try our best to deliver love to others."

More recently, tweets by Thai BTS fans throughout December 2020 went viral when birthday messages for their favorite idols were displayed on the back of tuk-tuks instead of billboards at railway stations (see Figure 2). Not just BTS, this tuk-tuk birthday projects were also used by other fans of K-pop artists in Thailand. Bangkok Post (2020) reported that this activity symbolizes protests to railway operators due to the stoppage of their train services during the series of pro-democracy rallies. K-pop fans online encouraged fellow fans to do the same. This effort is also considered fan-activism as they intended to help improve the income for tuk-tuk drivers because they have been badly affected by the pandemic.

Figure 2. Birthday messages on the back of tuk-tuk in Bangkok.



(Source: <https://thisrupt.co/current-affairs/boycott-culture-democracy-weapon/>)

Analyzing these examples of charity-based fan activism can inform us about the implications regarding K-pop fans' civil/political participation in Indonesia and Thailand. From the four examples, we see how BTS fans, ARMY (Adorable Representative MC for Youth), are especially active in philanthropic acts in both countries. They are globally known for advocating #EndViolence campaign with UNICEF, gender and racial issues, human rights issues, and the funding for environmental benefits. This movement can also be explained by the fact that BTS spoke at the UN General Assembly in September 2018 and renewed its commitment to promote children and young people's self-esteem and well-being worldwide through the LOVE MYSELF campaign (UNICEF, 2021). In each case, the intersection between cultural participation and civic/political participation can be explained by fans' going public about their activism. Fans changed from audiences to become public when they posted about their charity and donation on social media. When the post managed to become viral or a topic of discussion for many people, mainstream news media picked up the story, spreading the information even further to general Indonesian and Thai populations.

Participation and resistance are also prevalent in these fan activities. In the cases of Indonesia, fans can be said as taking part in youth-led global environmental campaigns, using fandom to disseminate information about climate change and environmental awareness. But at the same time, they also have their agenda, resisting the mainstream depiction and widely held stereotypes of K-pop fans in their country. By displaying to the public that they are capable of contributing to the betterment of society, they want to replace their negative images as obsessive consumers of Korean popular culture. On the other hand, Thai fans do not concern themselves with how other people perceive them. But similarly, they participate in activism thinking about how they could help people around them. In tuk-tuk birthday messages, Thai K-pop fans' activism also represents resistance toward the anti-democracy government trying to curb down their voices. We will explore more about this topic in the coming section of the analysis.

Fan activism is born through affect, the need to speak up their voice, and their identity in fandom concerning certain issues. In the case of Indonesia and Thailand, these three factors: love for their idols, the need to have their voices heard by the people; and their identity as part of K-pop fandom and citizens of their respective countries; coincide within issues related to the climate and current socio-political condition their countries are facing. Fans actively use fandom to tell stories that

inspire others to take action. We see how fans repeatedly mention that they want to "bring hope" like their idols and are inspired to take action by K-pop music. This story acts as a common ground that unites fans into one fandom identity. The narrative for their idol's "birthday" is also used frame time for the fan activism. Birthdays of their favorite idols are usually celebrated worldwide, and especially on social media. By choosing to conduct their activism on these specific days, fans will get more exposure, which can yield bigger impacts.

Then, how does fan culture influence youth civic/political participation in the form of activism? We can trace it back from K-pop fans participation that is widely practiced in its country of origin. K-pop fandom is a transnational network connected through the internet, and as a fandom, it has a characteristic of a relatively low barrier of entry. As a result, what K-pop fans do in South Korea will also influence the practice of fandom in other countries--though to what extent it influences largely depends on the socio-political and cultural situation in international fans' home countries. As the four examples we examined have a common theme on birthday celebrations, we can refer to how Korean fans celebrate their idols' birthdays. In Korean subway stations, K-pop idol's birthday billboards are a common sight. Fans usually pay a certain amount of money collected to have their birthday wish displayed in LRT stations. This fan practice then influences fans in other countries in celebrating the birthday or anniversary of their favorite bands, including Indonesia and Thailand. Yet, due to the current situation in their countries related to natural disasters, poverty, and struggle for democracy, the K-pop birthday celebration has been transformed into fan activism.

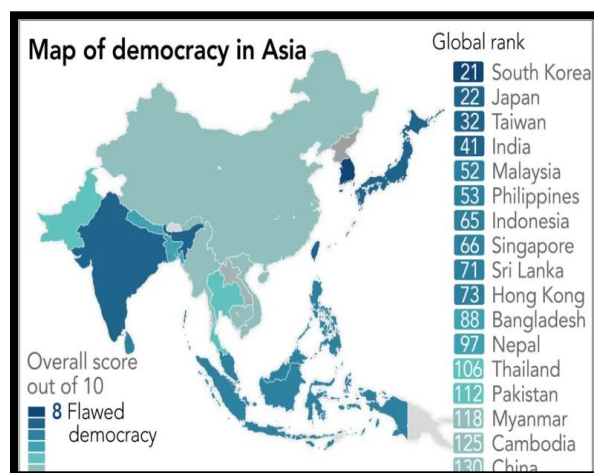
Looking at these four areas of analysis, we can see how charity-based fan activism has civic/political implications narrated through stories and collective identities that arise from the fandom and fan culture itself.

- ***Politically Motivated Fan Activism: Collective Identity and Democratic Participation***

In addition to charity-based fan activism, K-pop fans in Indonesia and Thailand also partook in protests and demonstrations against the government or criticizing certain policies. While the background situations for the emergence of philanthropic activism between Indonesia and Thailand are quite similar, the democratic participation of fans is rather distinct. The possibility might lie in the political forces and the level of democracy in each region. Based on the map of democracy in Asia in 2018, the outcomes of democratization in the regions vary from flawed democracy to authoritarianism (Figure 3). Unlike in Europe or in the United

States, where military intervention was minimum, it was not the case in Asia as military, and authoritarian legacies influenced politics and democratization. Moreover, the establishment of democracy depends on each state's degree of freedom, authoritarianism, and democratic consolidation (Case, 2015). In this case, most Asian and Southeast Asian countries had experienced turbulent regime transitions and nation-building processes with the military as an important key variable; therefore, civilian participation in the state's politics remains challenging. In the case of Thailand, K-pop fans' pro-democracy movement and thousands of other Thai youths faced challenges as they tried to speak out against the military regime.

Figure 3. Map of Democracy in Asia



(Source: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Asia-Insight/Asia-s-fragile-democracies-struggle-to-tame-illiberal-forces>)

Since early 2020 in Thailand, various media have reported thousands of protesters, mostly pro-democracy young activists, who took to the streets of Bangkok in calling for political reforms and stopping crackdowns and harassment on the government critics. The rally was first ignited by the dissolution of the Future Forward Party (an oppositional party that has a greater democratic outlook) by the Thai military in February 2020. The protesters echoed their protest not only in the offline form, but also through various online platforms; with #WhatsHappeningInThailand Twitter hashtag and Facebook group 'Royalist Marketplace' become prominent spaces to disseminate information on critics and

also to report on what happens during the demonstrations (Thomas, Beattie, & Zhang, 2020).

After the first movement, another protest occurred in July 2020, voicing three demands: disbanding parliament and organizing transparent election, reforming monarchy and amending the constitution previously drafted by the military, and stopping harassment and crackdowns on peaceful government critics (#WhatsHappeningInThailand, 2020). The biggest rally since the military junta held power in 2014 occurred in October 2020 when the clash between demonstrators and military personnel escalated. The police used water cannons to disperse the peaceful gathering. This act has received international condemnation when trending on Twitter as it breaches human rights, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.

Being a youth-led political demonstration, cultural references in offline and online spaces were repeatedly used during the rallies. For instance, protesters on the streets took pictures or selfies and uploaded them to social media posing with 'three-fingers' salutes referencing a popular Hollywood movie, *The Hunger Games*. The 'three-fingers' salute means a sign of resistance towards the oppressing regime, and has been used as a symbol in much of demonstration in Thailand ever since (Wongcha-um, 2020).

In addition to their tuk-tuk birthday messages protests, K-pop fans in Thailand played an important role in the democratic movement through their presence in social media, specifically Twitter. Thai fans were inspired by the democratic protest that happened in Hong Kong and South Korea. Seeing what happened in President Park Geun Hye's impeachment rally, the social media coverage about the movement and Kpop celebrities' involvement has inspired fans—or the younger generation—to be politically aware and vocal about the situation on their own country. For instance, former KARA member Han Seung-Yeon, Korean actress Kim Yoo Jung, and singer-actor Lee Joon were spotted by fans participating in the Korean rally (Doo, 2016). Thai Kpop fandoms, mirroring the events in South Korea, have taken their support to social media, following suit the Thai artists and Kpop idol who showed their concerns about the violence in Bangkok. The Kpop idol, Nichkun, a member of 2PM who is also a Thai citizen, tweeted: "The use of violence is something I cannot watch and stand idly by, violence has never helped anything. I hope everyone stays safe... and take care of yourselves." (Chen, 2020)

The Kpop fandoms then flooded Twitter trends by combining #WhatsHappeningInThailand and #หยุดคุกคามประชาชน (stop oppressing people) hashtags with other Kpop-related hashtags to spread the message to the world and attract supports from overseas fan communities. Besides online support, Thai Kpop fandoms – from Super Junior to Girls' Generation, EXO, and BTS, also worked on gathering money for protesters' protection gears. This movement also donated to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights [TLHR], which provided pro-bono legal aids to pro-democracy demonstrators arrested and given charges by the Thai government (Rawnsley, 2021). Nevertheless, the Kpop fandoms do understand that they wield power as change-makers through their online community.

Having a higher level of democracy (ranked 65 worldwide), in Indonesia, K-pop fans' political participation has less to do with protesting against the monarchy and military but more about government issuance of the new law. In June last year, the new Omnibus Bill on Job Creation (RUU Cipta Kerja) was hotly debated and discussed by Indonesians on social media. The government submitted the new bill draft to the House of Representatives. Still, many were against its implementation because it's feared to negatively impact the environment and weaken the protection of workers' rights (The Jakarta Post, 2020a). Despite the majority of Indonesian opposed the bill, the government continued to process it. As a result, civil society organizations, NGOs, labor groups, and student activists joined the protest to cancel the job creation bill (The Jakarta Post, 2020b). At the same time, Twitter was flooded with hashtags such as #DPRRIKkhianatiRakyat (#HouseBetraysThePeople), #BatalkanOmnibusLaw (#CancelTheOmnibusLaw) and #MosiTidakPercaya (#VoteOfNoConfidence).

Just like how Thai K-pop fans use Twitter to protest and raise awareness of the issue, Indonesian K-pop fans also participate in the protest by utilizing hashtag and their wide network on social media. According to Ismail Fahmi, a social media expert from Drone Emprit, K-pop fans have helped Omnibus Law-related hashtags become a worldwide trending topic on Twitter (CNN Indonesia, 2020). K-poppers who were at first clueless about the issue became enlightened after following the conversations on Twitter. After understanding what the issue is about, they participated in the conversation with others concerned about it. They helped shape a netizen cluster together with political parties, labor organizations, activists, and students that exclusively talked about Omnibus Law. Fahmi added, "demographically speaking, K-poppers (K-pop fans) is the biggest social media

users. By taking part in using the hashtags, they become more educated about this issue."

From the case of Thailand and Indonesia regarding K-pop fan activism that related directly to government and laws, we see how the intersection between cultural and political participation happened in social media, namely Twitter. In the case of Thailand, K-pop fans were inspired to take action because, as active users of social media, they have seen political protests in South Korea and other Asian countries that resonated with pro-democracy. Indonesian fans, however, were exposed to the issue without knowing but then decided to take action because they could relate to the cause. Both Thai and Indonesian fans became public by tweeting their thoughts and utilized hashtags. Taking part in this protest is a form of activism as they know the hierarchy or structure they are going against. In contrast to the charity-based activism in which fandom identity is very strong and precedes the fan's national identity as Indonesians or Thais, these two examples showed resistance based on collective interest related to their citizenry. On the one hand, Thai fans used K-pop-related hashtags to spread to the world about what was happening in their country. Korean idols with Thai nationality also united fans also expressed their concerns about the matter. On the other hand, Indonesian fans used their massive presence on Twitter to help push their protest as a trending topic. In both cases, fans used their access to K-pop fandom to serve collective interests as citizens of Thailand and Indonesia.

Finally, it is not a presumptuous thing to say that K-pop fandom influences fans' political participation from the two examples we have discussed. K-pop fans know how to organize the digital world. For example, they are used to working collectively to make sure that their favorite boyband's comeback stage or new album dominates Twitter's worldwide trending topics. According to K-pop expert Cedarbough Saeji, the political participation of K-pop fans should not be something unusual, "that these young, socially progressive, outward-looking people who are adept at using these online platforms. They are stuck at home and online even more because of Covid-19 – that these people are doing political things is not surprising" (The New York Times, 2020). In this case, K-pop fandom has facilitated young people to gain the digital skills necessary for activism projects.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper has provided recent examples of K-pop fan activism in Indonesia and Thailand. Among the samples, we grouped the cases into charity-

based fan activism that takes form in civic participation driven by K-pop narrative to inspire action. The other group directly concerns the governments, laws, and policies, fueled by political goals and collective identity as citizens of their respective countries. Then, we analyzed both groups by considering four areas of studying fandom and civic/political participation: the intersection between cultural and civic/political participation, the tension between the involvement and resistance, affect and collective identity, and impacts. We have concluded that fandom may have a bigger influence on youth participation in democracy. Civil society in a way that helps inspire actions and provide young people with digital skills they need to partake in fan activism that concerns real-life issues. Since K-pop fandom is transnational by nature and fan-based political mobilization is happening everywhere. As a final note, examples of fan activism described in this paper suggest that we need to consider popular cultural consumption and media convergence in studying youth participation in democracy. Because when we use a conventional lens and narrow definition of participation, we fail to "...consider young people's conceptualizations of participation...that new political views and vantage points are missed" (Collin, 2015). So, examining more case studies of fan activism in different localities will enrich our understanding of the power of cultural community, participatory culture, and youth political participation in our contemporary world.

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