

Celebrity Worship among K-Pop Fans

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ABSTRACT

Korean Pop, also known as K-pop, is currently very popular in Indonesia, especially among teenagers and early adults. Being a fan can fulfill the need for entertainment that can bring motivation and happiness. However, in reality, many K-pop fans who initially only admire turn into a cult or celebrity worship. The purpose of this study is to describe celebrity worship in K-pop fans. The approach used is qualitative-phenomenology. The participants of this study consisted of four K-pop fans who were taken purposively. The results showed that fans follow celebrities as part of entertainment (entertainment-social). Moreover, fans also have deep feelings for celebrities, such as feeling happiness and sadness over events experienced by celebrities (intense-personal feeling). Fans also have an obsession with their idols (borderline-phatological) which causes daily life to be disrupted. A positive self-concept, high self-esteem, and critical thinking skills seem to be important to minimize idolization. In addition, the realization that idols present an idealized version that is not always the same as reality needs to be instilled, including a love for the nation's culture can also reduce excessive love for foreign cultures.

Keywords: celebrity worship, k-pop, k-pop fans

Introduction

Korean Pop or commonly called K-pop is currently popular in Indonesia, especially among teenagers and young adults. Developments make it easy for individuals to communicate and access information from around the world through the internet. The internet has become a link between idols in South Korea and fans around the world, including Indonesia. K-pop fans in Indonesia continue to increase every year, even topping the list as the country with the largest number of K-pop fans in cyberspace in 2022 (CNN Indonesia, January 2022). This is clear evidence of what is widely known as the Korean Wave.

Korean Wave/Hallyu is a term for the spread of the Korean cultural wave that was first introduced in China and then expanded to East Asia to Southeast Asia including Indonesia (Shim, 2006). One of the Korean cultures that gained immense popularity is its pop music group or commonly referred to as K-pop. K-pop is popular music from South Korea that is usually performed by a group consisting of four to a dozen members (Indira, Komsiah, Syaifuddin, 2022).

K-pop stars are not only talented musicians and dancers, but also idols who have attractive physical characteristics (Sakinah, Hasna & Wayuningsih, 2022). There are several other reasons why Korean idol groups are so popular these days. One of them is loyal fans. Over time, K-pop fans feel a sense of kinship through experiences generated by the appeal of

idol characters, creating a close bond and increasing the sense of intimacy between fans and their idols (Perbawani & Nuralin, 2021).

This excessive admiration refers to a fan's attachment to an admired artist figure or commonly referred to as Celebrity Worship. Celebrity worship is a form of closeness to celebrities that leads to dysfunctional behavior (Rojek, 2012). There are three aspects that can be described as celebrity worship. First, entertainment-social, which is the motivation underlying fans' active search for celebrities. Fans are attracted to celebrity idols because of their ability to entertain and attract attention. Second, intense-personal, which is a very strong feeling towards the idol. Fans have intense and compulsive feelings for everything related to the favored idol. Third, borderline-pathological, which is a fan who is willing to do anything for his idol, including doing illegal things and is considered to reflect a person's catalogical social (Maltby, Day, McCutcheon, Horan & Ashe (2006).

Celebrity worship begins during adolescence and increases during adulthood (McCutcheon, Lange, & Houran, 2002). According to Liu (2013) adolescents often experience uncertainty and confusion about new roles and will identify with adults or idols who can help them find information to shape their identity. According to Stever (2011) celebrity worship is practiced by adolescents as part of the developmental process to gain a sense of identity necessary for the purpose of building intimate relationships with others.

A fan is someone who fully supports their idol, but potentially has excessive love for the idol by showing aggressive behavior. Fans like this have extraordinary loyalty, attachment and even love for their idols and are even willing to carry out something they like to the extreme, they are commonly referred to as fanatical fans. Regina (in Perbawani & Nuralin, 2021) states that fanatical fans have a strong bond with their idols like an interpersonal relationship which is closely related to the concept of self-identity as a form of emotional behavior.

According to research by Gumelar, Almada, and Laksmiwati (2021) physical appearance is one of the important assessments in the world of the South Korean entertainment industry. Fans start by liking K-pop visuals and songs, learning more about the groups that sing the songs, and digging up personal information on the members. According to Ayu and Astiti (2020) K-pop fans dig up information about the idols they like through social media platforms such as twitter, snapchat, instagram or through print media such as teen magazines. Fans discuss their idols and exchange information with other fellow fans. Efathania and Aisyah's (2019) research shows that the amount of time spent accessing social networks is related to celebrity worship. The more time spent accessing social networks, the higher the level of celebrity worship. Based on the results of the Kumparan survey, 56% of K-pop fans spend 1-5 hours surfing social media to find out all information about K-pop idols. As many as 28% of fans spend more than 6 hours on the internet to watch various activities of the idol (Kumparan, January 2017).

According to Maryam (2016) celebrity worship behavior can have a negative impact on low mental health, such as anxiety, decreased self-esteem, stalking, depression and other extreme behaviors. Similar to previous research conducted by Sansone and Sansone (2014), individuals who experience high celebrity worship tend to have poor mental health related to psychological illnesses such as compulsive buying, low self-control, stalking behavior, addiction or even criminality. Fans who are obsessed with their idols are willing to do anything to meet or contribute to their idols' careers as a form of support.

Celebrity worship is not only seen from how much fans love K-pop idols but also from social media. The fanaticism behavior that many K-pop fans do is aggressive behavior. Common aggressive behavior is attacking each other with malicious criticism with different fans on social media. In addition, another aggressive behavior is making fun of other artists or figures who are considered disrespectful to their idols (Febriany, Santi & Ananta, 2022).

These cases of celebrity worship are only some forms of celebrity worship. This study aims to find out celebrity worship in Indonesian K-pop fans, factors, and impacts.

Methods

This research was conducted using a qualitative-phenomenological approach involving 4 participants who are K-Pop fans. Data were collected by in-depth interviews and then analyzed in several stages, namely coding, grouping of theme units, and interpretation. In terms of data validity, researchers used triangulation of data sources, namely from the closest people who know the participants well (significant others).

Results

This study focuses on celebrity worship in K-pop fans. There are 4 participants in this study. Participant 1 (MA) is a 25-year-old woman and has been a K-pop fan for 6 years. Participant 2 (LP) is a 30-year-old woman and has been a K-pop fan for 15 years. Participant 3 (BK) is a 24-year-old male and has been a K-pop fan for 10 years. Participant 4 (WY) is a 24-year-old woman and has been a K-pop fan for 7 years. Based on the results of interviews with the four K-pop fan participants, the researcher presents an overview of celebrity worship, influencing factors, and its impact.

First Participant (MA)

Participant MA was first introduced to K-pop in 2009, when he was in elementary school. The reason participants like K-pop is because they follow their friends who are also K-pop fans. In addition, the lack of impressive boy bands or girl bands in Indonesia makes K-pop more attractive according to MA participants. Participants feel that K-pop idols are an important part of their lives. Participants are willing to sacrifice time and money to support their K-pop idols without feeling a loss. Participants also believe that they are loved and saved by K-pop idols. Participants appreciate the effort that K-pop idols make to fans so participants expect the same in their personal relationships. For participants, K-pop helped to increase positive self-perception.

Second Participant (LP)

Participant LP became familiar with K-pop in 2009. At the beginning of liking K-pop, participants were attracted by the visuals of idols who felt in accordance with the participants' tastes in style and appearance. Participants actively seek the latest information about their idols through social media or in fan communities. Participants have a drive to keep updating and completing their collection of K-pop items.

Participants are also often involved in conflicts in online media to defend their K-pop idols. In addition, participants also follow illegal accounts to get personal information about their idols. There is a feeling of similarity between participants and their idols in terms of interests or personal experiences. The hard work that K-pop idols do makes participants not only interested but also a source of inspiration to develop themselves. Participants feel that

the positive values displayed by K-pop idols can be carried out in real life, especially in choosing a partner.

Social media and streaming applications become a bridge for participants to deepen their engagement with their idols. In fact, participants can spend all day just looking for information about their idols on the internet. The collaboration between K-pop idols and big brands increases the status and image of idols in the eyes of participants. This makes participants become extravagant and the extravagance is considered a self-reward.

Third Participant (BK)

Participants' interest in K-pop idols is influenced by visual appearance. The characteristics of K-pop music fulfill participants' needs and preferences. In addition, participants are also attracted to the performance and professionalism of K-pop idols. Participants feel that their relationship with K-pop idols has become an important part of their lives.

Participants also have a high interest in wearing the same clothes as those worn by K-pop idols. Participants try to imitate or own things related to their idols' lives. Participants often think about their idols, not only thinking about idols in general but also imagining specific activities that their idols might do. Not only that, participants also involve themselves in conflicts with other fans to defend their idols due to criticism or attacks.

Live broadcasts conducted by K-pop idols strengthen the emotional bond between participants and their idols. Through online media, participants have the opportunity to interact directly with their idols. Participants spend 7-9 hours surfing social media to find the latest information about their idols. Through idolization, participants feel more confident and less insecure because K-pop is where their happiness lies.

Fourth Participant (WY)

Participant WY liked the genre of K-pop songs and enjoyed the performances given by K-pop idols on stage. In addition, participants are also attracted to the romantic attitude of K-pop idols and have fantasies of being in a relationship with their idols. There is a strong relationship between participants and their idols, because participants identify themselves as having the same personality.

This strong relationship makes WY participants not want their idols to have partners because WY participants feel they will lose interest and feel disturbed. Her idol's work is able to express the feelings and problems that participants face, creating a strong emotional bond. Participants also collect and interact with items related to K-pop idols because they provide satisfaction for participants. As a result of this, participants often spend money to buy items related to K-pop.

Celebrity Worship in K-pop Fans

The physical appeal of K-pop creates a strong sense of admiration. But not only that, interest in the Korean entertainment industry also occurs because the unique song genres and stage performances accompanied by elaborate choreography attract fans and provide a different experience compared to local music. In addition, participants described idols as perfect partners, showing that idols are not only valued for their work and talent, but also portrayed as ideal figures that represent participants' hopes and dreams. This idealized image strengthens emotional attachment and makes fans feel closer to their idols.

Based on the findings in the field, participants perceived K-pop idols as people close to them. Media exposure provides wide access to idols' lives. Fans seem to know everything about their idols through the media. Fans feel like they really recognize their idols from the idols' backgrounds, hobbies, and personalities because their experiences through these media are perceived as real relationships. This illusion of experiencing face-to-face interaction with celebrity characters in a spectacle can lead to a phenomenon called parasocial relationships.

Task attraction experienced by participants includes a sense of admiration for the dedication and hard work their idol has put in to achieve success. An individual will consider the role of accepting, rejecting or interpreting parasocial interactions with media personas after the program ends. The existence of this connection makes an individual feel good about interacting with their fav idol personality.

Participants often see themselves in the celebrities they idolize. Participants consider their idols to reflect their own feelings, principles, or personal experiences which are included in identification attraction. Furthermore, the romantic attraction aspect experienced by participants in this research is in the form of feeling close to their idols. Fans not only imagine communicating directly with their idols, but also dream of themselves as their idols' partners and raise their expectations of real-world partners.

The impact of celebrity worship found in the software is divided into two types, namely positive and negative impacts. The positive impact is that the emotional support provided by idols provides comfort, overcomes loneliness, and helps fans face difficult times. The success achieved by idols as a result of hard work, perseverance, and dedication is also a source of inspiration for fans. Fans who idolize feel motivated to pursue their own dreams and goals with the same passion.

In this study, it was also found that the idolization carried out by participants had a positive impact on increasing self-esteem. Celebrity worship can increase participants' self-esteem through identification with idols, sources of inspiration, emotional support, recognition and acceptance in the community, achievement through fan activities, and good role models.

Discussions

Intense-personal feeling in celebrity worship makes fans feel a personal connection with the idol. Fans feel like they can communicate with the idol interpersonally (Nata et al., 2022). This connection is also found in participants who feel a strong bond, which is not easy to explain. The presence of an idol figure in the participant's life provides a sense of comfort and a feeling that they are loved and appreciated. In addition, participants described the idol figure as the perfect figure to be a partner, showing that the idol is not only appreciated for work and talent, but also described as an ideal figure who represents the hopes and dreams of participants. This idealized image strengthens emotional attachment and makes fans feel closer to their idols.

The above shows that the sense of being loved and the image of an idol as an ideal figure is the result of a sense of closeness or intimacy built with an idol, despite the fact that the relationship is one-way or referred to as a parasocial relationship. Erikson (1968) explains that intimacy can occur due to the presence or absence of social contact. Erikson argued that if an early adult cannot make personal commitments to others, then they will be isolated and fixated on their own activities and thoughts (self-absorb) (Papalia, Old & Feldman, 2009). This situation occurs in participants where participants experience the inability to build

intimacy so that it makes them fixate on their activities and thoughts, namely by continuing to idolize.

Failure to achieve intimacy in participants can be seen with expectations with the criteria possessed in the idol figure. Idols create standards that are difficult to achieve by real partners. This causes dissatisfaction in the relationship because the real partner cannot meet these standards. The results of this study are in line with Alwisol's (2014) opinion that when the need for love and belonging cannot be fulfilled, it is not due to frustration as a result of social encouragement, but rather due to the absence of psychological intimacy with others as happened to BK participants who prioritized BTS over personal relationships.

In the theoretical model that does not consider relational variables, the relationship in the form of the fan's perceived closeness to the idol fails to be considered. This is because this theoretical model does not consider the possible importance of an early adult individual's perception that he and his idol share the same emotions, connections, intimacy, or bonds. In line with the results of Boon and Lomore's (2001) research, it shows that 75% of early adulthood individuals have a strong attraction to celebrities in their lives, such as pop idols, movie stars, and so on.

Based on the findings in the field, participants consider K-pop idols as people close to them. Media exposure provides wide access to idols' lives. Fans seem to know everything about their idols through the media. Fans feel like they really recognize their idols from the idols' backgrounds, hobbies, and personalities because their experiences through these media are perceived as real relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This illusion of experiencing face-to-face interaction with celebrity characters in a spectacle can lead to a phenomenon called parasocial relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

According to Sokolova and Kefi (2020), parasocial theory relies on the virtual relationship that occurs between celebrities and their fans but this relationship is intimated as a relationship that fans perceive as real. Fans enjoy interpersonal relationships with celebrity personalities until a very intimate connection is formed. As a result, fans feel that celebrities are personal friends, family, relatives, or even lovers (Hung, Chen & Tse, 2011). Parasocial relationships are thought to start when fans feel that they are friends with celebrities in the media. Regular contact will increase the accuracy of fans' understanding of media characters including style, personality, preferences, personal life as well as interpretation and understanding of the meaning of character behavior (on stage) (Chung & Cho, 2014).

In general, there are factors that influence a person to engage in celebrity worship. Internal factors are task attraction, identification attraction and romantic attraction (Stever, 2009). Task attraction experienced by participants includes a sense of admiration for the dedication and hard work done by their idols to achieve success. Through task attraction, fans can build and strengthen emotional relationships with their idols. Horton and Wohl (1956) state that accessing images, videos or programs is a form of parasocial relationship role. An individual will consider the role of accepting, rejecting or interpreting parasocial interactions with media personas after the program ends. The existence of this connection makes a person feel happy to interact with their favorite idol personality. Although it seems strange, it turns out that parasocial relationships are commonplace and are considered an extension of social relationships in real daily life (Giles, 2002).

Participants often see themselves in the celebrities they idolize. Participants perceived their idols as reflecting their own personal feelings, principles, or experiences, which falls under identification attraction. Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) explain that identification can

mean two things. First, when someone imagines themselves in the character's shoes and feels the character's experience when watching. Secondly, many researchers have found that this identification can have an effect beyond the viewing activity that can create a broader impact on the views and behavior of fans in real life. When a person finds a good and idealized character image in their favorite celebrity, fans tend to follow and seek information about them that can be used as a reference in attitudes, behaviors and personalities applied in everyday life.

Furthermore, the romantic attraction experienced by participants in this research was a feeling of being close to their idol. Fans not only imagine communicating directly with their idols, but also dream of themselves as their idol's partner and raise their expectations of partners in the real world. According to Stever (2013), romantic attraction is the best indicator of the highest level of fan intensity in a community. This statement is in accordance with the results of research conducted by Aulia and Qodariah (2018) in the Bandung Army community, it was found that 29 respondents (90.6%) were in the high category in the romantic attraction aspect.

Apart from internal factors, external factors, namely the media, play a very important role as a factor in the celebrity worship phenomenon. The media is the main source of information for knowing details about idols' personal and professional lives. Based on the research results, Twitter is a social media that is widely accessed by participants as K-pop fans. This is in accordance with statistical data from the Indonesian Twitter account which states that Indonesia is in the first position for the country that uploads the most conversational tweets about K-pop on Twitter (Kim, 2021). The appearance of idols in advertising campaigns for well-known brands is also a factor in the emergence of celebrity worship. . Through marketing, idols can build and maintain strong relationships with fans, which ultimately strengthens the idol's image and appeal in the eyes of the public.

In this study, it was also found that idolization carried out by participants had a positive impact on increasing self-esteem. Celebrity worship can increase participants' self-esteem through identification with idols, sources of inspiration, emotional support, recognition and acceptance in the community, achievements through fan activities, as well as good examples and role models. When someone finds a good character image that meets their standards in a celebrity, fans tend to follow the celebrity and look for information about them to increase their self-esteem (Jannah, Sari & Fitri, 2023). By focusing on these aspects, fans can utilize relationships with their idols to build and strengthen their sense of self-confidence and self-worth. Meanwhile, the negative impacts of celebrity worship are obsessive behavior, conflict with people around and excessive spending.

Conclusion

Celebrity worship is a phenomenon that starts from simply admiring a celebrity for entertainment to having an unhealthy obsession with celebrities. At the entertainment-social level, fans follow celebrities as a form of entertainment. At the intense-personal feeling level, fans have deeper feelings towards celebrities, such as being able to feel happiness and sadness over events in the celebrity's life and starting to join communities and collect items related to the celebrity. At the borderline-phatological level, fans have an excessive obsession with the celebrities they like. The factors that cause someone to experience celebrity worship in this study are a sense of admiration for the celebrity's talent, personality, lifestyle, need for identification, media exposure. There are positive and negative impacts of the celebrity

worship phenomenon. The positive impact of celebrity worship is that it can provide inspiration, motivation and entertainment for fans. The negative impact is that excessive idolization causes daily life to become disturbed, especially if it develops into obsession, it can affect personal relationships and perceptions of reality.

Acknowledgement

Thank you to the participants who were happy to be fully involved in this research.

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