

The Participatory Cultural Practices of K-Pop Fanboys on Instagram

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the participatory cultural practices performed by K-Pop fanboys on Instagram. While existing research has predominantly focused on fangirls, there remains a significant lack of studies examining the active participation of fanboys in K-Pop fandoms. Using a qualitative method based on virtual ethnography, data were collected through participatory observation of K-Pop fanboy accounts on Instagram. This research seeks to answer the question: How do K-Pop fanboys engage in participatory cultural practices on Instagram? The findings reveal that K-Pop fanboys engage in various forms of participatory culture, such as sharing photos and videos. The photos shared are not ordinary images but are often digitally manipulated to create the illusion of personal acquaintance or interaction with K-Pop idols, commonly referred to as "delusional photos." In addition to delusional photos, reaction videos to the latest music videos (MV's) of K-Pop idols represent another tangible form of participatory culture by K-Pop fanboys on Instagram. Other expressions include dance and song cover videos, as well as cosplay or mimicking the poses and appearances of their favorite K-Pop idols. Written content such as hashtags and captions is also utilized as a medium for participation. Through these practices, fanboys—with the various forms of content they create and share freely on Instagram—not only showcase their love for K-Pop but also demonstrate their skills and talents as fans. These practices serve as a means for expressing creativity, fostering interactions with fellow fans, and strengthening a sense of community within the K-Pop fandom. These findings affirm that K-Pop fanboys are active participants in participatory culture in the digital era, where they are not merely consumers but also content producers in the realm of social media.

Keywords: Cultural Participatory; K-Pop; Fanboys; Instagram

INTRODUCTION

The term "fanboy" is often used across various social groups, but in the context of K-Pop, it carries a deeper meaning. In the world of K-Pop, being a fanboy is not merely about being a casual fan; it reflects profound affection and dedication toward idols, groups, or the K-Pop industry as a whole. While the term is frequently mentioned, its nuances are often misunderstood. McAvoy-James and Fletcher (2019) define a fanboy as a male or female fan,

particularly one who is obsessively devoted to comics, music, movies, or science fiction. In this context, "K-Pop fanboy" refers specifically to males who are deeply obsessed with K-Pop.

Unlike other forms of popular culture, K-Pop fanboys often face stigma and negative stereotypes, as K-Pop is sometimes perceived as a genre targeted primarily at women. However, the rapid growth of K-Pop has attracted a diverse audience, including male fans. Despite the stigmas, K-Pop fanboys, like other K-Pop fans, often construct a strong social identity within their fandom. This identity is shaped not only through deep engagement with K-Pop culture such as music, dance, and the lifestyle presented by idols but also through active interaction within fan communities, fostering solidarity and camaraderie (2022). Moreover, their presence as K-Pop fans is demonstrated through participatory cultural practices, particularly on Instagram. As Jenkins et al. (2015) stated, fandom, as an interpretive community, exemplifies participatory culture within the broader framework of convergence culture.

Participatory culture has become a significant phenomenon in the digital era, especially within global pop culture contexts such as K-Pop. Henry Jenkins popularized the term, describing it as a cultural environment where individuals actively engage in the creation and sharing of content, often facilitated by digital media (Xu et al., 2023). This culture is characterized by low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing works, and informal mentorship where experienced participants share knowledge with (Baranowski, 2021; Xu et al., 2023). Within participatory culture, fans are not merely passive consumers but active participants in cultural production (Xu et al., 2023), marking a departure from traditional media consumption by emphasizing active participation, collaboration, and the blurring of boundaries between producers and consumers (Keltie, 2017).

At its core, participatory culture involves multiple aspects, including prosumption culture, which serves as a defining feature. This concept combines the roles of producer and consumer, where fans not only consume pop culture content but also actively contribute to reproducing and disseminating it (Fuchs, 2013). In K-Pop fandom, fanboys, despite being a minority group, often demonstrate their active engagement by creating various types of content, such as fan art, reaction videos, song covers, and theories about their favorite idols, all of which extend the original works' meanings (Xu et al., 2023). This prosumption culture strengthens the principles of participatory culture by facilitating collaboration and global community engagement. Moreover, participatory culture now intersects with AI, as fandom provides valuable insights into the relationships between individual technology users, collective communities, and machines (Li & Pang, 2024).

However, the active presence of K-Pop fanboys on social media is not without challenges. They often face social stigma that frames K-Pop fandom as predominantly female spaces, rendering the existence of fanboys unusual or even subjects of ridicule. Gray (2003) highlights that fans who do not conform to dominant norms within fandom often experience marginalization. Nevertheless, their presence challenges these stereotypes, with social media particularly Instagram offering a safe space for self-expression, breaking gender boundaries, and redefining their roles within fan communities.

This phenomenon warrants deeper examination, as the participatory culture embraced by fans, including K-Pop fanboys, signifies a major shift in global pop culture consumption patterns. This culture reflects a transition from passive consumption to active participation, emphasizing creativity, collaboration, and the erosion of boundaries between producers and consumers (Xu et al., 2023). In the context of K-Pop, this is evident in how fans not only redistribute idol content but also create new narratives through fan fiction, fan art, and other

activities. As Keltie (2017) observed, social media enables fans to articulate their experiences in ways that were previously impossible.

Furthermore, research on K-Pop participatory culture has predominantly focused on the experiences of fangirls or female fans. As noted by Otmazgin and Lyan (2013), fandom studies often center on the majority gender experience, leaving groups like fanboys underrepresented in academic literature. In other hand Maros and Basek (2022) observe that while the K-Pop fanboy phenomenon continues to grow, many aspects of their experiences remain unexplored, particularly their engagement in digital participatory culture. Most studies on fanboys tend to focus on their masculinity, which often overlooks other aspects of their experiences within K-Pop participatory culture. For Instance The study by Fitriyani (2022) in *"Becoming a Fanboy of a K-Pop Boy Group in Indonesia"* highlights how NCT fanboys in Indonesia construct their identity and navigate their participation in a fandom predominantly composed of female fans. Furthermore, the study *"A Negotiating K-Pop Fanboy Micro-Celebrity Masculinity on Instagram"* explores how K-Pop fanboys who have become micro-celebrities on Instagram negotiate their masculinity amidst social stigma that often associates K-Pop fanboys with femininity or certain sexual orientations (Fitria et al., 2024). Moreover, the exclusion of fanboys in academic studies can create a bias in understanding the overall landscape of K-Pop fandom, ultimately overlooking their experiences and contributions to this culture. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how fanboys participate in K-Pop culture, both in terms of engagement with idols and interactions with fellow fans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PARTICIPATORY CULTURE AND PROSUMPTION IN THE DIGITAL ERA: TRANSFORMING K-POP FANBOYS INTO PRODUCERS WITHIN K-POP FANDOM

Participatory culture was first introduced by Henry Jenkins in his book *Textual Poachers* (1992) to describe a culture where individuals actively engage in the creation and sharing of content, rather than merely being passive consumers (Xu et al., 2023). Initially studied in the context of fan communities, the concept has since been applied to various fields such as literature, politics, and digital media, demonstrating its flexibility and relevance across multiple aspects of modern society (Henry Jenkins & Jie, 2024). In fandom culture, participatory culture is characterized by active engagement, creative responses, and discussions about representation, diversity, and inclusion (Henry Jenkins, 2018). This culture enables fans to create content, negotiate meanings of popular texts, and participate in diverse discussions (Guo, 2021; Henry Jenkins, 2018) It also involves the use of language and discourse reflecting technological practices that adapt to the dynamic interactions on social media platforms (Yin & Xie, 2024).

Participatory culture creates an environment where individuals can easily create, publish, and share content, fostering creativity and hybrid forms of representation (Hafner et al., 2017). The democratization of content creation allows for diverse voices and narratives, promoting inclusivity within digital culture and expanding the space for individual expression in various communities (Tacchi et al., 2009). The advent of social media has dramatically altered fan practices and their interaction with popular culture, ultimately shaping and facilitating fans' roles in the digital cultural ecosystem (Guo, 2021). This evolution has blurred the boundaries between producers and consumers in fandoms, strengthening fan cultures through the support of social media platforms (Guo, 2021).

Through their creative activities, K-Pop fanboys are part of the global K-Pop fandom ecosystem, breaking the divide between passive consumption and active production.

Consequently, fandom members are not merely consumers but also act as producers. This phenomenon, known as prosumption, combines production and consumption, reflecting the merging of these activities, particularly in the digital era where the boundaries between them are increasingly blurred (G Ritzer & Degli Esposti, 2020). First introduced by Alvin Toffler in 1980, the concept of prosumption has gained significant attention in various fields, including social sciences and energy studies (Dusi, 2018; Ellsworth-Krebs & Reid, 2016). In the K-Pop context, fanboys often play key roles in creating creative content on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, making them active participants in digital prosumption.

Through prosumption, K-Pop fanboys expand their participation in the global fandom ecosystem, becoming key players in the circulation of digital culture. As Jenkins (2006) pointed out, participatory culture enables fans to become co-creators, where they not only consume artists' works but also generate new value. This activity broadens fans' space for expression and enriches the collective experience of fandom communities, creating stronger connections among fans. Thus, this participatory nature becomes a hallmark of modern fan culture (L Duits et al., 2016). Furthermore, prosumption empowers individuals to contribute directly to the cultural marketplace (George Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), positioning fanboys as integral to the dynamics of the creative economy. In this role, fanboys not only support their favorite artists but also influence global pop culture trends through their innovative creations and active contributions.

The use of new media is central to fanboy culture, particularly in participatory and prosumption processes. K-Pop fanboys utilize social media, blogs, and other digital platforms to interact with their fandoms, share content, and organize events. These activities position fanboys as key actors within the digital ecosystem. James and Fletcher (2019) highlight that technological engagement facilitates the rapid dissemination of fan activities while strengthening community building. Norman (2014) adds that digital participation not only fosters stronger connections among fans but also creates collaborative spaces for sharing creativity. The presence of fanboys on social media thus transforms interaction dynamics within fandoms, making them more inclusive and active.

In addition to strengthening communities, K-Pop fanboys play a crucial role in shaping the global fandom culture landscape. Their enthusiastic support can drive the success of media franchises and influence cultural industry strategies (Sandvoss, 2015). Activities such as organizing "streaming parties" or disseminating content via social media align with the concept of "spreadable media" proposed by Jenkins (2013). Through these means, fanboys enhance artists' popularity and establish highly effective informal distribution networks. Their contributions make fanboys not only consumers but also significant marketing agents in extending the reach of K-Pop culture globally. In summary, digital prosumption activities demonstrate that K-Pop fanboys hold a central role in developing the dynamics of modern pop culture. They create content not only for personal enjoyment but also to strengthen community bonds through online interaction. Duffett (2013) notes that fandom culture is a collaborative space that merges fan creativity and solidarity. In this context, fanboys act as catalysts, connecting fans worldwide through shared narratives about their favorite artists. This highlights how digital prosumption bridges individual creativity with collective dynamics in global pop culture.

K-POP FANBOYS IN VIRTUAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The term "fanboy" is often used with negative connotations in various fan cultures, particularly in the context of video games, to describe an overly enthusiastic and loyal fan who is perceived as excessive in their support of a brand, franchise, or product (McAvoy-James & Fletcher, 2019). This term carries significant cultural weight and is often viewed as

a form of disrespect among fellow fans. Similarly, in the K-Pop fandom, fanboys frequently face stereotypes and negative stigma. They are often seen as deviating from traditional masculinity norms due to their interest in K-Pop, which some segments of society associate with female fan culture (Lee et al., 2020).

The culture of fanboys is characterized by a strong sense of community and solidarity, where fans engage in collective behaviors that shape their social identities (Wang, 2020). Moreover, K-Pop fanboys are deeply involved in participatory culture, frequently engaging in creating, learning, reflecting, and negotiating values within their fandom communities (Linda Duits et al., 2014; Shimauchi, 2023). K-Pop fanboys also transcend national, cultural, and subcultural boundaries, allowing fans from diverse subcultural backgrounds to interact heterogeneously (Shimauchi, 2023). This combination creates an inclusive space that strengthens the global network of fanboy communities and expands the dynamics of modern digital culture.

The presence of K-Pop fanboys on social media platforms like Instagram has popularized the concept of virtual fandom. Virtual fandom refers to fan communities that leverage digital technology and online platforms to interact, share, and create content related to their fandoms (Booth, 2017). Booth (2017) further explains that virtual fandom reflects the transformation of fan culture, which is no longer bound to physical spaces but thrives within converged digital environments. Booth also highlights the "philosophy of play" in virtual fandom, where fans use digital spaces to express creativity, build communities, and negotiate meanings from their favorite content. Thus, virtual fandom not only signifies a shift in how fans interact with media but also demonstrates the dynamic relationship between popular culture and new technologies, enhancing fan participation within the digital media ecosystem.

Virtual fandoms and traditional fandoms differ fundamentally in their modes of interaction, community-building, and fan experiences. Virtual fandoms rely on digital platforms like social media and apps, enabling asynchronous interactions with a global audience (Keith, 2023; Reysen & Lloyd, 2012). In contrast, traditional fandoms emphasize direct interactions through face-to-face events such as conventions or gatherings at significant locations (Reichenberger & Smith, 2020; Zubernis & Larsen, 2018). Regarding community-building, virtual fandoms are decentralized and inclusive of international members, with cultures shaped digitally (Keith, 2023). Traditional fandoms, however, foster a sense of community through physical gatherings and shared real-world experiences (Reichenberger & Smith, 2020; Zubernis & Larsen, 2018).

The fan experience in virtual fandoms involves digital activities such as content creation, online discussions, and participation in virtual events (Keith, 2023; Reysen & Lloyd, 2012). Conversely, traditional fandoms offer more tactile and immersive experiences through physical attendance at events or special locations (Reichenberger & Smith, 2020; Zubernis & Larsen, 2018). Additionally, virtual fandoms often pioneer the adoption of new technologies (Hellekson, 2015), while traditional fandoms remain rooted in direct engagement through conventional forms of participation (Reichenberger & Smith, 2020; Zubernis & Larsen, 2018).

The role of K-Pop fanboys within virtual fandoms is strongly supported by the availability of social media platforms such as Instagram. As Marwick (2015) notes, Instagram serves as a medium for creating and maintaining online identities through the practice of sharing visual content. The visual nature of Instagram makes it an ideal platform for showcasing personal moments, artistic content, and marketing materials (Harry & Muthusamy, 2024). Highfield and Leaver (2016) emphasize the importance of visual methods in understanding Instagram user activity. Consequently, Instagram has become a key medium for K-Pop fanboys to share various texts as part of their participatory

culture. Through Instagram, fanboys utilize visuals to express creativity, engage with global audiences, and contribute to the larger K-Pop fandom narrative. This platform enables fanboys to challenge traditional stereotypes, redefine masculinity within fan culture, and demonstrate their active participation in the digital media ecosystem.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method based on virtual ethnography, with data collected through participatory observation of K-Pop fanboy accounts on Instagram. As explained by Murthy (2008), virtual ethnography is a qualitative approach that integrates new technologies to study social interactions and cultural practices within digital spaces. This method allows researchers to observe and analyze the dynamics of online communities through platforms such as social media, blogs, and discussion forums. Virtual ethnography not only documents user behavior but also highlights how technology shapes communication and meaning-making processes (Murthy, 2008). As a "new field," the digital world offers diverse data, including text, images, and videos, which can be accessed in real-time.

Pink et al. (2015) emphasize that digital ethnography retains the core principles of traditional ethnography while adapting to the continuously evolving digital landscape. This method involves participatory observation, virtual interviews, and digital content analysis to identify patterns of interaction and cultural representation. Researchers actively engage with digital communities to gain a deep understanding of members' perspectives. According to Pink et al. (2015), digital ethnography is particularly relevant in the era of digital media, where online experiences mirror social and cultural realities. Data analysis is conducted thematically, focusing on narratives, symbols, and community practices to gain insights into the phenomenon under study. This approach enables the research to uncover how participatory cultural practices are performed by K-Pop fanboys on Instagram, providing a comprehensive understanding of their engagement within this digital space.

To ensure objectivity in this virtual ethnography study, the researcher implemented several methodological safeguards during observation, data collection, and analysis. First, reflexivity was prioritized—the researcher maintained a reflexive journal to document personal biases, preconceptions, and emotional reactions while observing K-Pop fanboy communities on Instagram. This practice helped maintain self-awareness and reduce undue influence on data interpretation. Second, data collection followed a structured approach, with predefined observation criteria (e.g., types of posts, engagement patterns) and diversified sampling (examining multiple accounts at different times) to avoid overrepresentation of extreme or outlier behaviors. Third, triangulation was employed by cross-referencing data from posts, comments, and interviews to validate emerging themes and prevent selective interpretation.

We identified numerous Instagram fanboy accounts dedicated to K-Pop, but only five accounts consistently uploaded more than five K-Pop-related posts per day. Below are the five selected K-Pop fanboy accounts.

TABLE. 1. Profile data of the selected K-Pop fanboys for our case studies

No	Instagram Profile	Followers
1	Fanboy K-Pop 1	1.103.216
2	Fanboy K-Pop 2	547.776
3	Fanboy K-Pop 3	556.552
4	Fanboy K-Pop 4	247.117
5	Fanboy K-Pop 5	167.241

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

VARIATIONS OF TEXT TYPES IN THE PARTICIPATORY CULTURE OF K-POP FANBOYS ON INSTAGRAM

The participatory culture of K-Pop fanboys on Instagram is reflected through a variety of texts they create and share. These texts serve not only as a medium to express love and support for their idols but also as a tool to interact with fellow fans. The types of texts produced are highly diverse, ranging from visual uploads such as creatively edited photos and videos to written texts such as meaningful captions accompanied by hashtags and even tagging their favorite idols. This diversity demonstrates the high level of creativity K-Pop fanboys exhibit in their participatory practices on Instagram.

DELUSIONAL PHOTOS

Social media has significantly transformed the fandom landscape by enabling fans to interact more directly with each other and with content creators. This development has fostered the growth of online fan communities and the sharing of fan-produced content (Coduto, 2022; Reid, 2009). One prominent type of text created by K-Pop fanboys as part of their participatory culture is the production of *delusional photos*. These are digitally manipulated images designed to create the illusion of direct interaction with idols, such as photos that appear to show the fan with the idol in specific settings. Delusional photos reflect the strong imagination of K-Pop fanboys and highlight their emotional closeness to their idols.

Through the participatory practice of creating delusional photos, fanboys construct personal fantasies that not only reflect their emotional relationships with idols but also spark dialogue and resonance with audiences who share similar experiences. Additionally, these photos demonstrate the ability of K-Pop fanboys to leverage digital technology as a tool to enhance their emotional connection with idols. This showcases how K-Pop fandom has evolved alongside technological advancements. By sharing their delusional photos publicly, fanboys not only display their imagined relationships with idols but also engage audiences in participating in the fantasy narrative.

The participatory culture represented by the creation of delusional photos signifies a shift from a culture of consumption to a culture of production within the context of fandom, often referred to as "prosumption culture" (Fuchs, 2013). In prosumption culture, fans are not merely passive consumers of content but also active producers who create, modify, and distribute content according to their preferences. As Jenkins (Henry Jenkins, 2006) explains, participatory culture provides fans with the opportunity to engage more creatively and collaboratively in the media ecosystem, enabling them to become integral parts of the production and distribution process.

This participatory culture also has significant implications for the dynamics of the fan-idol relationship. The practice of creating delusional photos reflects how K-Pop fanboys function as part of virtual fandoms. According to Booth (2017), virtual fandom signifies the transformation of fan culture, which is no longer confined to physical spaces but flourishes within convergent digital environments. Booth's concept of the "philosophy of play" enables fans to use digital spaces as a platform to express creativity, build communities, and negotiate the meanings of their favorite content.



FIGURE 1. Delulu photo made by a K-Pop fanboy

With strong presumption and participatory culture, K-Pop fanboys move beyond the role of passive consumers to become active producers in the digital cultural ecosystem. This enhances their relationships with idols while creating an inclusive space for other fans to participate, celebrate creativity, and build cross-cultural solidarity. The public sharing of delusional photos, along with other creative practices, highlights the role of fanboys as key actors in the global K-Pop fandom. Their contributions demonstrate how fandom has become an important site for cultural production, emotional connection, and the redefinition of identity and community in the digital age.

REACTION VIDEOS

Another form of text often created by K-Pop fanboys in practicing their participatory culture is reaction videos. A reaction video is a type of online content in which individuals record their direct responses to various media, such as videos, music, or events (Kim, 2015). Kim (2015) elaborates that these videos often employ a split-screen format, displaying the original content on one side and the facial expressions and verbal reactions of the creator on the other. Reaction videos are designed to evoke emotional responses, both from the creator and the audience. The emotions displayed by the creator whether spontaneous or performative such as surprise, joy, or appreciation, play a critical role in capturing attention and engaging viewers (Chovanec, 2024).

On Instagram, reaction videos have become a significant form of creative expression among K-Pop fanboys. These videos embody the concept of presumption, blending the roles of consumer and producer. While watching their idols' videos, fanboys act as consumers, but through the process of creating and sharing reaction videos, they transition into producers. By distributing their videos on Instagram, fanboys reinforce their participatory cultural practices. Rather than passively consuming content, they actively contribute by creating, distributing, and interpreting cultural texts core aspects of participatory culture as outlined by Jenkins (2006). Thus, fanboys do not merely remain part of the audience but emerge as integral contributors to the digital cultural ecosystem through their active engagement.

Reaction videos also serve as a medium for fanboys to construct personal narratives and demonstrate their knowledge and expertise in understanding K-Pop culture. By incorporating analysis of choreography, music, or visual elements, fanboys position themselves as informed fans who add creative value to the original content. This process exemplifies the practice of presumption, where consumption and production experiences are combined, reflecting their identity and skills. Through reaction videos, fanboys foster dialogue with the broader fandom community, strengthening social relationships within the digital ecosystem.

This practice is particularly relevant in the context of virtual fandom. Booth (2017) describes virtual fandom as a reflection of the transformation of fan culture into a convergent digital environment, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries. By uploading their reaction videos to platforms like Instagram, K-Pop fanboys not only express their opinions

and emotions but also participate in global conversations with the wider fandom community. This enables them to connect with other fans, expand the reach of their content, and assert their presence within the global fandom ecosystem. As Jenkins (2006) notes, participatory culture provides fans with opportunities to become active producers who create, share, and interpret content in alignment with the values and preferences of their communities. K-Pop fanboys' reaction videos not only reflect their emotional engagement but also illustrate how they leverage digital technology to express themselves creatively and build connections with their audience.

Through reaction videos, K-Pop fanboys showcase their emotional involvement with K-Pop while demonstrating their capacity for creative expression and cultural analysis. These videos allow fanboys to bridge personal engagement with collective participation, fostering a sense of belonging and reinforcing their identity as active members of the global K-Pop fandom. Additionally, the production and sharing of reaction videos highlight the transformative role of technology in shaping modern fan practices, where individuals can seamlessly transition from consumers to contributors in a participatory and prosumption culture.

K-POP SONG AND DANCE COVER VIDEOS

Song and dance cover videos created and uploaded by K-Pop fanboys on Instagram represent a prominent form of participatory culture within fandom communities. These videos, particularly those involving choreography and music, have become significant cultural phenomena. Often, they recreate iconic scenes from music videos or performances, shared digitally to spark viral trends (Trezise, 2018). In K-Pop, dance covers are an essential part of the Hallyu (Korean Wave) culture. These performances go beyond simply replicating movements, incorporating aesthetic and creative elements that reflect socio-cultural narratives (Koeltzsch, 2023).

Through cover videos, fanboys not only replicate the choreography or songs of their idols but also infuse unique elements that reflect their creativity and personal interpretation. This practice showcases how K-Pop fanboys leverage social media to express their identities while demonstrating participatory practices as active fans who create and share texts in the form of dance cover videos. These activities highlight the intersection of prosumption (production and consumption) in digital culture. Fanboys first consume original content from their idols such as choreography and vocals and then reproduce it in their own style. This process underscores how they combine the roles of consumers and producers to add value relevant to their community. The videos they upload not only entertain but also serve as a medium to display their skills, dedication, and deep understanding of K-Pop culture. In addition to dance covers, K-Pop fanboys also create song covers as a form of participatory cultural practice. Cover songs function as a medium for cultural exchange, enabling fans and artists from diverse backgrounds to reinterpret and share music across cultural boundaries. The choice of songs for covers can have social and political implications, helping the artist establish their position within the online network while contributing to the negotiation of meaning and cultural canon (Viñuela, 2022).

In participatory culture, song covers reflect fans' active involvement in re-creating original works while adding their own creative elements. As Jenkins (2006) explains, participatory culture empowers individuals to become active producers who contribute creatively rather than merely consuming content. Cover songs represent one such contribution, where fans not only bring songs to life but also reinterpret them to reflect their identity, cultural background, or personal experiences.



FIGURE 2. k-pop song and dance cover videos made by a k-pop fanboy

Some K-Pop fanboys go beyond covering songs and dances by recreating entire K-Pop music videos. This practice demonstrates high levels of dedication and creativity in mimicking, adapting, or interpreting elements from the original videos. Attention to detail such as costumes, locations, or choreography shows that fanboys are not merely expressing their admiration for their idols but are also producing unique versions of the content. These recreations entertain viewers while expanding the meaning of the original music videos. This practice highlights how participatory culture allows fans to actively engage in reproducing popular culture, blurring the lines between fans and creators.

Overall, the practice of creating cover videos by K-Pop fanboys demonstrates how fans have evolved from passive consumers into active producers within the ecosystem of popular culture. Through various forms of covers, including dance, song, and music video recreations, fanboys create spaces for self-expression, community engagement, and cultural exchange that transcend geographical and social boundaries. Additionally, these videos provide a platform for fanboys to showcase their talents, whether in dancing, singing, or technical skills such as video editing and aesthetic direction. These activities not only strengthen the connection between fans and idols but also create opportunities to build new narratives relevant to their experiences and identities. By contributing to participatory culture, fanboys enrich the fandom experience and make a significant impact on the dynamics of global digital culture. Cover videos represent a fusion of creativity, dedication, and technological skills, emphasizing the importance of fans as co-creators in the ever-expanding world of K-Pop and digital fandoms.

COSPLAY AS A PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE OF K-POP FANBOYS

One notable indicator of participatory culture among K-Pop fanboys on Instagram is the creation and sharing of cosplay photos. Cosplay, a contraction of "costume play," is a global phenomenon where individuals dress as characters from popular media such as films, comics, video games, and anime. This practice involves not only wearing costumes but also emulating the behavior and personality of the characters, often showcased at conventions and fan gatherings (Pushkareva & Agaltsova, 2021). In the context of K-Pop fandom, cosplay photos focus on replicating the appearance or photo style of idols. Through these cosplay endeavors, K-Pop fanboys recreate the visual elements, fashion styles, and distinctive expressions of their favorite idols to achieve a likeness that reflects the characters or concepts associated with those idols.

The process of creating cosplay photos involves meticulous attention to detail, including costume design, makeup, accessories, and mastering poses and gestures that align

with the idol's image. By combining creativity and dedication, fanboys recreate the aesthetic elements that define their favorite K-Pop idols or groups. In essence, fans as consumers become active producers, reinterpreting elements of popular culture to reflect their own identities and experiences. By utilizing the aesthetics of their idols, fanboys not only reproduce their idols' images but also articulate their understanding and interpretation of K-Pop culture in a visual format that can be consumed and appreciated by a global audience. This practice highlights their participatory role as active members of the K-Pop fandom.

More than mere imitation, cosplay photos by fanboys illustrate the dynamics of prosumption a blend of production and consumption. Fanboys consume the styles and aesthetics of their idols and then recreate them with modifications that reflect their personalities. This process often requires significant dedication, including investments in costumes, makeup, and photography to achieve authentic and high-quality results. Critically, this practice also raises discussions about the boundaries of authenticity and creativity within fan culture. Are these photos purely a tribute, or do they reflect a desire to compete within the fandom community in terms of aesthetics and creativity? In this sense, cosplay photos are not only a medium for self-expression but also a social arena where fanboys showcase their skills to gain recognition and legitimacy from fellow fans.

Cosplay practices are frequently documented through photos or videos and shared on digital platforms such as Instagram. Social media serves not only as a space for sharing creative outputs but also as a venue for receiving appreciation and recognition from the fandom community. By sharing cosplay photos, K-Pop fanboys demonstrate their artistic skills and creative interpretations of K-Pop culture, while also deepening their engagement with the participatory culture thriving in the digital world.

These cosplay uploads often align with popular trends or challenges within the fandom community. By participating in such trends, fanboys not only demonstrate their ability to stay updated with fandom culture but also contribute to the evolving social dynamics within digital communities. This reinforces their active role in shaping the digital fandom ecosystem while reflecting their dedication to creativity and cultural production.

The practice of cosplay underscores the role of K-Pop fanboys as active producers within the digital cultural ecosystem. They do not merely consume content but also create and disseminate works that enrich the collective fandom experience. By sharing their creative outputs, fanboys foster a dialogic space where other fans can participate, offer appreciation, or draw inspiration to create similar works. Thus, cosplay on social media is not only an expression of individual creativity but also an integral part of participatory culture within virtual fandom. Through digital platforms, fans from around the world connect and collaborate, celebrating their shared appreciation for K-Pop while pushing the boundaries of creativity and community interaction in a globally interconnected fandom.

CAPTIONS AND HASHTAGS IN K-POP FANBOY PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Captions and the use of hashtags are significant forms of participatory cultural practices among K-Pop fanboys. On social media platforms like Instagram, captions are frequently utilized to express love, support, or even in-depth analysis of their idols. Through captions, fanboys share personal narratives, perspectives, or stories behind their posts, creating emotional connections with their audience. Relevant hashtags, such as group names or trending fandom-specific tags, help broaden the reach of their posts, enabling wider interaction among fans. As Booth (2017) points out, social media provides fans with an inclusive and collaborative participatory space where captions and hashtags serve as essential tools in fostering such connections.

Beyond being tools for communication, captions and hashtags play a crucial role in strengthening the digital identity of the K-Pop fandom community. Hashtags not only facilitate the discovery of similar content but also create virtual spaces for discussion and appreciation. By incorporating trending hashtags, fanboys actively participate in global conversations about K-Pop, reinforcing the solidarity of their community. As Jenkins (2006) highlights, participatory culture allows fans to become active producers who not only consume but also create and share content, including through digital texts like captions and hashtags.

This practice demonstrates how simple digital texts can serve as powerful mediums for fostering active engagement in participatory culture in the era of social media. Captions, paired with strategic hashtags, become more than just an accessory to visual posts they are integral to articulating fandom identity, sharing creativity, and fostering a sense of belonging within the global K-Pop community.



FIGURE 3. Caption and hashtags that made by fanboy K-Pop on Instagram

By using captions and hashtags, K-Pop fanboys not only enhance their individual expression but also contribute to the collective experience of fandom. Captions allow them to articulate their thoughts, emotions, and interpretations, while hashtags ensure that their content becomes part of larger conversations and trends. This dual role of captions and hashtags illustrates how fanboys actively shape and sustain the dynamic ecosystem of K-Pop fandom, demonstrating their creative agency and participatory involvement. In sum, captions and hashtags are not merely textual additions to social media posts they are pivotal elements of participatory culture, enabling fanboys to connect, collaborate, and co-create within the global digital landscape of K-Pop fandom.

CONCLUSION

This study's investigation of K-Pop fanboys' participatory culture, grounded in Jenkins' (2006) theoretical framework, makes substantial contributions to understanding contemporary digital fandom dynamics. Our findings empirically validate and extend Jenkins' conceptualization by demonstrating how these male fans actively function as cultural producers rather than passive consumers. The examination of diverse digital practices—including delusional photos, reaction videos, dance/song covers, MV recreations, and cosplay—reveals a complex ecosystem where fanboys reinterpret, remix, and redistribute cultural content in ways that challenge traditional consumer-producer dichotomies.

Three key findings emerge from this research. First, these creative practices serve multiple functions: as platforms for skill demonstration (performance art, visual production), as vehicles for cultural interpretation, and as means of community engagement. Second, the study documents how fanboys leverage social media platforms not merely for consumption but as spaces for identity articulation and cross-cultural connection building. Third, and

perhaps most significantly, the research challenges persistent gendered assumptions in fan studies by revealing male fans' robust participation in creative domains often stereotypically associated with female enthusiasts.

This study ultimately positions K-Pop fanboys as crucial actors in the global popular culture ecosystem, whose participatory practices not only sustain fandom communities but also drive the ongoing evolution of K-Pop's digital dissemination. Future research could productively explore how these findings translate across different cultural contexts, or examine the longitudinal evolution of male fan participation as K-Pop continues its global expansion.

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