



Raising Star During Pandemic: K-Pop Fans as Actor in Indonesia Digital Activism

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Abstract. During the pandemic, Indonesia has a new actor in digital activism, namely K-pop fans. Participating in digital activism is actually nothing new for K-pop fans in Indonesia. Before the pandemic, the Gejayan Memanggil action was also enlivened by K-pop fans in voicing the action on Twitter to become a trending topic. However, after experiencing a pandemic, the participation of K-pop fans in digital activism has been increasingly highlighted by the media and netizens. Not only in Indonesia, but internationally, such as the success of the Army donation for Black Live Matters in America. Using a qualitative approach and literature studies method, researcher analyzed the data using a digital activism approach and pop culture in fans and fandom. The results showed that during the pandemic, K-pop fans had carried out digital activism in the form of donations and enlivened hashtags on social media to become trending topics on social and political issues, feminism, the environment, and humanity. The factors that influence the increasing participation of K-pop fans in digital activism are the diversity of digital platforms, simplification of issues, demographics of K-pop fans, and participatory culture in K-pop fandom.

Keywords: fans · K-pop · digital activism · fandom

1 Introduction

K-pop fans who are members of certain fandoms often carried out many digital movement activities, initially movements related to their idol artists. This movement is usually in the form of calls around raising hashtags to popularize their idols when releasing new songs by watching their video clips on YouTube repeatedly or listening through Korean music platforms such as Melon. This movement is called streaming party. In addition, K-pop fans also often make movements to invite other fans to vote for their idols at music events which are often held at the end of the year. Even though they are familiar with digital activism on social media, K-pop fans are not widely known as participants or actors in social movements on social media.

This phenomenon was explained by [1] that in some corners of the internet, there is the ability of K-pop fans to organize music. These are the various types of activities of youth and international Korean pop music enthusiasts who organize these activities on a daily basis on social media. The method used is the old method that has been passed

down from generation to generation from previous generations of fans, namely through coordinating groups called fans such as ARMY (fans of BTS) and Blackpink fans, the most popular female idol group in Korea, to ensure that their favorite idols always get trending topic that could lead the charts and sold out the tickets in South Korea. Since the emergence of the covid pandemic, it is alleged that there has been a change in the trend of digital activism where K-pop fans have begin to participate more and become actors in social movements, especially on social media. Before discussing these changes further, let's first understand about K-pop fandom. K-pop fandom consists of a group of people who are fans of Korean Pop music (K-pop). In the 1990s, the Korean (Hallyu) wave began to spread internationally as a result of the success of Korean dramas. The majority of its distribution reaches neighbor countries in Asia [2]. The production of Korean dramas uses the background song as the theme song for the main characters as well as for the supporting characters. However, audiences can get better access to Korean pop songs even before people are familiar with the website. In general, K-pop fans also like watching Korean dramas and are integrated into the Korean wave universe (Hallyu). It can be concluded, the content of the K-pop fandom is actually quite popular because many of them also enjoy Korean drama content.

Fandom in English means fan club or kingdom (kingdom) of fans (fan), which is then united into fandom. The word fan is defined as short for fanatic, a symbol when someone is directly connected to the media with the aim of asserting their identity and conveying their feelings towards a media product [2]. According to [3], the notion of fandom is not something separated by the lines are clear between each other. Fans in fandom always have messy concepts. There will be a gradation that moves between understandings of fans and audiences. There will always be people who don't categorize themselves as fans and don't want to be part of the fan community or culture fans. They will not use fandom studies. This K-pop fandom is relatively new and consists mostly of women, about 85% of the total population and are between the ages of 15 to 18 years.

K-pop fans who in fact move a lot in online media represent participatory culture from its foundations, enabling the transition to be more fluid, affective and provide a democratic media environment [4]. Now, after facing the pandemic, many K-pop fans are participating in digital activism in the realm of social movements, no longer revolving around the movement of their idols.

In 2020, K-pop fans who use Twitter as the main media and several other supporting social media such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and other platforms, are seen actively participating in the digital movement in America. Among other things, they spammed birthday cards on President Trump's birthday, fulfilled the hashtag to hear the keyword white supremacist, flooded the Dallas police application with K-pop idol fancams to seek intelligence among the protesters, and managed to collect a donation of 1 million US dollars from Army BTS for the Black Lives Matter group [1].

The participation of K-pop fans in the BLM campaign was the beginning of the international media spotlight on the contribution of K-pop fandom to digital activism [5]. In Indonesia itself, K-pop fans first started to engage in social movements on social media, marked by the hectic hashtag #gejayanmemanggil among Kpop fans in 2019. The Gejayan Memanggil movement, which also uses social media platforms to voice their agenda, received great support from K-pop fans. The data from the Drone Emprit, after

the completion of the Gejayan Memanggil movement, K-pop accounts were included in several big names of Gejayan Memanggil movement actors on Twitter, marked by the large number of engagements obtained by these K-pop influencers. This also repeated itself in 2020 in the midst of a pandemic when the emergence of the digital movement to reject the Omnibus Law.

Previous studies related to K-pop fans and the digital movement talked a lot about the Black Live Matter movement, what social movements have been carried out by the Army fandom as a K-pop fandom that is considered the biggest and strongest in the current era. Fundraising by fans to help marginalized people, as well as the role of fandom in digital activism related to politics for young people in Indonesia. Research that focuses on how K-pop fans become new actors and what social movements are carried out after going through the pandemic period in Indonesia has not been found.

2 Methods

Researcher use literature studies method to conduct this research. In the early stages of the research started by looking for news related to digital movements in Indonesia which were also enlivened by K-pop fans, media comments, and public opinion on the issues raised, namely the participation of K-pop fans in digital activism. After that, author looked for journal articles that discussed the digital activism of K-pop fans on social issues and other important issues in various regions of the country. Most K-pop information is spread across various platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc. and to get the latest information needed, author made observations on the Indonesian mainstream public media on Google and a thread containing data on the engagement of a movement in Indonesia using Twitter. Analyzing what digital movement activities have been carried out by K-pop fans during the pandemic period, from 2020 until now, what is the position of K-pop fans in the movement and how successful the digital movement is with actors K-pop fans in Indonesia.

To get journals that provide information about digital activism and fandom studies, author access the journals from Google Scholar and the journal databases subscribed by UGM library. The keywords entered to search for the journal were “K-pop Digital Activism,” “K-pop Fandom,” “K-pop Social Activism,” “Fan Activism,” “BTS impact,” and “BTS Digital Activism.” After getting the specific literature and containing the required information, author decided to focus the analysis only on cases of digital activity by K-pop fans in Indonesia during pandemic. What are the activities carried out as a form of digital activism and what is the factor of their increased activism.

3 Results

Although often received negative labels, K-pop fans have massive power to organize a movement for a sense of mutual solidarity. That way, K-pop fans actually often do digital activism. In addition to the cases in America that occurred at the beginning of the pandemic regarding BLM and were in the spotlight, there were actions to voice the case of two students who died in Bangladesh, donating rice, trees, money and supporting other humanitarian campaigns. The movement is often performed under the name of

their idol. The Chilean government once stated in their country report that K-pop fans contributed greatly to the protests that took place there.

K-pop fans are able and willing to volunteer in large numbers for issues that really concern them. In addition to reasons of interest in the circulating issues, there is an idol factor that encourages K-pop fans to volunteer to become movement actors on social media.

According to fans, making donations and other digital activism can help improve their idol's reputation. The culture of artists in Korea who are diligent in making donations is brought by fans to their respective countries [6].

3.1 Donation

During pandemic, there were many movements that voiced the need to donate to the affected and marginalized. McD's collaboration with BTS, which provided a special menu in the form of BTS Meal in the midst of a pandemic, initially sparked controversy because it caused long queues and gatherings people when Indonesia was implementing PSBB (Social Restrictions) and gathering was prohibited. Getting scathing criticism from netizens, Army which is a fandom of BTS decided to raise funds for victims affected by covid. In one week of fundraising, 250 million rupiah was collected. Apart from being in the form of funds, during the BTS Meal which coincided with BTS's birthday, Army was able to carry out tree planting movements and succeeded in planting thousands of trees [7].

According to Karlina, who is a digital anthropologist, BTS and Army are not only a place to channel fanaticism. There, they also provide social encouragement to share knowledge so that activism in the realm of social media is high [8].

Besides BTS, there was EXOL fandom which is fan of a K-pop group called EXO. On the birthday of one of its members, Park Chanyeol, fans donated 1127 trees. Besides Park Chanyeol, EXOL fans also donated Mangrove plant seeds for the Mangrove conservation program in Indonesia. The amount of donations starts from Rp. 10,000 for one tree. The donation was held to raise funds from the *lindungihutan.com* website. Exo fans also made donations when the earthquake hit Palu, Sulawesi. Donations were channeled in the form of money and medical assistance, which at that time were desperately needed by the citizens [8].

Not only donations for the benefit of forest protection, K-pop fans also donate to adopt rare or endangered animals. Adoption here is intended to be a part to participate in providing funds for the process of caring for these animals to the official management. Donors will get an adoption card. The animals that received the most donations were primates and big cats.

3.2 Democracy and Politic Participation

Before pandemic, in 2019 K-pop fans was active in the Gejayan Memanggil movement which demanded the ratification on the elimination of sexual violence, prosecute environmental destroyers, sued the RKHUP, against the weakening of the KPK, the right to speak for activists, prosecute environmental destroyers, rejected problematic articles



Fig. 1. SNA Omnibus Law on Twitter

of the land bill and rejected articles problem with the labor bill. During the Gejayan Memanggil, K-pop fans also dominated the hashtag on Twitter. Data from Done Emprit states that K-pop fans are among the big actors driving the movement on social media.

During the pandemic, in 2020 there was a digital movement that was bustling on Twitter and other social media to reject Omnibus Law or the Job Creation Law because it was considered not to prioritize labor rights. This digital activism was quite successful and managed to master trending Twitter topics in Indonesia for a few days from October 4–5, 2020. Based on data from Ismail Fahmi, founder of Done Emprit, it was explained how K-pop fans became important actors in this movement (Fig. 1).

Photo from Done Emprit above is a Social Network Analysis (SNA) of the conversation map on Twitter on October 5, 2020 at 5 pm to 10 pm WIB which shows an interesting pattern that there is only one large cluster, namely the cluster that is against the Omnibus Law. The cluster consists of accounts of academics, BEM, NGOs, activists and K-pop fans uniting to provide support.

Fundraising by K-pop fans in Indonesia can be called digital activism. This is because traditionally activism has the meaning as a doctrine, practice, crackdown or involvement as a suggestion to achieve political or other goals [7] (Fig. 2).

Table above is the result of processed data from Done Emprit which shows the top 60 most influential accounts in the movement against the Omnibus Law on Twitter. K-pop fan accounts can be found at number 9 belonging to @ustadchen, number 11 @honeygulfie, number 21 @swooya_, number 24. @hwakmureo, number 25 @forjungs, number 30 @hanbeomphile, number 31 @dounmuse and number 33 belonging to @daisikseu_. There are still several other Kpop accounts that are included in the top 60 most influential actors on the table.

3.3 Feminism

The Women's March Jakarta, that held in the midst of a pandemic in 2021, held virtually to avoid crowds. This event uses the Twitter platform to move the masses online and on Youtube Jakarta Feminist. This movement uses the hashtag #PuanDanKawanMelawan

No.	Account Name	Follower	No.	Account Name	Follower	No.	Account Name	Follower
1	@womensmarchjkt	45,734	37	@journalin	2,885	41	@journalin	881
2	@itswidis	24,288	38	@journalin	2,782	42	@journalin	880
3	@journalin	14,236	39	@journalin	2,714	43	@journalin	879
4	@journalin	13,987	40	@journalin	2,653	44	@journalin	878
5	@journalin	13,887	41	@journalin	2,142	45	@journalin	877
6	@journalin	13,884	42	@journalin	1,973	46	@journalin	876
7	@journalin	14,487	43	@journalin	1,963	47	@journalin	875
8	@journalin	13,286	44	@journalin	1,873	48	@journalin	874
9	@journalin	13,286	45	@journalin	1,889	49	@journalin	873
10	@journalin	8,838	46	@journalin	1,882	50	@journalin	872
11	@journalin	8,750	47	@journalin	1,888	51	@journalin	871
12	@journalin	8,272	48	@journalin	1,888	52	@journalin	870
13	@journalin	8,288	49	@journalin	1,888	53	@journalin	869
14	@journalin	4,521	50	@journalin	1,888	54	@journalin	868
15	@journalin	4,758	51	@journalin	1,888	55	@journalin	867
16	@journalin	4,288	52	@journalin	1,888	56	@journalin	866
17	@journalin	4,771	53	@journalin	1,888	57	@journalin	865
18	@journalin	4,687	54	@journalin	1,888	58	@journalin	864
19	@journalin	4,588	55	@journalin	1,888	59	@journalin	863
20	@journalin	4,688	56	@journalin	1,888	60	@journalin	862
21	@journalin	4,587	57	@journalin	1,888			

Fig. 2. List of Top Influencer on Twitter during Omnibus Law Movement

as the official hashtag and marks the @womensmarchjkt account. Adapted from Magdalene’s article ((Pasinringi, 2021) covering the Women’s March Jakarta 2021, this movement brings several demands:

- Urge the adoption of laws and policies in gender base violence.
- Remove policies that damage the environment and promote sustainable and inclusive environmental stewardship protecting indigenous peoples.
- Urge for equal access to education and protection of students.
- Urge the passage of a student-friendly law.
- Urge the passage of laws that favor the community, women, minority groups, and other vulnerable groups.
- Promote an inclusive, stigma-free and discriminatory Health system.
- Urge for equality in the field of employment and labour.
- Global solidarity supports, rejects authoritarianism, militarism, violent acts of racism, and other discrimination in various sectors.

In this movement, data was obtained showing the most influential actors during digital activism using the hashtag #PuanDanKawanMelawan. The data was obtained from the results of the SNA analysis that was personally collected by Rifka Anisa (Anisa, 2021) (Fig. 3).

Of the several clusters that have enlivened this hashtag, in the first group it can be seen that the BTS AHC Indonesia account occupies the first number as the most influential actor in this group. In another group, the most influential actor is the @ARMYactivist account at number two after the @journalin account. The two accounts are fanbase

No.	Actor	Number of connections/ties	Actor	Influence/Eigenvector Centrality
1.	@BTS_AHC_IDN	128	@BTS_AHC_IDN	1
2.	@itswidis	73	@itswidis	0.570312
3.	@journalin	71	@womensmarchjkt	0.507812
4.	@womensmarchjkt	65	@marinnaraz	0.484375
5.	@amnestyindo	15	@journalin	0.289062

Fig. 3. List of actor using hashtag #PuanDanKawanMelawan

accounts of BTS idols which are K-pop music groups. His fandom called Army is known to have a large number of fans, not only in Indonesia but also internationally outside of South Korea and has a solid bond between fellow fans in one fandom.

3.4 Environment

Many K-pop fans have done digital activism that focuses on environmental issues. As explained above, there are many donation movements for planting tree seedlings in mangrove forests or other nature conservation. Not only by Army fandom at certain moments such as idol birthdays, many fans from other K-pop fandoms enliven the donation movement to plant trees, both collectively and personally. Based on the observations of researchers on Twitter during the pandemic, personal actions usually don't require special times for their idols to make donations. Personal actions are more often carried out based on a special time for the fan, such as when a fan has a birthday, earns more money, gets new achievements in life such as graduating from school or being accepted by school, increased career, getting married, etc. This donation was made as a form of celebration for him who wanted to be immortalized in a useful way together with his idol. Therefore, fans also often donate using the name of their idol even though this act is done personally and to celebrate their personal things.

In November 2020, K-pop fans also participated in environmental activism on Twitter regarding the issue of land burning in Papua. This case was carried out by a South Korean palm oil company called Korindo. The findings of the investigation show that this subsidiary of Korindo Group holds 57,000 hectares of oil palm plantation concessions in Papua and during 2011–2016 has deliberately burned forests to clear land [9].

The existence of this case prompted K-pop fans to participate in voicing the forest protection movement by raising the hashtags #SaveHutanPapua #SavePapuaForest and #SaveHutanIndonesia to trending on Twitter on Friday, November 13, 2020. This movement initiated by K-pop fans was praised by many other netizens and campaigners. Greenpeace Indonesia Forest, Asep Komarudin. According to them, this is a bold and objective act because it does not consider South Korea, which is the country of origin of their idols. This action also continues to be encouraged so that they can show and invite other young people to care about environmental issues [9].

4 Discussion

In the midst of active political participation of young people in Indonesia, Indonesian K-pop fans are among those who take part in many digital based movements during pandemic. They participate by using hashtags to spread and voice the cause they support. These are factors that have contributed to the increased participation of K-pop fans in digital activism during the pandemic.

4.1 Diversity of Social Media Platform

Indonesia is a country with an active population using dominant social media, where as many as 160 million people in 2020 use the 5 most accessed social media in Indonesia,

namely Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, and Twitter. 99% of access to social media is done using HP. This data was obtained from Hootsuite (We Are Social) which was re-explained by Rita on the Geotimes (2020) page.

We can see that netizens have facilities in the form of a variety of digital platforms which are important for carrying out digital activities. In accordance with what [10] said that a movement built on connective action will be realized when social media is connected, personal ideas, and network resources with other people become a single unit. In conducting digital activism, group communication media such as social media will help the effectiveness of delivering information to other group members. This is because the process is quite easy with just one click, such as retweeting and liking tweets of mutual interest on Twitter or other social media. Social media is considered to be able to answer the shortcomings of traditional media or the general flow in conveying information, namely with interactive capabilities such as providing comment fields to discuss and interact with each other [11].

According to [10], connective action which is a form of political participation has become commonplace for digital society, so this affects the influence of formal organizations on individuals and conventional group ties that often appear in conventional movements are replaced by individuals on the internet network. Individuals who are members of a community will also be encouraged to interact with other communities or with activities organized by the community.

It can be seen that in digital movements which are followed by K-pop fans such as rejecting Omnibus Law, donations for victims of the flood and earthquake in Palu, donation movements and planting tree seeds, donations for victims affected by Covid by the Indonesian Army, participation of K-pop fans at the Women's March Jakarta 2021 movement virtually, an action to voice environmental damage due to forest fires that occurred in Papua. All of these activities are not only crowded on one social media platform, but also on many other social media, which means relying on multi-platforms for this movement.

Internet in this case social media also provides a free public space for individuals in it to want to participate in digital activism activities. Social media offers anonymity with the ease of using real accounts and anonymous accounts (fake accounts, alter accounts, role player accounts and ava K-pop accounts or fan accounts) so that individuals can be bolder and feel free to express opinions, criticisms, ideas and attitudes or views on issues. -the issue. This also reinforces the theory that digital activism prioritizes group identity over personal identity in the absence of a formal organization or group, in contrast to conventional activism.

4.2 Simplification of the Agenda or Issues

Lim [12] in his research states that in digital activism, simplification of narrative is needed. The narrative that is brought needs to be simplified, framed so that it is easily accepted by the target audience, interesting and can become viral and move activism.

This can be seen from how the tweets refusing the Omnibus Law that went viral among K-pop fans contained simple sentences such as "The only trustworthy DPR is DPR Live." DPR Live itself refers to a music group from South Korea. Tweets with simple narratives like this are easier for K-pop fans to accept because it is close to their

background so fans will voluntarily spread the tweet and encourage them to know more about the problem or issue that underlies the emergence of the viral tweet.

4.3 Kpop Fan Demographics

Ismail Fahmi, a social media expert who owns Drone Emprit, explained in his thread that demographically, K-pop fans are the biggest global users of social media. By participating in using hashtags, they become more educated about this issue (Omnibus Law). K-pop fans who use social media massively are not only children who are in school, but also students who are already literate with social political issues, many of whom are even campus activists or in the working age or work in the government and public sectors or sectors affected by the Job Creation Law.

Saeji, an assistant professor from East Asian Culture at Indiana University assesses that young people, who are socially continuous processes, are extraordinary insightful people who are adept at using online platforms, trapped at home and all online activities due to the covid pandemic, then doing political stuff shouldn't come as a surprise. They are young people who consciously want to learn about new cultures to follow their interest in pop culture products (Coscarelli, 2020).

4.4 K-pop Fandom Participatory Culture

Ismail Fahmi, a social media expert and owner of Drone Emprit explained in his tweet about the participation of K-pop fans in digital activism, especially when the movement against the Omnibus Law emerged, that K-pop fans who initially did not understand the issue become understood after following many conversation threads on Twitter. After understanding about the issue, they participated in many tweets with other K-pop colleagues who also cared about the issue. K-pop fans who are used to uniting with each other to trend issues related to their idols, use the same pattern for the digital movement. They helped form the large netizen cluster together with political parties, labor organizations, activists, academics and students who exclusively discussed the Omnibus Law.

When fandom unites for a reason, it has become a form of participatory culture which is common among young people in online spheres such as social media [13]. In the online world where the entry limit is low, there is a lot of combined existence between popular culture (pop culture) and participatory culture which is a driving factor in improving and cultivating people's skills [14]. Although it is often seen as a group of people who are fanatical in being fans and gets negative stigma from other netizens, judging by how K-pop fans get the nickname Ava K-pop on Twitter as a mockery of other netizens, K-pop fans have managed to break the stigma by doing a lot of positive things like philanthropy, digital activism, supporting social issues, etc. This activity has now become commonplace in the K-pop industry, where fans do this not only out of personal concern but also to promote idols so that they continue to get a good name in the eyes of the general public [15].

K-pop fans know how to organize the digital world. Accustomed to working collectively to ensure their idols have stage performances or album releases that can dominate social media trending topics before they do digital activism collectively.

5 Conclusion

Digital activism by Indonesian K-pop fans during the pandemic focused on issues related to social politics, feminism, humanity, and the environment. In addition, they also often carry out movements on social media to open donations to people in need, such as victims of natural disasters, people affected by Covid, protection of forests and endangered animals. This is actually not new because internationally K-pop fans have participated in digital activism such as BLM in America. Donating has also become a long-standing culture in the K-pop fandom which is also done by K-pop idols so that fans participate in imitating their idols. The factors that influence the increasing participation of K-pop fans as new actors of digital activism in Indonesia during the covid pandemic are the diversity of social media platforms which are the main factors in digital-based movements. This diversity is the basis of the interconnected connective action. Connect one individual to another through various platforms and become a group of actors. There is a simplification of issues when spreading movement narratives using digital platforms. K-pop fans framed the issue to be closer to their background, easy to understand, interesting, thus encouraging K-pop fans to find out and participate in the movement. The demographics of K-pop fans, the majority of whom are young students and working age, therefore already have extensive knowledge of social and political issues, as well as technological literacy. Lastly is the K-pop fandom culture, which is moving participatory, collective and close between other individuals in the community, making it easier and more common for K-pop fans to become new actors in digital activism.

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