

Participatory Culture: A Study on Bangtan Boys Fandom Indonesia

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Abstract

In the past few years, South Korean pop culture has become a global phenomenon. The sudden popularity of the culture commonly known as Korean Wave or Hallyu. This trend includes Korean drama, dance, music, films, animation, games, and fans club for Korean pop celebrity. In the past, those who become fans is only from a specific age, but now it is more varied. One of most popular of the Korean singer groups is BangTan Boys. Abbreviated as BTS, the fans of BangTan Boys is proudly call themselves, "ARMY". Using the Henry Jenkins's Participatory culture theory along with qualitative method, this research tries to analyze that there are audiens who do not only consuming pop culture, but also producing new cultural artefacts from that. The data were collected by focus group discussion, in-depth interview and data analysis. It shows that some of the fans are making "fanfiction" as the reproductions of new artefacts, despite actively participating in BTS fandom by doing activities as include in the four types of Jenkin's participatory cultures.

Keywords:

Cultural Studies, Fandom, Participatory Culture, Korean Pop, BTS

Introduction

As a global phenomenon, Korean Pop Culture has flourished causing what so called the Korean Wave impact. This Korean Wave has also reached Southeast Asian countries, including moslem-majority countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia (Cho, 2011). From K-pop, drama series, to variety shows are now become a new favourite entertainment of the world's citizens, including Indonesia. As evidence, there are many of K-Pop idols whose show-tickets are sold-out within minutes (Larasati, 2017).

This K-Pop phenomenon has begun few years ago and it grows without any sign of declining trend. In fact, the prediction of this phenomenon shows that the numbers and fanaticism is increasing. From few of people of fans, now they grow rapidly, consisting of more varying types of societal background and people.

In "Identity and Pleasure", especially in chapter "K-Pop and Gendered Asianization" Heryanto stated that youngsters of Indonesia, especially female youth, plays an important role in popularizing this Korean Pop, or K-Pop (Ariel Heryanto, 2012). With the existence of K-Pop,

there are also another various cultural values which absorbed, such as culinary expansion of Korean culture, as another effect of K-Pop influence.

This also raises a question in the chapter of “Identity and Pleasure”, whether or not there is proximity between South Korea and Indonesian culture as Asian countries. That being said, the possibility of similarity between two cultures may cause Korean Pop be easily and warmly accepted in Indonesia. There is also another thought of whether there is a gap culture after New Order in Indonesia, hence Korean culture came in such good timing to gain people’s sympathy.. Heryanto also assumed that there is a national desire to look for alternative model to become Indonesian person, as well as the new media exposure that allows young female generation to consume and produce textual material, audio and visual smoothly in global scale (A Heryanto, 2014).

According to Mark Duffett’s, Fandom is a sociocultural phenomenon largely associated with modern capitalist societies, electronic media, mass culture and public performance (Duffett, 2015). As also stated by Fiske, that Fandom is a common feature of popular culture in industrial societies (Lewis, 1992). Fandom is also common on sport fans such as football and other type of sports (Brown, 1998). Another approach analyzed that fandom phenomenon is related to “sacralization element of our culture” along with the formation of a community (Jindra, 1994).

As social media flourished, this new media has become a dominant technology in forming fandom (Highfield, 2013). (S. K. -po. Jung, 2011) Analysing how social media-empowered online fandom enhances cultural flow and affects transcultural pop circulation dynamics. Participation media fandom. It also contend the mainstream broadcast as television as dominant media in creating fandom (De Lopes, 2012). A study also conducted analyzing picture-based social media such as Tumblr in fandom (Hillman & and Carman Neustaedter, 2014).

New genres in pop culture makes a more diverse channel in forming fandom (Lee, 2011) studied the nature and implications of fan-translation and distribution of cultural commodities through a case study of English fansubbing of anime or in this case subtitling of Japanese animation in English. (Bennet, 2012) Arguing that fans are using social media and mobile technology in an effort to contest and reshape the boundaries of live music concerts. The study demonstrates how these online tools are involving fans that are not physically present at the show, seemingly incorporating them into the real-time “live” experience .

This research will mainly discuss about a text-creation in a popular culture, which then turns into a new form of popular culture. By this, fans are not only consuming the popular culture, but also re-creating it. Moreover, scientifically described by Henry Jenkins, this phenomenon is what so-called as “The Participatory Culture”.

In the era of new technology where new media grows rapidly, Henry Jenkins thinks that the unlimited access will allow the cultural exchange system, production and distribution process into a more democratic way via media industry. As a distribution platform of K-Pop, social media have taken over the role of printed and traditional visual media. In 2011, the term Hayylu 2.0 was initiated as the spread of Korean Wave burst into outer parts of Asia, all because of the online social media and the active users (S. Jung & Shim, 2006). Jenkins also mentioned in his book that fans are segment of audience that are very active, who do not only reject or accept what is offer, but also demanding, of becoming a full participant (Jenkins, 2006). In convergence culture, Jenkins emphasized that there is slightly no difference between producer and consumer, whereas everyone is participating in the process.

The chosen object of this research is South Korean boyband, Bang Tan Boys, also known as BTS. As Vice media has published that BTS is an extraordinary boyband, whose lyrics are not only unusual, but also sensational and controversial. It includes suicide, political critics, online harassment and many other topics.

BTS is also considered as the future of K-Pop, and the symbol of world globalization based on their achievement in Billboard Music Award, that has been so far dominated by Western artists. BTS became the only group who got into the Billboard Hot 200 despite the fact that they are not under the management of three giant Korean labels, which are YG, SM, and JYP Entertainment. BTS has also repetitiously received acknowledgement from international artists who compete with them in various world music awards.

"Many tried to compare BTS and other Western boybands, but honestly, nothing really compares. BTS is a new phenomenon. Their success does not only break a new record, but also shifts the stereotype of East Asian bands in USA. They become the proof that success can be achieved without following pop standard from Anglo-Saxon countries." (Vice, 2017)

BTS fanbase named ARMY, the acronym for Adorable Representative MC for Youth, categorized as a militant-like group. Just like their name, ARMY has so far become the biggest fan club in South Korea, and other K-Pop lover countries including Indonesia (cnnindonesia, 2017). An article from Kompas.com even showed that BTS fans are the best fandom in entertainment industry.

"Billboard stamped ARMY, or the fans of BTS, as the best fan base group amongst all fans in entertainment industry. The appreciation to ARMY is related to what has been happening to BTS, where these days, they are on the spotlight of every music stage in USA." (Kompas.com,2017)

Militant activities of ARMY, including their tweets requesting BTS to perform in Billboard Music Award was one of the things that made them the best fandom. It's also mentioned in the article that ARMY are the most solid fans who worked and will support BTS to make sure they are always in the top chart, as well as being invited to BBMAs 2017. As mentioned previously, in the era of cultural convergence, there is only a slight difference between production and consumption because everyone is participant. Fan fiction is a cultural production made by the fans of something, in a literature form related to their idols.

"One of the most well-known and actively participating fan activities is fan fiction. (Fan fiction) is basically act as an extension of the writers' own personae and fantasies. Fan fiction is any type of fiction written using previously conceived characters, events, and/or settings to produce unique stories." (Gooch, 2008)

Moreover this study would like to answer an important question as how fans of BTS conducted their participatory culture?

There are a couple of previous studies made as references for this research. Firstly, Ika Mardiana from Universitas Airlangga has conducted a research in 2015 with the title "Participatory Culture in Comic Fan Society (Participatory Culture Study towards Bungkul Surabaya Comic Community)". This qualitative study attempted to comprehend the participatory culture of the Bungkul Surabaya Comic fans. Through cultural studies perspective with ethnography method, it examined the meaning of the structure within the text consumed

by the readers. They then related it with the interpreted behavior from the fan members.

Second research is "Social distribution: K-pop fan practices in Indonesia and the 'Gangnam Style' phenomenon" by Sun Jung dan Doobo Shim. This article analysed the new social distribution network mode that is controlled by the company through the dynamicism and practice of K-Pop consumption on social media. They also use case study fandom of K-Pop in Indonesia and the phenomenon of Gangnam Style.

The third one, "The Communication of Fan Culture: The Impact of New Media on Science Fiction and Fantasy Fandom" was conducted by Betsy Gooch. This essay tracked the relevance of fan community history related to the evolution of science fiction and fantasy, as well as the contribution of the fans to the genre conversion and style genre. This essay also features the influence of the genre to the lives of the fans, such as cultural shaping, and the intertwined reason is necessary to the continuity of the science fiction and fantasy genre. This research specifically focused on the main activity and the production of fan culture: fanspeak,) costume, literature, fan art, filking, and set outlet to conduct fan activities (convention and fanzines). Every activity and production is in communication modes, the communication between fans is what creates the community and the fan culture.

The fourth research is entitled "Participatory culture on YouTube: a case study of the multichannel network Machinima" by Bryan Mueller.

Participatory culture theory, explained by Henry Jenkins and Yochai Benkler, suggested that the birth of new media enables unlimited access to cultural exchange systems, it supports a more democratic production and distribution in media industry. Active audience manifests other benefit of bigger audience participatory, and is a high appreciation for their creative results, as well as public is no longer control by consumerism culture. This journal article also investigates the validity of the claim by checking agency, motivation, and executive partner perspective hired by the YouTube multichannel of MCN (Machinima). The gap between those studies and this one is the participatory culture from the fans of BTS, a South Korean group idol.

"Participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created)." (Jenkins, 2006)

Fandom according to Jenkins:

"Ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, spectatorial culture into participatory culture, is one of the central characteristic of fandom. One becomes a 'fan' not by being a regular viewer of particular program but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about program content with friends, by joining a 'community' of other fans who share common interest" (Jenkins, 2006)

The forms of participatory culture, according to Jenkins are classified into four types: affiliation, expression, collaboration to solve problem, and circulation.

1. Affiliation is a form of participatory culture which is marked by the combination of self (formally and informally) of the fans as part of online community and centralized on

online social media such as Friendster, Facebook, MySpace, Game Clans, Metagaming, and Twitter.

2. Expression is a form of participatory culture through the expression of someone. An individual can create new form of creativity on online media. Types of media that cover this kind of expression are Skinning and Modding, Fan Videos, Fan fiction, Mash-up.
3. Collaboration to solve problems is the type of participatory culture marked with the cooperation of the group, either formally or informally, to develop new knowledge such as Wikipedia.
4. Circulation is a form of participatory culture where there is a formation of information flow on media to sharpen and enhance the content. This type is usually in the form of blogs or podcasts (Jenkins, 2006).

There is no clear division between producer and consumer, because in convergence culture everyone is participant. Yet, Jenkins stressed on the difference between interactivity and participation. Interactivity refers to the usage of technology to create responsiveness between inputs, and feedbacks from consumers. Meanwhile participation is more an open form, less controlled by the media producer and more to the control of media consumer.

Methods

This research is trying to give explanation on how this phenomenon describes human action in other words this paradigm recognizes human behavior and posits researcher as the main instrument (Baxter, 2004). Interview and analysis is conducted on fan fiction website.

"The interpretive paradigm encompasses broad range of orientations, each with its own historical roots. However, in general, researchers who embrace the interpretive tradition believe that human action stands apart from the rest of the physical and biological world because of the reflective capacity of human beings."

Although the researchers describe how they collect the data, the objective is not one of positioning the reader to replicate the study. The challenge is how they tell the story of what they have learnt. As stated by (Lindlof, Taylor, & B., 1995):

"To the analyst, documents are very important because they are the "paper trail" left by events and processes. Documents indicate, among other things, what an organization produces and how it certifies certain kinds of activities, categorizes events, or people, codifies procedures or policies, instructs a readership, explains past or future actions and tracks its own activities."

This research uses interview and focus group discussion (FGD). As the main source of the data, the total informants in this research are three, with two text-producers and writers, and another one is the reader There is also an FGD with BTS fans to comprehend participatory culture, which are: (1). Anderson Tanjung (2). Kadek (3). Naomi (4). Angel (5). Septri (6). Septri (7). Nida (8). Nareswari.

Results

Bang Tan Boys (BTS)

BTS the short of Bangtan Sonyeondan or "Beyond the Scene" is a South Korean Boyband that is capturing the hearts of millions of fans globally. The members of BTS are

RM, Jin, SUGA, J-Hope, Jimin, V, and Jung Kook. Gaining recognition from their authentic, self-produced music and top-notch performances by their way to interact with their fans, the band is well on their way to becoming a global icon since they debuted in June 2013. While imparting a positive influence through activities such as a campaign entitled "LOVE MYSELF" and the UN 'Speak Yourself' speech, BTS has mobilized millions of fans across the world and developed fans as the called "ARMY". BTS also topped prominent music charts and has sold out worldwide tours including stadiums and have been recognized with numerous prestigious awards as the Billboard Music Awards and American Music Awards.

Known for their vast social media presence, BTS were the most retweeted celebrities in the world in 2017 and 2018. In October 2016, Billboard placed BTS #1 on their Social 50 chart, another first for a Korean group. In May 2017, they won the Top Social Artist Award at the Billboard Music Awards, becoming the first Korean group to win a BBMA.

On November 20, 2017, Guinness World Records revealed that BTS had earned a spot in their 2018 edition for "having the world's most Twitter engagements for a music group". In 2018, BTS became #1 on Forbes Korea Power Celebrity list, which ranks South Korea's most powerful and influential celebrities, as well as #1 in a Gallup poll for Korea's most loved artists of 2018. They also became the youngest ever recipients of the Order of Cultural Merit from the South Korean government. In September 2018, BTS gave a speech at the United Nations as ambassadors for UNICEF and featured on the cover of Time magazine's international edition as 'Next Generation Leaders'. This Korean group singer consist of Leader Kim Namjoon (RM), Ji Seokjin (Jin), Min Yoongi (Suga), Jung Hoseok (J-Hope), Kim Taehyung (V), Kim Jimin, Jeon Jungkook.

Participatory culture is one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another.

When they share how they start liking K-Pop and joining participatory culture,

"I used to listen to the songs, but was not yet really a fan. Once or twice there was a video that made me want to watch all Korean stuff, such as dance cover, but only little dancers".

"Their video concept looked different. They firstly came out on the video from a dried swimming pool, but it's entirely not a Korean concept at all. Usually Korean has the glamorous things as the theme, but BTS is so not, and their lyrics are relatable to me. I just realised and got to know more about BTS, and they are very different than any other Korean artists. Until today, I like BTS because they really are good, we can also see that they come from small agency and arrived in the big success. Really, now I only follow BTS (as idol) because they are good from the lyrics side." (Angel)

Nida:

"First thing that you have to know is I'm actually not into K-Pop, Miss. I only know and listen to some little songs that I like. But BTS is different they are not just another KPop Boy band... They are all so talented, plus, they have an amazing producer who made them what they are today. I firstly like the songs, most of their songs are written by themselves. So through the music that they personally made, they tell stories about their experience, basically anything from teenagers' issue, romance, school, and brokenheart. Social life in South Korea is not easy, they also put some critics in their songs. Their music is so honest. There are many songs that give motivation too, Miss, and they have saved my suicidal lives of the fans that were depressed. They also made some songs about their fans. So they don't only produce songs, but also quality is put into account. There are some songs which sentences are highly literated, they wrote them by themselves."

Participant is expressing likeness by voting their idol when nominated and by purchasing their physical album. According to the fans, by doing this the money will go directly to the idol. Some of them even participate actively by doing dance cover and producing new artefacts such as fan fiction.

"Perhaps we don't do dance cover, but we vote. For an award for example, Billboard was their first one, and they received Top Social Artist because we vote for them."

"Because BTS fans happened to buy the stocks, sometimes buy stars, when there is someone's birthday, stars must be bought. Also album purchase, album is the main income for the idol. So if we buy the physical album, the money goes to the idol. The percentage goes mostly to the idol because it affects the chart position."

Jenkins stated that in participatory culture, they often feel like they care what other people think about what they have created. The informants also state this:

"I honestly struggle with my own physical appearance, then BTS did the Love Myself campaign, and I was so related. We have to love ourselves they way we are, Love yourself love myself." (Naomi)

"They make our life more colourful, we can cry because of them, we can also meet other ARMY, and we feel so close with each other." (Septry)

"Not only BTS, ma'am, in any Korean fandom, we don't only know each other, but also support each other. Sometimes our idols support us too. I was once bullied at school, everyone didn't like me and see me as an enemy. Then I liked Twice when I was on third grade of Junior High School. I felt the connection and I saw new inspiration to move on and became motivated. People see me weirdly and question what is fandom. But somehow I still feel saved by them, ma'am." (Anderson)

Discussion

a. Affiliation

The form of participatory culture is marked by the coordination of self, both formally and informally by a fan in an online community that is usually spread on online social media. This is done by two of the informants in this research. One of them, Anderson, is a member of one community named "fancafe" and fan members. Other informant also states that she is a member of BTS fan community on Facebook, she became one of those in order to get the news update of her idols. Meanwhile another informant said to have subscribed the idol's website.

b. Expression

Expression is a form of participatory culture in which someone expresses him/herself. An individual can create new form of creativity on available online media. Media covering this type are: Skinning and Modding, Fan Videos, Fan fiction, Mash-up. Kadek and Anderson express their participation by doing dance-covers, meanwhile Naomi, Angel and Septry are more into reading and creating fan fiction of BTS, as well as collecting fan art. The online media for this form are Youtube, Wattpad, Blogspot, Twitter, and AO3 from the official BTS website with membership access. Anderson also adds that online media help him facilitate the expression in Vlive, an application where they can directly interact with their idols live.

"I love reading fanfiction in Wattpad and AO3. But the famous one is Wattpad, although BTW like to write stories in AO3. I like that one, ARMY members prefer the AO3. As for Blogspot, there is a famous one, from 2013 they always update about BTS"

"I collect them, in gallery too, so there is a shipper who serves any orders. I usually ship vkook, so I like that they are cute. Fanart is not only a picture, there is fan edit, video,

which they trim and edit to become a movie trailer, so I watch those because of the creativity value. People can actually create a better friendly world through the art. It's so much fun."

"I actually write FF for not only K-Pop but also American series such as SVU, Parks and Rec, and Agents of SHIELD. For Korea, I only write about Twice. This is actually a chance, from American TV show, which I usually explore on the fictional character, but for Korea, they are real living humans who have real lives. For Korean, we talk about their real life as individual, not a character. I never thought I could do so, I thought it was only a fantasy to tell about real living person."

"Read and watch these moments. I never thought I would make a fanfiction of girl x girl, which is a lesbian love story. Because I don't know what it's like, but then I researched seriously about them, in order to present a good story, I even asked to my lesbian friends to gain insight. So for me, I really tried to find out what they are like, what they do, and anything related to them so I can write Korean fanfiction and girl x girl."

c. Collaboration to Solve Problem

Collaboration to solve problem is a form of participatory culture marked with the cooperation and coordination both as a group or individual and both formal and informal form, such as Wikipedia. One of the collaboration that has been done is the celebration of the birthday of BTS personnels, during this all of his fans change their profile pictures into purple, the favourite colour of the birthday guy, and greets him "happy birthday".

"Once, there was the day all of ARMY members wore purple clothes, some of them even made the clothes themselves, but that what makes it special. There are also many similar projects, April Fools for instance, where ARMY members change their profile picture with BTS memes, ARMY photo bomb, and so on. Airport project, too, we made a barricade to protect BTS when they arrived. The most common project is Twibbon. In a concert, when BTS hand their microphone to the ARMY, we will change the lyrics with our customised words like happy birthday Jimin, or anything else. The last concert in Indonesia, they made a yellow flower project. So that day all of the fans were wearing yellow rose during Spring Day song."

Other thing is by giving support to their idol like what Angel explained:

"I'm behind the screen. BTS now have ARMY protection squad, which was established just a year ago, but now it's so big. There are people who bashed BTS, bashed the logo, then ARMY members report it. There is one ARMY member who actually collects 5000 files of hatred and sends them to BTS and to Army Protection Squad. We all together messaged those accounts and reporte them. We provide proof and make sure those hatred and hater accounts are reported and blocked."

Other collaboration in fandom society is when some of them creat fan fiction, they mention and appreciate other fans in return,

"But as the reader we would like to support the writers, and as writers they also say thanks to the readers. They actually have 'supporter of the month' to acknowledge supporters who have been very kind and supportive. Writers actually not only write but also can create an extraordinary plot for the readers to enjoy. They are so good that we only read for an hour meanwhile they take weeks to write it."

d. Circulation

As a form of participatory culture, circulation creates a wave and channel if information in media to enhance the content. All informants agree that media that have been very productive and effective are Vlive and Twitter because those are the official accounts and

trustworthy ones. Anderson states:

“For me it’s Vlive, and Twitter too because we have many interactions in Twitter. Sometimes when they create personal Instagram, they actually contaminate their names. Because being an idol is so hard, once you make a mistake, people make it a big deal. Like Twice, for example, they only have one Instagram account for the 9 personnels within 3 to 4 years’ period of time. Because if one of them do something wrong, the whole thing is affected.”

Conclusion

Most of the consumers of popular culture, as Korean Pop Artist in this research do not only consume the popular culture, but they also produce new artefacts too. Based on the analysis above, the form of participatory culture among fans of BTS are by producing their new artefacts such as dance cover on Youtube, fan fiction on Wattpad, register as member from the official website of their idol. They use all aspects of participatory culture from affiliation, expression, collaboration, and circulation and they are doing them personally or collectively. When they want their idol to notice their presence by changing all profile pictures or using same color t-shirt when one of the idol is having a birthday, they did that collectively. Jenkins’ notion of participatory culture shifts attention from ‘poaching’ the text towards exploring the fan community itself as a social actor in the realms of new media. How they use their collective agency as power players in the realm of contemporary media culture. It brackets off personal fandom and tells us much less about processes intrinsic to it, both on an individual and collective level.

At individual level, they produce fan fiction as an alternate version of the existing stories or fan fiction. In fact, they are able to focus and give more attention on description or exposition on existing characters and plots. They learn to map their emotional issues onto pre-existing characters allows young writers to reflect on their own lives from a certain critical distance and work through issues, such as their emerging sexualities, without facing the stigma that might surround confessing such feelings in an autobiographical essay. By doing fan fiction, they stated that there is such a pride in gaining recognition even on online format, for their work and receive more feedbacks on their writing.

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