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The Influence of K-Pop Fandom on Cross-Cultural Social Identity among Indonesian Teenagers

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of Korean popular culture has transformed digital fandom into an important space for intercultural interaction and youth identity formation. This study aims to examine how participation in K-pop fandom influences the cross-cultural social identity of Indonesian teenagers. A qualitative descriptive case-study approach was employed using semi-structured interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and supporting survey data collected from active members of K-pop fandom communities. The findings reveal that fandom participation promotes cultural learning through language acquisition, appreciation of Korean culture, intercultural communication, and selective cultural adaptation while simultaneously strengthening social belonging, peer relationships, creativity, and collective participation. However, challenges related to consumerism, stereotypes, parental conflict, and social conformity also emerge. The study demonstrates that K-pop fandom functions as a participatory social environment where adolescents negotiate hybrid identities by integrating global cultural influences with local cultural values. These findings contribute to the understanding of digital youth culture and provide practical implications for educators, families, and policymakers in promoting positive intercultural engagement and digital citizenship among adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

The globalization of digital media has transformed the circulation of popular culture into a multidirectional process that reshapes cultural identities, social interactions, and youth lifestyles across national boundaries. Among the most influential manifestations of this phenomenon is the Korean Wave, commonly known as *Hallyu*, which encompasses music, television dramas, fashion, cosmetics, and digital entertainment. Within this cultural movement, K-pop has emerged as one of the most successful examples of transnational cultural production due to its sophisticated entertainment system, intensive digital marketing, and highly organized global fandom communities. Unlike previous forms of cultural globalization that relied primarily on traditional media, the global expansion of K-pop has been accelerated by social networking platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and X, enabling

fans to participate actively in cultural production, information dissemination, and community building rather than merely consuming entertainment content. These developments have transformed K-pop into a social and cultural phenomenon that extends far beyond the music industry and increasingly influences how young people construct identities, establish interpersonal relationships, and negotiate cultural belonging in digitally connected societies (Hällgren & Björk, 2022; Conti, 2025; Miladi et al., 2022). This study is grounded in the premise that K-pop fandom represents not only a leisure activity but also an evolving social institution that shapes cross-cultural identity formation among adolescents (Lee, 2022; Stefanie Ruiz et al., 2025).

Indonesia has become one of the largest K-pop markets in Southeast Asia, where teenagers constitute the dominant demographic participating in various fandom activities. The rapid increase in digital connectivity has enabled Indonesian adolescents to engage continuously with Korean popular culture through streaming platforms, fan communities, online discussions, merchandise consumption, and collaborative digital campaigns. Recent international studies suggest that K-pop fandom has evolved into a transnational participatory culture in which fans actively create, translate, distribute, and reinterpret cultural content rather than acting as passive audiences (Jin, 2020; Yoon, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2021; Oh, 2021). Such participation provides opportunities for intercultural communication, language acquisition, global networking, and collaborative learning while simultaneously strengthening emotional attachment to global fan communities. In Indonesia, these interactions have encouraged teenagers to develop interest in Korean language, customs, values, and everyday cultural practices, illustrating how digital entertainment increasingly functions as an informal environment for intercultural education and social learning. The phenomenon indicates that fandom participation has become deeply embedded within adolescent socialization processes rather than remaining limited to entertainment consumption. This contextual background is consistent with the research setting, which highlights Indonesian teenagers as active participants in online and offline fandom communities where cultural adoption, peer interaction, and identity negotiation continuously occur (Fatikh, 2025; Zahra, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, the influence of K-pop fandom can be understood through the intersection of Social Identity Theory and cultural globalization. Social Identity Theory argues that individuals develop self-concepts through membership in meaningful social groups, where shared symbols, emotional attachment, and collective experiences contribute to identity construction (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Reimer et al., 2022). Contemporary fandom communities exemplify these mechanisms because participation is characterized by collective rituals, shared narratives, coordinated digital activities, and strong emotional investments that reinforce both individual and collective identities. Meanwhile, globalization theories emphasize that cultural identities are increasingly hybrid rather than fixed, emerging through continuous interaction between local traditions and transnational cultural influences (Appadurai, 2020; Mohyeddin, 2024). Consequently, Indonesian teenagers who actively engage in K-pop fandom do not simply imitate Korean culture but negotiate multiple identities by integrating global cultural values with local norms and social expectations. Such hybridization reflects broader transformations occurring in contemporary youth culture, where digital participation facilitates the construction of flexible identities that transcend geographical boundaries while remaining embedded within local cultural contexts. This perspective aligns with previous observations that K-pop fandom provides emotional belonging, social recognition, and opportunities for intercultural interaction through collaborative fan practices and digital communication networks.

Empirical studies have recently begun to acknowledge that the enactment of K-pop fandom has multidimensional educational and psychosocial impacts. The past five years' studies showed that sustained engagement in Korean popular culture positively affects intercultural competence, language learning motivation, global citizenship awareness, digital literacy and collaborative problem solving (Jin & Yoon, 2021; Lee & Lau, 2025; Jeong & Bae, 2024; Nam et al., 2024; Kwon & Lynch-Kimery, 2024; Yoo et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2024). Researchers have suggested that fandom communities function as participatory learning spaces and that community members share knowledge and engage in charitable efforts, create fan art, and develop collective responsibility. Fandoms, meanwhile, are not just entertainment space, but instead increasingly expand into transnational social networks that enable intercultural dialogue and social participation. Concurrently, researchers have highlighted the opportunities that digital fandom offers to teens for establishing personal identities, fostering peer bonds, and building a sense of belonging in globally networked communities. Such discoveries reinforce the emerging scholarship on popular culture that goes beyond a media consumption approach and adopts viewpoint of broader sociological and identity-based theories that can explain the complex connection between globalization, digital participation, and youth identity formation.

Though the study of K-pop fandom has been rapidly expanding, there are still some gaps in the studies. While many previous studies have focused on consumer behavior and media engagement, celebrity worship, or marketing communication, few have considered the fandom as a social institution that constructs a cross-cultural social identity by continuing to interact within transnational communities. In addition, research results are inconsistent: while some studies focus on the positive benefits of fandom for intercultural competence, language learning and social connectedness, others address financial pressures, excessive consumption patterns, parental conflict, and social stereotypes. These divergent views have not been combined into a coherent model to account for Indonesian teenagers' negotiation of global cultural influences and local cultural values and social expectations. Thus, a more comprehensive view of fandom is needed to account for fandom as a multi-faceted space where cultural learning, social belonging, identity negotiation, and intercultural adaptation all happen at the same time.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of fandom in the formation of Indonesian teens' cross-cultural social identity. The novelty of the research is that it is based on a multi-theoretical framework, which integrates the two theories of fandom; Social Identity Theory and cultural globalization, to explain fandom as a participatory social space instead of a mere form of entertainment or media consumption. This study explores the cultural interest, social belonging, self-expression, and the difficulty of identities emerging from fandom participation in order to give a more nuanced account of the formation of adolescent identities in transnational digital communities. The results are likely to contribute to the existing body of literature on digital youth culture and cross-cultural identity as well as to provide practical information for teachers, parents and policy makers in their efforts to foster positive intercultural relations with adolescents.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using a case study approach to investigate how participation in K-pop fandom influences the construction of cross-cultural social identity among Indonesian teenagers. A qualitative design was considered the most appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of fandom

participation within their everyday social and cultural contexts rather than to test causal relationships quantitatively. The case study approach enabled an in-depth exploration of K-pop fandom as a contemporary social phenomenon embedded in real-life settings, allowing the researchers to capture the dynamic processes through which adolescents negotiate cultural values, social belonging, and identity within transnational fan communities. Consistent with qualitative inquiry, the research emphasized participants' lived experiences and subjective meanings to develop a contextualized understanding of cross-cultural identity formation. This methodological approach is particularly suitable for examining complex social interactions that cannot be adequately explained through numerical measurements alone.

Research Context and Participants

The research was conducted within the context of Indonesian K-pop fandom communities, both in online and offline environments where adolescents actively interact, exchange cultural knowledge, and participate in collective fandom activities. Indonesia was selected because it represents one of the largest K-pop audiences in Southeast Asia, with teenagers constituting the dominant demographic within fandom participation. The study focused on adolescents who were actively involved in fan communities, social media discussions, fan gatherings, streaming activities, and other collaborative fandom practices.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which enabled the researchers to recruit individuals capable of providing rich and relevant information concerning the research objectives. The inclusion criteria required participants to be active members of K-pop fandom communities with varying demographic characteristics, including gender, educational background, and duration of fandom involvement. This variation allowed the study to capture diverse perspectives regarding cultural adaptation, social interaction, and identity negotiation while ensuring sufficient depth and breadth of qualitative evidence.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three complementary techniques consisting of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source because they provided participants with sufficient flexibility to explain their experiences, motivations, perceptions, and interpretations regarding their engagement in K-pop fandom. The interview protocol contained open-ended questions exploring cultural interests, social relationships, identity development, and challenges encountered during fandom participation.

Participant observation was conducted in both online and offline fandom settings, including social media platforms, fan community discussions, concerts, and fan gatherings. Through direct observation, the researchers documented patterns of communication, collective behavior, language use, cultural practices, and symbolic expressions that reflected participants' social identities. In addition, document analysis was undertaken to examine fan-generated materials such as social media posts, fan art, translated content, and other digital artifacts that illustrated how fandom culture was internalized, reproduced, and communicated within the community. The integration of these three techniques enabled data triangulation by capturing the phenomenon from multiple sources and perspectives, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the systematic procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). The analytical process began with

repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence to achieve data familiarization. Subsequently, meaningful units of information were coded and grouped into categories representing recurring patterns across participants' experiences. These categories were then refined into broader themes describing the influence of K-pop fandom on cultural interest, cross-cultural interaction, social belonging, identity construction, perceived benefits, and challenges experienced by Indonesian teenagers. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison was applied to identify similarities and differences across data sources, ensuring that the resulting themes accurately represented participants' experiences while remaining conceptually coherent. The final themes were interpreted by integrating empirical findings with Social Identity Theory and cultural globalization perspectives to explain the processes of cross-cultural social identity formation.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopted the qualitative quality criteria proposed by Gunbayi (2024), including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from interviews, participant observations, and documentary evidence. Dependability was maintained by documenting each stage of data collection and analysis systematically, allowing the analytical procedures to remain transparent and consistent throughout the research process. Confirmability was strengthened by grounding interpretations directly in participants' narratives and observational evidence rather than researcher assumptions, while transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and participant characteristics to enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings in similar settings. The use of multiple sources of evidence and systematic analytical procedures contributed to the overall reliability and credibility of the study's conclusions regarding the role of K-pop fandom in shaping cross-cultural social identity among Indonesian teenagers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results presented in this section are derived from the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence collected throughout the study. Quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires administered to 300 Indonesian teenagers who actively participate in K-pop fandom communities, while qualitative evidence was generated through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The combination of these data sources provides a comprehensive understanding of how K-pop fandom contributes to the development of cross-cultural social identity among Indonesian adolescents. Rather than presenting isolated statistical findings, this section systematically organizes the results into several interconnected themes that reflect participants' experiences and patterns of fandom engagement.

The presentation of findings begins with the demographic characteristics of the respondents to establish the contextual background of the participants. It then examines the intensity of K-pop fandom engagement before exploring its influence on cultural interest, cross-cultural adaptation, and social identity formation. The subsequent sections describe the perceived benefits obtained through fandom participation as well as the challenges encountered by teenagers in maintaining their involvement within fandom communities. Throughout this section, quantitative findings are strengthened by interview excerpts that illustrate participants' experiences and provide deeper insight into the meanings attached to their fandom activities. Unless otherwise stated, all tables presented in this section are based on the primary data collected by the researchers through questionnaires, interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

Characteristics of Indonesian K-Pop Fandom Participants

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provide the contextual background for understanding the findings presented in the subsequent sections. A total of 300 Indonesian teenagers who actively participated in K-pop fandom communities were involved in this study. The demographic profile includes gender, age, and educational background, as presented in Table 1. These characteristics illustrate the composition of the participants and provide a basis for interpreting patterns of fandom engagement and cross-cultural social identity.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 300)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	210	70.0
Male	90	30.0
Age		
13–15 years	85	28.3
16–18 years	125	41.7
19–21 years	90	30.0
Educational Background		
High School Students	175	58.3
University Students	125	41.7

Source: Primary questionnaire data, 2025

As presented in Table 1, female respondents constituted the majority of the sample, accounting for 70.0% (n = 210), while male respondents represented 30.0% (n = 90). This distribution indicates that female adolescents were more actively represented in K-pop fandom communities than their male counterparts. In terms of age, respondents aged 16–18 years formed the largest group, comprising 41.7% (n = 125) of the total sample. Participants aged 19–21 years accounted for 30.0% (n = 90), whereas those aged 13–15 years represented 28.3% (n = 85). These findings suggest that K-pop fandom participation was most prevalent among middle and late adolescents.

Regarding educational background, 175 respondents (58.3%) were high school students, while 125 respondents (41.7%) were enrolled in universities. The relatively balanced distribution across these educational levels indicates that participation in K-pop fandom extends from secondary education into early adulthood. Overall, the demographic profile demonstrates that the study involved respondents with diverse educational backgrounds while maintaining a concentration among female adolescents and individuals aged 16–18 years, providing an appropriate basis for examining patterns of fandom engagement and cross-cultural social identity in the following sections.

Patterns of K-Pop Fandom Engagement

Following the demographic profile, this section examines the respondents' level of engagement in various K-pop fandom activities.

Table 2. Levels of K-Pop Engagement among Respondents (N = 300)

Engagement Activity	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Streaming music/videos	75.0	20.0	5.0
Following social media	80.0	15.0	5.0
Purchasing merchandise	40.0	35.0	25.0
Attending online concerts	55.0	30.0	15.0
Joining fan communities	70.0	20.0	10.0

Source: Primary questionnaire data, 2025

As presented in Table 2, respondents demonstrated consistently high participation in digitally mediated fandom practices, particularly in following K-pop-related social media (80.0%) and streaming music and videos (75.0%), indicating that digital platforms constitute the primary channel for fandom engagement among Indonesian teenagers. Participation in fan communities was also substantial, with 70.0% of respondents reporting high involvement, reflecting the importance of social interaction in sustaining fandom activities. In contrast, activities requiring greater financial commitment, such as purchasing official merchandise (40.0%) and attending online concerts (55.0%), showed comparatively lower levels of high participation, suggesting that economic considerations may influence the intensity of certain forms of fandom engagement. Overall, the findings indicate that respondents predominantly engage with K-pop through accessible digital platforms and community-based interactions rather than consumption-oriented activities.

Cultural Adaptation through K-Pop Fandom

The findings presented in this section examine how participation in K-pop fandom influences respondents' cultural adaptation and interest in various aspects of Korean culture. As shown in Table 3, respondents reported that fandom participation had the strongest influence on increasing awareness of Korean culture (70.0%) and stimulating interest in learning the Korean language (65.0%). More than half of the respondents also indicated that fandom encouraged them to try Korean food (55.0%), while the adoption of Korean fashion (45.0%) and participation in Korean cultural events (40.0%) were reported at comparatively lower levels. Overall, the findings suggest that K-pop fandom primarily promotes cultural awareness and curiosity, with behavioral adaptation occurring to varying degrees depending on respondents' opportunities and personal preferences.

Table 3. Influence of K-Pop Fandom on Cultural Interest (N = 300)

Indicator	Strong Impact (%)	Moderate Impact (%)	Low Impact (%)
Interest in Korean Language	65.0	25.0	10.0
Awareness of Korean Culture	70.0	20.0	10.0
Trying Korean Food	55.0	30.0	15.0
Adoption of Korean Fashion	45.0	35.0	20.0
Participation in Cultural Events	40.0	30.0	30.0

Source: Primary questionnaire data, 2025

The interview findings indicate that cultural adaptation among Indonesian teenagers developed gradually through continuous interaction with K-pop content and participation in fandom communities. Four dominant themes emerged from the interviews, namely language learning, appreciation of Korean culture, selective adoption of lifestyle practices, and the development of intercultural openness. These themes complement the quantitative findings by illustrating how respondents experienced cultural learning in their everyday lives.

The first theme concerned respondents' increasing motivation to learn the Korean language. Most participants explained that language learning was not initially planned but emerged naturally after repeated exposure to K-pop songs, interviews, dramas, and online broadcasts. Respondents described language acquisition as an

enjoyable process because it enabled them to understand lyrics, communicate with international fans, and appreciate the cultural meaning embedded in Korean media.

"When I first became interested in K-pop, I only listened to the songs because I liked the melodies and choreography. As I watched more interviews and live broadcasts, I became curious about what the members were actually saying without subtitles. I started learning simple Korean vocabulary through YouTube, language-learning applications, and fan translation accounts. Little by little, I understood common expressions, and eventually I felt more confident following Korean content directly. Learning the language has made me appreciate not only the music but also the culture behind it."

Several participants also reported that language learning encouraged them to explore broader aspects of Korean society. They explained that understanding simple expressions helped them recognize differences in customs, etiquette, and social interactions portrayed in entertainment content.

"I realized that many words used by Korean artists have cultural meanings that cannot always be translated directly into Indonesian. Because of that, I became interested in reading about Korean traditions, respect for elders, and everyday communication. I think learning the language helped me understand why people behave differently in different cultures instead of simply copying what I saw in dramas."

Another recurring theme involved respondents' appreciation of Korean culture beyond entertainment. Participants explained that K-pop encouraged them to explore Korean cuisine, traditional celebrations, historical sites, and social customs. These experiences were viewed as opportunities to broaden cultural knowledge rather than replace their local identity.

"Before becoming a K-pop fan, I knew very little about Korea apart from the music. After joining fandom communities, I often watched documentaries, cooking videos, and travel content shared by other fans. I became interested in trying Korean food, celebrating Korean cultural festivals held in my city, and learning about Korean history. For me, these activities are ways of appreciating another culture while still respecting Indonesian traditions."

The interviews further revealed that respondents selectively adopted elements of Korean lifestyle according to their personal values and social environment. Rather than fully imitating Korean culture, participants tended to incorporate certain practices that they considered appropriate and compatible with their daily lives.

"I enjoy Korean fashion because it looks simple and comfortable, so sometimes I adapt the style when choosing my clothes. However, I never feel the need to become exactly like Korean idols. I simply take inspiration from their creativity while adjusting everything to my own personality, family values, and local culture. I think that is what makes fandom enjoyable because it allows us to appreciate another culture without losing our own identity."

Many respondents also emphasized that interaction with international fandom communities had broadened their perspectives regarding cultural diversity. Communication through social media enabled them to exchange ideas with fans from different countries, encouraging openness toward different languages, traditions, and viewpoints.

"Through online fan communities, I have spoken with fans from Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and even South Korea. We often discuss music, but eventually we also talk about our daily lives and cultural differences. Those conversations taught me that every country has unique traditions, and learning

about them makes me more respectful toward people with different backgrounds."

Another participant highlighted that intercultural communication had increased self-confidence when interacting with people from outside Indonesia. Participation in international fan projects required collaboration, mutual respect, and effective communication despite cultural differences.

"I joined several international fan projects where members from different countries worked together to celebrate our favorite group's anniversary. At first I was nervous because my English was not very good, but everyone was supportive. After several projects, I became much more confident communicating with people from different cultures. It made me realize that fandom is not only about entertainment but also about learning how to collaborate with people from around the world."

The interview findings illustrate that K-pop fandom functions as a medium for cultural learning that extends beyond entertainment consumption. Participants consistently described language learning, appreciation of Korean traditions, selective lifestyle adaptation, and intercultural communication as important outcomes of their involvement in fandom communities. These qualitative findings complement the survey results by demonstrating that cultural adaptation occurs through continuous interaction with digital content and social engagement within transnational fan networks, contributing to broader cross-cultural understanding among Indonesian teenagers

Social Identity Formation through K-Pop Fandom

The interview findings revealed that participation in K-pop fandom significantly contributed to the formation of respondents' social identity. Rather than functioning solely as a source of entertainment, fandom became a social environment where participants developed a sense of belonging, constructed shared identities, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and expressed themselves creatively. Five interrelated themes emerged from the interviews, namely sense of belonging, group loyalty, peer recognition, collective participation, and self-expression. These themes provide qualitative support for the quantitative findings presented in Table 4 by illustrating how social identity was continuously negotiated through interaction within fandom communities.

The first theme concerned respondents' strong sense of belonging to fandom communities. Many participants described fandom as a "second family" where they felt accepted regardless of differences in age, educational background, or geographical location. This feeling of inclusion motivated them to remain actively involved in community activities and maintain long-term relationships with fellow fans.

"When I first joined the fandom, I did not know anyone. After participating in several online discussions and fan gatherings, I realized that everyone shared the same enthusiasm and respected one another. Eventually, the fandom became like a second family because I could freely express my opinions without worrying about being judged. Even though we come from different regions, we always support each other."

"I think what keeps me in the fandom is not only the artists but also the people I meet. Whenever I experience academic stress or personal problems, there are always friends from the fandom who encourage me. The emotional support makes me feel that I truly belong to this community."

Another important theme was group loyalty. Participants explained that supporting their favorite artists was viewed as a collective responsibility rather than an individual activity. Streaming music, voting during award events, and promoting new releases were commonly organized through coordinated teamwork among fandom members.

"Whenever our favorite group releases a new album, everyone already knows their responsibilities. Some members focus on streaming, others promote the songs on social media, while others organize voting schedules. We work together because every small contribution is considered valuable for achieving our common goal."

"I never feel forced to participate in fandom activities. Instead, I enjoy contributing because it feels like we are accomplishing something together. Seeing our favorite group receive awards makes us feel proud because we know that our collective effort played a small part in supporting them."

The interviews also demonstrated that fandom participation enhanced peer recognition and strengthened respondents' confidence in their social interactions. Participants explained that being recognized as K-pop fans enabled them to establish friendships more easily, particularly in educational settings where shared interests became the foundation for social relationships.

"When I entered university, I hardly knew anyone. One day I noticed someone carrying merchandise from my favorite group, so I started a conversation. Since then we have become close friends and even introduced each other to larger fandom communities. Having the same interest made it much easier to build friendships."

"Most of my closest friends today are people I met because of K-pop. At first we only discussed music, but eventually we talked about our studies, family, and future plans. The fandom became the starting point for genuine friendships that continue beyond entertainment."

Collective participation emerged as another important dimension of social identity formation. Respondents emphasized that fandom activities extended beyond entertainment to include collaborative projects, fundraising initiatives, and social campaigns. Such activities strengthened their perception that fandom communities could contribute positively to society.

"Our fandom organized fundraising activities for disaster victims and distributed food packages during Ramadan. Although we were united by K-pop, these social activities reminded us that the community also has responsibilities toward society. Participating in charity projects made me feel proud to be part of the fandom."

"Joining charity events changed my perspective about fandom. Many people think fans only spend money on albums, but in reality we also organize blood donation campaigns, environmental clean-up activities, and fundraising events. Those experiences taught me the importance of teamwork and social responsibility."

The final theme highlighted self-expression as a significant outcome of fandom participation. Many respondents explained that the fandom environment encouraged them to explore their creativity through fan art, dance performances, video editing, photography, writing, and digital content creation. These activities enhanced their confidence and enabled them to express personal identities while interacting with broader fan communities.

"Before joining the fandom, I was a very shy person and rarely shared my work with others. After seeing other fans upload illustrations and edited videos, I decided to create my own fan art. The positive feedback I received motivated me to continue improving my skills, and now I even accept freelance illustration projects."

"Participating in dance cover competitions helped me become much more confident speaking in public and performing on stage. Initially I joined because I liked K-pop choreography, but eventually I discovered abilities that I never realized I had. Those experiences have influenced how I see myself today."

The interview findings suggest that K-pop fandom serves as an important social environment for identity construction among Indonesian teenagers. Participants consistently described fandom as a community that fostered belonging, encouraged cooperation, strengthened interpersonal relationships, promoted civic engagement, and facilitated creative self-expression.

Perceived Benefits of K-Pop Fandom

The interview findings indicated that respondents perceived numerous personal and social benefits from their involvement in K-pop fandom communities. Beyond entertainment, participants described fandom as a platform for personal development, emotional well-being, intercultural learning, communication improvement, and creative exploration.

One of the most frequently reported benefits was emotional support and psychological well-being. Respondents explained that engaging with K-pop content and interacting with fellow fans helped them cope with academic pressure, personal stress, and feelings of loneliness. The supportive atmosphere within fandom communities enabled participants to share experiences and receive encouragement from individuals with similar interests.

"University assignments often make me feel overwhelmed, but listening to K-pop music and talking with friends in the fandom helps me relax. Whenever I have a difficult day, there is always someone in the community who is willing to listen and encourage me. The friendships I have built through the fandom have become an important source of emotional support."

"The fandom became a place where I could express my feelings without being afraid of negative judgments. We often motivate each other during stressful periods, especially before examinations. I feel happier because I know that there are people who genuinely care about my well-being."

Participants also emphasized that fandom activities contributed to the improvement of communication skills and intercultural competence. Through interactions with fans from different countries, respondents became more confident communicating in English, developed greater appreciation for cultural diversity, and learned to respect different perspectives during online discussions.

"Before joining international fan communities, I was not confident speaking English. Because I interacted with fans from different countries almost every day, I gradually became more comfortable communicating and expressing my ideas. Besides improving my language skills, I also learned how to respect cultural differences during discussions."

"Meeting people from different countries made me realize that everyone has unique traditions and viewpoints. Even though we have different backgrounds, we can cooperate because we share common interests. Those experiences have made me more open-minded and respectful toward cultural diversity."

Another important benefit involved creativity and self-development. Many respondents reported that fandom participation inspired them to acquire new skills, including graphic design, photography, video editing, dance performance, content creation, and event organization. Several participants explained that these activities eventually became valuable experiences that supported their academic and professional development.

"I initially learned graphic design because I wanted to create promotional posters for our fandom events. Over time, my skills improved, and I began accepting freelance design projects. Something that started as a hobby eventually became a valuable professional skill."

"Managing fan events taught me how to organize activities, communicate with many people, and solve unexpected problems. Those experiences have increased my confidence in leading group projects at university because I already have experience coordinating different individuals toward the same objective."

Several respondents further explained that fandom encouraged lifelong learning by motivating them to explore topics beyond popular culture. Exposure to Korean language, history, tourism, and cultural traditions inspired participants to seek additional knowledge through books, documentaries, online courses, and educational content.

"At first I only wanted to understand song lyrics, but eventually I became interested in Korean history and culture. I often read articles, watch educational videos, and even attend cultural seminars organized by universities. I never expected that my interest in music would encourage me to study another country's culture so seriously."

The interview findings suggest that participation in K-pop fandom provides benefits extending far beyond entertainment consumption. Respondents consistently described improvements in emotional well-being, intercultural communication, creativity, leadership, teamwork, and lifelong learning. These qualitative insights reinforce the quantitative findings by demonstrating that fandom participation contributes positively to both individual development and broader social competencies, supporting the role of transnational fan communities as meaningful environments for adolescent growth.

Interpreting Cross-Cultural Identity Formation through K-Pop Fandom

The findings demonstrate that K-pop fandom functions as a dynamic transnational social environment in which Indonesian teenagers construct cross-cultural social identities through continuous interaction, cultural learning, and collective participation rather than through passive media consumption alone. This finding reinforces the argument that contemporary fandom communities have evolved into participatory digital spaces where identity is negotiated through shared practices, symbolic interaction, and collaborative engagement (Yoon, 2022; Parc & Kim, 2020). Instead of merely consuming Korean popular culture, participants actively developed intercultural awareness by learning the Korean language, exploring cultural traditions, and communicating with international fans. These patterns support Jeong and Bae (2024), who argued that intercultural competence emerges through sustained cultural interaction rather than formal educational settings alone. Similarly, Lee and Lau (2025) found that global fan platforms facilitate meaningful intercultural communication by connecting geographically dispersed individuals through shared cultural interests.

The present findings further extend Social Identity Theory by illustrating that fandom membership provides emotional belonging while simultaneously encouraging hybrid

identity construction. Rather than replacing local cultural identities, Indonesian teenagers selectively integrated Korean cultural elements into their existing cultural values. This observation aligns with Mohyeddin (2024), who emphasized that globalization increasingly produces hybrid identities instead of cultural homogenization. Likewise, Reimer et al. (2022) explained that social identification is strengthened through collective experiences and shared symbolic meanings, both of which were consistently reflected in participants' descriptions of fandom communities as "second families." However, this study advances previous literature by demonstrating that identity construction occurs simultaneously across cultural, emotional, and social dimensions, highlighting fandom as a multidimensional social institution instead of simply an entertainment-oriented community.

Another key contribution has been in relation to the connection between digital participation and social capital. Collaborative fandom activities led to improved teamwork, leadership, communication, and civic engagement, according to respondents, and involved charity campaigns and fundraising, content creation, and foreign fan projects. This aligns with Yang et al. (2024), who found that fandom online has more and more been used to encourage participation in philanthropy and collective social responsibility. Similarly, Nam et al. (2024) found that transnational fandom communities establish sustainable collaborative systems through social media engagement and Malik and Haidar (2023) classified K-pop fandom as a learning community of practice, which could interact with each other and learn together. In this study I extend these viewpoints by showing civic involvement as a manifestation of collective identity in fandom communities instead of in isolation.

The results also show that the positive aspect of fandom comes with certain difficulties such as financial strain, parental disillusionment, social stereotyping, and conformity in fandoms. This result aligns with Novianty and Srimulyani (2024) who noted that Korean popular culture can affect the adolescence's consumption behavior and lifestyle. Likewise, Kirin et al. (2025) pointed out the conflict between appreciation of culture and too much consumerism among university students. The current research combines the positive and negative aspects of fandom in a unified explanation, while most previous research has focused on either the positive or negative side. As one of the main novelties of the study, this balanced interpretation of fandom as a space of interculturality and fandom as a critical space of cultural negotiation is conceptualized. This balanced understanding of fandom as a space of interculturality and fandom as a critical space of cultural negotiation is conceptualized as one of the main novelties of this study.

This research holds theoretical significance because it combines the theory of Social Identity Theory with cultural globalization to account for the process of cross-cultural identity formation in digitally-mediated fandom communities. This holistic approach illustrates how emotional bonding, intercultural communication and participatory digital activities all play a role in shaping identity development. In practice, the results indicate that teachers, parents, and policy makers need to acknowledge fandom as a potentially powerful informal learning space that can enhance intercultural competence, global citizenship, digital literacy, and collaborative competency in adolescents. It is, therefore, recommended that educational institutions also use fandom as one of the components of intercultural education programs, instead of fandom only being perceived as a consumption of entertainment.

These contributions must be acknowledged but there are a few limitations. The qualitative case study design does not allow for the findings to be generalized to other adolescent populations and the Indonesian fandom context can be different from that of other cultural contexts. Future studies could use longitudinal and comparative cross-national designs to examine the dynamics of cross-cultural identities across

time and other cultural settings. The theoretical model proposed in this study could be further developed by quantitative approaches such as structural equation modeling or mixed-method designs, which would explore the causal relationships between fandom behaviors, intercultural competence, psychological well-being and identity development.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study showed that K-pop fandom is a social and cultural environment that influences the cross-cultural social identity of Indonesian teenagers. Fandom is not just about fun and games, it is about intercultural learning, language acquisition, cultural appreciation, social belonging, and creative self-expression, as it involves ongoing engagement with digitally mediated communities. The results also suggest that the Korean cultural elements are not fully replaced with local cultural values in the formation of the adolescents' identity, but rather the integration of the cultural elements is selective. Concurrently, practices of fandom come with their own conundrums of consumerism, social archetypes, parental ignorance and conformist demands, thus making the business of identity negotiation in transnational digital environments a complicated affair.

By combining the perspectives of Social Identity Theory and cultural globalization, this study offers a novel paradigm for understanding how digital fandom enables multidimensional identity construction processes, namely emotional attachment, intercultural interaction and collective participation. In practice, the results will prove useful for teachers, parents and policy makers to consider fandom as an informal learning space which can support the development of intercultural competence, global citizenship, digital literacy and collaboration in adolescents. However, the study has a number of limitations, including the qualitative character of the study (case study) and the study of Indonesian teenagers which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could also be comparative cross-cultural, longitudinal, and mixed-method designs to investigate the effects of fandom engagement on identity formation in various cultural settings and at different points during the adolescent years.

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