The K-Pop Fans Perception Over a Cancel Culture Phenomenon

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Abstract

This study examines the perception of K-pop fans towards a cancel culture phenomenon that is happening. The background of this thesis begins when cancel culture emerges and has been used against certain individual or groups of people as an act of boycott. This cancel culture is also happening within K-pop communities as an act of cyberbullying and has been used as a common term in social media platforms. This study uses qualitative as a research method with phenomenological approach to gain deeper information from the respondent. With semi-structured interview as a data collection method, this study expected to give a different experience from the respondent regarding cancel culture. As the results, six respondents have similar perception over a cancel culture phenomenon as most of them agree that cancel culture is inclined to the negative side. Although overall, cancel culture has both positive and negative sides. This research also finds that most respondents never experience the cancel culture phenomenon themselves, but someone that they know in K-pop community has experienced the impact of cancel culture. Therefore, hopefully this study can be used as an awareness from using social media platforms. It will also be able to consider a regulation to make social media platforms a safe space for people to use in the future.

Keywords: K-Pop Fans; Cancel Culture; K-Pop Fans Perception.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji tentang persepsi penggemar K-pop terhadap fenomena cancel culture yang sedang terjadi. Skripsi ini dilatar belakangi ketika budaya cancel muncul dan digunakan terhadap individu atau kelompok tertentu sebagai tindakan boikot. Budaya batal ini juga terjadi dalam komunitas K-pop sebagai tindakan cyberbullying dan telah digunakan sebagai istilah umum di platform media sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologis untuk mendapatkan informasi yang lebih dalam dari responden. Dengan wawancara semi terstruktur sebagai metode pengumpulan data, penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan pengalaman yang berbeda dari responden mengenai budaya batal. Hasilnya, enam responden memiliki persepsi yang sama atas fenomena budaya batal karena sebagian besar setuju bahwa budaya batal cenderung ke sisi negatif. Meski secara keseluruhan, budaya batal memiliki sisi positif dan negatif. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa sebagian besar responden tidak pernah mengalami sendiri fenomena budaya batal, tetapi seseorang yang mereka kenal di komunitas K-pop pernah merasakan dampak dari budaya batal. Oleh karena itu, semoga penelitian ini dapat digunakan sebagai kesadaran untuk menggunakan platform media sosial. Ini juga akan dapat mempertimbangkan peraturan untuk menjadikan platform media sosial sebagai ruang yang aman untuk digunakan orang di masa depan.

Kata kunci: penggemar k-pop; batalkan budaya; persepsi penggemar k-pop.

INTRODUCTION

Korean pop or commonly known as K-pop is one part of the Hallyu wave or Korean Wave. The emergence of the term Hallyu caused the spread of a massive cultural wave. Until finally the wave began to enter Indonesian society through newspapers which made it a Korean heat wave phenomenon in 2002. The second wave hits Indonesia in 2009 with the emerging of some popular singers (Rahmawati 2020). The famous girl band and boy band such as Super Junior, Shinee, TVXQ, Girl's Generation, T-Ara, and many more have fans spreading all over the world including Indonesia. Agency companies in the Korean entertainment world usually have strict rules for the actors and artists who work in them (Soheili 2019). Therefore, the good name of the company is an obligation for Korean idols to maintain it. If there are idols who do not obey the rules given by the agency or when the agency's name is tarnished due to mistakes made by the idol, then the idol is at risk of losing his name and the possibility of being expelled from the agency where he works may occur (Griffiths 2018). The boycott that occurred in South Korea is commonly known as cancel culture. Cancel culture is an act in which an influential individual such as a singer, actor, politician, or big company, takes an action or expresses their opinion which is contrary to the opinion of most people. This culture often makes the person concerned get negative treatment from social media account users.

Cancel culture is one way to follow up on behavior that is not in flow with the norms and ethics that apply to many people. No one knows when this cancel culture phenomenon specifically originated. Referring to the University of Central Florida article, the reference to cancel culture in pop culture comes from the 1991 film New Jack City, one of the characters named Nino Brown said "Cancel that [woman]. I'll buy another one,"; which this character refers to the statement of his girlfriend who does not agree with the violence he commits (Dudenhoefer 2020). This culture does not only affect individual people, large companies with well-known brand names also cannot be separated from acts of 'cancelled' by the public. For the people, especially in K-pop industries, hot news came from one of Korea's top artists named Seo Ye-ji. Seo Ye-Ji, who played the Korean drama series titled It's Okay to Not Be Okay, was hit by a scandal and had to take time off for her career. This is related to Kim Jung Hyun, who had a romantic relationship with Seo Ye-Ji. Because of this scandal, Seo Ye-ji was accused of being the cause of Kim Jung Hyun not being professional with his female co-star (Rin 2021). This was revealed after Dispatch shared a message containing some heated conversation between Seo Ye-Ji and her ex-boyfriend, Kim Jung Hyun. Dispatch is one of the controversial news media in South Korea (Lee 2021). This is because they often reveal secrets of Korean artists secretly.

From this the previous case shows that the cancel culture has had a major impact on the reputation of a company or individual. This is like getting a 'social sanction' from the public without the perpetrator in question getting it through legal channels. Even so, this is where the problems that arise as a result of the boycott phenomenon begin. From the very beginning this culture had no limits in determining which individuals or companies could be boycotted. The public only assumes through one of the media (pictures, videos, news) that are considered incompetent by fans, then without thinking immediately declares that they have boycotted that person.

For K-Pop idols or actress, having a fandom which is group of enthusiastic fans is important to support them. They have their own fandom name; each one is based on the group that they are supporting. This phenomenon sure has been known in K-Pop fandom communities. Most of them use a platform on social media to become up to date with their favorite K-Pop artist. Twitter, for example, has been used for connecting with idols because of how sophisticated things

are nowadays (Bodegon-Hikino 2021). For the past 10 years, K-Pop has dominated Twitter on a huge scale. With the features that Twitter brings such as Twitter Spaces, it has become a wonderful bridge as a path between artist and fan. All it takes is just the internet and a little click to post what you want to say on Twitter.

Due to its convenience and easy access to the internet, social media sure has become teenagers' first place to interact with each other. The internet has become a part of their lives while they are growing up (Vaterlaus et al. 2014). According to Saripah & Pratita (2018), while it's good for the teenagers usually characterized based on their curiosity and having them idolize the K-pop artist because of the artistic skills such as singing, dancing, and acting etc., and not to mention their attractive visage. Unfortunately, this commonly led to negative behavior on social media because of their immaturity, and one of them is cyberbullying (Rashid 2022). Study showed that cyberbullying related to K-pop is visible through several cases. It has been spotted in K-pop fans as one of their aggressive behaviors (Eliani, Yuniardi, and Masturah 2018). For example, the research that has been conducted by Nugraini (2016) shows that the EXO-L (the name is reserved for the EXO fandom, a K-pop boyband) fandom tend to be having some aggressive behavior in social media by attacking another fandom by throwing some rude comments in another fandom accounts. Not just that, they also attacked another person and participated in political activities. In May 2020 the K-pop stans account hijacked a hashtag on Twitter. It was the #WhiteLivesMatter hashtag, and they are flooding it with K-pop videos (Bedingfield 2020)

Thus, cyberbullying is frequent because most of the K-pop fans do their activities on the internet (Andriani et al. 2020). And over the years it has been dominating worldwide trends on Twitter because of their growth. The reason why these matters and concerning is because the aggressive behavior can lead to some sort of mental breakdown that has been experienced by the victims. Or someone's account being hacked so suddenly, and the information changed without the owner knowing it. Other than that, Saripah & Pratita (2018) found in their study that cyberbullying comes in many forms. It can be harassment, flaming, cyberstalking, impersonation, exclusion, and denigration. The victims can suffer from depression and trauma caused by the action of cyberbullying such as sending a hate speech in direct message on Twitter. Also, cyberbullying has several negative impacts, it can decline someone else's academic performance and affect their relationships with other people. Or it might be worse, suicide. And this is the reason why this research has been conducted; to prevent the rise of cyberbullying involving K-pop fans and the side effects that have been affecting almost every internet user, especially Twitter.

Study conducted by Palomares et al., (2022) found out about the consequences on the lives of person who get impacted by cancel culture. The result of the study shows that the effects of cancel culture faced by the victims are some have their career ended, getting a backlash, losing their job, and last, getting criticism. The term 'cancelling' or boycotting is a metaphor that has the meaning of an attempt to unfollow the social media accounts of the person or organization concerned, refusing to participate in activities that can provide income to that person or organization. For example, such as stop listening to that person's songs, or stop buying products made by certain organizations, and even commenting directly on his personal account, you can also make separate posts about things that make that person getting boycotts (Yakovlev 2021).

Joanne the Scammer was one of the people to get credit because of the use of word "cancel culture" thus, it was an early example of the term's rising (Bromwich 2018). Cancel culture or boycott culture is usually used by marginalized groups, which they use to get compensation from people who speak on social media platforms (Dudenhoefer 2020). Over time, people who engage in a boycott culture are people seeking redress for hate speech made by others. Another research

conducted by Bangun & Kumaralalita (2022) has a collective understanding about what cancel culture is. Generally, they are choosing Kim Seon Ho as the main case study of cancel culture because of the spread rumor that caused him getting backlashed and losing his contract with several company. As quoted by Seto, (in Bangun & Kumaralalita, 2022) they also mention that with the rise of social media and how easy it is to spread the news to public in a second makes the cancel culture phenomenon growth more in digital platforms and causes panicking to surroundings.

Perception is called the core of communication, because if our perception isn't accurate, there's no way people can communicate effectively. According to Robbins (2003) (in Rahayu, 2020) Perception is impressions that received by individuals through the five senses to be analyzed, interpret, and then evaluate until the individuals get their own meaning. The higher the degree of similarity of perception between individuals, the easier and the more they communicate, and therefore it tends to form a cultural group or group identity.

According to Blake & Sekuler (2006), the perception process includes three main stages. The first one is selection, this one refers to a process by an individual who chooses which stimuli to attend to and which to disregard (Goldstein, 2010, p. 5). It is selected with the aid of touch, smell, sound, sight, and taste. The next process is called organizing. This is the second stage of the perception process, in this process people are sorting and categorizing information that already perceived and from cognitive patterns that has been learned. According to Coren & Girgus (1980) there are three ways to sort things into patterns, it is by using proximity, similarity, and difference. Because in terms of proximity, people usually think that things that close together goes together. The final stage of the perception process is called interpretation. According to Goldstein (2010) (quoted in IvyPanda, 2020) it's determined by personal values, experiences, needs, beliefs, involvement, and other personal factors. People interpret information using schemata. Schemata is defined as the way our brain organizes experience or knowledge based on our past experience (Watts and Goodfriend 2022). Thus, people show different methods of perception. According to Jackson, the mind interprets sensory information by forming connections between different stimuli.

Cancel culture and cyberbullying are linked together, especially when it comes to the existence of K-pop fans. As cited in Andriani et al., (2020), there are various forms of cyberbullying according to Lastriani (2018). The one that has been received by K-pop fans were hate speech and hate comments using the social media platforms as the media to send the hurtful message. Cyberbullying has been introduced mostly by teenage K-pop fans, because according to Putri et al., (2016), the biggest internet user specifically in Indonesia (64%) are teenagers aged from 15 to 19 years old. So even as a fellow K-pop fans can do the cyberbully act, usually known as fandom war. They can be witnessed through some K-pop community up on social media and sharing all information connected about their favorite K-pop artist with another fellow K-pop fans (Bangun and Kumaralalita 2022).

This study has been conducted to examine the cancel culture phenomenon in K-pop community. This can help create a better understanding about K-pop fans perception towards cancel culture especially when it comes to the side effects that it caused within and outside of K-pop community. It also serves as for future researchers in many fields such as media and communication studies. This study also takes an example of how technologies and media can change the way people communicate from one person to another, individually and in group. This can also enrich the study of cyberbullying caused by cancel culture both in Indonesia and Malaysia thus answering the problem formula and achieving the research objectives.

The research area of this study is limited to respondents that meet the criteria for this research since the researcher is going to use semi-structured interview. The respondents of this study consist of six students from Indonesia that meets the requirements of this research. The purpose of the study is to find out about their initial interest in K-pop and perception with their experience from each K-pop fans about their knowledge on cancel culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research objective is to focus on K-pop fans perception about the cancel culture phenomenon. It is to explore the K-pop fans awareness of cancel culture in social media platform that they are using to interact with other K-pop fans. Purposive sampling is one of the non-probability sampling techniques where the researchers select a sample based on the researchers needs for the study. The sample or respondent that has been selected has characteristics for the researchers. This research uses a phenomenological approach using semi-structured interviews to examine and collect data to answer all the research questions. The data and information collected are analyzed using a thematic analysis.

Since this study uses a purposive sampling as a data sampling technique, at first researcher will select the individuals that fit this study and focus only on the small sample. Adolescents are essential to meet the criteria as stated in the study. After that, a detailed message will be sent to the candidate of respondent and the researcher will ask politely for their permission to be interviewed along with the letter of permission from university to collect the data. Six participants that have met the criteria were agreed to be interviewed. Each of the interviews lasted about 20-60 minutes. After the interview was finished, the conversation of the interview on text was transcribed using Word before the data being analyzed and coded using excel.

Table 1

Respondent Initial and Age

No	Name	Age	Gender
1	DA	23	Female
2	FT	23	Female
3	RF	22	Female
4	DR	21	Female
5	FA	22	Female
6	SA	22	Female

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the thematic analysis, the researcher found out that the respondents have different experiences when they first were introduced to K-pop. It shows that overall respondent, which is respondents 1, 4, 5, and 6 have chosen Girl's Generation or SNSD (*So-nyuh Shi-dae* Sonyeo Sidae), from the Sino-Korean root meaning "Generation of Girls") as their first favorite K-pop group. Meanwhile respondent 3 chose BTS as her first favorite K-pop group. Respondent 2 chose Super Junior as her first favorite K-pop group, and it's the same for respondent 6 who has two favorites K-pop groups besides Girl's Generation so Super Junior. To put on summary, only one respondent who sticks with the same K-pop group favorites. The majority of the respondents chose Girl's Generation as their first K-pop group favorite. It's because Girl's Generation were

one of the top popular from K-pop second generation back then. They are also one of the biggest selling girl groups in terms of physical and digital album sales (Kumar 2022).

The way respondents got their first K-pop experience varied. For respondent 1, DA got her way to K-pop because of the influence from her school friends in 5th grade. A similar case happens with respondent 4. DR first heard about K-pop in 6th grade when there's a farewell party happening at her school. Respondents 2 and 5 got in a situation where family's influence plays role to introduce them to K-pop. FT first introduced to K-pop when her older brother played K-pop songs circa 2012-2013. Meanwhile FA first discover K-pop around 2007 when her mother followed one of the popular K-drama back then, Full House. The soundtrack from that K-drama is what droves FA into K-pop because she liked the soundtrack. Her mother is also really into things related to K-wave (especially the K-drama) and that's where she found out about K-pop girls and boy bands. For respondent 3, RF starts stanning BTS around 2018 when she finds out about them on Twitter, at that moment, she was having a hard time. For her BTS was the first boy band that brought her into K-pop. She feels comforted by BTS songs and she relates to most of it. The last respondent (6), SA, likes Super Junior and SNSD because they happened to be on the rise in the music industry at that time. From that, her interest in K-pop continued as she discovered another K-pop group.

In general, it shows there are main platforms that were used by the respondent as their media for their K-pop activities. The majority used Twitter as their source of information in their K-pop activities and their source of information. All except respondent 4 who used Weverse as another platform to gain insight for her favorite K-pop group current activities. Respondents 1, 6, and 4 also use Instagram for their platforms on the internet.

Table 2
Respondent different platforms to use for their K-pop activities.

No	Name	Platform
1	DA	Twitter and Instagram
2	FT	Twitter
3	RF	Twitter
4	DR	Instagram and Weverse
5	FA	Twitter
6	SA	Instagram and Twitter

In this section researchers also show the source when they first heard about cancel culture. For respondent 5, FA shared that she was only familiar with the action of cancel culture. She has no idea if it comes with a name on it. Later she found out about the term when her lecturer discusses one of cancel culture cases in class.

> *"At first, I was only familiar with the action but did not know about the name of the phenomenon. And I find out information about what the cancel culture phenomenon is when the teaching and learning activities in class is going on, it happened at that time my lecturer discusses about one of the cancel culture's cases that occurred in the entertainment world."*   Respondent 5

The interview results contain descriptions of how respondents perceived cancel culture in their own perception. In general, it shows that cancel culture definition by the respondents were leaning to a negative meaning. Respondents 2, 3, 5, and 6 agree that there are some positive sides in cancel

culture. Although respondents 3 and 5 show their perception of cancel culture more to the negative side.

Table 3

Respondent different description of cancel culture.

No	Name	Platform
1	DA	An action to "throw away" a person or group of people and reject the people.
2	FT	Boycotting/cancelling someone who does or says something bad.
3	RF	A phenomenon where people try to cancel or push other people's off
4	DR	An event that occurs by an individual or group and cannot be accepted by another individuals/group.
5	FA	An act of canceling the image of that person.
6	SA	Cancel culture is where people will alienate, drop, or even mass boycott someone when they make a mistake or commit a crime.

"...for me cancel culture is actually a phenomenon with more negative side rather than the positive one. I think cancel culture is like a two knives blades. It's kind of a society law."

Respondent 3

According to the definition of cancel culture by the respondent, overall, they all agree that cancel culture is an act to expelled people off from society because of a mistake of that person make. Especially for respondent 6, SA stated that cancel culture is a culture where people will boycott someone when the person makes a mistake or committed a crime. A different view from respondent 5, FA describes cancel culture as an act of canceling the image of that person. Which mean this is inclined to the popular people like actress or celebrity, although a regular people still can get an impact from this culture. FA added that in the world of K-pop the case that usually happens is about bullying. Another perspective comes from respondent 3 where she perceives cancel culture as a phenomenon of people trying to push other people's off because they have a contrary principle and opinion of something and it's contradictory with the majority of people. RF also pointed out that cancel culture is a law that is working within society, but the law is risky. This means RF perception of cancel culture is as something that culturally happens in the society, it's also work as a law. Thus, when people do not follow the law, that's when cancel culture happens.

Researchers are going to show the respondent's knowledge of cancel culture case that is happening in K-pop industry. Meaning that the example of the case are Korean celebrities.

Table 4

Respondent different description of cancel culture case in K-pop.

No	Name	Case
1	DA	The case of G-dragon from Bigbang, GD has been accused of doing drugs.
2	FT	An idol from GOT7 named Jackson because of his statement in public.

3	RF	The bullying case of Garam during high school which is a sensitive topic in Korea
4	DR	The Korean actor Kim Seonho got a scandal for impregnating his ex.
5	FA	Jackson Wang getting hit by a massive cancel culture because of his action for blatantly supports the Chinese government.
6	SA	A case of Seungri Big Bang who is suspected of being involved in the online prostitution business.

Table 3 shows that the respondents have different cases for their example of cancel culture in K-pop. Although respondents 2 and 5 bring up the same case, they are pointing a different perspective. For respondent 2, FT were focusing on the statement of that idol. While respondent 5, FA is more to the action of the idol.

For the experience in cancel culture, only two people stated that they did not experience cancel culture by themselves or people around them, which is respondents 2 and 4. For respondent 1, DA stated that the one who is experiencing cancel culture is her friend. She was attacked by the K-pop fandom ARMY (the name of BTS fandom) all because of her statement on Twitter that is contrary with the majority of people in that K-pop community. As for DA herself she never experiences this behavior that is implying cancel culture herself. Similar case happens to one of respondent 6's case. SA once knew someone in K-pop community on Twitter that has been insulted and cursed by several other K-pop communities. All this because she stated an opinion that shows she acts neutral. Bullying reaches to the point where they bring the person's physical appearance and equating her behavior. Again, SA never experienced the case herself.

Meanwhile for respondent 3, she did experience the case of cancel culture by herself. She stated that between 2017 and 2018 when she first using twitter for her fandom activity, she heard an issue that BTS will come to Indonesia for a concert. RF aware of Indonesia toxic fans culture that is still happening. With that, she was commenting about that issue on Twitter by stating her opinion. From that a lot of people got triggered by her statement. She starts getting bullied, but it didn't last too long.

This research objective is to determine the respondent's interest towards K-pop. It aims on the respondent's different experience on their journey as becoming a K-pop fan. From their first favorite K-pop groups to their recent favorites. The results from data analysis show that there were similarities between the respondent's first favorite K-pop groups. According to Kumar, (2022) Girl's Generation is on the top list as one of the second-generation K-pop groups that is in the K-pop golden of age when popularized K-pop were trending overseas.

For research objectives two, this part aimed to seek facts about where the respondents first heard about cancel culture and which platforms that they were using. For the result, most of them are using a social media platform by Twitter for their K-pop activities. Twitter is also one of the platforms where most of the respondents first heard about cancel culture. As stated in the previous chapter before, Twitter shows that Indonesia is one of the countries with the largest volume of most K-pop tweets ("Indonesia among K-pop's," 2020). Remember that one of the respondent's criteria is having Indonesia as their nationalities. So, this is connected with the awareness of the respondents as Indonesian who mainly uses Twitter as their platform. The respondent first hears it as a term that is commonly used in Twitter, especially in the K-pop community.

For the last research objectives which is to find out the side effects of cancel culture on K-pop fans. This study aimed to find out about the impact that has been produced by cancel culture phenomenon especially on K-pop fans within or outside the community. The first step is to find the awareness of some cases related to K-pop industry because of cancel culture. All the respondents have different examples of cancel culture's case in K-pop industry. Through the findings, it shows that boycotting someone is commonly used to make that person expelled from society. As stated in (Dudenhoefer 2020), cancel culture or boycott culture is usually used to get compensation from people who speak on social media platforms.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study indicates several practical implications that are worth it for future study. Implications are often used to show the possible effect that possibly have an influence of the study in the future. As for the findings of this research, it is important to raise the awareness of cancel culture especially for those who are active on social media. Therefore, hopefully this study will be a part of raising awareness on using social media platforms. Also, there needs to be some regulations on the internet about cyberbullying to decrease the number of cases that is happening, that hopefully, with this study this will become a consideration in the future. So that it can create a safe space for people to use the platform.

The first limitation for this study is that this research is limited to a small number of participants. Plus, it was only conducted focusing on one generation (Z). For this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling method. Due to the short amount of time, the outcome of this study may not represent all the K-pop fans perception in the whole age range from different generations.

Due to the completion of this study, there are a few recommendations the researcher would like to suggest for the sake of future improvement based on the limitations of this study.

For future research, the study should have more participants in order to gain more richness of the data accurately. So, it would have a variety of respondents to view this phenomenon and gain a new insight into the study. Future research should also consider conducting research using a mixed method for a more thorough study.

Based on the overall results, this study has shown the perceptions of K-pop fans and their experience with cancel culture phenomenon. This study also succeeded in answering three main research objectives. This research was focusing to the K-pop fans that falls on the adolescent age range in generation Z and all of them are from Indonesia. Although in the first part of the objective, the study shows that each respondent has a different approach for their first K-pop experiences. Also, the qualitative research method using a phenomenological approach has been applied in completing this study. A semi-structured interview has been used with six respondents who are identified as K-pop fans that meets the criteria. The findings were analyzed and have been discussed by describing the perceptions of cancel culture phenomena among K-pop fans. Most K-pop fans have a negative perception of cancel culture phenomenon. Although they believe the cancel culture has its positive and negative sides.

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