

Hit by the Wave:
K-pop in Norway, its characteristics,
community, and its place in the lives of
Norwegian K-pop fans



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Abstract

This qualitative study delves into the K-pop fandom in Norway, seeking to explore its cultural underpinnings and social significance. Beginning with an exploration into the origins and contemporary landscape of K-pop, the research centers around semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with eight participants. Through a comparative analysis investigating reoccurring themes across these interviews, this thesis aims to ascertain the characteristics of the Norwegian K-pop fandom. Drawing upon a wide scope of literature on subculture, youth culture, fandom culture, and internet culture, this thesis explores the varying trajectories fans have into the fandom, their reasoning for remaining in the fandom, how they derive meaning from their fan affiliation, and finally, their stylistic elements and social practices. In the discussion, this thesis explores how the perspectives outlined in the selected literature contribute to understanding this fandom, aiming to illuminate the multifaceted identity and impact of K-pop fandom within the Norwegian context.

Preface

Both for transparency and context, I myself am a tenured K-pop fan (since 2011) and have observed the development of K-pop in the Norwegian public's mind; first through a personal lens, and later an academic one. During my bachelor's, I produced two separate analyses of K-pop; firstly, as to its role in Norwegian alternative education, including interviews of Hadeland Folkehøgskole's K-pop Wave course leaders; secondly, proctoring a rudimentary survey of members in the K-pop Norge Facebook Group, to aid a textual analysis of BTS' 2016 Wings' album music releases regarding youth culture.

This master's thesis can therefore be thought of as 'picking up where I left off' with much more direction and structure with regards to the growing audiences of K-pop and its possible influence on Norwegian youth.

Furthermore, this thesis would not exist had it not been for my backup. It has been a challenging process, but I have been lucky enough to have some help and encouragement along the way.

I am deeply grateful to Torgeir Uberg Nærland for his exceptional guidance, unwavering patience, and invaluable encouragement throughout this journey.

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1.0. The K-pop phenomenon and Norway

In recent years, South Korean cultural content, with a particular focus on K-pop, has gained a widespread global acclaim and remarkable demand.

This cultural wave, known as *Hallyu*, meaning ‘the Korean tidal wave’ as aptly phrased by Beijing journalists in the late 1990s, has reached the shores of not only surrounding Asian countries, but also in Europe, South, and North America. This process of globalization, and the introduction of ‘soft power’ as described by Joseph Nye Jr, in his 1990 *Soft Power* provides an interesting perspective pertaining to cultural studies; especially when faced with the new music genre making its presence known to the wider Western audience: K-pop.

Although the genre is nothing new, as it has existed since the late 1990s, it is a new stimulus for Western audiences listening in on local radio stations. *Ice Cream* by BLACKPINK and Selena Gomez (YG Entertainment/Interscope Records, 2020) and, *My Universe* by BTS and Coldplay (Martin, et al., 2021), proliferated Norwegian radio stations in the summers of 2020 and 2021.

Additionally, *Ice Cream* appeared as a favorite among younger audiences through interactive media, i.e., *Just Dance* (Ubisoft, 2009-2023), during their afterschool activities (SFO in Norway) in 2020. This was observed by myself, while working as a substitute teacher in both a primary and secondary school, before embarking on this thesis in 2022. While this may seem a rather small ‘slice’ of youth culture, and anecdotal at best, *Ice Cream*’s inclusion in *Just Dance*’s repertoire of songs alone demonstrates the growing popularity of K-pop and can be safely assumed to be enjoyed and ‘completed’ by many young people who participate in the game.

K-pop has left its mark on a plethora of platforms ranging from traditional to digital media outlets, as exemplified by Bong Joon-ho’ *Parasite* (2019) becoming the first foreign language film to win best picture at the Academy Awards in the same year of its release; BTS (Hybe Labes; BigHit Corporations) being the first K-pop group topping the Billboards Top 100 for the first time with their all-English song *Dynamite* in 2020 (Pascual, 2022), and reaching local Norwegian radio stations with their collaboration with Coldplay’s *My Universe* in the summer of 2021; *Squid Game* (Hwang, 2021) becoming the most viewed show

on Netflix, in the same year (Gallagher, 2021); The Samsung Group topping as #5 on charts for top tech-companies in the world in 2022 (Kurban, 2022), as well as the South Korean current account reaching around \$68 billion in 2020 (Economic Policy Bureau - Economic Policy Division, 2020). South Korea has become a huge player in both the global cultural industries and consumer markets. Its influence is impossible to avoid.

Most interestingly, this cultural phenomenon has transcended borders, captivating the hearts of individuals in nations seemingly disconnected from both its culture and language, fostering extensive academic scrutiny (for further reading, see: Marinescu & Balica, 2013; Um, 2013; Yang J., 2012; Ko, et al., 2014; Jin, 2014). Within the confines of this thesis, my objective is to delve into the impact and experiences of the South Korean pop phenomenon felt by Norwegian K-pop enthusiasts, K-pop fans, as they are commonly referred to as by both them and by those who are not fans.

Norwegian K-pop fans are a diverse group of individuals. As per my previous survey, albeit rudimentary, they range on average between the ages 12 to 30 years old, and each was introduced to K-pop in their own unique way. The fandom is also one to go above and beyond for both their idols and what they believe in. As exemplified in Bruner's *TIME* article ('How K-pop Fans Actually Work as a Force for Political Activism in 2020', 2020), the K-pop fandom is a force to be reckoned with when banded together. As Bruner illustrates in this article, the K-pop fandom (with the help of other TikTok users) famously tricked Trump in how many would show up to one of his rallies in 2020, as well as them raising millions in charity, matching BTS' donations (Bruner, 2020). There are many examples to pull from; however, these are some of the most well-known ones. Additionally, and as previously mentioned, had it not been for the Norwegian K-pop fandom there likely would never have been a *Korea Wave* course at Hadeland Folkehøgskole.

Through outlining South Korean modern history, (i.e., K-pop and Hallyu's soft power goal and the industrialization of K-pop), we will achieve a better understanding of the possibilities of this phenomenon. Building upon this, we will be investigating scholarly sources pertaining to subculture, youth culture, internet culture, audience studies, and fandom studies, to provide a cohesive foundation to

analyze the data collected for this thesis. This data was collected through conducting eight semi-structured qualitative interviews with self-proclaimed K-pop fans, where the aim is to explore what characterizes them as a fandom, social community, and possibly, as a subculture.

By examining these K-pop fan interviews, I endeavor to differentiate K-pop from the broader tapestry of modern Korean history, considering its possible classification as a subculture within Norway. I also aim to explore whether engaging in this cultural phenomenon represents an act of defiance, as is often portrayed in the narratives of subcultures, or an act of identification driven by a sense of social distinction—i.e., fandom. My pursuit is to disentangle these facets, and hopefully, distinguish between subculture and fandom.

1.1. Research Question

To ensure a meaningful and productive discussion, let us begin with a key question. This thesis is guided by a set of three interrelated research questions that align with its main purpose. However, at the core of our exploration is the following overarching question:

What characterizes the K-pop fandom in Norway today?

For efficient analysis, we break this into three sub-categories of inquiry:

1. Why/how does one become a K-pop fan?
2. What stylistic, ethical, and social practices constitutes the K-pop fandom in Norway today?
3. What characterizes the Norwegian K-pop fandom as a social community?

The primary objective of these inquiries is to explore the phenomenological experiences of Norwegian K-pop fans and investigate how these experiences contribute to their process of finding meaning within the fandom.

The first inquiry aims to gain insight into how they became K-pop fans, through an examination on their varying trajectories into the fandom. This insight will offer understanding into the mechanisms underlying this initial attraction.

The second inquiry seeks to unravel the defining characteristics and behaviors that distinguish someone as a K-pop fan. It also aims to unveil the prevalent inclinations and distinctive traits within the Norwegian K-pop fandom, providing a comprehensive view of its markers and tendencies.

The final inquiry serves a dual purpose: it acts as a catalyst for discussion while also functioning as an exploration into the Norwegian K-pop fan community. This question serves as the cornerstone of our discussion, tying together insights from the previous inquiries to create a cohesive investigation into the overarching research question.

1.2. Motivation

Recently the *International Journal of Communication* published a slew of articles pertaining to the rise of Hallyu content in Western media, and its rising popularity in the US and Western Europe. One of these articles, written by Media Studies scholar Dal Yong Jin of the Simon Fraser University, examines “the reasons global audiences enjoy Korean popular culture beyond cultural proximity and affective affinity” (‘Transnational Proximity of the Korean Wave in the Global Cultural Sphere’, 2022, p. 10).

In it, he analyzes the traditional methods utilized by scholars in their research into K-pop and Hallyu, and he himself presents a new framework he calls ‘transnational proximity’ influenced by socio-economic similarities between the consumers of Korean media content and what the content presents, rather than relying on cultural proximity and affective affinity as these theories limit the scope with which to explain the spread of this phenomenon (Jin D. Y., 2022). Considering this new approach is so relevant for this thesis, and one of which I originally was going to suggest, this thesis will be relevant in a contemporary lens, due largely to the proliferation of online spaces, pre-existing anime and South Asian culture fandoms in Norway, and how Norwegian fans came to find K-pop. The shift that has occurred, when these aspects are factored in, is quite fascinating, as will be illustrated in the Analysis chapters.

Though this thesis is not the only academic investigation into K-pop’s influence, it provides a more measured analysis of personal accounts provided by Norwegian K-pop fans, which can prove a valuable insight into how this phenomenon took hold so quickly in the larger Western hemisphere. It is my hope

that, by adding my contribution with this study, it may provoke more rigorous research into this field, and allow for not only K-pop to earn a place among academic discourse as representative of a country's growing prosperity, but also provide insight into how communicative media is shaping the world at large, and expanding the reach previously-ignored cultures can now achieve (such as through social media). It may even tell us a little about how the world is changing, and what is *Yet to Come*¹ (BTS, 2022, HYBE corporations/BigHit Entertainment).

1.3. Introducing K-pop: What is it, exactly?

However, before we delve into the aforementioned analysis, it is imperative to acquaint ourselves with the essence of K-pop. Here, our focus will be on unraveling the distinctive style, visual aspects, and (in 2.0.) historical evolution of this musical genre. K-pop, an abbreviation for South Korean popular music, has garnered substantial global recognition over the years.

In this section we will go through some of the history of K-pop and talk about the OSMU-model utilized by the entertainment companies. The purpose of this section is to establish a comprehensive understanding of the K-pop genre and industry. This foundation will enable us to contextualize the analysis of this thesis, making it more accessible to an external audience.

As mentioned, K-pop, is an abbreviated form of South (K)orean pop music and began during the 1990s in South Korea. It is a combination of the *kayo* or *trot* traditional music (alt.: t'ûrot'û) (derived from Western and Japanese influence) and genres such as hip-hop, jazz, and rhythm and blues (Oh & Lee, 'K-pop in Korea: How the Pop Music Industry Is Changing a Post-Developmental Society', 2014). Although some acts began surfacing in the late 1980s, as seen by the boy band, Sobangcha (DSP Media), it was not until Seo Taiji and the Boys (Banana Cutlure; Bando Records, 1991-97), that *kayo* music began to morph into K-pop, or *Idol music*, we see taking the world by storm today (Oh & Lee, 2014).

¹ (BTS, 2022) *BTS (방탄소년단) 'Yet To Come (The Most Beautiful Moment)' Official MV*
Retrieved November, 2023 from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXpOeZnZ8hQ>

(Context: This is one of last music videos BTS made before going a group hiatus due to military service. It illustrates K-pop as a genre, its sound, and some of its lyrical tendencies: a good introduction to K-pop if unfamiliar with the topic of this thesis)

On the surface, K-pop is filled with talented and beautiful performers, dancing in perfect union, and skilled in many facets of entertainment be it singing, rapping, dancing, hosting, participating in reality/variety shows, and much more. The performances are larger-than-life, filled with colors, fashionable stage and airport-attire (*Figure 1*), often-manufactured relationship drama, and high-quality music video productions.

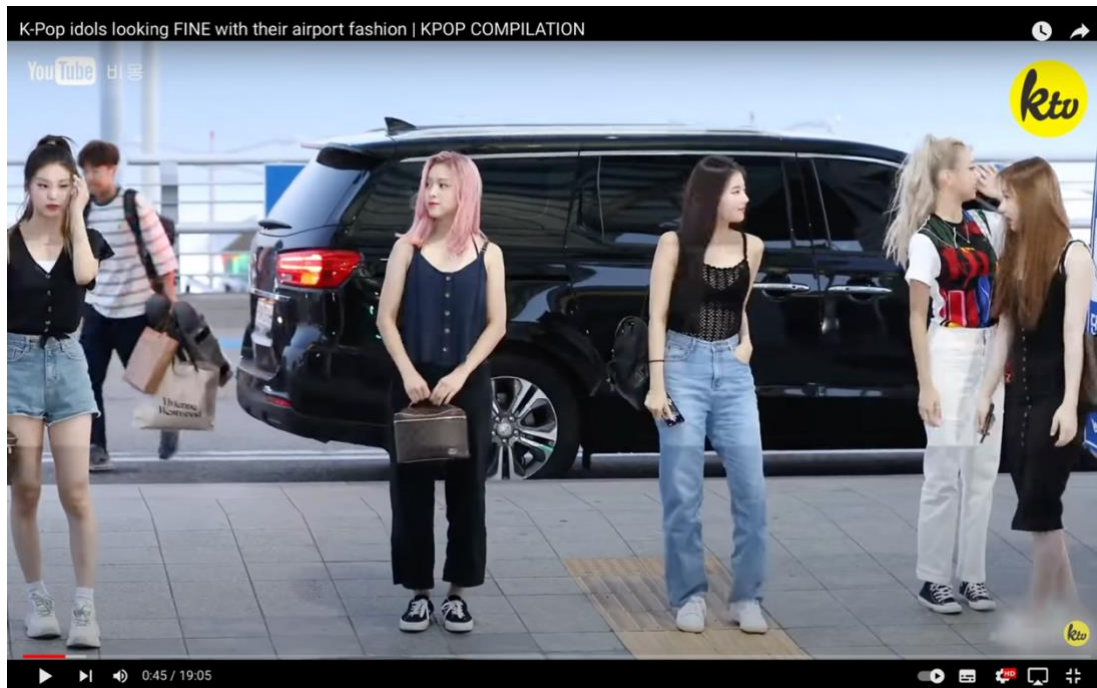


Figure 1: Screenshot from a YouTube compilation video (Koogle TV, 2019) where members of the group ITZY (JYP Entertainment) are posing for paparazzi before boarding their plane. Accessed November 1st, 2023.

In a sense, these ‘idols’, as they are commonly referred to, are almost superhuman in their presentation. They are funny, charming, serious, skilled, down to earth, and there will always be those (fans) who can relate to them. Their groups are more than colleagues; they are a family, and the fans, an extension of this. They are the perfect celebrity. However, K-pop is more than its music, beyond it obviously being an industry. It is also South Korean cultural content, such as food, fashion, cars, phones and much more. It is the quintessence of *Hallyu*.

However, by looking further into the industry one quickly sees that this is a process comparable to clockwork. These fantastical individuals are recruited through a process commonly referred to as the OSMU-model (One Source Multi Use) (Kim Y., ‘A Conceptual Framework for One Source Multi Use Strategy of Culture Content 브랜드 아이덴티티 기반 문화콘텐츠 OSMU 전략 연구’, 2012). This process consists of an extensive audition-process, screened through the

producers of a given entertainment company (hereafter referred to as EC(s)), and a challenging and extensive training process, sometimes lasting multiple years, which does not guarantee a debut. The most notable of these EC(s) utilizing this model and training of their talents, and the ones most mentioned during the interviews conducted for this thesis are: SM Entertainment (founded by Lee Sooman, in 1995), YG Entertainment (founded by Yang Hyun-suk, in 1996), JYP Entertainment (founded by J. Y. Park, in 1997) and Hybe Corporations (founded by Bang Si-Hyuk, in 2005). These are only a handful of the amount of EC(s) that are in South Korea. According to a survey conducted by statista.com there were 4610 registered EC(s) in 2020 (statista.com ‘Number of enterprises in the popular culture and arts industry in South Korea from 2014 to 2020, by type of business’, 2021) where 318 of these answered they had their own trainees. Although not all EC(s) utilize the OSMU-model, it is prevalent enough that it warrants mention. It helps conceptualize not only the genre, but also the industry as a whole.

In essence it is a model created to maintain and build brand-identity through managing a plethora of brand-specific features; although, there is some deliberation with regards to how this is best accomplished (as elaborated in Kim Y.-J. , 2012, p. 157-160). Regardless, Kim mentions the necessity to understand OSMU as a model to enhance brand identity, and brand equity, referring to the works of Shelby D. Hunt (‘On Reforming Marketing: For Marketing Systems and Brand Equity Strategy’, 2006), Kevin L. Keller (‘Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity’, 1993) and Lynn B. Upshaw (*Building Brand Identity: A Strategy for Success in a Hostile Marketplace*, 1995). Kim elaborates in his text that, to maintain brand identity, a brand must consider an intentional multi-faceted approach to OSMU marketing. Which is to approach the different dimensions pertaining to marketing (Kim Y.-J. , 2012).

In the K-pop industry this is seen by their cross-media approach, be it by sending their idols to variety shows², or creating a YouTube channel where their idols perform differing tasks, such as reacting to their newly published music videos (*Figure 2*), or simply through vlog-looking content.

² For reference, see: Lee, G. (2022, May 17) *16 Variety Shows Starring Your Favorite K-pop* Retrieved November, 2023 from Buzzfeed.com: <https://www.buzzfeed.com/gracehlee/variety-shows-starring-your-favorite-k-pop-idols>



Figure 2: Screenshot from Youtube.com (EXO's official YouTube channel). Kai (far left) together with the rest of EXO (SM Entertainment) is reacting to his new music video 'Rover'.

Furthermore, this cross-media approach is also seen in how the idols engage with their fans. Every group has their own fandom, with a name already provided, and their fan-identification is handed to them through the means of light-sticks (Figure 3), logos, and through V-Lives (streaming platform commonly used by idols), and styles. They have 'dance practice'³ videos of their dances, which makes them easier for fans to learn⁴, many groups also create dance-challenges for their fans on TikTok, which provides a sense of community – the idea that the dances are available for the fans to learn and can be a common activity (Figure 4).

³ K-pop group 'dance practice' example:

ITZY. (2020, March 11). *ITZY "WANNABE" Dance Practice*. (JYP Entertainment) Retrieved November 2023, from YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_Lkhx18BU

⁴ (Haelium Nation, 2023)(Haelium Nation, 2023) Example of fans dancing (1st is a dance crew, 2nd is an example of what fans call 'busking'):

Haelium Nation. (2023, March 3). *[KPOP IN PUBLIC] BLACKPINK (블랙핑크) - BOOMBAYAH (붐바야) | Dance Cover by Haelium Nation*. Retrieved November 2023, from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiL5Hqyd5Ho>

MAD-X Official. (2023, July 28). *[KPOP IN PUBLIC] WE MADE KPOP RANDOM DANCE PLAY BY MAD-X ROUND 1 | AT HANOI WALKING STREET*. Retrieved November, 2023 from YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgIv_W1jtk

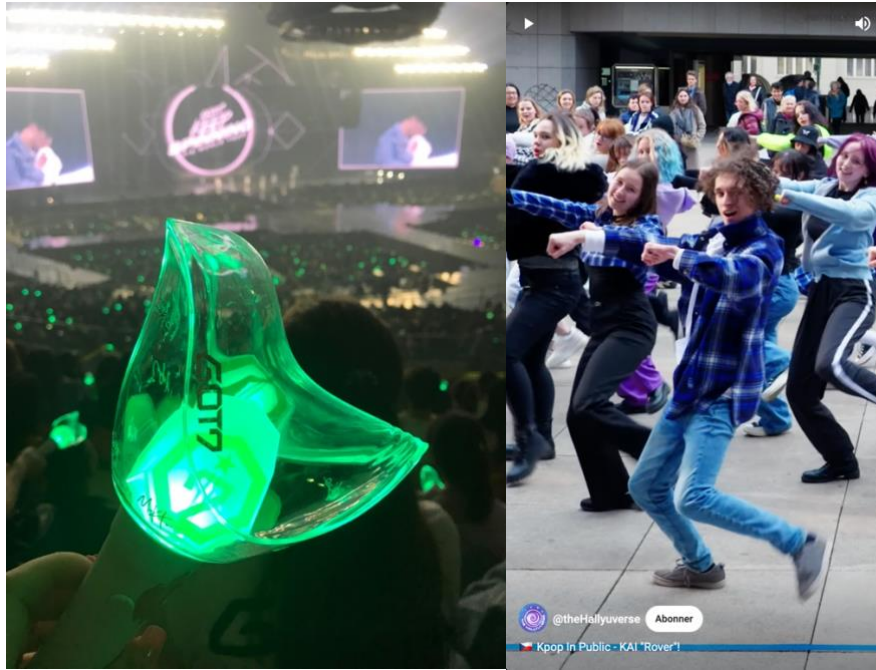


Figure 3: GOT7 (JYP Entertainment) light-stick, picture used with permission (see Figure bibliography for credit)

Figure 4: K-pop fans dancing KAI's (EXO) 'Rover' in public in the Czech Republic. Screenshot from youtube.com (theHallyuverse, 2023).

Our emphasis on the industry aspect serves a dual purpose. Firstly, as previously explored in this thesis, K-pop is an extension of the Hallyu phenomenon itself. To divorce it from its original cultural context would risk overlooking essential perspectives that are crucial for interpreting the data collected in the study for this thesis. Secondly, it is noteworthy that the informants in these interviews consistently referenced the K-pop industry and its intricacies. This underscores the industry's significance in comprehending K-pop as a whole, but also in gaining insights into the fandom itself.

1.4. How the Thesis is structured

Before delving deeper into this thesis, it is crucial to provide a descriptive overview of its structure. This thesis is structured into eight chapters, each serving a distinct purpose:

Chapter One

Introduction: This section concludes the introductory chapter, encompassing the rationale behind this thesis, defining K-pop, and establishing the research question.

Chapter Two

Contextualizing South Korean Modern History: This chapter provides a brief overview of South Korean modern history, aiming to introduce the reader to the Hallyu phenomenon, its connection to K-pop, and the associated political implications.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework: This chapter delves into the theoretical foundation of this thesis, presenting and demonstrating the scholarly perspectives employed in the subsequent analysis and discussion.

Chapter Four

Methodology: Focused on the study's background, this chapter introduces the influential article and outlines the data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter Five

Fandom Motivations Analysis: This segment dissects the motivations driving the fandom's engagement, offering insights into their underlying reasons through examining the first sub-inquiry.

Chapter Six

Fandom Codes and Practices Analysis: This section further explores the stylistic, ethical, and social norms prevailing within the fandom by examining the second sub-inquiry.

Chapter Seven

Discussion: This chapter synthesizes and interprets the data presented in the preceding analysis chapters and answers the last of the three sub-inquiries above-mentioned.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion: Concluding remarks and reflections drawn from the process and outcomes of this thesis.

2.0. *Hallyu*: The concurrence of financial bloom, global participation, and the power of cultural influence

To fully grasp Hallyu, it necessitates viewing it not merely as a cultural wave but also as a political agenda. To embark on this understanding, it is vital to appreciate its historical underpinnings within the context of South Korea's governmental landscape and its recent neo-liberalistic transformations. Especially considering Hallyu encompasses all South Korean cultural export, K-pop included.

Therefore, in this chapter we will delve into an exploration of key milestones in contemporary South Korean history, with a dedicated focus on the country's cultural industries. Here the aim is to provide a contextual understanding of the significant socio-political transformations that have shaped South Korea's trajectory over the past half-century. Our investigation spans through examining the Park Chung-hee administration (1963-1979), and the policy dynamics during the tenures of Chun Doo Hwan (1980-1988) and Roh Tae Woo (1989-1993). Furthermore, this chapter will provide an overview of the financial crisis of 1997-8, and the regulatory shifts within the cultural domain, shedding light on their reverberations throughout the South Korean soft power landscape, popularly recognized as the Hallyu Wave.

Dr Dal Yong Jin's 'The Power of the Nation-state amid Neoliberal Reform: Shifting Cultural Politics in the New Korean Wave' (2014), underlines the importance these political and economic circumstances have when exploring K-pop's rise to the mainstream today. As we saw earlier, despite the South Korean current account fluctuating in recent years (for context see: Economic Policy Bureau - Economic Policy Division, 2020; and, Statista., 2023), it does not diminish its relevance in the global scale considering the increasing awareness of K-pop and other South Korean cultural contents in the general Western population.

2.1. *Hallyu*: The Park Chung-hee reform

The 20th century was a rather turbulent century for the Korean peninsula. They experienced financial collapse, multiple economic reforms, a Japanese invasion (1910-45), a national division (1950-53), and rapid economic growth moving into the 21st century. It went from being known as an impoverished nation, into a modern contrast of political governance; the South became a prosperous

beacon of republic ideals, whilst the North became a demonstration of political failure, seen through a Western lens.

As explained by Hyung-A Kim and Clark W. Sorensen in *Reassessing the Park Chung Hee Era, 1961-1979: Development, Political thought, Democracy, and Cultural Influence* (2011), in 1961, Park Chung-hee, with his military junta, couped the South Korean government (2011, p. 5). Despite this thesis taking a neutral stance on the domestic ramifications this brought South Korea, what he did to the country's economy is important to consider. Under his governance he changed the country's approach from the previous agricultural economy to a highly industrialized export and HCI (in this paper: Heavy and Chemical Industries) (Kim & Sorensen, 2011). With his radical plan he and his constitutes managed to increase the GDP from 4.2 to an average of 8.5 per year within a two-decade period (Kim & Sorensen, 2011, pp. 3-4). This put South Korea on the map and gave the country an avenue to later investigate other modes of income.

Although the mediums have changed in the past eighty years, export is still at the center of South Korean economy. Park's reign lasted 18 years, until his assassination on October 26, 1979, it remains the common consensus that his government is at the core of Asian industrialization (Kim & Sorensen, 2011, p. 3).

Seeing the country being internationally regarded as bankrupt (the contemporary debt was roughly \$93,2 mm.), Park, in 1963, pushed the country into an export-led industrialization, where they realized they had to export goods at any price to get the country out of said bankruptcy. Although this helped the economy, they were still sensitive to major changes, such as the Nixon Administration pulling back one-third of their American troops stationed in the country, and President Nixon announcing his visit to China the same year, 1971 (Kim & Sorensen, 2011, p. 23).

Despite the expressed concerns regarding the reduction of US military forces in East Asia from South Korea, and Japan alike, Nixon went through with his 'Doctrine' (Oka, "Laird Finds Both Seoul and Tokyo Fears U.S. Cuts" *The New York Times*, 1971; Taylor Jr., Smith, & Mazarr, 'US Troop Reductions From Korea, 1970-1990', 1990). This led Park to announce a state of emergency and declared the *Yushin* (reform) system. With this system he proclaimed himself as South Korea's supreme leader and abolished all political parties, became in charge of choosing all leading officials, and pushed down on his HCI plans (2011, pp. 6-

7). Furthermore, after seizing control over the cultural industries, as an additional aspect to the Yushin reform, he required a newfound cultural identity to be established, as a building factor to the focus on the country's financial growth. The Park government mandated propaganda songs to be played on the radio and television, at least twice a day (Yim, 'Cultural identity and cultural policy in South Korea', 2002; as cited in Kwon & Kim, 'From censorship to active support: The Korean state and Korea's cultural industries', 2013, p. 519). Additionally, the Park government fronted traditional and folk art through investing 70% of the public expenditure (Yim, 2002, p. 40).

Despite Park's efforts, the hands-on approach to not only the cultural industries, but also the harsh work conditions and lack of individual freedoms, resulted in pushback from the South Korean people, in the form of the Pusan-Masan uprising, which ultimately resulted in his assassination the same year, 1979 (Korea Democracy Foundation Open Archives, 2022).

2.2. *Hallyu*: From a military state to a neo-liberal democracy

Soon after Park's assassination, the exchange of power resulted in a new military coup, this time led by Major Chun Doo Hwan, in 1980 (lasting until 1988). Despite the Regan Administration giving their blessing, both Chun and Roh Tae Woo's (1988-93) governments implemented stricter military control of the nation which sparked domestic pushback and led to a surgency of democratic demonstrations, the most notable being the *Kwangju uprising* (alt.: Gwangju) in May 1980 (Han, 'Kwangju Uprising', 2022; Yim, 2002). Despite no immediate dissolution of the military-led state, this uprising resulted in the country finally gaining its first democratically chosen president, Kim Yong Sam, in 1993 (Han, 2022).

However, the events of 1980's South Korea still holds a veil over contemporary South Korea. The Chun and Roh Tae Woo governments implemented neo-liberal economic and cultural policies whilst maintaining media control. The push for a more liberal cultural market intensified, and demand for a review into censorship laws to accommodate this burgeoning market increased. Which is where Kim Yong Sam's (1993-98) government comes into play. During his time in office South Korea saw major changes in their censorship law on the cultural

industries, as well as international influx of cultural media (Kwon & Kim, 2013). This is also when the Hallyu wave saw its fruition to what we know today.

2.2.1. *Hallyu*: Major changes to censorship laws

Censorship laws (in particular pertaining to the Motion Picture Law, Act 995) first implemented in Chung-hee's government in 1962 (Im, "Freedom of Speech and Cinema: The History of Korean Film Censorship", 2006, pp. 98-99), played an integral part in the shift experienced by cultural industries during the late 1990s. Both Chun and Roh's governments – in particular Roh's government – liberalized the cultural market, allowing for more foreign films to enter South Korea in the late 1980s: in part due to said liberalization, and the build-up to a democratically run South Korea (Kwon & Kim, 2013). However, this was also partially due to demand from the US government (Jin D. Y., 2014, p. 82). In fact, the USA sent a strong complaint to South Korea regarding their strict regulations surrounding the import of foreign film in 1985. Later that same year they revised the Motion Picture Law for the sixth time since its implementation in 1962, and a Korea-US Film agreement was signed (Im, 2006; Paquet, 'The Korean Film Industry: 1992 to the Present' *New Korean Cinema*, 2005).

Prior to this, the South Korean film industry had struggled vastly to stay afloat because of this Motion Picture Law. There were a slew of rules pertaining to it; however, the most notable ones were the necessity for approval prior to its production, that the companies owned their own capital, and that they were obligated to produce a minimum number of pictures annually. This was predominantly legislated to control public sentiment and to ensure no films promoted communism; it was ultimately an extension of the previous ruler Rhee Syngman's suppression of the press (Paquet, 2005, p. 34; Im, 2006, p. 98; Park & Curran, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, 2000, p. 113).

The 1985 revision resulted in vast changes to the South Korean film market; for example, previous restrictions to the annual exhibition of foreign films (approx. 27) increased to over 200. Foreign films not only found easier distribution within South Korea but were also now able to operate on South Korean soil. But not all was positive. It introduced a more hostile environment for domestic filmmakers, as now homegrown cinema was not expected to meet box office success (Paquet, 2005, p. 41). To counter this, young producers began cooperating

with the “*chaebols* (family-owned conglomerates, such as Samsung, Hyundai and LG)” (Jin D. Y., 2014, p. 81; Paquet, 2005, p. 41). Which brings us back to the mid-90s where the domestic film industry saw an uptick in support from the state.

Jurassic Park (dir. Spielberg, 1993) grossed an amazing \$402,5 mm. domestically, and \$643 mm. internationally, during its first year of release (Rubin, 2022). This number was presented to President Kim Yong Sam, and his government implemented The Film Promotion Law (act 5129) in 1995 (Im, 2006), as the replacement of the Motion Picture Law, after his speech, January 26th, 1994:

In the 21st century, the cultural industry itself will be the largest industry through the advancement of diverse audio-visual media. Since Western countries compete with each other in the cultural sector, we must develop new cultural products to meet global sense, and big corporations have to invest in the realm of culture. (Kim Young Sam, "Industry needs to invest in the realm of culture" (Seoul: Blue House's Digital Archive), 26 January 1994, 198-217, as cited in Jin D. Y., 2014, p. 80).

This allowed film companies tax breaks, so chaebols could find capital in the newly reformed film industry. And, since the cultural sector began spearheading this aspect of South Korean export, it shaped much of local South Korean popular culture during the initial stage of the Hallyu wave (Jin D. Y., 2014, p. 82).

Additionally, the censorship law on music was also lifted during the late 1990s. There are several reasons for this, however it is commonly understood that Seo Taiji and the Boys were instrumental in this, as it was their petition that catalyzed this change (Publish & Prosper, 2023, see timestamps: 06:08-06:27). As Seo Taiji says himself in the interview in Publish & Prosper’s documentary, that the censorship law made it so he could not release one of the songs on his album *Seo Taiji and the Boys IV* (Bay Studio; Techno Taiji; Ocean Way Studios, 1995). It was only after this petition had been signed by, not only himself, but also a significant number of fans, it was removed. Additionally, South Korea also saw considerable focus on expanding funding behind their cultural content during Kim’s government. Coupled with changes to the censorship laws, much of the groundwork was laid for Kim Dae-jung’s government (1998 - 2003) (Kwon & Kim, 2013).

2.3. The financial crisis of 1997-8: what caused it, and why is it relevant?

This financial crisis was influenced by many factors, so we will be investigating the largest policy-drivers in the domestic and foreign sectors. Professor at the Department of International Trade, Kangwon University, Hyun Hoon Lee, in his text 'Korea's 1997 Financial Crisis: Causes, Consequences and Prospects' (1999) contextualized that this was, first, due to the financial growth generated by the neo-liberal reforms made by the Chun and Roh governments. He states that, during the late 1980's the weaknesses began to present themselves as South Korea's global competition increased (1999, p. 351). Prof. Lee, attributes this to the "[...] excess government involvement in the economy caused inefficiency, over-capacity and imbalances in many sectors" (1999, p. 351). Due to the political sector having its ties to chaebols, it opened for high-risk loans on their behalf, and in some cases, corruption⁵. This in part resulted with the top 30 chaebols having a debt-equity of 519 per cent, contrasted with Japan's 193 per cent, and USA's 154 per cent, by the end of 1997. Furthermore, due to the control exerted by the government, banks relied more on their intervention, rather than focusing on profit-first models of operation (1999, p. 352). Lee also argues that the education system had failed to keep up with the economic growth, especially regarding the necessary talent South Korea required for this kind of economic complexity (1999, p. 352). Coupled with an excess in government involvement, there were also consequences to their financial liberalization. Due to a lack of sufficient supervision and regulation of secondary financial institutions, merchant banks, increasing from six in 1993 to thirty in 1996, caused ripple effects in the national debt: "This led to a serious mismatch in maturities between borrowing and lending. Short-term loans accounted for 63 per cent of the total debts on the eve of the financial crisis. With this fragile structure of foreign debt, Korea became highly vulnerable to the instabilities of the international financial markets." (Lee, H. H, 1999, p.355).

Due to these economic complications the country saw themselves having to rely on external help to restabilize this. Hence, they turned to the IMF

⁵ For example, see: Jordan, M. (1997, May 18) 'PRESIDENT'S SON JAILED IN S. KOREA.' *The Washington Post*. Retrieved November, 2023 from [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1997/05/18/presidents-son-jailed-in-s-korea/f1357937-41a9-43eb-9b30-5516f1afc76d/): <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1997/05/18/presidents-son-jailed-in-s-korea/f1357937-41a9-43eb-9b30-5516f1afc76d/>

(International Monetary Fund) for financial aid. Lee elaborates that the IMF required South Korea to tighten their monetary and fiscal policies, and for the other financial institutions to meet the capital adequacy ratios set by the BIS (1999, p. 360). This resulted in further financial struggle for many corporations - including major banks. Inevitably, these stipulations led to the first negative drop of South Korea's GDP in 18 years, and roughly 1.66 million jobs were lost (1999, p. 361). However, Lee continues by explaining that the country began to see a recovery in the beginning of 1999, and that "[t]hanks to large current account surpluses, Korea's useable foreign exchange reserves grew to a record level of US\$65.5 billion as of 30 September 1999" (1999, p. 361).

2.4. Kim Dae-jung and government and *Hallyu* towards the present day

Considering the financial crisis, Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) saw the necessity to increase the deregulation and privatization of the country's cultural industries (Kwon & Kim, 2013). The most notable deregulatory measures were the allowance of Japanese cultural content distribution, and a new focus on technological advancement. Due to these policies, South Korea saw an increased focus not only regarding the cultural industries, but also in the digitization of these industries (Kwon & Kim, 2013). During his presidency he increased the government's support of the cultural industries to KRW640 billion, whereas it had been KRW5 billion during Kim Yong Sam's government (Kwon & Kim, 2013, p. 525). This cultural focus has continued with successive governments. President Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2007) focused on globalization and training of the country's youth within the cultural industries sector, and Lee Myung-bak (2008-2012) signed The Korea-US FTA (free trade agreement), making it the second largest agreement (after the European Union) (Kwon & Kim, 2013).

As we can see, the Hallyu wave is a measured and beneficial cultural complex, enhancing South Korea's soft power in the global market. It is not only a means to build their own economy within, but also through considerable cooperation and trade agreements with the world at large. The Korean wave has hit our shores, and from the looks of it, it is here to stay.

3.0. Theoretical framework and literature review

In this chapter we will go over the theory utilized for the analysis of the data collected for this thesis. To refresh your memory, the research question for this thesis is “What characterizes the K-pop fandom in Norway today?”, paired with these follow-up questions: (1) Why/how does one become a K-pop fan?; (2) What stylistic, ethical, and social practices constitutes the K-pop fandom in Norway today?; and lastly, for the discussion, (3) What characterizes K-pop as a social community?.

First, we will go over the theoretical framework pertaining to *subculture* (3.1.). Here we will explore Hebdige’s (1979) and Yinger’s (1973) texts and their understanding of what constitutes a subculture.

Then we will move on to *youth culture* (3.2.), mentioning the works of Buckingham et al. (2014), Frank Furedi (2021), David Elkind (1996), and Heather Addison (2006).

Furthermore, we will go over *fandom* and *celebrity studies* (3.3.), visiting the works of Henry Jenkins (2012), Joli Jenson (1992), John Fiske (1992), Charles L. Ponce de Leon (2002) and Lee Barron (2015).

Finally, we will go over *audience* and *communication studies* (3.4.) by examining the works of Ytre-Arne & Das (2020), Kim Christian Schrøder (2011), some of Stuart Hall’s theory (1999), and Dal Yong Jin (2022).

3.1. What is a subculture?

Primarily, this section aims to explore the theoretical framework adopted by this thesis in evaluating the K-pop fandom’s potential classification as a subculture. Drawing from Hebdige’s (1979) and Yinger’s (1973) perspectives, the discussion aims to establish a comprehensive definition of subcultures, distinguishing them from ‘contracultures’ (alt.: countercultures), often prone to misconceptions and connotations.

According to Oxford English Dictionary a subculture is:

Noun: 2. Originally Sociology and Cultural Anthropology. An identifiable subgroup within a society or group of people, esp. one characterized by beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger group; the distinctive ideas, practices, or way of life of such a subgroup.

Now frequently used in a less technical sense, particularly with reference to popular culture. (Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd Edition, 2022)

Thus, how subcultures are understood can vary, especially regarding its use being in a “less technical sense” with regards to aforementioned “popular culture”.

In the early stages of research into the concept of “youth culture” (or *subculture* if you will) the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Studies (CCCS) are regarded as the pioneers of the Anglo-Saxon world (Buckingham, Bragg, & Kehily, 2014, p. 2). In their book *Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media* (2014), David Buckingham, Sara Bragg and Mary Jane Kehily, explore the research and general understanding of youth culture in our contemporary times. Although what is to be presented here is the concept of *subculture*, it is important to mention how tightly these two “perspectives” are connected.

Sub- and fan cultures are also closely tied with youth cultures, as was observed by the CCCS, and as we will see later (3.3.). The subcultures, of the dominant culture were often inspired by a shift in the youth’s sentiments of 1980-90s Britain (2014, p. 2). Or, as Dick Hebdige observed in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), shifts in youth’s socio-political realities of the 1960s-70s Britain. Meaning, I would even allude that this is the most common feature in the development of a subculture: a change in socio-political standings and realities. In particular, pertaining to youth. This will be explored further (see 7.0.).

Hebdige (1979) mentions eloquently that the “the meaning of subculture is [...] always in dispute, and style is the area in which the opposing definitions clash with most dramatic force” (1979, p. 3). In his book he starts off the conversation by attempting to define culture itself, drawing upon the literature of Raymond Williams, T. S. Eliot, Richard Hoggart, Ferdinand de Saussure Barthes, Karl Marx, Stuart Hall and Louis Althusser. Drawing upon their theories and philosophies, he concludes that culture is semiotic in nature. It reflects the concept of “myth is a type of speech” (Barthes, 1972, as cited in Hebdige, 1979, p. 9), and that these mythologies of practices, and implicit understandings, of symbolic actions can even be understood as a form of common ideology of the mass, or rather, culture. The commonly understood practices of style, in subcultures presents a form of

public deviance, due to their re-imagining of these semiotic presentations (Hebdige, 1979). Hence, the language of “anti-establishment” comes into play, due to these subcultures’ decoding. As Hebdige contextualized in *Subculture* (1979), the subcultures of 1960-70s Britain had this seeming reluctance to participate in what would be considered the “common mythos”, in terms of style.

Albeit Hebdige conceptualized subcultures quite extensively, it is interesting to add the work of J. Milton Yinger (1973).

Yinger, in his ‘Contraculture and Subculture’ (Ed. Arnold, *Subcultures*, 1973, pp. 121-134) provides a conceptual differentiation of how the two – contraculture and subculture – can be distinguished from another. As Hebdige explains, a subculture is most notably defined by its style purposefully going against what is considered the society’s *status quo*. Meaning, the style’s *enuncative productivity* (for context see Fiske, ‘The Cultural Economy of Fandom’ 1992 in 3.3. Fandom studies) is designed to signal otherness and provoke the established ‘appropriate’ dress of the larger culture (Hebdige, 1979, pp. 100-112). Yinger follows a somewhat similar trajectory, insofar as he defines the delimitation of these two societal sub-communities/societies, as, despite there being a “conflict” with the larger culture in subcultures, its *culture* is not necessarily defined by this; however, in a contraculture, it is. I am bringing this up as a means to clear up this thesis’ understanding of subculture; so as to concretize its analysis.

Hebdige continues to show his view of these subcultures later in his book as something almost alien, although with an air of intrigue. Yet, this is where it becomes hard to distinguish the concept of subculture from youth culture.

They are seemingly indistinguishable from each other in the sense that youth culture is also tightly connected with the emergence of celebrity and Hollywood tailoring films to the increasing teen population in the 1950s onward. This has led way to what we now know as the “summer blockbuster”. However, Hollywood’s obsession with youth was not new, even in the 50s through 90s. What is commonly known as Hollywood’s “cult of youth” was already heavily debated during the 1920s, as well as their propensity to market their films with sex and romantic partnership (Addison, “Must their Players Keep Young?”, 2006). This, coupled with what Frank Furedi in his book *100 years of Identity Crisis* (2021), calls “psychological validation” of youth, could very well be what Hebdige (1979) observed as anti-establishment in the subcultures he studied. All this makes it

difficult to assume this anti-establishment a conscious endeavor. This being *because* of its tight connections with youth culture, and how the emergence of suburban life and the new media landscape changed so rapidly in the 20th century.

3.2. Youth culture or identity crisis?

We will now explore the theoretical framework applied in this thesis concerning youth culture. As previously discussed, Hallyu and consequently K-pop are products targeting young individuals, warranting an examination of this phenomenon through the lens of youth culture. Considering the age at which the informants encountered K-pop, it appears to be a pivotal discovery often made during formative years, thus underscoring its significance. Here we will go over some of Elkind (1996) and Frank Furedi's (2021) work, followed by Addison (2006), before moving onto fandom culture.

The sense of emerging into adulthood is a concept psychologists such as Jung and Piaget have attempted to define. Piaget, together with Inhelder stated in the 1950s:

The adolescent not only builds new theories or rehabilitates old ones, he also feels he has to work out a conception of life which gives him an opportunity to assess himself and to create something new (thus the close relationship between his system and the life program). Secondly, he wants a guarantee that he will be more successful than his predecessors (thus the need for change in which altruistic concern and youthful ambitions are inseparably blended).
(Inhelder & Piaget, 1955/1958, p. 342, as cited in Elkind, D. 'Inhelder and Piaget on Adolescence and Adulthood: A Postmodern Appraisal'. *Psychological Science*, 7(4), 1996, pp. 216–220)

However, as David Elkind deliberates in his special section in *Psychological Science* July 1996, that despite Inhelder and Piaget's originality, they failed to contend the varying realities of youths growing up in environments that weren't the Neuchatel Educational Center in Switzerland. Elkind also mentioned the prevailing failure to consider the realities of female social development (Elkind, 1996), which is also visible in Hebdige and other CCCS texts as well. Regardless, what was most intriguing in Elkind's "postmodern appraisal" was his mention of Margaret Mead's "distinction[s] [...] made regarding the effect of the rate of technological change on culture." (Elkind, 1996, p. 218). In this appraisal Elkind

summarizes Mead's three types of cultures: *post figurative*, *configurative*, and *prefigurative*. *Post figurative* cultures are slow-moving and are guided by the traditions and authority of the elders. *Configurative* society is different insofar that the technological developments create a shift between the youths and elders where the youths become on average more skilled than the elders. This is where a "rift" (my understanding of Elkind's summary) between the generations begin to form. *Prefigurative* culture suggests this "rift" as fully formed, as in the younger generations have lost the veneration of the elders, since the skills and knowledge of the elders are outdated (Elkind, 1996).

Taking this perspective into consideration, it becomes easier to contextualize subculture in the "less technical" sense described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* quote from earlier. However, it is hard to speak of youth culture without bringing Frank Furedi's *100 years of Identity Crisis* (2021) into the discussion. Deceptively, it is not simply a historical walk-through of what identity crises are, and where the term originates from, but also a book contextualizing some of what might have caused the anti-establishment attitudes Hebdige observed in 1960s Britain.

If we paraphrase Furedi's (2021) text, he speaks of the changing sentimentality of raising the young from the 19th century on towards recent years. Mainly, he walks us through the historical contexts surrounding the invention of adolescence, and how it juxtaposes young adulthood, as he feels the world has stopped truly considering the past when raising the young. As in, the context of history is being consistently undervalued when raising them (i.e. traditions, the guidance of elders, and history at large). Furedi argues for the value of this 'past', even though it has been considered 'out of date' by academics and educators alike since the 1920s. Of course, this devaluatization of the 'old' has its roots in the changing political and economic realities of the world, especially pertaining to USA's society of the early 20th century. Furedi further explains that, during this time, it was seen as more important to raise a generation capable of rapid change, so as to be cognitively able to keep up with the shifting demands of society. Simply put, due to traditional values no longer "working", it is put aside for instead teaching the young to be highly adaptable. What Furedi argues however, is that this is de-moralizing the young, causing them to lose a sense of "collective identity" which would have otherwise provided them the framework to create a

personal identity for themselves (Furedi, 2021). As he states rather poetically: “Once this bond [between generations] begins to unravel, what is left is a sense of self in search of a home. This sense of homelessness created a need for the science of psychology, which, [...] diagnosed this predicament as an identity crisis.” (2021, p. 2). A lack of moral guidance, as he explains in his book, referring to “the foundational principles of what provide society’s standards of what is right and wrong” (2021, p. 1), creates an animosity to adult authority which subsequently results in the identity crisis (Furedi, 2021).

Additionally, taking the Hollywood’s “cult of the young”, into consideration, we might see why youth has been in the public consciousness for such a considerable amount of time. In “‘Must the Players Keep Young?': Early Hollywood's Cult of Youth” (2006), Heather Addison speaks of the Victorian dichotomization of aging, and how this played into how youth was viewed in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Essentially, one could either age well, by being self-reliant and in good health, or one could age poorly, as in one is decayed and dependent (2006, p. 4). Furthermore, as the world became increasingly industrialized the need for young workers increased, adding to the need of ‘good aging’, which was reflected in the new media. As Addison illustrates in her essay, “Hollywood and the Industrial Age became close partners in the creation of a youth-oriented consumer culture” (Addison, 2006, p. 6). Which also paved the way for what would be considered celebrity-veneration today.

Hollywood presents what would and should be desired, using young and beautiful actors as the avatars of what would be what the sponsors and industry wanted to sell. This is reflected in modern media landscapes, with the Kardashian clan being frontrunners of Western beauty standards, traditional celebrities becoming increasingly in charge of their own social media platforms (or, rather, the illusion of this), and K-pop idols utilizing online platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), V-Lives and many more. What we see nowadays, is not only the established modes of operation mostly created by online micro-celebrities, but also the uptick in utilizing these methods by media intermediaries in the promotion of more traditional celebrities. By doing this they achieve a closer reach to the consumers of this content, and the frequency of when and how people interact with

their celebrity-content further underlines this veneration (i.e., para-social relationships) and their grasp on the everyday lives of the consumers.

3.3. *Fandom: A business, or an alternative community?*

In this section, we will explore key theories and texts that form the basis of our study in fandom and celebrity studies. We will cover vital terms and definitions essential for understanding the data analysis and discussions ahead. This section will discuss the works of Jenkins (2012), Jenson (1992), and Fiske (1992), and define what constitutes a fan. There has also been included scholarly texts related to celebrity cultures by Barron (2015) and Ponce de Leon (2002), given that this fandom revolves around K-pop idols. It was deemed significant to incorporate this perspective due to its relevance.

“[W]hat it means to be a fan should be explored in relation to the larger question of what it means to desire, cherish, seek, long, admire, envy, celebrate, protect, ally with others. Fandom is an aspect of how we make sense of the world, in relation to mass media, and in relation to our historical, social, cultural location. Thinking well about fans and fandom can help us think more fully and respectfully about what it means today to be alive and to be human.”
(Jenson, *The Adoring Audience*, 1992, p. 26-27)

Lisa A. Lewis’ book *The Adoring Audience* (1992) begins with Joli Jenson’s plea to speak of fandom as something akin to an extension of human understanding, coupled with a critique of the aristocratic views on fandom in academic circles (Jenson, 1992). It would seem disingenuous to shy away from this reality when looking into this fandom. Seeing as I am someone who has been a part of this fandom for well over a decade, it was somewhat reassuring to see this take as well, considering the overall experiences I and some my fellow K-pop peers have witnessed throughout the years. I am bringing this up as a means to disclose any lingering concerns of in-group relation, and hopefully further underline the necessity to look more closely into this sub-group of fans.

To divorce fandom from youth culture, and subsequently, subculture, is a difficult task. To be a fan is so intrinsically ‘youthful’, and often categorized as crazed behavior. As established by Hebdige, a subculture is motivated by their style, esotericisms, and music. The punks of the 70s had rallying cries not only in their opposition against the establishment through fashion, but also in their music.

Some of it illustrated in the *Sex Pistols* ‘Anarchy in the UK’ (1977), some of it in its reggae origins and counterculture acts of the 1970s and early 1980s. The punks live on in acts such as *Blink-182*, *All Time Low*, *Green Day*, *Fallout Boy* and many more.

These music genres, be it traditional rock, pop punk, or punk, seeped their way into the anime fandom, as seen in the AMVs produced by fans⁶. Although this being the norm a decade ago, we see now that the tradition has continued into what is referred to as fan made videos (hereafter referred to as FMVs)⁷⁻⁸. Some of which using modern punk classics, some being remixes, and some AMVs now utilizing K-pop music in their respective edits⁹. As we will see in the Analysis chapter of the data collected from the interviews conducted, there is some indisputable crossover from the anime to the K-pop fandom with the older fans, specifically in Norway. This is an important detail when contextualizing the fandom literature we will be reviewing in this chapter.

Fans have existed for as long as humanity has; it is only that of recent years they have been given a label. Alexander the Great is often credited as the first celebrity (Barron, *Celebrity Cultures*, 2015), and Napoleon Bonaparte could be considered a political celebrity of the post-revolution era in France in the late 18th century. While these examples of celebrity are politicians; it is important to understand the historical contexts celebrities have regarding fandoms, and by extension, participatory culture. The idea of a celebrity is that they are a symbolic conduit of ideas and audience reverence, meaning their purpose is that of a model of both communication and ideals. As Lee Barron (2015) cites Fred Inglis (2010, *A Short History of Celebrity*); despite the concept of ‘celebrity’ as a term only

⁶ See example here:

Meady AMVs. (2020, August 14). *Naruto AMV - Blood // Water [Naruto VS Sasuke]*.

Retrieved November 2023, from YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJ7KbA6Si4Y>

⁷ See example here: (FMV for BTS “the tradition continues”)

Btsly Edits. (2019, December 27). *BTS X In the End Fmv*. Retrieved November 2023, from

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StqQ7mvUzZM>

⁸ The distinction between AMVs and FMVs are for clarity, and how it is referenced in the respective fandoms, e.g., every AMV is fan made, but not every FMV is an AMV, if you will.

⁹ See example here: (Here they use a soundtrack from the *League of Legends* game)

The Anime. (2023, October 7). *Villain - AMV 『Anime MV』*. Retrieved November 2023,

from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eNDUZWR4k>

coming into the public conscience during the mid-18th century, the shift is simply that of someone going from being “[...]a more general process of renown – a status typically linked with acts of ‘high accomplishment’” (2015, p. 22) which brought honor to a title, to those of which whose “[...]famous faces of the day would be noted and recognized by the public” (2015, p. 23) as a direct consequence of modern media communications developments and metropolitan urbanization.

This development changed the way in which people engaged with the media, all going from Alexander the Great’s portraited coins to the beginning of the mid-18th century’s ‘*chroniques scandaleuses*’ of France, that Charles L. Ponce de Leon (*Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940*, 2002, p. 16) credits the public’s novel ability to increase their scrutiny of their elites. The commonalities of the old and the new is that fans watch their fan-objects with a reverence, although, in the 21st century can deliberate the semiotic take-aways from the engagement. The encoding-decoding (Stuart Hall, ‘Encoding/Decoding’, 1999) is now a parlay of social capital; also known as the para-social relationship (Horton & Wohl, ‘Mass Communication and the Para-Social Interaction’, 1956).

Firstly, for clarity’s sake, the definition of a fan we will utilize in this thesis is the one proposed by Matt Hills, and referenced in Barron’s *Celebrity Cultures* (2015):

“It’s someone who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV programme, band; somebody who can produce reams of information on their object of fandom, and can quote their favorite lines or lyrics, chapter and verse.” (Hills. M, 2002, *Fan Cultures*; as cited in Barron, L., 2015, *Celebrity Cultures*, p. 84)

Hills, and further elaborated by Barron, made sure to mention that a fan is someone who consumes media in ‘unexpected ways’, and their deliberations stand outside the norm with regards to how they read, and consume, the media of their fan-object(s) (Barron, 2015, pp. 84-85).

Furthermore, Henry Jenkins, in his *Textual Poachers* (2012) speaks at length of the modern perception of “the fan”. Most importantly, he cites the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, providing the historical definition of the recently ‘abbreviated form’, ‘fanatic’ (2012, p. 12). Considering the religious connotations of the Latin word ‘fanaticus’, he further elaborates on how this understanding of the fan is still

prominent in the modern era. The fan, as he describes, is often related to ideas of obsession, danger, and even violence – calling back to attacks, and murders, committed by fans of celebrities, and how they are portrayed in popular media of the 70s through the 90s – as well as the frenzied crowds of fangirls. Despite the citations of the harsh criticism of fans, he further elaborates the distinction between, essentially, the ‘aficionado’ vs the ‘fan’ (which is a comparison made by Jenson as well, in *The Adoring Audience*, 1992); calling back to Bourdieu’s work, Jenkins further contextualizes the fan as an antitheist of the elite within the understanding of ‘good taste vs bad taste’. Jenkins describes something akin to an intellectual conflict between the educated and the fool, illustrating that the idea of a fan as someone whose opinion on a piece of media being ‘worthwhile’ blurs the lines between the bourgeoisie and the common so much that the adverse opinions the ‘general public’ have of fans is almost necessary (Jenkins, 2012). Jenkins makes a point to say that, although the stereotypes surrounding fans, *Textual Poachers* assumes “[...] that speaking as a fan is a defensible position within the debates surrounding mass culture. [...] [T]his book perceives fans as producers and manipulators of meaning.” (2012, p. 23), and does this by “rejecting [the] media-fostered stereotypes of fans as social dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers” (2012, p. 23).

Furthermore, Jenkins mentions the conflicting emotions of fans, pertaining to the creators’ power of the medium of the fan-object(s):

“Fans recognize that their relationship to the text is a tentative one, that their pleasures often exist on the margins of the original text in the face of the producer’s own efforts to regulate its meanings. [...] often they [fans] respond with hostility and anger against those who have the power to “retool” their narratives into something radically different from that which the audience desires.” (Jenkins, 2012, p. 24).

This can fall somewhat into the idea of *the auteur vs metteur en scène*, a debate which has proliferated the international film industry since the mid 1940s (Thompson & Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 2003). Originally this was a debate regarding who the ‘true’ author of a film was; the screenwriter or the director, and whether or not the director was the ‘author’ (*auteur*) of the art, or merely the ‘stager’ (*metteur en scene*) (2003, p. 416).

This debate has later morphed and been recontextualized within circles of fans, and fandoms. Especially pertaining to more contemporary times of filmmakers, and actors, engaging in activities fans and other audience members deem as unfavorable, or downright deplorable. This can be seen in fans boycotting certain media due to a disagreement with a new release, or as exemplified in the #metoo-movement of the late 2010s, where films, television shows etc., were boycotted due to filmmakers' and actors' sexual misconduct – whether these people were ruled guilty or not, within the confines of a 'court of law'.

Alternatively, to provide a contemporary, and less political, example of this: In recent years the *Naruto* (manga created by Masashi Kishimoto and animated by Studio Perriot) fandom has critiqued the new spin-off series *Boruto: Naruto New Generations* (manga, Mikio Ikemoto, written by Ukyo Kodachi & Masashi Kishimoto, animated by Studio Perriot). Some 'old' fans of the original, *Naruto* (2002-2007) and *Naruto Shippuden* (2007-2017) series, are of the opinion the writers have 'nerfed'¹⁰ the original characters (Naruto Uzumaki, and Sasuke Uchiha) in a way they deem 'not canon compliant'¹¹. The argument is that the characters have been 'nerfed' for the sake of the new generation, often claimed that this is a symptom of bad writing or 'cheap way out', than it making sense in the story.

This has resulted in many boycotting the new series completely, or simply spend their time 'clowning'¹² on it online, on forums such as Reddit, X, and the like.

Jenkins concludes his book with key factors of how he considers fans, and academic theory pertaining to fandom studies.

Firstly, He argues that fans watch their fan-object(s) with a focus, whilst still maintaining a 'critical distance' (2012, p. 277). Here he cites John Fiske, who in his text 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom' (*The Adoring Audience*, 1992) spoke of the "semiotic productivity", "enunciative productivity", and "textual productivity" (Fiske, 1992, p. 37).

¹⁰ Nerfed is a commonly used word within fandoms; meaning characters who were previously considered *strong* has been written as *weaker* than previous, aka., *nerfed*.

¹¹ As in not in accordance with the established canonical events – see previous footnote for an example of this.

¹² Similar to the idea of 'trolling' online, however usually less aggressive. It is often memes created to poke fun of either the media (in this case, anime/manga) or other fans' posts.

Fiske argues that the semiotic productivity is a form of internal identity-making process, created from the semiotic “[...] resources of the cultural commodity” (1992, p. 37), which can be understood as a more general practice, rather than necessarily only happening to fans in their interaction with their fan-interests. Whilst the *enunciative productivity*, pertains to this identity-making happening externally – as in, it is spoken, as his terminology would suggest – either through dialogue, or through stylistic means, such as fashion and the like (1992, p. 38). Although Jenkins in his conclusion does not mention the latter of Fiske’s three types of productivity, I still find it prudent to contextualize the final *textual productivity*, as it pertains to Jenkins’ summary. Fiske elaborates that *textual productivity* differs from the enunciation of semiotic portrayal of fandom, as it is the act of fan-produced content. This can be anything from art to fan fictions (fan written stories – head canons, if you are familiar¹³), and Fiske makes it a point to mention that these works are not made for monetary gain; rather it is made to simply share their fan-interests within the confines of their community (Fiske, 1992).

This mirrors what Jenkins lists in his conclusion, on multiple points, such as his mention of the fans’ “meta-texts”. Here he is referring to the negotiation of head canons within the fandom. It also pertains to what he mentioned about their art and content production. Here he explains that many of the fans interviewed for *Textual Poachers* attributed fandom as a place where they were encouraged to build skills in areas they otherwise would not. All these facets of fandom also play into their “appropriation” of the media text that pertains to the fandom (2012, pp. 278-280). Meaning, as he states in the first point when referencing Fiske, he argues that this distinction of *semiotic* and *enunciative productivity* breaks down in practice. His observation is that these two states of fan productivity happen simultaneously, since “[f]or the fan, watching the series is the beginning, not the end, of the process of media consumption” (2012, p. 278). This is also true in the cases the fans who participated in this study, as they spoke of watching K-pop videos together (as we will discuss at length in 7.0.).

¹³ “Head canons” can be understood in the same way fan fictions are, although head canons are usually shorter, such as symbolism or character trait – as in often, but not always, understood by the fandom, realities in a media/fan-object which have not been out-right stated by the creator(s).

There is also the case of “consumer activism”, where Jenkins attributes this to the fans of his study bringing shows out of cancellation, or as the examples provided in the 1.3, pertaining to the *TIME* article (Bruner, 2020). Here Jenkins continues to say that fandom is also a result of pushing back against the “relative powerlessness of the consumer in relation to powerful institutions of cultural production and circulation” (2012, p. 278). Meaning, the producers prefer a mute audience; the fans are anything but (2012, p. 279).

Furthermore, he argues that fandom functions as an “alternative social community” (2012, p. 280) and repeats the lyrics of a song he cited in the beginning of his final chapter, and later as a part of his finishing statements, titled *Weekend-only World* by T. J. Burnside Clapp (1987, Fesarius Publications, as cited in Jenkins, 2021, pp. 277 & 280-81). He argues that this is the reality of fans, and one they are conscious of; that fandom is a fleeting moment, self-regulatory, to maintain sanity in the real world. He states that fandom exists within a “utopian dimension” which meets the needs of the fans, be it community or others (2012, p. 282). He also mentions that the social rules within a fandom are self-regulatory in a sense, where what is considered poor behavior is looked down upon within the community, and that they have an established sense of ways-of-conduct. He makes it a point to state that despite the utopian reality a fandom is supposed to provide, there are bad-players in fandoms as well; however, this means-of-conduct is something established within fan communities (2012, p. 282).

Lastly, despite mentioning academic ethnographic readings on fandom still necessitating further research, he finishes *Textual Poachers* by saying: “Fandom does not prove that all audiences are active; it does, however, prove that not all audiences are passive” (2012, p. 287). Which in this thesis has been understood to mean; elucidating to the idea that fandom is as much ‘uses and gratifications’, as it is meaning making of cultural content through community deliberations.

3.4. Internet Culture

Lastly, we will delve into the theoretical framework utilized concerning internet cultures; or, more specifically, media experiences research. This focus was deliberate, acknowledging that delving extensively into internet cultures presents challenges beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, this section presents

theoretical perspectives considered throughout this study. Their relevance will be highlighted in the ensuing discussion (see chapter 7.0.).

In contextualizing the analytical framework applied in this study, it is imperative to first explore the prominent role of internet culture within the broader discourse. It is pertinent to approach this from a nuanced perspective, as initially outlined by Ytre-Arne & Das in their work ‘‘Audiences’ Communicative Agency in a Datafied Age: Interpretative, Relational, and Increasingly Prospective’ (2020). By examining this article, it can provide a wider understanding of fan roles in the relationship they have with their fan-objects, specifically pertaining to the Norwegian K-pop fans. How they engage with both their fan-objects and community is predominantly an online endeavor, which means we must consider their place in how K-pop proliferates their social media environments, and how this can provide an additional aspect to how we understand the characteristics of their fandom.

Ytre-Arne & Das (2020) attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the notion of agency within the domain of communications research, delving into various conceptualizations of agency as delineated within the realms of reception theory and sociology. The authors articulate their definition with reference to audience engagement within digital media environments and illustrate audiences’ communicative agency as follows: “[the audiences’] capabilities to effect power potentials through interpretative engagements in everyday processes of communication, in relation to structures that take part in the same communicative processes.” (2020, p. 785). In essence, this can be understood as an audience member’s ability to influence interpretative engagements during everyday communication processes, within the context of the structures (i.e., social media sites etc.) involved in these communicative exchanges (i.e., posts and content making). Their development of a definition is pertinent within the context of communicative research, and it provides an important perspective when understanding what characterizes Norwegian K-pop fans.

Which brings us to Schröder (2011) who, in his text ‘Audiences are inherently cross-media’ talks about a new perspective being necessary in audience research; that the cross-mediality of audiences is not a perspective existing in a vacuum. Rather, it is an inherent reality of audiences, falling back to the ideas

presented by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch in their ‘Uses and Gratifications’ (1973), pointing to a consumers’ complex relationship with the media platforms available to them (1973). ‘Complex relationship’ here pertains to an interwoven approach in terms of how/why/when audiences engage with these different sources of media contents.

It can be argued that the inherent cross-mediality of audiences has always been the case; yet Schrøder contextualizes the challenge quite neatly. He states that both audience practice and expectations as continuous; its relationality and subsequent participation can only exist if it is tied to the other: “because the media that were available to users in a given situation, but not chosen, maintain a shadow presence in the mind of audience members, due to their previous experience of these other media” (Schrøder, 2011, p. 6). For an audience member to engage with and respond to a media content, they must have both access to that content and a meaningful connection with it. Hence Schrøder’s suggestion of utilizing the triangulation-method – where one utilizes complementary qualitative and quantitative research in order to do a comparative analysis between the two – when researching audiences (2011, p. 12). For context, we see this cross-mediality very much being the case for the younger fans in this study. As we will further elaborate in the Analysis chapter, it is still worth mentioning how relevant this perspective is in relation to this thesis.

Additionally, Dal Yong Jin’s ‘Transnational Proximity of the Korean Wave in the Global Cultural Sphere’ (2022) also elaborates on necessary perspectives when researching fandoms/audiences today. He argues that Hallyu’s seemingly unexplainable popularity with Western audiences is likely due to these idols, music videos, dramas, and films, all speak to a socio-political reality shared by the global youth, regardless of nationality (Jin, 2022). Furthermore, he argues that instead of utilizing theories such as cultural proximity theory, and active affinity theory, instead scholars should perhaps look to the idea of transnational proximity.

He speak at length of the problems when understanding the cross-cultural flow of Hallyu content, as cultural proximity would not explain why fans in the West would enjoy South Korean cultural contents. This is due to the West focusing more on individualism, whilst South Korea focuses more on Confucianism and collectivism (also, importantly, the language barrier). Therefore, by extension it would not explain instances of what Stuart Hall called *lack of equivalence* (Hall,

‘Encoding/Decoding’, 1999, p. 54) becoming practically benign to fans. This is because, most fans do not speak Korean, nor have any cultural ties to the country.

For context, the ‘lack of equivalence’ Hall speaks of, pertains to both a physical, and temporal, distance between the encoder of a message and the decoder, of said message. Meaning there is a potentiality for distortions in the decoding of a message, hence the ‘lack of equivalence’ (Hall, 1999, p. 54).

Furthermore, Jin argues that, whilst active affinity does hold some merit with regards of fandom studies (seeing some of it pertains to the fans of this study), it would not explain what these ‘affinities’ are necessarily, and it does not explain how non-active fans (as in non-participants of fandom events etc.) further engage with the fan-object(s). He therefore argues that the rise in ‘general popularity’, so to speak, can best be explained by this transnational proximity model, as it looks deeper into how a larger group of people find interests in Hallyu content. That it is more so defined by globally shared experiences amongst youth, rather than it ‘holding’ affinities or cultural proximities, which would in theory invite a much smaller number of fans, regardless of their level of participation (Jin, 2022).

Despite this thesis’ more allusive and overarching approach – looking more at our participants’ phenomenological experiences in relation to a larger scope of research in order to identify their common characteristics – understanding this aspect of audience research is imperative to uncover trinkets of gratification fans receive when engaging with K-pop: in particular, the inherent transnationality and ‘transfunctionality’ of finding and engaging with K-pop. ‘Transfunctionality’ – a term I am coining for this act – is tied to Kats et al.’s (1973) understanding that “books functioned most like newspapers, on the one hand, and like cinema, on the other” (p. 515). As we will see, fan engagement with K-pop, while mostly recreational, also functions as a method to connect with other fans, and occasionally create content themselves.

4.0. Method

In this chapter we will cover the methodological foundation for this study, some of the interview guide’s questions, the method used for analyzing the data collected and the study which inspired this thesis, how the data was coded and

analyzed, ethical concerns and considerations, and finally, some overarching observations made during the commencement of the interviews.

As mentioned in 1.1. Research Question, the inquiry of this thesis is:

“What characterizes the K-pop fandom in Norway today?”

Followed by these three underlying points of interest:

1. Why/how does one become a K-pop fan?
2. What stylistic, ethical, and social practices constitutes the K-pop fandom in Norway today?
3. What characterizes the Norwegian K-pop fandom as a social community?

As a reminder, the initial two inquiries are directed towards the analysis chapters, while the final question serves as a catalyst for discussion.

4.1. Inspiration and Qualitative Research

This study was conducted using a qualitative method, which consisted of eight semi-structured interviews – either in person, or by utilizing online communication platforms such as Messenger Video Chat or Zoom. The choice behind this was three-fold.

Firstly, it appeared as the best method to acquire well-thought-out answers, and hopefully gain some insight into how they experience the fandom from a phenomenological angle, while also allowing for informants an opportunity to elaborate on their opinions wherever they felt necessary, or where I saw the opportunity.

Secondly, having had a previous experience with surveys (done during the bachelor’s thesis and essay, as stated in the *Preface* of this thesis), I found them to be inconclusive despite the number of participants, and limited to multi-choice answers that provided little opportunity for discussion. Of course, there is the argument for the triangulation-method, as illustrated by Schrøder (2011); however, this undertaking appeared to surpass the feasible scope of this thesis, given that the entirety of data analysis and coding had to be conducted independently.

Thirdly, this study was heavily inspired by, ‘Making Monsters: Lady Gaga, Fan Identification, and Social Media,’ by Melissa A. Click, Hyunji Lee and Holly Wilson Holladay (2013).

4.1.1. ‘Making Monsters’ (Click et al., 2013) and How it Applies

In their article (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013) they interviewed 45 self-identified ‘Little Monsters’ (Lady Gaga’s fandom) and examined their fan identification to Lady Gaga as their fan-object.

Despite this thesis having a wider focus on the fandom (i.e., their characteristics, as opposed to fan identification with specific K-pop idols), Click et al., conducted a more focused examination on how Little Monsters make sense of their parasocial relationship with Gaga (2013). Citing the works of Caughey, Sandvoss, Horton & Wohl, Jackie Stacey, and Cavicchi (and, additionally, other scholars studying the cultural significance of ‘the monstrous’) they create a thorough theoretical framework they utilize in the analysis of their conducted, 15-90 minute, interviews (2013, pp. 362-67).

Their research methodology began with the distribution of a Survey Monkey link on relevant platforms for recruitment, prompting those interested to provide contact information. Subsequent interviews, conducted via phone or online communication software like Skype etc., focused on participants’ connection to the Little Monsters fandom name and their perceptions of Lady Gaga as their fan-object. Questions delved into participants’ identification with both the fandom name and Lady Gaga, as well as their views on her social media presence and altruistic efforts. Of all 45 interviews, three interviews were conducted in Korea, whilst the rest in English, whereas the Korean interviews were later translated to English.

Finally, after compiling their verbatim transcripts into 294 pages, they utilized a comparative method, so as to uncover themes in their data, citing Cresswell’s *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (2007) (2013, pp. 367-68).

Similarly, this thesis approached the recruitment process in a similar fashion; there was posted an invite to this study on the *K-pop Norge* Facebook group 13th of February 2023. The first interview (this informant was introduced

through my own peers; a fellow member of a local film club), had already been completed in November 2022, and was considered initially a pilot; however, on consideration of the information gathered and its relevancy, it was eventually included in the main thesis. Out of ten commenters of the Facebook post, four were reached through Facebook Messenger; another preferred Instagram direct-message, and the last was a former classmate from senior secondary school, whom I have not been in contact with until I invited her to this study. Unfortunately, my original final informant became unreachable, however, luckily I was allowed to leave a poster-invitation (for reference, see *Outland Poster* in Appendix) to this study in the local Outland store for a final participant, who contacted me via email two weeks later. The interview was conducted on April 14th, 2023.

So, to enhance clarity: between November 2022 and April 2023, eight interviews were conducted; the participants consisted of seven females and one male. The youngest participant – the male, at seventeen – and the oldest, at thirty, provided a fair sample of age differences for the subject matter (*Figure 5*):

Alias	Age	Signifiers
Maya	18 (F)	VGS (High School); Mother, scientist; Father, previously a journalist, works in communication; aiming for university in the UK (journalism)
Signe	20 (F)	(BA) Chinese; Father, dentist; Mother, admin
Synnøve	29 (F)	Ex-teacher; career-change to back-end developing; Speaks Korean
Therese	27 (F)	Hairdresser's apprentice; K-pop podcast host
Kari	30 (F)	Freelance journalist; parttime mom; Magazine Editor; Speaks Korean
Siri	27 (F)	Front-end developer
Martin	17 (M)	VGS; Mother, nurse, and teacher; Father is MD; Speaks Korean
Emma	21 (F)	(BA) Media and Communications; plays musical instruments

Figure 5: Table of aliases and markers

This specific age bracket was chosen so as to facilitate a wide range of answers pertaining to how they became fans, and if relevant, if they had noticed any changes in how non-fans perceive their fandom (considering its recent popularity in the West), and their sustained affiliation with this fandom. Additionally, their recruitment via this Facebook page was deliberate; it functions as a hub for over 4.1. thousand Norwegian K-pop fans (as of writing this thesis).

Four interviews were conducted face-to-face (Maya; Signe; Kari; Emma), while all others were held over Facebook Messenger and Zoom (Synnøve; Therese;

Siri; Martin). Additionally, all interviews were conducted and transcribed in Norwegian; solely the citations in this thesis have been translated into English.

Whereas Click et al., asked questions pertaining to the Little Monsters relationship with Lady Gaga, and their fandom name (2013), I chose to ask question pertaining to the Norwegian fans' experiences of being a fan of K-pop in Norway, their relationship with other fans, and how they found out about K-pop etc.

These consisted of questions such as (translated, due to the interview guide being written in Norwegian): *When did you first hear about K-pop?; What is it about K-pop you like, something you dislike?; Is K-pop something you talk about with friends (even if you know they do not listen to K-pop)?; Have you noticed any changes to how people perceive you as a K-pop fan in recent years, in light of its rising popularity in the West?.* Furthermore, some of the questions regarding how they experience the language-barriers (if they experience one; some of the informants speak the language), and how they experience how idols' scandals are handled/ what becomes scandals in South Korea as opposed to in Norway, was also a part of the interview (for a more complete overview see: *Interview Guide*, in the Appendix).

Given the thesis's aim to delineate characteristics of the K-pop fandom, rather than exploring how individuals identify with specific fan-objects (such as favorite groups or idols), these questions were deemed more suitable for achieving the thesis's objectives.

4.2. Transcription and Coding of the Data

Here we will cover how long the interviews were, the transcription process and finally how the data was coded and analyzed.

4.2.1. Interviews and Transcription

The interviews range between 40 – 90 minutes, resulting in eight Word documents of transcriptions ranging between 19 – 27 pages. The interviews themselves were divided into two parts: firstly, participants' socio-economic position, and secondly, the K-pop 'questionnaire'. Participants were asked questions that defined their self-identification as K-pop fans, such as the length of tenure within the fandom, experiences participating in said fandom, their fandom

experiences vs. Norwegian cultural norms, and perceptions from those outside of the fandom.

Due to the transcription process stagnating for various reasons, the process was instead divided into a two-step process. Firstly, I utilized an automated transcription program so to streamline the process (where all ethical concerns were considered, see 4.3.4.3. for elaboration). Once the transcripts were finished, I removed automated timestamps within the terminal shell, and put them into a Word document. This allowed me to begin the preliminary analysis as I listened to the recordings; I also corrected any errors from the automated process and re-structured the overall format. I separated the speakers (the informant and myself) to note tone-indicators, while adding my own commentary for the second analysis section using Word's 'comment' feature. It was during this that I chose informant aliases.

4.2.2. The Analysis

The second, and deductive analysis, was completed by creating two documents, the first of which was a 172-page PDF compiling all the transcribed interviews, with an additional cover page wherein the research question and its subsections were listed. The second document, titled *Kartleggings Dokument av Intervju* (in English: Mapping Document of Interviews), divided each interview question into a table that listed which informant answered x question on which page as well as the answer itself, so I could more easily compare and take notes. I have included the table (*Figure 6*) for reference, with aliases but all details removed:

<u>Interview nr.</u>	Pages	Codes
1 – Maya, 18		
2 – Signe, 20		
3 – Synnøve, 29		
4 – Therese, 27		
5 – Kari, 30		
6 – Siri, 27		
7 – Martin, 17		
8 – Emma, 21		

Figure 6: Removed the contents from this due to the notes in it made it too large to be easily added as an example.

By utilizing this method, I was able to categorize themes and practices for final analysis. I then imported the transcription PDF into iBooks so I could use the note-taking feature on an iPad with an Apple Pencil. This allowed for more streamlined digital multi-tasking and reduction of paper wastage. As inspired by Click et al., this thesis also utilized a comparative method as well, identifying themes as they emerged in the data; the presented table facilitating this process.

Finally these answers were categorized by colors and practices pertaining to each of the three sub-questions to the Research Question: (1) Why/how does one become a K-pop fan?; (2) What stylistic, ethical, and social practices constitutes the K-pop fandom in Norway today?; (3) What characterizes the Norwegian K-pop fandom as a social community?. However, it is noteworthy that the final sub-question among the three was incorporated into the discussion chapter rather than being its own chapter in the analysis, as was originally the plan.

4.3. Reliability, Validity, Generalizability and Ethical Concerns

Here we will go over questions pertaining to this study's reliability, validity, generalizability, while referencing Barbara Gentikow's *Hvordan Utforsker Man Medieerfaringer?: Kvalitativ Metode* (2019) (in English: *How Does one Explore Media Experiences: Qualitative Method*). Finally, we will cover any ethical concerns and considerations that applies.

4.3.1 Reliability

“Reliability means dependability and credibility. One must be able to trust both the data and the results of the analysis, and there must be no errors in the measurement or investigation of the phenomenon in question. Additionally, the analysis must be consistent and result in sturdy conclusions.” (translated to English by author, Gentikow, 2019, p. 57)

Gentikow elaborates that, despite the criticism of the qualitative method in academia, this consideration does not only apply to the quantitative method. By considering the questions asked, the distance in relation between the interviewer to the interviewee, and whether the questions asked pertaining to the research question stands (Gentikow, 2019).

This has been taken into consideration during the process of conducting this study. As was mentioned, all participants, but one, were unacquainted individuals to myself; the informant whom I went to senior secondary school with, we have not been in contact since graduation in June 2015, and she was invited to the study due to me recollecting she spoke of K-pop during the time we attended school together. Additionally, there were made no changes to the interview guide, ensuring I asked all informants the same questions, her included. Furthermore, the questions were designed to ascertain general experiences, allowing for overlap in answers; at the very least, it was hoped overlaps would occur.

4.3.2. Validity

“Validity can be translated to sustainability, legitimacy, correctness, or truth. The demarcation between *reliability* and *validity* is not immediately visible, but I interpret the *validity requirement* as superior to the *reliability requirement* due to it suggesting whether what is being researched, is relevant in relation to the research question [alt., point of contention].” (Translated by author – italics in original text, Gentikow, 2019, pp. 59-60)

Additionally, Gentikow expounds on the necessity to expand the utilization of this terminology for qualitative research, by explaining that the goal of qualitative research is to find “[...] if not *the truth* – at least truths” (Translation by author – italics in original text, Gentikow, 2019, p. 59). Furthermore, Gentikow cites Kvale (2000) regarding the idea that investigating and controlling for a study’s validity throughout the process – as opposed to only in the end of it, i.e., the rapport – is a necessary requirement for not only controlling a study’s validity, but also its reliability (Gentikow, 2019, p. 60).

As this pertains to this study, it has been taken into consideration as suggested. Throughout the process these questions of validity, and reliability, has been re-visited on multiple points. The general scope of inquiry – these characteristics – and the idea of acquiring phenomenological accounts from the fans interviewed, is being understood as having been achieved. I am also of the opinion that this study can be repeated, due to how the interview guide was structured. It asked both questions that pertained to personal experiences in the fandom, as well as specifics with regards to fan practices. Of course, the argument can be made that as each of the informant’s individual experiences of fandom

practices can vary, the validity of the data in this study can be questioned (as they should, the idea of empirical research is for it to always be questioned, to inspire further investigation), however, there is also the argument for this being a social community (as we will investigate in 7.0.) that some practices are observed by most participants, and the only potential variabilities are seen in how the individual participant *experience* them, as opposed to the *existence* of said practices.

4.3.3. Generalizability

“I prefer to *move the generalizability requirement for the personal level to a case level*, or to the actual phenomenon that is being researched.” (Translated by author – italics in original text, Gentikow, 2019, p. 62). Gentikow further elaborates that by utilizing qualitative data in this fashion, one can achieve a more grounded level of understanding a given phenomenon, as opposed to the general requirements for a study’s generalizability, as it relates to quantitative studies. Of course, she mentions the problematization with regards to the nature of a qualitative study, as it cannot give a generalized picture of a whole population, due to its limited sample size – as opposed to a quantitative study (Gentikow, 2019, pp. 60-63).

On one hand, the findings in this study can be generalized within the context, and understanding, that it is only looking to find and illuminate characteristics within the Norwegian K-pop fandom. However, on a different note, it also struggles to ascertain the true complexity a larger sample size would have provided. As mentioned earlier, it is, as is experienced by myself, regrettable that this study could not fulfill the requirements of the triangulation methodology as mentioned by Schrøder (2013). His article is included for this very reason, to illustrate potential weaknesses of this study.

As the fact that I have been a K-pop fan for a significant amount of time myself, there are some articulations provided by the informants during the interviews that did not come as a surprise; however, it has also been of utmost importance to maintain a critical distance to the fandom (beyond the interviews of course), to maintain the validity and reliability of the data collected for this thesis. Furthermore, the findings in the original survey I conducted in 2017, underscores some of my findings, as I was surprised to see them re-emerge (see “duality of

exposure” in both 5.0. and 7.0.) seeing the elucidation in the data in the survey did not explicitly illustrate this to having been a phenomenon in the fandom in 2017.

I am of the belief that this study can be repeated and achieve cross-over data, despite its small sample size. What would be interesting, however, is looking into smaller sub-sections of this fandom, as it relates to the dichotomy of the *solo-stan* (being a fan of a singular K-pop idol or group) vs the *multi-stan* (being a fan of multiple K-pop idols and groups). This was due to the sample analysed for this study being recruited on the Norwegian K-pop hub on Facebook, rather than specific fandomsites.

For clarity, this study has both the problems and strengths that the qualitative method creates, however, its goal is to illustrate characteristics and lay a potential foundation/inspiration to continue and perform more rigorous research into this phenomenon in Norway.

4.3.4. Ethical Considerations

As this thesis is focusing on phenomenologically expressed opinions of the K-pop fandom to understand and map out the characteristics of said fandom, it was important to consider the ethicizes pertaining to the study, and most importantly, its informants. These were the ethical considerations of this thesis:

4.3.4.1. Consent

Consent forms, outlining relevant guidelines, were provided to all participants. These were based on a template found on NSD – Norsk Senter for forskningsdata AS website (in English: The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS), albeit modified to fit the needs of this study (for reference, see *Consent Form* in the Appendix). This included the assurance of voluntary participation, with the option to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give any reason as to why, as well as the contact information to both my supervisor and me, and the Data Protection Officer of the university. This study was also cleared by SIKT.

4.3.4.2. Anonymity and Confidentiality:

Participants’ names were anonymized, and personal details were generalized, replacing legal names with aliases (chosen by myself), except for one

encrypted document (explained in 4.3.4.4. Results Communication), ensuring identity protection.

4.3.4.3. Potential for Harm:

Security measures included double-step verification for devices and local transcription. Meaning, the abovementioned program utilized for the automated first step of transcription did not require internet access, as well as the document consisting of their real names being encrypted, so as to minimize internet exposure, mitigating the otherwise low potential for harm. Their real names were also removed from the transcriptions after aliases had been decided.

4.3.4.4. Results Communication:

An encrypted document retains names and preferred contact information for sending the final thesis version to those participants who wished for it. Furthermore, literal translation preserves informant responses in this thesis, although it does acknowledge the possibility for linguistic differences (such as sentence structures etc.). Finally, this document will be deleted upon the completion of this thesis, after it has been sent to those for whom it is required and wished.

4.4. Further Observations

Finally, while conducting the interviews, there were made some observations. I discovered that many were concerned with ‘answering appropriately’ to interview questions.

This prompted me to start each interview with a disclaimer that there was no correct answer; their opinions were taken at face-value. I found that its likely each participant acted with the fear of ‘representing’ the K-pop fandom in a poor light. Further discussion revealed that many recognized that those outside of the fandom viewed them negatively. Nearly all were concerned about ‘answering correctly’ and portraying themselves as authentic, multifaceted people. This behavior only reduced after the interviews, during more informal conversation. Enthusiasm and excitement were more prominent during this time, and more akin to the common perception of a ‘fan’.

It is worth noting that their knowledge of this as an academic study may have influenced their presentations, despite assurances that all personal details would be hidden. This means that there may well be inauthenticity in their presentation of themselves, despite the knowledge that I too am a fan. However, this reflects in many ways the pressure participants felt is put upon their idols. At least speculatively, I cannot discredit that many experienced less tensions when discussing the subject casually rather than as a mode of study; therefore, it may be difficult to ascertain what is ‘true’ fandom behavior and what is ‘presented’, if one is interviewing from an outside perspective. This is worth taking into consideration as we now move onto the analysis.

Analysis

We will now embark on the analysis phase of this thesis, which is structured into two segments, each dedicated to addressing its respective sub-inquiry. The discussion will commence by delving into the final inquiry among the three listed below. As mentioned in the introduction, the thesis’ research question is:

‘What characterizes the K-pop fandom in Norway today?’

To best answer this, I have separated this question into three subcategories, each defined by their own question:

1. *How* does one become a K-pop fan?
2. What *social and stylistic practices* does the fandom consist of?
3. What characterizes K-pop as a social community?

In the first analysis chapter (5.0), we will be analyzing the first sub-inquiry by examining the interviews conducted for this thesis and utilizing the data for analysis of the fandom to attempt to form a more concrete idea of what constitutes the Norwegian K-pop fan.

Here we will be exploring the ‘duality of exposure’ and the different motivations for *initiation*, *remaining*, and *participation* within the fandom.

What is meant by the ‘duality of exposure’ is simply the difference between conscious initiation vs initiation through exposure. In terms of conscious initiation, one is introduced to the genre through certain means, and actively seeks information themselves on the topic. Whilst, when it comes to initiation through exposure, the genre is already present in their online/offline lives for some time before initiation, akin to where it is part of their periphery. Therefore, through traditional media, their engagement becomes more so due to happen-stance, rather than having to actively look for information through self-motivated means. This duality will be examined in full in this first chapter, as well as the abovementioned modes of *remaining*, and *participation*.

In the second chapter of the analysis (6.0.), we will be looking into the different social and stylistic practices within the fandom; both to give a clear image of what the Norwegian K-pop fandom *is*, but also to finally investigate its analogous representation to that of subculture, youth culture, and fandom. Before examination, one of the questions I have is ‘can the K-pop fandom in Norway be considered a subculture, or does its characteristics fall into that of youth or fandom culture?’, hence the research question (see above), by exploring these characteristics, we will hopefully gain insight into how this novel fandom (in Norway that is) can be understood.

5.0. Analysis: Part one – Motivations

In this first section, we begin our investigation by looking at the ‘duality of exposure’; by this I am referring to what has been discovered as the two, *stumbled upon* vs *explored trend*’ trajectories the fans have had into the fandom. This provides us not only the shift in how fans find themselves exposed to the fandom, but it also gives us a foundation to build upon throughout the following sections of the analysis. As previously mentioned, the Hallyu wave is always advancing, not only in terms of natural evolution but also in the context of technological developments. This is well demonstrated in the varying modes of exposure the fans have experienced in their respective journeys into this fandom.

Building upon this, we will also be looking into the different *motivations* observed in the interviews. In this thesis, these have been categorized into three modes of fandom: *initiation*, *remaining*, and *participation*.

Motivations of *initiation* describes how the fans found K-pop, and we will be looking at three biographies, as presented by the informants during the interviews, to illustrate these varied trajectories into the fandom.

Motivations to *remain* within the fandom follow the initiation phase and explores the different motivations for staying in the fandom.

Lastly, through investigating the motivations for *participation*, we will explore the different levels of fan-participation within the fandom. Upon observation, these have been categorized into three levels of participation: *Organizers*, *Participants*, and *Spectators*. Via this, we will move towards the second part of this analysis (6.0.); the social and stylistic practices within the fandom.

5.1. Motivations: Initiation

Firstly, we will explore the ‘duality of exposure’ that have been discovered in the data of the interviews conducted for this thesis. These two most common trajectories the fans have had into the fandom have been dubbed: ‘*stumbled upon vs. explored trend*’, which is meant to illustrate that – despite there being outliers in the sense that they already have cultural ties to South Korea (Martin, 17) – there is a noticeable difference in how the fans in this study were exposed to K-pop and its fandom.

How one becomes a K-pop fan seems to not only vary depending on the time-period in which the fans discovered the genre, but also explain some key factors regarding who becomes a K-pop fan. The most interesting aspect, by answering this question; it not only exemplifies the extensive influence of the internet but also delineates the breadth of media cultures accessible to internet users. This shift in the availability of trans-national cultural scenes has changed how many engage with foreign music, art, and media. By investigating how this happens within this fandom, it may provide us a picture of how this is not only possible, but may also show us the beginning of something that will only keep happening (i.e., this is only the beginning of the sharing of cross-cultural contents online).

Although, there were similar origins of exposure amongst the informants of this study – that being social media – the trajectories of how they were exposed to this specific media-genre varied depending on the decade (2000s vs 2010s).

Upon investigation, the older fans seem to have *stumbled upon* the fandom/media genre, whilst the younger fans seem to have *explored a trend*. Both groups can be characterized by a common sense of curiosity of foreign cultures, which could explain their motivation to delve deeper into the fandom. Yet, despite their similarities, their encounter with the genre falls into these two separate categories of exposure.

Secondly, we will be investigating the similarities amongst the fans through analyzing their answer to the first question in the second part of the interviews; ‘When did you hear about K-pop for the first time/ When did you become a fan?’ Here, we will examine three separate biographies: one of Maya (18), who aspires to study her Bachelor’s in the UK; another of Therese (27), the hair-dressing apprentice; and finally, Siri (27) the front-end developer. Through these accounts, we will delve further into the second part of the initiation process and explore the factors that encourage fans to remain in the fandom (i.e., fan-retention). Through these biographies the duality of exposure will be illustrated through their individual introductions to K-pop.

5.1.1. ‘*Stumble upon*’ and the older fan

Although the average trajectory of the K-pop fans seems to have been predominantly defined by their social circles, most notably on social media – however, in some cases also in real life – there is a clear demarcation in how this came to be. Every informant in this study speaks of the fandom having a huge community online, and most have acquired friendships with other fans through social media; some of which have flourished into friendships offline as well.

However, in the case of the older fans, it has been a predominantly online endeavor, and their introduction to K-pop can be described as a ‘natural development.’ What is alluded to here is that most of the older fans (Kari, 30; Therese, 27; Siri, 27; and Synnøve, 29) mentioned that they were already exposed to anime (Japanese animation; Japanese cartoons etc.). They had already frequented on YouTube, be it watching and/or making fan edits of these anime shows. Through these series, and films, they were exposed to J-pop (Japanese pop

music), and they talked about how that exposed them more easily to K-pop. This introductory sequence is coherent as, during the time in which most of the older fans were exposed to K-pop (2005-2013), K-Dramas and Korean media were proliferating Japanese culture.

Regardless, likely due to this media culture proximity (Jin, 2022), the older informants spoke of how they would look further into East Asian pop music, and consequentially K-pop, which resulted in them *'falling'*, as the fans called it, for the genre. Notably, they became 'hooked', as many of the fans also called it, when they eventually found their first it-group. Meaning, the first K-pop group they became a fan of.

5.1.2. *'Explored trend'* and the younger fan

In contrast with the older fans, the average trajectory of the younger fans (Maya, 18; Signe, 20; Martin, 17; Emma, 21) seemed much less like the “natural development” abovementioned – through South Korea’s pop cultural affiliation with Japanese anime-shows and its music – but more akin to a result of general *exposure* to trends via readily-available social media. They seem to be less directly affected by the features of East Asian trans-cultural affiliation, and more affected by the rising popularity of K-pop within Western media outlets.

Dissimilar to the older fans, the younger fans mentioned more frequently that they had heard of K-pop some time before even looking into it; however, the right video/song at the right time is what got them 'hooked', to put it simply.

This is due to the rising popularity of K-pop in the West. Some of this upwards trend in popularity around the world can be attributed to PSY’s viral hit *Gangnam Style* (2012; YG Entertainment); however, we have also seen K-pop names hit more traditional charts such as BTS’ (HYBE Corporations; Big Hit Music) BBMA performances and *Billboard* records; and K-pop names perform at large-scale music festivals, such as Blackpink (YG Entertainment) being the first K-pop group to perform at the 2019 *Coachella* music festival, and in 2023, were the first K-pop group to headline that very music festival.

How the younger fans became fans appears to be more a result of *exploring* a pre-existing trend, rather than how the older fans’ *fell* into K-pop due to affiliated media sources. Of course, it is hard to say this with certainty, and may require further exploration in larger research endeavors for more definitive

conclusions. Notwithstanding, this distinction varies between individuals and this duality exemplifies the most common way Norwegians find/found K-pop within the context of this study. In the following section, we explore three informant stories, to shed light on this trend, and provide context into why they remained in the fandom post-initiation.

5.1.3. ‘*Stumble upon vs Explored trend*’ and what it can look like

Maya, the aspiring bachelor’s student, describes K-pop as something in the corner of her online social life; it was there, but she was not involved.

“[...] I became interested in it [K-pop] after it had already become quite popular. So, I, generally, started to know about it, because it was such a popular thing. It was something I saw online, and knew people who like it, and stuff.” (Maya, 18)

Meaning, she had heard of it sometime before looking into it. It was something she saw being discussed online and had friends who enjoyed the media genre. However, she continued by saying it was not until her father – who has worked as a journalist for some years – showed her a performance by the group BTS on *Saturday Night Live* in 2019 (making her somewhere between fourteen and fifteen at the time). She told me that he had asked if this was “something people her age enjoyed?”, and it was after seeing this performance that she began to pay more attention to K-pop.

She describes herself as someone who, when presented with a new interest, throws herself into headlong, which seems to be a trend in the more extreme side of K-pop fandoms, and fandoms in general. She has involved herself much more on the side of educating herself about the music, culture and, consequently, the media conglomerate. This is best illustrated by her additional interest – and further research into – South Korean history and K-pop’s role in the Hallyu wave, which developed some time after she became a fan. There is a level of investigation which, although also common with the other fans, its availability is in stark difference with older fans. What is meant by this is: both groups share their investigatory tendencies, however the depth of knowledge and the general accessibility of this information is more readily available today than it was a decade ago.

Therese, a 27-year-old hairdressing apprentice, and K-pop Podcast host, speaks of her journey into the fandom as a fond memory. Her journey started sometime between 2007 and 2009 – making her between eleven and thirteen around the time she discovered K-pop – and described a very different milieu online than what we have today, specifically on YouTube.

She spoke of a place where one could watch an entire anime show, although divided into 300 separate ‘parts’, and a place where fans would upload their fan made AMVs. She continued with, although fans still do this, it looks to have become more ‘common’ to post their short edits to TikTok or Instagram Reels. Through watching these anime videos and shows she found J-pop, and although she stated that it is hard to pinpoint which K-pop song she first heard, since she: “probably just thought it was a Japanese pop song”, she still remembers falling for the genre around this time. She theorizes that she might be one of those “emo-to-K-pop-fan-pipeline¹⁴” fans, and on top of this, she mentioned how surprised she was realizing 2NE1 (girl-group, YG Entertainment) was active at the time – considering most of the J-pop groups she followed had stopped being active.

When asked to describe what K-pop is to her, K-pop will always be what she remembers from that era: over the top party music. She reminisced of a time where the anime and K-pop fan communities in Norway were one and the same, and mentioned an episode from not too long ago that illustrates this recent division of the two fandoms. She had met up with some fellow anime fans in Oslo, and whilst talking, a group of K-pop fans walked by. They could tell due to one of the girls wearing a K-pop pin, and one of the individuals in her group commented on the K-pop pin, calling it “cringe”. To this Therese explained she had looked at the person and said:

“My child, it wasn’t so long ago, we were a part of the one and the same community here.” (Therese, 27)

¹⁴ Note: how the fandom uses this term, “pipelines”, will be further investigated in 6.2.1. of the analysis.

She continued by saying that despite the overlap still existing, it is much more common for the younger generation to discover K-pop alone, rather than through anime and their corresponding fandoms, aka the pipeline-theory she mentioned at an earlier point during the interview. This suggests that the K-pop and anime fan-communities in Norway have become two separate groups from previously being a unified “front”.

Finally, Siri, a 27-year-old front-end developer, who, as well as being a K-pop fan, enjoys numerous creative hobbies such as drawing and gaming, and has an active social life both online and outside of the virtual sphere, talked quite vividly about her first encounter with K-pop. Or, rather, when she first heard a K-pop song she *knew* to be a K-pop song:

“It was when... SHINee came out with ‘Lucifer’ (2010: SM Entertainment). Really specific, hella’ specific, I remember. [...] It was then I realized it was a ‘genre’ in and of itself, which I listened to, and remember, I enjoyed.” (Siri, 27)

Despite SHINee not ending up being her it-group, she continued to speak fondly of the journey of getting more and more interested in the genre. Furthermore, as the interview progressed, when asked ‘what K-pop is to her?’, she continued to elaborate on the importance the groups have in the genre. For her, it is mostly defined by the it-groups of the masses or her own specifically; hers having been Block B.

She spoke fondly of a time where she would actively search for it, and knew what she calls, “unnecessary info”, about her favorite idols. This could be anything from artist birthdays to the artists’ favorite colors. During this time of her life, she actively sought out news and what she referred to as ‘the gossip’; however, describes K-pop as something she stumbles upon these days, either through YouTube’s recommended or on TikTok’s “for you-page”.

Although her level of participation in the fandom has dwindled since she discovered it at fourteen, she underlines that one of the many reasons for her previous investment was not only due to the music, but also the fact that the idols she ‘followed’ were her age at the time. Now, many of them have become inactive, either taking up roles as producers rather than performing themselves or due to

military enlistment. Therefore, now, she finds it hard to find new groups and artists to ‘follow’. She mentioned she finds it hard to become as invested these days since the idols who are active are so young now, and therefore the element of relating to them has been diminished. Even though the genre still holds a place in her heart, she can no longer keep up in the same way she once could. For her, K-pop was very much a part of her teens and early adulthood, which was also a time she feels she had the time to exude much of her free time on K-pop.

Siri holds many of the same characteristics as the other older fans that participated in this study; these characteristics being the lessened participation in the general K-pop fandom population.

Based on these observations, and analysis, there is more to their discovery of K-pop than meets the eye. The reach of the South Korean music scene is not only promoted through the channels of the East Asian trans-cultural affiliation, but it has also become more readily available through the development of online social platforms. Of course, there is the idea that algorithms may also have something to do with this; however, this shift in how accessible transnational media cultures have become is illustrative of a phenomenon we will likely see more of. Furthermore, their likelihood of being exposed to the foreign media was also predicated on social circumstance and general interest in the wider East Asian cultures. Every informant in this study had some underlying interest or ties to Asian Culture – as will be looked at more in 6.1.1. Nevertheless, although the varying trajectories into the fandom is an important stepping-stone into what characterizes the Norwegian K-pop fandom, we must also look at what made them stay after the initial exposure to the media.

5.2. Motivations: Remaining in the fandom

Here, we will delve into the two primary factors that I have identified as key reasons why the fans have remained in the fandom: *community* (5.2.1.) and *content* (5.2.2.). By examining the motivations for fan retention, we aim to gain insight into what renders the fandom so appealing to such a vast and diverse international audience. It is worth noting that, while individuals can derive enjoyment from a particular interest independently, fandoms commonly foster a sense of collective belonging.

What has been observed suggests that the community aspect of the fandom – those that one interacts and develops relationships with around this ‘common core interest’ – plays a pivotal role in fan retention, while the content itself consistently enlivens and provides talking points; this dual appeal underscores the self-sustaining nature of a fandom (Jenkins, 2012). While the content is key, and perhaps relays to a wider appreciation of music or East Asian culture in general, that alone would likely not be as captivating for the dedicated fan if not for the participation aspect.

5.2.1. Community

Although the role communities have in fandoms is well-established in academic discourse, it is still pertinent to mention fan experiences in this study as well. It may seem repetitive to do so; however, by investigating what the fan-experiences are within each fandom, it can provide us details; since despite the ‘fandom’ being an encompassing term, there are distinctions. It will allow us to identify the role these communities have on the international discourse between fans, how it affects the individual fans, and how they play a role in how they engage with the fan object, their constituents, and any potential out-groups. This is what we will be investigating here; through fan accounts and how they elaborate on the varying facets of what it is like to be a part of this large fan community.

5.2.1.1. Friendships

The question that asked what “K-pop is to them?” revealed more about why they remained in the fandom after this initial exposure, and it is without a doubt the community itself. Every informant spoke to some degree about the community and friendships the fandom has provided, some of which have lasted for over a decade.

Signe, a 20-year-old bachelor’s student, studying Chinese, talked about this aspect in great detail. She had always had an interest in southeast Asian cultures – her chosen BA being evident of that – yet the quality of K-pop that concerned her the most, and frequently showed itself during her interview, was the community and friendships K-pop had provided:

“[...] the four of us has become a girl-group, and we still keep in touch. [...] so now we have a really tight-knit group because of K-pop. That, that is what is forming this group. And that is what I find so special and fun. That is basically the best experience with starting to like K-pop, that it has created such good friendships. And, I have more friends online, that happened to live in the same town, who also liked K-pop.” (Signe, 20)

She concludes with the fact that K-pop has given her more relations, not only online but also outside the virtual world. It is a huge component of her love for K-pop, and what looks to be one of the leading factors as to why she remained in the fandom. She, just like Maya, dives into her interests headlong, and becomes heavily infatuated with her fan-objects. However, Signe also mentioned how this was true for her cousin as well. Although they had always had some kind of contact due to their familial relation, it was not until her cousin also became infatuated with K-pop – and most notably NCT (boy band; SM Entertainment) – that they truly connected and became apart the four-people friend group abovementioned. Furthermore, K-pop has had its place as the ‘glue’ in many of the informants’ lives, as is the case for Kari, 30: “For me it is the immense pulling force, here I can find other I can talk to about K-pop. [...] It has given me friends in Malaysia, Australia, and the USA, which I never would have without it” Additionally, she mentioned how her snapchat-group are the same friends she got through K-pop ten years ago.

5.2.1.2. Nostalgia

Additionally, the community aspect of the fandom has not only helped the fans build a social foothold in their respective circumstances, but also provided them something fond to look back on. It seems that, regardless of how active they are in the fandom, or in some of the informants’ cases, used to be, there is something that holds true for almost all the informants that participated in this study. Kari, the 30-year-old freelance journalist with a 50-60% editorial position for a magazine, and bonus-mom to her partner’s children, contextualized this quite deftly:

“[Where does K-pop fit into your life these days?] Significantly less than how it was ten years ago. I still see it as something that holds

a big part of me. It has helped shape me as a person, more than, I believe, anything else. [It was] Over such a long time and in such a formative period of my life, so it will never be something I will let go of. [...] It is now more a background-thing that is constantly there. It is absolutely something nostalgic I return to. If I have a bad day, K-pop is what I turn to, in order to ease my mood.” (Kari, 30)

As already mentioned, although the older fans’ participation within the fandom has dwindled over time, there remains the question of what made them stay in the fandom, let alone begin to identify themselves as K-pop fans in the first place. Kari summarized this quite eloquently, and in a way that reflects the other informants quite well. For, when asked what she thinks about when one says “K-pop” she said the first thought that comes to mind is “happiness”:

“Yeah, just the feeling of that [happiness], *it* [K-pop] is what has given me my *closest friends*, it has given me many of *the best experiences* I’ve had in life, and the *best memories* I have. It is something I value immensely, and something that feels like ‘my own’.” (Italics added for tone-indication, Kari, 30)

K-pop is something *she knows*, it is something *she understands*, and something *she can do* (note: Kari also speaks the Korean language and has lived in South-Korea for a short period of time). To her it is more than a genre; it was a “lifestyle”.

She explains that since it holds such a special place in her heart, it cannot be put in a box. To her, it is bigger than simply a genre present in another culture. This is reflected in how all the informants spoke of K-pop as a whole. The intensity of their interest/participation of/within the fandom, while varied, follows into an idea that this is more than a genre – or at least, it cannot be so easily defined as one, and the word ‘genre’ is used only as a recognizable moniker. This reveals that there is something more profound to their identification and participation. There is more to K-pop than handsome boy bands dancing in unison and pretty videos, that entices them to stay in the fandom.

5.2.1.3. *Why call yourself a K-pop fan?*

Furthermore, the idea of one's identity, and why someone would identify as a fan is also an important question; especially when looking into group-identification/association. The 29-year-old Synnøve, who's in the process of changing careers from teaching music to back-end developing, also mentioned how the community and K-pop plays a pivotal role in the development in some of the fans' identity:

“Of course, one's identity can change over time, based on what one has been through, right? So, for a K-pop fan, it can... Yeah, just being a fan can become a part of someone's identity, I think. [...] If you're a K-pop fan *together*, where you get a common denominator, such as one's interest in K-pop and values, maybe interest in culture. [...] I think the fandom can be a part of that. To help, maybe? It can be a good start, to find your identity through K-pop. Cause, I hadn't gone to Korea if I hadn't heard of this [K-pop], right?” (Synnøve, 29)

This suggests that the fandom is not only a way for the fans to find a community of people having the same interests, but also a way for them to connect on a deeper level. As mentioned, Frank Furedi (2021) spoke of this at length; the younger generation needs to find a community outside of traditional means to find their identity. This is coherent, not only in the sense of the importance the community plays in the fandom, but also in the sense that it is discovered at such a formative age. Many youths today find their communities online; it makes sense that a community, especially of this size will play a part in how the fans learn to engage with the outside world for better or for worse – depending on personal perceptions, of course. However, despite this being the case for many fans, there is also deliberation in the fandom as to how far this level of self-identification can go.

Emma, a musically inclined and a 21-year-old Media and Communication bachelor's student, talked about the “discussion” pertaining to the identification of the K-pop fan rather balanced. Despite never having met anyone whose identity revolves around K-pop, and only K-pop, in the real world, she mentioned that she has witnessed it online:

“People who; they go to school, they don't work, they have no other interests, they *only* speak of K-pop... that's where [social media]

you find those who are unhealthy, kind of.. the toxic fans. Because, the only thing they approach is K-pop, the only thing they read about, listen to, watch, is K-pop. [...] The only people they talk to are *other* K-pop fans; that's when you can say K-pop is their entire identity. That's when they become the *same*, that there is nothing else to their identity *but* K-pop, and that's where it gets risky, I think.” (Emma, 21)

She did make sure to mention that she does not think this is unique for K-pop fans alone. Despite never having met anyone in the real world that would match this description, she did say that she sees this online in other fandoms as well – be it television shows or other genres of music – when people become what she referred to as ‘obsessed’; that's when it becomes an indictment on their personality and behavior on social media. Meaning, becoming ‘toxic’: the idea of online ‘toxicity’ is a rather contentious debate online, and one that I am sure the reader has seen to some extent. It means that one can fall into the habit of ‘internet trolling’, ‘force’ their way into someone's feed, bullying, or ruin discourse by being purposefully inflammatory. Within the context of the K-pop fandom, the data suggests it is defined by ‘putting down’ other K-pop sub-fandoms (meaning; fan groups to specific artists or groups), or ‘hating’ on artists, and what Emma illustrated in her response as seen above.

Interestingly, despite the negative connotations surrounding the hyper-self-identification she mentioned, she did find conversations surrounding identity important when speaking about people's affiliations with fandoms.

“I think that, so long you talk with other people, as long as you are interested in other things as well, it is fine to be ‘obsessed’ with K-pop. [...] Where it is a big part of your identity. As long as you take a break from it from time to time; focus on other people, focus on other things. When it becomes the only part of your identity, that's when the ‘toxicity’ begins. That's when one becomes a really obsessed fan that says really, really, creepy things; who behaves very weird on concerts...” (Emma, 21)

What she was alluding to here, and later confirmed during the interview was the *sa-saeng* fan (사생팬; sa-saeng-paen). This is the ‘crazed fan’, as also illustrated in Jenkins (2012, pp. 12-13); the ones whose obsession has resulted in them stalking their favorite idols. In Korean, sa-saeng fan, translates to “the

stalking fan”, as it illustrates their repeated infringement on the idols’ private lives etc.

Emma underlines that becoming a sa-saeng fan is the “worst outcome” of a fan, and something mentioned by many of the informants as something one ought to avoid. The notion of these kinds of fans was something they attributed to the poor perception many had of their fan-community, and some of them theorized that the media-visibility of these kinds of fans is what gives the K-pop fandom such a bad reputation.

5.2.1.4. *In-group vs out-group*

Many of them reminisced back to their secondary school days, and mentioned instances where this idea of the ‘crazed fan’ was donned upon them, causing discomfort in their visibility as fans of K-pop:

“I have always... I have always been afraid to call myself a K-pop fan. I know there are many these days, who are ‘unhinged’: who screams to the world that they are a K-pop fan, but it feels like... When I went to secondary school, *koreaboo* was a frequently used nickname, which is something I do not identify with **at all**. [...] [I]t was never at the level where: “Oh I want to be Korean!” it was more like: “This is super cool!”. But, I think it might have something to do with the fact that, when you’re overwhelmed with all the new stuff, you become hooked, and want to learn everything, and so on.” (Signe, 20)

Signe further told that she would be getting comments such as “they [K-pop idols] look like girls”, or “but you don’t even understand what they’re saying.” All of which she mentioned upset her; considering these are “real people we’re talking about” (Signe, 20), and K-pop is something she cares for deeply. Although she referred to herself as a “fandom-girl”, and mentioned how her previous classmates also viewed her accordingly, this pushback is not unheard of amongst the fans. Synnøve called back to a conversation she had had with a friend of hers, who is also a K-pop fan, who mentioned something similar happening:

“Where she has often been in a car with a couple of other people. We’re from the countryside, right? So, there are many “cruisers” and so on, and she then she has maybe played a couple songs. And then, often, that one is met with ... that bad things are said, I guess you could say. Maybe about K-pop artist, regarding their looks, and songs, and that the boys looks like girl etc, you know? That is one

of the more typical instances I feel I hear the most often. Yeah, that the boys looks like girl, that the boys wear makeup, and yeah ... stuff like that.” (Synnøve, 29)

It is further alluded that they can feel like they belong to two worlds. Where one of the worlds is where they are surrounded by those who love K-pop and accept them as fans; and then another world, where they are scrutinized for enjoying K-pop and South Korean culture. There is also a discomfort that this brings, since they mention that they become hesitant to share K-pop music to those who they are uncertain would share their interest.

Whilst speaking about K-pop’s recent entrance into the Western conscious, Martin (17), mentioned that BTS’ latest appearances on US-based award shows has helped the perception of K-pop by the general-public. That, by being accepted into more mainstream programming and channels, BTS has broken through some kind of barrier, where it is more readily accepted by the Western public – that K-pop is slowly becoming a part of a ‘cultural canon’, which is something similar to what Jenkins referred to (2012, p 18). Although Martin spoke of pushback in comments and the like, he has witnessed a shift, as of late, where K-pop seems to more accepted at large. However, when talking about identity and K-pop he also mentioned the idea of the ‘koreaboo¹⁵’:

“I feel like, if I had lived in Korea, I would have just thought [of K-pop] as a regular person on the street. But, maybe ... at least in the Western community, I would think most of the ‘koreaboos’ ... basically the ones that make/like the culture ‘to the extreme’, and actually wants to *be* apart of the ethnicity, and the culture, and follow Korean norms, and not just be a part of the subculture, for example. [...] So, I would say that the term ‘K-pop fan’ is *more* negatively associated, for a normal person than not.” (Martin, 17)

Martin’s relationship with K-pop is somewhat different from the other K-pop fans of this study, seeing as both his parents are Korean and he has grown up with predominantly Korean media, despite being born and raised in Norway. His perspective is an important one. There is some clear distinction that repeats itself

¹⁵ Koreaboo refers to non-Korean fans of K-pop, similar to the weaboo (non-Japanese fans of anime). These terms are often used derogatorily and can imply excessive or extreme fandom. They create tension within these fan communities as they often represent the extreme end of the fan spectrum, akin to sa-saeng fans in K-pop culture

in how the fans who participated in this study refers to themselves versus those who do not listen to K-pop: ‘us’, ‘other K-pop fans’, versus the ‘normal person’.

To listen to K-pop is seemingly considered fundamentally ‘abnormal’, and what Martin mentioned is quite interesting: “If I had lived in Korea, I would have just thought about it as a regular person on the street.” What this suggests, that considering this is not the standard pop-music in Norway, its abnormality is defined by it being “non-English-foreign”, more so than it simply being sung and performed in a foreign language. Alluding to the fact that if the music is not performed in English, and/or Spanish, it is considered foreign – in the ways that matter with regards to what is considered normal, or abnormal – despite English technically being a foreign language to most Norwegians. This adds a significant layer into the general understanding with how the ‘normal person’ perceives K-pop, seeing as there is a likelihood of xenophobia as well.

Martin is not the only one to refer the non-K-pop-listener as a ‘normal person’. There is a clear distinction between the in-group of K-pop fans and the out-group non-K-pop fans, further underlining the fandom as a community.

5.2.2. Content

As mentioned in the introduction to this sub-chapter, the two themes motivating fan-retention that emerged were *community* and *content*. Now that we have gone over the community aspect of fan-retention, we will now look at the content aspect of fan-retention.

Contrary to the stereotype that K-pop exists with only one brand of music, the genre caters to all musical tastes, including rock, rap and ballads; it is not limited solely to pop music and colorful over-the-top, almost nonsensical, music videos. This is also demonstrated through each of the informants’ elaborations around their fan object(s). The fan object(s) in this case are irrelevant to how they were exposed to the genre initially. The main factor for fan initiation is, of course, the music; however, as demonstrated, it evolves into fandom as they find their group and begin to follow the different idols. Fan participation seems to stem mostly from how the K-pop industry markets their idols.

Briefly directing your attention back to Fiske (1992) and Ytre-Arne & Das (2020), and the general idea and goal that K-pop has within the Hallyu wave – not

only from a capitalistic perspective, but also the one mentioned in President Kim's speech in 1994 – which adds a layer to the discussion regarding why fans remain in the fandom. It is pertinent to remember that fan-participation, fan-object-relation, and the maintenance of the para-social relationship, is promoted by the South Korean cultural industries to reach a wider audience. This is illustrated by what was mentioned in 1.3., the V-lives, the fan-meets, the constant availability of the idols, and the image they are to uphold within the industry and towards their audiences. These aspects of K-pop were frequently mentioned during the interviews, often unprovoked. The line “there is so much content” was echoed by nearly all informants, and proved a huge component as to why they continued their investigation into the genre and subsequent fandom. Obviously, as mentioned, the community aspect of the fandom is a major factor for their decision to remain in the fandom, there is also much elaboration by and amongst the fans with regards to this overflow of content. On one hand it is viewed as a positive; that there is always something new to enjoy. However, on the other hand it is also something that concerns the fans. Before elaborating that K-pop can be viewed as overproduced, Signe explains her take on it:

“I feel it's obviously due to how K-pop is produced. Everyone has to fit into a specific concept or show a specific thing. [...] And there is much more content [in K-pop] than there is in the West. 'Cause I feel, if you follow a K-pop group they will release like three albums in a year. Whilst, if you like whatever Western artist they might release an album once every three years. So, I feel there is much more [content] in K-pop.”

Throughout her interview she did repeat that this is one of her favorite aspects of the genre, and she is not alone. Almost all the informants mentioned the amount of content production in K-pop as one of its defining factors, and many of them spoke of it as a positive. Martin attributed it to “You can enjoy any group you like, and there are many groups who have their own ‘terms’ and features. They can appeal to more people”. However, some found it to be somewhat overwhelming as well:

“[...] I can't keep up with it all, at all. And, I know that if I actively tried, I still wouldn't be able to anyway. [...] Maybe I'd be able to choose a member, perhaps, and that I was only to focus on this person, and what they do. [...] But it is insane how ‘much’ there is. Especially considering they can have their own solo-streams and

stuff. I have, for example, seen Jungkook from BTS pop up at random, at like a v-live, and just sit there for 2 hours and just talks with the fans. That they just do it at random. [...] this is also on top of all the content that is planned. [...] No, I just can't keep up, to be honest." (Siri, 27)

The amount of content also inspires some discussion amongst the fans. Maya who, much like Signe, appreciates the amount of content, does mention the following when she was asked what she did not appreciate with K-pop:

"Well, there is again the part where it [K-pop] is so *over produced*. It is hardy personal, and the more you become.. the more you become aware of all the personalities of the K-pop-events are *fabricated* for you to like them. [...] And, of course, it is *extreme how they're trained*, how extreme the environment they're in, and all of those diets. [...] And when there are so many young people that are so invested in it [K-pop] they get a poor relationship with their own bodies. [...] Cause, they [idols] are represented as the ideal." (Maya, 18)

Maya is not alone in these observations, Signe also mentioned how she worries about these aspects of K-pop:

"[...] I try to distinguish what is positive with the idols and people, as one, and then the industry is its own thing. For example... I find it totally insane how much they are forced to do, and how overworked many of they are... Especially, for example, I have been really into NCT Dream lately, and it looks like they are about to faint on the spot now and then. They get worked so much, so they always have to have a comeback, and they have those so many times in a year. Well, from the perspective of being fan, it is always nice to get more content, but then you also end up getting really worried, because you see how ill many of them [idols] get [...]"

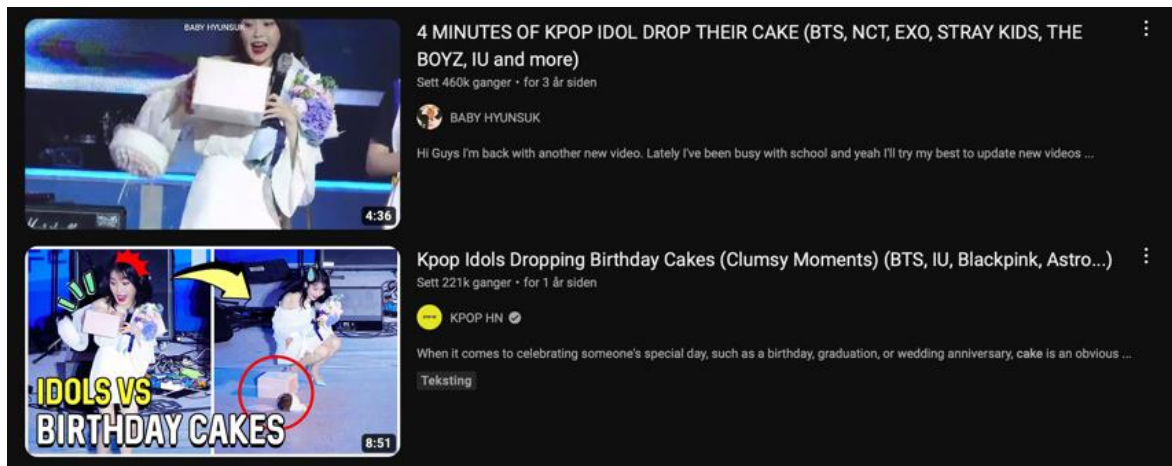


Figure 7: Screen shot from YouTube.com after searching "Kpop idols dropping cake compilation". Screen shot taken 19.09.2023.

Signe also went on to talk about how the diet-culture worries her and talked about a fan-theory (i.e., the ‘meta-texts’ as Jenkins calls them, 2012) as to why the idols keep ‘accidentally’ dropping their cakes on their birthdays (Figure 7). For context, this is a phenomenon so common that fans have made ‘compilation videos’ of it on YouTube¹⁶. The fan-theory is that the idols drop their cakes on purpose due to caloric restrictions permeated by both industry standards and encouragement from the idols respective EC(s). Signe attributes this to not only the abovementioned, but also that it is a result of the idols’ lack of autonomy in the industry, which is common knowledge amongst fans of K-pop.

Furthermore, there is the argument that K-pop is so heavily competitive, mentioned by especially Maya, Signe and Kari. Although they all enjoy the content, they also express concern for both idols and fans, as it pertains to both this body-ideal, but also a disdain for how competitive this industry is.

5.3. Motivations: Participation

In examining the motivations behind fan-initiation (duality of exposure) and fan-retention in the informants (community and content), we will now look at the varying degrees as to how their fan-participation takes shape. Both during the commencement of the interviews, and through deductive examination of the data, I have identified three levels of engagement from the fans within the fandom. In

¹⁶ For further context, see: BABY HYUNSUK. (2020, July 7). *4 MINUTES OF KPOP IDOL DROP THEIR CAKE (BTS, NCT, EXO, STRAY KIDS, THE BOYZ, IU and more)*. Retrieved September 2023, from YouTube: <https://youtu.be/Lio40XUcxqM?si=mrBdEfpKGnOSJ0-Z>

this section we will delve into the diverging motivations of sustained involvement, exemplifying distinct patterns of fan participation among the informants.

This exploration is structured around three roles: the *Organizers*, the *Participants*, and finally the *Spectators*.

For some fans, engagement with the fandom and media genre varies: some dive in headlong, while others participate more passively, akin to the extrovert-introvert dichotomy. While the former is more common, this study refrains from definitively measuring prevalence due to its limited scope. However, it is crucial to consider these differences, as they were observed in the data.

The intense dive into the fandom and its content is a common and important factor, yet the manner of engagement varies. There is no discernible generational difference either; rather, it is dependent on the individual. Illustrated by the experiences of Siri and Signe: Signe thrives on the community aspect, using it to establish a social foothold in her new university town, while Siri acknowledges a preference for “lurking” in these communities, especially online.

5.3.1. Organizers

The organizers, as understood within the context of this thesis are the ones who actively produce fan-content for other fans to enjoy, i.e., the fans who engage in what Fiske calls *textual productivity* (1992, p. 39). This we see particularly in Kari (30) and Therese (27) from this study.

Kari has been an admin for online fan hubs, and at one point participated in organizing K-pop conventions in Norway. Additionally, this friend group she had been referencing during the interview, has also been a part of organizing conventions and the like.

Therese, 27, as mentioned in her spare time is a host for a K-pop themed podcast. Moreover, she also mentioned that she has made some blogs on Tumblr, and through this made friends she does research for the K-pop podcast with.

Although, this kind of textual production is not necessarily a given, it is valuable for the fandom; especially recalling the interview I had with the course leader at the *Hallyu Wave* course at Hadeland Folkehøgskole in late 2017. These platforms and textual production have the potential to help facilitate courses like these, as it can be assumed that without garnering some foothold within Norwegian culture, this course would not attract much interest from a predominantly

Norwegian student body. Additionally, this productivity also helps sustain the community aspect on a larger scale than that which was explained by, for example, Signe.

5.3.2. Participants

As for the participants, we are looking at what Fiske called *enunciative productivity* (1992, pp. 37-8). This enunciative productivity is defined by their vocal and physical engagement with K-pop. They are not producers of texts necessarily, but they do utilize the fandom as means for social gathering, style etc.

As mentioned, Signe, 20, has used K-pop as a means to establish a social foothold in her new town, as well as a means to gain social contact with strangers at K-pop concerts; Martin, 17, use K-pop as a means for social gatherings and views music videos with friends; Maya, 18, mentioned how K-pop was a huge component for her friend group when she started senior secondary school, and further explained how K-pop had helped her gain more friends when she studied abroad the year prior to our interview; Emma, 21, mentioned how she and her friends will watch K-pop themed videos online, or watch music videos when they are together; and, finally Synnøve, 29, used K-pop for her music examination prior to becoming a teacher, she sang a song from the group 2NE1. As well, it is a part of discourse amongst her friends, despite it being something she explained them not being “up to date on” any longer.

As style will be examined closer in 6.2. Stylistic practices, there was also mention of how they would be inspired by fashion trends related to K-pop, or noticed it on others before initiating conversations about K-pop. As Fiske demonstrated, this enunciative productivity was different from the semiotic, insofar as it is communication about and around K-pop happening externally – which also seems to be the signifier of the *participant* role within this fandom.

5.3.3. Spectators

As for the spectators, it looks to be most in line with what Fiske referred to as *semiotic productivity* (1992, p. 37); as in, the fan-participation happening largely internally. There is the argument that this level of participation is a combination of the semiotic and enunciative productivities, pertaining to what

Jenkins (2012) illustrated, however, this will be examined further in the 7.0. Discussion.

Out of all the participants of this study, Siri, 27, was the only one that fell into this category. She explained that her level of fandom has largely happened online, and that she has not utilized K-pop as a social vehicle in the same way as what has been illustrated above. She explained that she mostly engages in online gaming, and, from what has been gathered, this seems to be where she achieves a social foothold, more-so than with K-pop. For her, K-pop is a personal experience, and something she enjoyed largely by herself.

This activity is often called ‘lurking’ online, which is the term Siri also used when describing her engagement with K-pop and its fandom: meaning someone who does not actively engage in online discussions, but reads and pays attention to them. Considering the nature of this level of fan-participation, it is unsurprising there was only one out of the eight interviewed who fell into this category; however, I claim this cautiously, due to my affiliation with the fandom. They are more common than one would think; however, gaining data on them can be challenging due to their passive participation.

6.0. Analysis: Part Two – Practices

Now that we have looked at the motivations in the fandom, examining their initiation (i.e., how they found K-pop; the duality of exposure), what made them remain in the fandom (fan-retention; community and content), and their levels of participation in the fandom (organizers, participants, and spectators) we will now move on to second part of the analysis, by examining fan-practices. The separation of these two chapters has been done for the sake of clarity, as there is much to cover.

In this chapter we will be analyzing the second question posited in the introduction of 5.0.:

(2) What *social and stylistic practices* does the fandom consist of?

Firstly, this has been done through dividing social and stylistic practices. The social practices pertain to the commonalities between the informants. Meaning, what they have in common, as well as what opinions they may share (on topics such as *fan-authenticity*). The stylistic practices, however, pertains to fan-specific clothing styles, jargon, and their thoughts/feelings on K-pop music.

There were many factors in ‘being a fan’; unwritten rules, modes of conduct, and even hints of a philosophy dictating behavior. Some of this presented through participant deliberation on what constitutes a fan, and some in the surrounding public opinions about the fandom. Both aspects are necessary to understand the fandom and how they present themselves.

6.1. Social practices

Here we will begin by investigating the social practices, or rather, characteristics observed when analyzing the interviews conducted. Through investigation I have noted four facets of social characteristics; these have been dubbed *curiosity*, *hobbies*, *fan practices* and *fan authenticity*, and will be presented accordingly.

6.1.1. Curiosity

Before looking into any of the other major similarities amongst the fans, it is prudent to look at the most signifying denominator they have in common, which is curiosity. Especially their curiosity pertaining to other cultures, seeing as they most likely would not have even considered K-pop, had it not been for this interest. It is as Synnøve (29) said: “I hadn’t gone to Korea if I hadn’t heard of this [K-pop], right?”.

Interestingly, their curiosity is not only limited to a curiosity of other cultures, but it looks to be inspired by *how* interested they become in any given field of interest. Without the quality of going headlong into one interest, the fan-element and engagement do not seem to happen, as is illustrated in both Jenkins’ (2012) and Jin’s (2022) texts. Even though there are no direct quotes from any of the informants, besides Maya as we saw above, how much they know about K-pop, the culture, whether they have gone/plan to go to Korea, is indicative of this quality. They have a strong interest in their overarching fan-object, K-pop, and this influences how they talk about it. There are a few instances in the interviews

where this occurs. This being in the sense that they became excited, illustrated in how much faster their pace became, and how much they were smiling when reminiscing of when they discovered their interest:

“[...] ever since secondary school I have been really interested in Asian cultures. Since, when I first found out about it, I was like: ‘oh my days, this is so different from any of the Norwegian stuff I have seen before!’ Like, how these [Asian] buildings look, when we [Norway] have these kinds of buildings, how and everything surrounding that. I was completely shocked: and that’s when it became such a big interest, which is when I fell into K-pop and a little anime, as it was first, I think” (Signe, 20)

In this part of the interview Signe spoke with valor, and was visibly excited to share this discovery, exemplifying how important this was – and still is – to her. Quickly bringing back the identity aspect of the fans; how they engage with the media, and how much joy their interest provides is a contingency with regards to how much their curiosity provides rather than takes.

By engaging with the topic, and the culture, they achieve elation, which also reinforces their reason to remain in this fandom. What is fascinating with K-pop fans is that they do not only get this elation when engaging with their it-groups, favorite artist, or shows, but also when engaging with other aspects of South Korean culture, such as the language, or the possibility to travel to the country itself.

Furthermore, the variety of being engaged with a culture at large also provides an additional facet to their engagement with K-pop, which is the inspiration to engage with other cultures as well:

“[...] Are you K-pop fan, you won’t necessarily be only interested in K-pop, kind of. Yes, you can be interested in many different cultures.

[...] I really enjoy the country [South Korea] as a place you can travel to ... [...] I would definitely travel to other countries to learn about their culture. [...] I find going to another country to learn about their culture, is a personal thing, right? You get so much closer [to the culture]..”(Synnøve, 29)

To engage with not only South Korean culture, but other cultures as well, we can see they further expand their knowledge of the world as well. This is taking the older fans previous and forerunning anime-appreciation into consideration and as a key example of this phenomenon. The trans-cultural affiliation works in favor

of any further interests, and their pre-established sense of curiosity for other cultures only escalates the possibility of them diving into the media of other cultures as well. In fan-communities, this is commonly referred to as “pipeline-theory” (for further context see 6.2.1. *Negotiated Language* further down in this thesis), which Signe explained as follows:

“I have read a lot about this ‘pipeline-theory’: That, if you like one fandom, you are more likely to fall into another one. I have seen maps over all these different pipelines, and I found it super interesting. Cause, when I looked at it, I saw that this was true in my case! Because I went from 5SOS [5 seconds of summer: a band] to anime, and then to K-pop! Wow!” (Signe, 20)

Although, the fandom refers to it as a ‘pipeline-theory’, it is mostly related to how one field of interest can relate to another, i.e., if one enjoys knitting one is more likely to pick up crocheting, than, let’s say, tinkering with heavy machinery as their next hobby.

This suggests that this curiosity is a characteristic heavily indicative of a K-pop fan.

6.1.2. Hobbies

Further investigating other similarities amongst the fans of this study, they all shared similar hobbies, creative endeavors, and a propensity to value time in groups, rather than alone. All eight of the informants mentioned that they enjoy spending time with friends in their spare time, listing listening to music as a key component to this activity. Of course, how frequently they spend time together with friends varies depending on how much free time they have on their hands. As we saw previously with Siri, the amount of time they exude on K-pop, and in the intermission of whatever life demands, is dependent on how much of that time they have.

Furthermore, we see in all the participants that, although social gatherings were a priority, age played a part in how much, or how accessible, these opportunities were.

“I have always been very active on social media, so I have gotten to know many through social media. So, it’s natural that that’s where most of the contact happens. I obviously have some [friends] where we try to meet up to play games, or maybe go out for a drink, but we are now in the age where

toddler life has started to take priority, so that has become quite minimal [meeting up in person]” (Kari, 30)

Even though Kari is the only parent out of the informants, this limitation in the possibility to meet in-person was echoed with some of the other older fans as well. Siri’s friends moved out of the city, so they rarely meet in-person, and Therese mentioned that her friends did not live in her immediate area. It is also worth adding that many of the informants mentioned that they were quite active online, meaning they seem quite accustomed to maintaining friendships there as well.

Meeting friends in-person seemed much easier for the younger fans, as Martin mentioned that he enjoys ‘hanging out’ with friends and going to the city to go shopping. Both Signe and Emma mentioned that they have friends in their immediate vicinity, and that they enjoy listening to music, or discussing current events in K-pop with them.

Additionally, almost every informant has some creative endeavor as an activity. Maya plays drums in a band; Synnøve, beyond what has already been mentioned, plays both the guitar and bass, and enjoys to draw; Therese, as mentioned, is a K-pop podcast host, dances, and enjoys videography; Kari, next to working as a journalist, is an instructor for an amateur theatre group, and enjoys to draw and paint; Siri enjoys gaming and drawing; and finally, Emma, plays a brass instrument, dances and draw.

There is an element of enjoying the arts that seems to be common denominator amongst the fans, which also plays into what Fiske, Jenson and Jenkins (Fiske, 1992; Jenson, 1992; Jenkins, 2012) talked about regarding fan-productions. To be a fan is not only to admire, but also to create.

6.1.3. Fan Practices

Now, as it pertains to fan tasks. One of the more known facets of fandom is that they move with intention in terms of practices, and that they have tasks that they perform. In the interviews there was mention of such habits, be it in relation to fan-tasks, or fan-engagements. One notable one is that they try to ‘sneak’ in K-pop in everyday situations, even if surrounded by people they believe to be non-fans. Take Synnøve (29) for example. Even though she stated she does not have

many friends who are non-fans, she did mention that she will talk about K-pop if the music is playing:

“[...] I might put some song on if there’s a playlist, that everyone is listening to, I might sneak some in. And that’s when I will try to make sure, that ‘this you need to listen to guys.’ I might also share some of the music with one of my friends. She doesn’t listen to any of it, but she might get really excited, when listening to up-beat K-pop.”

She is not alone in this, as this looks to be common practice amongst the fans who participated in this study. Take Signe for example; as we saw earlier, she would show K-pop to her cousin, maybe add it to party-playlists, but be mindful of what music she will start with:

“[...] you always show the English songs BTS has first: Just so you can see if you get a bite. To put it this way ... when I first got my cousin into K-pop, you don’t start with the Korean songs: I played *Shut up and Dance* by Jason Derulo. [...] Like, you don’t start with the most extreme first, like NCT’s *Sticker*, you don’t start with those.” (Signe, 20)

There seems to be a layer of shame attributed to being a K-pop fan, that the informants are walking around. This brings back what Signe mentioned earlier; that she was considered the ‘fandom-girl’ at her secondary school, and despite not being outright bullied for it, she did know that it was not necessarily considered a positive. However, this does not stop them from ‘testing the waters’ when it comes to showing people the genre.

“[...] if I notice that, a friend, *could* be interested [...] I might say: ‘ok ... what is it that this person enjoys? Which music genres do they like?’ then proceed to finding a music video that fits their interest in music, and then try.. yeah, try to show them the song, show them the music video, for then to see what they think, but I... Yeah, when, I have discussions about K-pop, I usually have it with those *I know* are interested in K-pop” (Emma, 21)

Emma further explained that due to the stereotypes about K-pop fans – that they have a reputation of being crazed and have done some ‘crazy’ things – she likes to be mindful of with whom, and at what time, she will bring up K-pop.

So, besides from the general fan-tasks, and what K-pop fans considers fan-authenticity (which we will look at next), one of the more important practices is that they enjoy sharing the genre but are quite mindful of who they share it with.

6.1.4. Fan authenticity

The introduction of ‘fan-authenticity’ might seem tentative at first, yet it holds significance as it was pivotal in gathering insights into their perceptions of established fan practices that define an authentic fan. Within online fandom communities, being an authentic fan is often associated with specific markers and practices. By eliciting their perspectives on these aspects, the aim was to compile a more comprehensive inventory of common fan practices within the K-pop fandom.

The question regarding what constitutes an ‘authentic fan’ permeates online K-pop discussion forums: who streams the most, who has the most albums, who goes to the most concerts, etc. The preliminary hypothesis was that: in order to be considered a K-pop fan one simply had to be a fan of the genre, and according to the informants, they all seem to agree to this notion.

Unsurprisingly, the older fans found the notion of fan-authenticity-participation conundrum somewhat silly, if not also unhelpful. Synnøve mentioned how she was not fond of the labeling:

“I am of the opinion, that you have to make that [one’s fan-authenticity] decision yourself. [...] I’m not a fan of putting such labels on oneself. That one must vote on every *Music Bank*, that one must stream every time, kind of. Only... Only to live up to some other person’s expectation. For, there are those who *have* those expectations. There is no actual fact that *that* is what a ‘real’ fan does, right?”

She continued to elaborate that one’s fan participation could vary:

“I think, that some, see being a real fan is to follow all that the groups does, every concert and the like. For some it is only to listen to the music, and follow them on social media, for example. To be a real fan, yeah. For me it is to only listen, right?”

She then continued to mention that even though she herself does not participate on voting (on music shows) etc., it does not negate the fact that she views herself as a real fan.

Similarly, Therese, had a similar take but for different reasons. She herself is more focused on avoiding ‘gatekeeping’¹⁷ within the community and trying to open the fandom up for more diversity, even among the levels of fan-participation:

“I have, for a long time now, tried to avoid being a gatekeeper to any community I fall under. This is because I remember when *I, myself*, started participating in whatever community where I was new, there would always be some who’d say things such as ‘you’re not a real fan of whatever it is, because you do not know this silly info that doesn’t really mean anything’. So, in my own time I’ve decided to focus more on; ‘Hey, you like one K-pop song, from one group? Cool! Then you’re a newbie K-pop fan. That’s great!/ You like every single song from a group, and you know everything about them? Cool! Then you’re a fan of that group, and also a K-pop fan. That’s great!”

She continued by saying that, instead of focusing on how much someone might know about K-pop, she finds it be more productive to back-up the people who enjoy the genre. She is of the opinion that it is more important that more people listen to it, rather than everyone who does being an expert on all things K-pop. To her it is about being a part of something, and sharing the experience of K-pop, rather than keeping it within one specific community or within one specific paradigm of ‘the perfect fan’. Kari also shared this opinion, and put it quite nicely:

“I have always been of the opinion that no one gets to define what you are a fan of, or how big of a fan you are. [...] people express their love and their thing in their own way. [...] For me it is very much defined by that feeling. One can be a fan *for different reasons*. One can be a fan because one likes the music, or one can be a fan because one likes the people in the group. [...] I have received it [comments] before, where I wasn’t a real fan because I didn’t like 100% of the music they have released. And, for me, that gets a bit ridiculous.. *That’s* when you begin to exclude so much in what, I think, is supposed to be a very *inclusive* thing, an *inclusive concept*.” (Kari, 30)

¹⁷ See 6.2.1.1. Internet Jargon, for context

She further elaborated that the K-pop fandom is a place where many of those who feel like outsiders *can* find a community. That, even though she herself is particularly interested in Asian culture, she is of the belief that those who do not find a place of belonging elsewhere, can find it in the K-pop fandom. Mostly because, that is where she found it herself.

Kari is not alone in this. It is frequently mentioned, across all interviews; K-pop, is as much a fandom, as it is a community. As they talked about K-pop, and elaborated on the questions, it became clear that the fandom and community is synonymous in nature. That despite the in-group discussions, and in some cases arguments with regards to one's authenticity as a fan, the *reason* people become fans is because of this inclusivity Kari mentioned, and not just the music in and of itself.

However, there is also some tasks that must be in place for someone to be 'visible' as a fan. Even though you do not have to follow all the rules of participation, some practices are still expected. Emma said this about being an authentic fan:

"I think, if you're an authentic fan, you have to show that you're a fan of that person. You don't necessarily have to *prove* it, but you can't ignore them all the time, you have to listen to the music. Maybe buy a couple of things? Like if you're a fan, you might not have to do that, but at least show that you're engaged and like the artist."

What she is alluding to here are markers that make you recognizable as a fan, however she was clear that you did not have to buy expensive merch or albums. She said that so long as you listen to their music on Spotify and stated that since the fan-to-fan-object relationship is para-social, and therefore transactional in nature – you buy the music they produce, as the exchange – there are some markers that are necessary to make the ball go around. However, the notion of having to stream a song continuously on YouTube, "to watch a music video ten times, on your laptop, mobile, the TV, simultaneously", was still not necessary. For her, even though she finds the markers important, she underlines that they are there only for the transaction to be possible. That a fan does not need to do more labor than listening to an artist's music and respecting them as a creator.

One's authenticity seem therefore to be mostly defined by one's own perception of what constitutes a fan, rather than following every unwritten rule of the community: these rules revolve around possessing an almost encyclopedic knowledge of K-pop, consistent streaming habits, purchasing all albums/merch released by a specific idol or idols, wholeheartedly supporting and endorsing everything produced by the idol(s), attending concerts, and direct communication with their idol(s).

The informants, however, seem to be more concerned with the experience of fandom, rather than the tasks fans are commonly associated with and that the overarching authenticity of a fan is how much that individual fan enjoys K-pop rather than anything else.

6.2. Stylistic Practices

In this final chapter, we will explore the distinctive elements that define this fandom, specifically focusing on language, fashion, and music. Although the role of music has been extensively discussed earlier, this section serves as a conclusive exploration, offering an essential synthesis of the previous discussions.

This segment aims to delve into the stylistic practices observed within the data collected from interviews. Drawing from Hebdige's comprehensive examination of subcultural stylistic practices (1979), which were integral to subcultural research, we aim to adopt a holistic analytical approach. Building on the perspectives discussed in 3.0., this thesis endeavors to comprehensively analyze the observed stylistic elements.

Among the stylistic practices observed within this fandom, a critical aspect is the negotiation of language. This negotiation occurs both in literal terms, where fan objects predominantly use a foreign language, and figuratively, as fans often integrate language elements from South Korean culture or other diverse contexts.

Furthermore, as it pertains to fashion, they have distinguishing elements easily recognized by fans. Additionally, they have practices for when and where these styles are used by the fans, be it in everyday life to concerts.

Finally, there is the music element. This fandom is built upon the enjoyment of K-pop music, and it plays a pivotal role in their fandom activities.

6.2.1 Negotiated Language:

Firstly, there is the topic of jargon within the fandom. This can be words they acquired from the Korean language, such as title, and hierarchy markers such as *unni* (big sister, female-female) *noona* (big sister, male-female), *oppa* (big brother/boyfriend, female-male), *hyung* (big brother, male-male), and many others. These words represent age difference, and who is talking to whom, such as whether a term is said by a male to another male (as illustrated in the brackets above). Additionally, there are synonyms within the fandom – which we can also see across others – such as *gatekeepers* and *stan*, as well as online-jargon such as *pipelines*.

Here we will analyze how they use language within the context of their fandom. Some is borrowed; some is created within.

6.2.1.1. Internet Jargon

To begin with, looking at words that proliferate online spaces, such as the terms *gatekeeper* and *pipelines*. The use of these terms can tell us much about how fans speak about and amongst each other.

Firstly, looking at the term *gatekeeper*: as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “a person or thing that controls access to something, or that monitors and selects information, etc.” (gatekeeper, n., additional sense, 2023). As opposed to the original meaning being someone in charge of a gate, online spaces have also adopted this utility of the word. As defined by one of the users on *The Urban Dictionary*, a gatekeeper is, “When someone is an asshole enough to tell you that you don't have enough qualities to like what you want to like or be what you want to be, solely based on their opinions and experiences, even if they don't know as much about what said person aspires to like/be” (Ikindofhatemysself, 2021).

As illustrated by the informants in earlier sections, this is also a prevalent idea within the fandom. The user, Ikindofhatemysself, even provided an example under their definition, exemplifying a conversation amongst fans, showing a hypothetical conversation where person A proclaims a fan-identity of a topic, but due to not being able to recite an extensive list of details pertaining to this fandom, Person A is called “not a real fan” (Ikindofhatemysself, ‘Gatekeeper’, 2021), i.e., the ‘authentic-fan’ notion from earlier. This mirrors what was implied by Therese when she talked about what makes a K-pop fan. This term is used to describe

unfavorable fan-behavior. This idea of gatekeeping being bad was mirrored across the interviews, as shown in earlier sections.

Secondly, the term *pipeline*, is also something one sees on online forums, and despite there lacking definitive definitions as to what it means, Signe's explanation above covers it quite nicely. Essentially, 'pipe-lines theory' means the most likely trajectory from one interest to another. Additionally, Therese mentioned in a throwaway comment that she was an "Emo to K-pop-fan-pipeline" talking about her previous fandom interests before getting into K-pop. In an exploratory endeavor, I chose to employ the aforementioned term to gauge its comprehension by one of the informants (Synnøve, 29) subsequent to the initial instances in which I had encountered it. She exhibited a clear understanding of the term, as evidenced by her seamless response to the posed question, indicating a proficient grasp of the concept. In the course of additional research, I encountered a video on YouTube elucidating the term 'fandom pipeline,' presented by the creator ColeyDoesThings (*the fandom pipeline*, 2022), explaining in detail what has been stated by Signe. Most interestingly, the exploration extended to the commentary section, where viewers engaged in a thoughtful deliberation on the observed phenomenon.

6.2.1.2. *Fandom Jargon*

Here we will explore some more of the jargon which presented itself in the interviews; those being *stan*, the *finger-heart*, and other Korean specific words. These have been divided into "something borrowed", as in they derive from other fandoms, and "something new", being the ones deriving from within the K-pop fandom. Unsurprisingly, the latter being words of Korean origin, and the previous being commonly attributed to Eminem.

Stan (Something borrowed)

Stan, in the context it presented itself in the data, seemed to be a placeholder for the term fan, almost alluding to some kind of difference between the two, without this distinction being obvious.

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, it means "an extremely or excessively enthusiastic and devoted fan" (Merriam-Webster, (n.d.)). In its 'Word History' section, it is attributed to Eminem, where Stan was the name of this kind

of fan, in his song under the same title. The difference however between the fan and the stan is not immediately obvious; in the data, it seems to be this placeholder as mentioned. A stan is simply someone with a more ‘concentrated’ devotion to a fan-object.

Finger hearts (Something new)



Figure 8: BTS and President Joe Biden, picture from BTS' official X (formerly Twitter) account. Posted 1. June. 2022.

The finger-heart, or the onehanded heart-sign is one you see commonly used by K-pop artists, and a hand sign that has popped up in the West as well (Figure 8). Siri, for instance, after being asked if there are any major differences between what you can do amongst K-pop fans versus non-fans, she talked about this symbol having become an emoji (👉) and being used by her boss to signify pinching – small amount – changes needed in the app she works on. She also attributes this to the fast-pace changing of meme-cultures, mentioning she can no longer keep up with the trending K-pop memes, but remembers the old ones.

Additionally, there are Korean words, such as *saranghae* (사랑해; I love you), *oppa* (오빠: big brother/boyfriend), *noona* (누나: big sister) etc. These words are directly derived from the South Korean language. Although all informants are of the opinion one is not required to learn the language, most would suggest it,

seeing they are of the opinion one would be “less ignorant if you do” (Signe, 20), that it “can help *enhance* the experience,” (Synnøve, 29), and “adds another level to it” (Kari, 30). It is worth mentioning that Kari, Synnøve and Martin speak the language; however, the idea that one *must* learn it is not one they have, and some, such as Therese and Martin state that a fan will learn some words and terminology, simply due to being exposed.

Notably, and a facet that presents a challenge in terms of independent verification, is the extent to which they would have employed fandom jargon with the same level of openness if they were not aware of my personal affinity for K-pop.

6.2.2 Fashion

When asked, only a few of the fans were able to describe the general fashion of a K-pop fan, describing it more conceptually than something specific and easy to distinguish from the general public, and other fan-communities. This was despite them alluding to a rather clear idea of what the average K-pop fan looks like. Siri, being one of them, described it accordingly:

“For me, K-pop and clothing style goes very much hand in hand. [...] if I am to imagine a K-pop fan, I will see a very specific clothing style. [...] for women I think of, for example, ‘pleated skirts’ ... not the school-type of pleated skirts, but with larger folds. I often think of *that*. Lately, I have associated it with more akin to ‘high-waisted’ clothes, like skirts and trousers – but I think it is also just a trend. [...] I think a black sweater, with some kind of white writing here [points to her arm], with, like, a white stipe as well, maybe. Either a completely white stipe, or a white stripe with some white text down the sleeve, like really specific.”

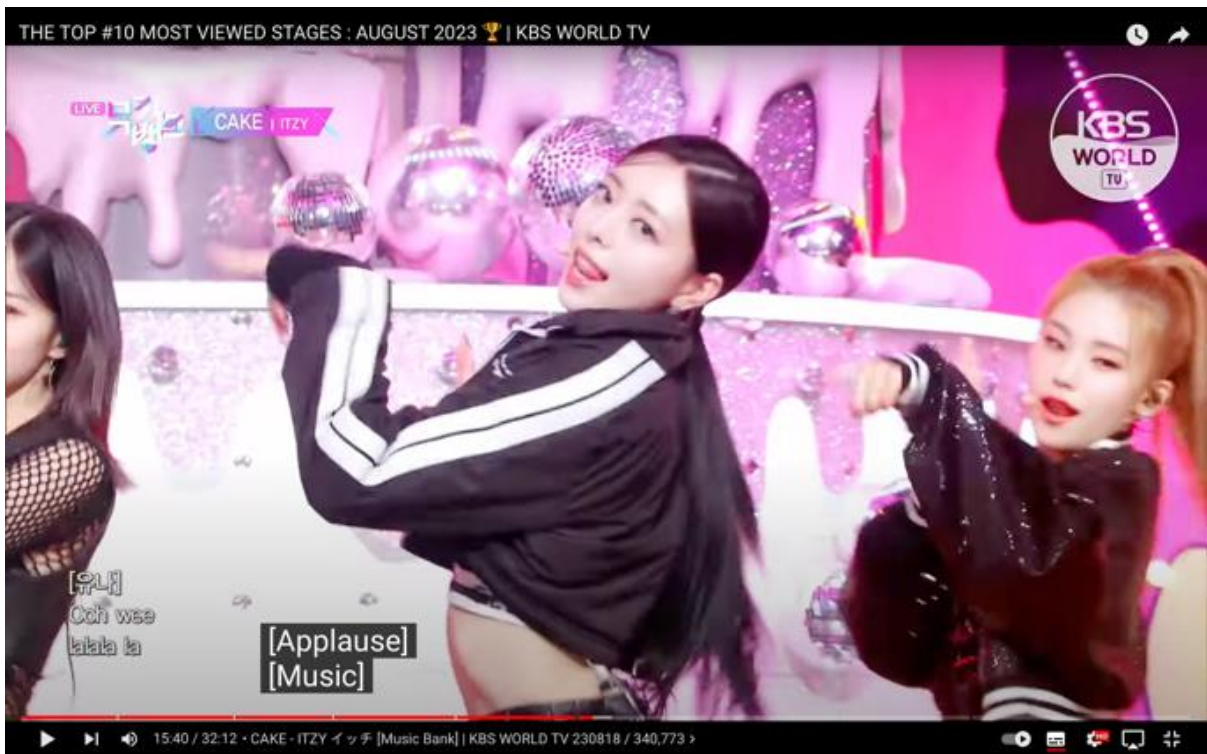


Figure 9: Screenshot of the stripe Siri referred to.

She concludes that this is the casual version of what a K-pop idol might be wearing on stage (Figures 9, 10 & 11), essentially, it is trendy in nature. Similarly, Synnøve has made the same observations, and attests it to the fact that many of the K-pop fans will imitate their favorite groups in terms of style:

“For me it [K-pop] is a kind of genre. [...] I think it is a very unique in comparison to other kinds of pop. There are many different aspects to this genre. Dance, music videos, clothing style. [...] When I have been to concerts, you notice who’s a K-pop fan, who isn’t. You can see it in the clothing style. Often, those who are K-pop fans, imitate, kind of, the K-pop groups.”



Figure 10: Example the 'trendy' styles fans might emulate, as described by Synnøve.



Figure 11: Final example of both 'trendy style' and the pleated skirts mentioned by Siri, and other informants.

This is reoccurring across all interviews, some comparing it to more of a trendy, internet look, and others attributing it to what the K-pop idols wear, and the fans choose to wear similar clothes. “I can *tell* the difference: *especially* with K-pop fans. Sometimes I will see someone in the street who wears really colorful clothes and think ‘I bet that person likes K-pop’. Because, I can *see* the inspiration from other idols” (Emma, 21). Maya echoed something similar, “We [K-pop fans] have colored hair, and we usually wear some kind of K-pop merch. And, I don’t know, lots of color, and that they’re a bit anti-social, meaning they aren’t necessarily the most popular people, kind of. They are the ones sitting in the corner. Yeah, those things. I don’t know how to explain it, it’s just something I know when I see people” (Maya, 18).

Although it has proven difficult to find specific pictures of K-pop fans wearing this style, a quick Google search shows how emblematic the artists’ style is for the K-pop fan. The inclination of fans to emulate these styles often correlates with the general age demographic of fans most intense periods of fandom, typically ranging between the ages of 12 to around 19. Additionally, there exists a component of creative expression through the incorporation of style, as exemplified by Kari, who customized her jeans inspired by BoA (solo-artist; SM

Entertainment), highlighting the fans' ability to infuse their creativity into their fashion choices. This duality is intricately linked with the previously discussed markers: it provides a tangible means to discern admiration through signifiers like merchandise and markers such as fashion or 'shape language'. Furthermore, the manifestation of these styles is particularly pronounced during concerts and events, where fans gather and engage with one another, as explained by informants.

6.2.3 Music and meaning

Now, turning to the music. Although it may seem unusual to address this last, it was an intentional choice. As expected, the fandom revolves around music, and most discussions center on its themes. What intrigued me was the almost casual response when I asked, 'What is a K-pop fan?' Nearly all informants answered matter-of-factly: 'It's a person who likes and listens to K-pop. Yeah, that's it.' (Maya, 18). Of course, Maya elaborated that there's a distinction between those who like only one song and those who simply prefer not to be labeled as 'K-pop fans.'

Music holds a significant place in the lives of the informants. For Synnøve (29), it's part of her daily playlist and a gateway into K-dramas and language learning. Therese (27) not only finds it inspirational for her podcast but also for her dance interest. Kari (30) associates it with happiness and nostalgic fondness, albeit playing a lesser role. Siri (27) experienced it as a significant outlet in her younger years and a source of relatable artists. Martin (17) prioritizes K-pop's influence due to his connection with the culture, enjoying the unique attributes each group offers. Lastly, Emma (21) incorporates it into her hobbies and social discussions, relishing dance and sharing thoughts with friends.

While K-pop acts as a binding factor, the central focus lies on the community it engenders. The informants' nonchalant attitude towards music as the core element is expected, yet our exploration reveals there's much more to it. Beyond the music, there's community, identity formation, roles, style, markers, and a creative outlet. Music seems to facilitate these aspects rather than solely define them.

7.0. Discussion

In this chapter we will be going over the third, and final, research question: What characterizes the Norwegian K-pop fandom as a social community?

As we have seen there are many practices and characteristics that makes up this fandom. We have covered how, and sometimes why, they became K-pop fans, how they found the fandom, and what inspired them to stay. Also, we have classified them into three groups of fandom participation, the *organizers*, the *participants*, and finally the *spectators*.

Furthermore, we have delved into the differing practices discovered in the interviews, be it the commonalities amongst the fans (such as the sense of curiosity, past time activities, and fan practices), their opinions on fan-authenticity, or how they navigate language (both Korean and online), their fashion and the music.

As stated, here we will begin discussing these points of interest and compare them with the theoretical framework illustrated in chapter 3.0., and by this hopefully be able to answer both what characterizes the K-pop fandom as a social community, and by extension answer the overarching research question of this thesis.

Firstly, we will be following the structure laid out in the theory chapter, meaning we will first discuss the modes of *subculture* observed, then we will speak of the modes of *youth culture*, modes of *fandom* and *celebrity culture*, and finally look at the modes of *internet culture*. We will be examining the data presented in the analysis and ‘pulling’ from the literature provided from previous chapters.

7.1. Social Community

“What characterizes the Norwegian K-pop fandom as a social community?”

What can characterize them as a social community, I would argue are their practices, in-group discussions regarding rules and etiquette, and finally that they have roles within this community. Specifically, how these practices are deliberated, and how the social gatherings and share-based culture dictate this community. As we have seen, one of the most prominent facets of this community

is that it functions as a vehicle for the forming of friendships, being the fans' most favored aspect.

Furthermore, the differing roles – such as the *organizers*, *participants*, and *spectator* – further underscores this as a social community. This pertains to both what Furedi (2021) and Hebdige (1979) say about their respective cultures in question.

Whether the K-pop fandom can be understood as a subculture will be discussed further down; however, their style, their jargon, their 'common mythos' (as in memes, celebrity gossips, achievements by fans and idols) suggest there is an element of social-community. Moreover, as it pertains to Furedi (2021), there is the element of the fans finding a 'common identity' through the fandom. As both Maya and Kari said, quite explicitly: this is a place even those who feel left out of the larger culture can find a place of belonging. Jenkins (2012) also mentioned this, as it pertains to fandom culture; the fandom functions as a "weekend-only world", the fans feel freer in the fandom. Jenkins mentioned that fandoms functioned almost as a vehicle for self-discovery, in the sense of allowing participants to engage and discover other facets of their identity; be it through the arts, administrating fan-events or the like (2012, p. 280).

This fandom can therefore be understood as a social community. They share, meet up with each other, have established places of communication (the Norwegian K-pop Facebook group is testament to this), and have non-verbal communicators symboling their belonging within this social community.

7.2. What characterizes the fandom in Norway, specifically?

As anticipated prior to commencing this thesis, identifying these aspects has presented a dual nature, proving both challenging and relatively straightforward. In this section of the analysis, we will be (somewhat) following the structure of the 3.0. Theoretical Framework chapter of this thesis, distilling each of the aspects of the fandom as it pertains to subculture, youth culture, fandom culture, and internet culture.

Some of the more defining features of this fandom is the music they listen to; that they utilize Korean and internet jargon when speaking about their fan-object, and that they fall within the characteristics that makes out a fandom, are

all somewhat obvious findings. However, understanding this fandom from the lens of youth culture and subculture has proven itself more challenging. The approach of examining this fandom from multiple perspectives, beyond solely through the lens of fandom, may arise from a desire to amplify its significance. This inclination is potentially influenced by both my personal identity as a K-pop enthusiast and the broader concept of viewing fandom as analogous to human experiences, as previously I referenced by Jenson (1992).

7.2.1 As a subculture

After conducting the interviews, and reviewing the data multiple times, I cannot make the assertion that the Norwegian K-pop fandom falls within the “requirements” for it being a subculture, despite some of them calling themselves so.

Calling back to the 3.1. *What is a subculture?* chapter, we looked at how both Hebdige (1979) and Yinger (1973) understood subcultures. Yinger provided the clear distinction between contraculture and subculture, providing depth to the ‘anti-establishment’ terminology posited by Hebdige.

Of course, there is an argument for the K-pop fandom being subcultural in their politically “defiant” behavior as illustrated in Brunner’s *TIME* article from 1.3 *Introducing the phenomenon*. In it, it shows the American K-pop fans toying with politicians and proving themselves to be force within a public sector, however, based on my interviews and (arguably limited) data, to assert the Norwegian K-pop fandom as ‘anti-establishment’ and ‘defiant’ in way that falls within the understanding of Hebdige’s definition of subculture seem somewhat unfounded.

There is style; there is music; there is jargon; there is an element of ‘feeling like outsiders’; there are elements of subcultural markers; however, some of the more defining features of subculture has not been explicitly observed in the data during its analysis.

Notably, the question pertaining to whether being a K-pop fan was anti-Norwegian, illustrated this quite well. All informants expressively stated that it was not; Signe describing herself as somewhat patriotic; and Kari underlining that she is a proponent for Nynorsk (literally: ‘New Norwegian’, one of the two official

writing systems in Norway, and source of heavy debate domestically). Furthermore, Synnøve, Siri and Emma, all state that fandom is simply an avenue for a different social community that it is underscored by this aspect of it being an interest in Korean popular content, rather than it being something out-right ‘defiant’. Although there are sources that can allude to this fandom being a subculture, one of which is noted in the thesis (Bruner, 2020), the data collected in this study cannot assert that the Norwegian K-pop fandom is a subculture. Nevertheless, this aspect presents an intriguing avenue for deeper exploration in any subsequent research endeavors.

7.2.2. As a youth culture

The youth culture question seems to be somewhat more easily argued for; however, I have realized it is mostly speculative.

On one hand, the idea of the fans acquiring a common identity and a ‘way of being’ through the fandom is quite explicit in the data.

First, in Furedi’s second chapter ‘Before Identity Crisis was Given a Name’ (2021), he tells us about Rousseau’s *Julie*, published in 1761, and Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774. He speaks of the authors receiving letters from readers, where they talk about how much these stories speak to them. Furthermore, he speaks of how the audience of *Werther* in particular was what “would be labeled in the 20th century as a youth subculture” (2021, p. 35). He speaks of the young adopting the clothes and attitude of the main character, what would now be understood as *fan-identification*. In Click et al., they cite Caughey (1984), where he explains that this identification can begin as one engaging with something a friend does (2013); however, after this initial stage can turn into what Fiske (1992) called semiotic productivity. This internal identification is not something new, and Furedi explains how this has been the case since the mid-18th century.

Similarly, the K-pop fans in this study spoke of how they would see other fans be inspired by the clothes of their idols, and on the occasion let themselves be inspired. Maya mentioned that “Since I, particularly like J-hope [member of BTS]. I noticed I later began to adopt a lot of how he had talked about his personality and personal values,” Kari made her trousers resemble those of BoA.

Signe would wear a necklace with the initial of one of her favorite idols. Moreover, they also spoke of how they were worried the beauty standards of idols could affect the younger audiences, suggesting they are aware of how influential these idols are.

‘Must the Players Keep Young’ by Addison (2006), as mentioned, talked about how Hollywood has been curating the image that is to be desired for the past century. Similarly, K-pop is heavily curated, especially when keeping their soft-power (the cultural export) goal in mind. K-pop is not only the music, but the package deal: the idols are made to be larger than life, curated for the young. To suggest there are elements of youth culture at play is therefore not far-fetched.

Of course, the definition of youth culture is yet to be agreed upon amongst scholars; however, by looking at Elkind’s appraisal and his citation of Mead, the existence of the *prefigurative society*, and what Furedi called “The [fetishization] of change” (‘fetishisation’ in text, 2021, p. 90), elaborated by mentioning how the scholars of the 1930s who spoke of ‘change’ as something inevitable, and something one had to prepare the young for: “[...] the older generations will never see repeated in the lives of young people their own unprecedented experience of sequentially emerging change” (Mead, 1972, as cited in Furedi, 2021, p. 91). All this can begin to paint us a picture of, perhaps, what was the foundation of what Hebdige had witnessed in the 1960s and 70s in the UK’s youth.

This lack of common identity, as Furedi suggests, could be the very thing being at cause for the rise in subcultures in the mid 20th century. Perhaps it is that these subcultures are a result of youth culture, and subsequently the discovery of adolescence?

Unfortunately, this re-opens the question above – if youth culture is the foundation of both fandom and subculture, would that not make the K-pop fandom a subculture, all by virtue? It would suggest that even a fandom could therefore also be understood as a subculture. This muddies the waters of how each of these can be defined, hence the conclusion earlier. Although, this falls more under the concept of ‘epistemological hi-jinks’, it remains a fascinating perspective, nonetheless. Additionally, this is one of the main arguments this thesis has for this fandom to be researched further.

7.2.3. As a fandom culture

Arguably it speaks for itself: they fall within almost all that is mentioned by Jenkins (2012). To explain the seeming detour of the previous section, the primary understanding of this thesis mirrors that which Jenson (1992) spoke of; to view fans through the lens of human experience, and, as Furedi (2021) has proven, the identification with fictional characters falls within the veneration of celebrities. Arguably, this large-scale veneration noted in the readers of *Werther* in the mid-18th century could be the result of not only what Ponce de Leon noted in his 2002 *Self-Exposure*, explaining the public's novel opportunity to scrutinize their elites. Furthermore, reminding that the definition of fan chosen by this thesis is the citation of Hills in Lee Barron's *Celebrity Cultures* (2015):

“It's someone who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV programme, band; somebody who can produce reams of information on their object of fandom, and can quote their favorite lines or lyrics, chapter and verse.” (Hills. M, 2002, *Fan Cultures*; as cited in Barron, L., 2015, *Celebrity Cultures*, p. 84)

We can begin looking into how this fandom falls within what Jenkins had discovered, following his list from his finishing chapter of *Textual Poachers* (2012).

“a. Fandom involves a particular mode of reception” (2012, p. 277). What Jenkins means by this, and as explained in 3.3., is their reception involves a combination of what Fiske (1992) called the *semiotic* and *enunciative productivity*. Jenkins argues that the fans engagement with the fan-object(s) is a, somewhat, perpetual process. Although Jenkins calls it ‘the viewing is the beginning, not the end’ (paraphrased, 2012, p. 278), which is also true for the fans in this study, I would push it farther simply by bringing social media into the mix. Jenkins is not wrong, of course; however, the watching seems to be more than ‘a beginning’ for K-pop fans. Even if they engage with the media alone, such as Siri in this study, she will still partake in the discussion online, even if she herself does not write anything, i.e., enunciative productivity. From what I have gathered in the data, the discovery is ‘the beginning’, whilst the combination Jenkins argues (semiotic/enunciative) seem to be a part of a cycle. They digest the media, i.e., music, both in groups, alone, as a part of their go-to playlists for whatever moods

they are in. The semiotic nature of it is persistent, and the enunciative part happens seemingly simultaneously, even when they are technically alone.

“b. Fandom involves a particular set of critical and interpretive practices” (2012, p. 278). Here, Jenkins is talking about the adjustment fans make when they join a community – learning the etiquette if you will – and begin to partake in the process of creating what he calls *meta-texts* (2012, p. 278). Although there is no concrete proof of this in the data collected, there are allusions to it. It is also a practice easily seen under the music videos of certain artists, such as NEW JEANS “*Ditto*” (2022; ADOR), where one can see the ‘fan-theories’ in the comments under the video. Some of the informants mentioned they had heard of these texts; although, it looks like this sample of fans does not actively engage in this practice of engaging actively with meta-texts. Additionally, there is the ‘fan-theory’ pertaining to the ‘cake-dropping’ idols do, as illustrated in 5.2.2.

“c. Fandom constitutes a base for consumer activism” (2021, p. 278). What Jenkins is referring to here is the practice where fans will make petitions and actively participate, and in some cases, force their opinions on the production of whatever media they are fans of. Again, unfortunately this does not seem to be something the Norwegian fans of this study participate in either; however, a couple (Therese and Kari) had mentions of its importance, such as in reference to EC(s) treatment of idols etc. Beyond the scope of this sample, however, it does seem to be something of which the fandom is known for (take the Seo Taiji and The Boys petition for the censorship law in the late 1990s, and Bruner’s (2020) *TIME* article). Despite this, it was also not found explicitly in the data gathered for this thesis.

“d. Fandom processes particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions and practices” (2012, p. 279). What Jenkins means by this is the prevalence of fan productions, and the habit of appropriating the media available to them for re-editing and distribution amongst themselves (2012). This seems to be somewhat true for the fans of this study as well, albeit the number is small. Therese was the only one explicitly producing fan-content out of the eight, being a host for a K-pop themed podcast. However, the movement amongst *producing fans* did not seem foreign to most of them. Kari mentioned partaking in editing music videos and uploading them to YouTube between 2007-8, which is where she met other K-pop and K-Drama fans, which encouraged her to explore what it was.

“e. Fandom functions as an alternative social community” (2012, p. 280). Here Jenkins cites the “Weekend-only World” song by T. J. Burnside Clapp (1987), exemplifying its relevance when describing this “alternative social community”. This, however, has been explicit in the data, as seen in 5.2.1.1. The fans spoke at length of the community they had found through K-pop, and how that was one the more ‘magical’ aspects of the fandom for them. They also mentioned that they feel ‘freer’ when being with other K-pop fans, “I feel I can be myself. And I feel I have become more confident in myself” (Signe, 20), “I feel like I can express myself more freely [...] especially with my [Norwegian] friends who are fans, since they understand, for example, the Korean culture more” (Martin, 17), “For me, who is an adult, to be still allowed to listen to a song and shriek a bit, or become indescribably happy [...]” (Kari, 30). It is their “weekend-only world”, a place in which they can exist outside the expectations of the larger culture, if only for a few minutes.

7.2.4. As an internet culture

As I am sure has been noticed is, in 3.4. there were no texts pertaining to ‘internet culture’ specifically; this was done intentionally. As is known within the world of media studies, the audience of online platforms exist within two sectors: the media repertoire of the singular user, and the media ensemble of a larger group (for further reading see: Lomborg & Mortensen, 2017; Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017). Further, taking Schröder’s (2011) assertion into the conversation, it could suggest there are a plethora of internet cultures as distinguishable from each other as countries are (not to mention the sides of the internet defined by language as well).

What is interesting with the K-pop fandom is this demarcation, in terms of linguistical distance, has been crossed. Which also brings Hall (1999) back into the discussion: this encoding/decoding, and temporal distance between the South Korean medias and the transnational proximity, as proposed by Jin (2022), seem to be key components of the formation of internet cultures.

Additionally, and interestingly, there is also the social media presence mentioned by the fans of this study. They all engage with the fandom online, be it over Reddit, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, Tumblr, or Discord. They participate in the K-pop media ensemble, which is largely international. Many of

the fan productions before the EC(s) began to produce them themselves were mostly created by fans, i.e., translations of songs or subtitles on idol videos etc. This can make it difficult to distinguish the K-pop fandom from one internet culture from another. As Schröder said, “audiences are inherently cross-media” (2011, p. 6), and this is particularly true for the K-pop fans, even in Norway.

Ytre-Arne & Das’ (2020) definition of audience agency becomes particularly pertinent in this context. As the EC(s) increasingly re-assert control, or rather, reclaim authority in content creation (such as through translations), it prompts a critical examination of both the agency of existing fans within online communities and that of potential future K-pop enthusiasts. The fans’ textual productivity has its merits, fostering unity within the fandom and serving as a creative platform for fans. Yet, it also invites scrutiny regarding how this content is utilized, archived, and appropriated by the conglomerates that own the original material. Equally significant is the discourse concerning internet users’ control over the content visible on their feeds – a crucial point considering that many younger fans encounter K-pop through social media, rather than through traditional media channels.

Furthermore, as Jin stated in his 2022 article, to understand the international fandom, and how it came to be, requires a strong theoretical framework. His suggestion of looking at it from the lens of transnational proximity appears to have uncovered a significant insight. Considering anime shows such as *Pokémon* (OLM, Inc., 1997 – present) and *Digimon* (Toei Animation, CO, Ltd., 1999-2000) being childhood shows for many older fans, and *Pokémon Go* (Niantic, Inc., 2016) being a modern cultural classic, it might allow for a more ready acceptance of medias that have the same ‘look’ to them by Western audiences. Not to mention, Netflix is now a big distributor of other anime and Korean television shows, making them readily available for Western audiences. While Jin (2022) suggests the transnational proximity theory as relevant to audiences engaging with socio-economic themes portrayed in South Korean media, it appears there may be an additional factor influencing this scenario.

In his text he speaks at length about the weaknesses of active affinity theory as it pertains to audience research, especially pertaining to K-pop; however, there might be a combination of the two. Perhaps Western audiences have become accustomed to the Japanese medias, which makes the cross-cultural proximity of

theirs' to South Korea work in favor of the active affinity, where simply the transnational proximity makes this connection even stronger? Perhaps there is a pop-cultural proximity happening instead? Regardless, both active affinity and transnational proximity seem to be true in the case of Norwegian fans. Some heard first of anime and moved on to K-pop; some saw K-pop pop up more and more on their social media platforms, and the engagement with the media blossomed from there. (Perhaps the fans are correct in calling it a 'pipeline-theory'?)

Internet culture is discursive, international, and ever-changing. The fans engage with South Korean cultural content mostly online. As this study was to see what characterizes the Norwegian fandom today, there has been limited textual analysis of these online platforms due to it being beyond the scope of this thesis. Further research looks quite promising in terms of perspectives and themes if one wishes to indulge. The fans have a flourishing online world filled with fan-productions, petitions, and discussions. Which was mentioned by every informant in this study, and easily seen online, if one knows where to look.

8.0. Conclusion

At last, we have reached the conclusion of this thesis. As we have seen, K-pop is a package deal, filled with colors, high-performing individuals who dedicate their life to the craft, with a loyal and vast fandom. This phenomenon is most likely here to stay as we see more and more K-pop artists collaborate with Western artists, and people becoming more and more acquainted with South Korean cultural contents. Furthermore, we have also seen that K-pop is a part of a larger goal, fueled by South Korea's desire to become a part of the larger global economy, and it is well on its way. Their music and television shows have made its mark on Norwegian youth, as well as, K-pop has amassed a large international viewership, both active and passive. It is like Jenkins concluded in his *Textual Poachers*: "Fandom does not prove that all audiences are active; it does, however, prove that not all audiences are passive" (2012, p. 287).

In Norway, this is a vibrant social community with varying trajectories into it, and filled with a world of esoterisms, music, fashion, and roles. There has been as much to discover as to cover, and some has unfortunately had to have been left out, due to scope and time. To illustrate this, here is a summary of what has been discovered through posing the three sub-inquiries:

(1) Why/how does one become a K-pop fan?

There is a duality of exposure, in the sense that new social media landscapes and new acclaim and traditional media are now talking about K-pop. This is opposed to the previous trajectory, where it happened through social interaction and specific social communities online. They remain in the fandom due to both content and community, as well as it provides them roles (organizer, participant, spectator).

(2) What stylistic, ethical, and social practices constitutes the K-pop fandom in Norway today?

The Norwegian K-pop fandom has a plethora of markers, such as their inherent curiosity, their creative nature, and the fandom has signifiers in both jargon and style. Despite the music being at this fandom's core, it is the community and inclusivity that stands as its beacon.

(3) What characterizes the Norwegian K-pop fandom as a social community?

All facets mentioned above help facilitate this fandom as a social community, and functions as a vehicle for creative and social outlets.

While acknowledging the preceding discussions, it remains imperative to address the primary research question posited in this thesis:

“What characterizes the K-pop fandom today?”

The Norwegian K-pop fandom is predominantly a group of curious individuals, falling heavily into the markers of fandom and youth culture. They have their own practices; they value friendship and kinship and are undoubtedly creative; they also engage in online discourse and create events for themselves in Norway (as illustrated by the K-pop Norge Facebook group). They create meaning through engaging with the media, and share this amongst themselves, sometimes even ‘sneak’ it into playlists at parties and the like. Although they sometimes feel judged for their interest in K-pop, K-pop also empowers them to feel free and craft their own comfortable, safe spaces. It is their 'weekend-only world' and provides them a ready-made network of likeminded individuals with which to engage with - regardless of their backgrounds.

After conducting this study and subsequently writing this thesis, numerous lingering thoughts arise. However, what stands out the most is the necessity for further investigation into this fandom. This could be accomplished through the triangulation method mentioned by Schrøder (2011), elaborated on by Hasebrink and Hepp (2017), or by conducting a comprehensive textual analysis of the extensive online spaces frequented by K-pop fans. It is regrettable that this thesis could not encompass all these perspectives due to its scope limitations as each requiring individual attention.

However, it is my hope that this serves as a valuable contribution to a topic that will undoubtedly gain increased traction in the academic realm. With K-pop's growing influence and escalating presence in the Western world, the subject is set to garner more attention and scholarly exploration.

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Figure 1:

Koogle TV. (2019, October 27). *K-pop idols looking FINE with their airport fashion | KPOP COMPILATION*. YouTube.com. Retrieved November, 2023 from youtube.com: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=tMJKUwbw9Q4>

Figure 2:

EXO (yt. channel). (2023, March 14). *KAI ㅋㅇ' Rover' MV Reaction (feat. EXO)*. (SM Entertainment) Retrieved November, 2023 from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHpmz6SxH2U&t=87s>

Figure 3:

Ravne, L. C. E., (2019, June 15) *GOT7 Light-stick, Keep Spinning World Tour, South Korea* (used with permission)

Figure 4:

theHallyuverse. (2023, April 24). *K-pop in Public - KAI "Rover"!* Retrieved November, 2023 from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/IUKACyU6va0>

Figure 5:
Table of aliases and markers, for clarity.

Figure 6:
'Example' from *Kartleggings Dokument av Intervju*.

Figure 7:
Screenshot from YouTube (2023, September 19) Searched: "Kpop Idols dropping cake compilation"

Figure 8:
BTS_official (2023, June 1) 'BTS at the White House' Retrieved November, 2023 from X:
https://x.com/bts_bighit/status/1531843778327109632?s=46&t=uLGbmrRg_jbGFt35T5ftuQ


Figure 9:
KBS WORLD TV (2023, August 31) *THE TOP #10 MOST VIEWED STAGES : AUGUST 2023*  / KBS WORLD TV Retrieved September, 2023 from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjLWEELPmVA&t=1s>

Figure 10:
Fantreon (2023, October 6) *Xiaoting, Mina, Won-Young, Miyeon, and Karina's DumTikiChallenge (what if series)* Retrieved October, 2023 from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/7spoSInnOrA>

Figure 11:
BLACKPINK (2016, August 8) *BLACKPINK - '붐바야' (BOOMBAYAH) M/V* Retrieved September, 2023 from YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwmSjveL3Lc>

Appendix

Attachment 1: Consent Form

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

Hva betyr det å være en k-pop fan?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å få en dypere forståelse for norske k-pop fans og deres forhold til fandommen og Sør-Korea. Dette skrivet gir deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Dette er forskningsdelen til en Master oppgave som studerer effekten K-pop har på Norske fans. Hovedmålet med denne oppgaven er å starte en større samtale om fandom og hvordan det påvirker både livet og samfunnet til de den treffer.

Det er en rekke problemstillinger i selve Masteroppgaven, men den som kommer til å bli utforsket i disse intervjuene er k-pop fans sine følelser av tilhørighet både i og utenfor fandommen og hvilken plass k-pop har i livene deres. Noen av spørsmålene som kommer til å bli spurt er alder, hvordan/når en kom i kontakt med K-pop for første gang og hvordan deltagelsen i denne fandommen har påvirket ditt liv. Intervjuene er ment for å gi en følelse av erfaringskildring, og gir en mulighet til å dele både hva man liker med k-pop samt hva en kanskje ikke liker så godt. Det er en større samtale rundt både industri, og hvordan fandommen blir opplevd av deg som fan.

Alt som blir delt i intervjuet blir tatt opp på en ekstern mikrofon, som blir senere transkribert, deretter blir opptaket av intervjuet slettet. Transskriberingen blir en del av oppgaven og navn blir byttet til et alias for å beskytte identiteten til de som har deltatt i forskningsprosjektet. Intervjuene er forbeholdt Master oppgaven, og kommer ikke til å bli brukt i noen andre prosjekter.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Universitetet i Bergen er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Selv om veileder, Torgeir Uberg Nærland, er formelt prosjektansvarlig for dette forskningsprosjektet, men det er student, Adriane Louise Rødfjell, som er prosjekteier av: «Hva betyr det å være K-pop fan i Norge?»

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Hovedkriteriene for dette prosjektet er at de som blir intervjuet er selvbeskrivende k-pop fans. I lys av K-pop Norge, og deres k-pop fokus, er dere utvalgt til å få spørsmålet om deltagelse i denne studien. Denne Facebook siden har allerede vært med i en annen studie noen år tilbake, hvor det ble postet en survey for medlemmer å svare på, denne gangen blir det intervju.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Metoden som skal bli brukt kalles kvalitativt intervju, dette blir gjort digital via zoom. Dette innebærer én og én intervju med k-pop fanen og intervjuer, hvor intervjuet blir tatt opp på mikrofon. Opplysningene blir samlet inn via en kort forklaring om hvem intervju objektet er i begynnelsen av opptaket. Vedkommende kan velge selv hvilket navn de velger å gi, men dette navnet kommer til å bli endret i Master oppgaven for å vedholde personvernsreglementet.

Hvis du velger å delta i dette prosjektet, innebærer det et intervju hvor du blir spurt spørsmål innen k-pop. Det vil ta ca. 60 minutter. Dine svar fra intervjuet blir tatt opp som lydopptak som blir slettet når det er blitt transkribert.

Noen av spørsmålene som kommer til å være i intervjuet er:

- Alder og kjønn
- Litt om hobbyer som ikke er tilknyttet k-pop (dette er for å skape et bilde av hvordan livet er rundt fandommen og se om det er en rød tråd i hvem som har en tendens til å bli k-pop fans)
- Hva betyr det å være k-pop fan for deg?
- Hva liker du med k-pop, hva liker du ikke?
- Hvilke trender ser du mest i k-pop, hvordan opplever du disse som annerledes/forskjellig fra populærsamfunnet?
- Hvilke artister/grupper liker du mest, og hvorfor?

Om du er under 18, så kan foresatte få tilsendt intervjuguiden på forhånd ved å ta kontakt. Kontaktopplysninger er i slutten av dette dokumentet.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger og lydopptak av intervju vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Det er kun prosjektleder (Rødfjell) som har tilgang til lyd-materiale av deg.
- Det er prosjektleder som har behandlingsansvar for alt lyd-materiale av deg.
- Alt av lyd-materiell blir lagret lokalt, og blir ikke delt over noen form for trådløse delingsmuligheter.
- All datainnsamling skal bli behandlet under regelverket GDPR, og i henhold til Lov om behandling av personopplysninger (personopplysningsloven) §§ 8-11.
- Dette spørreskjema er hentet fra NSD - Norsk Senter for forskningsdata AS, og modifisert for å gjelde dette prosjektet og dets formål.
- Ingen andre institusjoner skal ha tilgang til materialet samlet inn til dette forskningsprosjektet.

Kun alder, og relevante kommentarer gitt av deltaker blir delt i mulig publikasjon (inkl. alias valgt av prosjektleder). Ingen lyd-materiell kommer til å publiseres.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes 1. Juni 2023, ved innlevering av Master oppgave. Alle navn og lydopptak skal bli slettet innen denne datoen, og det resterende er transkriberte intervju hvor navn byttes med alias.

Grunnen til at transkribering blir tatt vare på er:

- Disse blir eventuelle vedlegg til master oppgaven
- De må sees over igjen når dato er satt for avsluttende presentasjon av prosjekt, denne får dato etter innlevert oppgave.
- Blir transkriberte intervju lagt til som vedlegg i hovedoppgave, så er dette for å være tilgjengelig for sensorer og senere forskning.
- Alle lydopptak vil bli slettet og transkriberte intervju blir anonymisert innen 1. juni 2023.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Universitetet i Bergen har Personverntjenester vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

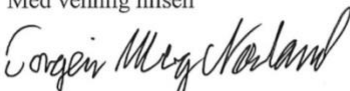
Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Universitetet i Bergen ved
 - (Student) Adriane Louise Rødfjell: gef017@uib.no
 - (Veileder) Torgeir Uberg Nærland: tona@norceresearch.no
- UIBs personvernombud: Janecke Helene Veim: personvernombud@uib.no

Med vennlig hilsen



Torgeir Uberg Nærland
(Forsker/veileder)



Adriane Louise Rødfjell (student)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Hva betyr det å være en k-pop fan?», og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervjuet
- at prosjektleder tar lydopptak under intervjuet

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Attachment 2: Interview Guide

Dette intervjuet er todelt

Del 1:

Kan du si litt om deg selv?

- Alder
- Hva gjør du? -> skole/ jobb
- Hobbyer som ikke er direkte tilknyttet k-pop? (evt idrett etc)
- Venner utenfor SoMe?
 - Hva pleier dere å gjøre?
- Hva gjør dine foresatte, dvs. jobb etc.

Del 2:

- Når hørte du om k-pop første gangen?
- Hva er det med k-pop du synes er bra? Noe du synes er dårlig?
- Hva tenker du når jeg sier k-pop?: Hva er k-pop for deg?
- Er k-pop noe du snakker med vennene dine om?
- Har du venner som ikke er k-pop fans? Snakker du med dem også om k-pop eller er dette noe du kun snakker med de du vet er k-pop fans?
- Er k-pop noe du opplever mest på sosiale medier, dvs. skjer mesteparten av samtalene om og rundt k-pop online, eller er dette noe du snakker ofte om i "real-life" også?
- Hvilke artister hører du mest på?
 - Er dette gutte eller jente grupper?
 - Hva er det som graviterer deg med disse artistene? dans/vokaler?
 - Hvor mange medlemmer er det i disse gruppene, og hvilket Entertainment firma har dem?
 - Hvor populære er disse gruppene globalt tror du?
 - Har du noen tanker rundt hvordan disse gruppene blir promotert/behandlet av Entertainment firmaene?
 - Er du kjent med noen store skandaler om og rundt k-pop artister, hva tenker du om disse?
 - Hvorfor tror du disse gruppene er såpass populære/ukjente?
- Hvis jeg sier k-pop fan og identitet, hvilke tanker slår deg?
- Hvordan ville du beskrevet identitet?
- Tror du samtaler rundt identitet har noe å si når en snakker om folk sin tilhørighet til spesifikke fandommer?
- Er du med i noen online k-pop forum?
 - hvis ja: Hva er greit å gjøre, og hva er ikke greit å gjøre innenfor disse forumene?
 - Opplever du at det er yngre eller eldre fans i disse forumene, og hva får deg til å tro at de kanskje er eldre eller yngre fans?
 - Kan du si litt om de sosiale dynamikkene i disse forumene og her på folkehøgskolen når det kommer til koreansk språkbruk?

- Er det å lære mer om Sør Korea og språket deres nødvendig for å ha en tilknytning til fandommen?
- Jeg har et inntrykk av at eksperimentering innen identitet, kjønnsuttrykk, og klesstil har en viss form frihet innen denne fandommen, er dette noe du også har sett?
- Er det ting du kan gjøre blant fans som du ikke kan gjøre ellers? dvs. er det forskjellige begrep, opplevelser som du føler er mer akseptert i k-pop fandommen, enn ellers i det Norske samfunnet?
- Føler du deg friere i fandommen? Ja/nei, hvorfor?
- Jeg har også fått et inntrykk av at k-pop er oftest mest populært blant kvinner, er dette noe du ser deg enig i?

Attachment 3: Outland Poster



Er du imellom 16 - 30 år gammel?

Vil du bli med i studiet: "Hva betyr det å være k-pop fan i Norge?"
Studien hører til en Master oppgave med samme tittel.

Metoden som blir brukt heter kvalitative intervju, som vil si en til en intervju, hvor jeg spør dere om fandommen, kpop, og deres erfaringer som norske fans.

Er dette noe du synes er spennende, eller ønsker mer informasjon, send en mail til:

adriane.rodfejl@student.uib.no, eller ring nummeret nederst på arket.

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