

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Fans previously carry out passive consumption activities in media culture. Fans come from the word ‘fanatic’ that is often attributed to excessive forms of worship and enthusiasm (Jenkins 1992). As a form of worshipping and enthusiasm, they carry out consumption activities regularly such as watching all of their idol performances, impulsively buying all of their idol merchandise in large quantities, accept whatever content provided by their idol be it good or not, and so on. All of those are passive consumption activities that have occurred in the world of fans. The passivity done by fans is caused by fans’ dependence on mainstream media such as television and magazine that only provides one-way interaction between fans and idols. The limitations experienced by these fans made them unable to freely express their love for their idols; fans could only accept what their idol gave them just like that.

However, new media and the development of technologies allow fans as a consumer to reproduce media content they get (Jenkins 2006). While the old media limiting the relationship between fans and their idols and creating a clear gap between producers and consumers, new media provides a platform for fans to be more active in consuming their idols through social interaction (Jenkins 2006). Various social media provide complete freedom for fans to redefine or reassign

their idols with a new concept; they can make their own meaning and not fixated on what they get from the media, this is known as Textual Poaching (Jenkins 1992). An interesting example of this shifting is fans can now freely reassign their idols' gender through text or the interactions they do on social media. An example of this phenomenon is the number of photos of Korean idols that are supposed to be male, but because of their soft figures and appearance, the fans edit their photos to become very feminine and even change their appearance to become a girl. Some fans also create fan fiction with two male idols as the characters but one of them is changed to a female one and called it *gender switch* fan fiction. These phenomena support the statement that social media provides an opportunity for fans to produce their own meanings without having to be fixated on what the media provides.

In this study, the phenomenon that is about to be analyzed is the K-Pop doll phenomenon that is often found on Instagram. K-Pop doll is K-Pop merchandise in the form of dolls that resembles K-Pop groups' members (Díaz 2020). This phenomenon emerged around 2015 when a group of fans from a Korean group released a doll that represented a member of the group (Saavedra 2019). This K-Pop doll is a new means for fans to carry out creative activities such as create creative narratives and pictures about their dolls. The owners of these accounts are mostly female fans and they will upload their doll's 'activity' followed by a different narrative and appearance for each doll. This study will analyze the owners of the K-Pop doll account from the members of Seventeen, a Korean boy group consisting of 13 members who debuted in 2015. In its history,

Seventeen always shows significant progress in the K-Pop world, for example in 2019, their albums sold 1.500.000 copies and then increased greatly in 2020 to 2.530.000copies (Koreaboo 2021). The progress of the albums' sales shows that there is a rapid increase in the number of their fandom named *Carat*, which made Seventeen more popular and recognized by the public.

The number of Carats is spread all over the world, including in Southeast Asia, where Seventeen always stops by for tours. Out of their four seasons of tours, Seventeen is always consistent to stop by to Southeast Asia. . They always stop by to Indonesia and the Philippines, while three times to Singapore and Thailand, and second times to Malaysia (Fandom (Seventeen Wiki) n.d.). Their consistency in holding concerts in Southeast Asia is found to be quite high when compared to the number of their concerts in other parts of Asia, such as East Asia. Seventeen have also visited countries in East Asia, such as Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan, for their concerts. For example, Hong Kong and Taiwan have been visited three times while China had the opportunity to welcome Seventeen only once (Fandom (Seventeen Wiki) n.d.). From the number of concerts and their consistency in coming to countries in Asia, it can be seen that Seventeen holds more concerts in Southeast Asia than other parts of Asia.

In addition, the huge existence of many Carats in Southeast Asia is also shown through the results of the streaming entries for Seventeen's songs on the *Spotify* platform, which shows the streamers from all cities in the world. Among the fifty cities in the top list of Seventeen song streamers, Jakarta is in first place, Singapore is in second, Surabaya is in third, Quezon City is in fourth, and

Bangkok is in fifth (svt_spotify, 2021). The five cities are ranked in the top five with the highest number of streamers in all cities in the world, followed by cities from other countries such as Kuala Lumpur, Osaka, Bandung, and Los Angeles (svt_spotify, 2021).

The large number of concerts held by Seventeen in Southeast Asia more or less indicate that the number of Carats in Southeast Asia is quite large and significant. The fact that five cities in Southeast Asia top the list of Seventeen's songs listeners and streamers also shows that Carats in Southeast Asia are massive and dedicated in consuming Seventeen. K-Pop doll phenomenon also occurs in Carat fandom, including Carat in Southeast Asia. Through the number of hashtags on Instagram regarding Seventeen dolls, the top countries with the highest number of hashtags are Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. This fact indicates that Carats in Asia, especially Southeast Asia, are very massive and consume Seventeen dolls significantly. The three countries with the highest number of hashtags for Seventeen dolls are Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore, all of which are countries in Southeast Asia, adding to the fact that these three countries are countries that have a significant number of Carats in Southeast Asia.

Seventeen dolls are more interesting than other group dolls because Seventeen dolls have many versions despite their large number of members. Each Seventeen member has their own doll with various versions and appearances, but there are two Seventeen members whose dolls are popular among Carats in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore these members are S.Coups and

Jeonghan. Their dolls are like dolls that cannot be separated, because mostly every Carat that has an S.Coups doll, most of them also has a Jeonghan doll. The data obtained from the number of hashtags on Instagram regarding S.Coups and Jeonghan dolls in each country shows that the significance of these two dolls is quite strong compared to dolls from other members. S.Coups and Jeonghan dolls have the highest average when compared to the other eleven members of Seventeen; Jeonghan led with an average of 145 while S.Coups with an average of 140.

From the variety of Seventeen dolls, S.Coups and Jeonghan dolls are usually displayed with significant differences in appearance to show their masculinity; Carats usually give S.Coups dolls with a boyish appearance while Jeonghan dolls mostly stick with a feminine appearance. Their appearance is often contradictory even though they both represent men. From these differences, it can be assumed that Carats are not only necessarily consuming the dolls but also consume and has the power to redefine Seventeen's gender through their dolls.

The main issue being discussed here is how fans become more active when doing consumption activities in the media and proven by the freedom they have to reassign their idols' gender. Therefore, the theory that was used is *Textual Poachers* by Henry Jenkins (1992). Jenkins describes the world of fans as an active and creative community because it invites many forms of participation and engagement (Jenkins 1992). Through textual poaching, he states that fans are allowed to participate actively in the circulation of media (Jenkins 1992). By the use of this theory, this study focuses on the way Carats in Southeast Asian,

especially in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore, reassigned the gender of S.Coups and Jeonghan through their practices as the doll owners. The process of gender reassignment is the result of fans' participation as an active consumer and a group of people that tried to resist the media ideology..

Many previous studies are focusing on how fans represent and redefine the masculinity of their idols in the form of fan works. The first related study was a study by Astutiningsih (2013) finding that fan fiction, especially slash fiction, can be a breakthrough for the dominant ideology about gender. The second related study was a study by Hoad (2017) depicting that heavy metal's slash fiction can deconstruct gender norms by using critical discourse analysis. The third related study was a study by Richards (2013) finding that fans can modify the masculinity of a character from television in slash fan fiction by using textual analysis. The fourth study was a study by Duggan (2017) showing that fans as an author can reinterpret the hegemonic masculinities presented in the original media to create a new narrative by using a case study approach. The fifth study was a study by Nisa, Naryoso, Rahardjo, and Dwiningtyas (2015) explaining that fans can challenge the dominant gender ideology through *yaoi* fan fiction by using James Scott's theory of resistance. Based on the previous studies, it is known that fans reassign the gender of their idols as well as challenge the gender norms through written form. However, those previous studies still have not discussed how fans do gender reassignment on visual objects such as dolls.

Thus, this study focuses on how Indonesians, Filipinos, and Singaporean Carats consume their S.Coups and Jeonghan dolls since the writer argue that apart

from consuming dolls, they also consuming Seventeen's gender as well as reassigning it to a different type. The above previous studies have explored how fans can now describe their idol masculinity in different types and interpret their idol masculinity through written forms, namely fan fiction. This supports Jenkins' statement on his textual poachers theory that fans are not a passive community who affirmatively accept everything their idol has to offer but now they can reproduce it according to their liking.

Therefore, to pursue the aim of this study, the theory of textual poaching by Henry Jenkins was used together with the qualitative method and interpretive approach. The interpretive approach focused on the complexities of meaning given from symbols and social interactions as well as emphasizes how people transform social phenomena into narratives and texts (Putnam and Banghart 2017). Aligned with the purpose of the qualitative method, this approach has a point to gain in-depth data from the informants to understand the point of view of the informants about the phenomenon. Hence, for the data analysis, this study applied Jenkins' theory of textual poaching to interpret the results of the online interviews with the informants, which for this study are the owners of S.Coups and Jeonghan account dolls on Instagram.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

How is poaching activity practiced by Carats in Southeast Asia on their S.Coups and Jeonghan dolls?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the questions stated in the statement of the problem, this study has an objective that is to see how poaching activity is practiced by Carats in Southeast Asia on their S.Coups and Jeonghan dolls.

1.4 Significance of the Study

For the researcher, this study is a way to increase the researcher's knowledge about the issue of fan world, textual poachers, and masculinity. As for the society, this study is expected to break the society's negative stereotypes about fans as well as to provide new insights to the society that along with the development of the media, fans will also develop into an active and creative community. This study is also expected to give material contributions to Cultural Studies, especially on the study of fans and masculinity.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

- a. Carat: The official fandom name of the South Korean boy group, Seventeen (Afifah and Kusuma 2019).
- b. Fandom: A subculture that transcends the traditional geographic and generational boundaries and is characterized by its distinct styles, forms of consumerism, and cultural preferences (Jenkins 1992).
- c. Gender: The differentiated social roles, behaviors, and social characteristics given by culture to women and men (Dionisio 1994).
- d. K-Pop Dolls: K-Pop merchandise in the form of dolls that resembles K-Pop groups' members (Díaz 2020).

- e. Textual Poachers: Textual Poachers explains the struggle of social groups to define their own culture and focuses on the fans that can resist legal constraints on their pleasure as well as regulate the circulation and production of popular meaning (Jenkins 1992).