

The Characteristics of Fandom Reveluv as A Cyberfandom of Red Velvet on Twitter

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Abstract

The existence of social media, including Twitter, supports the popularity of K-Pop music in Indonesia. The fan enjoyment practice in digital media, called cyberfandom, has unique characteristics that indicate the latest trend of fandom in Indonesia. This current study aims to review the characteristics of cyberfandom practices carried out by the fans of K-Pop music on social media. To do this, the descriptive qualitative approach is applied. The object of the research is Red Velvet, one of the popular girl bands from Korea. The data were collected through participant observation of Red Velvet's Twitter fandom followers. The result shows that there were various socialization activities on cyberfandom. The fans did not only enjoy the works of their favorite groups but also produced fan arts and traded photocards and various fansite knick-knacks. The existence of production activities in addition to consumption activities shows that the cyberfandom of Korean music-lovers had become a prosumer. The presence of a digital platform had perpetuated the commodification of fandom in Indonesia.

Keywords: Cyberfandom, Twitter, Red Velvet.

Abstrak

Kepopuleran musik k-pop di Indonesia ditunjang oleh keberadaan media sosial. Praktik kepenggemaran di media digital yang disebut dengan cyberfandom ini, memiliki karakteristik khusus yang menunjukkan tren kepenggemaran terkini di Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan meninjau karakteristik praktik cyberfandom yang dijalankan oleh penggemar musik k-pop di media sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif. Pada penelitian ini, studi kasus yang digunakan adalah salah satu grup musik k-pop populer, yaitu Red Velvet. Dalam proses pencarian data dilakukan observasi partisipan dari pengikut twitter fandom Red Velvet. Kegiatan sosialisasi di cyberfandom beragam. Lebih dari sekadar konsumen yang menikmati karya grup kesukaan, mereka juga memproduksi fan art, trading photocard, dan berbagai pernik fansite. Adanya kegiatan produksi di samping kegiatan konsumsi menunjukkan bahwa cyberfandom pencinta musik Korea telah menjadi prosumer. Hadirnya wadah digital telah melanggengkan komodifikasi fandom yang ada di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Cyberfandom, Twitter, Red Velvet.

I. INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought changes in various sectors. One of the lines that are heavily influenced by technology is information and communication (Bulck et al., 2015). The power

of digital technologies and social media has been reported as vital in shaping an Indonesian pop culture idol such as Via Vallen (Riyanto and Dewi, 2020). In the world of fandom, information about idols is the most important aspect to know. This aspect is becoming more important for the fans of Korean pop (K-Pop) music. The distance between the fans and their idols makes them follow the movement of information via online media, so that not to miss the latest information about the idols.

K-Pop fan meetings, which are dominated by meetings in cyberspace, have made Twitter one of the platforms that have a fast rate of information dissemination, making it an option chosen by K-Pop fans. Through technology, the level of fan consumption of their idols' works increases. The ease of communication networks as a promotional medium is one factor that leads to the rise (Jensen, J., 1992; Sandvoss, C, 2005). Information about the idols can be accessed every day and can add up in a matter of minutes.

Research conducted by Fauziah and Kusumawati (2013) shows that fans use Twitter to upload tweets, pictures, and the latest news about fandoms and their idols. K-Pop fans use Twitter as a medium for receiving and seeking information, as well as a place to express their reactions to the idols. However, as time goes by, Indonesian K-Pop fans nowadays no longer only use Twitter as their consumption area, but also become their production area.

Sugihartati (2019) has previously studied the practice of consumption and production in the world of fandom. In her research, she captured new insights into the fandom industry. According to the study, fans are not always understood as passive victims of the forces of the popular culture industry or victims of the capitalization of the mass media. In the study, it was found that some fans were also actively involved in the process of producing texts and giving meaning. The object of this current research is different from Sugiharti's research object. The object of her study is the fandom from the *Mortal Instrument* series. In contrast, the object of this current study is the K-Pop fandom.

This current study explores the specific characteristics of the K-Pop cyberfandom in Indonesia. The results of the study can be used as a further reference on the culture of cyberfandom in Indonesia.

The method used in this research is participant observation, which means that the researcher participated in online interactions, explored and analyzed the activities on the Twitter fanbase, one of the K-Pop fandoms. The results of the study would map the characteristics of K-Pop cyberandom in Indonesia.

In the K-pop world, it is essential to note that official fan-club names are primary for an icon gathering to have. These are ways for fans to show their loyalty to their idols, just as adding a way to quickly identify a group's fandom.

As quoted from channel-korea.com (2020), Red Velvet (레드벨벳) is a group of five young girls under SM Entertainment which appeared on August 1, 2014. The group initially consisted of Irene, Seulgi, Wendy, and Joy. In March of 2015, Yeri was added as the fifth member. After very nearly 3 years of advancing, Red Velvet at long last uncovered that their authority fan-club name would have been "ReVeluv."

In January of 2017, SM Entertainment said that the fans would decide red Velvet's fan-club name. They collected recommendations from fans, and afterward, the individuals themselves picked the name they believe is the best. The office acknowledged entries until February 5, and the fan whose recommendation was picked would likewise be granted a written note and signed CD from the Red Velvet's members.

After reviewing through the fans' recommendations cautiously, 'ReVeluv' was picked on the grounds that the young ladies needed the name to represent the caring relationship that RED VELVET has with the fans. The announcement of the fan-club name was made when they were celebrating the 1000th-day commemoration of their debut. It was great news for all of the fans waiting for the declaration since the previous year.

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II. Research Method

This current study applied a qualitative method. Data were collected from Twitter account. The participant observation technique was applied, in which the researchers participated in online interactions on the Red Velvet fanbase account. The use of the technique was to make the data obtained have a depth of information value.

The data collection technique was done by digging primary data. For this reason, in-depth observations were made by creating a fake account and joining the fanbase to confirm whether the incoming data matched the facts in the field or not. In this case, the researchers observed the interaction of the Reveluv community to get to know the research object and all things related to it.

The data analysis technique was carried out using fandom theory to see the characteristics of Reveluv in Red Velvet's fan community interactions (Virtual Community Fans) on Twitter social media accounts. The interaction about the fan culture was connected with commodification that occurred in the Reveluv fandom.

III. Results and Discussion

a. The Characteristics of Reveluv-Fan Accounts as Red Velvet Cyberfandom on Twitter

The characteristics of Reveluv fandom on Twitter can be divided into two: Active fans (fans who consume and produce) and passive fans (fans who only act as consumers).

b. The Characteristics of Active Fans

In Reveluv's fandom on Twitter, there exist active fans who enjoy fanart, fansites, fan projects, and trading cards. Fans show their activeness in producing and consuming works such as fanart and fansite. The activities are a means of developing their hobbies of writing, drawing, and photographing. Besides, for some fans, increasing productivity

through these hobbies is an escape from the saturation of daily activities. But nowadays, however, fans do not only produce such a thing but also make them as a commodity. The products created are related to Red Velvet such as in the forms of fanart and various fansite knick-knacks. Fans with these characteristics usually tend to have virtual identities. Their identities as fans are formed through their personal activities in finding works such as fanart and fansite. Fans give meaning to fandom through cultural activities that make them more immersed in cyberspace activities as if they had their own world, including in interacting with other fans about their works. They communicate with each other through social media.

(1) Fan Art

Fanart is a work of art by fanartists (a term for fans who do fan art) about their idols or biases. Fanart is a fan culture created in a visual form based on the characters, environment, and stories of a favorite object (Gooch, 2008). The fan art of Red Velvet is facilitated by the available media and internet networks. Through this fan art, fans try to express their drawing skills and imagination. The creators usually upload fanart via their Twitter accounts. The fan arts are then disseminated by ReTweeting (RT) or giving likes and sharing the posts on the fanbase accounts. Artworks (another name for fanart) are given comments by the followers. The more comments, retweets, and likes, the more popular the artwork will be. Fan creativity to their idols is shown through fanarts.

Fans channel their hobbies and imagination into fanarts and they make their creations according to their expertise. The works produced can please the feelings of the creators as well as other fans. Fans' imagination of their idols is manifested by funny fan arts, based on real events that have been experienced by their idols. The events were later developed to produce beautiful and entertaining creations. They will feel satisfied if their works are not only seen and liked by other fans but are noticed by their idols or biases. In the virtual world, the girl band Red Velvet's cyberfandom also pays great attention to the copyright of the fan-created artworks and literature. It is evident in a number of fan arts that are spread on Twitter. Fans always post original works stating the works' copyright, which is then written with the abbreviation 'cr' which means credit or copyright.

There are a number of forms of commercial commodities that are produced from fan arts. A fanart that is widely liked can be turned into a comic with a storyline. Besides, through fan arts, various kinds of merchandise are created, such as keychains, mugs, stickers, tumblers, fans, transparent cards, and photo cards.

The distribution of comics and merchandise is not traded freely but is carried out among fans via social media. The makers of Comic fan arts and merchandise will announce prices, purchase methods, and delivery of goods through their personal Twitter accounts. One example of Red Velvet fans commercializing their fanarts is an account belonging to 빵 완 with the username of @wanfession. @Wanfession's account often uploads fan arts about Red Velvet and gets responses from other fans such as retweets, likes, and replies. Like one of the following tweets.



Figure 1. Tweet fan art commodification from @wanfession.

The tweet is a form of commodification of fan art created by @wanfession, which is traded in the form of hard enamel pins, sticker sets, and transparent photocards.

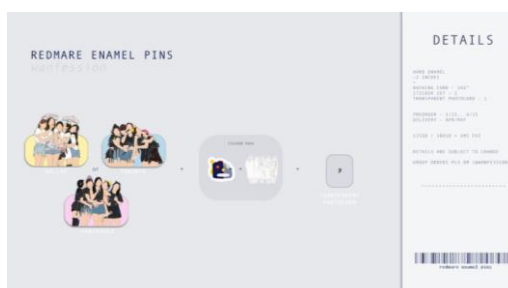


Figure 2. Details regarding the Redmare fan art which will be commercialized.

In this case, @wanfession makes her idol, Red Velvet, as an inspiration for works such as making fan arts. Conveyed through a fanart, the owner of the @wanfession account used the moment of Red Velvet's concert entitled "The Redmare Tour" as inspiration and an expression of gratitude from fans to their idols who have worked hard to carry out the concert

tour well. The post of "The Redmare Tour" fanart had received 1.2K likes and 759 retweets from other fans.



Figure 3. Fan art of The Redmare Tour

The idea of commercialization arose when the @wanfession account received an overwhelming response from Reveluv. Through the votes feature on the Twitter platform, @wanfession can measure the fans' purchasing power towards her fan art in the form of a pin. The results showed that 98% of the 166 votes of Twitter users answered Yes.

Fanart is made by fans as a token of appreciation for their idols. Apart from being a form of expression and appreciation, Reveluv's productions are also a means of communication between fans. Through fanart, fans who have the same interests and talents in drawing, for example, can appreciate each other's works and learn from each other. The internet is an important part of facilitating the production of text produced in the form of fanart.

(2) Fansite

Apart from being in the form of artworks such as fanart, fans also create works in photography known as a fansite. The fansite is a fan activity that hunts for exclusive photos of one of the K-Pop group members. The people behind these fansite activities get a specific nickname from K-pop fans, namely *masternim*. Exclusive photos from the masters' hunts were collected and then modified on DVD and photobooks to be sold to fandoms worldwide. Besides, fansites also made various kinds of merchandise with their respective versions. The proceeds from sales of photobooks and merchandise are not enjoyed alone but are played again for their idols, such as for birthday support or birthday gifts for their idols. *Masternim* generally comes from very wealthy families because *masternim* must have

a camera with the latest telephoto lens and a camcorder with 4K resolution to get professional photos.

The word of fansite undergoes a shift in meaning. Initially, fansite was only interpreted as an activity to access certain online sites to obtain information, data, and news about idol figures. The fansite is a place of opinion, to exchange ideas between fans, such as the point of view of the people around them, sharing fun, dedication, and so on. Fansite can be in the form of blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. As K-Pop has become more globalized, fansite is now used by K-Pop fans as a term that refers to accounts that share exclusive photos and videos of their idol activities. The fansite is also a part of fans, but fans who are often called fansite masters are not just fans; they have professional photography skills. They also know the official activity schedule of the agency and even their idol flight numbers. Photos and videos taken by the fansite master are then uploaded in high definition to online sites. They upload them not only on blogs but also on social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube, to reach fans globally. A fansite is not managed individually but rather by a team that usually has two to three people managing the fansite.

The girl band Red Velvet also has several fansites on Twitter for each of its members. Even one member can have three to five fansites. One of them is @ Wenever940221. "Wenever" is a Korean fansite dedicated to Red Velvet's member, Wendy. "Wenever" joined Twitter and has been a fansite of Red Velvet Wendy since November 2015. Her current follower has reached 88 thousand fans from all over the world.



Figure 4. Fansite dedicated to Red Velvet Wendy.

Apart from Twitter account, Wenever has other social media accounts such as Instagram, YouTube, and online sites. It allows fans to quickly access various online platforms to get photos and videos about Red Velvet Wendy.

The commodification forms taken by fansite are quite varied, ranging from photo books, DVDs, cheering kits, slogans, and Season Greeting. Just like the fan art previously discussed, the distribution of fansite items is not freely traded. Fansite uses the terms PO (Pre Order) and GO (Group Order) for trading. They provide detailed information about prices, how to purchase, and delivery of goods through the Twitter accounts of each fansite.



Figure 5. Commodification of fansite in the form of Season Greeting.

Figure 5 is an example of the commodification of fansite items from @Wenever940221 in a Season Greeting form. Season Greeting is items that are only produced by the end of the year. The Season Greeting contents are calendar (new year), photocard set, monthly planner, postcard set, and so on. In Figure 5 above, each country that wants to order Season Greeting from Wenever already has a GO (Group Order) admin representative. Admins from each of these countries will then distribute these fansite items to be sent to fans who have ordered. The price for one Season Greeting package is in the range of 300 to 400 thousand rupiahs. The @nnaasappi account is the account that Reveluv Indonesia trusts to buy official items from fansites, such as Season Greeting, photo books, DVDs, and cheering kits.

c. Characteristics of Passive Fans

Fans are looking for the latest news and information about the artist's personal life, status posts, or the results of their creativity, and so on. Activities of finding the latest news on the internet about the artists have become a part of their daily life. Besides, information about the latest projects being worked on by the idol artists or even gossips regarding the

artists is also in demand by fans. In essence, fans cannot be separated from online media and use the internet to access various social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. Social media, especially Twitter, are used by fans to follow their idol artists and get issues that are currently being discussed among fans. Twitter is a social media that K-Pop fans must have because the news or information is much updated on this social media.

There are passive-fan characters in Reveluv's fandom on Twitter, namely those who only enjoy fanfiction and fanbooks. They only do a few cultural activities in the fandom. They tend to be passive in terms of producing works such as fanfictions and fanbooks. However, they are active in consuming activities because they like certain fanfictions or fanbooks, which are then downloaded from the internet to be enjoyed privately. Fans with these characteristics usually tend to have real identities because their identities as fans are formed through activities with an environment containing peers. Through interactions with peers, they are introduced to fanfictions and fanbooks.

IV. Conclusion

The practice of fandom has now entered a new era. Fans are not only the target of mass media consumers but also producers. In the K-Pop cyberfandom in Indonesia, fans make their idols the object of commodification for personal or group gain. K-Pop fans take advantage of digital media as a forum for showing their creativity, which can then become a selling point. The practices carried out by the K-Pop cyberfandom show that young active users of social media in Indonesia have been able to seize opportunities from the ease of internet access. Besides, the practice shows that internet devices may negatively affect the youth people is not entirely correct. They can be positive if their creativity is channeled appropriately.

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