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Article

Loyalty in K-Pop Fandom: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract: This topic addresses how the culture of K-Pop fandoms has been studied, focusing on loyalty within K-pop fandoms. This research aims to provide a solid knowledge foundation through a systematic and bibliometric review of literature on loyalty in K-pop fandoms, identifying opportunities for theoretical and empirical advancement. To achieve this, a rigorous and predefined methodological process based on the PRISMA methodology was followed, using four stages for the review: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The criteria for selecting articles were relevance to the subject of study and the publication period since 2017. A total of 51 documents from 150 articles in the Scopus database were analyzed, with results identifying advancements in research by various authors. The study concludes that unilateral loyalty in K-pop, driven by identity and morality, strengthens fans' commitment to their idols without expecting reciprocity, creating a strong community with an "us vs. them" mentality. This phenomenon is comparable to cohesion in other fandoms and sporting events, highlighting how digital interaction and symbols of belonging enhance emotional bonds and a shared sense of identity.

Keywords: K-pop; fandoms; light stick

1. Introduction

In the analysis of loyalty within fandoms, particularly in the context of K-Pop culture, there is a deep and continuous connection between fans and their idols, reflecting a commitment that transcends difficult moments and challenges cultural and social expectations [1]. Loyalty, driven by social interactions in digital communities, has been explored from cultural, psychological, and economic perspectives [2,3,45], when addressing the ethics of love within fandoms, reflects on how fans' passionate love can lead to behaviors that challenge ethical norms, emphasizing that this devotion often oscillates between unwavering loyalty and transgressions, a phenomenon also observed in football and other contexts of intense fandom [34].

Levental [46] adds complexity to the debate by exploring how fan loyalties are challenged by personal commitments, such as romantic relationships. Fans, particularly in the K-Pop fandom, face dilemmas when their loyalty to idols collides with their romantic attachments, revealing that love for idols is not an isolated commitment but interferes with personal and emotional aspects of their lives. This dynamic is also reflected in football, where fans experience internal conflicts between their passion for the team and other aspects of their lives [42].

The sense of belonging and identity construction of fans is influenced using digital platforms, which facilitate continuous interaction and reinforce bonds with their idols [4,5]. In this process, Archer and Baker [51] identify how fans create "virtual homes" during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, uniting fandom communities through shared online experiences, thereby reinforcing their loyalty and commitment. This sense of digital community is not only evident in the K-Pop fandom but also in other contexts, such as football fans, who maintain their identification and loyalty despite challenges such as club relocation [42].

Fiadotava [47] observes how loyalty can emerge ironically, as in the case of FK Slutsk fans, who initially engaged with the team for humorous reasons but developed a genuine attachment. This phenomenon highlights Archer's [45] idea of how fan love can evolve and transform, turning what starts as superficial attraction into a deep emotional commitment. Zhou et al. [48], on the other hand, explore entertainment-related tourism, emphasizing that destination image and place attachment can

mediate fan loyalty to sites associated with celebrities and film productions, extending fan commitment beyond digital interactions to physical experiences in the real world.

Regarding fandom dynamics in urban and sporting contexts, Santana and Téllez [49] analyze how loyalty can fragment in cities with multiple teams, showing that fans may distribute their devotion among different identities. This phenomenon parallels K-Pop fans who display fragmented loyalties to different groups or idols within the same industry. Lee et al.'s [50] research complements this view by examining how self-expansion and commitment to pop idols influence followers' loyalty, suggesting that the emotional relationship with idols can lead to greater investment in fandom-related leisure activities, thereby strengthening fan identity and commitment.

In the context of fandom consumption and monetization, Dwyer et al. [52] explore the intersection between sports betting and team loyalty. This dynamic mirrors the consumption of fandom-related products in K-Pop, where fans purchase merchandise to reinforce their identity and commitment. Archer [45] notes that this type of loyalty may also present an ethical dilemma, as excessive commercialization can affect the authenticity of the relationship between idols and fans, a concern also shared by sports fans who perceive an exploitation of their emotions and loyalties [44]. The analysis of loyalty within fandoms in K-Pop and sporting contexts reveals a complex phenomenon where fan love can lead to ethically questionable behaviors, as highlighted by Archer [45] and Levental et al. [46]. Fans' devotion is influenced by digital interactions, entertainment tourism, and personal dynamics, reflecting a commitment that not only shapes their social and cultural identities but also challenges the boundaries of ethical and emotional loyalty.

2. Materials and Methods

This research was guided by both quantitative and qualitative approaches, as bibliometrics and literature review were used to map the research structure and disciplinary fields [14] through metrics and content analysis to assess the quality of scientific publications [15]. Two types of bibliometric techniques were employed: evaluation and relational techniques. The former included measures of productivity (number of articles per year, countries, and authors), while the relational technique utilized co-occurrence analysis of keywords. Additionally, for the systematic review, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology, 2020 version, was followed, which integrates four stages of verification applied to social sciences: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (see Table 3). The first phase consisted of a search in the Scopus database using the search equation shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Search Equations.

Database	Search Equations	Results
SCOPUS	TITLE-ABS-KEY("fandom" OR "fan culture" OR "fandom culture" OR "light stick" OR "lightstick" OR "light stick show" OR "fan lightstick") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY("K-pop" OR "Kpop" OR "Korean pop") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("loyalty" OR "commitment" OR "fan loyalty")	150

The documents were selected starting from the year 2019, obtaining a set of documents, from which those relevant to the topic of loyalty in K-Pop fandoms were chosen, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Loyalty in K-Pop Fandoms.

No	Authors	Title
1	Ma et al. [2]	How Do Comeback Korean Pop Performers Acquire Audience Empathetic Attachment and Sustained Loyalty? Parasocial Interactions Through Live Stream Shows

2	Jin et al. [9]	How do fandom types differ? A taxonomy of K-pop fandom with network embedding
3	Menawati & Putri [3]	Representation of Popular Korean Culture (K-POP) Industrial Identity through A Virtual Ethnographic Approach
4	King-O'Riain [4]	"They were having so much fun, so genuinely..": K-pop fan online affect and corroborated authenticity
5	Lee et al. [8]	Unveiling the success factors of BTS: a mixed-methods approach
6	Al-Kuwari & Chandra [16]	From the Furjān to the Stadiums: Examining Qatari Football Fandom and Migrant Experiences before and during the World Cup
7	Patrick Williams & Wang [11]	How fan clubs manage the authenticity of fans' identities in Chinese idol culture
8	Jiang & Bairner [37]	Chinese football fandom and civic identities: a study of the fans of Shanghai Shenhua and Beijing Guoan
9	Raissa [7]	The Relationship Between Big Hit Entertainment Business Strategy in Selling Korean Pop Culture and Consumer Loyalty During COVID-19
10.	Schleifer & Tamir [24]	Sport, the arts, and fans' loyalty: the role of color for sport fans
11.	Sveinson [38]	"Be a Good Fan During the Good, the Bad, and Even the Ugly": Exploring Cultural Boundaries Through Sport Fan Discourses on Twitter
12	Santana & Tocora [34]	Fan loyalty and underperforming teams: the case of Atlas F.C
13	Ploeg [39]	A New Form of Fandom: How Free Agency Brought about Rotisserie League Baseball
14	Allison & Pope [40]	Becoming Fans: Socialization and Motivations of Fans of the England and U.S. Women's National Football Teams
15	Ay & Kaygan [41]	Autonomy or loyalty? Community-within-community interactions of a local football fandom group
16	Potter [42]	From Merton to Milton Keynes: Wimbledon Football Club Fans and the Impact of Post Team Relocation Ten Years after the End of the Crazy Gang
17	Shane-Nichols et al. [43]	NFL fans' identity and consumption behavior by gender
18	Obiegbu et al. [6]	Co-constructing loyalty in an era of digital music fandom: An experiential-discursive perspective
19	Ludvigsen [44]	Transnational fan reactions to transnational trends: Norwegian Liverpool supporters, 'authenticity' and 'filthy-rich' club owners

20	Limic & Limb [10]	Self-Produced K-Pop Web Entertainment Program Production Components and Their Effect on Global Audience's Program Satisfaction and Artist Loyalty—Focusing on “Going Seventeen”
21	Humphries & Kucek [27]	Examining soccer fan performances through performative sport fandom theory: how fans of the spurs perform their fandom
22	Gong [12]	Transcultural taste and neoliberal patriotic subject: A study of Chinese fans' online talk of K-pop
23	Archer [45]	Fans, Crimes and Misdemeanors: Fandom and the Ethics of Love
24	Levental [5]	Online sports fans communities: humor, trivial knowledge, and anti-modern tendencies
25	Pan & Phua [32]	Connecting sponsor brands through sports competitions: an identity approach to brand trust and brand loyalty
26	Larkin et al. [30]	Toward a Better Understanding of Fair-Weather Fandom: Exploring the Role of Collective Narcissism in Basking in Reflected Glory and Cutting Off Reflected Failure
27	Hayat et al. [26]	Unveiling the Intersection of Individual Stardom and Team Loyalty in Social Network Reflections: The Case of Soccer-Stars Ronaldo and Messi
28	Levental et al. [46]	Passionate hearts, torn loyalties: navigating the interplay between fandom and romance
29	Obiegbu et al. [6]	The critical music fan: the role of criticality in collective constructions of brand loyalty
30	Fiadotava [47]	we came for the Sluts, but stayed for the Slutsk: FK Slutsk Worldwide Facebook page between ironic and genuine football fandom
31	Zhou et al. [48]	Celebrity and film tourist loyalty: Destination image and place attachment as mediators
32	Friedman [25]	A Fan's Emotional Pendulum
33	Raharjo et al. [36]	Hitting the Right Notes: Exploring the Relationship between YouTube Music Videos and Digital User Engagement
34	Jiang y O'Callaghan [28]	Chinese football fandom: Growing with the changing Chinese society. In The mediating power of sport: Global challenges and sport culture in China
35	Trail et al. [13]	How best to measure connection to a team: team identification, brand attitude/loyalty, consumer lifestyle or interest level?
36	Blum [35]	Shipping—An afterword

37	Kipen [29]	Fandom
38	Carnochan [33]	The faith of the fan
39	Thompson et al. [22]	Developing esport tourism through fandom experience at in-person events
40	Kim & Kim [1]	How does a celebrity make fans happy? Interaction between celebrities and fans in the social media context
41	Santana [49]	One city two teams: A mixed approach study for exploring sports fandom
42	Lee & Moon [8]	New public segmentation for political public relations using political fandom: Understanding relationships between individual politicians and fans
43	Lee et al. [50]	The influence of self-expansion on pop-star fans’ leisure constraints, commitment, involvement and future intention
44	Fruh et al. [23]	A fair shake for the fair-weather fan
45	Marroquín Paitan [21]	Preserving community through translation: A case study of a fandom community translation I
46	Fiesler y Dym [21]	Moving Across Lands: Online Platform Migration in Fandom Communities
47	Jones [17]	Design for joy : Constructing equity trails in fandom – centered classroom
48	Tamir [20]	Choosing to stay away: Soccer fans’ purposeful avoidance of soccer events
49	Kruger [18]	Exploring the foundations of unilateral loyalty in coalitional psychology: Identifying mechanisms of identity, morality, and disgust.
50	Baker [51]	Creating virtual homes during COVID-19: #HomemadeDisney and theme park fandom’s response to crisis
51	Dwyer et al. [52]	Fan conflict or complement? Exploring the intersection of sports betting and team loyalty. International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship.

Table 3. PRISMA Flow Diagram.

IDENTIFICATION	Total number of articles identified with the search equation (Table 1) (N = 150)
SCREENING	Total number of articles screened by title and abstract (N = 143).
ELIGIBILITY	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (aspects such as methodological quality, study design, study population, and outcomes are evaluated) (N = 76)

INCLUSION	Total number of articles selected (N = 51)
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3. Results

3.1. Bibliometric Analysis

In 150 documents

The analysis of the publications in Table 4 shows an initial growth between 2017 and 2018, starting with 8 documents in 2017 and decreasing to 2 in 2018, followed by a significant increase to 13 papers in 2019. From 2019 to 2022, an upward and stable trend is observed, with 13 documents in 2019, 16 in 2020, and 2021, and a peak of 19 in 2022. This increase coincides with the global expansion of K-pop and the growing academic interest in its cultural impact. However, from 2023, there is a slight decrease with 17 documents that year and 15 in 2024. For 2025, only one document is recorded, which is due to the anticipation of the year.

Table 4. Articles Published by Year.

Year	Documents
2017	8
2018	2
2019	13
2020	16
2021	16
2022	19
2023	17
2024	15
2025	1

Based on the results obtained from Scopus, which include 150 documents on culture and loyalty in K-Pop fandoms, a significant distribution by country is observed in Table 5. The United States leads with 57 papers, representing 38.78% of the total, reflecting the country's strong interest in global cultural studies and popular music. The United Kingdom follows it with 24 documents (16.33%), indicating considerable attention to the K-Pop phenomenon, particularly in Europe. Israel has contributed 11 documents, representing 7.48% of the total, reflecting interest in K-Pop within the context of cultural and media studies. Surprisingly, South Korea has only produced 7 documents (4.76%), despite being the country of origin of K-Pop. This may be due to many South Korean research articles being published in other languages or local media that are not indexed in Scopus.

Table 5. Documents by Country.

Country	Documents
United States	57
United kingdom	24
Israel	11
South Korea	7
Australia	6
Canada	6
Indonesia	6
China	5

New Zeland	5
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Australia, Canada, and Indonesia each produced 6 documents (4.08% of the total each), likely driven by the growing popularity of K-Pop in these regions. China and New Zealand, with 5 documents each (3.40%), have also shown interest in the phenomenon, although with a lower volume of production. In general, the United States and the United Kingdom dominate academic production, accounting for more than 55% of the total documents, highlighting the role of English-speaking countries in disseminating research on K-Pop internationally.

The author analysis of publications on loyalty in K-Pop fandoms, as shown in Table 6, reveals a growing field with diverse contributions. Of the 150 articles on this topic, Levental, O. and Tamir, I. are the most prominent authors, each with three publications, representing 2% of the total research. Their consistent presence suggests that these authors are key figures in the study of loyalty in K-Pop, possibly providing in-depth perspectives on the emotional connection and commitment of fans in this area. A second group of authors, such as Carnochan, W.B., Dwyer, B., Dym, B., Ellis, N., Fiesler, C., Fink, J.S., and Galily, Y., contributed two articles each, representing approximately 1.3% of the total studies. Although their contributions are smaller in number, this group complements the field with specific and varied approaches, which may include themes such as identity, consumption practices, and community-building within K-Pop fandoms.

Table 6. Authors.

Author	Documents
Levental, O.	3
Tamir, I.	3
Carnochan, W.B.	2
Dwyer, B.	2
Dym, B.	2
Ellis, N.	2
Fiesler, C.	2
Fink, J.S.	2
Galily, Y.	2

Together, this analysis reveals that the field of study on loyalty in K-Pop fandoms is characterized by distributed authorship, where multiple voices and perspectives enrich the understanding of this unique loyalty. The lack of concentration of publications in a few authors suggests that the topic attracts broad interest, with multiple approaches reflecting the complexity and diversity of fan experiences in this genre. For researchers interested in this area, these authors represent relevant benchmarks, and the wide range of contributions indicates an expanding field that responds to the global popularity and intense dynamics of K-Pop fandoms. The 150 documents were analyzed using VOSviewer software, showing two (2) clusters, as seen in Figure 1, with the words of each cluster displayed in Table 7. The neon green cluster. The red cluster refers to the relationship between.

Cluster 2 (Neon Green): Focus on Community and Identity

This neon green cluster centers on the social and cultural aspects of fandoms, particularly in the creation of communities and identities. Terms like community, identity, club, and fandom are especially prominent, indicating a strong focus on how fans form bonds and define themselves through their involvement in these fan groups. Key inferences from this cluster emphasize the importance of community in fandoms. Fans are seen as part of strong, cohesive communities where they develop deep connections and a sense of belonging. This finding aligns with research that explores how participation in fandoms contributes to social interaction and collective identity formation.

Additionally, identity plays a crucial role, with a central theme being how fans' identities are constructed and transformed through their active participation in these groups. The inclusion of terms such as football fandom and sports fandom suggests that researchers are comparing K-Pop fandoms to other types of fandoms (e.g., sports fandoms) to highlight similarities and differences, particularly regarding how identity is shaped within these diverse fan communities. This cluster underscores the dual focus of research on fan loyalty within K-Pop fandoms: (1) the development of methodological approaches to study loyalty and its broader impact across industries, and (2) the exploration of community and identity, illustrating how these fandoms create strong social networks and influence the self-perception of fans.

4. Discussion

4.1. Findings

The findings of Al-Kuwari and Chandra [16] reveal how the World Cup transformed the role of fans in Qatar, highlighting the loyalty of both local and migrant fans through their participation in events and support for global football culture. This phenomenon mirrors the loyalty observed in K-pop followers, where national pride and identity are crucial elements that foster engagement with both the culture and the team. Migrant fans, in particular, balance dual identities, supporting both their home teams and Qatar, underscoring the importance of community in shaping a sense of belonging. In this context, Jones [17] complements the discussion by noting that fandom-centered classrooms can strengthen student loyalty and commitment by integrating their interests. This approach not only creates a positive educational environment but also resonates with the intense group cohesion described by Kruger [18] in K-pop fans, where loyalty is often unidirectional, and characterized by investment without expectation of reciprocity. Such loyalty manifests in acts of defense toward idols, creating a clear distinction between the group and outsiders, which further strengthens internal bonds.

On the other hand, Fiesler and Dym's [19] research highlights how the migration of fandom communities across online platforms affects the cohesion and loyalty of followers. This underscores the flexibility and dedication of K-pop fans in maintaining their connection with idols. Similarly, Tamir [20] observes that some football fans, like their K-pop counterparts, choose to distance themselves from certain events for emotional or ethical reasons, which can deepen their commitment to a more authentic vision of fandom. Marroquín Paitan [21] explores the concept of "community translation" within fandoms, where Spanish-speaking K-pop fans translate related content, such as song lyrics and interviews. This effort not only overcomes language barriers but also strengthens cohesion within their fandom community. By sharing these translations, fans reaffirm their loyalty to K-pop and create a sense of belonging that consolidates group ties. In this regard, Thompson et al. [22] highlight that the experience at live events, such as concerts, not only reinforces loyalty but also fosters a sense of community and shared celebration.

The loyalty within K-pop fandoms is distinguished by its depth, as analyzed by Fruh et al. [23]. These authors contrast "fair-weather fans" with the truly loyal ones, emphasizing that followers not only celebrate successes but also remain loyal during difficult times. This loyalty is often measured by emotional identification with idols, a factor that Trail et al. [13] consider crucial for the sustainability of the fandom. The analysis of loyalty in K-pop fandoms is enriched by the work of

Schleifer and Tamir [24], who highlight that the colors associated with groups and artists act as powerful symbols that reinforce fans' identity and loyalty. This multifaceted dynamic encompasses emotional, community, and symbolic factors that contribute to robust and meaningful loyalty among followers. Further exploring these dynamics, Friedman [25] examines the "emotional pendulum" experienced by football fans in response to their teams' ups and downs, reflecting a symbolic connection like that of K-pop fans, whose loyalty fluctuates with the achievements of their idols. Gong [12] adds a transcultural dimension by analyzing how Chinese K-pop fans negotiate their national identity within foreign pop culture, balancing loyalty to idols with patriotic identity.

In the sports realm, Hayat et al. [26] investigate the interaction between devotion to individual stars, such as Messi and Ronaldo, and loyalty to the team as a whole. This duality of loyalty is also observed in K-pop, where fans express fidelity to both their favorite idols and the entire group. Humphries and Kucek [27] explore how Tottenham Hotspur supporters consolidate their group identity through social media and the stadium, a practice that also defines K-pop fandoms. Jiang and O'Callaghan [28] show how football fandom in China reflects broader social transformations and how support for local teams contributes to civic identity, like the commitment shown by K-pop fans toward their idols in times of social change. The K-pop fan classification by Jin et al. [9] offers insight into the multiple facets of this loyalty, from casual fans to devout followers, providing a structural perspective on how loyalty varies with levels of identification and commitment. Kim and Kim [1] emphasize the importance of social media interaction between celebrities and fans, which reinforces the sense of closeness and elevates fan satisfaction, while King-O'Riain [4] underscores that authenticity in these interactive relationships adds emotional value that nurtures fan loyalty.

From a literary perspective, Kipen [29] studies how fans reinterpret works and attribute personal meanings to them, creating connections that strengthen the sense of belonging, a phenomenon also present in K-pop, where followers interpret lyrics and narratives to construct a shared identity. Together, these studies demonstrate that fan loyalty, both in sports and in K-pop, is not merely an act of consumption, but a cultural and emotional practice that facilitates the construction and reaffirmation of identities in ever-evolving social contexts. Larkin et al. [30], on "fair-weather fans," suggest that loyalty in fandom may be conditioned by group pride and collective perception, establishing a relationship between loyalty and the success of idols. Lee et al. [31] explain that factors of identification and emotional connection, such as those that have propelled BTS's success, are essential for maintaining deep and meaningful loyalty in K-pop fandom. Ma et al. [2] highlight how live-streaming programs strengthen the emotional bond and loyalty between fans and artists within K-pop.

In a global context, Menawati and Putri's [3] research on K-pop culture and the identity of its fans in virtual spaces emphasizes that loyalty in these fandoms is built and sustained through shared digital practices. This aligns with the analysis by Obiegbu et al. [6] on critical loyalty, where fans express and negotiate their loyalty through constructive participation and demand for authenticity. This approach is also observed in Patrick Williams and Wang's [11] study of authenticity in the idol culture in China, where fan clubs play an active role in managing a genuine identity. Pan and Phua [32] introduce the idea that loyalty not only manifests in devotion to idols but also in resistance to criticism. This reflects a similar perspective in football fandom, where fans show loyalty in difficult times and defend their teams. In this sense, loyalty becomes a form of cultural resistance that unites followers through their commitment to the group.

Thus, loyalty in fandoms, both in the context of K-pop and in sports, is a complex phenomenon involving a range of emotional, community, and symbolic factors. Through emotional identification, online interaction, and the creation of shared spaces, fans build and sustain their loyalty, making it a fundamental element in the construction of identities within evolving communities. This study opens the door to deeper analysis of loyalty in varied fandom contexts, contributing to the understanding of the connection between culture, identity, and devotion.

4.2. Interpretation of Results

Al-Kuwari and Chandra [16] highlight the importance of community in shaping the fan experience, reflecting patterns like those observed in the K-pop fandom. Complementing this idea, Jones [17] points out that fandom-centered classrooms can strengthen students' loyalty and commitment by integrating their interests. This approach is crucial for creating a positive and communal educational environment, where loyalty is expressed not only on an individual level but also fosters group cohesion. This cohesion is an aspect that Kruger [18] describes when observing loyalty within the K-pop fandom, where fans invest in their idols without expecting reciprocity, creating a strong and distinctive internal bond compared to external ones.

Fiesler and Dym's [19] research supports this analysis by highlighting the migration of fandom communities across online platforms, which impacts fan cohesion and loyalty. This flexibility and dedication are evident in how K-pop fans maintain their connection with idols, a dynamic also observed in Tamir's [20] work, which notes that some football fans choose to distance themselves from specific events for emotional or ethical reasons, thus strengthening their commitment to a more authentic vision of fandom. In the context of community translation, Marroquín Paitan [21] explores how Spanish-speaking K-pop fans reaffirm their loyalty through the translation of content, overcoming language barriers and strengthening community cohesion. This aspect is complemented by Thompson et al. [22], who argue that the experience at live events, such as concerts, not only reinforces loyalty but also fosters a sense of community and shared celebration among attendees.

Fruh et al. [23] offer an additional perspective by differentiating between "fair-weather fans" and truly loyal ones in the K-pop fandom. This distinction is essential because it emphasizes that followers remain loyal not only in moments of success but also during challenges, measuring their loyalty through emotional identification with the idols. This aspect is considered crucial for the sustainability of the fandom by Trail et al. [13], who emphasize the importance of this emotional connection. The work of Schleifer and Tamir [24] enriches the analysis by highlighting the role of colors associated with groups and artists as powerful symbols that reinforce fans' identity and loyalty. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of fandom dynamics in K-pop, encompassing emotional, communal, and symbolic aspects that contribute to strong and meaningful loyalty among followers.

4.3. Implications

Al-Kuwari and Chandra [16] suggest that national pride and identity are crucial for fostering loyalty among fans, which opens a pathway for investigating how these factors can be used in educational and social contexts to strengthen cohesion and collective identity. This interaction between fandom and cultural identity could be a promising area of study in sociology and social psychology. Moreover, the observation that migrant fans balance dual identities, supporting both their home teams and Qatar, highlights the complexity of identity in the age of globalization. This could lead to future research in cultural anthropology and migration studies on how migrant communities negotiate their loyalty and sense of belonging in multicultural contexts.

The role of fandom-centered classrooms, as mentioned by Jones [17], suggests that integrating personal interests into learning can enhance student engagement. This has significant implications for pedagogy, indicating that educational strategies that incorporate fandom culture could foster more positive and collaborative environments. Similarly, the intense group cohesion described by Kruger [18] and the migration of fandom communities across online platforms noted by Fiesler and Dym [19] open the door for exploring the nature of loyalty and cohesion in the digital age. This could inform future studies in communication and media, as well as the development of digital platforms that foster authentic connections among fans.

On the other hand, the analysis of loyalty in K-pop fandom about emotional identification with idols, mentioned by Trail et al. [13], reinforces the need to explore how this identification could be a determining factor in the sustainability of fandoms. This is relevant to social identity psychology and marketing, especially in the context of popular culture and the music industry. The importance of symbols, such as the colors associated with groups and artists, discussed by Schleifer and Tamir [24],

underscores the role of symbolism in constructing identity and loyalty. This could be a focal point in the study of semiotics and visual communication within fandoms, contributing to a richer understanding of how symbols affect behavior and group cohesion.

4.4. Limitations

Studies on loyalty in the K-pop fandom present several limitations that hinder a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. One crucial aspect is the geographically limited focus in some studies, such as that of Al-Kuwari and Chandra [16], which focuses exclusively on Qatar. This focus restricts the ability to generalize findings to other regions and cultures, overlooking the diversity of fan experiences in broader contexts. This lack of geographical representation can result in a partial view of the loyalty dynamics and motivations driving followers in different cultural environments. Additionally, the complexity of the concept of loyalty, which varies from individual to individual, may be subject to biases in the methodologies used. Surveys and interviews, commonly employed, rely heavily on personal perceptions, which could influence responses and limit the accuracy of the data obtained. While some studies draw parallels between the K-pop fandom and football fandom, the lack of exhaustive comparisons between different fandoms may lead to oversimplification of the motivations and forms of loyalty that characterize each group, as mentioned in Jones [17].

The educational context may also limit the understanding of loyalty dynamics within the K-pop fandom. Although Jones [17] focuses on the educational environment, it does not delve into how loyalty dynamics manifest in other contexts. This limitation prevents the capture of how factors such as race, gender, and social class impact loyalty to K-pop. Furthermore, the ephemeral nature of music trends and market saturation may affect fan loyalty, aspects not thoroughly addressed in existing studies. On the other hand, the reliance on qualitative methodologies may introduce additional biases, as responses could be influenced by the desire to conform to group expectations. Although the article suggests that classrooms centered on fandom promote loyalty, it does not consider that this may exclude those who do not identify with such fandoms. This limits the understanding of interactions and experiences within a significant part of the fan community.

In the theoretical framework presented by Kruger [18], although the concept of "one-sided loyalty" is explored, there is a lack of empirical analysis connecting these concepts to the K-pop fandom. The absence of case studies limits the applicability of the findings and may result in overgeneralizations about loyalty in this context. By focusing on one-sided loyalty, the article may oversimplify the relationships between fans and idols, ignoring elements of emotional reciprocity that are essential to understanding these complex dynamics. Finally, although the work of Fiesler and Dym [19] provides perspectives on the migration of fandom communities across online platforms, it limits itself to examining the movement without delving into the reasons motivating fans to follow their communities. The quality of content, interaction with other fans, and the evolution of fandom culture are crucial to understanding loyalty, and their absence in the analysis restricts a complete view of this phenomenon. Together, these limitations highlight the need for future research that adopts a broader and more diverse approach to understanding loyalty in K-pop fandoms, considering geographical, contextual, cultural, and social factors.

5. Conclusions

Kruger's [18] research on "one-sided loyalty" shows how K-pop fans invest deeply in their idols without expecting reciprocity. This loyalty, driven by factors of identity and morality, creates a sense of obligation toward the idols, especially in the face of external threats. Furthermore, internal cohesion within these fandoms is strengthened by an "us vs. them" mentality, consolidating emotional commitment within the community. On the other hand, Al-Kuwari and Chandra's [16] analysis of football fans in Qatar reveals that events like the World Cup generate national pride and a sense of community. This phenomenon shares similarities with the cohesion observed within the global K-pop community, where fans share a collective identity and emotional commitment [8].

In the educational realm, Jones' [17] analysis highlights how fandom-centered environments promote a sense of belonging by integrating students' interests. In the context of K-pop, a similar

approach would allow fans to feel recognized, consolidating their identity within the fandom and strengthening their loyalty. Similarly, Tamir [20] observes that some K-pop fans avoid certain activities for ethical reasons, emphasizing their commitment to an authentic relationship with the fandom and showcasing the complexity of their loyalty. Fiesler and Dym [19] provide a deep understanding of emotional commitment from fans, which, in the case of K-pop, manifests in their adaptability to support their idols across different platforms. Marroquín Paitan [21] highlights how "community translation" allows fans to overcome language barriers and strengthen their global bonds.

Moreover, the distinction between "fair-weather fans" and truly loyal fans, as analyzed by Fruh et al. [23], is also present in the K-pop fandom, where followers remain unconditional during difficult times. Trail et al. [13] stress that this emotional identification strengthens the bond between fans and K-pop, while Carnochan [28] compares this devotion to a form of faith, describing the almost religious loyalty that creates passionate communities transcending mere entertainment. Following this line, Lee and Moon [27] show that, like in politics, K-pop fans form an intense connection with their idols, defending their public image and reinforcing a sense of community. Similarly, Santana [29] observes that rivalries and community practices in sports find parallels in K-pop, where "fan wars" and live activities consolidate emotional bonds between fans.

Blum and Levental [30] highlight how "shipping" and humor in online communities strengthen cohesion within the K-pop fandom. Potter [42] and Schleifer and Tamir [10] emphasize the adaptability of fans and the use of symbols like "light sticks" as forms of cohesion and group expression. During the pandemic, fandoms adapted to virtual environments, as evidenced in phenomena like #HomemadeDisney, where fans used digital media to strengthen connections with their idols [32]. In K-pop, the use of "light sticks" symbolizes cohesion and emotional attachment between followers, and social media interactions contribute to a sense of belonging that is fundamental to loyalty [3].

Fiadotava [47] emphasizes how fandom environments can also promote belonging in educational spaces by integrating students' interests. This approach, when applied to K-pop, allows fans to feel recognized and consolidate their identity within the community, thus strengthening their loyalty. In an analysis of network adaptability, Larkin et al. [30] observe that digital communication facilitates social cohesion by enabling fans to interact and build strong relationships with their idols. The distinction between loyal and temporary followers, analyzed by Fruh et al. [8], is also evident in K-pop, where fans remain unconditional during controversies or hardships. Carnochan [33] compares this devotion to religious faith, arguing that K-pop generates a loyalty that transcends entertainment, while Trail et al. [13] stress the importance of the emotional connection between followers and K-pop.

Furthermore, studies such as those by Hayat et al. [26] and Humphries and Kucek [27] highlight how identity and belonging phenomena in K-pop fandoms find parallels in other contexts, such as sports, where group identification and a sense of belonging are crucial. Thus, Santana and Torcora [34] describe how rivalries in sports are reflected in K-pop through "fanwars," which strengthen emotional commitment and connection between fans. Blum [35] and Levental [5] also highlight how entertainment elements, such as "shipping" and humor in online communities, foster cohesion within the K-pop fandom. At the same time, Kim and Kim [1] analyze how social media facilitates the building of communities, enabling followers to share experiences and foster a deeper sense of belonging.

The pandemic further accelerated fandoms' transition to digital environments, with examples such as the #HomemadeDisney phenomenon, where fans turned to virtual platforms to connect with their idols and express their loyalty [32]. In the K-pop fandom, this trend was reflected in the symbolic use of "light sticks" as a sign of cohesion, while social media interaction reinforced a sense of belonging vital to loyalty [23]. Loyalty in K-pop fandoms is a complex phenomenon encompassing emotional, social, and cultural aspects. This active interaction between fans and artists, along with the followers' ability to adapt and redefine loyalty dynamics, provides a robust theoretical and empirical framework for understanding these phenomena in contemporary pop culture. This

underscores the relevance of these studies for future research in the fields of social and cultural sciences [5,36].

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