Subculture of female Korean culture fans: pleasure, creativity, and sisterhood

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Abstract The entry of the Korean wave in the early 2000s in Indonesia, which was facilitated by internet technology, has become part of communication activities. This has led to the formation of subcultures of fans of Korean wave products, namely K-Drama and K-Pop, including women's subcultures who like K-drama and K-Pop. This subculture was built and developed through social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp. This article reviews how the digital era has changed how female fans interact to empower themselves through subcultures in the online space, mainly focusing on female fans of K-pop bands and K-dramas. Using the ethnographic research method, the research results show that along with the digital era that continues to develop, the subculture of female fans, initially formed through a physical collective group, has now evolved into a subculture of female fans formed through internet-based interactions. The subculture of female fans in the online space has become a forum for exploring pleasure, creativity, and self-empowerment through text production and reproduction of media texts supported by digital technology. Exploration of fun, creativity, and self-empowerment merged in a sense of sisterhood, participatory and collaborative culture.

Keywords: female fans; Korean culture; subculture

INTRODUCTION

Before the digital era, K-pop and K-drama fans formed communities in conventional ways, such as holding regular meetings at basecamps, creating fanzines disseminated through fan recommendations, exchanging merchandise, and watching DVDs together. However, in the digital era, fan practices are developing with the support of features available on social media, enabling fans to exchange information and engage in joint creativity. In the decade since the beginning of 2000, more and more online subcultures have emerged along with the development of various social media platforms that provide group and community features, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram. Based on data from We Are Social, the number of active social media users in Indonesia in January 2023 is 167 million users who spend an average of 7 hours 42 minutes using the Internet. The three social media most widely used by Indonesians are WhatsApp (92.1%), Instagram (86.5%), and Facebook (83.8%), with a user age range from 16 years to 64 years, with 48.6% of total social media users being women. This data illustrates that the Internet has become a part of Indonesian society's life. People with the same thoughts, hobbies, and interests build a subculture and live, interact, and create creativity, mediated by the internet.

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Since its emergence, the subculture has taken various forms, such as the punk community, graffiti artists, and the female subculture of K-Pop and K-Drama fans, who are the subject of this research. This subculture was born through the initiation of 3 people who got to know each other through online media and often exchanged stories about their interest in K-Drama. They then created a K-Drama fan group on Facebook to serve as a space to share information about the K-Drama they like. The number of members continues to increase with a recommendation system between members until it now has 653 members in 2023. What differentiates a subculture from a community, mass, public, or society? According to Thornton (2003), this will always be a matter of debate. Still, Thornton answers this question by defining a subculture as a group of people on a small scale who are united by the same interest in something. In general, subculture is seen as something that is built formally and informally based on choice or is formed naturally through a sense of brotherhood, for example, prisoners in prison or a group of people in an asylum.

Many fans love the opportunities digital media provides. In the context of social media (Donath, 2005), states that by using the interaction networks that exist within it, people can connect interactively, such as through chat, email, and digital conferences such as Usenet. People can form thousands of online communities to discuss various topics; also, by using social media, people can even carry out collective projects such as fundraising. This shows that social media is more than just a communication medium because it can support and sustain different interactions. Likewise, the online community of female K-Pop and K-Drama fans is among the thousands of communities developing on social media. The arrival of the Korean wave in Indonesia has impacted the growth of K-pop and K-drama fan communities. The increase in the number of online communities of fans of Korean Wave products in Indonesia is based on interest in actors and actresses from South Korea, the desire to get more information about idols, and the desire to interact with fellow fans(Nugroho, 2014).

K-pop female fandom is considered unique in terms of wholehearted fan activities, both through online and offline activities. They are loyal consumers who not only listen to K-pop music and buy K-pop albums but are also willing to travel abroad to see K-pop concerts, become fan subs for free, organise K-pop flash mobs in their home countries, post reaction videos to newly released K-pop music videos, and even getting tattoos of their beloved K-pop stars; they also construct fictional and personal narratives by referring to their idols as husbands or 'oppa' (Oh, 2015). On the other hand, Busse's study of the sub-cultural community of Star Trek fans among female fans showed that women are an active audience that criticises, interprets, and often changes the source text of the shows they like. The response of female fans is often seen from a feminist perspective that is critical of misogynist media culture (Busse, 2016). A study on Female Fandom Online conducted by Bury also stated that According to Bury (2005), since the 1980s, feminist discourse has stated that women can be active spectators, not just spectators who enjoy the good looks of male actors to the point of falling in love with the actor without being able to separate fantasy from reality. Bury, who studied online female fans, stated that fans' desire for male actors is not about feelings of romantic love but instead desire as a product of a discursive process. Bury (2005) further stated that fandom is ultimately about building relationships between fans; a sense of solidarity grows with the same interest in media texts.

Through this article, the author analyses how the fan practices carried out by female K-Pop and K-Drama fans in the digital era, whether the fan practices carried out are only limited to pleasure as fans or more than that, the subculture of female K-Pop and K-Drama fans can become space to develop and empower oneself, especially when it comes to the stigma attached to female fans as fans who prioritise excessive emotional feelings for their idols and tend to ignore logic.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses the Netnography method proposed by Kozinet. Netnography is a new methodology in qualitative research that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that emerge through computer-mediated communication. More specifically, Kozinet divides four types of Netography: Symbolic Netnography, Humanist Netnography, Digital Netnography, and Auto Netnography (Kozinets, 2015). The researcher chose to use Symbolic Netnography in this study, considering that symbolic netnography is used to understand the subcultural identity of female K-Pop and K-Drama fans through interaction, translating fan practices, meanings, and rituals carried out together online.

In this study, the researcher positions himself as a participant in a fan group to observe and trace the interactions carried out by the research subjects. The three research subjects are private groups, so to maintain research ethics, the researcher sought permission from the group admin to take screenshots in the group. Here is a screenshot containing the request for permission from the group admin (see Figure 1).
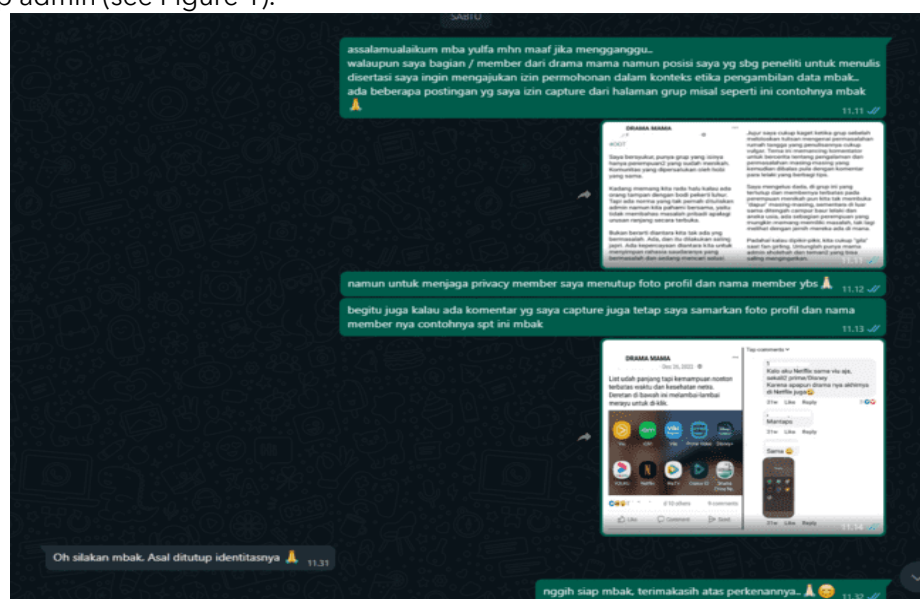

Figure 1. Screenshot of the researcher's WhatsApp conversation with the group admin
Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

Research data was collected through screenshots of photos, captions, and comments that appeared on the Facebook group and WhatsApp group pages. Data analysis was conducted by classifying the data and dividing the data into several folders namely– the pleasure, creativity, and empowerment folders. The next stage is data interpretation, which focuses on the subjectivity and position of the research subject.

The research subjects were three online communities of female K-pop bands and K-drama fans, namely MyDay, Drama Mama, and Mamak Ngedrakor. The researcher found these three communities using a recommendation system from fellow K-Pop and K-Drama fans on Facebook and WhatsApp Group. The description of the research subject is summarised as follows:

MyDayKalsel, a subculture of female fans of the K-Pop Band DAY6. They were formed in 2019 with 81 female members from various regions in the province of South Kalimantan. The age range of subculture members is 17 to 27 years, with daily activities as high school students, university students, and workers. Subcultures are built online through different social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp.

Drama Mama, a subculture of women who are fans of K-drama and K-pop bands. They were formed in 2015 with 656 members from various regions in Indonesia. All members are women aged 30 to 56 years. Subcultures are built online through Facebook. Subculture members use a recommendation system to join this subculture. Their daily activities are as a homemaker, worker, and mompreneur.

Mamak Ngedrakor, a subculture of female K-Drama fans. They were formed in 2018 with 44 women members from various big cities in Indonesia. The age range of members of this subculture is 33 years to 45 years. This subculture was built online through WhatsApp. Apart from that, this subculture has an Instagram account to display its creative fan content. The daily activities of members of this subculture are homemakers, workers, and volunteers in non-profit organisations. The educational background of a subculture typically consists of members of a university.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Development of Women's Subculture in the Digital Era.

The study of subculture began in the 1970s and was pioneered by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham. It views subculture as a culture of resistance that deserves recognition and acceptance. This institution was initiated by Richard Horggart, E.P Thompson, and Raymond Williams. CCCS introduces an interdisciplinary methodology that combines textual analysis with a focus on historical and social context. These analytical works have similarities in viewing and analysing culture but differ from previously existing social studies paradigms, although this does not mean rejecting or abandoning them. This tendency later became known as the Birmingham School, which is also the basis of the cultural studies paradigm. Two phenomenal works produced by CCCS experts are Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain, written by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson in 1975, and Subculture: The Meaning of Style, written in 1979.

Subculture consists of two words—sub, which means part or part, and culture, which means habit or habit. Conceptually, subculture is a movement, activity, or behaviour (collective) or part of a larger culture which is usually used as a form of resistance to mainstream culture. It could entail resistance against anything: religion, country, institutions, music, lifestyle, and everything that is considered mainstream. Consequently, subculture is also labelled as 'deviant culture'. The Birmingham School views subculture as a culture of resistance that must be given a place. Subcultures in the cultural studies framework are seen as "entire ways of life" and "maps of meaning" that make its members comprehend the world. The sub has the connotation of being unique and different from everything considered mainstream culture. The specificity of a subculture depends on its binary opposition, namely the idea of a dominant culture that is mass-produced so that it is no longer authentic (Sugihartati, 2017).

As a subcultural theory developed by the Birmingham School, several criticisms were raised in response to the work of Hall, Hebdige, Willis, and others. Cones (Barker, 2020) states that "young people" in the theoretical framework of cultural studies can no longer be said to be deviant "only" because Cones considers the concept of resistance used by CCCS to be too exaggerated. According to Barker (2020), the fundamental criticism of CCCS subcultural theory is related to the positioning of youth subcultures as white, male, and working class. CCCS praises youth culture and ignores the various characteristics of racism and sexism. This is believed to be one aspect of subcultural theorists' emphasis on excitement at the expense of routine, meaning, and style over fun and fantasy. Barker also stated that whatever we believe about young people, they are still divided by class, race, and gender, but they are united by age, attitude, or style. The ideas that develop post-subculture are not only because distinctive youth cultures never existed but because they are increasingly fragmented. The idea of an authentic, media-free, grassroots subculture can no longer be maintained (Barker, 2020).

Criticism was also expressed by Thornton, who stated that a cultural club is a fad, having fun and fragmented, just like "clubland," which constantly changes its name, style, and location where they gather, as well as artists, genres, and songs which continue to change. Hence, it takes work to map patterns. Youth culture club. However, they continue categorising and classifying youth culture according to musical tastes, dance forms, rituals, and clothing styles. They offer a different taste and place. Clubbers see themselves as outside and at odds with "mainstream" culture. Youth subcultures, in this case, clubbing and music subcultures, are built through technological and media enculturation (Thornton, 2003). As stated by Barker (2020), subcultural theory understands youth culture to be "outside" the media and in conflict with it; on the other hand, contemporary theorists state that youth culture is always "inside" the media, dependent on the media even when they try to ignore it—the media. Media plays a vital role in slowly building meaning and subculture among young people. Communication media create subcultures by labelling them and creating boundaries about them that differentiate them from mainstream culture (Thornton, 2003).

McRobbie puts forward a critique that focuses on women's subculture. Previous subcultural studies were considered to have yet to identify the role of women in subcultures. Women were not the focus of the study and were only added as "footnotes" or viewed regarding their sexual attractiveness (McRobbie, 2000). Women's subcultures have become invisible because the term subculture has acquired strong masculine overtones (McRobbie & Garber, 1997). Traditional subcultural studies focus on acts that occur in public rather than at home,

which excludes women. McRobbie criticises Hebdige's willingness to acknowledge the absence of race in subcultural studies while completely overlooking issues of gender and sexism (McRobbie, 2000).

McRobbie's criticism then encouraged the development of research on women's subcultures. Until now, research on women's subculture continues to develop with various loci and focuses, for example, the online community of women TV series fans (Bury, 2003), (Baym, 2000), research on the subculture of women football fans conducted by Dunn (2014), research on and research on women's subcultures conducted by Losane (2016) which focuses on subcultures that form in women-only prisons.

Bury (2005) believes that the development process of information technology and technology itself is the foundation for building heterotopias in the cyber world and online communities, specifically for women. Looking at the history of women being able to connect to cyberspace via computers in the office, landline telephone services have the impact of reorganising the conception of male dominance in the cyber world. The practice of online female fandom as a heterotopia is described by Bury as a space of resistance to the pressures of work targets, stress, and isolation felt by women. They use working hours and office facilities such as computers with an internet connection to interact with female fandom online; they share stories about their workload and support each other. Research subjects with the same interest in K-Drama and K-Pop meet on social media, interact, and then build a subculture specifically for women by making several conditions to join as group members, namely using a recommendation system by group members, female, making posts that are pornographic, related to racial and ethnic politics, as depicted in the following screenshot at Figure 2.
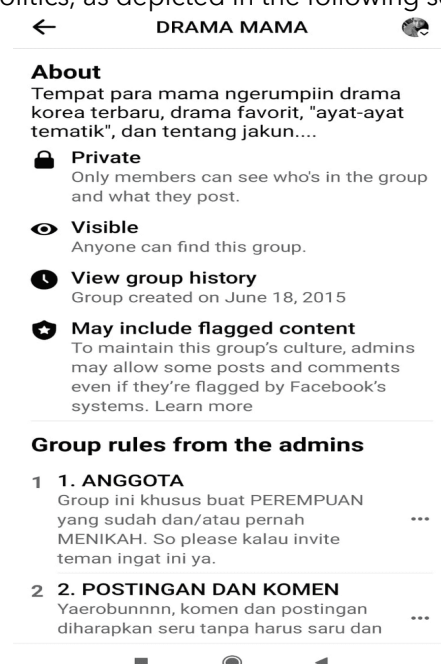

Figure 2. Screenshot of the Drama Mama Facebook group page
Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

The research data above is in line with what was stated by Bury (2005), that Female Fandom is not only an intimate space for women but also a private property characterised by the existence of requirements to join as a member and locked groups depicting the defence of property ownership. According to Losane (2016), the subculture formed by women differs from that of men. Women's subcultures were formed based on the desire to build personal relationships. The language used by this female subculture is also very distinctive; they use slang commonly when interacting within the subculture. According to Donath (2005), language shows group identity; various phrases and abbreviations are developed through group interactions, for example, IMHO, BTW, SPAM, NEWBIE, and FLAME. Using the language used and developed in the online community is like using the local language in a particular area. Using this language, we can identify someone's identity in an online community, such as the word "Newbie," which refers to a new member or beginner. Likewise, the language used in interactions between

members of the Drama Mama and Mamak Ngedrakor groups, for example, the term "torn bread" refers to the abdominal muscles of actors shown in K-Drama scenes, as in the status clip written by one of the following subculture members at Figure 3.

Figure 3. Screenshot of the Drama Mama Facebook group page
Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

McRobbie & Garber (1997), who wrote about teenage girls and subcultures, stated that women's participation in youth culture can be seen from how they negotiate different spaces of pleasure that are different from men. According to McRobbie and Garber, this difference can be interpreted as a form of resistance; they constitute a particular group that is private and exclusive so that parents, teachers, and, of course, men cannot access it. As written in the description of the Mama Drama group on Facebook, it is "a place where mothers chat about the latest Korean dramas, favourite dramas, thematic verses and about Adam's apple." The term "Adam's apple" in the group description is an analogy for K-Drama actors. The role of mother, which is constructed by culture, makes the female members of the K-drama group feel that they are not able to express their admiration for K-drama actors freely, both in the real world and in the virtual world, so they established the Drama Mama group which is a space for them to express their admiration for K-actors, K-Drama sharing information about the storyline and commenting on each episode of K-Drama shows that are currently popular. This group feels free from the stigma that women who wear the hijab and women who have husbands or children should not be overly attracted to other men. As in the screenshot of the status written by one of the members at Figure 4.

Figure 4. Screenshot of the Drama Mama Facebook group page
Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

According to Brake (2013), there are five functions that subcultures can play for their members, namely providing a solution to various socio-economic and structural problems, offering a form of collective identity that is different from schools and work areas, and providing a space for alternative experiences and images of reality. Social, providing various meaningful entertainment activities that conflict with school and work areas and providing solutions to existential identity dilemmas, especially outside school or work. The routine roles carried out by research subjects as both mothers and workers make them want to relieve fatigue (Ang, 2013). In her book, Watching Dallas, she describes watching the Dallas series as a form of "me time" for female viewers. Watching Dallas casually in the living room, they feel free to be themselves. This can be interpreted as women's resistance to the crush of daily household work. His research on female romantic fiction fans, Radway (1991) stated that reading romantic fiction books and communicating with fellow fans made women feel more confident and improved the mental health of those trapped in monotonous activities such as caring for the house, husband, and children.

Female Fan Subcultures in the Digital Era: Creativity, Empowerment, and Sisterhood.
Looking at the history of the formation of internet-mediated female fan subcultures starting in the 1990s, female fans developed a subcultural base through mail lists based on their shared interest in media texts. This subculture is also a form of resistance to the issue of gender differences, especially in the context of the fandom that emerged in internet media at that time. Horbinski, (2018), stated that the online fan community in the 1990s was the starting point for establishing an online fan community, which continues to grow. Female fans began to form mail lists using the computer and internet facilities available at their workplaces even though bandwidth was limited.

In contrast to the advantages of today's widespread internet access, it opens many opportunities for female fans to engage in bullying practices on social media; as stated by Thornton (2003), subcultural traditions continue to grow in areas of subcultural activity such as media users, audiences, and fans. According to Thornton, the adaptation of subcultures by media and communication studies is the impact of research on media, audiences, and ratings. The correlation between subculture and the study of audiences is in audience behaviour, which is considered extraordinary due to feelings of obsession with media texts or what is usually termed "fan" and "fanatic." Furthermore, according to Thornton (2003), the more time people spend watching, reading, and listening to communication media products, the more subcultures will grow around that area; the elements that bind these new forms of subculture are no longer face-to-face communication—face or even telephone lines but also now constitute fan magazines, radio, television, computers, and the Internet. What Thornton stated was proven in terms of forming a subculture of female K-Pop and K-Drama fans on social media. Since the arrival of the Korean wave in Indonesia in 2000 through K-pop music and K-drama shows broadcast on national television, fan subcultures were born through the initiation of several people to create an online community through social media. This online community was built to be a space to share information and interests regarding favourite K-Pop Band and K-Drama activities. The number of members continues to increase with a recommendation system between members, such as the Drama Mama group, which was built by three female K-Drama fans in 2015 on Facebook and has 653 members in 2023. In addition, the Mamak Ngedrakor group was developed through a WhatsApp group in 2018 and had 44 members, all of whom are women who come from various provinces in Indonesia, such as West Java, East Java, South Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and West Sumatra. The MyDayKalsel group has also been developed via WhatsApp since 2019 with 81 members.

Pearson (2010), says that the digital revolution has significantly impacted fandom, including strengthening the symbiotic relationship between producers and fans and forming a new culture. Multimedia is a digital space that presents many cultural expressions in all their diversity. Digital space ends and breaks the boundaries between popular culture and the culture we have learned from generation to generation, combining information and entertainment and print media with audio-visual media. Through digital space, we can find various cultural expressions connected through hypertext. Sophisticated multimedia builds a new symbolic environment and makes the virtual world a reality (Castells, 2009). Fans are creative by using multimedia facilities such as applications for editing photos and videos. With these applications,

fans create fan videos, edit photos, and distribute them through fan groups such as in the Figure 5.
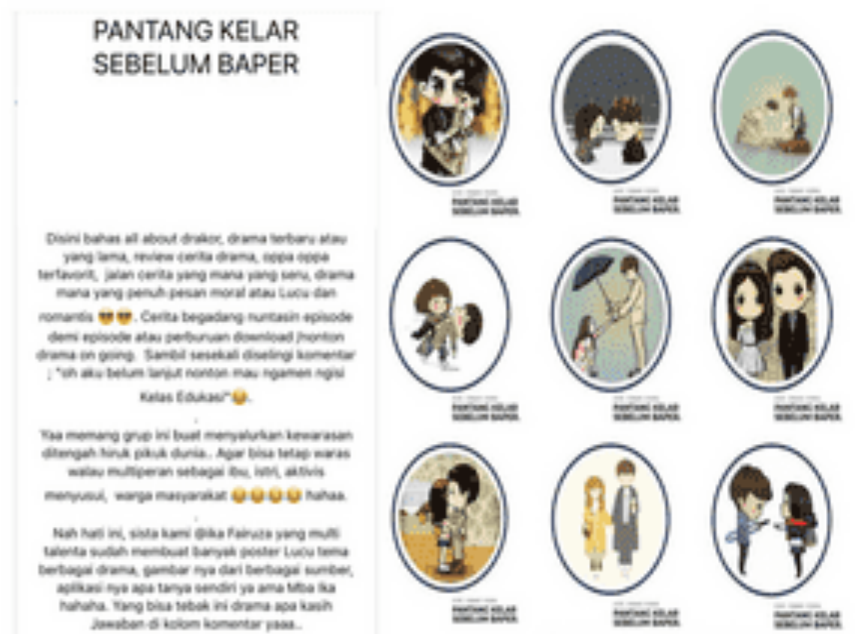

Figure 5. Screenshot of the Mamak Ngedrakor WhatsApp group page
Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

In the past, exchanging merchandise was carried out during fan club meetings. Now, in the digital era, it is carried out via social media by carrying out giveaway activities as carried out by the Mydaykalsel group below:

Figure 6. Screenshot of the MyDayKalsel WhatsApp group page
Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

Apart from the activities above, several fan practices include celebrating idols' birthdays, watching K-dramas together via Zoom, and participating in fundraising by fellow K-Drama and K-Pop fandoms. The female fan subculture also creates creativity, which leads to the empowerment of fellow fans in the subculture they build. Social media provides a platform for agency and empowerment, especially for women, who use social media to represent and share stories not covered by traditional media (Bruce, 2016). For example, based on the author's observation notes, the Drama Mama group conducted three webinars. For members of the

Mama Drama group, one was with the theme "What if you get COVID? with the resource person who is also a member of the Drama Mama group.
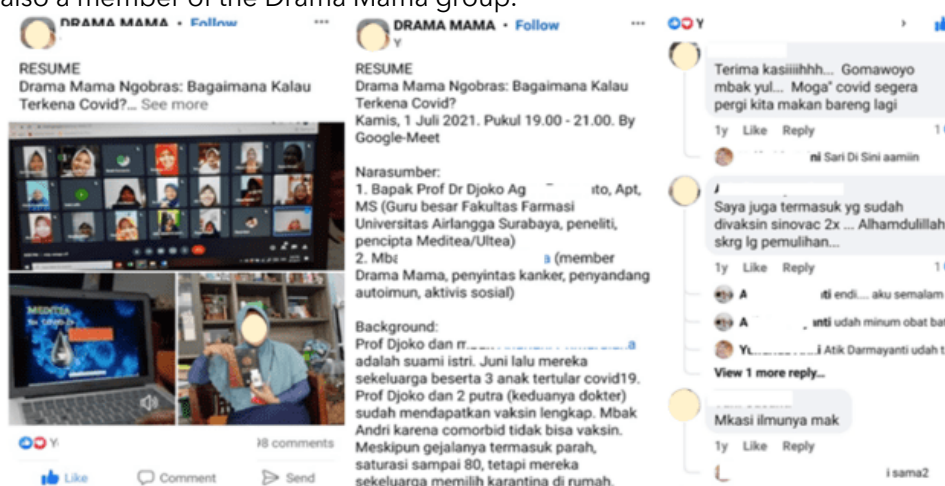

Figure 7. Screenshot of the Drama Mama Facebook group page
Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

From the activities at Figure 7, it is known that fan creativity has gone beyond activities that are considered just for fun. However, fans have empowered the subculture they built by exploring the potential of subculture members and sharing their knowledge with other members. The Negdrakor Mamak Group also carried out similar activities, creating an Instagram account @ac.korea to upload content they created with the hashtag #ParentingLessonfromDrakor to prove that there are many positive values that viewers can interpret from the Korean Drama storyline as in the Figure 8.
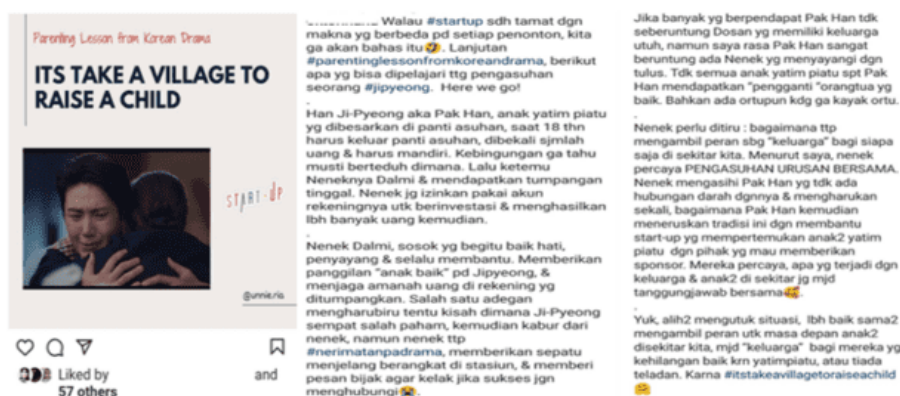

Figure 8. Screenshot of the @ac.korea Instagram Page
Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

With fan activities like this, the female subculture of K-Pop Band and K-Drama fans fights the stigma that watching Korean dramas makes fans unproductive and spend time in illusions, such as fighting the stigma of female K-Pop fans in research Kim (2017),K-Pop fans who are considered "inferior" in South Korea. The label "passing," which means women from the lower class, is attached to female K-Pop fans because of their behaviour, which is considered aggressive and excessively obsessed with their idols, such as crying and screaming hysterically while watching concerts, writing letters to idols in blood ink and even stalking their idols, but the Female K-Pop Band fans fight this stigma with female fans showing their activities in fundraising actions for charities and political demonstrations against government policies that are considered detrimental. In each of these actions, they use the identity of their idol's name in every charity activity and use glow sticks when carrying out demonstrations.

Not only empowerment, but the female fan subculture is also a whole of feelings, supporting each other and sharing feelings through daily interactions. According to Losane

(2016), the subculture formed by women differs from that of men. Women's subcultures were formed based on the desire to build personal relationships. They share the same beliefs and views, for example, political beliefs. Friendship is built in online communities through broad and in-depth conversation topics interspersed with humour, supportive attitudes, and acceptance as a friend (Baym, 2000). In daily interactions in fan groups, subculture members do not only share information about their idols. The Mama Drama Group creates a confiding column every Monday so that group members can share their feelings and release stress from their daily roles. Apart from that, a health consultation column is also created every Wednesday; subculture members can consult online with doctors who are also members of the group. This activity is a form of mutual support, and they call this "sisterhood." Figure 9 are examples of support and confiding provided through conversations and comments that illustrate members of the female subculture who are fans of K-Pop and K-Drama.

Figure 9. Screenshot of the Drama Mama Facebook group and Mamak Ngedrakor group page
Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

Figure 9 depicts support and shared feelings between subculture members. According to Bury (2005), this attitude cannot be separated from women's identity in the real world, which is characterised by a communication style with a supportive attitude, listening attentively, respecting the existence of other people, and offering supportive responses. From the observation notes on the activities of the three subcultures of female K-drama and K-pop fans, the attitude of acceptance as women makes the subculture of female fans not only a space to share fun as fans but more than that, a space to improve mental health and build confidence as a female fan.

CONCLUSION
Female fan subcultures continue to grow and continuously develop fragment along with the advancement of digital media technology. This research strengthens the online female fandom theory put forward by Burry (2005) that women can be active viewers, not just spectators who enjoy the good looks of male actors, to the point of falling in love with the actor without being able to separate fantasy from reality. The subculture of female K-Drama and K-pop fans in the digital era is not limited to online spaces where they can enjoy the fun of being fans of Korean wave products. The subculture of female K-Drama and K-pop fans in the digital era have also become a space for empowerment through collaborative creative projects based on personal potential and digital media technology as a form of resistance to the stigma attached to female fans and more than that, the subculture creates mediated bonds of sisterhood all through by the digital media.

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Maulina, N.

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