

## *Cyberbullying among teenage K-pop fans*

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**Abstract:** This study aims to discuss how teenage K-pop fans need a proper approach to be introduced to the forms of cyberbullying, to describe how to recognize and overcome cyberbullying, and to discuss K-pop as media literacy for K-pop fans. This study was a library research with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through questionnaire and observation. The results of observation indicated that the easy access to the internet and the unlimited use of social media have contributed to the popularity of K-pop in Indonesia. K-pop fans can easily access their idols' songs, music videos, activities, etc. Social media, which have been widely used thanks to the convenience and affordability of internet access, have posed positive and negative impacts. One of the most alarming negative impacts of social media is cyberbullying. The results of the study showed that: 1) there were different forms of cyberbullying experienced by K-pop fans, and 2) there were different sources of cyberbullying experienced by teenage K-pop fans, including inside, internal, and external sources.

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, K-pop, Teenage, Social Media

**Abstrak :** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan bagaimana remaja penggemar *K-Pop* membutuhkan pendekatan yang tepat dalam mengenalkan bentuk-bentuk *cyberbullying*, mengenali dan mengatasi *cyberbullying* hingga *K-Pop* sebagai media literasi bagi penggemar *K-Pop*. Pendekatan yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini ialah pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian library research. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan angket dan observasi. Pelaksanaan penelitian dalam artikel ini didasarkan pada hasil observasi bahwa akses internet dan media sosial yang tak terbatas menjadi salah satu faktor pendukung perkembangan *K-Pop* di Indonesia. Penggemar dapat dengan mudah mengakses informasi mengenai lagu, MV, ataupun aktivitas idolnya. Keberadaan media sosial yang semakin beragam, ditambah dengan makin mudah dan murah akses internet, tentu saja memiliki dampak positif dan negatif. Salah satu dampak negatif yang ditimbulkan dan dapat dikatakan cukup mengkhawatirkan adalah *cyberbullying*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 1. terdapat beberapa bentuk *Cyberbullying* terhadap penggemar *K-Pop* 2. Remaja menunjukkan sumber *cyberbully* yang diterima remaja penggemar *K-Pop* berasal dari inside, internal, dan eksternal.

**Kata Kunci:** Cyberbullying, K-POP, Remaja, Media Sosial, Memahami

## INTRODUCTION

The current global conditions have transformed activities and interactions in a way that mostly involves the comfort of one's own home through gadgets and the internet, resulting in the rapid growth of internet users, especially children and teenagers. The number of teenage internet users increased between 2010 and 2014 (Wahid, Ramdhani, & Wiradhany, 2014). Furthermore, Woods & Scoot (2016) revealed that teenagers tend to spend most of their time on social media. Noviandri (2015) mentioned that people in Indonesia use the internet to perform various activities. Consequently, many Indonesians are highly in favor of the internet.

Indonesia is located in the Asia Pacific region, which is inhabited by a total of 4.3 billion people. More than half of the population (56% or 2.42 billion people) is internet users, while about 2.14 billion people are social media users (Ramadhan, 2020). The widespread use of social media has become a distinguished phenomenon in today's digital era. Ramadhan (2020) said that 80% of internet users use their mobile devices to surf on social media. This shows that internet users in Indonesia are huge and most active users on social media are teenagers.

According to Putri, Nurwati, Budiarti (2016), the biggest internet users in Indonesia (64%) are teenagers aged 15-19 years. The use of social media has been popular among teenagers Mochamad (2021). Currently the life of teenagers is not merely about their relationship with their family. The internet has become a significant part of their lives as they are growing up (Vaterlaus, Beckert, Tulane, & Bird, 2014).

Meanwhile, the studies by Yao et al (2014); Pratiwi (2017); Liu, Fang, Deng, & Zhang (2012); and Chang et al (2015) found that socio-emotional relationship and mediation have impacts on the use of the internet by teenagers. Not only to emphasize the demands and necessities of the internet, the data also show that children use the internet massively without adequate supervision. In line with the 2018 data of the survey from the Association of Indonesian Internet Service

Providers (APJII) in terms of age, teenagers aged 10-14 years had the penetration rate 66.2%, while teenagers aged 15-19 had the highest penetration rate with 91% and 49%. K-pop fans are also around the same age as mentioned by Korean Culture and Information (KOCIS) that K-pop fans are in their teens and early 20s. It can be assumed that internet users are dominated by K-pop fans. Sa'ir (2020) found that Surabaya as a metropolitan city in Indonesia with its strong culture is also influenced by the widespread K-pop through social media.

Due to its convenience and inexpensiveness, not to mention the current pandemic, the internet has become children's and teenagers' first choice for interactions. As a result, children and teenagers have more time and opportunities to surf on the internet. They also have become one of the most vulnerable groups of people to the negative impacts of digital technology. Teenagers characterized by their curiosity and immaturity can easily plunge into doing negative things on social media; one of which is cyberbullying (Saripah & Pratita, 2018). Meanwhile, the study by Rinata & Dewi (2019) showed that age plays an important role in responding to hoaxes about their idols.

Maturity and experiences are the important aspects in making one wiser in using social media. Based on the findings of previous research, it can be assumed to teenage K-pop fans who often make online interactions have no sufficient digital literacy. Cyberspace that can be inhabited by people from all ages and backgrounds allows them to have interactions with anyone. This can cause adults, teenagers, and children to be prone to negative treatments or even become perpetrators themselves. Since most people still have low digital literacy and lack knowledge about the forms of cyberbullying and know how to overcome it, many commit cyberbullying without knowing it and the legal consequences of their actions. Cyberbullying has various negative impacts, such as the declining academic performance and bad

relationships with peers. Thus, cyberbullying must be prevented as early as possible (Littlejohn et al., 2017); Baron et al. (2018).

Cyberbullying is frequent among K-pop fans because they do most of their activities on the internet. K-pop fans are generally called the Korean wave (*Hallyu*) fans. The Korean wave is the increasing popularity of South Korean culture not only in Asia, but also around the world. *Hallyu* is a phenomenon in which the influence of South Korean culture has spread around the world, including Indonesia (Ardia, 2014). The existence of K-pop can also be witnessed through the presence of K-pop fan clubs that have sprung up on social media and share all kinds of information about K-pop artists with other fellow K-pop fans. K-pop has a great number of fans not only in South Korea, but also in other countries in the world, including Indonesia. Most of Indonesian K-pop fans are teenagers. Initially, the popularity of the Korean wave was often called Hallyu because it first started in the East Asian countries. However, as the time went by, K-pop has become increasingly popular around the world, especially Indonesia (Jin, 2016). In its development process, the Korean wave has hugely impacted the entertainment world in Indonesia, especially television programs (Rinata & Dewi, 2019). Jeong, Lee, & Lee (2017) stated that 70 Korean dramas aired in Indonesia between 2002 and 2011. Given the explanation above, observation was carried out for data collection. This study focuses on understanding cyberbullying and how to prevent it. The exploration and analysis on cyberbullying aim to raise the awareness of why it is important for teenage K-pop fans to understand cyberbullying as the victims and perpetrators.

Studies on cyberbullying have been conducted by many researchers, but only a few focused on exploring cyberbullying among teenage K-pop fans in Indonesia. Thus, three important elements were correlated in this study: teenage K-pop fans in understanding and preventing cyberbullying. Based on the study by Tsitsika et al (2015), the number of cases in cyberbullying among teenagers in Indonesia is high. This is due to the teenagers'

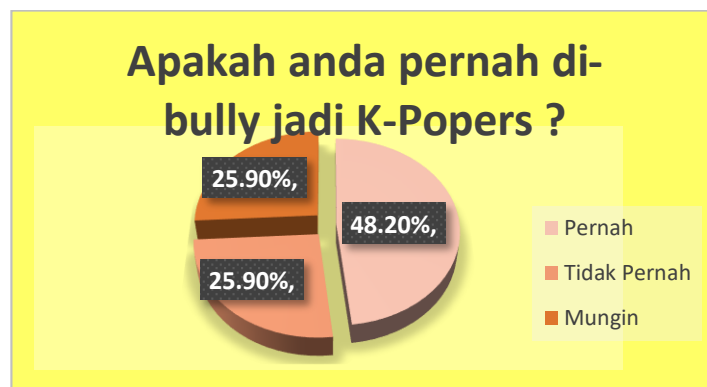
lack of knowledge about how to use the internet wisely and safely. Rinata & Dewi (2019) mentioned that teenagers aged 12-17 years will respond to the hoaxes about idols differently from teenagers aged 22-27 years. It should be understood that most of K-pop fans' activities are done online on social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc. In Indonesia, teenage K-pop fans have an easy access to the internet and do most K-pop-related activities online, making them prone to become the victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying. Digital literacy among K-pop fans has become essential since children and teenagers are still immature and need a special approach.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This was a descriptive qualitative study with library research used to analyze the importance of discerning and preventing cyberbullying among teenage K-pop fans. Journal articles, proceeding, and digital books were used to collect data. Initial sampling was performed to generate statistic data as an initial observation and an article to explain the data. Initial data identification was done to know what kinds of data could be found in the field that can describe the phenomenon of cyberbullying among teenage K-pop fans and the extent of their understanding about cyberbullying through questionnaire distributed to a total of 282 K-pop fans between 25 and 28 of August 2020.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore the forms of cyberbullying and how to recognize them as well as the importance of understanding, preventing, and tackling cyberbullying among teenage K-pop fans. The primary data were collected from the questionnaires distributed to 282 respondents. Meanwhile, the secondary data were collected from journal articles, e-book, proceeding, and news articles in order to obtain more complete description of the phenomena in the real field.



Picture 1

Source: Research Data 2020

Data showed that most K-pop fans had been bullied, some had never been bullied, and some were doubtful if they had been bullied. The study by Yana (2014) revealed that the forms of cyberbullying ranged from Facebook account being hacked to K-pop fans being ridiculed or insulted on social media. It also found that the forms of cyberbullying include cyberbullying direct attack and cyberbullying by proxy. The cyberbullying found was in the written form which aimed directly to the victims through direct message or on the Facebook or Twitter timeline. Another form of cyberbullying found was someone's social media account being hacked and all information changed without the knowledge of the account owner. Meanwhile, (Saripah & Pratita, 2018) in their study found that the forms of cyberbullying include flaming, harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, impersonation, and exclusion. Cyberbullying can also be affected by environment, both in the real world and on social media. If the victim is accustomed to rebel against mistakes, he or she will rebel and try to remain dignified every time he or she receives intimidation. However, if the victim is a modest person or a person who does not want to prolong a problem, he or she will receive more intense intimidation.

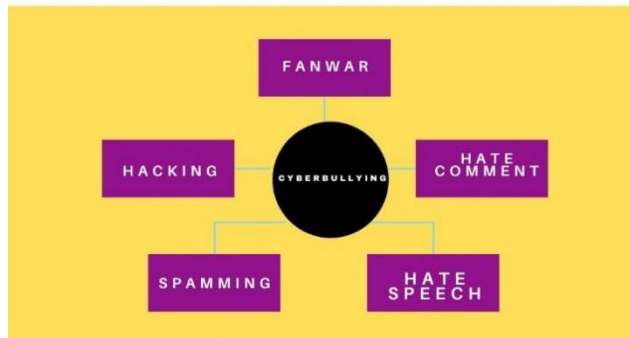
The study by Rahayu (2012) found that abuse in the virtual world can intimidate a person Yana (2014). It does not cause physical

injuries, but it hurts psychologically. Many people underestimate this issue despite the fact that the impacts are profound on both the victims and perpetrators. The victims can suffer from depression and legal actions sometimes must be taken. The findings of the study were categorized into two: the sources and forms of cyberbullying received by teenage K-pop fans. This situation places teenage K-pop fans not only as victims, but also perpetrators when making interactions on social media.

#### a. Forms of Cyberbullying

Library research was conducted and found that the forms of cyberbullying received by teenage K-pop fans were hate speech, (Lastriani, 2018) *spamming* (sending undesirable messages repeatedly), *hacking* (impersonating someone else or pretending to be on behalf of someone else and send malicious messages to other people), *hate comment* (sending hurtful messages or threats through online chatting platforms, posting hurtful comments on social media, or posting embarrassing or hurtful comments or pictures on social media) and fanwar (mocking others and provoking battles verbally). Fanwar and hate speech were also discussed in a journal article entitled: Fanwar; the War between K-pop Idols' Fans on Social Media (Lastriani, 2018).

### Types of Cyberbullying Experienced by Teenage K-pop Fans



Picture 2

Source: Research Data Analysis in 2020

The study by (Anwar, 2018) revealed that K-pop fans were 15-22 years old, which then can be assumed that the victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying were also between the ages of 15-22 years (Yana 2014). The study conducted by (Maya, 2015) also found the same results that the informants that became the victims and cyberbullying were teenagers aged 15-17 years and aged 12-22 years respectively. The primary data also showed that most of the respondents were between 13 and 21 years old and dominated by female K-pop fans. The cycle of cyberbullying not only involves victims, but also perpetrators.

#### b. Sources of Cyberbullying

K-pop fans received cyberbullying from different sources. This situation has made them become perpetrators given the fact that the sources of cyberbullying are closely related

to one's life and there is no limitation in making interactions on the internet. Maya (2015) ; Gaffar (2020) in his study found that intimidation usually originates from family. This is in line with the study on *Fanwar* conducted by Lastriani (2018) that the war between fandoms or between fans within the same fandom is the root of cyberbullying.

Fandom or fans who think they are the strongest will judge others who look weak. The results of these previous studies showed that there are three sources of cyberbullying: 1) **Inside**, the fan himself or herself who argues against other fans from different fandoms that have different opinions on the idols, 2) **Internal**, the environment of fellow K-pop fans from different fandoms by giving hate speech about their idols, and 3) **External**, common people who do not understand about K-pop.

### Sources of Cyberbullying among K-pop Fans



Picture 3

Source: Data Analysis in 2020

K-pop fans gave different characteristics from each other. For example, fangirl is divided into several types: *below average fangirl*, a type of fangirl who has the least potential to cause chaos, insult, or disturb other fandoms or non-K-pop fans. They admit that they have an obsession with someone and exhibit immature actions about it; *average fangirl*, a fangirl who participates frequently on the internet and is not dangerous. This type of fangirl tends to speak harshly, get irritated easily, and become hysterical inappropriately; *above average fangirl*, a type of fangirl who has extreme obsession. They tend to be easily hysterical, irritated, and angry when someone tells them that their idol is only a two-dimensional character and the chance to meet him or her is very unlikely. All K-pop fans in their teens belong to different fan clubs. The surrounding environment that is into K-pop influences teenagers to be interested in K-pop (Rengganis, 2017).

Their fantasy is much higher than the other types of fans, indicating that their maturity level is lower. Fanaticism is the reason a group of fans has aggressive behaviors. Fanatic individuals tend to have low awareness, resulting in uncontrolled behaviors (Maya, 2015). Fanaticism is a belief that involves extreme obsession with an object. Fanatic behavior is often exhibited in various ways, such as excessive enthusiasm, emotional attachment, uncontrolled feelings of love and interests in a long period of time (Eliani et al 2018).

Based on the findings of the study by Rinata & Dewi (2019) ; Apriliani (2019), one of the negative activities performed by K-pop fans on social media is fanwar in which fans attack other fans on the cyberspace. This causes fans to spend a great amount of time on the internet to hunt for information (Rinata & Dewi, 2019). Data showed that more than half of the respondents spent 8 hours a day on the internet to search for information about their idols, to stream for their idols' shows, and to vote for their idols in certain events.

Fanaticism is the reason a group of fans has aggressive behaviors. Fanatic individuals tend to have low awareness, resulting in uncontrolled behaviors. According to Lastriani (2018) due to fanaticism with a person or an idol, individuals often defend their idol furiously. A fanwar may start when different fandoms mutually denounce other idols and defend their own idols. The desire of the K-pop fans to defend their idols by arguing with other K-pop fans triggers the emergence of cyberbullying.

This shows that internet users in Indonesia, especially teenage K-pop fans, are prone to become the victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying. Social media users should first understand the agreement, ethics, and impacts of social media usage. More importantly, Information and Electronic Transaction Law (UU ITE) has been enforced to monitor social media users' activities. These efforts are hoped to be able to prevent various forms of cybercrime from harming social media users.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion: K-pop fans aged 15-22 years can become the victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying. This cyberbullying circle is focused not only on the victims, but also on the perpetrators. The impacts of cyberbullying on the K-pop fans' real lives include depression and legal cases. The forms of cyberbullying among teenage K-pop fans are hate speech, spamming, hacking, hate comment, and fanwar rooted from the inside, internal, and external sources. K-pop fans have common and specific characteristics that require different approaches.

Suggestion: Idolizing K-pop artists are not wrong as long as no individual or group is harmed. As cyberbullying is increasing, it is important for teenage K-pop fans to use social media intelligently and wisely. This study can be used as a reference in recognizing various forms of cyberbullying behaviors so that cyberbullying can be prevented.

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