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From Fandom to Frontline: Indonesian K-Popers, Islamic-Pop Activism, and Digital Solidarity for Palestine

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Abstract

The recent resurgence of pro-Palestinian activism among Indonesian youth reflects not only growing humanitarian concern but also the evolving role of digital communities in political discourse. Within this landscape, K-pop fandoms—once seen as apolitical entertainment spaces—have emerged as unexpected yet powerful platforms for solidarity movements. This research aims to examine how Indonesian K-Popers, particularly the Xkwavers community, construct digital solidarity networks for Palestine. This study employs a qualitative case study approach, utilizing digital data collection techniques through Xkwavers' online content, virtual participant observation, and in-depth interviews with community members. Data were analyzed using thematic coding, guided by Manuel Castells' theory of the network society, specifically his four dimensions of power. The findings reveal that Xkwavers operates not only as a fandom collective but also as a religio-cultural movement that mobilizes donations, performs BDS campaigns, and shapes pro-Palestinian narratives through Islamic-pop aesthetics. Symbolic figures such as Fuad Naim serve as authoritative nodes who legitimize religious and political messages, amplified further by algorithmic logics of social media platforms. The study shows that K-pop-based activism is neither spontaneous nor purely cultural; rather, it is the outcome of complex power configurations within digitally mediated networks. The implication of this research is the need to recognize fandom-based digital communities as emerging sociopolitical actors in shaping transnational solidarity and public discourse in the digital age.

Keywords: Religious Popular Culture; Palestinian Solidarity; K-Pop Fandom; Digital Activism; Network Society

Meningkatnya kembali aksi dukungan terhadap Palestina di kalangan anak muda Indonesia tidak hanya menunjukkan kepedulian kemanusiaan, tetapi juga peran baru komunitas digital dalam wacana politik. Di tengah fenomena ini, fandom K-pop – yang sebelumnya dianggap sekadar ruang hiburan apolitis – berubah menjadi wadah solidaritas yang aktif dan berpengaruh. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana K-Popers Indonesia, khususnya komunitas Xkwavers, membangun jaringan solidaritas digital untuk Palestina. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berupa studi kasus dengan teknik pengumpulan data secara digital pada konten-konten Xkwavers, observasi virtual partisipatif, dan dilengkapi dengan wawancara mendalam terhadap anggota komunitas. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik pengodean tematik dengan kerangka teori masyarakat jaringan dari Manuel Castells, khususnya empat bentuk kekuasaan dalam jaringan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Xkwavers tidak hanya berperan sebagai komunitas penggemar, tetapi juga sebagai gerakan budaya-religius yang menggalang donasi, melakukan kampanye BDS, dan membangun narasi pro-Palestina melalui estetika Islam-pop. Figur seperti Fuad Naim menjadi simpul otoritatif yang memberi legitimasi religius dan politik, diperkuat oleh algoritma media sosial. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa aktivisme berbasis K-pop bukanlah gerakan spontan atau murni budaya, melainkan hasil dari konfigurasi kuasa yang kompleks dalam jaringan digital. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah pentingnya mengakui komunitas digital berbasis fandom sebagai aktor sosial-politik baru dalam membentuk solidaritas lintas negara dan wacana publik di era digital.

A. INTRODUCTION

Support for Palestine gained renewed momentum following Israel's large-scale offensive in the wake of the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace n.d.). This event triggered a wave of global solidarity, particularly as social media became flooded with information and live coverage of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The world once again turned its attention to this small region in the Middle East. Attacks targeting Palestinian civilians became the main catalyst for various forms of solidarity actions across the globe, including in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, numerous communities voiced their condemnation of Israel, both in physical spaces and across their social media platforms. One such community comprises fans of South Korean music and cultural products—known as K-Popers. K-Pop has emerged as a rising global cultural phenomenon. It has evolved beyond a mere musical genre to become a cultural force influencing millions of fans worldwide. Behind the glamour of Korean music and culture, K-Pop communities have increasingly become active in voicing social and political issues. This phenomenon demonstrates that expressions of social and political realities are no longer confined to political or social organizations. K-Popers, as a community rooted in art and culture, also respond to social issues. One striking example is the growing support from K-Pop fans for the Palestinian struggle. Through social media, they express solidarity and use their platforms to support efforts for peace and justice in the conflict zone. This shows that the K-Pop community is not solely engaged in entertainment but also acts as a social agent in shaping public opinion.

Concrete actions of solidarity with Palestine include the practice of cancel culture and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement carried out by Indonesian K-Pop fans on social media. They have even extended these actions to K-Pop musicians or idols discovered to support

or use products linked to Israel (suara.com n.d.). Many fans expressed disappointment with idols who became sponsors of brands affiliated with Israel, with some deciding to idolize them no longer. Moreover, this type of action is not unique to Indonesia. Many K-Pop fans in other countries also participate in this movement.

K-Pop, as part of the Korean Wave, is not limited to Indonesia (Pramadya and Oktaviani 2021). For example, young people in the Middle East also show a strong enthusiasm for Korean cultural products (Elaskary 2018). K-Pop even bridges Palestinian and Israeli fandoms under one umbrella. K-Pop can cater to diverse audiences across the world. Through the active role of fans, contemporary global culture has crossed political, ethnic, and social boundaries, reaching various groups—even in peripheral areas (Otmazgin and Lyan 2013).

The previous literatures on K-Pop and digital activism generally divides into two main streams. First, cross-national studies emphasize the role of fandom as a transnational affective network transcending ethnic, religious, and political boundaries (Otmazgin and Lyan 2013; Elaskary 2018; Lee et al. 2020). This body of research shows that K-Pop is not merely a cultural entertainment product but also a vehicle for mobilizing social issues, including humanitarian solidarity (Hitchcock 2016; Awad 2021; Lustick and Shils 2022). Second, studies in Indonesia largely focus on the diffusion of Korean popular culture and its effects on youth lifestyles, identity formation, and cultural habituation (Muhammad 2013; Putri, Liany, and Nuraeni 2019; Pramadya and Oktaviani 2021; Jayanti et al. 2022; Sudwintari and Perangin-angin 2022). Some research has begun to touch on digital activism among K-Pop fans and the issue of boycotting Israeli products from the perspective of Muslim consumers (Syfa 2023; Utama et al. 2023), but these studies do not link the phenomenon to a power-network analysis within fandom communities.

From this, a clear research gap emerges: no study has yet examined how Indonesian *hijrah* K-Popers build digital solidarity for Palestine while simultaneously negotiating religious identity and popular culture within the context of social movements. Previous studies in Indonesia tend to stop at the level of popular culture adoption or philanthropic participation by fans (Muhammad 2013; Putri et al. 2019; Jayanti et al. 2022). Meanwhile, global studies on BDS and digital activism highlight the issue and transnational movements but overlook the local context of Indonesia's religious fandoms (Hitchcock 2016; Monshipouri and Prompichai 2018; Awad 2021).

This article seeks to address that gap by exploring how Indonesian K-Popers construct digital solidarity networks in support of Palestine. It focuses on identifying the various forms of digital participation they engage in and analyzing how their fandom network serves as a space for producing meaning, negotiating youth identity, and transforming activism grounded in popular culture. Thus, Indonesian K-Popers' involvement in solidarity with Palestine carries significant academic value because it illustrates the shifting landscape of social movements in the digital era. Their participation shows that political groups or ideologically-based organizations no longer monopolize activism but can also emerge from global entertainment communities typically perceived as apolitical. Furthermore, the emergence of *hijrah* K-Popers who combine expressions of Korean popular culture with religious and political agendas signifies a new articulation of identity among Indonesia's *hijrah* youth in digital spaces. This opens up critical avenues for examining how popular culture becomes a medium for articulating cross-border solidarity and how Indonesian K-Popers build digital solidarity for Palestine through networks within the framework of the network society.

B. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative case study approach, focusing on the X-Wavers community—Indonesian K-Pop fans who actively express solidarity with Palestine. The data collection process includes: (1) digital content analysis of Twitter/X, Instagram, and Telegram; (2) participant observation in X-Wavers' workshops; and (3) in-depth interviews with community members selected through snowball sampling.

The data were analyzed using thematic coding, guided by Manuel Castells' network society framework—specifically his four forms of power: networking power, network power, networked power, and network-making power. The process consisted of data reduction, theme coding, and interpretation. To ensure validity, the study employed source triangulation (content, interviews, and observation) and methodological triangulation, along with member checking with key informants. The researcher also maintained reflexivity by keeping an analytical distance during participant observation and recording potential biases throughout the research process.

Theoretical Framework

The internet is regarded as a primary medium integrating various previously disconnected technologies and content. It functions as an interconnected network of computers and servers that link and combine diverse technologies and forms of content, while also unifying multiple communication patterns. This shows the central role of the internet in enabling media convergence and bringing together many aspects of our digital lives into a single, versatile platform (Kirtiklis 2017).

In a network society, the primary actors are human beings, but they are organized through complex networks (Castells 2011). Castells first introduced the term network society in his book 'The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture,' where he

defines it as 'a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks' (Castells and Castells 2009). In such a society, major social, economic, and political interaction forms are organized and executed through intricate, interconnected networks. These networks constitute a new social morphology that shapes how people produce, communicate, interact, and exercise power (Castells 2010).

According to Castells, there are at least four forms of power within a network society. First, networking power refers to the influence of actors or communities connected to global networks. Those within the network hold more power to influence others compared to those outside the network. Second, network power arises from pre-established norms and standards that determine who is allowed into the network and how interactions are governed. Third, networked power refers to the influence dynamics between social actors within the network. Each network has its own internal characteristics that shape decision-making processes. Fourth, network-making power is the ability to shape and organize the network, based on the values and interests of those who control it.

Using Castells' network society theory, this research aims to elaborate on the BDS phenomenon as practiced by Indonesian K-Popers. As widely known, many BDS-related activities are promoted through the internet and social media as their primary platforms. The main focus of the analysis is the X-Wavers community and its solidarity campaign for Palestine. In line with Castells' theory, the X-Wavers have built a complex communication network through social media, allowing members to share information, deliver messages, and coordinate actions. By utilizing the connective power of the internet, these individuals demonstrate their support for Palestine, forming a new kind of political engagement and social activism in the digital era (Castells 2011).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on data collected from digital content, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with members of the Xkwavers community. The analysis highlights how K-pop fandoms, particularly those shaped by hijrah youth culture, engage in political expressions and solidarity for Palestine through digital platforms. By applying Castells' framework of power in the network society, the discussion unpacks how fandom-based activism is constructed, organized, and reproduced across different layers of digital interaction. The findings are organized into four main themes that correspond to the four forms of network power: networking power, network power, networked power, and network-making power. Each theme illustrates how the Xkwavers community navigates the intersection of pop culture, religion, and technology to articulate collective political identity and mobilize action.

1. From Antisemitism to Digital Solidarity: Tracing the History of Antisemitism in Indonesia

To understand the current hatred toward Israel in Indonesia, one must go beyond the contemporary conflict in Gaza and trace the history of antisemitism rooted in Indonesia's religious and political discourse since the 20th century. Negative imagery of Jews—often associated with colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism—has served as an emotional framework passed down through generations. In the digital age, this framework is reproduced through religious discourse and global popular culture, including K-Pop fandoms. For instance, Indonesian K-Popers' solidarity with Palestine does not occur in a vacuum; it is shaped by this historical legacy of animosity toward Israel, now expressed through digital cultural practices such as cancel culture, BDS, and solidarity narratives on social media. In this way, the involvement of popular culture communities

reveals how historical memories of antisemitism in Indonesia intersect with emerging forms of youth digital activism.

The concept of antisemitism is not static; historically, its terminology has evolved. The term first emerged in Germany in the 1880s, initially referring to those who opposed equal rights for Jews within society. Over time, its meaning broadened to encompass various actions or speech that target or threaten Jewish people. David Engel argues that understanding antisemitism requires a historical lens. Historians often link negative actions and attitudes toward Jews to this concept, but Engel emphasizes the need to consider the specific social and political contexts in which such actions occur. This helps avoid the use of 'antisemitism' as a singular or exclusive explanation for negative behavior toward Jews and encourages deeper inquiry into the communal and political motivations behind such behavior (Ury n.d). Antisemitic sentiments have since spread to many parts of the world, including Indonesia.

The history of Jews in Indonesia spans a long period. To this day, Judaism is not officially recognized as a religion in Indonesia. According to a circular issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (No. 477/74054, dated 18 November 1978), all Indonesian citizens must adhere to one of five officially recognized religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, or Buddhism (Manager 2005). This policy has led to discrimination and even racism against Jewish followers in the country (Rachman 2022). The first Jews believed to have arrived in Indonesia were of Spanish and Portuguese descent who came in 1514 via Talaud, Manado through the Ternate/Maluku, Timor, and Old Manado routes. They fled from Spain and Portugal during the Inquisition. This claim is supported by the discovery of skulls resembling Jewish features, and the use of Jewish surnames among the Sangihe Talaud communities in Manado, such as Loope, Lumire, Willehima, Masone, and Sarah. Another piece of evidence is the existence

of a synagogue on Jalan Garuda in Manado, which was destroyed during the Japanese occupation (Burhanudin et al. 2022).

Other sources report that 1782, several Jews were accepted into the Dutch colonial administration in Indonesia. They were appointed as civil servants and military personnel. One piece of evidence comes from Yaakov Saphir-Halevy (1822–1886), who visited the Dutch East Indies in 1861 as part of a fundraising mission to India and Australia. During this trip, he met a Jewish merchant from Amsterdam who named twenty Jewish families from the Netherlands and Germany, including members of the Dutch colonial military, and several Jews living in Surabaya (Goldstein 2015).

Jews began leaving Indonesia during the Japanese occupation and the early years of Indonesian independence. Nevertheless, remnants of Jewish communities—primarily Sephardic Jews—remained. Some later returned during the Dutch military aggression following Indonesia's independence, joining efforts to support the Zionist movement. They were affiliated with the Nederlands Indische Zionistenbond (ANRI 1948). In 1953, a Zionist organization was established to advance the interests of the Jewish movement. During that period, a letter written in Indonesian was addressed to President Sukarno's cabinet, sent by eight Jewish individuals representing the 'Jewish Community of Indonesia.' In the letter, they offered to act as informal advisers on Jewish affairs for the Indonesian government. This development was supported by the World Jewish Congress (WJC), which maintained close ties with Jewish communities in Indonesia. However, in 1957, President Sukarno enacted a nationalization policy, which led to a sharp decline in the Jewish population. Today, only a few Jewish-descendant families remain in Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya, continuing to preserve Jewish traditions (Hadler 2004).

According to Israel's oldest newspaper, *Haaretz*, the Jewish community in Indonesia is spread across six regions, including West Java,

Bandung, Medan, and Papua. A rabbi named Meijer Verbrugge stated he has two families in Lampung and around 20 relatives in Jakarta and Timor Leste. He estimates that there are at least 140 Jews in Indonesia, most of whom are concentrated around Jakarta (Banka 2019).

The outbreak of the Israel–Palestine conflict, combined with Sukarno's long-standing opposition to Israeli occupation, has helped shape the development of antisemitic narratives in Indonesia. Dutch anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen argues that the roots of anti-Israel sentiment in Indonesia partly stem from a book titled 'Jews as Symbols in Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Discourse.' In addition, other books containing Western antisemitic content have circulated in Indonesia. Following the 1993 peace agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, local magazines such as *Panji Masyarakat* and *Al-Muslimun* published special reports on Jews and Zionism. These magazines not only featured political opinion and analysis but also disseminated antisemitic information based on the infamous 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' (Bruinessen 1994).

This hostility has continued – and even intensified – into the 21st century, particularly among conservative Islamic groups in Indonesia. The Israel–Palestine issue is often used as political fuel by parties and individuals seeking public sympathy and votes. Islamic political groups affiliated with *Media Da'wah* frequently scapegoat Jews to deflect from policy or economic failures. Jews often become targets of slander – not only due to Qur'anic verses and Islamic traditions emphasizing animosity toward them but also because of the frequent conflation of Jewish identity with Zionism or Israel, despite the significant differences between these terms. In Indonesia, preachers frequently portray Jews negatively as a way to delegitimize their ideological opponents and reinforce particular Islamic viewpoints. As such, antisemitic sentiment in Indonesia today remains closely linked to the ongoing Israel–Palestine conflict. Nonetheless, even

beyond the conflict, Jewish people – individually or collectively – are often depicted in Islamic religious doctrine as deniers of prophecy, distorters of scripture, and so on. The ongoing oppression of Palestinians by the Israeli government has further amplified negative attitudes toward Jews (Muhtadi 2020).

Contemporary antisemitism in Indonesia cannot be separated from the intersection of historical trauma, global politics, and the dynamics of digital popular culture. Anti-Israel discourse often merges with religious narratives and pro-Palestinian solidarity, which, in the online sphere, manifest through social media, memes, music, and popular communities such as K-Pop fandoms. Studies indicate that antisemitism in Indonesia often evolves into anti-Zionist rhetoric that more broadly targets Jewish identity. Social media accelerates this sentiment by rapidly spreading hate speech and conspiracy theories influenced by global contexts, especially the Middle East conflict (Lim 2017). Furthermore, digital solidarity movements – such as those found in K-Pop fan communities – illustrate how hatred toward Israel is rearticulated through the language of pop culture and virtual activism. This demonstrates a continuity between Indonesia's historical antisemitism and new forms of hatred configured in the digital era.

2. Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS): A Form of Protest in the Social Media Era

One of the main forms of protest against Israel in the social media era is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement (Hitchcock 2016). Israel's attacks on Palestine have triggered massive shockwaves across the international community, particularly in the Islamic world. This movement began in the early 2000s and has since evolved into a global mass campaign. BDS has fundamentally reshaped how people view Israel and

has, in many contexts, significantly amplified antisemitism (Barnett and Karsh 2023).

Today, the BDS movement stands as the most prominent and widely recognized form of resistance in anti-Israel narratives. Officially launched in July 2005 by more than 170 organizations representing Palestinian civil society, BDS has garnered extensive support that reaches far beyond Palestinian territories. The movement has attracted endorsements from notable figures such as Desmond Tutu, Ken Loach, Judith Butler, and Roger Waters. BDS activists describe Israel as a state operating under an apartheid regime. The movement calls for comprehensive boycotts – across economic, political, academic, and artistic sectors—and urges divestment and sanctions against Israel. Omar Barghouti, a leading figure in the movement and an alumnus of Tel Aviv University, has boldly accused Israel of practicing apartheid, Nazism, and genocide (Awad 2021).

Naturally, Israel has not remained passive in the face of this movement. Historically, Israel has encountered boycott efforts before and has developed strategies to counter them. In April 1936, for instance, the Arab Higher Committee launched a general strike and an agricultural boycott in Palestine targeting British and Jewish communities. In response, Jews in Palestine worked to build the economic self-sufficiency that Zionist leaders had long envisioned (Lustick and Shils 2022). Today's BDS activists generally call for three key demands:

1. Ending Israel's occupation of Palestine and its colonization of all Arab lands, including the dismantling of the separation wall in both territories;
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality;
3. Respecting, protecting, and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

Palestinian civil society groups also call upon international organizations and individuals around the world to join the BDS movement—similar to the global campaign that once targeted apartheid in South Africa (Zanotti et al. 2017). However to what extent has the BDS movement impacted Israel's actions in Palestine? that BDS alone cannot reverse decades of Israeli dispossession of Palestinian rights. New strategies are needed. The movement's consistency and coordination must be strengthened to maintain pressure on Israel (Awad 2021). In reality, brand boycotts targeting companies affiliated with Israel have exerted some pressure, even though Palestinians continue to experience systemic injustice (Utama et al. 2023).

To some degree, that pressure has caused discomfort within the Israeli government. Interestingly, it is not the BDS actions themselves that most trouble Israel's opponents. Rather, it is the portrayal of Israel as a violator of human rights and as a colonial, apartheid regime that poses a deeper challenge. This image stands in stark contrast to Israel's projected global narrative as a beacon of democracy and a haven for Jews fleeing global antisemitism (Hallward 2022).

3. K-Pop in the Digital Society in Indonesia: Between Cultural Movement and Social Movement

'K-pop' generally refers to popular music originating from South Korea. Just as the United States became the birthplace of pop music through figures like Taylor Swift, South Korea developed a new hybrid genre that has gained widespread popularity in the country. Over the past three decades, K-pop has transcended national borders and now dominates the Asian music market. Its highly devoted fans have helped boost the Korean music industry, creating a domino effect on the country's economy. K-pop's success relies not solely on its attractive visuals, but also on a sophisticated industry system that includes content creation, promotion, and multiple

revenue streams such as album sales, music streaming, concerts, and merchandise. Today, Korean pop culture is at its peak, playing a dominant role in the global music industry (Liu 2023).

K-pop is part of the broader Korean Wave, also known as *Hallyu* (Muhammad 2013), a term that refers to the spread of Korean popular culture through entertainment products such as dramas, music, and fashion (Putri et al. 2019). This K-pop fever has spread globally, including to Indonesia. In this context, the internet has played a major role in bringing the Korean Wave into Indonesian society. Indonesian fans frequently engage with Korean content on social media platforms and visit websites offering Korean Wave-related material. So far, the impact of the Korean Wave on Indonesian society has been significant. It has shaped behavioral patterns, particularly among Indonesian female K-Wavers (a term for Korean culture enthusiasts). Many young women try to emulate behaviors frequently portrayed in Korean media and, socially, become influenced by Korean cultural norms. Over time, continuous exposure to Korean culture tends to increase emotional and cultural attachment. As a result, these fans become more likely to modify their thoughts and behaviors, moving away from traditional Indonesian norms and becoming more aligned with Korean cultural values (Putri and Reese 2018). Due to K-pop's immense popularity, even Indonesian politicians have incorporated K-pop elements into their campaigns to appeal to young voters.

In its development, K-pop fandoms are not limited to music and cultural consumption alone. Many fans also become involved in charitable initiatives and social causes. For instance, fans often organize donation drives and community service projects on their favorite idols' birthdays. These acts, whether for social or environmental causes, are seen as expressions of love and support for the artists they admire. K-pop fans believe such actions help reflect positively on themselves and enhance the image of the fandom on a global scale. Moreover, K-pop fans have actively

raised funds for various issues – such as natural disasters or humanitarian emergencies – through social media platforms. These activities indicate that K-pop fans possess strong social awareness and can provide tangible support to causes they care about (Kim and Hutt 2021).

Digital activism by Indonesian K-pop fans typically centers on issues such as social justice, feminism, humanitarian relief, and environmental concerns. These positive activities are not new; long before, many fans had participated in global digital activism movements like Black Lives Matter in the United States. Similarly, many K-pop idols are known for making donations, which often inspires their fans to follow suit. Through social media narratives, K-pop fandoms can frame issues in accessible and engaging ways, making them easier to understand. This framing encourages more participation from fans in the movements they support. Although most of K-pop fans are students or young adults of productive age, they are generally well-informed about social and political issues. They are highly literate in digital technologies (Syfa 2023).

A concrete example of this activism occurred in December 2021, when BTS ARMY Indonesia organized a fundraising campaign on the *Kitabisa* philanthropic platform. The goal was to assist victims of the Mount Semeru eruption, and the campaign successfully raised Rp 90,437,789. Additionally, through another initiative called the 'Seonhohada Indonesia Project', fans collected Rp 136,109,376 to provide free meals for the poor and homeless during Ramadan. This campaign was launched to celebrate the birthday of their favorite actor, Kim Seonho (Utomo and Heriyanto 2022).

One positive impact of Korean cultural adaptation in Indonesia is the growing love among youth for music, creativity, and a broader awareness of other countries (Sudwintari and Perangin-angin 2022). Korean content – music, film, food, and lifestyle – has become highly popular among Indonesian youth. This trend reflects the massive diffusion of Korean

culture and its widespread influence on Indonesian society (Jayanti et al. 2022).

The expansion of K-pop in Indonesia can be attributed to several factors: the country's demographic composition, the role of social media, and government efforts in both Indonesia and South Korea to promote Korean culture, including the establishment of Korean Cultural Centers. Generation Z, which constitutes Indonesia's second-largest population segment, has played a key role in the widespread popularity of K-pop. According to a survey by IDN Research, one in four (24%) Gen Z Indonesians are interested in K-pop, compared to 14% among Millennials. Indonesian Gen Z fans' most popular Korean idols include BTS, BLACKPINK, and IU (Utomo and Heriyanto 2022). Meanwhile, Yu Lim Lee's research on the Korean Wave in Indonesia and Malaysia—two Muslim-majority countries—identifies three key drivers of cultural hybridity between local and foreign cultures: a shared Asian identity, state policies promoting unity in diversity, and local consumer xenocentrism. However, two main barriers remain: religious conservatism and inter-ethnic discrimination (Lee et al. 2020).

Considering all this data, it is clear that K-pop in Indonesia's digital society should be seen as a cultural and social movement. On one hand, K-pop represents a cultural phenomenon that has gained substantial popularity and influence in Indonesia, leading to the adoption of Korean music, fashion, and lifestyle trends. On the other hand, K-pop also functions as a social movement due to its potential to unite people, foster solidarity, and drive social change. Despite its unifying potential, K-pop still faces resistance and criticism from certain segments of society.

4. K-Popers and BDS Movement Againsts Israel: a Network of Power Analysis.

Acts of support for Palestine have been widely carried out by young people who identify themselves as K-Popers (fans of K-pop or Korean culture) on social media. These individuals usually form fandom groups, based on their favorite K-pop group or an individual idol. Each fandom carries its unique name depending on the idol it supports—for example, ARMY refers to fans of BTS (Bangtan Boys), while Uaenas are fans of the solo artist IU.

These fandoms often initiate various social campaigns based on their community identity. They frequently promote positive causes such as environmental awareness, disaster relief donations, and humanitarian campaigns. These groups form what can be seen as imagined communities, united by their shared admiration for K-pop idols and Korean pop culture.

When a member of a K-pop group celebrates a birthday, fans affiliated with the corresponding fandom often organize what is known as a 'Birthday Project.' One example was when ARMY organized a campaign to plant 1,000 trees to celebrate BTS member Park Jimin's birthday. This kind of initiative reflects the transformation of K-pop fandoms from mere music fan communities into active participants in social causes. These communities operate online and offline, with many of their campaigns—especially those focused on social and environmental issues—gaining significant traction on social media. As such, K-pop fandoms have become a meaningful part of the broader digital activism landscape.

In the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict, Indonesian K-pop fans have also taken concrete action by challenging Zionist narratives as a form of solidarity with Palestinian war victims. Many have engaged in fundraising campaigns to support Palestinians affected by the conflict. They have also participated in the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and

Sanctions) movement against Israel. One of the most prominent communities involved in these efforts is Xkwavers.

Xkwavers, short for 'Extraordinary Kwavers,' is a multi-fandom K-pop and K-drama fan community based in Indonesia ('Extraordinary Korean Wavers,' n.d.). This community has a strong digital presence, including over 76,000 followers on Instagram (@xkwavers n.d.), more than 15,000 members on Telegram, and over 7,000 followers on X (formerly Twitter) (@xkwavers2023). Fuad Naim, a well-known Islamic influencer among Indonesia's *hijrah* youth founded the group.

Xkwavers is widely regarded as a *hijrah* Muslim community that integrates K-pop fandom with Islamic preaching. This is evident in the religious content and activities they share on social media platforms. The community frequently organizes Islamic study sessions specifically designed for Muslim K-pop fans. This hybrid of K-pop culture and Islamic values has resulted in a community platform that resonates deeply with Indonesia's youth. Their programs include topics such as 'Heart Management' (*Manajemen Qolbu*), mental health awareness, and a series of spiritual events branded as 'Unlock.'

As previously mentioned, the Xkwavers community has been actively involved in campaigns to boycott Israel in response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One notable example is their 2024 'Unlock Ramadan' program, which the author personally attended. This event focused on Palestine and was conducted over seven Zoom sessions throughout the holy month. Below is one of the promotional captions shared on their social media platforms to attract participants:

Do you agree with the statement that 'K-Popers can't stand injustice'? We can't stand it when their agency mistreats our bias. We can't stand it when antis blindly hate them So as K-Popers, we also can't remain silent when we witness the cruelty committed by JEEONIZ against our brothers and sisters in PLSTN. However feeling sad and angry isn't enough. Those emotions will fade unless nourished by knowledge. That's why K-Popers should be on the front lines in becoming aware of what's happening in PLSTN. Let's show that we're not just obsessed with our bias – we can also contribute to the liberation of PLSTN 🍉 Join Unlock Ramadan 1445H now!

The 'Unlock Ramadan' series consisted of eight sessions, led by a different speaker. The first session, 'Our Voice for Palestine,' was hosted by Pepi Kim, a BTS fan and influencer. The second session, 'Things We Can Do for Palestine,' featured Emeraldal Noor Achni, a *da'wah* visual artist. The third session, 'The Strongest Women with,' was led by Sukiyati Satuhu, an Islamic influencer specializing in women's and family issues. The fourth session, 'Fact Check Palestine with,' was led by Quran Review. The fifth session, 'Debunking Enemy's False Narrative,' was delivered by Erlangga Greschinov, a digital activist and founder of the pro-Palestine campaign *Julid fi Sabilillah*. The sixth session, 'MZ and Palestine with,' was presented by a yet unnamed speaker. The seventh session, 'Our Beloved Baitul Maqdis with,' featured Renadakiska. The final session was delivered by Fuad Naim, with a concluding topic titled 'Liberation of Mind.'

The event attracted at least 391 participants from various regions across Indonesia, representing diverse age groups. The data indicates that most participants in these events were urban youth. Urban Muslim communities tend to engage with contemporary *hijrah* groups and religious study forums such as Xkwavers. In expressing their concern for Palestine, this group has also organized humanitarian fundraising campaigns. These donations were collected from various segments of society, with a primary focus on members of the K-pop community.

When viewed through the lens of Castells' theory on power in the network society, several dimensions of power within the Xkwavers community become evident. First, networking power in Xkwavers demonstrates a significant capacity to organize and mobilize its members within a structured network. Originating from a shared love for K-pop, the community has built strong bonds among Korean music and dramas fans, forming a solid collective identity. In addition, their *hijrah* youth background in a key motivation for their support of Palestine. It is well known that communities associated with the contemporary *hijrah* movement have been especially vocal in supporting the Palestinian cause. Through fandom groups and social media platforms, Xkwavers has established a network that connects thousands of individuals with shared interests. In the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict, this networked infrastructure is strategically used to support social and political actions that emphasize solidarity with Palestine. As a community largely composed of Gen Z members, they are digitally literate and fully use digital technologies to amplify their campaigns.

Second, network power within Xkwavers is reflected in their ability to utilize existing norms and standards within the K-pop community to influence the attitudes and behaviors of their members. This community operates with a set of internal norms that guide member engagement. Beyond their shared interest in K-pop, members are united by shared religious beliefs. Based on the author's observations, their participation in BDS campaigns and other forms of pro-Palestinian advocacy is primarily grounded in humanitarian concerns, although often framed with religious undertones. They mobilize support through the community's collective identity and the social influence of prominent figures within it. One such figure is Fuad Naim, the group's founder, whose role is pivotal in shaping the narratives disseminated within the community. They do not merely use

power to gain support but also to set agendas and control the discourse that aligns with their political and religious goals.

Third, networked power is visible in how Xkwavers uses its influence within K-pop networks and social media platforms to spread messages supporting Palestinian solidarity and opposition to Israel. The community has on several occasions released lists of K-pop idols caught using or endorsing brands affiliated with Israel—brands that have long been targets of boycott by pro-Palestine activists. This has created a moral dilemma for fans who admire these idols. While some idols are indifferent to the conflict, others have been criticized for their affiliations, leading fans to express disappointment in comment sections or to withdraw their support altogether. Some remain loyal while awaiting official clarification from entertainment agencies. To promote their pro-Palestine stance, the community frequently produces engaging digital content that captures attention and circulates their intended messages. They also incorporate Islamic study sessions to blend K-pop enthusiasm with religious values, thereby expanding the reach and resonance of their activism.

Fourth, network-making power in Xkwavers is evident in their ability to build and manage their social media networks. Targeting religiously inclined youth who are fans of K-pop, the community provides a safe and engaging space for its members. Their model of da'wah through K-pop represents a novel development in the world of Islamic proselytization. While K-pop may not align with traditional Islamic doctrine, the community has successfully constructed a strong network that infuses religious values into the lives of youth already immersed in K-pop culture. Xkwavers wields strong influence across platforms like Instagram, Telegram, and X (formerly Twitter) to maintain this network. Events such as 'Unlock Ramadan 2024 – Palestine Edition' illustrate their approach: educating members about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and empowering them to act. Through these networks, they organize religious and social

programs—including Islamic study sessions and charity initiatives—while distributing messages related to social and political issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their command over digital network-building allows them to push forward their ideological agendas with strength and consistency.

Considering Castells' dimensions of power, it can be concluded that the Xkwavers network does not merely serve as a medium for distributing pro-Palestinian information. Rather, it functions as a discursive arena charged with power relations. The presence of figures like Fuad Naim illustrates how symbolic authority operates within the network, where his role as an opinion leader grants both religious legitimacy and moral authority to the narratives being constructed. This dynamic demonstrates how networking power enables religious and political messages to be internalized and reproduced by community members through workshops and narratives he produces. He functions as an authoritative node, shaping religious and political narratives simultaneously. This authority does not emerge from individual charisma alone, but is mediated by algorithmic logic, which determines content visibility—allowing messages rich in religious symbolism to reach wider audiences. In other words, religious authority in digital spaces relies not solely on knowledge or personal popularity but also on negotiation with transnational technological structures.

At the same time, social media algorithms act as non-human actors that are far from neutral. Instagram's recommendation systems or Twitter/X's trending topic features amplify emotional, popular content aligned with the logic of digital visibility. This mechanism illustrates the operation of networked power, where digital solidarity is not simply the result of collective consciousness but a construction mediated by technology.

Furthermore, network power in this community can be seen in the adoption of specific norms, such as using K-pop symbols in pro-Palestinian campaigns, which normalize political expression through fandom aesthetics. Meanwhile, network-making power becomes apparent when authoritative figures succeed in forming new transnational networks—blending digital activism, fandom communities, and religious narratives. The result is a relatively autonomous network with its own religio-political agenda. According to Castells' framework, then, digital solidarity among Xkwavers does not emerge spontaneously or naturally. Instead, it is the product of complex interactions among symbolic actors, algorithmic logic, and the mechanisms of meaning reproduction within the network.

D. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the Xkwavers community—a convergence of K-pop fandom and hijrah youth identity—plays a significant role in promoting pro-Palestinian digital solidarity. Through campaigns, workshops, and social media engagement, they participate in the BDS movement, mobilize donations, and disseminate political narratives that align religious values with popular cultural aesthetics. Indonesian K-Popers, particularly those in the Xkwavers community, build digital solidarity networks for Palestine not solely out of humanitarian concern, but as part of a growing socio-political identity rooted in religiously-inflected popular culture.

This phenomenon reflects a broader shift in how youth activism takes shape in the network society. Xkwavers illustrates that activism today is no longer the domain of formal political organizations, but emerges from hybrid communities rooted in fandom and digital religiosity. Castells' theory of network power helps reveal how digital infrastructures, symbolic authorities, community norms, and algorithmic systems collectively shape political participation. Figures serve not only as religious guides but also as

strategic opinion leaders who navigate digital platforms to influence public discourse. The Xkwavers case underscores that political agency is increasingly mediated by cultural consumption, religious expression, and technological affordances.

This study is limited to a single case, which may not capture the full diversity of K-Pop fandom activism in Indonesia. Future research should explore comparative cases across different religious, regional, or generational lines, and examine how algorithmic visibility influences the success of digital movements. Theoretically, this study contributes to understanding how fandoms can function as political agents in the digital age, and how power in networked societies enables new forms of youth-led, transnational solidarity. Practically, it highlights the importance of recognizing online communities as spaces for civic engagement and sociopolitical negotiation beyond conventional institutions.

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