

Constructing Idol Femininity: The Circulation of Feminine Ideals within JKT48's Digital Community

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Abstract

- Purpose** : This study examines how JKT48 fans circulate femininity values through criticism and evaluation on social media and how these practices construct members' networked selves within Indonesian cultural contexts.
- Method** : This qualitative study combined digital ethnography with Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. Data collection began with online participant observation, followed by the documentation of fan posts and comments and a literature review of idol culture, fandom, femininity, and digital identity. The collected data were subsequently examined through textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice.
- Results** : Fan criticism operates as a mechanism for circulating and enforcing femininity values related to performance, emotional expression, politeness, friendliness, appearance, and professionalism. Idol identities are dynamically negotiated through tensions among personal expression, fandom expectations, platform-based visibility, and Indonesian cultural norms.
- Conclusion** : Feminine values are not only produced by the industry but also negotiated and enforced collectively by the fandom through standards such as emotional expression, performance energy, and modesty. This research opens up opportunities for further research, particularly in exploring the long-term impact of digital social control on *idols' psychological health* and the dynamics of their personal identities outside the public sphere.

Keywords: Digital fandom; Femininity; JKT48; Networked self; Social control

1. Introduction

Idol groups have a unique appeal that lies not only in their music or appearance, but also in the cultural values they carry. In the Indonesian context, JKT48, as an adaptation of the Japanese AKB48 concept, brings elements of Japanese culture that influence how they present themselves to the public. JKT48 is one of the *sister groups* of AKB48. JKT48 is the first idol group in Indonesia. JKT48 fans can interact with their favorite JKT48 idols and have the opportunity to meet JKT48 *members directly* at the Theater located on the F4 Floor of FX Sudirman Mall. JKT48 originated from AKB48 which debuted in 2005, produced by Yasushi Akimoto, and has had quite high popularity in Japan since 2005 until now. In addition to showcasing entertainment skills, such as singing and dancing,

the concept of the *idol group* Japan also carries a unique concept, namely "Idols You Can Meet" (Mulya & Mulyana, 2022) .

One prominent aspect in representing *idol group identity* is how feminine values are distributed by JKT48 *members* and fans , both on stage and in digital interactions. The main focus of discussions about women's femininity relates to how they behave, thus exerting control over them. Socially, many societal regulations have emerged with the aim of controlling women, dictating their behavior, and determining the roles they must fulfill according to prevailing social standards. Mass media and social media play a significant role in shaping society's perception of ideal femininity (Sulistiyani, 2021). This depiction of female femininity is inseparable from the influence of the globalization of music, which then maintains hegemonic racial and gender hierarchies (Lemos, 2011). Based on this statement, the construction of women or female femininity becomes a value that is also displayed through music.

Feminine values that *idols emphasize Groups* often embrace a *kawaii* (cute) image, as well as elegance and adherence to traditional norms (Matsue, 2017). Mass media and social media play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of idealized femininity (Sulistiyani, 2021). In global popular culture, including *idol music*, the construction of femininity often follows a hegemonic gender hierarchy (Lemos, 2011). This means that femininity is treated as a set of ideal attributes (e.g., gentle, polite, and friendly) expected of female idols. The implementation of the Japanese *idol concept* in Indonesia faces adjustments to the local context: Indonesian society tends to be sensitive to issues of morality and decency, so JKT48 *members* are required to project a feminine image that is not only professional on stage but also polite and in keeping with local cultural norms.

In popular culture, these values are not only generated by agency strategies but also influenced by fan communities that actively provide evaluation and criticism. Social media, especially platforms like X, has become a primary space for fans to interact directly with JKT48 *members*. In the book *Textual Poachers*, it is explained that *fans* actively try to incorporate what is depicted by media texts with their personal life experiences, fans also create their own meanings, even provide evaluations of the media texts they like (Jenkins, 1992). Thus, it can be said that fans are not just passive consumers of what they consume in the media. *Fans* actively produce and manipulate the meaning of media and cultural products (Jenkins, 1992). In this study, JKT48 fans provide criticism and evaluations of the performance of JKT48 *members* after watching *online* via *streaming*. Criticism and evaluation as in Figure 1 provide codes of ideal femininity values that fans expect from JKT48 *members'* stage actions.

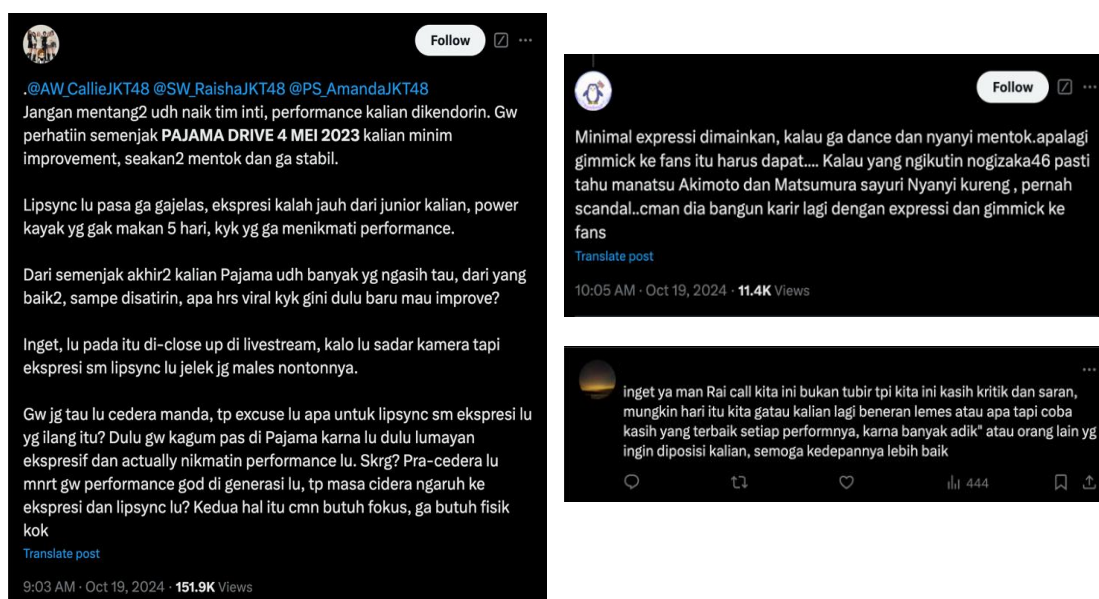


Figure 1. Fans' Critical Comments on JKT48 Members
(Source: Platform X screenshot)

Members' dancing styles, dressing, interactions with the public, and self-expression are the focus of repeated attention and are judged by fans. These standards reflect the gender expectations that exist in popular culture when *members are members*. *Idol groups are expected to exhibit a combination of professionalism and personal charm that aligns with the group's image. This demonstrates how fans collectively construct and uphold ideal feminist performance norms.*

Fan criticism of JKT48 *members*, particularly regarding their appearance or behavior, often reflects collective expectations of ideal femininity. Weisgram et al. (2011) showed that feminine values are often associated with expressions and movements that form the basis for constructing an ideal figure. In the case of JKT48, such criticism can prompt *members* to quickly adapt to fan expectations, even to the point of publicly apologizing on social media. This situation illustrates the dynamics of the distribution of feminine values that not only reflect but also reproduce gender norms through social control mediated by digital technology.

There is little research that explicitly discusses how fan criticism on social media acts as a mechanism for the distribution and enforcement of feminine values, and how this shapes the digital and performative identities of female *idols* in the local Indonesian context. This is what this study aims to bridge by examining the interaction between *fan communities* and *idols* as a social practice laden with ideological content. This study seeks to fill this research gap by unpacking the self-configuration of JKT48 *idols through the lens of the distribution of feminine values and power relations* in digital communities, showing how technology, gender, and culture are intertwined in the production of contemporary identities. In doing so, this study broadens the understanding of how social norms can be produced, negotiated, and enforced collectively in the open space of new media.

This study aims to uncover how JKT48 *members' self-configurations* are formed through the distribution of feminine values in the context of local Indonesian culture. Therefore, the research problem proposed in this study is how the JKT48 fan community distributes feminine values through criticism and evaluation on social media, and how this shapes the *members' self-configurations*. *The main focus of this study is to explore the role of fan community criticism and evaluation*

in creating, upholding, and strengthening expected feminine values, and how social media becomes the primary medium in the process of distributing these values. Academically, this study contributes to enriching studies on popular culture, *fandom studies*, and gender construction in the new media era by adding dimensions regarding how community interactions can shape individual identities in digital spaces that are both participatory and normative. Practically, this study provides insights for entertainment industry players and *idol management* regarding the importance of understanding the dynamics of social media as a space for identity negotiation and cultural control, and for fan communities to reflect on their collective influence in shaping social norms and gender representation through everyday digital practices.

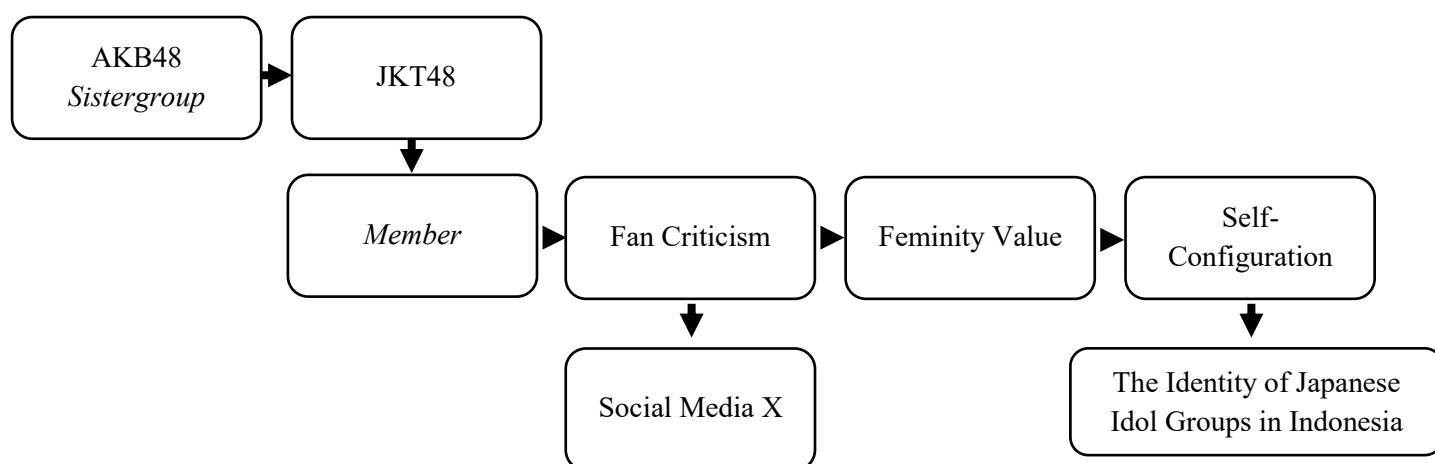


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretative-critical paradigm to deeply understand the process of distribution of feminine values and the formation of idol self-configuration in the JKT48 digital community. The interpretative approach is used to interpret the subjective meaning of fan interactions and *idol responses*, while a critical perspective is used to reveal power relations and the reproduction of gender ideology contained in digital communication practices. The research strategy used is digital ethnography combined with Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model. Digital ethnography allows researchers to observe the social practices of *fandom communities* naturally in online spaces, especially on *platform X* as the main space for JKT48 fan interactions, while critical discourse analysis is used to examine how language in these interactions represents, distributes, and reproduces feminine values and power relations between fans and idols.

The object of this research is the practice of distribution of feminine values in the interaction of the JKT48 digital community, with the unit of analysis being comments and posts of fans containing criticism or evaluation of the performance and behavior of *members*, public responses of JKT48 members on social media, as well as collective discourse of *fandom* formed through interactions in threads, *reposts*, and online conversations. Data collection was conducted through online participatory observation by tracing fan community activities, including the use of hashtags, interactions on fanbase accounts, and discussions with high levels of engagement. In addition,

digital documentation was conducted by collecting screenshots of posts, comments, and relevant conversations as analysis materials, and supported by literature studies to strengthen the theoretical framework related to idol culture, the construction of femininity, *fandom practices*, and the concept of *networked self*.

Data selection was conducted purposively, with the criteria being posts containing explicit criticism of *members*, having a high level of interaction, and being relevant to issues of femininity such as expression, appearance, attitude, and moral norms. To maintain the focus of the analysis, the data was limited to specific moments or issues that triggered intense discourse within *the fandom community*. The collected data were then analyzed through two integrated stages. First, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns of feminine values constructed by fans through *coding stages* to produce key themes such as standards of gentleness, politeness, and ideal performance. Second, the analysis continued with a critical discourse analysis to reveal how language in fan criticism functions as a mechanism of social control that reproduces gender norms and power relations within the digital community. The analysis was conducted at the textual, discursive, and social levels to examine the relationship between language choice, discourse production, and the underlying ideological context.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study applies source triangulation by comparing data from various uploads and relevant literature, as well as conducting *peer-reviewed studies*. *debriefing* to reduce interpretation bias. Furthermore, the entire research process was systematically documented through an audit trail and accompanied by researcher reflexivity to maintain awareness of subjective positions in the analysis process. With this approach, the research is expected to produce a comprehensive understanding of how feminine values are distributed, negotiated, and upheld in digital communities and how these processes shape the self-configuration of *idols* within the context of Indonesian popular culture.

3. Result

The research findings were generated through a thematic analysis process to identify patterns of feminine values constructed by fans, and were further deepened using Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model to reveal how language in fan criticism represents power relations and the reproduction of gender norms. With this approach, the analysis focuses not only on what fans say, but also on how these meanings are produced, negotiated, and normalized in digital communication practices. Therefore, the discussion in this section is organized into three main focuses, namely the distribution of feminine values in *idol practices*, *self-configuration (networked self)* JKT48 *members* as a response to pressure from the digital community, as well as the role of the fandom community as a social control mechanism that shapes the performance standards and identities of *idols* in the new media space.

Femininity Values Japanese Idol

Idols have historically been used as cultural symbols that reflect and shape gender values in society. Matsue (2017) explains that the performativity of Japanese idols, *such as* Hatsune Miku and AKB48, involves a complex interplay between visual idealization and fan-formed narratives. In this context, the feminine values displayed by *idols* encompass not only "*kawaii* " (cute) visual appearance, but also adherence to traditional gender norms, such as modesty and obedience.

Weisgram et al. (2011) added that femininity is often associated with values such as warmth, sensitivity, and the ability to build positive social relationships. In the case of idols, these values are projected through their on-stage performances and interactions with fans. This projection of feminine values is often adapted to market needs and prevailing social demands.

As idols, JKT48 members are expected to display ideal feminine values, including gentleness, friendliness, and high spirits in every performance. When these actions do not conform to public norms or expectations, fan criticism can become a form of social regulation of *the idol's identity*. *Fan criticism becomes a tool to enforce these feminine values*, especially through a focus on dance moves, facial expressions, and interactions with the audience. The distribution of JKT48's feminine values is not only limited to the stage, but also extends to their digital activities as they are expected to continuously display an ideal feminine image in their posts and *online interactions*.



Figure 3. Fan Criticism of JKT48 Members' Performance on Social Media X
(Source: Platform X screenshot on April 27, 2026)

This can be seen concretely in one of the fan posts on social media X, which directly criticized the performance of a JKT48 member. *In the post, the fan questioned the idol's emotional state and*

professionalism. Although it ended with positive encouragement, the structure of this criticism indicates an expectation of ideal performance that must always be met. This kind of criticism not only assesses technical aspects, but also implicitly demands emotional consistency, energy, and dedication as part of the construction of ideal femininity in *the idol industry*. This standard reflects the construction of femininity in popular culture that positions women as figures who must always appear emotionally and performatively perfect. In this context, even human conditions such as fatigue can be interpreted as deviations from ideal standards, thus triggering correction from the community.

Criticism of *idols* is also often linked to gender standards in popular culture. For example, female *idols* are criticized for not meeting certain expectations of "ideal femininity" constructed in a patriarchal society. For example, AKB48 members are faced with expectations to project a "kawaii" feminine image through clothing, facial expressions, gestures, and even dance (Huaman, 2018; Yamamoto, 2019). This style is often seen as representing adherence to traditional norms of femininity influenced by Japanese patriarchal culture. Women are portrayed as passive, weak, submissive, hopeful, lacking in motivation, and dependent on external forces. In the Japanese social context, this performativity of female identity serves as a platform for fantasies of female subjugation for men who refuse to accept the reality of women's empowerment. In the Indonesian context, this reinforces the dominant social discourse that women's position should, as far as possible, not exceed male dominance.

In the context of JKT48, fan criticism on social media is often directed at how *members reflect* perceived ideals of femininity. Collective criticism arises when members are *deemed* to fall short of these expectations, prompting *members to publicly apologize on social media, such as X*. This situation *reflects how* feminine values are controlled by fans. The digital identities of JKT48 *members* are fluid and constantly reshaped by the feedback and expectations of the fan community.

Self Configuration (*The Networked Self*) JKT48 Members

According to Julie E. Cohen in *Configuring the Networked Self* (2015), a person's identity in the digital world is not only formed by themselves, but also through interactions with communities in digital spaces. In the context of JKT48 *members* whose activities can be watched *online*, fans can provide evaluations or criticism directly through social media, generally through X. When criticism or evaluation from fans appears and becomes a topic of widespread discussion, JKT48 *members* often immediately respond by apologizing publicly on the same *platform*. This process *reflects the concept where the identity of JKT48 members* continues to be formed and adjusted to feedback and collective demands from fans. Therefore, their identity is not only a personal reflection but also the result of negotiations with the digital community that actively monitors and interacts (Cohen, 2012).



Figure 4. JKT48 Members' Apology Responses as a Form of Digital Identity Negotiation
(Source: Platform X screenshot on April 27, 2026)

This phenomenon can be concretely observed in a post by one of *the members*, who publicly apologized on social media. In a post on the site, *the member* clarified his actions and apologized for any perceived overreaction by fans. The language used suggests an attempt to defuse conflict and conform to community expectations. This practice is part of a social mechanism that requires *idols* to maintain an image that aligns with the collective norms of *the fandom*.

Daily activities in the digital world, such as criticizing JKT48 *members* on social media, influence how the fan community and *members* interact. Fans often follow existing rules or norms, for example, by providing contextual criticism, but some also try to change these rules by forming stronger collective opinions. On the other hand, JKT48 *members* try to circumvent this pressure by issuing apologies or clarifications directly on social media (<https://www.instagram.com/kopiidol/reel/DBTTGx3JFXz/>). This demonstrates how the digital space has become an arena for adjusting, changing, or overcoming community expectations (McCarthy & Wright, 2004).

Members' self-configurations are shaped through intensive digital interactions with fans. Criticism of their performances encourages *members* to adjust their behavior, expressions, and emotions to meet fan expectations. In this process, self-configurations become dynamic, continually evolving based on interactions with the digital community. For example, *members* who receive criticism for lacking energy often demonstrate significant changes in their subsequent performance, reflecting adaptation to that feedback. These adjustments are part of a strategy to maintain their relevance to fans while meeting local market standards.

There are significant differences between the *idol self-image* in Japan and in Indonesia. In Japan, AKB48 promotes the "idol you can meet" concept, which focuses on personal connection through small theater and direct interaction. This concept emphasizes the *idol's growth journey* from amateur to professional, enabling fans to be actively involved in the process. In contrast, JKT48 in Indonesia, while embracing the same concept, must adapt to local expectations, which emphasize politeness and conformity to Indonesian cultural norms. The Indonesian market tends to be more sensitive to moral and aesthetic issues of politeness, which are considered in line with traditional values. This encourages JKT48 *members* to project an image that is not only professional but also polite and friendly, in accordance with local standards.

Digital Communities and the Social Control of Fans

Fans as a community gather *online* through social media X. These fans join a community due to the presence of a brand. Their interest in the brand makes them gather together to become a community on social media. According to (Futuwwah & Mardhiyah, 2019), brand communities that are established *online* provide community activities for building relationships and bonds with fellow members. These fans use social media X as a platform to communicate with other fans to find out the information they are looking for. The participation of fans carried out in the context of the brand community will increase their knowledge about brands and products as a consequence of the interactions made through the media. Social media X has become the main *platform* for the fan community to create, maintain, and strengthen social control mechanisms for JKT48 *members*.

Through this media, fans not only observe but also actively provide assessments and criticism that influence *member behavior*. This control action is in accordance with the concept of social surveillance, where individuals or groups are directed to meet certain social expectations (2018). In this context, collective criticism on social media can quickly transform into significant social pressure. When the majority of social media users have a negative view of an individual, this often results in a collective movement that ends in the exclusion or humiliation of that individual. This situation shows how social media is not only a space for interaction, but also a powerful tool for regulating and controlling the behavior of members in digital communities.



Figure 5. Community Discourse “Idol Police” as a Mechanism for the Legitimation of Criticism in Fandom

(Source: Platform X screenshot on April 27, 2026)

This phenomenon is increasingly evident through the emergence of accounts or actors within the community who explicitly position themselves as "norm keepers." In these posts, fans emphasize the importance of distinguishing between criticism and bullying, while also stating that criticism will be given when a *member's* behavior is deemed deviant as a JKT48 *idol*. This statement demonstrates that the community is not only spontaneously criticizing but also constructing moral legitimacy for such actions. Criticism is positioned as legitimate and even necessary to maintain ideal *idol standards*.

The existence of narratives like these demonstrates that *fandom communities* have internal mechanisms for defining the line between justified criticism and behavior that violates norms. In other words, *fandom* is not only a space for cultural consumption but also a space for active social regulation. Fans collectively build consensus on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior for idols, creating a system of social control based on digital participation.

These communities not only provide criticism but also serve as a reinforcement of the ideal standards members should meet. Discussions in forums or fan groups often focus on evaluating individual performance, creating a consensus on what constitutes "good performance." The influence of these communities creates collective pressure on members to continually improve themselves according to the agreed-upon standards. Social media can provide a platform for more transparent and direct criticism of *idols*. *The concept of networked publics* by Boyd (2010) explains how this space allows fans to articulate their criticisms publicly and collectively.

As Galbraith and Karlin point out, idols use various media to build emotional intimacy with fans. Intertextuality helps idols strengthen this connection through consistent portrayals of their personalities. When these personas appear inauthentic or deviate from fans' expectations, criticism arises.

Fan criticism of JKT48 *members' performances* often focuses on the emotional expression and energy displayed in their dances. Criticisms such as "lack of passion" or "lack of energy" serve as markers for how fans define ideal performance standards. Social media platforms serve as a primary venue for this criticism, often in the form of direct comments or discussions in community forums. This mechanism not only shapes the members' public image but also creates social pressure for them to meet these expectations.

Fan criticism not only impacts *idols' relationships with fans but also their self-concept*. Galbraith and Karlin (2019) suggest that intimate interactions, such as through small theaters or social media platforms, can amplify this pressure. Idols must constantly change their personas to conform to fan expectations, creating a conflict between public and private identities. Constant criticism can impact *idols' mental health*, as evidenced by numerous studies on the impact of social media on psychological health.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the distribution of feminine values in the JKT48 digital community is an active and layered mechanism of social control. In contrast to previous research that tends to position femininity as an industry product or agency strategy (Matsue, 2017), this study finds that the fan community has a significant role in defining, enforcing, and reproducing

standards of femininity through everyday digital communication practices. Thus, femininity in this context is not *top-down*, but rather a result of negotiations between the industry, *idols*, and the fandom community.

One important finding is that fan criticism serves as a primary instrument in distributing feminine values. Criticism is not only directed at the technical aspects of performance, but also encompasses the emotional, expressive, and moral dimensions of an *idol*. This shows that femininity in the *idol industry* is not limited to visual appearance, but includes expectations for emotional consistency, attitudes, and even psychological states that must be maintained in public. This finding expands the concept of femininity as a social construct by demonstrating that digital communities play an active role in the normalization of these values.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the concept of *networked self* (Cohen, 2012) is not only relevant in the context of digital identity in general, but also key to understanding the dynamics of *idol identity*. The identities of JKT48 members are formed through a continuous process of negotiation between self-expression and community pressure. The response in the form of a public apology made by *the members* shows that *the idols' digital identities* are adaptive and responsive to collective opinion. This confirms that *idols* exist within a system of power relations that involve fans as actors with significant influence.

Another interesting finding is the emergence of actors within *fandom communities* who act as guardians of norms. The presence of these actors indicates that *fandom communities* possess internal mechanisms for regulating and legitimizing critical practices. Criticism is viewed not only as an expression of opinion but also as a moral act aimed at upholding *the idol's ideal standards*. Thus, *fandom* functions not only as a space for participation but also as a system of social regulation with an informal structure of values and authority.

From a critical discourse analysis perspective, this phenomenon demonstrates that the language used in fan criticism reproduces broader power relations and gender ideologies. Criticism of female *idols* often contains implicit expectations about how women should behave, appear, and express themselves. This suggests that *fandom practices* in digital media are inextricably linked to patriarchal social structures that still influence constructions of femininity in popular culture. In other words, social media is not only a space for interaction but also an arena for the reproduction of ideologies that reinforce certain gender norms.

Furthermore, this study also found contextual differences between idol practices in Japan and Indonesia. Although JKT48 adopts the Japanese *idol concept*, the self-configuration process in Indonesia demonstrates a stronger intensity of social control, particularly regarding norms of politeness and moral sensitivity. This suggests that cultural globalization does not occur homogeneously, but undergoes a localization process influenced by local social values. Thus, the self-configuration of JKT48 *idols* can be understood as the result of a complex interaction between global culture and local norms.

The findings of this study provide an important contribution to expanding the study of fandom, digital culture, and gender construction. This study shows that the relationship between *idols* and fans is not one-way, but rather a reciprocal one fraught with power dynamics. Fans not only consume but also produce and control meaning, while *idols* act as subjects who continuously negotiate within the system. Thus, this study confirms that digital identity in popular culture is a

collective construction formed through interaction, social regulation, and the distribution of values within the digital media ecosystem.

5. Conclusion

Feminine values are propagated through criticism and evaluation on social media, which then functions as a mechanism of social control over *idol behavior and performance*. Feminine values are not only produced by the industry but also negotiated and enforced collectively by the fandom through standards such as emotional expression, performance energy, and modesty. In this process, self-configuration (*networked JKT48 members' self-identities*) are dynamically formed as a result of the interaction between self-expression and digital community pressure, allowing *idol identities* to become fluid and continually adapt to fan expectations. These findings emphasize that the relationship between *idols* and *fandom* is both participatory and normative, as fans act as agents who shape and control representations of femininity in digital popular culture.

This research opens up opportunities for further research, particularly in exploring the long-term impact of digital social control on *idols' psychological health* and the dynamics of their personal identities outside the public sphere. Furthermore, future research could broaden the context by comparing *fandom practices* across countries or social media platforms to examine differences in value distribution patterns and power relations. Practically, these findings also provide a foundation for the entertainment industry to design communication management strategies that are more adaptive and sensitive to the dynamics of digital communities, while also encouraging fans to be more reflective in producing criticism in the digital public sphere.

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