

# THE TRANSCULTURATION OF K-POP FANS' PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF "CALL ME BY FIRE VIETNAMESE VERSION"

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines the transculturation of Vietnamese K-pop fans' practices through the case study of *Call Me By Fire Vietnamese Version*, analyzing how these practices shape domestic fandom and contribute to Vietnam's entertainment industry. Using a mixed-methods approach (an online survey, twelve in-depth interviews, and digital ethnography), the research applies Transculturation Theory (Ortiz, 1940) and Participatory Culture (Jenkins, 1992, 2006, 2015) to conceptualize the show as a contact zone where global fan cultures intersect with local norms. Findings show that while K-pop fan practices serve as a central influence, they are reconfigured through three phases. In deculturation, fans detach their practices from the K-pop context. During acculturation, activities such as social media engagement, streaming, voting, financial mobilization, and fan-driven projects are negotiated and adapted to local conditions, blending various Asian fan influences with individual skills. In neoculturation, a hybrid Vietnamese fandom emerges in which fans shift from consumers to cultural partners, preserving the participatory practices of global fandom while embodying local socio-cultural characteristics, contributing to the professionalization and vitality of the domestic entertainment ecosystem. This process also highlights institutionalization in Vietnam as an ongoing negotiation among fans, artists, and management companies. The research positions K-pop fan culture as a cultural gateway that introduces global practices into Vietnam while enabling Vietnamese cultural products to circulate outward. These insights offer practical implications for media producers and policymakers and expand regional fan studies by demonstrating how global fan cultures integrate into local entertainment industries.

**Keywords:** Korean Wave, Vietnamese K-pop Fan, Fan Study, Transculturation, Participatory Culture

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the K-pop fandom in Vietnam has evolved into one of the most dynamic and adaptable fan communities in Southeast Asia (Suh et al., 2006), characterized by high levels of initiative, digital skills, organizational ability, and financial mobilization (Phan, 2018; Le, 2023). However, this energy has largely been directed toward foreign idols, while the domestic market has lacked both industrial infrastructure and sufficient space for fans to participate as deeply as they would in the Korean model.

The emergence of Call Me By Fire Vietnamese Version (Anh Trai Vượt Ngàn Chông Gai, hereafter *ATVNCG*) in 2024 marked a turning point. For the first time, a domestic entertainment program met the aesthetic and technical standards familiar to Vietnamese K-pop fans, while simultaneously allowing them to engage in a range of activities typically associated with global fan practices. In this convergence, transnational fan practices, values, and logics were detached from their original context, renegotiated, and reconfigured within Vietnam's socio-cultural environment.

The frameworks of transculturation theory (Ortiz, 2022) and participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992, 2006a; Jenkins et al., 2016) provide a conceptual lens to interpret this process as a sequence of deculturation, acculturation, and neoculturation. This study positions *ATVNCG* as a contact zone (Pratt, 2008), where global fan cultures meet the local context, generating a hybrid fandom familiar in its practice structures yet distinct in the ways it is localized and increasingly institutionalized in Vietnam.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### **Korean Wave and K-pop fans' practices in Vietnam**

The Korean Wave (Hallyu) emerged in the late 1990s and quickly developed into a global cultural phenomenon through the combination of state policy, entertainment industry strategies, and the expansion of digital media infrastructures (Jin, 2016; Kim, 2013). After an initial period driven primarily by television dramas, K-pop expanded its influence from the mid-2000s through the idol-training system, high production standards, and the leverage of digital platforms that fostered a global participatory fan culture (Jenkins, 2006b; Cho & Sim, 2013; Butsaban, 2023). In Vietnam, the arrival of Hallyu coincided with the country's economic liberalization during the Doi Moi reform. It surged in the 2000-2010s period (Duong, 2016), supported by increasing Korea-Vietnam exchanges and the rapid development of digital media (Dinh, 2016). Vietnamese K-pop fandom emerged through a bottom-up trajectory as fans translated and circulated content, managed fanpages, and organized events long before official distribution channels appeared, gradually building a highly organized community with strong digital capabilities (Le, 2023). Common practices such as fansubbing, streaming, voting, fan fiction, cover dance, and fan gatherings illustrate how Vietnamese fans have become embedded in global participatory culture (Le, 2023). Research on cover dance shows that fans not only consume but also reproduce, create, and negotiate identity within digital cultural environments (Phan, 2018). At the same time, public discourse on "fan cuồng" (fanatic) and concerns about "cultural invasion" reveal ongoing tensions between transnational cultural consumption and local social norms (Duong, 2016; Pham, 2022). Yet, participatory practices rooted in social values, such as charity projects, educational fundraising, community support initiatives, and environmental campaigns, represent strategies through which Vietnamese K-pop fans respond to these stigmas and reshape public perception (Le, 2023).

Overall, prior studies describe Vietnamese K-pop fandom as a young, dynamic, highly organized community with strong digital participation capacity that forms a crucial foundation for subsequent processes of cultural negotiation and hybridization within Vietnam's entertainment landscape.

### **Vietnam's entertainment industry context**

Following the Doi Moi reform (1986), Vietnam promoted cultural development policies aligned with a knowledge-based economy model, emphasizing innovation, content export, and cultural identity preservation (Nguyen, 2020). Directive No. 30/CT-TTg (2024) further reinforced the goal of expanding the cultural industries, prioritizing professionalization of key areas, including performing arts, alongside upgrading event infrastructure, accelerating digital transformation, and strengthening international cooperation (Vietnam Prime Minister, 2024). Recent policy forums have likewise highlighted the need for systematic artist training and enhancing market standards in line with East Asian cultural industry development models (YeaH1 Group, 2025; N.L.D. Newspaper, 2025). At the practical level, since the 2010s, several domestic companies have experimented with idol group models (e.g., 365daband, Uni5, Monstar), adopting K-pop-inspired training systems and visual concepts. However, these efforts were frequently compared to Korean products and criticized for being copycats. A small market, limited capital, and the absence of an industrial training system and artist management infrastructure have made it difficult for V-pop to compete in a landscape strongly dominated by K-pop (Tinnhac, 2018; Phuong, 2017).

Before 2024, K-pop fandom and V-pop fandom largely operated as two separate ecosystems: one highly organized and proficient in global fan strategies but criticized for being “sính ngoại” (xenophile), prioritizing foreign artists over domestic talents; meanwhile, the other was fragmented, loosely structured, and rarely able to build a sustainable community. This gap laid the foundation for new points of contact between the two fandoms as the entertainment market began to shift.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to capture general trends in fan behavior and attitudes while also delving into their motivations, experiences, and cultural negotiations underlying those practices. In the quantitative approach, an online survey was conducted from September to October 2025 through ATVNCG community groups on Facebook and Threads, resulting in 545 valid responses. The questionnaire included items on demographic characteristics, fandom background (particularly K-pop experience), frequency of participation in activities such as streaming, voting, merchandise purchasing, and fan projects, as well as 1-10 Likert-scale measures evaluating the influence of K-pop fan culture and changes in time and spending on domestic entertainment compared to K-pop after watching the program. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. In the qualitative approach, the study conducted twelve in-depth interviews directly by the researcher, including ten long-term K-pop fans actively participating in the ATVNCG fandom, one cultural-entertainment journalist (Ms. Nghiem Ngoc), and one Head of Marketing Communications of Yeah1 Group - the production company behind the show (Mr. An Zuno). The semi-structured interviews, lasting from 45 to 60 minutes, focused on fandom trajectories, motivations for returning to the domestic scene, the influence of international fandom experiences on domestic fan practices, experiences conducting fan projects, the interaction of fan and management companies, as well as the changes in public and industry perceptions. In addition to primary data, the study incorporates secondary expert data from the public broadcast on YouTube of *8 Saigon Talkshow* (November 2024), where three CEOs of artist management companies (GSN Media, Great Entertainment, 777 Entertainment) discussed the state of Vietnam's artist management industry, its relationship with fandom, and emerging pressures from fan communities. Relevant segments were transcribed and analyzed as part of the expert interview dataset. The researcher also conducted online observations from June 2024 to October 2025 on Facebook and Threads, monitoring posts and discussions related to ATVNCG, announcements of fan projects (digital out-of-home advertising, hereafter DOOH; food support; check-in booths; freebies), streaming

and voting campaigns, and post-concert reactions. Field notes and screenshots were collected to support the interview and survey analyses. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with key themes surrounding the return to the domestic scene, the processes of detaching and reattaching fan practices, how global norms encounter local rules, the rise of a local hybrid fandom, and the gradual institutionalization of fan practices. In this study, the identities of fan participants are completely anonymized to protect their privacy. However, the identities of media professionals and journalists are disclosed with their consent, as they are public figures directly relevant to the research context.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The online survey was purposively designed to target audiences with high levels of engagement in the ATVNCG fandom, with a screening question on “fandom background” indicating that 88.6% of the respondents were K-pop fans. This proportion aligns with the research objectives, as it enables direct observation of the shift and reconfiguration of fandom practices from a transnational context into the domestic sphere. Among this group, 65.4% had been K-pop fans for more than seven years, representing a generation of fans who have accumulated extensive experience in community organization and management within international fandom environments. In terms of demographics, the gender ratio showed a dominance of women at 94.6%, with only 4.3% being men, and less than 1% identifying as other genders or unspecified. The age distribution was strongly concentrated in the 20-29 group (66.7%), representing a generation that came of age alongside the rise of the Korean Wave in Vietnam. More than 75% reside in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, the two largest cultural and economic centers of the country, which have served as the hubs for spreading Korean entertainment trends in Vietnam over the past two decades. This structure corresponds with previous studies on Vietnamese K-pop fandom, which describe it as a women-driven and highly urban phenomenon (Le, 2023; Dinh, 2016; Gammon, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024). Alongside the quantitative data, ten semi-structured interviews with fans (F1-F10) provided in-depth information on the spectrum of roles within the ATVNCG fandom. Most participants were women from the late Millennial and early Gen Z generations who had been active in major K-pop fandoms such as BTS, EXO, iKON, and Seventeen, taking on responsibilities including fanpage management, voting coordination, fan project design, or fansite operation. Six participants currently serve as core team members in ATVNCG Season 1 fanclubs, directly coordinating online and offline support projects (F2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8), while the remaining four maintain individual fan practices such as streaming, voting, or content design (F1, 6, 9, 10).

**Table 1** Profile of 10 fan interview participants

Anonymized Label	Age	Gender	Residence	Supporting ATVNCG's Artist
F1	26	F	Hanoi	Tang Phuc
F2	24	F	Hanoi	Representative of SBSS Team - Soobin SuperStar (Fandom Soobin)
F3	26	F	HCMC	Core team member for multiple fan projects across different fandoms.
F4	24	F	Hanoi	Representative of Briqueta - Cuong Seven support team (Fandom Cuong Seven)
F5	32	F	HCMC	Representative of Fandom Thanh Duy
F6	23	F	Hanoi	S.T Son Thach, Neko Le, Kay Tran
F7	27	F	Hanoi	Representative of Neko Le 2302 - Carnation FC (Fandom Neko Le)
F8	29	F	HCMC	Representative of KAYFAM0605 - Vao Bep cung Kay Tran (Fandom Kay Tran)

Anonymized Label	Age	Gender	Residence	Supporting ATVNCG's Artist
F9	27	F	Vietnamese international student in Korea	Soobin Hoang Son
F10	20	F	Vietnamese international student in Korea	Tang Phuc

### Vietnamese K-pop Fans and the Return to Domestic Scene

Most interviewed fans stated that they discovered ATVNCG through their long-term exposure to Korean or Chinese survival shows and through short videos, memes, and discussion content circulating on Facebook. In a context where Facebook remains the dominant social network in Vietnam (Chi, 2024), the platform became a natural bridge that enabled K-pop fans to approach a domestic entertainment program. Their encounter with ATVNCG thus not only reflects the East Asian popular culture flow, where Vietnamese fans move flexibly across different cultural spaces, but also vividly illustrates the logic of media convergence (Jenkins, 2006b), in which content flows across multiple media platforms and audiences actively participate in navigating that flow. Furthermore, survey findings indicate that respondents highly appreciated *artists' talent* (95.5%), *Vietnamese cultural artistic elements* (93.9%), and *production quality* (88.1%) as the primary reasons for watching and supporting the program. In interviews, the performance “Nước Hoa” (Perfume) was frequently described as a turning point that helped fans realize Vietnamese artists “possess the full combination of vocals, dance, and stage presence, approaching K-pop standards” (F1). Statements such as “Vietnamese artists are now just as professional as international idols” (F2) and “they deserve much more love and support” (F5) illustrate a shift in how Vietnamese K-pop fans perceive domestic artists, grounded in the artists’ capabilities and efforts rather than nationalist discourse. Additionally, a sense of nostalgia was highlighted by journalist Nghiem Ngoc, who noted that “for many 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> generation fans, contemporary K-pop has become overly globalized and has gradually lost the identities they once loved, whereas ATVNCG stages and artist interactions evoke the feelings of earlier boygroup eras such as Super Junior, INFINITE, EXO, and music shows like Inkigayo and Music Bank.”

Quantitative data reinforces this picture as respondents scored 8.4/10 for the statement “Since watching ATVNCG, I have spent more time on domestic entertainment compared to K-pop,” and 8.0/10 for “Since watching ATVNCG, my spending on K-pop has significantly decreased, while my spending on domestic entertainment has noticeably increased.” This indicates a significant shift from outward global engagement toward domestic cultural consumption, not merely a break with K-pop but a reallocation of time and resources. Long-term K-pop fans played a pivotal role in this transition as they recognized gaps in how Vietnamese artists connected with fans and proactively brought their skills home: forming voting teams for Soobin Hoang Son (F2), contacting artist managers to organize food support projects for “talented artists who have not yet received deserved support” (F3), and joining core team to manage projects and voting campaigns for Neko Le (F7).

Taken together, this phase can be seen as a typical indicator of the deculturation phase in the transculturation process (Ortiz, 2022; Hermann, 2007), when fans begin to detach their practices from their original K-pop framework and adapt them to a new context. However, this process of bringing practices home was not entirely smooth. Some activities had to be adjusted to fit Vietnam’s economic, legal, and cultural conditions.

### Global Norms Meet Local Rules

Survey results show that fans acknowledge the influence of K-pop fan culture on the operation of domestic fandoms (mean score 7.69/10), yet the degree to which they directly apply K-pop fandom skills to supporting ATVNCG is significantly lower (6.09/10). This gap suggests that,

in the perception of fans, domestic fandom practice is no longer a replication of a single model. Instead, it is shaped through a multi-source selection, negotiation, and adjustment process, combining experiences from various international fandoms (e.g., Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Thai) with professional skills and the Vietnamese social context. In the online space, Vietnamese fans still maintain a similar high level of interaction (95.7%) but with a significant shift in platform preference as Threads has become the ideal substitute for X (Twitter), providing an open, real-time, horizontally structured space where users can freely share, discuss, and co-create content. In other words, Twitter-based global fan practices are being rearticulated through Threads-based local fan practices, shaped by Vietnamese language, culture, and social context. This shift exemplifies the localization of participatory culture within Vietnam's media convergence. Core habits such as streaming (89%) and voting (87.6%) are maintained at a very high level. F3 served as the leader of the Vietnamese voting team for iKON in 2018 MAMA, sharing that *"the last-minute point-boosting strategy learned from K-pop was transferred to domestic voting, only the platform and scoring system changed."* Also, F6 described reusing dozens of email accounts previously created for K-pop voting to participate in ATVNCG-related voting categories in domestic award shows. In terms of the fan economy, 79.7% of survey respondents reported purchasing official merchandise from the program or ATVNCG artists. While in K-pop, physical albums, lightsticks, and photocards are industry norms, V-pop lacked a formal system for producing and distributing fan-targeted official goods. ATVNCG created a turning point when releasing lightsticks, T-shirts, scarves, random photocards, plush doll idols, and more, with many items selling out continuously. Simultaneously, fans began mobilizing capitals at unprecedented scales, most notably Neko Le's fandom Carnation, which raised over 1 billion VND, allocating roughly 800 million for voting in the 'Outstanding Male Entertainer' category. F7, the vote team leader and a long-term BTS fan, admitted that *"most voting skills came from K-pop, but applying them in Vietnam requires constant testing and adjustment to local platform mechanics."* The rapid growth of the fan economy has also created confusion for companies and artists. All three CEOs in the *8 Saigon Talkshow* acknowledged that Vietnamese showbiz is *"not yet accustomed to receiving direct financial contributions from fans."* As K-pop's consumer culture is brought home, both companies and artists must learn and renegotiate boundaries. This initial confusion reflects an ongoing negotiation between globalized consumption practices and local cultural norms. Vietnamese fans are asserting their influence through spending behaviors, yet they are expected to adapt the local culture, where the line between *"supporting the artist"* and *"commercializing the fan-idol relationship"* remains sensitive and is still being redefined. Regarding offline participation, as geographical and economic barriers were lowered through improved event infrastructure and policies supporting music tourism, Vietnamese fans gained more opportunities for physical presence. The ATVNCG concert series in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi (10/2024 - 9/2025) became an ideal space for a generation of long-term K-pop fans once constrained by distance and cost to revive the experience of following their idols in a familiar, accessible, and same-language environment. A striking 92.4% of survey respondents reported attending at least one ATVNCG concert, nearly three times the rate at which they had ever attended a K-pop concert (34%). Meanwhile, 61.9% had directly participated in at least one fan project (e.g., DOOH advertising, food support, charity activities, freebies, check-in booths), compared to only 37.1% during their time in K-pop fandoms. Fans rated 8.24/10 for the statement *"Applying K-pop fan skills and practices helps domestic fandoms operate in a more organized and professional way,"* indicating that K-pop fans serve as the core driving force in raising operational standards for domestic fandoms. The ecosystem of fan support for ATVNCG has become highly diverse. Food support has been localized through concepts tied to collective memory, such as the *"Tap Hoa Ong Thien"* food truck by artist Quoc Thien's fans, decorated to resemble a traditional neighborhood grocery shop. DOOH advertising, once

primarily used for Korean idols or Thai actors, has now become a familiar method of supporting Vietnamese artists, with several projects even expanding to Seoul, Beijing, and Times Square in New York. Fanmade check-in booths at concerts reflect multisourced adaptation as they evoke Chinese-style flower walls (F2, F3) and Thai fan meeting booths (F1, F6), yet are executed with the professional project management experience of core team members (F8). The emergence of freebies culture, Vietnamese cheering kits, and Vietnamese fansites demonstrates how K-pop aesthetics are being translated into the local language and imagery. As F1 noted, “*seeing a fabric slogan in Vietnamese for the first time felt so strange, but also joyful and proud. Until now, I had only ever seen names in Korean (Hangul) or English. I also realized that Vietnamese fansites can take high-quality photos like K-pop fansites I had always followed.*” However, this localization process also encountered friction with domestic regulations. Requirements for artists’ image-use permissions, non-profit commitments, monitoring of fansite activities, and controls over freebies distribution were sometimes inconsistent, leading to confusion among fans (F1, F5). These tensions reflect the acculturation phase, where global norms encounter local institutional boundaries.

In summary, the acculturation phase demonstrates that Vietnamese fans are continuously negotiating between familiar K-pop fan practices and the emerging conditions of the domestic cultural environment. Elements such as new digital platforms (e.g., Threads), local operational rules, market structures, and expanding opportunities for physical presence intersect with global fandom experiences, encouraging fans to adjust their skills and modes of participation through a multilayered and continuous adaptation process.

### **The Rise of a Domestic Fandom**

For more than a decade, fan communities in Vietnam, particularly K-pop fandom, have faced significant social stigma, often portrayed as “*fanatic.*” Fans were frequently perceived as “*irrational*” or “*detached from reality,*” mirroring the broader skepticism toward Korean popular culture in Vietnam (Le, 2023; Duong, 2016; Pham, 2022). However, processes of globalization, the rise of social media, and fans’ own efforts to reposition themselves have gradually shifted this image. As journalist Nghiem Ngoc observes, “*the image of Vietnamese fans has been re-perceived in a more positive way in popular culture.*” Vietnamese K-pop fans have proactively used participatory practices rooted in social values, such as charity projects, educational fundraising, community support initiatives, and environmental campaigns. These practices continue to be maintained and promoted in domestic fandom. Outstanding projects include: Soobin Hoang Son’s fandom donating 300 million VND for the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) to support flood victims and 900 million VND for the “*Vì mái trường cho em*” education fund (Linh, 2025), or multiple fanclubs contributing to the Heartbeat Vietnam program under VinaCapital Foundation, with artist Jun Pham serving as ambassador, helping children with congenital heart disease receive lifesaving surgeries. Fans such as F2, F7, F8, and F9 emphasized that these activities not only strengthen artists’ positive public image but also enable fandoms to be recognized as communities with cultural and social value. Consequently, fandom is repositioned as a creative and responsible community with the ethics of cultural citizenship. Based on this foundation, a hybridized domestic fan culture gradually emerged. Instead of copying the K-pop model, Vietnamese fans selectively combine, adapt, and localize elements that fit the domestic environment. F3 emphasized that the convergence of various universal fan cultures allows the ATVNCG fandom to “*proactively select the good parts of each side and adjust the inappropriate elements, without excluding any side.*” This hybridization gives rise to its own system of practices and linguistic codes. For instance, the bandana has become a signature merchandise item because of its low production costs, high usability, and strong visual identification; or slangs such as “*chơi trong zone*” (playing in our zone), “*chính quyền*” (the government), and “*trả job*” (repaying the job), which reflect how fans negotiate behavioral boundaries in the context of a shortened artist-fan distance. One of

the most obvious manifestations of this “Vietnamization” process is the *Guinness World Record* for “*The largest gathering of people wearing traditional Vietnamese clothing*”, an event that brought together over 5,000 participants through the coordinated efforts of the ATVNCG production team and the fan community (Khanh, 2025). This event not only demonstrated the organizational capacity and solidarity of the fandom but also illustrated how Vietnamese fans incorporate national pride and cultural heritage into modern fan practices. From a transculturation perspective, this can be understood as the neoculturation phase: elements borrowed from multiple sources are reconfigured into a fandom model characterized by a distinctly Vietnamese identity, both associated with global norms and rooted in the domestic socio-cultural context.

### **The Institutionalization of Transcultural Fan Practices in Vietnam**

The growth of fandom presents both opportunities and challenges for the Vietnamese entertainment industry. From a media perspective, journalist Nghiem Ngoc argues that newly formed domestic fandom is a distinctive gear that simultaneously generates momentum and pressure. The strong purchasing power and organizational capacity of fandom can increase brand confidence in choosing an artist as ambassador, expand commercial opportunities, and enhance media impact. Conversely, due to the absence of a fully developed industrial infrastructure in V-pop, artists cannot release products as consistently as Korean idols, which leads to “*fans easily disappointed and creating pressure on artists and companies.*” All three managers in the *8 Saigon Talkshow* acknowledged that Vietnam’s artist management sector remains in its early stage, with approximately 60-70% of companies operating on a family-based model, lacking systematic training, brand management, and fan management divisions. Institutionalization, therefore, is not a process of disciplining fans but rather a continuous negotiation among fans, artists, and media producers, in which each party learns to maximize benefits, minimize conflicts, and restructure value towards a sustainable development model. From the production side, An Zuno (Head of Marketing Communications of Yeah1 Group) emphasized the need for “*transparent approval procedures for fan projects, an official fanclub platform, and clear guidelines to ensure brand consistency. In addition, there should be co-creative forms of collaboration between artists and fans, such as merchandise or fanzones at concerts (e.g., the check-in booth street at ATVNCG concerts). When fandoms are respected as cultural partners, this relationship can be far more sustainable.*” At the policy level, the Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST, 2025) also recognized that K-pop’s success is not only driven by its music but also its capacity to commercialize and professionally organize its fandom communities. In this regard, the Vietnamese K-pop fandom serves as a model for V-pop fandoms seeking to professionalize their operations and transform from passive consumers to active cultural co-creators.

Overall, recent developments indicate that Vietnam’s entertainment industry is gradually moving toward a cooperative governance model, in which state agencies, entertainment companies, media-commercial partners, and fan communities collectively negotiate, coordinate, and co-create cultural and economic value (Butsaban, 2023). As journalist Nghiem Ngoc once described, the return of a community with global fan experience, especially K-pop fans, has helped transform Vietnam’s entertainment industry “*from a stagnant pond into a flowing stream.*” For this stream to be smooth and sustainable, however, progress should extend far beyond replicating surface-level K-pop practices such as voting mechanisms, merchandise, or fan meetings. What matters more is institutionalization, which establishes stable structures, norms, and channels, thereby enabling sustainable, collaborative engagement. As Vietnam’s entertainment industry is developing and shaping its industrial infrastructure, institutionalization should be understood as a multi-dimensional process of cooperation across the cultural ecosystem, in which fans and media producers work together to co-create, regulate, and sustain fan practices. Through this process, Vietnamese fandom can retain its cultural



identity while adapting to the global rhythms and industrial logics of contemporary entertainment.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that transculturation in Vietnamese K-pop fandom is not merely a shift in preferred artists from K-pop to domestic performers. Rather, it represents a deep restructuring of practices, values, and relationships among fans, artists, and media producers. Accordingly, K-pop fan culture functions as a cultural gateway, where transnational skills, participatory habits, and norms enter Vietnam, while simultaneously opening new pathways for Vietnamese cultural products to circulate outward. ATVNCG demonstrates that when a domestic product reaches standards of production quality and participatory structure, fandom trajectories that once flowed outward globally can reverse direction and return to the domestic sphere. However, this process operates within a persistent tension between *empowerment* and *exploitation*. Fans experience unprecedented empowerment, from influencing voting results and shaping artist images to determining the program's overall visibility, yet much of their emotional, creative, and promotional labor remains unpaid and is often taken for granted. As these practices increasingly resemble professional standards, the boundary between fan labor and industrial labor becomes blurred, raising questions about recognition, sustainability, and the ethical limits of fan labor mobilization. This tension suggests the emergence of *participatory professionalism*, where fans operate on a semi-professional, semi-voluntary logic (Cavicchi, 2015). Fanclubs operate like project teams with a professional plan, designated roles, budgets, risk management, and design standards. At the same time, companies and producers are gradually recognizing that fandom is no longer a passive audience but a cultural partner, requiring them to participate in an institutionalization process grounded in dialogue and co-creation rather than top-down control. New strategies from management companies and the state's increasing recognition of fandom as a cultural industry resource indicate that Vietnam is moving toward a cooperative governance model, echoing K-pop's governance structure.

Overall, this study argues that the transculturation of K-pop fans' practices not only produces a hybrid fan culture that blends global fandom logics with distinct Vietnamese characteristics but also reshapes the structure of the fan economy and cooperation mechanisms in the entertainment industry. Vietnamese fandom is entering a new phase: from being stigmatized, it is now emerging as a force capable of setting standards, generating value, and contributing to the sustainable development of the domestic entertainment market.

Future research may expand in three directions: 1) comparative studies of similar cases of Vietnam or across Southeast Asia to observe variations in transculturation processes within the fan studies context; 2) examination of reverse flows to clarify how K-pop fan culture is localized in other developing countries and how it interacts with local cultural industries; and 3) deeper analyses on how genders, fan generations, and fans residing outside major metropolitan areas contribute to fandom participation structures. These directions would broaden discussions of transculturation while deepening understanding of the increasingly significant role of fandom in contemporary cultural ecosystems.

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