

The Hyperreality of Fiction Idol on K-Pop Demon Hunters Animation through The Fandom's Fast-Paced Transmedia Storytelling

Arif Zuhdi Winarto

Doctoral program of Media and Culture Studies, the Graduate School Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

Mulawarman University, Indonesia

Email: arif.zuhdi.w@mail.ugm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study examines how K-Pop Demon Hunters became a transmedia phenomenon through the rapid circulation of fan and creator responses across digital platforms. Using netnography, it analyzes six YouTube Shorts videos that circulated around the film shortly after its Netflix release, including parody, AI-generated realism, official choreography, behind-the-scenes content, cosplay, and vocal performance. The study finds that the film's fictional idol groups were repeatedly re-staged as if they were real K-pop acts through a combination of participatory fan practices, studio-produced content, and independent creator labor. Drawing on Jenkins's participatory culture and transmedia storytelling, Baudrillard's hyperreality, and Virilio's dromology, the analysis shows how speed, repetition, and visual realism helped blur the boundary between fiction and reality. Rather than functioning only as an animated film, K-Pop Demon Hunters evolved into a distributed media event in which audiences actively expanded the narrative across platforms. The study contributes to media and fandom studies by showing how fictional idols can gain cultural legitimacy through transmedia circulation, platform-based participation, and collective audience imagination.

Keywords: Hyperreality, K-Pop Demon Hunters, Netnography, Participatory Culture, Transmedia Storytelling

INTRODUCTION

The current K-pop phenomenon has developed into a global cultural force that not only influences the music industry but also extends into various forms of entertainment media, including the animated film industry. Alongside its industrial expansion, K-pop also produces what Baudrillard conceptualizes as hyperreality, a condition in which mediated representations become more real and meaningful to audiences than reality itself, particularly through highly curated idol images and fan engagements. One of the most recent works in June 2025 that epitomizes this trend is K-Pop Demon Hunters, which fuses the world of K-pop idols with elements of supernatural fantasy. K-Pop Demon Hunters is a fantasy musical animated film produced by Sony Pictures Animation, an American studio based in Hollywood, and distributed globally via Netflix. The film was written by Maggie Kang, a Korean-Canadian, and directed by both Kang and Chris Appelhaus. As a global streaming platform, Netflix enabled K-Pop Demon Hunters to be released simultaneously in more than 190 countries, with official language versions made available in several markets (*KPop Demon Hunters: Fictional K-Pop Bands Beat BTS and Blackpink in US Charts*).

The animation tells the story of a human world that for centuries has been tormented by demons preying on human souls on behalf of their ruler, Gwi-Ma (Byung-hun Lee). To protect humanity from these attacks, three young girls are chosen in every generation to become demon hunters, using the power of their voices and songs to create an invisible magical barrier known as Honmoon. This tradition continues across generations until the present, when the popular K-pop girl group trio Huntr/x comprising Rumi (Arden Cho), Mira (May Hong), and Zoey (Ji-young Yoo) lead double lives as idol stars and demon hunters (*Review and Summary: KPop Demon Hunters (2025) — Ashley Hajimirsadeghi*).

K-Pop Demon Hunters quickly became a global phenomenon following its Netflix release on June 20, 2025. The animated film immediately entered the Top 10 on Netflix across all 93 tracked countries, even achieving the No. 1 spot in 41 countries during its first week, including South Korea, Brazil, France, Mexico, and the Philippines (Stephan, 2025). Within its first two weeks, the film was watched more than 33 million times and amassed almost 94 million viewing hours, making it the most popular animated film in 26 countries and one of the platform's best-performing animated films of 2025 (Hoskins, 2025). The film maintained a high rating on Rotten Tomatoes, with a critics' score of 95% and an audience score of 97%, indicating widespread acclaim (*'KPop Demon Hunters' Arrives At No. 1 On Netflix With Stellar Critics' Score*).

The film's original songs, performed by the fictional groups Huntr/x and Saja Boys, also dominated global music charts. The song "Your Idol" (by Saja Boys) reached No. 1 on Spotify's US Daily Top Songs, surpassing the previous record held by BTS, while "Golden" by Huntr/x took second place, exceeding Blackpink's achievement on the same chart (Stevens, 2025). Furthermore, the music and soundtrack of K-Pop Demon Hunters debuted at No. 8 on the Billboard 200, marking the strongest film soundtrack debut of the year. "Golden" was also officially released and submitted by Netflix for consideration in the Best Original Song category at the 2026 Oscars (*KPop Demon Hunters Sets A Major Record As Netflix Eyes Award Potential*).

The worldwide popularity of K-Pop Demon Hunters highlights a fascinating and unprecedented phenomenon, a Hollywood animated product, centered around fictional K-pop idols, has achieved a level of global popularity often difficult for even real K-pop idols to attain. This phenomenon is not only driven by industrial production and distribution, but also by the active role of fandoms who participate in circulating, interpreting, and expanding the narrative across digital platforms. This achievement reflects not only the power of slick storytelling and cutting-edge animation, but also the profound influence of cross-cultural collaboration between the global entertainment industry and K-pop's distinctive music style and fandom culture, creating a hyperreality that is consumed in a flash. Within this context, fandom practices become a key site where hyperreality is produced and sustained, as fans engage with fictional idols as if they possess real cultural presence.

These dynamics are further intensified through transmedia storytelling, where narratives are not confined to a single text but continuously extended across platforms such as social media, streaming services, and fan-generated content. In such environments, speed (or dromology) plays a crucial role, as fan interactions, interpretations, and content circulation occur in real time, amplifying both narrative expansion and affective engagement. The synthesis of transmedia storytelling, dromology, and hyperreality in K-Pop Demon Hunters research exemplifies a unique cultural phenomenon where fans navigate complex narratives that transcend traditional storytelling boundaries. By understanding these elements, one can appreciate the depth

of fan interactions and the transformative nature of K-Pop in shaping contemporary popular culture.

Despite extensive research on K-pop's global circulation, transmedia storytelling, and participatory fandoms, relatively little attention has been paid to fictional K-pop texts produced outside the South Korean industry that nonetheless achieve significant global traction. Most existing studies center on real idol groups and their industrial and cultural ecosystems, leaving underexamined how fictional idols are taken up, legitimized, and circulated within fan communities. In addition, while hyperreality and dromology have been discussed in digital culture, their combined relevance to fast-paced, platform-driven fan practices remains insufficiently explored. There is thus a need for closer analysis of how fans actively construct and amplify transmedia narratives around fictional K-pop figures in real time, and how these processes blur the boundaries between fiction and reality within contemporary popular culture. Based on the research gap, this study seeks to answer two research questions. First, how is the transmedia storytelling of K-Pop Demon Hunters constructed by fandom on social media and how is the hyperreality of K-Pop idols in Demon Hunters reinforced through the fandom's fast-paced transmedia storytelling. Examining the dynamics of fictional film products like K-Pop Demon Hunters on social media within a short observation period after its release is crucial for the development of cultural and media studies. The rapid popularity of K-Pop Demon Hunters within the global fandom movement demonstrates that this phenomenon is not simply the result of the hard work of creators or something to be taken for granted, but also demonstrates the substantial impact of participatory collaboration among fans, who voluntarily contribute to the greater good of the capitalist media industry. By exploring these references, one can further investigate the dynamics occurring within the K-Pop Demon Hunters fandom and the implications of transmedia storytelling practices in the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. K-pop, fandom, and participatory culture

The relationship between K-pop, fandom, and participatory culture is best understood through Jenkins's framework of participatory media, which emphasizes that audiences are not merely consumers but active participants in the production, circulation, and reinterpretation of cultural content (Nurfikria, 2023). In the K-pop context, this participation is visible in fan art, fan fiction, dance covers, commentary, and other forms of online engagement that blur the boundary between consumer and creator (Sung, 2014). Rather than remaining passive recipients, K-pop fans function as co-producers of meaning who continuously shape the cultural narrative surrounding idols (Tian & Zhong, 2022). This participatory character is sustained by communal practices in which fans share information, resources, and emotional investments across digital platforms, thereby strengthening collective identity and solidarity (Ding, 2022). Fan-organized activities such as dance competitions, flash mobs, and local concerts further demonstrate that K-pop fandom is not only expressive but also socially organized and collaborative (Sung, 2014). These practices show that fandom transforms media consumption into a form of cultural labor and communal belonging, which is central to Jenkins's understanding of participatory culture (Kim & Hutt, 2021). K-pop fandom also reveals a hyperreal dimension, in which mediated idol images become more socially and affectively significant than the idols' material reality (Nurfikria, 2023). Social media intensifies this condition by enabling constant interaction, rapid circulation of fan-made content, and immediate access to idol-related updates, making participation an everyday feature of the

K-pop experience (Daellenbach, 2021). In this sense, K-pop fandom illustrates a participatory culture in which collective creativity, digital circulation, and affective investment jointly produce an immersive fan world (Tian & Zhong, 2022).

b. Media Convergence and Transmedia Storytelling

The concepts of media convergence and transmedia storytelling, as articulated by Jenkins, provide an important framework for examining how K-pop operates within contemporary digital culture. Media convergence refers to the movement of content across multiple platforms, while transmedia storytelling describes a narrative design that unfolds through various media channels, each contributing distinct elements to the overall story (Jenkins & Plasencia, 2017). Within K-pop, these concepts help explain how music videos, reality programs, performances, social media, and fan-produced content collectively construct a distributed narrative environment. K-pop's wide circulation and global visibility are closely tied to this transmedia logic, as fans encounter the narrative across music videos, social media accounts, live performances, and variety content. Groups such as BTS and Blackpink have used storytelling elements across formats, allowing audiences to engage with the text in layered and sustained ways (Jung, 2011). Each platform contributes a different narrative fragment, while fan practices such as remixing, commentary, fan fiction, and online sharing extend the story beyond official production (Soriano, 2024). In this respect, transmedia storytelling in K-pop is both industrial and participatory. This participatory dimension is central because fans do not merely consume content; they also contribute to its circulation, reinterpretation, and cultural expansion (Jenkins et al., 2009). BTS's engagement with mental health and social issues, for instance, demonstrates how K-pop narratives can move beyond entertainment and generate broader public discussion (Kim & Hutt, 2021). Accordingly, media convergence in K-pop should be understood as a collaborative system in which official media content and fan activity mutually sustain the narrative world (Jenkins et al., 2009). This makes K-pop a strong example of how transmedia storytelling functions in contemporary digital environments.

c. Transmedia Storytelling with Speed: Construct Hyperreality World of K-Pop Idol Shipping

Transmedia storytelling in K-pop becomes even more significant when read alongside Virilio's concept of speed and Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. K-pop narratives circulate rapidly across music videos, social media, variety shows, and fan-generated content, creating a dense and fast-moving environment of interpretation, response, and repetition (Jung, 2012; Zheng, 2023). In this environment, fans are not only consumers but also producers of meaning through fan art, fan fiction, edits, and interactive commentary. As a result, each platform adds another layer to the story while simultaneously accelerating its circulation. Virilio's dromology helps explain why this speed is culturally important. For Virilio, speed is not merely a technical feature but a structural force that shapes perception, attention, and social organization (Virilio, 2006; Sebikova, 2018). In K-pop fandom, rapid updates, short content cycles, and real-time reactions produce an environment in which fans must continuously follow, interpret, and respond in order to remain part of the conversation (Jung, 2012). This acceleration creates a reactive cultural rhythm in which trends emerge quickly, intensify rapidly, and fade just as fast. Baudrillard's theory of simulacra further clarifies the consequence of this accelerated circulation. In his account, mediated signs can detach from original reality and circulate as self-sustaining simulations that appear more real than reality itself

(Baudrillard, 2008; Ryu, 2025). In K-pop fandom, this logic is visible in shipping culture, where fans construct romantic narratives involving idols, whether real, imagined, or symbolic, and circulate these narratives as if they were part of a shared reality (Jung, 2012; Yoon, 2022). Shipping therefore functions as a hyperreal practice in which repeated fan-produced representations transform mediated signs into emotionally credible relationships (Sebikova, 2018). The speed with which such narratives spread across platforms reinforces their plausibility and deepens fan involvement. Taken together, Jenkins, Virilio, and Baudrillard offer a connected analytical framework for this study: Jenkins explains fan participation, Virilio explains the speed of digital circulation, and Baudrillard explains how repeated fan-produced simulations can make fictional idols appear real (Nagy et al., 2022). Read in this way, K-pop fandom becomes a site where transmedia storytelling, accelerated circulation, and hyperreal identification operate simultaneously. This study therefore does not treat the three theories separately, but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of the same fandom phenomenon.

METHODS

This study employed netnography to examine how fandom participation, transmedia storytelling, and hyperreality are constructed around K-Pop Demon Hunters in digital spaces. Netnography is suitable because it allows the systematic collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of online cultural practices, especially those shaped by user-generated content and networked interaction (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). In this study, netnography was used not only as a descriptive method but also as an interpretive approach to understand how online fandom practices generate meaning and shape the reception of a media text. YouTube Shorts was selected as the main platform because it is especially relevant to fast-paced transmedia fandom. Its short-form and highly shareable content format makes it an effective site for observing how a media text rapidly becomes a participatory fan phenomenon. In the case of K-Pop Demon Hunters, YouTube Shorts functioned as a key space where parody, cosplay, AI-generated edits, commentary, fan reactions, and behind-the-scenes content were continuously produced and circulated. Its connection with Google Trends also enabled the researcher to trace search visibility and public interest related to the film. Data were collected during a 40 day observation period, from June 20, 2025, the release date of K-Pop Demon Hunters on Netflix, until July 30, 2025. This period captured the initial phase of audience response, when fan circulation and remix practices were most visible. Textual data were gathered on July 28, 2025, from YouTube Shorts using the researcher's own YouTube account connected to Google Trends. The search process used the keywords and hashtags "K-Pop Demon Hunters," "KPopDemonHunters," "#KPopDemonHunters," "#Kpop," "Huntrx," "Saja Boys," "Rumi," "Zoey," and "Mira." Six videos were selected based on visibility, relevance, audience engagement, production within the observation window, and representation of fandom practices such as parody, cosplay, AI editing, commentary, or interpretive fan content. The analysis followed a qualitative coding procedure. Each video was examined for narrative structure, visual style, captions, hashtags, and engagement indicators such as likes, comments, and views. The videos were then coded for transmedia storytelling, including cross-platform references, narrative extension, and reinterpretation of characters (Jenkins & Plasencia, 2017; Jenkins et al., 2009). They were also coded for hyperreality, including realistic portrayals of fictional characters and fan-made simulations that blurred fiction and actuality (Baudrillard, 2008; Ryu, 2025). The analysis further

considered shipping as fandom-based narrative production (Diao, 2023) and digital speed as a shaping force of circulation and participation (Virilio, 2006; Sebikova, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

K-Pop Demon Hunters achieved rapid global traction after its release on Netflix. The film reached No. 1 in 22 countries shortly after debut and later recorded 25.8 million weekly viewers in its fifth week, making it the first Netflix film to peak so late in its release cycle (Netflix Says 'KPop Demon Hunters' Just Made History With A New Record). Its soundtrack also performed strongly: "Golden" by Huntr/x earned 70 Perfect All-Kills in South Korea, topped the MelOn Daily Chart for three consecutive days, and entered the top 6 of the Billboard Hot 100. The song also reached No. 1 on YouTube Music Korea and No. 2 on Spotify Global (The Record-Breaking Achievements of 'K-Pop Demon Hunters' HUNTR/X and Saja Boys | Allkpop). Saja Boys achieved similar visibility, with "Your Idol" becoming the first K-pop boyband song to reach No. 1 on US Spotify, while "Soda Pop" also charted strongly on YouTube Music Korea and Spotify Global (KPop Demon Hunters: How a Fictional Band Is Dominating the US Music Charts - Vinyl Me, Please). Google Trends further showed that K-Pop Demon Hunters surpassed Blackpink and BTS in global search interest, indicating unusually high audience attention for a fictional K-pop text (KPop Demon Hunters - Explore - Google Trends, n.d.; KPop Demon Hunters, BLACKPINK, BTS - Explore - Google Trends).

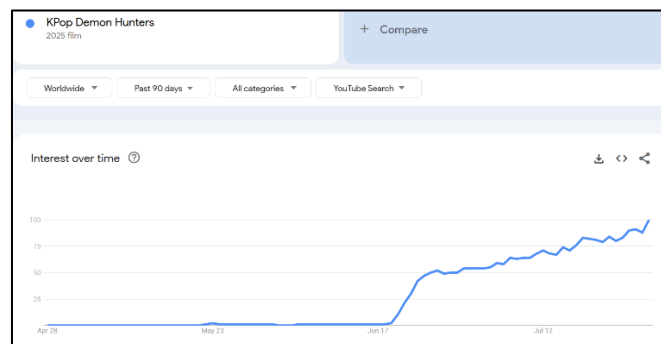


Figure 1: The first graph shows significant increase in the popularity of K-Pop's Demon Hunters globally (KPop Demon Hunters - Explore - Google Trends)

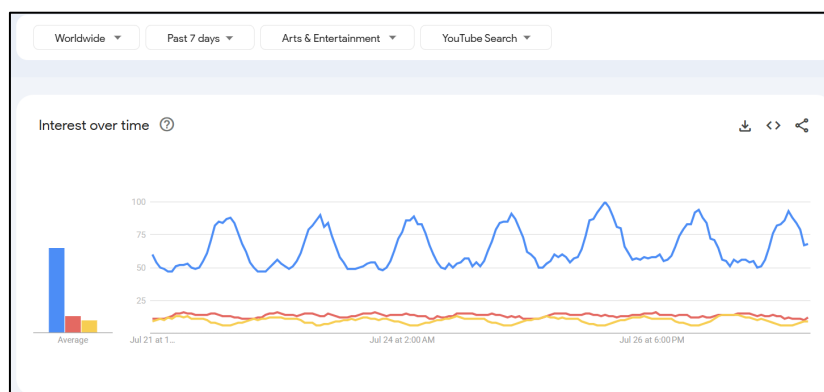


Figure 2: The second graph shows that K-Pop Demon Hunter's popularity surpassed that of real K-Pop girl group Blackpink (red line) and real K-Pop boy group BTS (yellow line) (KPop Demon Hunters, BLACKPINK, BTS - Explore - Google Trends).

The six YouTube Shorts videos selected for analysis were collected on July 28, 2025 from trending search results and hashtag-based discovery on the researcher's account. The final dataset consisted of videos by @TheManniiShow, @AI_WorksX, @Sony, @VibeScenesreal, and @Halcybella, representing parody, AI transformation, behind-the-scenes choreography, voice-acting content, cosplay, and vocal cover practices. Together, these videos show that audience engagement with K-Pop Demon Hunters extended beyond commentary and developed into multiple forms of transmedia circulation across creator, fan, and official content. Rather than functioning as isolated clips, the videos operated as interconnected responses that expanded the film's cultural visibility and narrative reach.

Table 1: The top six trending videos on YouTube Shorts on July 28, 2025 with hashtag #Kpopdemonhunters (Kpop Demon Hunters Meme - YouTube, n.d.)

Video	Creator	View and Likes	Comment	Sampling date	Release Date
I will NOT watch K-Pop Demon Hunters	@TheManniiShow 15M subscribers 4.6K videos https://www.youtube.com/shorts/S86fNSclMDc	140.000 Likes 4,384,975 Views	4.055	July 28 2025	July 17 2025
K-Pop Demon Hunters in Real Life (Golden.ver): HUNTR/X Rumi, Zoey, Mira!	@AI_WorksX 63.8K subscribers 6 videos https://www.youtube.com/shorts/qCipArov46A	451.000 Likes, 13.886.859 Views	4.036	July 28 2025	June 28 2025
Gear up for a bts look at reference choreography for "Takedown" from KPop Demon Hunters	@Sony 688K subscribers 2.1K videos https://www.youtube.com/shorts/66XS9TJtgiY	302.000 Likes, 18.278.007 Views	533	July 28 2025	July 17 2025
Behind the Voices of K-Pop Demon Hunters!	@VibeScenesreal 74.3K subscribers 95 videos https://www.youtube.com/shorts/C93o1LXLzMA	71.000 Likes, 3.897.890 Views	666	July 28 2025	July 17 2025
KPop Demon Hunters RUMI Cosplay!	@Halcybella 1.97M subscribers 1.2K videos https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ShnYHkhnOUY	254.000 Likes, 8.532.407 Views	1.542	July 28 2025	July 3 2025
KPop Demon Hunters COVER #Singing	@Halcybella 1.97M subscribers 1.2K videos	48.000 Likes,	791	July 28 2025	July 3 2025

Video	Creator	View and Likes	Comment	Sampling date	Release Date
#Cosplay #WhatItSoundsLike	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/6_4TxDp0QV8	1.931.172 views			

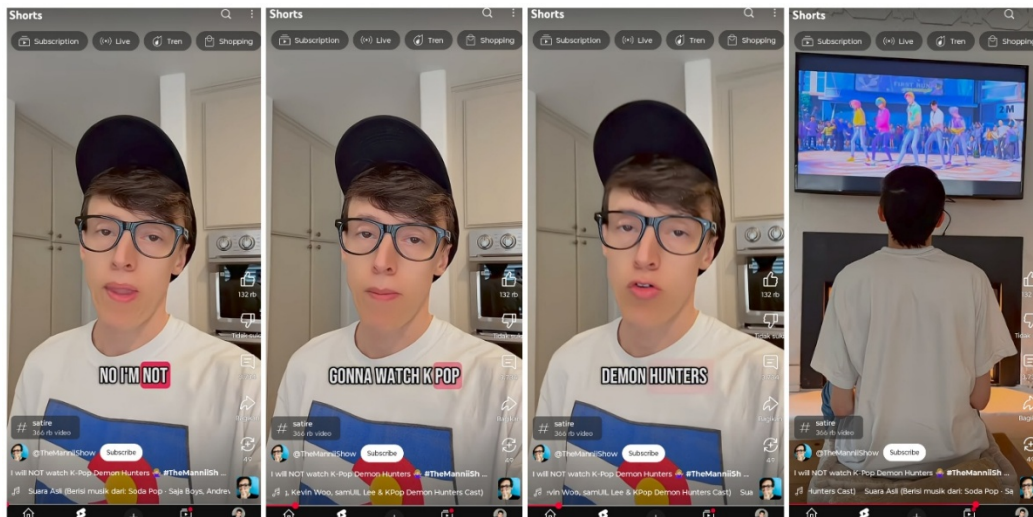


Figure 3. The screenshot of @TheManniiShow “I will NOT watch K-Pop Demon Hunters” (*I Will NOT Watch K-Pop Demon Hunters* 🧡 #TheManniiShow.Com/Series - YouTube)

The first video analyzed, “I will NOT watch K-Pop Demon Hunters,” captures an important reception pattern in which initial skepticism is transformed into participation through parody. Uploaded by The Mannii Show on July 17, 2025, less than a month after the film’s Netflix release on June 20, 2025, the video quickly went viral, attracting millions of views, tens of thousands of likes, and thousands of comments. The character’s dismissive line, “No, I’m not going to watch K-pop Demon Hunters. What is that? Like an animated movie for like kids or something? That sounds so corny,” frames the film as something initially perceived as childish or exaggerated. This reaction is significant because it mirrors a broader audience pattern in which the film’s unusual premise first invites doubt before later becoming a source of fascination and enthusiasm. The video is analytically important because its parody does more than mock the film; it stages a recognizable transition from reluctance to attraction. The phrase “I will NOT watch” became a repeatable discourse across platforms, with similar reactions appearing on TikTok and other social media spaces, where users described initially rejecting the film but later becoming deeply invested in it. In this way, the video operates as a compact narrative of conversion, showing how skepticism itself becomes part of the fandom story. Its popularity indicates that audience engagement is not limited to the film text alone, but also includes the circulation of reactions, jokes, and self-reflexive commentary around it. From a theoretical perspective, this video demonstrates how hyperreality and transmedia storytelling intersect in fandom circulation. The Mannii Show places the sketch within its parody series “MJ’s World,” creating fiction within fiction, yet the result is consumed by audiences as part of the larger K-Pop Demon Hunters media environment. Huntr/x, a fictional idol group, becomes the subject of commentary by another fictional persona, while the audience interprets the sketch as a meaningful extension of the film’s world.

This blurring of promotion, fan content, and narrative expansion shows how transmedia storytelling works not only through official production, but also through parody and platform-based circulation. The result is a holistic media experience in which fictional idols, fan reactions, and creator commentary reinforce one another.

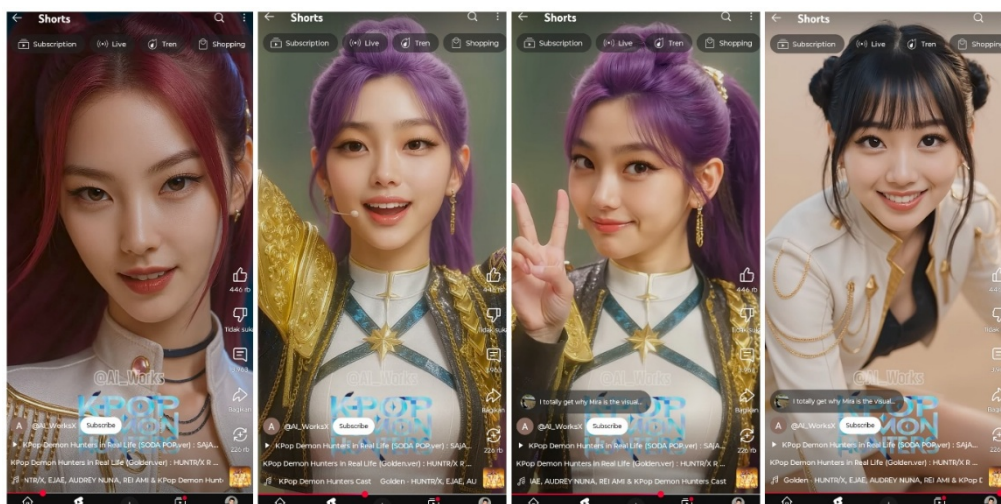


Figure 4. The screenshot of @AI_Worksx K-Pop Demon Hunters in Real Life (Golden.ver): HUNTR/X Rumi, Zoey, Mira! (KPop Demon Hunters in Real Life (Golden.Ver) : HUNTR/X Rumi, Zoey, Mira! #kpopdemonhunters #kpop - YouTube)

The short video “K-Pop Demon Hunters in Real Life (Golden.ver): Huntr/x Rumi, Zoey, Mira!” was released on June 28, 2025, and quickly accumulated millions of views, hundreds of thousands of likes, and extensive comment activity. The video presents Rumi, Zoey, and Mira in more realistic, human-like form through AI visual technology. Its impact lies less in narrative development than in the visual suggestion that characters originally confined to animation can appear as tangible performers in the real world. In this sense, the video offers a clear instance of Baudrillard’s hyperreality, where mediated representations become so convincing that the boundary between fiction and reality is destabilized. What makes the video significant is the way it converts animated idols into seemingly authentic K-pop figures. Huntr/x no longer appears as a fictional group limited to the film’s visual universe, but as a humanized idol trio that resembles real entertainment celebrities. This process creates a layered simulation in which fictional characters are first animated, then re-rendered through AI, and finally received by audiences as if they were real idols. Such a sequence demonstrates how digital fandom can produce a hyperreal image of celebrity, one that is not based on material existence but on visual credibility and affective recognition. The video also shows how transmedia storytelling expands through fan and creator practices. Its short, emotionally engaging format makes it easily shareable and highly adaptable, encouraging further circulation through edits, reaction videos, cosplay, and related fan productions. Rather than simply repeating the film’s narrative, the video extends it into a new visual domain, where characters migrate from animation to AI-generated realism and then into mass online consumption. This movement illustrates that transmedia storytelling in contemporary fandom is not only a matter of plot extension, but also of visual reconfiguration and platform-based circulation. More broadly, the video demonstrates that fandom is not a passive audience position but an active mode of narrative production. By rendering fictional characters as believable real-world figures, it shows how digital media can give fictional idols a tangible presence in public perception. The popularity of this content

indicates that in K-pop fandom, fiction and reality are increasingly negotiated through visuals, technology, and cross-platform participation.

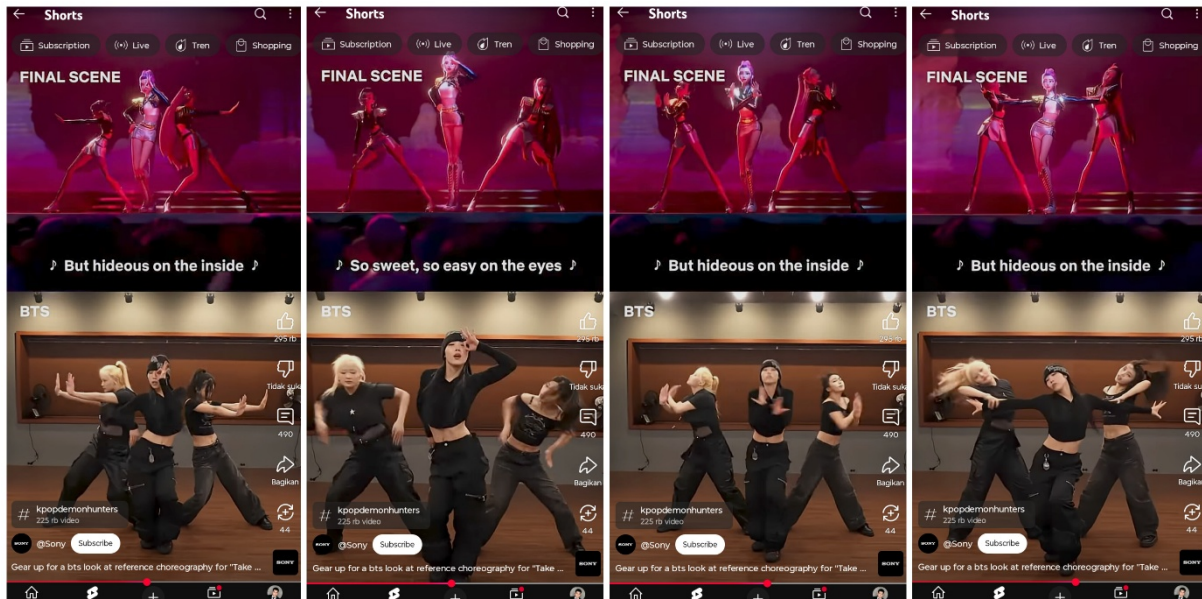


Figure 5. The screenshot of @Sony Gear up for a bts look at reference choreography for "Takedown" from KPop Demon Hunters (Gear up for a Bts Look at Reference Choreography for "Takedown" from KPop Demon Hunters - YouTube)

The official dance cover of "Takedown," uploaded on Sony's YouTube channel on July 17, 2025, represents a key instance of studio-produced transmedia expansion. With more than 18 million views and over 300,000 likes, the video presents professional dancers performing as Huntr/x members Zoey, Rumi, and Mira through tightly synchronized choreography that echoes the energy and visual language of K-pop performance. By intercutting live-action choreography with scenes from the animated film, the video reinforces continuity between the fictional and real-world versions of the group and extends the film's aesthetic into a performative media space. This video is important because it strengthens the hyperreal status of Huntr/x through official production rather than fan imitation. The dancers' bodies, movements, and stage presence give physical form to characters that originally existed only in animation, making the group appear as if it functions like a real idol act. In Baudrillard's terms, the video does not simply represent the fictional group, it stabilizes their simulacral presence by making the imitation appear culturally authentic. The result is not merely an adaptation of the film's choreography, but the creation of a believable idol performance that audiences can consume as part of the group's media identity. Unlike fan-made responses, this video shows that transmedia storytelling is not only generated from below but also strategically organized from above by the studio itself. Sony's official upload demonstrates that creators and rights holders now actively use platform circulation to extend narrative worlds beyond the film. In this case, choreography becomes a portable narrative form: it translates the animated group into a performative real-world register and invites audiences to read Huntr/x as if it were an actual K-pop act. This makes the video both a promotional artifact and a narrative extension. The video also encourages participatory reuse, as fans can replicate the choreography, remix the footage, or produce their own dance content across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube Shorts. In this way, official content does not simply sit apart from fandom activity; it triggers further

circulation and becomes part of a wider transmedia network. The studio-produced choreography therefore shows how contemporary fandom is shaped through collaboration between corporate media production and platform-based audience participation.

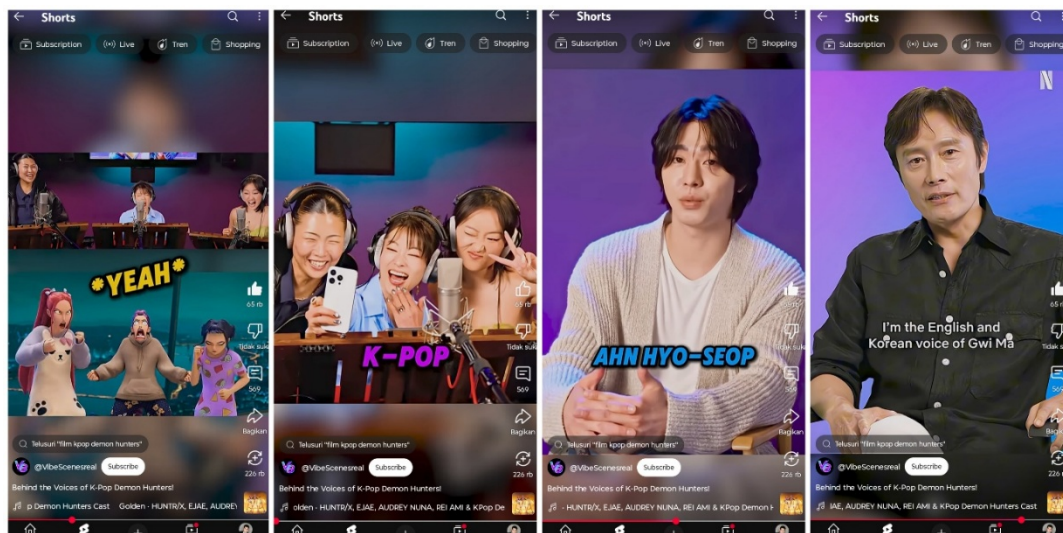


Figure 6. The screenshot of @VibeScenesreal Behind the Voices of K-Pop Demon Hunters! (*Behind the Voices of K-Pop Demon Hunters! - YouTube*)

The behind-the-scenes video on the voice-acting process for K-Pop Demon Hunters, uploaded by @vibescenereal on July 17, 2025, offers a different mode of transmedia expansion. Rather than extending the film through parody or official promotion, the video shifts attention to the production process itself, showing the voice actors behind Rumi, Mira, Zoey, Jinu, and Gwi Ma in the recording studio. Through fast-paced Shorts editing, the clip combines animated footage with real-life studio scenes, creating a dynamic contrast that links fictional characters to the human voices that animate them. Its strong engagement, marked by millions of views and tens of thousands of likes, shows that audiences are highly receptive to production-centered content when it is presented in an accessible and visually engaging format. This video is significant because it complicates the relationship between fiction and reality. The voice actors do not interrupt the fictional world; rather, they deepen it by making the process of character formation visible. In this sense, the video produces a subtle form of hyperreality, where audiences become emotionally invested not only in the animated characters but also in the real people who give them voice and expression. The fictional characters remain central, yet they now appear as entities sustained by recognizable human labor, gesture, and emotion. As a result, the boundary between the animated figure and the embodied performer becomes less stable.

The video also expands the logic of transmedia storytelling beyond both studio-controlled promotion and fan-generated participation. Because @vibescenereal is an independent entertainment outlet, the clip operates laterally rather than vertically: it is neither an official Sony release nor a purely fan-made response. Instead, it functions as an intermediary narrative form that curates and recontextualizes the film for online audiences. This shows that contemporary transmedia circulation is not limited to top-down or bottom-up flows, but also includes third-party media actors that reinterpret the text and add new layers of meaning. In this way, the video extends the fictional universe into the space of media production itself. It gives viewers access to the people, voices, and

creative processes behind the film, thereby enriching the audience's emotional attachment and expanding the narrative world beyond the animated screen.

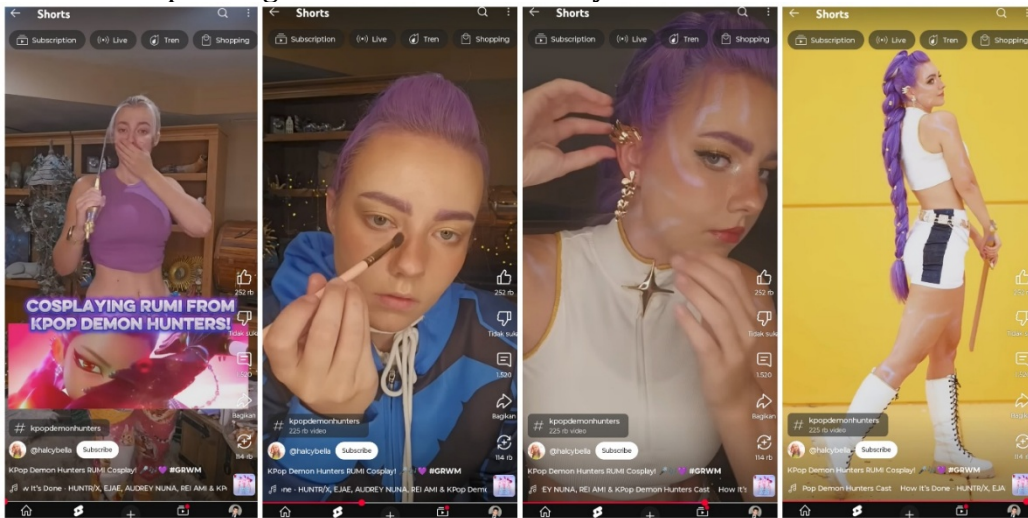


Figure 7. The screenshot of @Halcybella KPop Demon Hunters RUMI Cosplay! (KPop Demon Hunters RUMI Cosplay! 🎵🎶💜 #GRWM - YouTube)

The cosplay video by @halcybella, released on July 3, 2025, presents Rumi from K-Pop Demon Hunters through a detailed transformation process that includes makeup, wig styling, costume fitting, and the assembly of props and accessories. Rather than simply displaying the finished costume, the video emphasizes the gradual process of “becoming” Rumi, turning cosplay into a performative and visual narrative. Its fast-paced Shorts format and strong audience engagement, reflected in millions of views and hundreds of thousands of likes, show how short-form content can make character embodiment highly visible and shareable. This video is significant because it stages Rumi as a hyperreal figure through the human body. The creator’s transformation is so precise that viewers quickly identify the performer with the fictional character, allowing the animated idol to appear socially and visually real within the platform environment. In Baudrillard’s terms, the video does not merely imitate the character, it produces a simulation that becomes believable enough to function as reality in the eyes of audiences. The costume, makeup, gestures, and bodily performance collectively blur the line between fictional representation and embodied presence, making Rumi seem tangible beyond the film.

The video also shows how transmedia storytelling is shaped by creators who operate between fandom and creative industry practice. Halcybella is not only a fan but also a professional content creator whose channel is organized around cosplay, visual performance, and commercial collaboration. This means the video is not only a fan response but also a monetized creative act that extends the narrative life of the character. In this way, cosplay becomes both expressive and productive: it generates visibility, audience engagement, and economic value while also expanding the fictional universe into new visual and performative forms. As a result, the video functions as a form of embodied transmedia storytelling. It does not just reproduce Rumi’s image, it creates a new narrative of how Rumi can exist in real space through human performance. Audiences then share, imitate, and circulate this embodied version, producing another layer of transmedia expansion shaped by speed, creativity, and platform circulation.

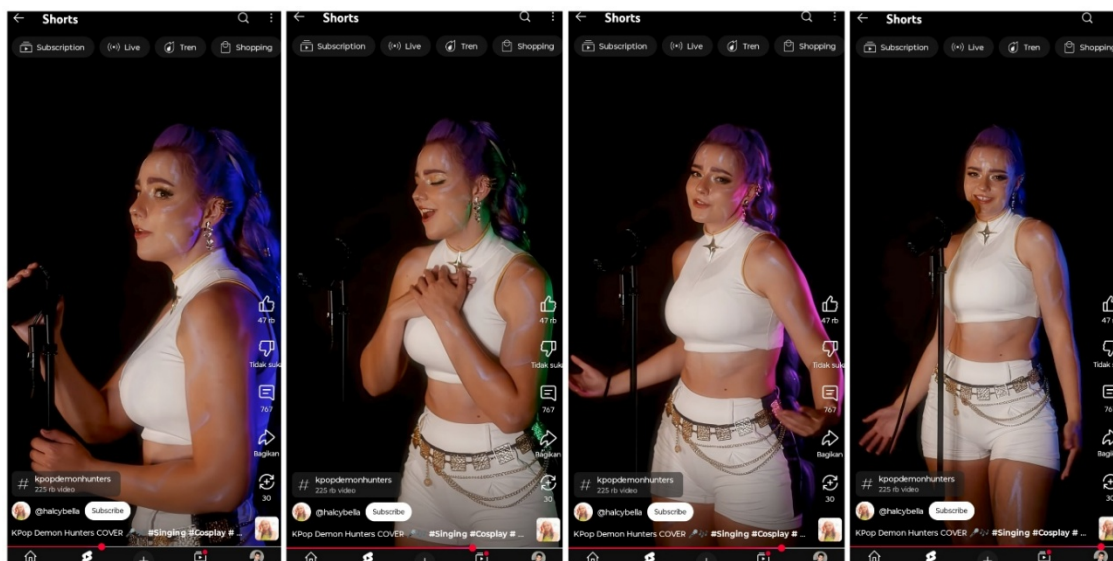


Figure 8. The screenshot of @Halcybella KPop Demon Hunters COVER #Singing #Cosplay #WhatItSoundsLike (KPop Demon Hunters COVER 🎵 #Singing #Cosplay #WhatItSoundsLike - YouTube)

The vocal cover video uploaded by @Halcybella on July 3, 2025, represents a more advanced form of hyperreality in K-Pop Demon Hunters. Released just two weeks after the film's Netflix debut on June 20, 2025, the video quickly gained significant engagement, with more than 1.9 million views and 48,000 likes. In contrast to lip-sync performance, Halcybella re-sings one of the film's songs while fully dressed as Rumi, thereby combining voice, body, and character identity in a single embodied performance. This is important because the performance does not simply imitate the fictional idol, it temporarily occupies the character's expressive role and makes the simulation feel socially and emotionally credible. Within Baudrillard's framework, this can be read as a third-level simulation, in which the copy no longer merely reproduces the original but begins to replace it in the audience's perception. Halcybella does not only reproduce Rumi's appearance through cosplay, but also performs the character's song in a way that fuses fictional identity with the creator's own bodily presence. As a result, Rumi appears less as an animated figure and more as a live, performative idol who can be heard and seen in real time. The authenticity of the singing performance strengthens this effect, since audiences encounter not a staged imitation but a convincing enactment that sustains the illusion of reality.

This video also shows how independent creators extend fictional characters into non-canonical spaces through embodied transmedia storytelling. After producing the visual transformation of Rumi in the earlier cosplay video, Halcybella expands the performance by adding voice and musical expression, thereby completing a more immersive character experience. The result is not simply a fan tribute, but a narrative extension that presents Rumi as a performative figure capable of existing beyond the animated film. In this sense, the creator does not only consume the text but actively re-creates it through bodily and vocal labor. The video also reflects the broader globalization of K-pop fandom and the growing role of the creator economy in transmedia circulation. Halcybella's profile, which includes business and collaboration contacts, indicates that such performances are not only expressive but also commercially situated. Together with similar creator practices, this demonstrates that transmedia storytelling now emerges through a network of fans, independent creators, and media industries who jointly produce and circulate fictional identities. The result is a highly fluid media environment

in which fictional characters can be activated, embodied, and consumed as if they were real performers.

Virilio's concept of speed helps explain why K-Pop Demon Hunters moved so quickly across platforms and why its fictional idols were so rapidly received as culturally real (Redhead, 2006). In this case, acceleration does not only refer to the pace of circulation, but also to the instability of perception produced by constant reposting, remixing, and platform-based repetition. As content travels faster, the distinction between original film text, fan-made response, and market circulation becomes harder to maintain. This is especially visible in the way Huntr/x and Saja Boys were treated as if they were real K-pop acts, even though they are clearly Hollywood-made fictional groups. In Virilio's terms, the "accident" here is not a physical breakdown but a perceptual one: speed produces confusion over origin, category, and authenticity (Webroot, 2022).

Taken together, these videos show that K-Pop Demon Hunters did not become a transmedia phenomenon through the film alone, but through the rapid accumulation of parody, AI realism, official choreography, behind-the-scenes mediation, cosplay, and embodied vocal performance. Across these forms, fictional characters were repeatedly re-staged as if they were real idols, while audiences and creators jointly participated in making that illusion socially credible. Jenkins helps explain the participatory and transmedia dimension of this process, Baudrillard clarifies how repeated simulations produce hyperreal idols, and Virilio shows how speed intensifies the collapse of boundaries between fiction, performance, and consumption (Jenkins & Plasencia, 2017; Jenkins et al., 2009; Baudrillard, 2008; Redhead, 2006). In this sense, the film's cultural force lies not only in its narrative content, but in the fast-moving digital ecosystem that transformed it into a shared media reality.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that K-Pop Demon Hunters became a transmedia phenomenon not simply because of its film narrative, but because of the rapid and layered ways it was reworked across digital platforms. Through parody, AI-generated realism, official choreography, behind-the-scenes content, cosplay, and embodied vocal performance, the film was continuously re-staged as a believable idol universe. These practices demonstrate that audience engagement in contemporary fandom is no longer limited to interpretation or consumption, but extends to active world-building across media forms. The findings also confirm that hyperreality is central to this process. Fictional characters such as Huntr/x and Saja Boys were repeatedly rendered as if they were real K-pop idols through fan production, studio promotion, and platform circulation. This made the boundary between fiction and reality increasingly unstable, not because the film claimed ontological authenticity, but because repeated simulations gave the characters affective and visual credibility. In this sense, the study supports Baudrillard's argument that simulation can become more socially compelling than the original. At the same time, the study shows that transmedia storytelling in the digital age operates through multiple directions at once. It is not only top-down, as seen in Sony's official choreography content, nor only bottom-up through fandom creativity, but also lateral through third-party media and independent creators who extend the narrative in new ways. Jenkins's framework helps explain how these flows of participation and circulation generate a distributed narrative environment, while Virilio clarifies how speed intensifies the pace at which fiction becomes culturally legible as reality. Overall, K-Pop Demon Hunters illustrates how contemporary media franchises can become socially real through fast, participatory, and visually persuasive circulation. The study contributes to media and fandom studies by

showing that fictional idols can acquire public legitimacy through transmedia labor, platform mediation, and the collective imagination of audiences. In this process, the distinction between film text, fan practice, and market circulation becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

REFERENCES

- Baudrillard, J. (2008). Simulacra and Simulations. In *The New Social Theory Reader* (2nd Editio). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003060963-37>
- Behind the Voices of K-Pop Demon Hunters! - YouTube*. Retrieved July 31, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/C93o1LXlzMA>
- Daellenbach, C. (2021). *The Invitation: Niche Audiences, Participatory Culture, and the Hype Machine*. <https://doi.org/10.32920/ryerson.14647497>
- Diao, Z. (2023). An Analysis of Anti-Feminist Expressions in K-Pop Culture. *Communications in Humanities Research*, 18(1), 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/18/20231121>
- Ding, J. (2022). Fandom and Popular Culture in the New Media Age Specialization. *The Frontiers of Society Science and Technology*, 4(10). <https://doi.org/10.25236/fsst.2022.041007>
- Gear up for a bts look at reference choreography for "Takedown" from KPop Demon Hunters - YouTube*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 31, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/66XS9TJtgiY>
- I will NOT watch K-Pop Demon Hunters 🤢 #TheManniiShow.com/series - YouTube*. Retrieved July 31, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/S86fNSclMDc>
- Jenkins, H., & Plasencia, A. (2017). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262036016.003.0012>
- Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Weigel, M., Clinton, K., & Robison, A. J. (2009). *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8435.001.0001>
- Jung, S. (2011). K-Pop, Indonesian Fandom, and Social Media. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0289>
- Jung, S. (2012). Fan Activism, Cybervigilantism, and Othering Mechanisms in K-Pop Fandom. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0300>
- Kim, P., & Hutt, E. (2021). K-Pop as a Social Movement: Case Study of BTS and Their Fandom ARMY. *Journal of Student Research*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.47611/jsrhs.v10i3.1772>
- Kozinets, R. V., & Gretzel, U. (2024). Netnography evolved: New contexts, scope, procedures and sensibilities. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 104, 103693. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ANNALS.2023.103693>
- KPop Demon Hunters, BLACKPINK, BTS - Explore - Google Trends*. Retrieved July 28, 2025, from <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?cat=3&date=now-7d&gprop=youtube&q=%2Fg%2F11kpd0b0g3,%2Fg%2F11byzf3gtr,%2Fm%2F0w68qx3&hl=en>
- KPop Demon Hunters: Fictional K-pop bands beat BTS and Blackpink in US charts*. Retrieved July 28, 2025, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyl1zyv1y2o>
- KPop Demon Hunters: How a Fictional Band is Dominating the US Music Charts - Vinyl Me, Please*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 28, 2025, from

- <https://www.vinylmeplease.com/blogs/music-industry-news/kpop-demon-hunters-how-a-fictional-band-is-dominating-the-us-music-charts>
- KPop Demon Hunters - Explore - Google Trends*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 28, 2025, from <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today> 3-m&q=%2Fg%2F11kpd0b0g3&hl=en
- 'KPop Demon Hunters' Arrives At No. 1 On Netflix With Stellar Critics' Score*. Retrieved July 28, 2025, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/timlammers/2025/06/20/kpop-demon-hunters-arrives-on-netflix-with-stellar-critics-score/>
- KPop Demon Hunters COVER* 🎤🎵 #Singing #Cosplay #WhatItSoundsLike - YouTube. Retrieved July 31, 2025, from https://www.youtube.com/shorts/6_4TxDpOQV8
- KPop Demon Hunters in Real Life (Golden.ver): HUNTR/X Rumi, Zoey, Mira!* #kpopdemonhunters #kpop - YouTube. (n.d.). Retrieved July 31, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/qCipArov46A>
- kpop demon hunters meme* - YouTube. Retrieved July 28, 2025, from https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=kpop+demon+hunters+meme&sp=CAM%253D
- KPop Demon Hunters RUMI Cosplay!* 🎤🎵💜 #GRWM - YouTube. Retrieved July 28, 2025, from <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ShnYHkhnOUY>
- KPop Demon Hunters Sets A Major Record As Netflix Eyes Award Potential*. Retrieved July 31, 2025, from <https://screenrant.com/kpop-demon-hunters-songs-record-award-potential-details/>
- Nagy, P., Mawasi, A., Eustice, K., Cook-Davis, A., Finn, E., & Wylie, R. (2022). Increasing Learners' Self-efficacy Beliefs and Curiosity Through a Frankenstein-themed Transmedia Storytelling Experience. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 53(6), 1626–1644. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13202>
- Netflix Says 'KPop Demon Hunters' Just Made History With A New Record*. Retrieved July 28, 2025, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2025/07/23/netflix-says-kpop-demon-hunters-just-made-history-with-a-new-record/>
- Nurfikria, I. (2023). Exploring Participatory Culture Among Persons With Disability: A Case Study on #Stopaudism. *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi (Indonesian Journal of Communications Studies)*, 7(3), 813–836. <https://doi.org/10.25139/jsk.v7i3.5870>
- Redhead, S. (2006). The Art of the Accident: Paul Virilio and Accelerated Modernity. *Fast Capitalism*, 2(1), 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.32855/fcapital.200601.002>
- Review and Summary: KPop Demon Hunters (2025) — Ashley Hajimirsadeghi*. Retrieved July 28, 2025, from <https://www.ashleyhajimirsadeghi.com/blog/kpop-demon-hunters-2025>
- Ryu, S. (2025). Hallyu content and hyperreality: Based on Baudrillard's theory of simulation. *The Global Association of Applied Liberal Arts Studies*, 3(1), 123–140. <https://doi.org/10.58990/GALAS.2025.3.1.123>
- Sebikova, L. (2018). The Ethical Aspects of Techno-Science, Dromology, and Hyperreality. *Communications - Scientific Letters of the University of Zilina*, 20(1A), 32–37. <https://doi.org/10.26552/com.c.2018.1a.32-37>
- Soriano, A. J. T. F. (2024). Textual Poachers and Fandom Dynamics: A Study of Filipino College Students. *Philippine Social Science Journal*, 6(4), 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.52006/main.v6i4.842>
- Sung, S.-Y. (2014). K-Pop Reception and Participatory Fan Culture in Austria. *Cross-Currents East Asian History and Culture Review*, 3(1), 56–71. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ach.2014.0011>
- The Record-Breaking Achievements of 'K-Pop Demon Hunters' HUNTR/X and Saja Boys |*

- allkpop*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 28, 2025, from <https://www.allkpop.com/article/2025/07/the-record-breaking-achievements-of-k-pop-demon-hunters-huntr-x-and-saja-boys>
- Tian, R.-G., & Zhong, X. (2022). *Fans Creation in the Development of New Media Technology: The Perspective of the Participatory Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220706.139>
- Virilio, P. (2006). Speed and politics. In *Theory Culture* (Vol. 16, p. 174). <http://books.google.com/books?id=EkDaAAAAIAAJ&pgis=1>
- Webroot. (2022). *The hidden threats lurking on illegal streaming sites*. https://www-cdn.webroot.com/9516/6265/6764/Webroot-Report-The-Hidden-Threats-Lurking-on-Illegal-Streaming-Sites_2.pdf
- Yoon, K. (2022). Between Universes: Fan Positionalities in the Transnational Circulation of K-Pop. *Communication and the Public*, 7(4), 188–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20570473221136667>
- Zheng, K. (2023). The Influence of K-Pop on Chinese Fans' Gender Perspectives: A Comparative Analysis Based on BTS and Blackpink. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 180, 3001. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202318003001>