

## **K-popper activism: the platform of fan activism in times of the covid-19 pandemic**

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*“All the underdogs in the world  
A day may come when we lose, but it is not today.  
Today we fight!”<sup>2</sup>*

*Due to the self-isolation caused by coronavirus, K-pop fans have used social media such as Twitter in order to engage, specially, in political, racial and gender agendas. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the demonstration and the activism of the K-pop fandom during the period of COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, we rely on theoretical assumptions which allow us to comprehend the fandom (Hills 2017, Jenkins 2015), conceiving the activism of fandom and, mainly, the cyberactivism (Queiroz 2017), as a form of resistance (Amaral, Souza, and Monteiro 2014), which allows this theme to be allied with the reception studies (Bonin 2018, Figaro 2000, 2009, 2019, Jacks 2015) and the data fandom (Zhang and Negus 2020). Among the demonstrations performed during COVID-19 pandemic, we highlight the support of K-poppers to the movement #BlackLivesMatter (Yang 2016) through social media as platforming elements for fan activism. Thus, this paper has made possible a reflection based on bibliographies regarding the reception of K-pop fans about the antiracist mobilizations, as well as their protagonism related to the metrics in favor of cyberactivism.*

Key-words: *Korean diaspora, opinions, Romania, Hallyu, diplomatic relations.*

### **1. Introduction**

The K-pop fandom comprises those who are fans of Korean pop music (K-pop). In the late 1990's, the Korean Wave (*hallyu*) started to expand due to the Korean dramas (K-dramas), mainly among the neighbouring countries (Monteiro 2014).

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<sup>2</sup> Lyrics of the song “Not Today” – BTS.

These productions of K-dramas use soundtracks that are theme songs for the main characters, as well as for the supporting ones. Therefore, the audience could get greater access to the Korean pop songs even before the democratization of the Web. In general, K-pop fans also like to watch K-dramas and are integrated into this Korean Wave universe. However, this cannot be an assertion given as a rule, since inside the fandom itself there are several pluralities.

Hence, this paper aims to investigate the demonstration and activism of the K-pop fandom during COVID-19 pandemic. Such proposal finds justification in the fact that K-pop fandom has already engaged in many other situations unrelated to the current historical and political context. At the same time, because of the self-isolation, these fans, who were already active on the Internet, are even more engaged in sharing and knowing the activism that is part of the fandom. This study, thus, intends to reflect on themes so far unnoticed by the mass media in a moment of vulnerabilities, in which many people are struggling, externally or internally.

For this purpose, the theoretical background to carry out this study covers, firstly, the initial understanding of fandom (Hills 2017; Jenkins 2015), turning afterwards to the activism of fandom and mainly to cyberactivism (Queiroz 2017) as a form of resistance (Amaral, Souza, and Monteiro 2014), which allows us to associate this theme with the reception studies (Bonin 2018; Figaro 2000, 2009, 2019; Jacks 2015) and the data fandom (Zhang and Negus 2020). It is estimated that this path makes possible a reflection on these demonstrations of the K-pop fandom, which tend to perpetuate.

## 2. The relation between fandom and K-pop fans

In the more accessible meaning of the term, the English word “fandom” means “fan club” or kingdom of fans – a blended term originating from the words: “fan” and “kingdom”. In this paper, we do not intend to elaborate a historiography of fan studies, but to propose a succinct comprehension of the term as a starting point for the understanding of the K-pop fandom.

The term “fan”, for Jenkins (2015), is interpreted as an abbreviation for “fanatic”, symbolizing someone who is directly involved with the media, in order to assert their identity and elevate the feelings about the media products. According to Hills (2017), the term “fan” cannot work as something delimited:

I think fandom is always a fuzzy set, or concept; there is never going to be a completely clear line around it as a category. There’s going to be gradations that move between notions of *fan* and *audience*. There may be some people

who wouldn't consider themselves to be fans and wouldn't be part of a fan community or a fan culture, they wouldn't use the discourse of fandom, and would not self identify as a fan. (Hills 2015, 151, emphasis in the original)

According to Hills (2017, 150), we should not focus on a definition of fandom, but on the way fandom is performed, for whom, and in what context. Based on that, Hills (2017) states that contemporary fandom is not perceived as coherent and singular, but as a network of networks or long affiliations of subcultures, all of them specialized in different forms of fan activities.

Regarding K-pop fans, it can be said that they are part of a fandom involved with many minorities. In the opinion of Berto and Almeida (2014, 40, own translation), K-pop fandom is an essentially young one and it is mainly composed of young females: "Among the thousand people who answered to the questionnaire, 85.5% are of the female gender and 51.9% are between 15 and 18 years old". Such a characteristic is frequently unappreciated and subjugated within a society in which misogyny still prevails. On Twitter, for example, there are many influencers and public figures who credited K-pop fans as revolted teenagers, foundation for left-wing demonstrations (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**  
Influencer's  
opinion  
about K-pop  
fans<sup>3</sup>

Source: Jhope  
(2020)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "The left-wing needs to make an alliance BEFORE EVERYTHING with the k-pop gang. these people are WILD. carlos' robots are nothing compared to revolted teenagers." (own translation)

"For starters there aren't only teenagers in the kpop, the left-wing before everything has to do their homework before trying to make an alliance." (own translation)

<sup>4</sup> In order to preserve the identity and maintain users' confidentiality, the profile pictures were changed, and the names of the original publications were erased.

It is worth mentioning that K-pop fandom is a multiple phenomenon, since there are those who prefer a certain group/band, as well as the ones who keep up with K-dramas and let themselves be enchanted by the cultural products of *hallyu*. In Brazil, K-pop has started to become popular since 2010, being the gateway for the Korean Wave in the country (Monteiro 2014).

### 2.1. From fandom to activism and cyberactivism

K-pop fandom cyberactivism, during the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), caused surprise to many people who are unaware of these fans' power (Figure 2). In the imaginary, there is the idea that this fandom is composed exclusively of teenagers, mainly by young women who hysterically acclaim their idols. However, even if the fandom is mostly young and female, this does not delegitimize the engagement of fans in important causes.

#### K-Pop Fans Are Becoming an Unexpected Ally to George Floyd Protesters

TIME  
26d



Source: Gayne (2020)

**Figure 2.** K-pop fans as allies to George Floyd protesters

Concerning the activism on the Internet, Queiroz (2017) points out that cyberactivism started to gain strength with the protests that occurred in the end of 2010, in the so-called Arab Spring. In Brazil, this kind of activism got significant proportion in 2013 with the wave of protests known as *Jornadas de Junho* (June Journeys), when the protesters organized themselves through social media in order to demand, at first, the reduction of the public transportation fare (Queiroz 2017).

(2014), these mobilizations in networks were already being integrated to the debate about fandoms. In Brazilian Universities, fan studies started to be included in the academic environment in the early 2000's, many times through researches developed by *aca*<sup>5</sup>-fans, i.e., scholars/academics who are fans or fans who became scholars (Toaldo and Costa 2017).

Thus, it can be stated that:

(...) the notion of civic and political participation and the social mobilizations gained a central and constant position in the debate about fandom organization, mainly, with the popularization of social media websites in the early 2000's, the same period in which the literature about fans starts to address this theme. (Amaral, Souza, and Monteiro 2014, 143, own translation)

Cyberactivism began with the popularization of the Internet in the early 1990's (Queiroz 2017). Nonetheless, it is not about something new, but a movement, "(...) heir of a process of social, cultural and political struggle that is prior to the Internet, but also directly related to its own development" (Queiroz 2017, 2, own translation). It is in this digital space that activists saw an opportunity to widen the power of communication and defence of the cause in focus (Queiroz 2017). On the Internet, there is the possibility for people to "have a voice", even though they are not artists or public figures. On the other hand, even if this perspective is beneficial in providing freedom of speech and engagement to the causes, it brings consequences when "giving voice" to people who disseminate unfounded ideas and fake news.

In what concerns the relationship between fan and artist, Bennett (2012) explains that many celebrities who have millions of followers on their social media are able to engage fans in different causes, like Lady Gaga<sup>6</sup> and Ian Somerhalder<sup>7</sup> have already done so, for example. This happens because social media in a certain way provide a greater contact between artists and fans, and this engagement can be either stimulated by the artist (Bennett 2012), or emerge unpretentiously in the fandom itself (Amaral, Souza, and Monteiro 2014), according to Figure 3.

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<sup>5</sup> Aca is the clipped form of the term *academic*.

<sup>6</sup> Lady Gaga mobilized her fans for the demonstration against the policy *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, that obligates American militaries to not reveal their homosexuality under penalty of expulsion (Bennett 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Ian Somerhalder mobilized his fans, through Twitter, to support the environmental cause and the animal rights, appealing to signatures and distribution of petitions, which demand changes and raise funds for this purpose (Bennett 2012).



**Figure 3.** Fans ask for the position of their K-idols<sup>9</sup>

Source: Guk (2020)<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, when the demonstrations in support for the BLM movement occurred, for example, K-pop fans used online strategies in favour of this movement, even before the artists took a position. Some K-idols have spoken favourably, such as Jay Park, Mark Tuan (GOT7), Amber Liu (former F(x)), Jae (DAY6), Ji woo and BM (KARD), Minzy and CL (former 2NE1)<sup>10</sup>, and others, such as the boy group BTS<sup>11</sup>, were demanded by fans to engage in the mobilizations for the BLM movement. It is believed that the entertainment company Big Hit<sup>12</sup> has influenced the position of this group, as well as the position of the other K-idols (South Korean idols).

Concerning fan activism, Amaral, Souza and Monteiro (2014) point out a contradiction problematized by Brough and Shresthova (2012): if activism is a synonym for resistance, how will it be capable of breaking the system? In other words: how do fans participate in a hegemonic space and at the same time seek to change this space? For that matter, the authors emphasize that:

<sup>8</sup> In order to preserve the identity and maintain users' confidentiality, the profile pictures were changed, and the names of the original publications were erased.

<sup>9</sup> "BM of KARD said that many companies aren't letting the idols position themselves in support to the BLM, one idol who took a position had her social media deleted, anyways all of this makes me think that bighit is deterring a position, obviously it's being dumb, but this isn't news+" (own translation)

<sup>10</sup> GOT7, F(x) and DAY6, KARD and 2NE1 are K-pop groups.

<sup>11</sup> BTS group took a position in favour of the BLM movement, but not when fans were expecting.

<sup>12</sup> Big Hit Entertainment is a South Korean entertainment company established in 2005 by the music producer and former composer of JYP Entertainment.

[t]he understanding of resistance according to a structural or post-modern view means, above all, to understand how the problematic is situated per se, if understood as a structure of domination, passivity and alienation (post-structuralist view) or as an opportunity for creative appropriation (post-modern view). (Amaral, Souza and Monteiro 2014, 6, own translation)

Despite the difficulties to define the concept of resistance, it has been formulated and it is being used for different areas (Amaral, Souza, and Monteiro 2014). Specifically, regarding the K-pop fandom mobilizations, it is worth highlighting that:

(...) not always the opposition will be explicit, visible or direct, such as in the cases in which forms of daily resistance are observed (Scott, 1985). As proposed by Scott (1985), acts of resistance – as well as in the oppression mechanisms – not always assume the form of rebellions, protests or collective mobilizations, but more subtle, individual and not articulated forms of cultural resistance. (Amaral, Souza and Monteiro 2014, 7-8, own translation)

K-pop fandom activism did not occur through rebellions or protests in the streets, like is the case of the other protesters in favour of the BLM movement, but through the Internet, mainly the social media Twitter, in which K-pop fans supported the cause and boycotted the opposition. Recently, K-pop fans have also used social media and the application TikTok in order to empty one of president Donald Trump's rallies, which was performed in a location with a capacity estimated for more than one million people.

Even before the last events during COVID-19 pandemic, the K-pop fandom had already mobilized itself favourable to urgent causes. For instance, we can mention the fans of the boy group BTS (known as Armys), who have already donated ten thousand dollars so that 1,250 trees could be planted at Jamsil Hangang Park, in Seoul, as a tribute to the 26<sup>th</sup> birthday of one of the members, RM (Kim Namjoon). This fandom has also got mobilized to donate supplies for the "comfort women", who are the survivors of the sexual slavery during the Korea under Japanese rule (1910-1945), performed blood donations, made donations to the animal protection group "Korean Animal Welfare Association", and raised donatives to the Korean victims of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The most recent group's donation was for the COVID-19 combat, exceeding 1.5 million dollars. Many of these initiatives start on social media and are able to unite Armys from many countries.

## **2.2. Contextualizing the relation between the K-pop fandom and the #BlackLivesMatter case**

The BLM case got its recent trigger due to the African American George Floyd's death, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020. In the occasion, the policeman from Minneapolis, Derek Chauvin, kneeled George's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Floyd did not show any resistance and warned the policemen that he could not breathe. The scene was video-recorded with the cell phones of many spectators and created social revolt and a wave of anti-racist protests in the world.

BLM is a movement that emerged with the goal of reporting aggressions of American policemen against black people, so that these policemen are judged and convicted for their crimes. Although George Floyd's murder has promoted this movement, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter had been on social media long before this case.

One of the most interesting developments in digital activism in recent years is the rise of hashtag activism, meaning discursive protest on social media united through a hashtagged word, phrase or sentence. #BlackLivesMatter, for example, was a protest movement that happened both in the streets and on social media in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in July 2013 in the shooting to death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin. Another example is #Ferguson, which happened in response to the shooting to death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014 by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. (Yang 2016, 13)

The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter reached the support of many people – public figures, companies, influencers, celebrities, among others – on several social media. The K-pop fandom not only supported the anti-racist cause, but also actively participated in it through social media. It is worth emphasizing, in this regard, that the study on racism in fan spaces is not new. According to Coker and Pande (2018, 98), "(...) the place of race/racism in fan spaces and fan studies in the contemporary moment is simultaneously characterized by a great deal of discussion as well as a resounding silence." On the other hand, there is an increase in fans who are seeking to comprehend how the media deals with issues related to representation of historically marginalized individuals (Coker and Pande 2018).



In the conjuncture of the K-pop fandom, Monteiro (2020 - verbal information<sup>13</sup>) states that K-pop fans cannot be considered as heroes by the activism in favour of the BLM movement. Moreover, the author explains that the K-pop fandom owes a retraction for still being racist, especially anti-blackness, even though it is part of a non-white and noncentral cultural movement. The support of fans is also shown as the beginning of an attempt to retract the racism that is embedded in the fandom, which disregarded, in a certain way, even the fact that it is composed by a black parcel. That said, Monteiro (2020) mentions that the K-pop needs to be essentially favourable to the BLM movement, restructuring itself as a non-racist and anti-racist cultural space, since it is a phenomenon that is racialized and non-Western (verbal information).

### **3. K-popper cyberactivism from the perspective of reception studies and data fandom**

As already discussed in this paper, K-pop fans' receptivity regarding the BLM movement has developed itself mainly through social media, long before their idols' pronouncement. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze this scenario under the perspective of the reception studies carried out by Bonin (2018), Fígaro (2000, 2009, 2019) and Jacks (2015). Didactically, the reception theories have as the object of analysis an artistic or cultural fact from the receiver's perspective, in other words, an artistic or cultural product not pacifically accepted by the audience but interpreted and meant from the individual and cultural experiences of their receivers.

According to Jacks (2015),

[t]he means are important in people's lives because they produce meaning, because they are part of the culture and they do not act only as transmitters or autonomous producers of meanings and imaginaries. They are part of different significant institutions, such as politics, the family, and education, among others. (Jacks 2015, 238, own translation).

For that matter, it is worth remembering that the video (means), which shows the policeman Derek Chauvin asphyxiating George Floyd, was recorded by the spectators (emitter) of the scene (message) (Jacks 2015). Although it is not an

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<sup>13</sup> Verbal information obtained on the live "K-pop fans' demonstrations in the pandemic context" that happened on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, on the Instagram profile of the research group Cultpop (Grupo de Pesquisa Cultpop).

artistic or cultural production, this video has grown to worldwide proportions, reaching an audience in networks (receiver) (Jacks 2015), which, besides not accepting pacifically the fact, interpreted it as embedded racism in the American police (effect) – triggering the BLM movement. This is one of the possible interpretations of the case based on reception studies.

In her studies, Fígaro (2009) analyzes the interpersonal relationships between co-workers as key elements in the communication between companies and employees, considering the work mediations as fundamental in the reception process. According to the author, the reception studies are not established through the dispute of force between emitter and receiver, since the means of communication do not move only as a linear transmitter of information, but must be understood based on the mediations (Fígaro 2000). It can be stated, thus, that the social discourses already existed even before the emergence of television and that their influence range from the interpersonal relationships to the meaning assignments in the social spaces (Fígaro 2000).

Fígaro's (2009) is of the opinion that the relationships among K-pop fans mediated by social media act in the reception process. This can be ascertained, for instance, when Brazilian K-pop fans were inspired by Americans at the time a deputy started to chase antifascists or when the hashtags #WhiteLivesMatter and #whiteoutwednesday started to go viral on social media even before the social media and the mass media notified the action promoted by the K-pop fandom.

The reaction of the Brazilian K-pop fandom can be understood with the assistance of Bonin's (2018) reflection when referencing the reception field based on Martín Barbero (1997):

The communication processes, related to reception, do not happen outside but are crossed by sociocultural, political and historical economic dimensions (among others) which mark, configure, and are the matrix – in different ways, in the concrete realities in which they are inserted – of these processes, being part of the logic of their intelligibility. (Bonin 2018, 62, own translation)

Just like a large part of the Brazilians, the K-pop fandom considered the anti-racist agenda as secondary, directing the main discussion to the antifascism issue, due to the current political context in the country. As explained by Bonin (2018), the communicational processes concerning the reception are crossed by sociocultural, political and economic dimensions, among others, and such aspects are applied to the population's general dissatisfaction in relation to the government and its flirts with fascism. In parallel, the non-white K-pop fans kept supporting the anti-racist struggle and mobilizations alongside other groups that primordially support the cause.

On social media, many images started to circulate with the antifascist logo, as shown in Figure 4, below.



Source: Leticia (2020)



Source: Fans... (2020)<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 4.** Antifascist K-pop logo

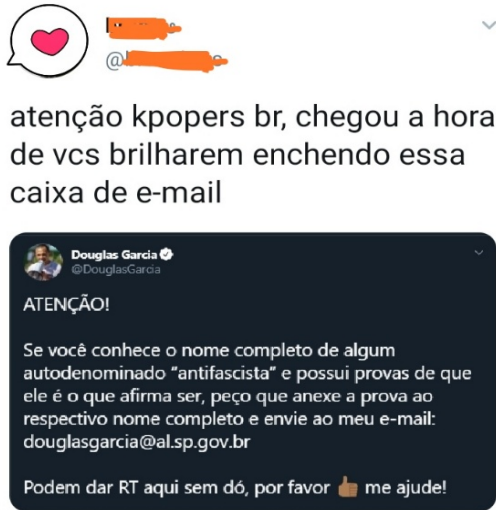
**Figure 5.** Dallas Police ask Twitter users to send videos of illegal demonstrations during the BLM protests

The K-pop fandom's anti-racist mobilizations in the United States started when Dallas police department requested Twitter users to send videos of illegal demonstrations during the BLM protests through the application iWatch Dallas App (Figure 5).

In this scenario, the K-pop fandom (the receiver) started to send spam of fancams<sup>15</sup> (the contents) massively, which would have brought down the platform (Jacks 2015). The same occurred with the police from Michigan, Kirkland and Washington. In a similar way, following the Dallas police example, some Brazilian deputies made the same request to Twitter users, however, in another direction, as we can see in Figure 6.

<sup>14</sup> The user's name was changed in order to keep the confidentiality of information.

<sup>15</sup> They correspond to short videos of artists. The word "fancam" comes from the terms fan and cam (camera).



**Figure 6.** Deputy Douglas Garcia asks that Twitter users denounce people self-styled antifascists<sup>17</sup>

17:42 · 01 jun 20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

Source: Bruna (2020)<sup>16</sup>

Besides Twitter, the K-pop fans used Instagram to post memes and fancams in opposition to the hashtags #whiteoutwednesday and #WhiteLivesMatter, in an attempt to stifle racist postings and prevent the BLM movement visibility. The hashtag issue refers to the influence of algorithms in actions, remembering that the reception study also goes through the challenges posed to Big Data in data extraction, mining and analysis, regarding the behaviour manipulation (Fígaro 2019).

Computing based on data tracking, implies, at the same time, everything that is diverse and not yet captured, in order to homogenize everything in databases which function for the production of models to be applied to measure and change actions and human behaviours. (Fígaro 2019, 224, own translation).

Fígaro (2019) states, yet, that the data tracking feeds the Big Data, transforming it in a great information repository, oriented to supply algorithms that are fed by the

<sup>16</sup> User's name and profile picture were changed in deference to confidentiality of information.

<sup>17</sup> "attention kpopers br, it's time for u to shine filling this email inbox" (own translation). ATTENTION! If you know the full name of any self-styled "antifascist" and have evidences that he/she is who they claim to be, I ask you to attach the proof to the corresponding full name and send it to my email: douglasgarcia@al.sp.gov.br. You can RT this without mercy, please. Help me!" (own translation).

applications and feed them on behalf of a goal. Thus, the population is both the main source and the final target of this repository, since the algorithms analyze and organize the data to operate its functionality, making any application to act according to these organizations called algorithms (Fígaro 2019).

The algorithms can predict users' actions, so the data mining becomes a tool for social control (Fígaro 2019). In the case of cyberactivism of K-pop fandom Stans<sup>18</sup>, it is clear the effective demonstration of these fans, which is followed by the participation of the hacker's group Anonymous. Because of this support, the fans started to follow Anonymous' accounts on Twitter, even though they do not know if these accounts are really official, doubting the protagonism of the K-pop fandom cyberactivism. That said, Reuter (2020) states that, when one of Anonymous' accounts published a tweet, it got thousands of re-tweets, likes and comments with Graphics Interchange Format (GIFs) within a few seconds. Such situation may indicate that these reactions are generated automatically, as observed by Reuter (2020):

There is a lot to be said for the fact that these reactions are machine-generated, says someone from Anonymous Germany, who has been involved for years and has been observing the K-Pop phenomenon at Anonymous for days now. Not only the speed is an indication of automation, but also the repetition of messages and animated images in the individual threads. (Reuter <https://netzpolitik.org/2020/k-pop-stans-are-boosting-us-protests-against-racism/>)

However, Florian Gallwitz, professor of Computer Science and Media at the Technical University in Nuremberg (quoted by Reuter 2020), opposes himself to this perspective when stating that these suspicious accounts did not seem like automated accounts.

Gallwitz' reasoning: Many of the accounts use iPhone and Android clients. Here it would be "extremely difficult to automatically simulate a realistic interaction". Furthermore, Twitter is cryptographically secured, so you can't just build a bot that pretends to be the iPhone Twitter app. (Reuter 2020, <https://netzpolitik.org/2020/k-pop-stans-are-boosting-us-protests-against-racism/>)

Instead of bots, Reuter (2020) explains that these profiles could be extremely active, like spammers, a troll's army or real K-pop Stans. It is typical of Anonymous

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<sup>18</sup> Fans who chase their idols and are highly engaged in causes related to them.

to create many accounts massively, while Twitter could not detect any “substantial coordinated activity” on these accounts (Reuter 2020).

It is worth emphasizing, yet, that there is not a way to measure a subordination of K-pop fans because of the support of one of the notorious hacking groups. A large part of the K-pop fandom adopts strategies on social media to support their idols (Zhang and Negus 2020), and such online activities can be adapted as cyberactivism tools. “Data fans understand how their online activities are tracked, and adopt individual and collective strategies to influence metric and semantic information reported on digital platforms and social media” (Zhang and Negus 2020, 493).

According to the authors, the data fandom represents

(...) more than ‘digital fandom’ (Bennett 2014, Booth 2010), a term describing how fans use digital media to acquire, communicate, share and organize knowledge. Data fan is a ‘self-concept’ (Perry, 2010) that conveys the way fans knowingly adopt a specific identity – a ‘codified interpretation of life’ – as they seek to influence the very data through which they are codified. (Zhang and Negus 2020, 496)

In this scenario, Zhang and Negus (2020) propose to analyze in what manner social media users raise awareness about the logics of the platform and data and, from this, develop strategies to interfere. “Regarding the K-pop fandom, these fans use these strategies to increase their idol’s visibility, increasing the commercial and cultural value of idols” (Zhang and Negus 2020, 502). Such awareness seems to happen through the data that is seen in charts, in a way that these representations indicate fan activities.

Chart data affords fans a visually unambiguous sense of their contribution to an idol’s success, a record of their achievement in competitive encounters with fans of other idols, and a sense of belonging to a wider fan community. (Zhang and Negus 2020, 504)

As reported by Zhang and Negus (2020), the charts are based on algorithms that combine fan activities. Besides that, the hashtags are important for the platforms and social media, since through their mediation it is possible to analyze the popularity of celebrities, among other issues. Thus, fans use social media as a way to generate data about their idols, so that these data become detectable to the other fans and to other social media users (Zhang and Negus 2020). This practice is established, therefore, as a way to influence the charts, being strategically formulated.

The data team are a group of dedicated, skilled fans with extensive knowledge of digital platforms, and who understand the technical processes driving algorithms and enabling loopholes. The team collect data from various platforms and prepare strategies for intervening, guiding other data fans who may not have such technical knowledge. (Zhang and Negus 2020, 506)

According to Zhang and Negus (2020), this team creates strategies that will range from influencing classifications on platforms and social media to removing negative comments about their idols. "When data fans have completed allocated tasks they may be rewarded with merchandise or tickets to exclusive events that the data team have acquired directly from the idol's company" (Zhang and Negus 2020, 506).

Therefore, the K-pop fandom elaborates many strategies which increase their idols' visibility and indirectly contribute for their idols' position in the charts (Zhang and Negus 2020). It is known that it is not only for the possible rewards that these fans feed these strategies, but also for the dispute, for the control, for the trust and for the feeling of being a fan when seeing their idol at the top on social media. Based on this perspective, this is the way by which the K-pop fandom cyberactivism resumes its protagonism.

#### **4. Final considerations**

The K-pop fandom got mobilized and is still acting in favour of causes during COVID-19 pandemic. These fans are aware when using online strategies and tactics to support their idols, showing to be able to manipulate the social media metrics, regardless of hackers' support, and to put their idols at the top of the charts through cyberactivism.

The demonstrations in favour of the BLM movement proved the power of K-pop fans and legitimized a fandom that is not only composed by hysterical women, teenagers, and white people. Although the fandom is mostly young and female, to generalize such characteristics to all the fans would be a mistake, because the K-pop fandom is diversified in terms of race, ethnicity and age.

Even though these demonstrations are positive, it is necessary to highlight that K-pop fans are not superheroes (Monteiro 2020). Even before the good actions and the activism during the pandemic, the K-pop fandom had already supported causes, not only because of altruism, but also for their K-idols, so that many of the good actions were done on behalf of their idols as a way to promote them, putting them at the top of the metrics. Besides that, inside the fandom itself there is an

embedded racism, an aspect that is much criticized by the non-white fans and that meets the fact that K-pop white fans were more remembered by the media as the responsible for the anti-racist struggle in the demonstrations in favour of the BLM movement, struggle that K-pop black fans face inside the fandom itself when they try to take a stand or when defending themselves of discrimination. It is necessary to mention, also, that many K-pop fans started to question the attitude of some K-idols who supported the anti-racist demonstrations, but when racism happens in South Korea, they are silent because they fear the reaction of conservative fans.

In Brazil, the reception of the K-pop fandom happened according to the current demonstrations in the context, marked by a moment of political instability, in which the main leader of the country flirts with fascist ideologies. Therefore, the anti-racist demonstrations which started in the United States were received in another way here, being overshadowed by the antifascism issue. Moreover, antifascists were chased by the opposition, and this includes the antifa K-pop fandom. Nonetheless, Brazilian K-pop fans supported foreign fans with the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter, with the fancams and with the visibility of metrics, not promoting K-idols during the anti-racist demonstrations.

Bearing this in mind, it can be stated that this text, based on the reception studies and the data fandom, contributed to the understanding of the K-pop fandom and its executions ranging from the causes framed in the context of COVID-19 pandemic to the strategies used by these fans on social media. It is estimated that, after this scenario of vulnerabilities, K-pop fans will keep fighting for urgent causes and, mainly, will learn to turn their attention to the fandom itself.

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