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Between Visibility and Simplification: Media Representation of K-pop Fandom in Chilean Broadcast Television (2017–2024)

Entre la visibilidad y la simplificación: representación mediática del fandom K-pop en la televisión abierta chilena (2017–2024)

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Abstract:

This article analyzes how broadcast television news in Chile represented K-pop fandom between 2017 and 2024. The research problem stems from the fact that increased media visibility does not necessarily imply greater cultural legitimacy, especially when transnational youth communities are translated by generalist media. The study aimed to identify the visual and performative markers privileged by the coverage, examine the narrative frames through which fandom is made intelligible to broad audiences, and assess the degree of cultural contextualization present in the news pieces. Methodologically, the study adopted a mixed-methods design with a qualitative predominance, based on content analysis of 30 reports aired by TVN, Mega, Canal 13, and Chilevisión. The analytical matrix included seven variables grouped into four dimensions: bodily and aesthetic marking of difference, fan performativity, fandom materiality, and cultural-audiovisual contextualization. The findings show that the coverage privileges hair, style, dance, and music as rapid recognition devices, while the material culture of fandom and references to Korean culture occupy a secondary place. Consequently, broadcast television increases the visibility of K-pop, but represents it in a selective, embodied, and culturally under-contextualized way: a form of visibility that ultimately operates as a simplification of the phenomenon.

Keywords: K-pop, fandom, media representation, broadcast television, cultural otherness.

Resumen:

Este artículo analiza cómo los noticieros de televisión abierta en Chile representaron al *fandom* K-pop entre 2017 y 2024. El problema de investigación surge de la constatación de que una mayor visibilidad mediática no implica necesariamente mayor legitimidad

cultural, especialmente cuando comunidades juveniles transnacionales son traducidas por medios generalistas. El estudio se propuso identificar los marcadores visuales y performativos privilegiados por la cobertura, examinar los encuadres narrativos mediante los cuales el *fandom* es vuelto inteligible para audiencias amplias y evaluar el grado de contextualización cultural presente en las piezas informativas. Metodológicamente, se desarrolló un diseño mixto con predominio cualitativo, basado en análisis de contenido aplicado a 30 reportajes emitidos por TVN, Mega, Canal 13 y Chilevisión. La matriz de análisis consideró siete variables agrupadas en cuatro dimensiones: marcación corporal y estética de la diferencia, performatividad fan, materialidad del *fandom* y contextualización cultural-audiovisual. Los resultados muestran que la cobertura privilegia cabello, estilo, baile y música como recursos de reconocimiento rápido, mientras la cultura material del *fandom* y las referencias a la cultura coreana ocupan un lugar secundario. En consecuencia, la televisión abierta amplía la visibilidad del K-pop, pero lo representa de forma selectiva, corporalizada y culturalmente subexplicada: una visibilidad que opera, en la práctica, como simplificación del fenómeno.

Palabras clave: K-pop, *fandom*, representación mediática, televisión abierta, alteridad cultural.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, K-pop ceased to be a peripheral form of consumption and became a cultural phenomenon visible across multiple spaces of the contemporary media ecosystem. The expansion of the Korean Wave has favored the circulation of music, images, aesthetic repertoires, and practices of participation that today exceed musical listening and involve collective translation, networked sociability, cultural appropriation, and shared forms of belonging (Jin, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2013; López Rocha, 2022). In Chile, this visibility is no longer restricted to specialized platforms or closed communities; it is also expressed in newscasts, morning shows, and generalist coverage, where fandom begins to be translated for broad and heterogeneous audiences. Recent

literature on the reception of K-pop in Latin America has shown that its expansion coexists with ambivalent forms of recognition, in which fascination, curiosity, exoticization, and social suspicion operate simultaneously (Clavijo Fonseca & Mora Aguilar, 2022; Choi & González Lustig, 2024; Min, 2021). The media do not merely register a pre-existing youth phenomenon; they actively participate in the production of its public meanings.

Classic fandom studies understood this practice as active appropriation, meaning-making, and affective investment (Fiske, 1992; Grossberg, 1992; Jenkins, 1992), while the subcultural tradition showed that styles, bodies, and consumption function as forms of symbolic differentiation and cultural capital (Hebdige, 1979; Hoggart, 1957; Thornton, 1995). Both lines, developed in the theoretical framework, make it possible to understand K-pop fandom as a dense cultural community—affective, material, and organized—rather than as a merely intensified audience. In this scenario, broadcast television deserves special attention because it is not the space where fandom represents itself, but the one in which the phenomenon is reorganized for mass publics through audiovisual operations of selection and hierarchization (Hall, 1997; Williams, 1974).

News coverage can produce an ambivalent visibility: on the one hand, it places the phenomenon on the generalist agenda; on the other, it can simplify it through operations of juvenilization, spectacularization, trivialization, or soft exoticization. Processes of representation and stereotyping do not operate solely through explicitly negative judgments, but also through reductions, fixations, and forms of classification that turn difference into an easily recognizable otherness (Hall, 1997; Lippmann, 1922; Said, 1978/2008).

The presence of K-pop in Chilean media coexists with a recent history of local appropriations, youth resignifications, and forms of digital activism showing that fandom is organized around repertoires of cultural citizenship and collective action (Choi & González Lustig, 2024; Min, 2021). On this basis, the present article analyzes the ways in which these newscasts construct K-pop fandom mediatically. Unlike previous literature, focused mainly on reception, practices, and the self-representation of fan

communities themselves, this work addresses an angle still little explored in Latin America: the translation of the phenomenon carried out by generalist television. Specifically, the study seeks to: a) identify the visual and performative markers privileged by the coverage; b) examine the narrative frames through which fandom is made intelligible to generalist audiences; and c) assess the degree of cultural contextualization present in the news pieces.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. FANDOM, SUBCULTURE, AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Fandom studies have moved away from the image of the fan as an irrational or culturally subordinate subject. Instead, they describe fans as actors who participate, interpret, and produce community within media and digital environments (Gray et al., 2007; James, 2025). From this perspective, fandom is not reduced to an intensification of consumption; it involves participatory, affective, and relational practices that articulate belonging, identity, and shared forms of recognition (Bollmer & Tillerson, 2025; James, 2025). Thus, the fan ceases to appear as an anomalous figure of consumption and comes to be understood as a cultural actor who resignifies content and organizes community (Gray et al., 2007).

This shift made it possible to think of fandom not only as active reception, but also as a space traversed by knowledge, hierarchies, and disputes over legitimacy. Baym (2000) documented early on that online fan communities develop their own interaction routines, norms, and hierarchies; Hills (2002) underscored the tensions between affect, knowledge, and legitimacy that run through fan cultures; and Sandvoss (2005) showed that the fan bond is sustained by regular, emotionally invested consumption that operates as a mirror of one's own identity. In digital and platformized environments, moreover, these hierarchies are reorganized through new forms of participation, visibility, and fan labor (Bollmer & Tillerson, 2025; James, 2025). From here, fandom can be understood as a cultural formation in which collective identity, affect, and distinction are constructed relationally.

In the case of K-pop, this articulation acquires a particular density. Belonging is expressed not only through musical taste, but also through objects, routines, corporealities, and repertoires of knowledge, such as albums, photocards, lightsticks, choreographies, streaming practices, and recommendation circuits (Han, 2017; Villegas et al., 2023; Yoon & Labarta Garcia, 2024). Within this framework, fandom is sustained by a cultural economy in which affect, materiality, and expertise are intertwined, and in which the community becomes legible through visible signs and shared forms of participation (Quiñones Hernández, 2022; Villegas et al., 2023). For this reason, reducing it to hairstyles, dances, or striking colors leaves out much of the symbolic density that organizes these practices.

That said, thinking about K-pop only through the classic notion of subculture would be insufficient without considering its transnational and digitally mediated character. Its expansion has been explained through the articulation between cultural industries, digital platforms, and global circulation, together with collaborative practices of dissemination, translation, and resignification driven by fans themselves (Jenkins et al., 2013; Jin, 2016). In Latin America, this process has been read as the shift toward a transcultural fandom sustained by digital mediation and situated appropriations (Han, 2017). Recent literature has further complicated this scenario by showing that global K-pop fandoms should not be idealized as homogeneous communities, but understood as spaces traversed by negotiations, frictions, and inequalities (Yoon & Labarta Garcia, 2024).

To this is added a dimension increasingly visible in recent research: the platformization of fandom. Platforms do not merely host fan participation; they also shape norms, hierarchies, and forms of community (James, 2025). Along the same lines, corporate digital infrastructures organize affects, consumption, and interactions, becoming active mediators of the bond between artists and audiences (Bollmer & Tillerson, 2025). In other words, contemporary K-pop fandom is not only participatory and transnational, but also increasingly mediated by platforms that channel and reorganize belonging.

From this perspective, collective fan identity should not be understood as a pre-existing essence or as a simple sum of individual tastes, but as a relational construction sustained

by shared practices, codes of recognition, and forms of distinction (Gray et al., 2007). In Latin America, this communal dimension has been observed in youth groups linked to K-pop in Bolivia, in the social perceptions weighing on fans in Colombia, and in the forms of cultural citizenship and sociopolitical action that these communities can articulate in Chile (Choi & González Lustig, 2024; Clavijo Fonseca & Mora Aguilar, 2022; Copa Uyuni & Poma Calle, 2017). Thus, K-pop fandom is neither a trivial hobby nor a lightweight identity, but a space of cultural mediation where affect, sociability, materiality, learning, consumption, and public participation converge.

This point is central to the present study. If K-pop fandom is a complex cultural community—material, affective, transnational, and increasingly platform-mediated—then its media representation does not fall upon a simple or self-referential object. When broadcast television selects certain signs of fandom—such as bodily appearance, choreographies, or collective enthusiasm—it does not merely describe a visible phenomenon; it publicly reorganizes its intelligibility (Hall, 1997; Williams, 1974).

2.2. MEDIA REPRESENTATION, STEREOTYPES, AND OTHERNESS

Representation theory starts from a central premise: the media do not reflect reality neutrally; they produce meaning by classifying, hierarchizing, and rendering difference recognizable (Hall, 1997). Along the same lines, Martín-Barbero (1987) showed that the media do not only transmit content, but culturally mediate social experience. From this perspective, analyzing the coverage of K-pop fandom involves examining not only what is said about it, but also under which keys it is translated and which conditions of legibility are imposed on it.

This view dialogues with the notion of framing, insofar as news coverage does not merely display facts, but organizes them under certain interpretive keys (Brüggemann & D'Angelo, 2018; D'Angelo, 2019; Entman, 1993). To this is added the notion of social representations, which makes it possible to understand how the media render the unknown familiar through shared categories that facilitate intelligibility, but can also reduce the cultural complexity of the phenomenon (Howarth, 2006; Moscovici, 1984; Sammut et al., 2015).

At this point, the discussion of the stereotype becomes central. For Hall (1997), stereotyping "reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference'" (p. 258), and operates most forcefully where there are gross inequalities of power. Said (1978/2008), in turn, argued that the Orient has served for Europe to define itself in contrast to its image, its idea, its personality, and its experience (p. 20), so that the representation of the culturally foreign tends to be organized through matrices of exoticization and distance that turn the other into an object of curiosity rather than an interlocutor. Recent research completes this picture: Santoniccolo et al. (2023) systematize the evidence on how simplified media representations consolidate stereotypes, while Arendt (2023) and Ward and Grower (2020) show that even apparently neutral representations can reinforce prejudice through the selective repetition of a few visible signs.

Applied to K-pop, this problem acquires particular relevance. Media coverage can broaden the visibility of fandom and, at the same time, reduce it to a few recognizable marks, such as striking hairstyles, colorful outfits, choreographies, or collective emotionality. Within this framework, representation oscillates between recognition and exoticization, in a movement that Min (2021) has described for the Chilean case as an everyday orientalism in which fans of Asian popular culture are considered "weird" and "outsiders" (p. 799), and which homogenizes the Asian under categories of cultural distance. The media otherness of K-pop, therefore, is not abstract, but situated in concrete Latin American contexts, as developed below.

Broadcast television occupies a central place in this production of otherness because it does not only name, but also visualizes. The televisual experience is organized through image, sound, rhythm, and narrative continuity, so that the representational problem is not played out only in verbal discourse, but also in the selection of shots, the repetition of scenes, the use of music, editing, and voice-over (Williams, 1974). Along these lines, the language of television news is built through operations of selection, hierarchization, and dramatization, which can reinforce forms of simplification and spectacularization (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2015).

The media representation of K-pop fandom cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between positive and negative images. What is central is to examine which visual and narrative repertoires make it recognizable and which dimensions are subordinated. Thus, a television piece may not be openly derogatory and still produce an impoverished image if it privileges the bodily surface, spectacularity, or curiosity over its cultural, material, and organizational fabrics. In Hall's (1997) terms, fixing difference in a few traits already constitutes an operation of stereotyping, even without hostility; and the exoticization described by Said (1978/2008) does not require caricature, but merely the conversion of the other into an object of curiosity. This is why it is more pertinent to speak of soft exoticization, juvenilization, or trivialization than of explicit stigmatization.

From this perspective, media otherness should not be understood as an intrinsic quality of the phenomenon, but as the result of operations of visual and narrative selection that make certain differences more visible, legible, and relevant than others (Arendt, 2023; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). In this process, K-pop fandom does not simply appear as a given cultural community, but as a journalistic object translated through frames that privilege some traits and relegate others. Thus, its recognition in the news space depends on forms of representation that make it comprehensible to generalist audiences, but that can also condition its cultural legitimacy and the terms in which that difference circulates publicly (Arendt, 2023; Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

2.3. K-POP, TRANSNATIONAL CIRCULATION, AND CULTURAL PREJUDICE

K-pop is part of a broader process of transnational circulation of South Korean culture, known as Hallyu or the Korean Wave. Jin (2016) has characterized its most recent phase—the New Korean Wave—as the result of the convergence between state policies of cultural promotion, entertainment conglomerates, and digital social networks, which amplify the global circulation of South Korean dramas, cinema, and popular music. This expansion is also inscribed in the transnational reconfiguration of television and audiovisual markets described by Chalaby (2005), in which content flows exceed national territories and articulate geocultural markets. Its global deployment, however, cannot be understood as the simple displacement of a musical product from an emitting center toward peripheral audiences: Jenkins et al. (2013) have shown that the

contemporary circulation of content depends on the dissemination and resignification work of users themselves, and Han (2017) documented, for Latin America, how fan communities localize K-pop through practices of translation and digital mediation. In this sense, K-pop does not circulate as a passive import, but as a cultural form appropriated, reinterpreted, and reinscribed in situated youth fabrics.

In Latin America, this circulation has given rise both to cultural appropriations and to forms of learning, sociability, and participation that exceed the logic of a passing fashion: López Rocha (2022) documented the diversification of Korean cultural consumption among young Mexicans through language learning, Valerio-Ramos and Hernández-López (2023) observed effects of interaction within the K-pop community on foreign language learning, and Choi and González Lustig (2024) analyzed the forms of cultural citizenship and sociopolitical action articulated by the Chilean fandom. Thus, K-pop operates in the region as a complex cultural mediation rather than as youth consumption without social density.

Nevertheless, the expansion of K-pop has not eliminated readings that codify it as otherness. In the Peruvian case, transcultural fandoms are configured in "fanscapes" traversed by negotiations, frictions, and inequalities, and not only by affinity or enthusiasm (Yoon & Labarta Garcia, 2024). In Chile, the reception of K-pop is also inscribed in a horizon where the Asian can be read through categories of homogenization, exoticization, and estrangement (Min, 2021). Something similar is observed in Colombia, where fans tend to be perceived as strange or deviant subjects with respect to the dominant cultural norm (Clavijo Fonseca & Mora Aguilar, 2022). In this way, the global reach of K-pop does not by itself guarantee cultural legitimacy; it coexists with local forms of prejudice and suspicion.

Precisely for this reason, the transnational circulation of K-pop makes media analysis especially relevant. When broadcast television addresses the phenomenon without contextualizing its origin, its circuits of circulation, or the internal diversity of its fandom, it tends to fix it as a striking difference rather than as a situated cultural practice. In this displacement, the global reach of K-pop functions as an argument for newsworthiness, but not necessarily as a gateway to its cultural and historical complexity (Hall, 1997;

Martín-Barbero, 1987). What becomes visible, then, is not so much a dense cultural community as a mediatically simplified version of it, condensed into quick signs of recognition and otherness.

From this perspective, exoticization should not be understood only as a hostile or caricatured representation. It can also operate through apparently neutral, curious, or festive formulas that broaden the visibility of the phenomenon but limit its comprehension by reducing it to a few recognizable traits (Hall, 1997; Min, 2021; Said, 1978/2008). In the case of K-pop, this means that a piece of coverage can make it visible in the news space and, at the same time, translate it under keys that reinforce its condition as a youthful, striking, and culturally under-explained difference.

3. METHODOS

The study was developed on the basis of a mixed-methods design with a qualitative predominance, suitable for examining an object whose relevance lies not only in the frequency of certain traits, but in the way these are articulated audiovisually and narratively to construct a public image of K-pop fandom. Within this framework, the quantitative dimension fulfilled a descriptive and corpus-systematizing function, while the qualitative dimension carried the analytical weight, making it possible to interpret how broadcast television renders this phenomenon intelligible to generalist audiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014).

Methodologically, the work relied on content analysis, understood both as a systematic technique for describing messages and as a strategy for interpreting configurations of meaning present in media texts (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017; Schreier, 2012). This dual orientation was pertinent because the interest lay not only in identifying which elements appeared in the pieces, but in understanding how those elements were hierarchized to construct K-pop fandom mediatically.

The corpus consisted of 30 audiovisual pieces aired between 2017 and 2024 on newscasts and news programs of TVN, Mega, Canal 13, and Chilevisión. The selection was purposive and non-probabilistic, prioritizing pieces in which K-pop, its artists, or its followers occupied a central place in the narrative. The time window was defined in light

of the trajectory of the phenomenon itself: 2017 marks an inflection in the global visibility of K-pop—with the irruption of BTS in Western award shows and markets—and the beginning of a more sustained presence of the genre on the Chilean news agenda, while 2024 corresponds to the close of corpus collection. The period thus makes it possible to observe the coverage once K-pop was already circulating as a newsworthy phenomenon on broadcast television. Thematically, the corpus comprised explanatory pieces on the phenomenon and its fan communities in Chile (12 pieces), coverage of concerts, festivals, and mass events—artist arrivals, cancellations, and programming milestones—(9), pieces centered on BTS as a global celebrity, including three on the band's hiatus due to its members' military service (6), and pieces on Korean culture and inter-Korean relations (3). The unit of analysis was each report, understood as a relatively autonomous piece, with voice-over, image selection, use of music, interviews, and a recognizable narrative structure (Casetti & Di Chio, 1999; Rose, 2016).

Observation was carried out using an analysis matrix constructed in a deductive-inductive manner. It was organized into four dimensions: bodily marking and aesthetics of difference, fan performativity, materiality, and cultural-audiovisual contextualization. From these, seven variables were defined: hair color, haircut, people dancing, representative objects, vivid colors, K-pop music, and allusion to Korean culture (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2012).

Table 1. Analytical variables and interpretive function of the matrix

Variable	Dimension observed	Main indicator	Analytical function
Hair color	Bodily markers	Dyed or chromatically striking hair	To observe whether the fan look operates as an immediate index of difference.
Haircut	Bodily markers	Bangs, straight hair, or cuts associated with idols	To identify bodily stylization as a sign of belonging.
People dancing	Performativity	Choreographies, covers, group movement, and euphoric gestures	To measure the weight of performance in the news construction of fandom.
Representative fandom objects	Fan materiality	Lightsticks, albums, photocards, plush toys, and merchandising	To assess whether the material culture of fandom appears as part of the narrative.
Vivid colors	Audiovisual aesthetics	Chromatic saturation in clothing, lights, set design, and supporting footage	To identify whether the coverage emphasizes the striking character of the phenomenon.
K-pop music	Ambience / musical explanation	Songs, fragments, mentions of groups or repertoires	To distinguish whether the music contextualizes the phenomenon or merely sets the mood of the piece.
Allusion to Korean culture	Cultural contextualization	Language, food, customs, and references to Hallyu	To assess the cultural depth with which the phenomenon is presented.

Source: The authors.

Table 1 synthesizes these variables, their indicators, and the analytical function each fulfills within the matrix.

The first dimension included the variables hair color, haircut, and vivid colors, since the literature on visual representation and subcultures has shown that the body, color, and style operate as semiotic resources of differentiation and recognition (Hebdige, 1979; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Rose, 2016; Thornton, 1995). In the case of K-pop, these bodily and chromatic repertoires are especially pertinent, because they constitute visible marks that television can capture and convert into immediate indexes of identification (Quiñones Hernández, 2022; Villegas et al., 2023).

The second dimension corresponded to fan performativity and was operationalized through the variable people dancing. Its inclusion responds to the fact that fan belonging is expressed not only through discourse, but also through performative and bodily practices that make the community visible (Gray et al., 2007; Han, 2017; Jenkins, 1992).

In K-pop, choreographies, covers, and shared gestures occupy a central place, while, from the logic of television, group movement contributes dynamism, rhythm, and visual intensity.

The third dimension was linked to materiality and was captured through the variable representative objects. Recent literature has shown that albums, photocards, lightsticks, plush toys, and merchandising are not secondary accessories, but objects charged with affective, symbolic, and identity value within fan communities (Aranda et al., 2013; Sandvoss, 2005; Villegas et al., 2023). Recording their presence made it possible to assess whether television represented fandom as a materially organized community or relegated this dimension to a secondary place.

The fourth dimension, relating to cultural and audiovisual contextualization, was operationalized through the variables K-pop music and allusion to Korean culture. The inclusion of music is justified because sound actively participates in the construction of audiovisual meaning and in the organization of the rhythm, ambience, and intelligibility of the pieces (Casetti & Di Chio, 1999; van Leeuwen, 2025). For its part, the allusion to Korean culture made it possible to assess the degree of contextualization of the phenomenon, given that the literature on Hallyu and transcultural fandom has shown that K-pop cannot be fully understood if separated from its cultural frameworks, its circuits of circulation, and its local mediations (Han, 2017; Jin, 2016; López Rocha, 2022; Min, 2021).

Each variable was coded using an ordinal intensity scale—high, medium, low, or none—in order to capture not only its presence, but also its relative weight within each piece. This decision responded to the fact that, in audiovisual analysis, the mere appearance of a trait does not always account for its narrative or visual relevance; its centrality, recurrence, and prominence within the editing also matter (Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017; Rose, 2016). Together with the ordinal coding, analytical notes were prepared for each piece, which made it possible to complement the descriptive record with observations on visual repetitions, narrative displacements, and modes of contextualization (Bardin, 1991; Schreier, 2012).

To strengthen the consistency of the instrument, the matrix was subjected to a pilot test prior to definitive coding. An intercoder reliability procedure was then applied, in which a second person coded part of the corpus with the same matrix and the same instructions. The level of agreement was estimated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, recommended for categorical variables because it corrects for chance agreement (Cohen, 1960; Lombard et al., 2002; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The analysis reached a value of $\kappa = 0.89$, indicating a substantial / almost perfect level of agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

The procedure was carried out in two phases. In the first, the descriptive coding of the corpus was performed, recording the intensity of each variable. In the second, the qualitative notes were comparatively re-read and again contrasted with the pieces in order to identify broader operations of representation, such as embodiment, the centrality of performance, the secondarization of fan materiality, ambient musicalization, and weak cultural contextualization (Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2012).

4. RESULTS

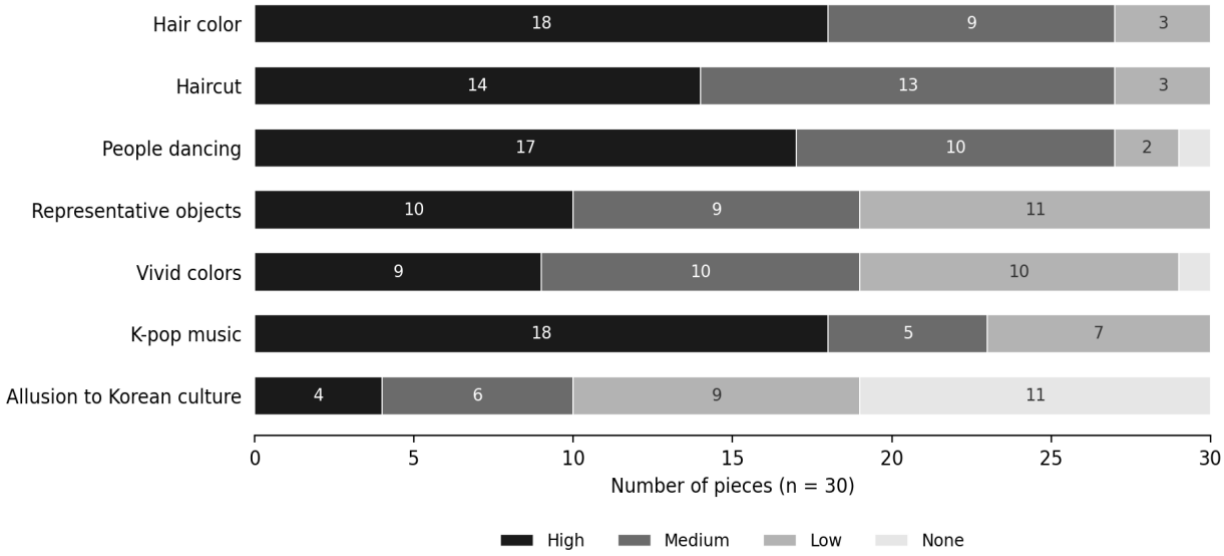
4.1. FROM THE DESCRIPTIVE RECORD TO THE BODILY VISIBILITY OF FANDOM

Table 2. Distribution of intensities across corpus variables (n = 30)

Variable	High	Medium	Low	None
Hair color	18	9	3	0
Haircut	14	13	3	0
People dancing	17	10	2	1
Representative objects	10	9	11	0
Vivid colors	9	10	10	1
K-pop music	18	5	7	0
Allusion to Korean culture	4	6	9	11

Source: The authors.

Figure 1. Distribution of intensities by analytical variable (n = 30)



Source: The authors.

Table 2 and Figure 1 show a clear pattern: the most intense indicators are those linked to the body and performance. Hair color and haircut, together with the presence of people dancing, concentrate most of the high and medium intensities, to which K-pop music is added. In contrast, allusion to Korean culture shows a much lower centrality. Taken together, this distribution suggests that the coverage relies above all on elements that are quickly visible and recognizable on screen, such as hairstyles, choreographies, collective movement, and sound ambience.

The coding notes reinforce this tendency. They repeatedly record observations about striking hair, bangs, imitations of the *idol* style, and dance scenes repeated throughout the pieces. This makes it possible to state that television does not first represent *fandom* as an organized cultural community, but as a bodily visible difference. It becomes recognizable, above all, through what the body displays and through the way that body moves in front of the camera.

The secondary place of other variables helps refine this reading. Representative objects appear with less centrality, while vivid colors are distributed more evenly across high, medium, and low intensity. In analytical terms, this shifts the focus from material and organizational culture toward its most visible public appearance. The coverage privileges what offers dynamism and can quickly be converted into supporting footage.

It is worth noting that clothing, although it did not constitute an independent variable, was recorded transversally in the coding notes: fans appear recreating their idols' outfits or wearing band merchandising, suggesting that the stylistic dimension of dress operates in the coverage as an extension of bodily marking rather than as an autonomous trait.

This pattern constitutes the empirical basis of an embodiment of fandom. Broadcast television makes K-pop visible through a visual economy centered on the body, performance, and immediate recognizability, leaving a denser explanation of the phenomenon in the background.

4.2. RECURRENT QUALITATIVE OPERATIONS IN THE COVERAGE

Table 3. Qualitative operations identified in the coding notes

Qualitative operation	Indicators involved	Recurrent evidence in the notes	Narrative function	Representational effect
Embodiment of fandom	Hair and haircut	Hairstyles, bangs, and looks associated with idols are emphasized	Makes the group identifiable through quick bodily marks	Fandom appears as visible difference rather than as a cultural community
Festive staging	Dance and group shots	Scenes of choreographies, contests, and collective enthusiasm are repeated	Contributes dynamism and televisual spectacularity	Reinforces a playful, youthful reading of the phenomenon
Secondary materiality	Representative objects	Merch, lightsticks, or albums appear once or twice or in the background	Reduces the time devoted to fan material culture	Weakens the image of fandom as an expert, organized community
Ambient musicalization	K-pop music	Songs function as background, repetition, or editing support	Facilitates immediate recognition of groups or idols	The music identifies, but does not always contextualize
Weak cultural contextualization	Allusion to Korean culture	Language, food, or traditions appear at low or null levels in much of the corpus	Keeps the cultural context outside the center of the narrative	Favors a soft exoticization and a partial understanding of the phenomenon

Source: The authors.

The re-reading of the coding notes made it possible to identify five recurrent qualitative operations: embodiment of fandom, festive staging, secondary materiality, ambient musicalization, and weak cultural contextualization. Taken together, these operations show that television coverage organizes *fandom* as a visible, dynamic, and easily recognizable difference, but not as a cultural community explained in depth.

The first three operations reinforce this logic. The insistence on hairstyles, looks, and bodily traits identifiable through quick marks; the repetition of scenes of dancing and collective enthusiasm turns it into an audiovisual spectacle; and the secondary presence of objects weakens its image as a materially organized community. To these are added music that tends to function as background rather than as explanation, and scarce cultural contextualization, in which references to Korean culture occupy a peripheral place.

This logic can also be observed in the textual dimension of the pieces. The corpus headlines systematically resort to a hyperbolic lexicon of overflow to name the phenomenon: K-pop “takes over” (“se apodera”) Santiago or the schools of La Pintana, “sweeps” (“arrasa”) across Chile, “causes a sensation” (“hace furor”) among Chilean Twitter users, and constitutes a “Korean revolution”, while fans “arrive en masse” or are described as an “army”. These formulas condense the magnitude of the phenomenon into images of irruption and overflow that reinforce its newsworthiness, but at the same time fix it as a striking difference rather than as a sustained cultural practice.

In this sense, the simplification of fandom does not necessarily depend on derogatory treatment. The coverage can be curious, festive, or even admiring and still produce a reduced image. The problem lies not only in the presence of certain signs, but in their hierarchization: a few scenes and visual marks end up condensing the entire intelligibility of the phenomenon. Thus, the descriptive matrix functions as a starting point, but the interpretation is played out in the articulation between data and qualitative notes.

4.3. WEAK CULTURAL CONTEXTUALIZATION AND SOFT EXOTICIZATION

Table 4. Relationship between descriptive tendencies and qualitative reading

Empirical axis	Observed tendency	Interpretive reading
Bodily markers	Hair, haircut, and dance concentrate most of the high and medium intensities	Television recognizes fandom through the body and performance
Fan materiality	Representative objects do not dominate the corpus and frequently remain in the background	Part of the material culture and expert knowledge of fandom is rendered invisible
Music and ambience	Music has a high presence, but its use tends to be atmospheric or repetitive	K-pop becomes sonically recognizable, though not always explained
Cultural contextualization	Allusions to Korean culture frequently appear at low or null levels	Fandom is visible, but culturally under-explained

Source: The authors.

Table 4 clearly shows the main limit of the coverage: low cultural contextualization. In most of the corpus, fandom appears on screen with few references to the language, culture, or broader frameworks of K-pop. This weakness is not corrected by the presence of music, since it tends to function more as ambience or editing reinforcement than as an explanatory resource. Thus, the phenomenon becomes recognizable, but not necessarily understood in its cultural complexity. The coding notes illustrate this pattern: in the coverage of the K-pop awards, for example, the Korean language appears only once while the piece concentrates on the aesthetics of the groups; and in the piece on the cancellation of the Music Bank festival, the fan community is represented by the same dance clip repeated throughout the entire piece.

When these results are cross-referenced, a logic of soft exoticization emerges more clearly. The coverage does not openly ridicule fandom, but it does maintain it as a striking, visually effective, and culturally under-explained difference. The Korean appears more as a mark of singularity than as a historical, industrial, or social context. In this sense, the visibility of the phenomenon is constructed through a narrow repertoire of signs—body, performance, music, and some partial references—that does not manage to develop its full cultural depth.

The consequence is an ambivalent representation. On the one hand, television broadens the visibility of the phenomenon and recognizes its power to convene. On the other,

that same visibility is organized under a logic that privileges immediate recognizability over contextualization, producing a simplified image of the phenomenon.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results support the claim that Chilean broadcast television constructs K-pop *fandom* through a logic of selective visibilization, thereby responding to the three objectives of the study. Regarding the first, the visual and performative markers privileged by the coverage are hair color and haircut, dance, and music, which concentrate the highest intensities in the corpus. In relation to the second, the frames identified—embodiment, festive staging, secondary materiality, and ambient musicalization—render fandom intelligible as a visible, dynamic difference rather than as an organized cultural community. As for the third, cultural contextualization turns out to be the weakest dimension of the coverage, with allusions to Korean culture that are mostly low or null. This set of findings dialogues with representation theory by showing that the media not only make a phenomenon visible, but render it intelligible through operations of selection, hierarchization, and public translation (Hall, 1997; Martín-Barbero, 1987).

From this perspective, the coverage neither denies the existence of fandom nor expels it from the news space. On the contrary, it installs it as a visible and recognizable cultural phenomenon. However, that visibility is constructed through a relatively narrow repertoire of signs that favors its reading as a bodily, performative, and emotional difference. On this point, the results dialogue with recent works that have shown that K-pop fandom constitutes a transnational, material, and affective community, sustained by repertoires of participation, objects, knowledge, and digital mediations that far exceed its spectacular dimension (Han, 2017; James, 2025; Yoon & Labarta Garcia, 2024). Broadcast television, by contrast, tends to condense that complexity into quick signs of recognition.

The secondarization of representative fandom objects reinforces this interpretation. If recent literature has shown that albums, photocards, lightsticks, and merchandising form part of the affective and identity economy of these communities (Villegas et al., 2023), their low centrality in the coverage suggests that television privileges what is

most dynamic and visually effective. In this way, fandom appears less as a materially organized cultural community than as a scene of bodies, movements, and emotions easily translatable into televisual language.

The centrality of dance and festive staging is also significant. Performance occupies a central place in K-pop fan culture, but in television coverage it tends to appear isolated from the broader fabrics of translation, circulation, and appropriation that sustain it (Han, 2017; Choi & González Lustig, 2024). Thus, dance functions as a visual condensation of the phenomenon: it makes the narrative attractive, organizes its rhythm, and facilitates newsworthiness, but at the same time it compresses the complexity of fandom into a form of bodily display that is immediately legible.

The weakness of cultural contextualization is probably the most relevant finding of the study. If K-pop has been described as a complex cultural mediation, articulated by cultural industries, platforms, and local repertoires of appropriation (Jin, 2016; López Rocha, 2022), the results show that Chilean broadcast television tends to present the phenomenon with few references to its cultural and historical frameworks. This distance between the complexity of the object and its media translation suggests that the coverage makes fandom visible, but not necessarily comprehensible in all its transnational and cultural density.

At this point, the discussion of otherness proves especially useful. The combination of strong embodiment, ambient musicalization, and weak contextualization makes it possible to think of the coverage not so much in terms of explicit stigmatization as of soft exoticization. That is, a form of representation in which fandom appears as a striking, visually effective, and culturally under-explained difference (Min, 2021). In this sense, the findings dialogue with recent studies on media otherness which warn that difference is produced not only through open hostility, but also through visual and narrative operations that make certain traits more legible than others (Arendt, 2023; Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

The study also makes it possible to qualify overly optimistic views of mere media visibility. Appearing on television is not necessarily equivalent to being represented in

the complexity that the literature itself attributes to these communities. Although K-pop fandom can articulate forms of cultural citizenship, sociopolitical action, and transnational belonging (Choi & González Lustig, 2024), these dimensions are scarcely thematized in the corpus analyzed. Television recognizes that the phenomenon exists and mobilizes audiences, but leaves out of focus much of its organizational capacities, its repertoires of participation, and its cultural depth.

In broader terms, the contribution of the article lies in showing that the media representation of K-pop fandom on broadcast television cannot be read solely in terms of presence or absence, nor as a simple opposition between positive and negative valuation. What is decisive is to observe how the coverage produces a media figure of fandom through operations of selection and hierarchization that broaden its visibility while reducing part of its complexity. In this sense, the study contributes to work on fandom, media representation, and transnational circulation by showing that the cultural legitimacy of these communities is played out not only in their own practices, but also in the ways generalist media translate them for broad publics.

The article does, however, present some limitations. The corpus was purposive and non-probabilistic, so the results cannot be extrapolated to all television coverage of K-pop in Chile. Likewise, the study focused on news pieces and not on audience reception, so it does not establish how these frames are appropriated, discussed, or resisted by audiences. Similarly, the matrix did not include specific variables on the profile of the protagonists and the sources of each piece, or on clothing as an autonomous trait—dimensions that were recorded only transversally in the coding notes and that future instruments should systematize. Even so, it offers a consistent basis for discussing the way broadcast television negotiates the boundaries between cultural difference, youth legitimacy, and public recognition.

On this basis, future research could compare this televisual representation with that produced by digital media or by fans themselves, incorporate reception techniques to contrast the coverage with forms of fan self-identification, and extend this approach to other transnational youth subcultures. Taken together, these findings support the conclusion that Chilean broadcast television not only reports on K-pop *fandom*, but

actively participates in the production of its conditions of public intelligibility. In doing so, it broadens its visibility, but also simplifies it: it reorganizes it under narrative formulas that privilege its most recognizable dimension over its cultural complexity. Between visibility and simplification is where much of the public legitimacy of these communities is ultimately at stake.

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7. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

	Author 1	**Author 2**	**Author 3**
Conceptualization	X	X	X
Data curation	X	X	X
Formal analysis	X	X	X
Investigation	X		X
Methodology			X
Supervision			X
Validation			X
Visualization	X	X	X
Writing - Draft	X	X	X
Writing – Review & editing			X

8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

9. DECLARATION ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence tools were used solely as support for reviewing the wording and style of the manuscript.

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