

Fan Labour in Closed Online Spaces: Admin Practices and Dynamics in the Enhypen WhatsApp Fandom

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in media technology have enabled K-pop fans to form active online communities where they express loyalty through fan labour by creating content, organizing projects, and investing personal resources to support their idols. This study explores how WhatsApp community admins perform fan labour and sustain participation within a closed digital environment. Active K-pop fandoms that produce and share fan-made content have evolved into digital communities where fans voluntarily contribute to both idols and entertainment agencies. Using a netnographic method, this study involved four months of participatory observation in the WhatsApp community Engene Team ID (September–December 2024). Data were collected through group interactions, observations, and interviews with six active members, including admins and regular members. Results show that admins play key facilitative roles by managing information flow, coordinating fan projects, and connecting internal members with broader fandom activities through a structured system of recruitment, task division, and collaboration. While these practices are often framed as hobbies or leisure pursuits, they also reflect unpaid digital work characterized by emotional and temporal strain and a desire for non-material recognition. By extending Jenkins' participatory culture theory and applying Fuchs' concept of digital work to closed social media spaces, this study demonstrates how collaborative fan labour creates structured roles and shared responsibilities that sustain the fandom ecosystem and blur the boundaries between leisure and labour. Future studies could examine how gendered expectations and exploitation influence leadership and recognition in fandom communities.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of media technology and the entertainment industry has facilitated the proliferation of groups within digital spaces, particularly among individuals who share common cultural and affective interests, such as fan communities. Digital media platforms now enable fans to interact, exchange ideas, and co-create meanings around shared symbols, narratives, and idols, fostering a sense of belonging that transcends geographical boundaries (Yoon, 2022). These online environments not only strengthen interpersonal connections among fans but also provide spaces for identity expression, collaboration, and participatory cultural production (Keith, 2023).

Many K-pop fans perceive it as their collective responsibility to support their favorite idol groups (Amali & Putri, 2025), viewing such efforts as a form of reciprocity for the dedication and hard work idols show their fans. This sense of mutual obligation often translates into active participation, with fans not only consuming but also voluntarily producing and circulating content, such as fan art, videos, and social media campaigns, that amplify their idols' visibility. Beyond content creation, fandoms also engage in highly organized collective actions, including large- and small-scale voting campaigns for annual music award shows in South Korea, demonstrating their commitment and coordination as a global



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fan community (Kang et al., 2019; Zhao, 2022). These contents and projects are produced using the energy, time, and even financial resources of the fans themselves, driving what is known as fan labour.

Building on the concept of participatory culture, fandom can be understood as a community grounded in emotional attachment and collective meaning, providing insight into the personal and social significance embedded in fan practices (Jenkins, 2009). Meanwhile, the concept of digital work provides a lens for understanding how fan participation functions collaboratively through cognitive, communicative, and cooperative processes (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that fan activities are not merely expressive acts of enthusiasm but also constitute coordinated and collective forms of digital labour.

Fan participation in fan labour extends beyond the passive act of consuming information or entertainment, as it embodies a deep sense of emotional investment and personal identification with the object of fandom (Livingstone, 2019). This emotional attachment transforms fans from mere spectators into active participants who contribute time, creativity, and social energy to sustaining and promoting the fandom community. Media industries or brands can strategically leverage the intense loyalty that develops within these communities to mobilize fans as co-creators and amplifiers of content, effectively turning affective commitment into productive engagement (Spence, 2014). However, such participation raises ethical concerns. When fan contributions are used without proper recognition or compensation, they risk being appropriated as free labour that benefits corporations more than the fans themselves (Stanfill & Condis, 2014).

According to data from Katadata Insight Center, Enhypen is one of the most popular K-pop groups in Indonesia (Karnita, 2022). This widespread popularity fosters strong engagement among its fandom, known as Engene, whose social media activities frequently take the form of fan labour. Within the Engene community, fan labour is expressed through various fanbase accounts, individual fan pages, and organized fan communities. The administrators of these communities play a crucial role in sustaining engagement and ensuring smooth coordination by managing member recruitment, facilitating interactions, and leading fan-driven initiatives.

The internet has facilitated easy access to content production, allowing fans to become increasingly active. This shift has created a complex dynamic of both fan empowerment and exploitation in the digital era (Wang, 2020). In a related context, research on prosumer behavior among BTS fans found that the group's agency constructs a sense of hyperreality to encourage fan participation in content creation (Nanda & Tjahjani, 2024). The concept of fan labour has also been examined through affect theory to deepen understanding of emotional investment in fandoms (Spence, 2014). Moreover, fan labour is often associated with the fandom gift economy, where creative outputs are exchanged as symbolic gestures within fan communities (Chin, 2018; Proctor, 2021).

A study of fan activism surrounding the television series *Fringe* on Twitter found that fans occupied a strategic position, enabling them to influence network decisions while simultaneously engaging in self-commmodification and digital exploitation (Guerrero-Pico, 2017). Similarly, urban youth participating in fandom activities on social media are not exempt from capitalist hegemony, as they often perform unpaid digital labour that reinforces the structures of the cultural industry (Sugihartati, 2020).

While previous studies have explored fan labour through activism, content production, and emotional engagement, most have focused on open, algorithm-driven platforms, leaving a gap in understanding how it operates in closed spaces such as WhatsApp. Unlike open environments driven by visibility and algorithms, closed platforms enable more personal and sustained interactions. WhatsApp, a social network of private chat rooms accessible only to connected users (Liew, 2020), has evolved to include features such as communities that connect multiple groups for coordinated activities. These affordances allow fans to engage and organize in more private settings, suggesting that platform openness shapes distinct communication patterns and that fan labour in closed environments warrants deeper examination.

This study extends the application of digital work and participatory culture theories by examining fan labour within a private digital environment. Empirically, it offers insights into how fandom communities on WhatsApp organize, negotiate roles, and sustain emotional bonds in closed settings, enriching our understanding of digital fandoms beyond mainstream, algorithm-driven platforms. Focusing on the WhatsApp-based Enhypen fandom community, this paper explores how admins and members engage in interactions and collaborative activities that contribute to the creation and circulation of fandom-related cultural content. Overall, this research advances discussions on digital fandom development through the lens of participatory culture within media and popular culture studies. Therefore, this study aims to examine how admins perform fan labour through communication, collaboration, and organizational practices within the WhatsApp-based fandom community.

METHOD

This study employs a netnographic approach, which combines observation and participation to explore the dynamics within the community (Kozinets, 2010). The five stages of conducting netnographic research, as outlined in Kozinets' methodology, provide a systematic framework for understanding and analyzing online communities. These

stages include Planning and Entrée, Identification and Selection, Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation, and Reporting, each serving a distinct yet interconnected function in the research process.

In the planning and entrée stage, the researcher defined the research questions, selected the social media platform, and determined the research topic (Kozinets et al., 2014). In this study, the goal is to investigate how fans engage in fan labour within the WhatsApp community Engene Team ID. During the identification and selection stage, the researcher initially chose the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) as the primary research site. However, due to difficulties obtaining informed consent and the lack of sustained user interaction, the site was deemed unsuitable. Consequently, the Engene Team ID WhatsApp community was selected as the primary research setting because its members and administrators actively interact and frequently share updates and fan-related content about ENHYPEN, providing a more consistent and observable communication environment.

During data collection, data were gathered through participatory observation, in accordance with established ethical guidelines. The researcher obtained permission from the community owner and group members before beginning the observation. Data were collected comprehensively and later filtered for relevance based on the theoretical framework. Data sources included participant observation, chat documentation, screenshots, and interviews conducted through personal WhatsApp messages. The researcher conducted daily observations, particularly during periods of high activity, and occasionally initiated conversations to stimulate interaction. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, participant anonymity and identity protection, disclosure of researcher background, and clear explanation of the study's purpose (Kozinets, 2015).

The analysis and interpretation stage involved coding the data and interpreting it using a hermeneutic approach grounded in the theoretical frameworks of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009) and digital labour (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013). The researcher categorized the findings using predefined codes, including account affiliation and online information (cognitive digital work); interaction and participation (communicative digital work and participatory culture); norms and ethics, motivation, and dynamics (cooperative digital work); labour; and other uncategorized information. Each finding included details such as date, time, content, context, and personal notes. When specific findings were unclear or difficult to interpret, the researcher contacted informants for clarification to ensure data accuracy. Data were triangulated through observation of group interactions, screenshots of digital communication, and interview transcripts.

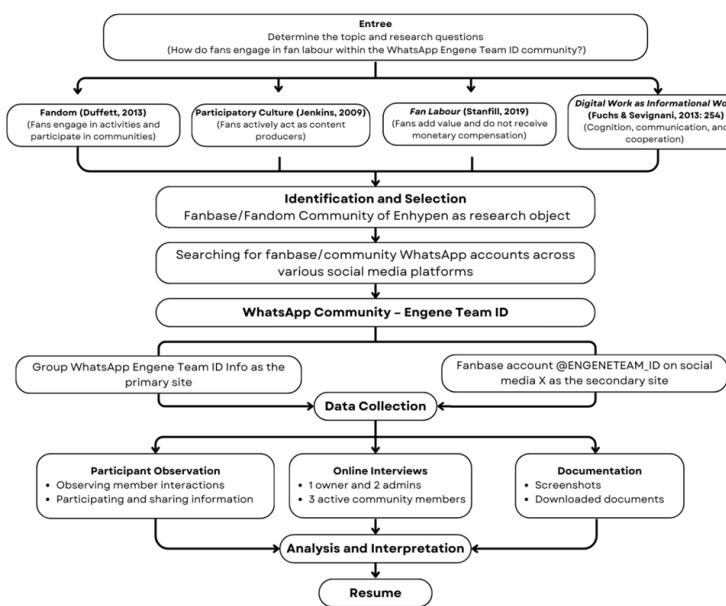


Fig.1. Research scheme (Processed by the author)

The subject of this study is the WhatsApp community *Engene Team ID*, which had over 200 members at the time of research. This community is affiliated with the ENGENETEAM_ID account on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). Data collection was carried out between September and December 2024. The WhatsApp community comprises one feature and several group chats: an *Announcements* feature and three main groups used for member interaction, *Enhypen_Ina Info*, *Fandom Game Arena*, and *Food & Drink*. This study primarily focuses on interactions within the *Enhypen_Ina Info* group, which serves as the primary research site, with the *Announcements* feature serving as a secondary site.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on two main criteria: their level of activity in the WhatsApp community and their affiliation with other fan-related social media platforms. The selection process also aimed to capture the diversity of fan engagement, including both personal and fanbase-driven participation. The research informants include O (32), the community owner; Dim (22) and Tia (16), the admins; Sal (22), a community member; and Aul (25) and Nin (37). For underage informants, the author ensured adherence to research ethics by obtaining parental consent through a formal permission letter. The author conducted interviews with six informants and actively engaged in the community by participating in various group interactions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Fans use WhatsApp communities as spaces to interact with one another and support fan activities that promote collective engagement. The use of WhatsApp on mobile devices blurs the boundaries between private and public spaces and between leisure and work activities (Liew, 2020). Fan activities, initially seen as forms of entertainment, can eventually push fans to 'work' (labour) by voluntarily engaging in actions that benefit another party: the agencies and idol groups they support.

A. Admins as Facilitators

Admins, who act as facilitators, are key in managing how information moves within the community (Jenkins et al., 2009). They ensure members can easily access and understand the information shared, helping to create a more collaborative and supportive environment. To provide community continuity, administrators engage in several activities. These activities will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

1. Voting on Fan Applications

Fans support Enhypen by participating in voting activities for both group and individual categories. Group voting typically occurs during weekly music shows and annual music award ceremonies. Voting for major yearly events normally runs from late in the year into early the following year. Since many categories in annual awards heavily weigh fan voting, participation becomes crucial. However, each event often requires fans to use multiple apps, which can be challenging. As noted by informant Dim, device limitations sometimes prevent fans from fully participating:

"I just focus on streaming, because my phone can't handle voting apps."

(Dim, Online interview via WhatsApp personal chat, October 1, 2024).

During annual music events, there is a noticeable increase in interaction and collaboration, both within the WhatsApp community and on members' personal social media accounts. In the observed period, admins and members actively encouraged daily voting through the Mnet Plus app, particularly in preparation for the 2024 MAMA Awards.

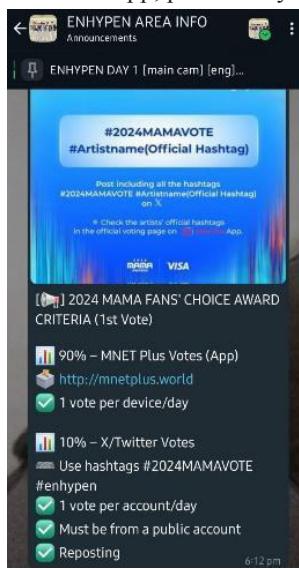


Fig.2. Voting activity in the WhatsApp community, illustrating how collective participation reflects coordinated fan labour efforts
(Source: Author documentation).

To maximize outreach, admins often used the #tagall feature via bots to alert all members, pinned voting tutorials, and consistently posted voting reminders. Community members also shared their voting proofs in the chat. Some members even used multiple accounts to increase Enhypen's chances of ranking highly in voting results. In addition to supporting the group as a whole, fans also participated in individual member voting. For example, Dim shared links to the Fanplus app to encourage voting for Jake, who had a birthday in November.



Fig.3. Voting activity for individual members, showing how fans personalize engagement while maintaining collective goals (Source: Author documentation).

On Fanplus, fans needed to watch ads (advertisements) to earn *VTs* (voting tickets), which could then be used to vote for their favorite idols. Winning individual birthday voting often results in birthday ads displayed in public spaces or fan apps, mainly in South Korea. This practice not only celebrates the idol's special day but also helps raise public visibility for both the idol and the fandom. Compared to voting for annual awards, individual member voting generated less excitement within the community. Interactions around individual voting efforts were notably quieter. This lower engagement could be attributed to the shorter voting period, the overwhelming number of concurrent voting events across different platforms, and the more demanding process of collecting *VTs*.

As a form of participatory culture, voting and streaming activities show that fans are not merely passive consumers. Instead, they actively shape new cultural practices around supporting idols and their communities (Jenkins, 2012). According to Sun (2020), activities such as streaming and voting can be classified as *unskilled labor*, in which any fan with internet access and a smartphone can participate. Through these collective efforts, fans build collaborations that result in tangible information flows and digital labour outputs (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013).

The activities of sharing information and coordinating voting strategies demonstrate systematic collaboration among community members within a fandom. This reflects the idea that fans work collaboratively to solve problems (Jenkins et al., 2009). Similarly, the strong commitment fans have toward their community often leads to significant cooperation to achieve shared goals (Baym, 2015; Recuero et al., 2012). These findings also align with the concept of cooperation in digital work theory, where fans collaborate to achieve objectives—in this case, promoting Enhypen through voting efforts to a broader public audience (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013). At the same time, these dynamics illustrate how fandom coordination mirrors managerial forms of digital labour, blurring the boundaries between voluntary collaboration and organizational control.

2. Giveaway Strategies for Enhancing Fan Participation

To encourage engagement, ENGENE TEAM ID admins held giveaways for WhatsApp and X followers. These giveaways offered a range of prizes, including e-wallet credits and official and unofficial merchandise for fans who actively participated in voting efforts supporting Enhypen during the 2024 MAMA Awards.

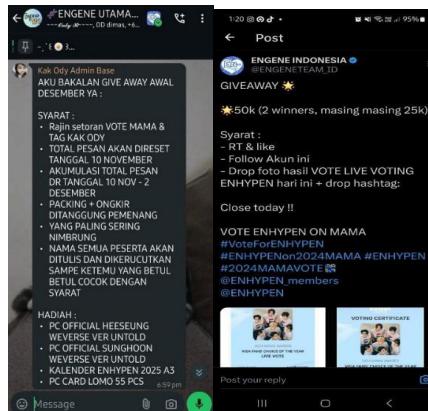


Fig.4. Giveaway strategy for active voters, demonstrating how admins motivate participation through reward-based interaction (Source: Author documentation).

For WhatsApp community members, the rules required participants to submit screenshots as proof of their voting activity and to remain active in group chats. Admins used a bot to track member activity by message count. Meanwhile, fans on X needed to retweet and like the giveaway post, follow the @ENGENETEAM_ID account, and submit proof of voting on that day using hashtags. Hashtags play a crucial role in enhancing fan engagement and online visibility (Kim et al., 2014). Trending topics on X demonstrate the collective influence of fandoms (Recuero et al., 2012). During the 2024 MAMA Awards, hashtags such as #VoteForENHYPEN and #2024MAMAAWARDS ranked among the top K-pop trends, contributing to 10% of the Fan Choice Awards score. This coordinated hashtag uses enhanced exposure and reflects the fandom's strong mobilization power.

The giveaway strategy effectively motivated fan enthusiasm and participation. This finding aligns with the notion that fans, acting as administrators, voluntarily provide financial support through giveaways without expecting direct compensation (Galuszka & Brzozowska, 2017; Chin, 2018). The giveaways also reflect the idea of fandom performance, where fans actively engage in tasks to achieve shared goals (Duffett, 2013). Additionally, these activities embody gamification practices that not only encourage participation but also foster a sense of solidarity among fans. The use of prizes and point-based engagement transforms voluntary fan enthusiasm into structured, goal-driven collaboration—demonstrating how fan activities merge pleasure and productivity to sustain the community's collective effort.

3. Providing Updated Information and Translated Content

Based on interviews with informants, the primary motivation for both founders and members to create and join the community was to facilitate easier access to information about Enhypen. The WhatsApp community is considered a platform that simplifies access to information for fans, especially those who face limitations in accessing various social media platforms and official applications. The following are statements provided by the informants:

"So that ENGENEs who want information about Enhypen but are hindered by memory space to download applications can still find out the information, it makes it easier for them..." (Tia, online interview via personal WhatsApp chat, October 5, 2024).

"Just to make it more convenient for those who catch up on updates late." (O, online interview via personal WhatsApp chat, October 10, 2024).

To facilitate communication with fans, Enhypen actively uses various social media platforms. However, the diversity of these platforms can pose challenges for some fans, as not all have access to multiple social media accounts. This situation leads to issues related to the accessibility of information for fans.

Interviews with Sal, O, and Tia highlighted that the WhatsApp community makes it easier to access updated information about Enhypen. Sal noted that the group allows members to stay connected and obtain the latest news quickly through shared posts. At the same time, O emphasized that the announcement feature organizes information in a reader-friendly format, helping members who may have missed earlier updates. Similarly, Tia mentioned that the community assists fans who face limitations in accessing specific applications or social media platforms.

This shows that the WhatsApp community can serve as an information archive platform for fans who may have missed updates. Moreover, the personal nature of WhatsApp makes it easier for fans to access information consistently shared by the admins. These findings align with Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, which posits that fans do not merely act as consumers but also as active producers who create and share content with other fans, thereby expanding access to information. In this case, participatory culture among fans not only occurs on large social media platforms but has also developed within smaller, yet sustainable, communities.

One of the main challenges in uploading content is the language barrier, which often makes it difficult for fans to access information about Enhypen. This situation pushes the admin team to first translate the content into Indonesian before sharing it with the community. The role of admins goes beyond simply sharing information; they also act as mediators who help community members understand and connect with the content. This helps ensure that all members can easily engage with and follow Enhypen's activities.

Based on an interview with Dim, one of the admins, the translation process is conducted in stages. Since none of the admins are fluent in Korean or Japanese, they first rely on English-translated versions before adapting them into Indonesian to minimize mistranslation. When content is sourced from other translators, proper credit is given (Figure 5, left side), while the absence of attribution (Figure 5, right side) indicates translations completed independently by the admins.

The act of translating content helps improve accessibility and fosters more inclusive communication within the fan community. It also encourages interaction between fans. When admins credit outside sources, it reflects an unwritten ethical practice within fan labour, suggesting that fandoms build their own value systems based on shared internal norms (Ostrom, 2000).



Fig.5. Translated content shared by admins, reflecting fans' voluntary work in knowledge and language mediation (Source: Author documentation).

This finding aligns with the concept of fan labour, which highlights how technology enables fans to participate by reproducing and distributing content (Stanfill, 2019). Such fan-driven content helps disseminate information more widely and fosters deeper engagement within the community. Moreover, this type of fan activity benefits companies by strengthening fan networks—particularly at the local community level (Derbaix et al., 2023).

4. Crowdfunding Activities

Admins serve as facilitators, relaying information and connecting the community to broader fan initiatives, such as comeback fundraising campaigns. Often led by international fans, these efforts involve monetary contributions, necessitated by access barriers to Korean platforms like Genie, which are then coordinated by fanbases to support streaming goals.



Fig.6. Crowdfunding for a comeback project, illustrating collaborative financial labour among fandom members (Source: Author documentation).

Donated funds are allocated to purchase streaming passes, which are then distributed to volunteer streamers. Within the WhatsApp community, admins serve as intermediaries between the organizing fan base and group members. As illustrated in Figure 6, O shared a QR code and bank account details for donations, using the tagging feature to notify all members. Several members, including the author, acknowledged the post through reactions.

This fundraising effort illustrates the solidarity and dedication that fans demonstrate toward Enhypen, aligning with the view of fandom as a form of performance in which community members actively engage in practices to achieve shared goals (Duffett, 2013). Furthermore, the admin's role as an information facilitator enables fans who might otherwise lack access to participate in supporting Enhypen's comeback. By contributing to these initiatives, fans voluntarily

invest time and financial resources without expecting monetary returns, reinforcing the idea that fan activities, though unpaid, ultimately benefit the entertainment industry (Stanfill, 2019). In this sense, the overlap between enthusiasm and labour highlights how voluntary participation in fandom simultaneously serves as a form of empowerment and a subtle mechanism of exploitation.

5. Building Relationships among Fans

To keep the group active, admins and members often interact by replying to each other's messages, sharing personal stories, and requesting permission to save each other's WhatsApp numbers. Based on an interview with Aul and Nin, both joined the WhatsApp community to find new friends who share the same interests.

When new members join, existing members usually greet them warmly and hope they will feel comfortable in the group. They also ask to exchange WhatsApp numbers and X (formerly Twitter) accounts to stay connected beyond the group. This indicates that social media plays a diverse range of roles in today's communication landscape (Triantoro & Pramana, 2024). Members aim to build connections beyond just WhatsApp, expanding their digital networks to strengthen social ties. These interactions demonstrate how the group fosters friendships and emotional support, aligning with Jenkins' concept of alternative social communities, where fandom serves as a space for deeper, more meaningful interpersonal relationships (Jenkins et al., 2009). This also shows that in today's digital age, social media serves more than just a tool for social interaction (Hidayat, 2024).

6. Community Collaboration with Other Fans

Engene Team ID is open to collaborations as a media partner to help promote fan projects to a broader audience. These projects can include member birthday events or photo frames. Fans who wish to collaborate should send a proposal via social media, which will then be reviewed by the media partner administrator. After internal discussion with other admins, they'll decide whether to approve the request.



Fig.7. Media partner activity on X, showing the interconnection between WhatsApp-based coordination and broader social media networks (Source: @ENHYPEN_INA).

"Steps: proposal, review, admin discussion, decision." (Dim, WhatsApp interview, Oct 1, 2024)

"We do media partner mostly for RTs and posting." (O, WhatsApp interview, Oct 14, 2024)

If approved, admins will either repost or produce content related to the fan event on X and distribute it within the WhatsApp group. This organized procedure demonstrates the professionalism embedded in Engene Team ID's administrative practices. This indicates that the community operates with clear collaboration systems, enabling fans to disseminate their events more effectively, even reaching smaller groups like WhatsApp. It also highlights the inclusive, open, and active nature of fan communities, where participatory culture enables fans to support one another through shared projects and content (Jenkins et al., 2009). Online communities, including fandoms, cultivate strong social ties through the exchange of resources and the provision of mutual support, mechanisms that are facilitated by their shared interests and collective identity (Baym, 2015).

B. Negotiation in Using Different Social Media

The choice of platform shapes how admins organize and share fan content, adjusting their approach to fit each platform's features. Based on the author's observation, even when the content is similar, the intensity and strategy of content publication differ across platforms. The WhatsApp group, especially the announcement channel, updates more frequently than the X fanbase account, often sharing concert fancam videos.

Tia, one of the admins, mentioned technical differences: on WhatsApp, hashtags are not a big focus, while on X, hashtags and originality are crucial to avoid being seen as copying. However, the author's observation shows that even on WhatsApp, hashtags are still used, suggesting that the format is not that different; what varies is the frequency of updates.

X demands more attention to the algorithm and visibility, while WhatsApp's private nature gives admins more flexibility. Admins often use casual language in WhatsApp, such as "gemes," "meng" (for Jungwon), or "kiyowo" (Korean for "cute"), which fits the platform's more intimate tone. This suggests that platform characteristics shape how admins communicate. WhatsApp's private, closed nature makes fans more relaxed in expressing emotions. Jenkins et al. (2009) described this as a *mode of reception* in which fans emotionally engage with idol-related content. The community becomes a space for fans to share and respond.

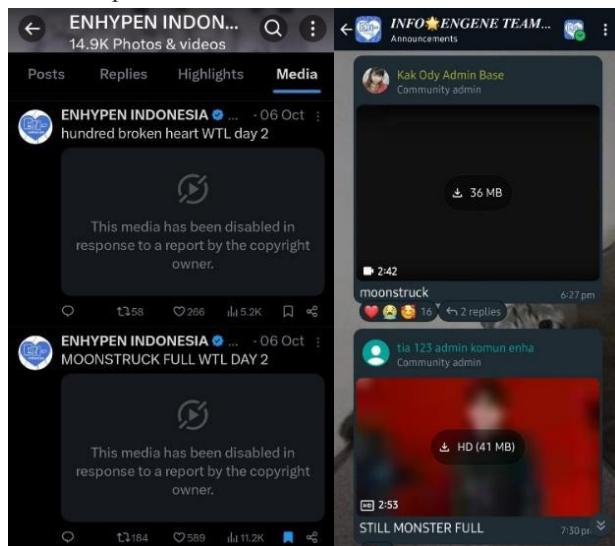


Fig.8. Copyright notice in shared content, highlighting fans' awareness of authorship and digital ethics (Source: @ENHYPEN_INA and Author documentation).

Another key difference is related to copyright. On X, concert clips (especially paid content) are often automatically blocked and removed. In contrast, on WhatsApp, admins shared the duplicate content without issues due to the platform's encryption and limited access, making it harder to detect copyright violations. Fans benefit from this by gaining free access to paid content, a common practice in K-pop fandoms. They share it within the community.

Negotiations across different social media platforms by admins reinforce participatory practices, demonstrating how platform-specific strategies shape the visibility, ethics, and sustainability of fan labour. These findings demonstrate how digital content sharing enhances fan access and participation (Duffett, 2013), aligning with the notion of participatory culture in which fans actively circulate and reproduce media to sustain communal engagement (Jenkins et al., 2009). Such fan labour simultaneously functions as unpaid promotional work, indirectly strengthening the fandom's visibility within the entertainment industry (Stanfill, 2019).

C. Admin Work System

Admins play a crucial role in sustaining online communities by facilitating communication and ensuring organizational continuity. Based on observations and interviews, this study found that admins adopt a structured, systematic approach with clearly defined, collectively agreed-upon roles. This division of responsibilities enhances coordination and task execution within the community.

1. Admin Role

The community admin structure consists of various roles, including owner, coordinator, update base admin, streaming chat group admin, community admin, rules admin, chat group admin, media partner admin, and design admin. Each admin has a specific role defined by mutual agreement.

Based on observations, the owner, O, plays a central role in maintaining the community's interaction dynamics. The owner is highly active in initiating discussions and determining topics within the community group. For example,

when the group is inactive, the owner can spark conversation by asking about members' activities or lack of participation. The owner also manages changes related to the community's identity, such as the name, profile picture, and the addition or removal of groups. O can be seen as an opinion leader in the Engene Team ID community due to their significant influence on interactions and group activities. Members also regularly ask the owner for permission before sharing information, promoting content, or leaving the group, aligning with findings on hierarchical systems in online fan communities (Zhai & Wang, 2023).

The update base admin's role involves keeping the community's channel and social media (X) up to date. The community admin helps manage activities and communication within the WhatsApp group and is actively engaged in daily interactions, though some admins only update the announcement feature. While the update task is specific, the author found that updating information is flexible, with all admins, including the owner, contributing to posting content. The streaming chat group admin monitors and manages the streaming chat.

The following roles are chat admin and rules admin. The chat admin oversees interactions within the chat group, while the rules admin ensures that all members adhere to the established guidelines. Violations typically include spam links, offensive language, and unauthorized promotions. Despite the closed nature of the WhatsApp community, admins often share links to join via fanbase accounts on social media (X). Although admins try to filter new members, *intruders*, or *goats*, as the admins call them, still manage to enter and share spam links, posing a digital security risk. When this happens, the bot deletes the message, issues a warning, and the admin removes and blocks the intruder.

The media partner admin handles collaborations with other media, communities, or fan groups for fan projects, reviews proposals before communicating with other admins for approval, and coordinates with other admins to ensure projects are executed. The design administrator creates visual content, such as community profile pictures and posters, to support the community's identity and activities.

Although each admin has distinct responsibilities, they all share the task of gathering the latest information about Enhypen according to a pre-established schedule. Each admin takes turns as the *on-duty* admin, responsible for collecting and sharing information with both the admin group and the WhatsApp community. As mentioned in an interview with Dim, the role system is flexible, allowing administrators to transfer tasks to someone who is busy. This system indicates an organized, collaborative digital work structure (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013), in which admins are not just consumers of content but also actively manage, reproduce, and distribute it to enhance Enhypen's online visibility. The strategy to address external disruptions demonstrates the admins' professionalism in maintaining the community's comfort.

2. Recruitment and Training

When selecting and onboarding new admins, the community owner applies specific criteria, including active participation, demonstrated through consistent engagement in group discussions. Adequate knowledge of Enhypen is essential to ensure accurate information sharing and prevent misinformation. Commitment and consistency are emphasized to ensure sustained involvement, while responsiveness and politeness, reflected in timely issue resolution and respectful communication, are also prioritized.

According to O, after an initial observation period, the admins discuss the candidate's suitability. Once accepted, new admins undergo a one-week training period during which existing admins provide instruction. The admin recruitment process is not publicly announced. It involves observing potential admins and discussing their suitability with other admins before making a final decision. According to interviews with Dim and Tia, they were directly recruited by the owner, O.

Admins are required to uphold community rules, including protecting its reputation, adhering to established regulations, and fulfilling assigned duties. Violations, particularly those that damage the community's image, can result in dismissal by the owner and fellow admins. For instance, a former admin was removed after fabricating an illness to seek attention, an incident that went viral on X and in the WhatsApp group, prompting corrective action to safeguard the community's integrity. O stated, "...we had to stop an admin because they lied, violating the admin rules."

From these findings, it is clear that the admin selection process is closed and based on community relationships. The recruitment, mentoring, and criteria for selecting admins, such as activity, understanding of the fandom, politeness, and commitment, demonstrate that admins consider ethical values, responsibility, and shared community values, not just individual abilities. The dismissal of admins who violate community norms reflects efforts to protect the community's credibility.

This process reflects the concept of immaterial labour, as described by Lazzarato, in which administrative work produces systems of organization and management within the community (Deamer, 2016). The training and dismissal procedures align with the view that experienced fans transmit knowledge, practices, and norms to newcomers (Bourdaa, 2022). Furthermore, the mentoring element of admin onboarding embodies the notion of participatory culture, where veteran members guide and socialize new participants into established fandom practices (Jenkins et al., 2009).

D. Community Rules

The WhatsApp community, which hosts numerous fandom activities and members, has established rules that both admins and members must follow. Rules created within a community are effective when they are clearly formulated and collectively understood (Ostrom, 2000). In this study, the owner and admins play a central role in shaping and enforcing these rules—such as guidelines for new members joining the group, sharing information, engaging in discussions, and leaving the community.

However, when specific rules or changes need to be decided, admins sometimes involve community members to ensure inclusivity and maintain participatory communication. This practice embodies the concept of collaborative problem-solving as a form of participatory culture, where fans work together to accomplish tasks and foster a shared understanding (Jenkins et al., 2009).

One activity that fosters member involvement and input is determining the feature for information dissemination, typically shared in the Announcements feature and GC UTAMA 1. Through polling, admins ask members to help select the best format for publishing information. The results showed that information should be shared only in the Announcements feature, while GC UTAMA 1 should be reserved for interaction.

To maintain a positive atmosphere, admins set rules that all members must follow, which are written in the group description. Each group within the community has its own set of rules, with the general rule emphasizing limits on discussion, a ban on discussing other idol groups, and a prohibition on offensive language that could incite conflict. The differing rules across the groups highlight that the community adapts regulations to meet the needs of its members.

Table 1. List of Prohibited Words in ENGENE UTAMA GC 1 WhatsApp Community

No	Indonesian Term	Approximate English Meaning	Type / Contextual Note
1	ajg	short for <i>anjing</i> (dog)	Common insult in Indonesian internet slang
2	ajig	variation of <i>anjing</i>	Informal derogatory slang
3	anjing	dog	Used as a strong insult or profanity
4	lu	you	Considered impolite in formal or community settings
5	gw	I / me	Informal pronoun; restricted to maintain decorum
6	dana kaget	“surprise money” link	Common phishing or spam phrase
7	gue	I / me	Informal slang similar to <i>gw</i>
8	anjg	short for <i>anjing</i>	Derogatory internet abbreviation
9	tai	feces	Harsh slang; used as profanity
10	anjink	variation of <i>anjing</i>	Derogatory expression
11	tolol	stupid / fool	Common insult
12	bjir	euphemism for <i>anjir</i>	Softer internet slang insult
13	anjir	variant of <i>anjing</i>	Milder profanity in online speech
14	gua	I / me	Informal pronoun
15	elu	you	Informal pronoun
16	klik disini	“click here”	Spam or phishing trigger phrase
17	goblok	stupid / dumb	Insulting expression
18	jnck	abbreviation of <i>anjing</i>	Vulgar shorthand
19	cok	short for <i>jancok</i>	Strong profanity from East Java dialect
20	bgst	abbreviation of <i>bangsat</i>	Derogatory insult
21	bangsat	bastard / scoundrel	Harsh insult
22	goblog	variant of <i>goblok</i>	Informal insult
23	asu	dog (Javanese)	Common local profanity
24	annying	misspelling of <i>anjing</i>	Internet euphemism
25	bajingan	bastard / rascal	Strong insult
26	anjirr	extended form of <i>anjir</i>	Emphatic slang form
27	njir	shortened from <i>anjir</i>	Softened profanity
28	sia	You (sundanese)	Considered impolite in formal or community settings

Source: Data processed by authors (2024)

A particularly notable rule in the community pertains to language and politeness. These are critical for maintaining communication comfort, so admins have created a list of *bad words* with the help of the Kanna3 bot, including terms that should not be used in group interactions. Based on the author's observations, when a member uses prohibited language, Kanna3 automatically deletes the message and issues a warning. Members are allowed up to five violations, after which Kanna3 will automatically remove them from the group. The prohibition on certain words reflects the community's commitment to ethical values.

Another rule involves new members. When a new member joins the community, Kanna3 sends a welcome message, and the new member must introduce themselves by filling out a personal data form. The introduction format includes: intro name|birth date|hometown|fandom|bias. Kanna3 records the data, so when a member's birthday comes up, Kanna3 automatically wishes them a happy birthday, followed by other members. Similarly, when a member wishes to leave the group, they must request permission from the admin or notify the group in advance. Additionally, if a member wants to promote something in the group, they must first obtain the admin's permission.

The use of bots in this context demonstrates that admins can adapt to the community's needs and leverage platform features to streamline their tasks, thereby maintaining the community's stability. This can also be seen as a form of negotiation between admins and the platform they use (Jenkins et al., 2009). These findings also align with the collaborative aspect of digital work theory, which posits that cooperation leads to the creation of a new system within a community (Fuchs, 2014). This system must be adhered to by all members to create a conducive atmosphere within the group. Admins perform both managerial and emotional labour to preserve community harmony, while technologies such as bots extend this governance through automated moderation. The coordination between human and algorithmic roles demonstrates that participatory culture is sustained not only through fan-to-fan interaction but also through technological mediation, reinforcing digital community management practices within fandom spaces.

E. Exploitation and Rewards

The fan labour activities conducted by community members and admins aim to raise Enhypen's popularity. These activities require personal resources—time, mental energy, and even money for necessities like internet data and smartphones—with financial compensation. Through observation and interviews, the author identified forms of exploitation, including undefined working hours and emotional fatigue. This is because admins actively monitor and share the latest information about Enhypen on community channels and groups every day. The intensity of this work increases when Enhypen has a busy schedule, such as during concerts, annual events, or comeback promotions. Informant Tia, who plays the role of an admin, mentioned feeling exhausted when she had to take over for the owner, O, and update information all day.

"I once replaced Kak O (owner) and had to update information all day, and it was really tiring." (Tia, Interview via personal WhatsApp chat, October 5, 2024)

Despite this, the interviews with O, Tia, and Dim revealed that they view these activities positively. They engage in these activities as hobbies and recreation, without feeling exploited.

"I see this as my 'me-time.' For example, we spend money to buy internet data to watch live streaming concerts or buy albums and photocards." (Dim, Interview via personal WhatsApp chat, October 1, 2024)

"I actually enjoy activities like sharing information. Coincidentally, I'm also the admin of the information group, so it doesn't bother me..." (Tia, Interview via personal WhatsApp chat, October 5, 2024)

"I think it's my own choice and hobby. I enjoy channeling what I know to share with other fans." (O, Interview via personal WhatsApp chat, October 14, 2024)

Dim views his admin activities as me-time or entertainment; Tia sees information-sharing as a fun activity; and Ody considers it something he does willingly as a hobby and enjoys sharing with fellow fans. This aligns with the argument that fans often engage in fandom activities as pastimes or hobbies, repeatedly performing actions related to their favorite objects and joining communities (Duffett, 2013). Even though fans enjoy what they do, this does not negate or diminish the fact that they are being exploited (Fuchs, 2014). This only indicates a shift in the structure of work. The roles fans assume without monetary compensation can also become targets of exploitative relationships (Daros, 2022). Furthermore, fan labour is not free from exploitation, which is indirectly a consequence of the competitive K-pop industry that primarily benefits entertainment agencies.

The results of the interviews above indicate that while admins perform fan labor willingly, they still expect some form of reciprocity from community members, such as acknowledging their hard work by spreading information within the community group. This was evident from the interviews with several informants:

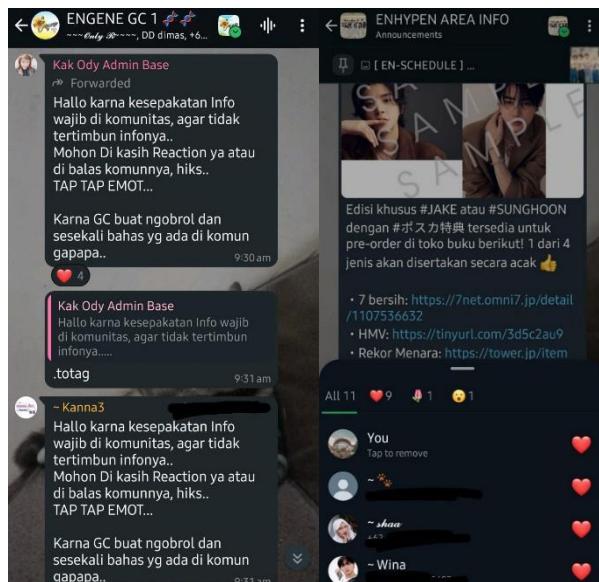


Fig.9. Admin encouraging members to react, demonstrating emotional engagement and affective labour in maintaining community interaction (Source: Author documentation).

Based on interviews with Tia and O, receiving reactions to their shared content was perceived as a meaningful form of appreciation. However, after agreeing to focus on uploading the latest information to the community's announcement channel, admins noticed fewer reactions. As a result, O encouraged members to provide reactions (often referred to as 'tap tap') in the announcement channel. The use of the word "*hiks*" in the message (Figure 9) suggests that the admin is experiencing emotional sadness due to the lack of feedback from community members on the shared content. After the notification, the author and some other community members responded by giving reactions in the announcement channel.

Previous studies indicate that fans do not expect financial benefits from their activities (Chin, 2018), a finding that is also reflected in this study. Interviews and observations reveal that the expected form of reciprocity among members is simple, such as responding in group chats or reacting to shared posts. When engagement is low, admins like Dim and O often remind members to give reactions as an easy way to show participation. They also share links to social media posts (on X) through the WhatsApp group, encouraging members to engage by retweeting, liking, or replying. For admins, these small acts of interaction—both within the WhatsApp group and across social media platforms—represent mutual respect and collective support within the community. This finding aligns with the theory of participatory culture, which emphasizes that not every fan must contribute. Still, all should believe in the freedom to participate and the importance of mutual respect (Jenkins, 2009).

Furthermore, the exchange of symbolic and social values—such as recognition, status, and interpersonal connections—rather than monetary gain, remains a central feature of participatory culture practices (Jenkins et al., 2013). When these practices occur within a more private social media environment, they further blur the boundary between leisure and digital labour. The findings reveal that in the WhatsApp fandom community, fan activities simultaneously represent forms of hobby, pleasure, participation, and subtle exploitation—illustrating the complex emotional and structural dimensions of digital fan engagement.

In addition, the findings show that administrative roles within the community are predominantly occupied by women, reflecting a gendered imbalance in role distribution. Thus, any analysis of fan labour must also consider the influence of gendered expectations that shape participation, emotional investment, and responsibility within fandom spaces. Previous studies have also found that K-pop fandoms are predominantly female, driven by marketing and promotional strategies that target women as the primary audience (Phillips & Baudinette, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that fan labour within the WhatsApp community Engene Team ID extends beyond expressions of affection for idols—it represents a complex form of digital work involving voluntary effort, emotional commitment, and the pursuit of recognition. The findings contribute to fandom studies by deepening understanding of participatory culture and digital labour in private, personalized online environments. Fandom, as this study reveals, functions not only as a site of cultural consumption but also as a form of social solidarity, in which members collaborate, coordinate, and emotionally sustain one another through shared activities.

Theoretically, this study expands Jenkins's concept of participatory culture by showing that fan engagement is not limited to public-facing, algorithm-driven platforms but also thrives within closed digital spaces such as WhatsApp. In

these spaces, fans adapt communal rituals and participatory practices to more intimate and continuous forms of interaction, suggesting that participatory culture is not dependent on visibility but on sustained social connection. Furthermore, drawing on Fuchs and Sevignani's concept of digital work, the study highlights how fans, particularly admins, create structured systems of coordination, management, and shared responsibility, forming an internal "work culture" that adds value to the fandom ecosystem.

In practice, these findings offer insights into digital community management and media industry practices. For community organizers, the study illustrates how fan groups in closed spaces can maintain engagement, distribute responsibilities, and foster belonging without relying on algorithmic exposure. For the entertainment industry, the results underscore the importance of recognizing and ethically engaging with fan communities, as their voluntary efforts significantly contribute to the creation of promotional and cultural value within the broader media landscape.

However, this study is limited to one WhatsApp fandom community, with six interview participants and a four-month observation period (September–December 2024). While the netnographic approach provided an in-depth understanding, it also carried the potential for interpretive bias due to the researcher's close involvement. Future research should extend this inquiry by comparing multiple fandoms or by focusing on a specific fan activity across different communities to capture broader variations in fan labour.

Finally, further studies should adopt a critical perspective on the intersections of fandom, labour, and exploitation, particularly regarding how fans' unpaid contributions sustain capitalist media systems. Given that K-pop fandoms remain largely female-dominated, exploring the gendered dimensions of leadership, labour division, and recognition within fan communities would provide valuable contributions to discussions on digital participation and popular culture.

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