The hyperreality world of K-Pop alternate universe (AU) fanfiction writers on X

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: hyperreality fanfiction Alternate Universe homosexual idol K-Pop	This article explores how writers of K-Pop Alternate Universe (AU) fanfiction on the platform X (formerly Twitter) construct hyperreal worlds centered on homosexual relationships between male K-Pop idols. Within these AU fanfictions, writers creatively craft alternative realities where idols are portrayed as gay, often rendering these imagined worlds more vivid and detailed than the idols' real lives. Using a qualitative method with a virtual presence phenomenology approach, the study reveals that AU writers employ various strategies—such as fake chats or tweets, images, videos, audio links, and character development—to build and sustain their hyperreal narratives. These strategies serve to both construct and reinforce the existence of homosexual AU fanfiction worlds. By leveraging social media as a storytelling platform, these writers not only produce but also amplify and disseminate their hyperreal creations, demonstrating the role of X as a powerful medium for expanding the reach and influence of fan-created realities.

Introduction

Fanfiction, or fan-created fiction, refers to narrative works written by fans that are based on characters or settings from existing works or real-life figures. This phenomenon has emerged as a result of advancements in science and technology. Today, fanfiction is widely disseminated through the internet, making it easily accessible to readers. According to Yuliana (2019), fanfiction writers often begin with a simple conceptual prompt—"What if..."—which sparks their imagination about their favorite idols. These writers then project their personal imaginations of idols' off-screen lives, which are often unknown or speculative, into fictional narratives.

Fanfiction spans a wide range of genres, one of which is AU, or Alternate Universe. As noted by Devi (2019), AU fanfiction presents a fictional world that diverges from the original reality. While the characters remain based on real idols, the setting, professions, or life circumstances portrayed are different from reality. Nevertheless, fanfiction authors tend to ground their stories in elements of real-life information accessible to the public, such as social media content, livestreams on platforms like YouTube or VLive, and other forms of interaction that allow fans to glimpse aspects of their idols' daily lives. Thus, AU fanfiction serves as a creative space where fans explore their imagination while still maintaining a connection to the recognizable aspects of their idols' realities.

Among the diverse forms of fanfiction, stories involving homosexual themes are particularly popular among K-Pop fans (Shella, 2019). These fanfictions are typically authored by women who imagine male K-Pop idols in same-sex relationships, pairing them based on perceived compatibility in terms of physical appearance, personality, or aura. For example, a tall idol with a deep voice and strong charisma is often cast as the dominant or more assertive partner in the relationship, while a shorter idol with a soft voice and a cute or cheerful image is seen as the more passive or submissive partner. These dynamics often resemble conventional heterosexual pairings but are reframed within a homosexual context.

This act of pairing idols is known as "shipping", a practice in which fans fantasize about two idols being romantically involved. Fans who engage in this are referred to as "shippers". In homosexual fanfiction, shippers often assume that the paired idols have a romantic or emotional connection off-screen, despite a lack of official confirmation. Based on such assumptions and the "what if..." premise of fanfiction, a large body of homosexual AU fanfiction has emerged, especially on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). These stories are typically published in the form of threads, comprising sequences of tweets often accompanied by up to four images or a video that enhance the storytelling.

There is no concrete evidence suggesting that the K-Pop idols portrayed in these stories are actually involved in homosexual relationships. In fact, as reported by Jogja.tribunnews.com (Fitrazana, 2020), K-Pop idols are often contractually prohibited from engaging in romantic relationships. Thus, the portrayal of idols as homosexual partners in fanfiction exists purely in the imaginative realm of writers and readers.

What is particularly noteworthy, however, is the way fanfiction writers believe in and portray these imagined relationships through their fictional works. In their narrative world, the imagined romantic pairing becomes a reality. From the perspective of Jean Baudrillard, this phenomenon can be understood as an instance of hyperreality—a condition in which fabricated realities feel more real than actual reality itself (Hidayat, 2021).

According to Baudrillard, hyperreality arises from the reproduction of signs that have no original referent, allowing the signs to develop an independent existence detached from real-world references (Natalia et al., 2019). In his work, Medhy Aginta Hidayat (2021) explains Baudrillard's view that today's reality is no longer merely described, represented, or communicated, but is instead engineered and simulated. In this simulated reality, everything is mixed, overlapping, and indistinguishable. Baudrillard argues that hyperreality involves the widespread dissemination of constructed realities that may appear even more authentic than the original. In this blurred space, facts and fabrications, authenticity and falseness, become indistinct—so much so that fabricated realities are often perceived as more "real" than actual reality. This is reflected in how AU fanfiction writers imagine K-Pop idols as homosexual individuals, constructing a reality that feels more genuine than the factual reality of these idols.

Writers further reinforce their belief through various narrative strategies. For example, they employ storytelling formats mimicking WhatsApp conversations, embed idol photos matching the storyline, and even include short video clips to create a more immersive and convincing experience. The inclusion of these multimedia elements produces simulacra—signs that gain their own existence, detached from actual referents. These signs are deliberately engineered to support the idea that the imagined homosexual identity of the idol is valid and, in some cases, perceived as more believable than real life.

This illustrates the phenomenon of hyperreality in K-Pop AU fanfiction, particularly those portraying idols as homosexuals. These stories emerge from the erasure of reference and the suspension of real-world constraints, ultimately surpassing the boundaries of reality. This makes the phenomenon not only intriguing but also relevant for further academic investigation, particularly given the limited research on this topic within the Indonesian context. Therefore, this study aims to understand and explore how hyperreal worlds are constructed by writers of homosexual K-Pop AU fanfiction, especially on the platform X (Twitter). By doing so, the research hopes to offer deeper insights into how hyperreality is represented and received within the Indonesian K-Pop fan culture.

Method

The research method applied in this study is a qualitative research method. This method is used to address the need to understand phenomena involving behavior, perception, motivation, and other factors holistically, through narrative descriptions and by utilizing various naturalistic methods (Moleong, 2010). This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore more deeply the phenomenon of hyperreality constructed by homosexual fanfiction writers, presenting it in narrative or descriptive form.

The approach used in this research is the phenomenological approach to virtual presence. Phenomenology as an approach emphasizes the understanding that reality is not only found in ordinary experience. This approach aims to explain phenomena and their meanings for individuals, as well as to understand the structure of consciousness within human experience (Hasbiansyah, 2008). Phenomenology seeks to grasp consciousness from the subjective perspective of the individuals involved. Meanwhile, virtual presence refers to an approach that does not involve direct interaction but rather uses mediated communication—especially through the internet and social media—to understand or experience presence virtually (Berger, 2020).

The data used in this study consist of primary data, obtained through interviews, and secondary data, gathered from literature sources. Primary data collection was carried out through observations of informants' accounts on X (Twitter) and in-depth interviews with 20 selected informants using the Direct Messages (DM) feature. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, in which the researcher did not strictly follow a systematically arranged and complete set of questions, but instead used a general outline of topics to be discussed. The interview process was conducted online through the X (Twitter) social media platform using the DM feature, or through private messages and voice calls via WhatsApp.

Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from sources such as books, previous research, and websites relevant to the topic of hyperreality as constructed by homosexual fanfiction writers. These secondary sources served to strengthen the primary data and provide broader contextual understanding for the study.

The sampling method used to select informants in this research is snowball sampling, in which the researcher identifies key informants who then recommend others deemed to possess relevant knowledge to complement the data. The researcher established general criteria to ensure that the information obtained would be specific and relevant. These criteria are as follows: (1) Female authors of homosexual fanfiction; (2) Homosexual fanfiction writers who are K-Pop fans (K-Popers); (3) Writers who use K-Pop idols as the main characters in their stories; (4) Writers who publish their fanfiction on the X (Twitter) platform; and (5) Writers who have published at least two stories that meet the established criteria. These criteria helped the researcher in selecting relevant informants and ensuring

that the collected data aligned with the study's objectives.

The data analysis technique used in this study is thematic data analysis as proposed by Miles and Huberman. Sugiyono (2017) explains that their model views qualitative data analysis as an interactive and ongoing process, carried out continuously until the data reach saturation. The steps in data analysis include data reduction, data display, thematic coding, verification, and conclusion drawing. The data validation technique applied in this study is source triangulation. Source triangulation is used to obtain data from different sources using the same method (Sugiyono, 2017). The locus of this study is conducted online via X (Twitter).

Results and Discussion

Strategies for constructing hyperreal worlds in homosexual AU fanfiction

In the effort to build a unique hyperreal world where fanfiction writers portray K-Pop idols as homosexual couples, several key strategies are employed. These include:

1. Using fake chats and fake tweets

To portray their stories, fanfiction writers often utilize tools such as fake chats, fake tweets, and similar media. This not only differentiates AU fanfiction from standard fanfiction but also allows writers to construct a hyperreal version of the lives of K-Pop idols featured as characters in their stories. Screenshots of fake messages or fake status updates are among the easiest and most effective ways to create a sense of realism (see Figure 1). By using these techniques, readers are more easily drawn into the story and feel a stronger emotional connection to the characters.

As previously explained, the fictionalized social media featured in these storylines accurately represents the characters of K-Pop

Figure 1. Examples of fake chats and fake tweets

idols. Through fake chats, fake tweets, and similar elements, the writers aim to depict the idols as having social media lives that mirror those of ordinary people. These fabricated interactions allow the dramatization of life events, romances, and other themes, fostering deeper reader engagement through character interaction. This enhances the believability and emotional intensity of the idols' "everyday" lives.

As noted by Rane, one of the informants in this study:

> *"Hmm, it's just to make it feel more real. You know, like with tweets—people usually want to see what someone's doing through their tweets. It's the same in AUs." (Interview with informant Rane, April 30, 2021)*

Common apps used to create fake chats include WhatsApp Mock, TalkMaker, and MeMiMessage. Meanwhile, Ugly Bird and TwitterStyleMemo are commonly used for generating fake tweets.

2. *Using photos of K-Pop idols*

Homosexual AU fanfiction often incorporates images as supplementary elements. These photos are typically embedded in the "head" tweet, the opening tweet that functions as the synopsis or introduction of the AU. Including photos serves not only to introduce the K-Pop idol characters but also adds a visual dimension to the synopsis, enhancing the aesthetic of the fanfiction's beginning. With these images, readers can more easily imagine and connect with the story's world (see Figure 2). In addition, images may also be embedded within fake chats or tweets. This enriches the reader's imagination by adding a visual element and simulates real social media patterns, where users typically share not only text updates but also images. Thus, readers experience a more authentic and immersive storyline.

As explained by Ipus, another informant in this study:

Figure 2. Example of an opening photo for a fanfiction story

"Since AUs are a mix of social media and narrative—sometimes leaning more toward social media or chat formats—the content adjusts to that style. Like using images, statuses, or tweets, for example. In social media-based AUs, images are central—especially if the AU is entirely in chat or social media format and not heavy on narration." (Interview with informant Ipus, April 29, 2021)

The use of images in fake chats or tweets is meant to simulate the experience of social media usage. However, as explained by Jean Baudrillard, hyperreality involves an excessive simulation in which the images used do not correspond to any physical reality. They are merely reproduced objects employed to construct and reinforce the hyperreal world created by homosexual AU fanfiction writers. By using such images, writers build a vivid and seemingly authentic atmosphere for readers—even though the materials used are entirely based in imagination.

The types of images used in AU fanfiction vary widely—from original or edited photos of K-Pop idols to unrelated photos such as scenery, food, or even body parts of other individuals. These images are carefully selected to fit the storyline and enhance the narrative experience.

Using videos of K-Pop idols

The use of videos is not commonly practiced by fanfiction writers, not only because it is less practical but also because it requires a significant amount of time to produce. However, despite being rare, videos can still be found in some homosexual AU fanfiction stories. This indicates that videos also serve as a tool to strengthen the imagined hyperreal world of homosexual K-Pop idols created by the writers (see Figure 3). By incorporating videos, writers can create a more dynamic and immersive experience for readers, adding an extra dimension to the narrative.

Figure 3. Example of a video in a fanfiction story

Similar to the use of photos, the use of videos is not limited in form. Videos can be self-made or sourced from existing content on the internet. Many videos are used as trailers for AU fanfiction, functioning literally as promotional tools to attract readers' interest in the stories the writers are creating or have already published. By using videos, writers can add a dynamic and interactive element to their story promotion, generating greater enthusiasm among readers. The use of AU fanfiction trailers not only provides an engaging visual preview but also strengthens the impression of the storyline and its characters. Thus, videos become an effective tool for capturing readers' attention and creating a stronger emotional connection to the stories crafted by the writers.

As expressed by two informants in this study, Estelle and Ehler:

"So that the readers can imagine it more vividly. So the AU isn't just monotonous—only fake chats and fake tweets over and over again." (Interview with informant Estelle, April 27, 2021)

"Many AUs include videos as illustrations." (Interview with informant Ehler, May 3, 2021)

Using audio (voice) links

The most commonly used audio links in constructing the hyperreal world of homosexual AU fanfiction are those shared via the Spotify app. These links typically lead to songs that are related to the storyline and are placed in the opening tweet of the story or at the beginning of the narrative itself. This practice aims to immediately immerse readers in the atmosphere intended by the author, enhancing the experience of reading the AU fanfiction (see Figure 4). With the right music, readers can connect more deeply with the characters' emotions and the storyline, creating a more engaging and immersive reading experience.

In writing homosexual AU fanfiction, authors often include audio links that match the emotional tone of the storyline. If the story depicts a sad situation, they'll add songs

Figure 4. Example of a Spotify audio link in a fanfiction story

that reflect that mood. Conversely, if the story presents a joyful moment, they'll link songs that fit the cheerful atmosphere. This practice is meant to strengthen the emotions the writer wants to convey to the readers, adding depth to the AU fanfiction reading experience. By embedding audio links that align with the story's mood, homosexual AU fanfiction writers can intensify readers' emotional engagement, drawing them closer to the characters and events portrayed. It also becomes a way for writers to express themselves and build a deeper connection between their work and the audience.

As a few informants explained when asked why they used audio links in their AU fanfiction:

"I usually do it because it's related, or just to make it more heartbreaking." (Interview with informant Estelle, April 27, 2021)

"It's for the mood, so the reader can listen to the song and really feel it more." (Interview with informant Erra, May 4, 2021)

Character emphasis in K-Pop idol roles

Emphasizing or reinforcing character traits is equally important in constructing the hyperreal world of homosexual AU fanfiction. This is because what drives the authors to write such stories is the desire to bring their imaginations of K-Pop idols to life as characters in their narratives. When asked how hyperreality is built through AU fanfiction, one informant responded:

"I use strong character traits. Like, I don't know if Taekook is real or not. So, in my story, I make Tae or JK (or both) madly in love. Once I shape their deeply devoted love story, I feel calm— it's just satisfying." (Interview with informant Estelle, April 27, 2021)

In constructing a hyperreal world around homosexuality among K-Pop idols, fanfiction writers often use their characters to reinforce or clarify the concepts they've imagined. This approach not only shapes the plot direction but also creates a stronger representation of same-sex romantic relationships between male K-Pop idols.

Through this, writers can present a more cohesive and immersive narrative for their readers, portraying their imagined world more vividly and convincingly.

The personalities shown in homosexual AU fanfiction may sometimes reflect the public personas of the idols. However, this still follows the basic principle of fanfiction: asking the question "What if…"—allowing writers to creatively explore characters. This means authors can create personalities that are completely different or even opposite to the real-life traits of the idols, resulting in unique characterizations free from the limits of direct reference. In this way, AU fanfiction becomes a space for writers to explore possibilities that might never exist in real life.

The hyperreal world of homosexual AU fanfiction writers

In the hyperreal world of homosexual AU fanfiction, the constructed reality—false, imitative, and imaginary—often appears more convincing than the original reality itself. Fanfiction writers are capable of presenting narratives so strong that they feel as if they are the real world, even surpassing actual reality. The concept of hyperreality, as defined by Baudrillard, suggests that this kind of reality emerges from something that never truly existed, yet becomes so convincing that it is perceived as real (Hidayat, 2021). In the context of AU fanfiction, this allows readers to deeply experience and understand the world crafted by the author as if it were a tangible alternative reality.

In this study's context, homosexual K-Pop AU fanfiction writers can be seen as individuals inhabiting a hyperreal world, in which they create an alternate reality where two male K-Pop idols are imagined as a homosexual couple. These narratives are built based on the writers' perceptions of the interactions between the male idols featured in their fanfiction. Within this constructed reality, they explore dynamic relationships and emotions between the characters, crafting stories that fulfill the desires and fantasies of the K-Pop fan community. Furthermore, these works reflect how popular culture like K-Pop can inspire fictional creations that represent variations in identity and sexual orientation. As some informants explained when asked why they chose particular K-Pop idol pairings for their stories:

> *"Because they're just so adorable together, and eventually, I just felt there was something different about them—we can see through their eyes. The way they treat each other is different. Yes, of course, all seven of them care for one another deeply. I'm honestly amazed at how caring they are, but these two just feel different to me." (Interview with informant Eerra, May 4, 2021)*

This statement illustrates that fanfiction writers often assume that the interactions between K-Pop idols go beyond close brotherhood and express romantic feelings. With this assumption, AU fanfiction writers create alternative realities that explore emotional depth and romantic relationships between male K-Pop idols, presenting stories that fulfill fans' desire to imagine the intimate side of their idols' lives. In their constructed worlds, they can portray touching love stories and reveal the complexity of relationships not typically visible in real life.

In this imagined world, a false reality is formed in which two male K-Pop idols are portrayed as romantic partners, thus positioning them as a homosexual couple. This depiction is likely to never occur in reality, given that homosexuality remains a taboo in both South Korea and Indonesia. This phenomenon reflects what Jean Baudrillard describes—hyperreality creates a version of reality that goes beyond actual reality and is based on something that never truly existed (Hidayat, 2021):

"But they're real to me, seriously. It might sound silly. But I wouldn't stan a couple unless they really give off a real vibe. That's why I only seriously stan Chanbaek and Taekook. The others I just see as bromance. It's like... their interactions are special. That's why I stan them—not just some fake bromance." (Interview with informant Ipus, April 29, 2021)

Even so, this fabricated reality eventually becomes a reference point for how both writers and readers of homosexual AU fanfiction perceive K-Pop idols in real life—how they interpret their interactions and even their sexual orientation. As some informants put it:

"At first, I just thought it was cute how people called them Taekook, haha. Then I tried reading some stories, and I just got more and more into it." (Interview with informant Attae, April 29, 2021)

"I'm an ARMY (BTS fandom), and I liked watching the members interact—just took it as brotherhood. But after searching and reading the AU fanfics, it kinda made me start fantasizing that they're actually real." (Interview with informant Ehler, May 3, 2021)

From these statements, it can be understood that homosexual AU fanfiction writers view real-life interactions between K-Pop idols through a lens shaped by the narratives they have created. They feel that the reality depicted in their works is reflected in the idols' daily interactions—even if there is no concrete evidence that those relationships are actually romantic. This shows how the alternative reality produced by the hyperreal world can influence both writers' and readers' perceptions and views of the real world, especially as the culture of fanfiction and the consumption of K-Pop content continue to grow.

Furthermore, the hyperreal world created by homosexual AU fanfiction writers

and disseminated through the social media platform X (Twitter) has become a new realm that is even more exciting and enjoyable than actual reality. This is evident from the opinions of several informants when asked how they would feel about writing a story that is not in the homosexual genre or that pairs their main character with a different K-Pop idol:

"No way, I'm still Taekook. Even though I sometimes read Yoonmin/Namjin, if I write, it's always Taekook. I just can't. The only one that really gives me the feels is Taekook, and the only one I feel is real is Taekook—so that's it, hahaha." (Interview with informant Erra, May 4, 2021)

"Taekook has to be with each other, they can't be with anyone else. It's not because I can't stand seeing my idol paired with a girl." (Interview with informant Estelle, April 27, 2021)

In the end, although at first these writers were surprised to discover homosexual AU fanfiction, they found that the hyperreal world created by such works had a unique appeal. Drawn in by this appeal, the writers became motivated to create their own homosexual AU fanfiction stories featuring their favorite K-Pop idols, turning it into a creative routine they could not leave behind. This phenomenon highlights how diversity in fanfiction can stimulate imagination and expand interpretations of existing works of art.

Hyperreality is a space where signs and images carry more weight than reality itself. Fanfiction writers deliberately maintain and strengthen their attachment to this hyperreal world using the five methods previously discussed, thereby constructing a world that feels real to them and to readers who believe in the portrayal of homosexuality in the K-Pop industry. Moreover, the use of the social media platform X (Twitter) as a space for their work not only enables the creation of hyperreality but also facilitates its spread

to a wider audience. This demonstrates that hyperreal worlds are not only created but also sustained and shared through digital platforms.

The images and signs used in homosexual AU fanfiction appear to go beyond real-world references, forming an alternative reality that feels more vivid to the writers. They are aware that, although the narratives they write about homosexuality in the K-Pop industry are compelling, they are most likely to remain fictional due to social realities that continue to mark homosexuality as taboo in many societies. Nevertheless, these works still serve as a medium to express thoughts, dreams, and creative exploration of themes that may be difficult to discuss openly in real-life contexts.

By creating their own hyperreal world, homosexual AU fanfiction writers can fulfill their desires and beliefs regarding same-sex romantic relationships between K-Pop idols. This proves that the artificial reality they create has surpassed the real world. Even so, they are aware that their hyperreal world is an illusion—and it is precisely within that illusion that they find more joy than in actual reality (Hidayat, 2021).

Conclusion

Based on the discussion of hyperreality constructed by homosexual AU fanfiction writers as previously explained, it can be concluded that AU fanfiction writers build a hyperreal world of K-Pop idols through stories published on X (Twitter). This hyperreal world is a false reality in which K-Pop idols are portrayed as homosexual and involved in same-sex romantic relationships. This false reality then becomes a frame of reference for fans of homosexual AU fanfiction in interpreting the interactions of idols in real life.

In constructing this hyperreal world, homosexual AU fanfiction writers employ five different methods. These are: (1) using fake chats, fake tweets, and similar formats; (2) using photos; (3) using videos; (4) using audio links; and (5) emphasizing character development. These five methods, in the context of Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, represent images and signs that overlap and become more convincing than actual reality. These signs and images are intended to create and sustain the hyperreal world of homosexual AU fanfiction writers, making the fictional world appear more real and tangible to both the writers and readers who believe in the portrayal of homosexuality among K-Pop idols.

The formation of this hyperreal world by K-Pop homosexual AU fanfiction writers through stories published on the social media platform X (Twitter) proves that hyperreality has become a common phenomenon in postmodern society, driven by technology, media, and consumerism. In such a hyperreal phenomenon, society tends to prioritize images, signs, codes, media, and technology over everyday reality, the actual reality, and is increasingly drawn to consume every form of visual reality accessible to them.

This study is limited in scope as it specifically focuses on the existence of fanfiction writers on the X (Twitter) platform and the hyperreal world they construct through their written works. Future research may explore the Alternate Universe (AU) fanfiction phenomenon from other perspectives, such as examining the social identities of homosexual AU fanfiction writers or analyzing their position within Indonesian society, which generally regards homosexuality as a taboo subject.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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