



Between Idol and Ideal: Celebrity Worship and Mate Preferences of K-Pop Fans on Platform X

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Abstract

Admired K-Pop idols often become role models because they are considered to represent ideal values, lifestyles, or characteristics. They consider idols as ideal partners because of the combination of physical appearance, personality, and representation that is consistently displayed in various media. This study aims to determine the relationship between celebrity worship and life partner preferences among K-Pop fans on platform X. This study was conducted using a quantitative method with a cross-sectional correlational design. The sample in this study amounted to 108 people. The significance value for the correlation test (p) was 0.013, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.239. This indicates a significant relationship between celebrity worship and mate preferences among K-Pop fans on platform X.

Keywords: *Celebrity Worship; Mate Preferences; K-Pop*

Introduction

Choosing a mate is a process between two people that starts from initial attraction to becoming a serious relationship (Nopela et al., 2023). Mate selection preferences are an individual's tendency to determine the criteria for an ideal mate based on values, experience and personal background. According to DeGenova(Cooperman & Waller, 2022), factors such as family background and personal characteristics can influence this process. Townsend states that the main dimensions of this preference include socioeconomic status, availability and support of a partner, and physical attractiveness (Yuliani & Khoiryasdien, 2023). These criteria form the basis for assessing a mate's long-term suitability, both emotionally and practically. While choosing the right mate can improve the quality of a long-term relationship, choosing the wrong mate can have negative consequences, such as increased divorce rates and relationship dissatisfaction (Buss & Schmitt, 2019). This impact is what makes people reluctant to marry. According to data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2024, the number of marriages decreased by 128,093, from 1,705,348 in 2022 to 1,577,255 in 2023 (Fauziyah & Putri, 2024).

Individuals will set certain criteria for a mate, such as age, education, occupation, and ethnicity. Furthermore, physical similarities are also important, as individuals typically choose partners who are similar to themselves. Normatively, society often idealizes mates with characteristics such as emotional

maturity, role model ability, and long-term commitment (Locke et. al., 2020). However, the fact shows that other factors such as social pressure, media, and excessive idealization of celebrities also influence these preferences, thus shifting these values (Pirzade et. al., 2024). A research suggests that men consider good looks as a potential mate, while women consider education and high income of their potential mate (Nopela et. al., 2023).

The criteria for choosing a mate regarding a person's attractiveness can vary not only due to changes in the times, but also due to the influence of mass media (Aulia, 2019). One interesting phenomenon that has recently become popular online is the emergence of pop culture, such as Korean Pop (K-Pop), which has appeared on various social media platforms. Developing countries like Indonesia are particularly vulnerable to the influence of developed countries, so the impact of the spread of K-Pop culture can be felt in the nation (Bupu & Kasiyan, 2024). K-Pop or Korean Pop is music that originates from South Korea and is a music genre that has many fans from various circles (Islamiyati & Susantun, 2024). The emergence of various fan groups on various platforms today is a result of the rapid development of K-Pop culture (Alhamid, 2023).

K-Pop fans have a special forum created to share with each other. They manage forums and groups on social media such as WhatsApp, Line, and Twitter groups or what is now known as X. Reporting from internal data from the X platform, in 2020 there were 6.7 billion tweets about K-Pop and increased by 16% to 7.8 billion tweets in 2021. Based on this data, Indonesia ranks first in the list of countries with active K-Pop fans and is the country with the most tweets about K-Pop for two consecutive years (Kim, 2022). Fans who are active in forums and follow all the activities of their idols or celebrities intensely create a feeling of closeness that encourages them to sympathize and spend more time in activities of worshipping their idols (Munica, 2021). These activities are what become known as Celebrity Worship. McCutcheon defines Celebrity Worship as an increase in admiration for someone who is famous (McCutcheon et. al., 2021). The behaviors commonly found in celebrity worship include actively seeking out the latest news about the idol's life, feeling a special connection or bond with the idol, defending the idol when someone insults them, and having excessive fantasies about what will happen to the idol (Blake et. al., 2023).

In early adulthood, individuals are still in the identity development phase. Although they have passed adolescence, the process of discovering their identity is often still ongoing, especially in the context of adjusting to social demands, careers, and interpersonal relationships. Admired idols often become role models because they are considered to represent ideal values, lifestyles, or characteristics. This process is influenced by the need for acceptance and the desire to emulate the attributes they consider ideal in their idols (Tsang, 2023). However, excessive idolization can cause negative impacts, such as the inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality, feelings of excessive dependency, having a low body image, consumer behavior, and viewing money and popularity as a source of happiness, as well as dissatisfaction with real relationships that do not match the expectations formed by the media (Ayu & Astiti, 2020). This phenomenon is increasingly prevalent among Gen Z, who often use K-pop idols as a benchmark in choosing a life partner, because these idols offer an image that looks perfect and ideal in their eyes which then influences their perspective on the criteria for choosing a partner (Hidayati & Sari, 2023). A research conducted by Islamiyati & Susantun (2024) shows that celebrity worship influences impulsive buying in consuming K-Pop merchandise. A study by Fitri & Larasati (2023) reveals that there is a positive relationship between emotional attachment and celebrity worship among NCT fans in early adulthood. This creates a discrepancy between the reality of the relationship and the fantasies formed from the media.

The phenomenon of celebrity worship occurs when individuals exhibit excessive emotional attachment to a celebrity, and this attachment can influence how they perceive their real-life mate. Maltby divides celebrity worship into three aspects (in Sekar et. al., 2024); Entertainment-social, intense-

personal, and borderline-pathological, each of which has a different psychological impact. Recent research shows that people with high levels of celebrity worship tend to base their standards or expectations for mates on their idols' characteristics, particularly in terms of physical attractiveness and social status (Lubis & Aulia, 2024). This creates a mismatch between the reality of the relationship and the fantasy created by the media.

The decline in psychological well-being that can affect emotional stability in establishing real relationships is also related to celebrity worship (Jannati & Qodariah, 2021). Factors such as low self-esteem and attachment to peers have been shown to trigger tendencies towards celebrity worship, which in turn strengthens its influence on partner selection (Luthfi & Harsono, 2022; Samsiyah dkk., 2023).

A preliminary study conducted by researchers using a questionnaire via Google Form distributed directly to K-Pop fans on platform X from January 3-10, 2025, showed that seven out of eight people wanted a life partner who had similar traits to their idols. Meanwhile, six out of eight people agreed that the characteristics of their favorite idols influenced their preferences in choosing a partner. Some fans felt that K-Pop idols reflected the ideal traits of a life partner, such as being intelligent, caring, hardworking, and family-oriented. This is in line with a study by Pradata (2019) shows that fans who idolize K-pop heavily tend to project idol characteristics into their romantic relationship fantasies. They perceive idols as ideal partners because of the combination of physical appearance, personality, and representation consistently displayed across media.

Based on existing research, many previous studies have focused on the influence of celebrity worship on mental health, self-esteem, and body image (Aziza & Eryani, 2022; Tresna dkk., 2021). However, there is still very limited research on celebrity worship that influences individual mate selection, especially among K-Pop fans. Therefore, this study is important to specifically determine whether there is a relationship between celebrity worship and individual preferences in choosing a life partner in more depth. This study was conducted with the aim of determining the relationship between celebrity worship and preferences in choosing a mate among K-Pop fans on platform X. It is expected that this study can fill the gap and provide new insights into the development of social psychology theory, especially regarding the impact of celebrity worship on a person's behavior and personal decisions, such as preferences in choosing a mate.

Method

This research employed quantitative methods. The design in this study applied a cross-sectional correlational design, a non-experimental approach aiming to determine the relationship between two or more variables without manipulating those variables. This design employed cross-sectional because data collection was conducted only once at a specific point in time, so the results reflected the relationship between variables at the time the data was collected (Azwar, 2021). The population used in this study was K-Pop fans in Indonesia, for which there was no definitive data regarding the number of K-Pop fans using X in Indonesia. In this study, the sample size was determined using the Lemeshow formula with 100 minimum respondents were used. The sampling technique used in this study was accidental sampling. The sample criteria determined in this study were male or female individuals, aged 18-28 years, never married, and K-Pop fans who actively used social media X.

The variable of preference for choosing a mate was measured using a modified scale from Yuliani & Khoiryasdien (2023) using Townsend's nine mate-selection question scale with a Cronbach's Alpha (α) value of 0.863. The celebrity worship variable was measured using Maltby's Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS). This scale has been adapted into Indonesian by Hesti (2023) and consists of 23 statements, all of which are positive. Validity and reliability tests have been carried out so that it can be declared valid

because it meets the model fit criteria, indicated by a positive factor loading value and a T-value exceeding 1.96 and is declared reliable because it has a Cronbach's Alpha (α) of 0.905.

In this study, the entire data analysis process was carried out using IBM SPSS software version 27. The tests used to analyze the research data were the normality test, linearity test, and product-moment correlation test. The normality test was applied with techniques included the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test. The linearity test is used to determine whether the relationship between two variables is linear. This test is used to analyze the relationship between two interval or ratio variables. The product-moment correlation (Pearson's r) measures the direction and strength of the linear relationship between two variables. A significant correlation indicates the presence of a relevant association in the data (Azwar, 2021).

Result and Discussion

Data collection for this study was conducted from August to September 2025 among K-Pop fans using platform X, aged 18 to 28. Data were collected from 108 respondents, with the following description:

Table 1. Respondents Characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent %
Gender		
Female	106	98.15
Male	2	1.85
Age		
18–21 years old	40	37.04
22–25 years old	61	56.48
26–28 years old	7	6.48
Total	108	100

Table 1 shows the results of the study of the 108 respondents, 106 were female (98.15%) and 2 were male (1.85%). Female respondents predominated in this study. Based on age criteria, the largest number of respondents were ranging from 22 to 25 years old (56.48%), followed by 18 to 21 years old (37.04%), and 26 to 28 years old (6.48%).

Table 2. Normality Test

Variable	Normality Index	Sig (p)	Interpretation
Residuals Data	0,062	0,200	Normal distribution of residuals

Table 2 shows that the normality index in this study was 0.062, with a significance value (p) of $0.200 > 0.05$, indicating that the data were normally distributed.

Table 3. Linearity Test

Variable	Linearity		Deviation from Linearity		Interpretation
	F	Sig (p)	F	Sig (p)	
Mate Preferences*Celebrity Worship	6.982	0.010	1.281	0.188	Linear

Table 3 shows a linearity significance value of 0.010 and a deviation of 0.188. Both figures indicate that celebrity worship has a linear relationship with mate preferences.

Table 4. Correlation Test with Product Moment

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig (p)	Interpretation
Celebrity Worship with Mate Preferences	0.239	0.013	Significant

Based on the table above, the significance value for the product-moment correlation test (p) was $0.013 < 0.05$, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.239. This indicates a significant relationship between celebrity worship and life partner preferences.

This study shows a positive relationship between celebrity worship and partner preferences, with a correlation coefficient of 0.239 and a significance level of 0.013. Individuals who admire celebrities excessively tend to seek similar characteristics in their mates, although the correlation is relatively small. This means that not everyone who experiences celebrity worship will choose a mate based on their idol, but some do prefer these characteristics, demonstrating the complex influence of celebrities on partner expectations.

This finding aligns with research conducted by Zafar dkk. (2020) which suggests that celebrity worship can lead fans to view celebrities as unattainable ideal figures in romantic relationships, thus becoming a reference point in mate selection. Dimensions on the Celebrity Attitude Scale, such as intense-personal and borderline-pathological attitudes, may foster this idealization and influence partner selection criteria. This supports the argument that celebrities influence perceptions of love, attractiveness, and ideal relationships beyond the realm of entertainment.

Other research has shown that emotional involvement with celebrities reflects the need for a relationship and serves as a role model (Chadborn et al., 2017). Unlike traditional parasocial relationships, this involvement indicates a deeper connection that can fulfill emotional and psychological needs. Therefore, individuals may subconsciously use admired celebrities as a reference for their ideal partner.

However, the low correlation suggests that other factors influence partner choice beyond celebrity worship. Personality, emotional experiences, cultural values, and social media may all be factors in a person's choice of partner (Akinduyo & Mabaso, 2024). Social media is also able to increase the feeling of closeness between celebrities and their fans (Griffiths, 2024). Personal relationship experiences also shape this pattern. People who are dissatisfied with their real-life relationships may seek out idealized celebrities when forming expectations about partners (Zsila et al., 2021). Thus, this study supports previous studies that celebrity worship has a significant relationship with preferences in choosing a life partner, especially among K-Pop fans.

Conclusion

In conclusion, celebrity worship has a significant relationship with the preference for choosing a mate among K-Pop fans on platform X, although it tends to be small. This is in line with the purpose of this study, which is to determine the relationship between celebrity worship and the preference for choosing a mate among K-Pop fans on platform X. Nonetheless, the small correlation implies that other factors affect relationship selection other from celebrity worship. The limitations of this study include the sample that tends to be homogeneous, thus possibly the sample is less representative in filling out the scale. For K-Pop fans, it is expected that they can be more aware and know the boundaries of idols. Future researchers are expected to conduct research with more diverse respondents using different methods from this study.

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