

Interrelationship Between Fandom Activities and Depression of Teenagers

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Abstract

Fandom activities are a hobby and part of life for many people around the world. In particular, for teenagers with great interest in pop culture and celebrities, celebrities are factors that affect various aspects of their overall lives. In this study, we would like to examine not only the effect of fandom activities, which are major components of youth's lives, on depression but also the effect of depression on fandom activities. The subjects of this study were 933 first-year Korean high school students who responded to the fourth survey of the KCYPS 2018 panel survey, saying, "I have a favorite celebrity or athlete". As a result of the study, first, depression and fandom activities were found to be mutually influential. Second, Gender, dependence on smartphones, parents' parenting attitude, peer relationships, self-esteem, and grades were found to be factors affecting fandom activities and depression in teenagers. Based on the results, this study would like to propose implications for youth fandom culture and mental health.

Keywords: Teenagers, Fandom Activities, Depression, Interrelationship, South Korea and Japan

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Introduction

In recent years, various aspects of fandom activities have been smoothly promoted are various age groups. It can be said that Korea's fandom culture was started by the 'Brother Unit' toward "Cho Yong Pil" etc., and our society experienced forming a fandom with overwhelming influence through "Fire Truck" and "Seo Taiji and Children" in the early 1990s. Then, in the late 1990s, fandom and fandom culture with commercial and systematic systems were formed by first generation idol such as "H.O.T.", "Sechskies" and "GOD". During this period, as the internet began to spread and support, the size and influence of fandom began to grow in earnest (Lim, 2003). Nowadays, K-POP's influence and popularity have been proven around the world, and as a result, the size of the fandom is also on a global scale. As such, the group called fandom has become one of the common and popular social and cultural phenomena not only in Korea but also around the world (Oh & Kang, 2018).

In Particular, since late 2019, the pandemic of COVID-19 has greatly reduced opportunities and areas for outside activities, making people relatively more likely to relieve stress and release life energy indoors (Ju et al., 2021). Therefore, as social relationship activities using online increased, and opportunities to access broadcasting media increased, the public's eyes naturally turned to entertainment and programs (Park et al., 2020). In particular, it was found that interest and concentration in popular culture increased significantly. As a result, popular culture and celebrities have become the core of important social phenomena, especially with the teuroteu and BTS since 2020, and the size of fandom targeting popular celebrities has increased and the social influence of fandom has been strengthened. For example, looking at the increase in subscribers to the BTS's official YouTube account, <BangtanTV>, the number of subscribers increased by 100% as of the time when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. In other words, the number of subscribers, which was about 25 million before the pandemic, has more than doubled in about a year and a half since the pandemic, now exceeding 50 million. As such, fandom activities aimed at a specific object can no longer be dismissed as a mania culture of only a few.

These fandom activities, especially for teenagers, have a strong judgment on popular culture and celebrities, and affect various aspects of their overall lives. Celebrities are an important factor in the process of forming their friendship and self-identity, and they also provide space and opportunities to satisfy various needs for recognition and belonging (Ahn et al., 2013; Baek, 2015; Kim & Kim, 2018). Korean society lacks the aspects of actively encouraging youth's play culture or broadly allowing opportunities for social participation. Adolescents who need common activities to relieve various stresses from life and strengthen their sense of belonging and solidarity within peer relationships feel catharsis and sense of fellowship through the formation of relationships with peers and peers in the process of admiring the same stars (Na, 2017). Teenagers experience a strong bond and belonging through belonging to the same fandom, experience strong recognition and attachment from others who have close relationships, form self-identity, and give meaning to their existence (Ahn et al., 2013). In addition, in recent years, it has been shown to have an effect on the formation of job views and external values and beliefs (Oh & Kang, 2018). As such, it can be seen that fandom activities are acting as an important component of life activities for teenagers. In other words, it can be seen that fandom activities have a large impact on the process of youth's friendship, self-identity formation, and various cognitive needs, and various psychological factors are intertwined with youth's fandom activities.

In particular, negative psychological states are affecting teenagers' concentration on fandom activities. It can be seen that fandom activities and depression act as factors that exchange mutual influence through research that examines the motivation to start fandom activities (Oh & Kang, 2018). Given that low self-esteem and low life satisfaction lead to fandom activities, it can be assumed that the element of depression can serve as an opportunity to start fandom activities. Therefore, in this study, we would like to examine not only the effect of fandom activities, which are major components of youth's lives, on depression but also the effect of depression on fandom activities.

The research question is:

1. Is there a mutual relationship between youth fandom activities and depression?
2. What is the effect of youth's fandom activities on depression, and what is the effect of youth's depression on fandom activities?

Theoretical Background

1) Fandom Activities

(1) Definition of Fandom

The word fandom is a combination of the word "Fan", which means a person who follows, supports, and supports a specific object or field based on affection, and the word "dom", refers to excessive immersion in a specific object (Jeong, 2010; Kim, 2013). In other words, fandom refers to people who passionately like and dig into a specific person or genre, or the culture surrounding them. Research on fandom culture and fandom activities in Korean society has generally focused on youth fan club activities, and in fact, most of the members who make up the fan club are teenagers. In particular, it appears that female teenagers are active as major members of large-scale fandom.

(2) Contents of Fandom Activities

Fandom activities can be largely classified into offline activities and online activities. Offline fandom activities include purchasing related goods, including albums, public broadcasting, participating in concerts and fan meeting events, and visiting theme cafes. Online fandom activities include fan community participation, artist promotion and fan voting through SNS and blog activities, online brand reputation management, related news translation support, blog and article commenting, music purchase and streaming, online concert and live video display.

Offline fandom activities can be said to be activities that meet any object, such as a favorite celebrity or cheering athlete, on the internet or on the network, or run to receive related goods (a variety of items related to the object of affection; Ahn et al., 2012). Offline fandom activities, which allow you to feel a vivid sense of realism through face-to-face, provide an opportunity to feel solidarity and belonging among fandom members. Offline activities are often conducted for a limited number of people in a closed and limited space, acting as an experience of narrowing the actual distance from the object of affection (Kang, 2012). In addition, a large part of offline fandom activities is the activity of running around to purchase various goods. It includes all offline purchasing albums of favorite singers, visiting theme cafes, and purchasing and collecting unofficial goods produced by fans.

Online fandom activities include various activities to improve the awareness, popularity, and image of the target on the internet and network, as well as activities to expand the size of the fandom and personal fandom activities through participation in the fan community. It also includes activities to support the activities of favorite singers through music purchase, streaming, and video streaming. Online fandom activities in Korean society have been greatly strengthened since the early 2000s. As computers and the internet became more common, online communication increased and even if they did not interact offline, they had the opportunity to narrow the distance between fandom members or their favorite through online media, making it easy to participate in their activities as a fan (Baym, 1998).

In particular, after 2020, concerts, fan meeting events, and good sales and purchases were conducted online. As the scope of online fandom activities expanded to the area of offline fandom activities, enthusiastic fans as well as the public who had only liked them easily participated in fandom activities, increasing the size and popularity of fandom (Kang, 2011).

(3) Motivation of Fandom Activities

If so, why do teenagers become focused and immersed in fandom activities. Teenagers spend a lot of time in the space of school. It is true that it is difficult for teenagers to create new cultures within schools with time and space restrictions, so it is not easy to participate in activities other than popular culture (Yoon & Chae, 2009). According to Lim (2002), Korean teenagers who lack leisure culture crave for passion, concentration, and immersion, finally find out outlet to relieve stress by voluntarily expressing their passion, and settle down. In particular, it appears that teenagers have no choice but to focus more on popular culture at a time when external activities are limited due to the recent pandemic.

Adolescents admire celebrities or athletes by encountering popular music and various popular media, and tend to naturally form fandom and find their own value and identity by becoming members of the group (Ahn et al., 2012), and try to relieve various stresses in life including academic stress frames (Jeon, 2005). In addition, when experiencing the absence of an appropriate role model, it was found that they focused on fandom activities as they pursued their own call model (Im, 2002; Yoon & Chae, 2009).

On the other hand, a sense of belonging is an important value factor for teenagers. Teenagers discover commonalities within the group by liking same people or objects as others, and this experience strengthening ties with them (Kim, 2012). In this way, fandom develops into a group with the same behavior and thinking patterns among members, and the more teenagers belong to the fandom, gaining satisfaction according to the group's power and affiliation. In other words, fandom is used as a space for group experiences that satisfy teenagers' desire to belong to (Kim, 2011; Park, 2012; Seo & Yang, 2014). It is said that adolescents form their own unique style through fandom activities and introduce themselves to others based on this consider themselves as special beings (Fiske, 1989).

Furthermore, youth fandom activities are not a simple type of youth-only culture. Fandom activities are a channel for expressing their desire to produce and fill various socio-cultural, economic, and psychological capital.

(4) Influence of Fandom Activities

Through previous studies, it can be seen that adolescents' fandom activities have various effects on their daily lives. Fandom activities have also been shown to motivate teenagers to communicate smoothly within their peer group and have a positive effect on school life and adaptation (Yoon et al., 2016; Cho et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018). It is true that there are aspects that have a positive effect on the development process of adolescents, such as relieving unmet needs in reality or effectively solving stress from relationship. According to Lee & Jung (2018), teenagers tried to solve the stress caused by parental oppression, control, and interference through fandom activities and alleviate conflicts with parents, thereby improving their adaptability to school life. In other words, teenagers whose parents grew up with negative parenting attitude tried to adapt more flexibly to school life by escaping from their suppressed situations by experiencing interactions within their fandom. In addition, Jeon (2005) said that participation in fandom activities can provide emotional comfort and stress relief opportunities, and Cho et al. (2016) said that sharing common experiences and emotions with others and learning interactions within the same group can make positive effect to make school life better.

On the other hand, teenagers' fandom activities are also a factor that positively affects their self-resilience and self-esteem formation. Ahn et al. (2013) emphasized that for teenagers, fandom activities are not just leisure or play activities. In order to participate in the group, they must go through the process of identifying their own tastes, finding partners to hang out with, and finding and acting with them in common activities. Therefore, fandom activities can have a positive effect on strengthening youth's capabilities, and they not only feel intimacy, belonging, and self-esteem through interactions with stars and others engaged in fandom activities, but also naturally improved self-resilience while increasing problem-solving skills (Ahn et al., 2013).

However, another previous study also suggested the negative influence of fandom activities. It has also proved that adolescents can experience addiction, anxiety, and social atrophy during their fandom activities, and life satisfaction may decrease through experiences such as school maladjustment, academic ability decline, and psychological instability (Na, 2017). In addition, Ahn et al. (2012) emphasized that excessive fandom activities negatively affect teenagers' life satisfaction, and argued that the more active teenagers participate in fandom activities, the less they tend to adapt to school life. According to Yoon et al. (2018), online fandom activities are becoming active as popular celebrities or athletes have recently focused on communicating with fans through personal fan pages, social media, and video productions. As such, fandom activities are strongly spread and carried out online, online-based fandom activities can lead to mobile phone dependence, and serious dependence and addiction can negatively affect school life. As mentioned earlier, fandom activities can start with various psychological difficulties, stress, anxiety, and depression problems. Ironically, however, teenagers with low life satisfaction choose fandom activities and participate more in fandom activities as a way to solve them, but in some cases, the more active they participate in fandom activities, their life satisfaction go lower and their psychological status turns negatively (Baek, 2015).

Fandom activities are an important subculture for teenagers who have rapidly grown in Korea's pop culture industry, are currently experiencing a Korean Wave around the world, and can easily access their favorite objects online due to media support. We should not force society to impose sanctions, control, and access to it. Therefore, it can be said that the

immediate task is to view fandom activities as a youth culture, and view them from a cultural relativism perspective, and support them to pursue healthy fandom activities.

2) Depression

(1) Definition of Depression

For people living in modern society, depression is not only a general emotion, but also emotion caused by psychological and physical burnout and daily boredom. In particular, it was mentioned in the introduction, the feeling of depression is eroding whole world more broadly than ever due to the outbreak of COVID-19, which has caused a global pandemic. Depression does not mean a temporary mood status, but a phenomenon in which negative emotional status such as sadness, loneliness, and emptiness appear continuously and for a long time(Shim, 2017).

(2) Depression of Adolescents

The factors of depression in adolescents classified in three, personal factors, family and school factors, and social factors. Personal tendencies, individual self-esteem, the degree of self-identity and self-resilience formation, and individual satisfaction with life were found to have an important influence on youth depression (Kim & Lee, 2021). In terms of development, adolescence is an intermediate stage from children to adults, and it is time to make effort to establish one's identity and improve self-esteem in various ways. During this period, performing development tasks may occurs high stress, and as their physical and psychological instability increase, psychological vulnerability can be weak (Kim & Kim, 2016). It shows that these individual psychological factors can lead to depression.

Adolescents' depression problems appear to be affected by relational factors as much as personal factors. According to the results of various studies, in particular, it was found that family and parents had a significant impact in the growth of adolescents. Many studies have shown that parents' participation, which means that parents who are interested in their children's daily lives and education and influence them to solve problems properly, parents' affection and interest in their children, and open-minded, receptive parenting attitudes are factors that protect teenagers from depression (Jeong, 2020; Kim, 2021; Lee et al., 2021). In other words, the characteristics of the relationship with parents at home is strongly related with the occurrence of depression in adolescents.

Also, teenagers of Korean society spend most of their days at school. Schools are an important place to provide teenagers with opportunities to have various experiences on their daily lives, but life and activities at school can cause emotional conflicts in various relationships with excessive academic stress, which often lead to depression, a major emotional problem in adolescence (Jeon & Lee, 2000). In particular, peer relationships at school are important social relationships that provide individual identity and experience of intimacy and belonging (Choi, 2010), and teenagers who have not experienced smooth peer relationships at school have low psychological and emotional well-being and life satisfaction (Lee et al., 2021). As such, family and school factors are closely related to the individual psychological factors, and family and school factors can further accelerate youth depression by strengthening individual psychological factors.

Adolescent depression also affected by the social atmosphere. Factor such as the social atmosphere is unique in Korean society that encourage and justify achievement-focused competition, examination-only education and entrance system, and pressure on success are acting as factors that cause emotional and psychological difficulties in adolescents (Yoon & Chae, 2016).

Method

In order to confirm the growth and development of children and adolescents, the Korean Children and Youth Panel Survey (KCYPs 2018) of the Korea Youth Policy Institute, which has been conducted every year since 2018, was used as analysis data. Sampling was allocated in proportion to the numbers of students by 17 cities and provinces, and sample schools were selected by dividing coeducational schools, and sample classes were randomly selected. In this study, 933 teenagers who answered “YES” to the question “Do you have a favorite celebrity or athlete” in the first year of high school who responded to the 2021(4th survey).

The main used variables are depression and fandom activities. As control variables, seven variables that were found to affect depression and fandom activities in previous studies were put in, and specifically, household income, gender, smart phone dependence, parents’ parenting attitude, peer relationship, self-esteem, and subjective evaluation of academic achievement.

First, we analyzed about demographic background of participated adolescents and their parents. Secondly, we conducted a descriptive statistical analysis and calculated the correlation coefficient to understand major variables, depression and fandom activities. Third, We conducted a regression analysis to analyze the effect of depression on fandom activities and, conversely, the effect of fandom activities on depression. At this time, seven variables known to affect fandom activities and depression in previous studies were used as control variables. We used SPSS 22.0 program for data analysis of this study.

Results of Analysis

1) General Characteristics of Participants

The demographic-sociological characteristics of participated adolescents are close to <Table 1>. When asked if they have a favorite celebrity or athlete, 47.5% (443 people) of male teenagers and 52.5% (490 people) of female teenagers said yes. The proportion of female adolescents was about 5.0% higher than that of male adolescents. According to a survey of where they live, 53.7% (501 people) lived in the Seoul metropolitan area and 46.3% (432 people) lived outside of Seoul metropolitan area. When asked about the subjective evaluation of last semester's grades, 28.9% (270 people) of adolescents said they did well, 20.2% (188 people) said they did not, more adolescents said they did well.

The education level of fathers and mothers was 66.8% (623 people) and 68.1% (635 people) for those who graduated from college or higher, respectively. According to a survey of the average monthly household income, 55.4% (517 people) of families are earning more than 3 million won and less than 6 million won, 33.9% (316 people) of families are earning more than 6 million won and 10.7% (100 people) of families are earning less than 3 million won. It was found that the respondents' household income level was generally high.

<Table 1> General characteristics of participants

Characteristics		People (%)		Characteristics		People (%)	
Gender	Male	443	47.5	Educational level (Father)	Lower than High school	264	28.3
	Female	490	52.5		Higher than Collage	623	66.8
					Other etc	46	4.9
Living Area	Seoul metropolitan area	501	53.7	Educational level (Mother)	Lower than High school	278	29.8
	Outside of Seoul metropolitan area	432	46.3		Higher than Collage	635	68.1
					Other etc	20	2.1
Grade	Did not well	188	20.2	Economical level of family	Less than 3 million won	100	10.7
	Usual	475	50.9		3 million won ~6 million won	517	55.4
	Did well	270	28.9		More than 6 million won	316	33.9

n=933

Conducted a basic analysis and correlation between depression and fandom activities, which are major variables. As a result, it was confirmed that depression and fandom activities had a positive (+) significant correlation ($p < .001$), and that the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis were normally distributed between 3 and 10.

<Table 2> General characteristics of participants

Variables	Correlation		Basic analysis		
	Depression	Fandom Activities	M(SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Depression	1	.120***	1.84(.54)	.338	-.206
Fandom Activities	.120***	1	2.34(2.04)	1.038	.878

n=933. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

2) Relationship Between Fandom Activities and Depression in Adolescents

In order to confirm the influence relationship between youth fandom activities and depression, the impact of youth depression on fandom activities was compared with the conversely, the impact of youth fandom activities on depression. <Table 3> shows the results of a regression analysis conducted on 933 adolescents who answered yes to the question ‘Do you have a favorite celebrity or athlete?’ Seven variables that have been shown to affect youth depression and fandom activities in previous studies were input as control variables, specifically household income, gender, smart phone dependence, parents’ parenting attitude, peer relationship, self-esteem, and subjective evaluation of academic achievement.

Depression in adolescents was found to have a positive (+) effect on fandom activities. This means that the higher the depression of teenagers, the greater the fandom activity, which is also consistent with the results of Oh & Kang (2018). Among the control variables, gender,

smart phone dependence, parents' parenting attitude, peer relationship showed significant effects on fandom activities. Conversely, teenager's fandom activities also had a positive (+) effect on depression. This means that the higher the fandom activity of teenagers, the higher their depression. Among the control variables, all variables except households with 'less than 3 million won' showed a significant effect on depression. In summary, it was found that the higher a teenager's depression, the higher their fandom activity, and conversely, the higher the fandom activity, the higher their depression.

<Table 3> Relationship between Fandom Activities and Depression

Depression -> Fandom Activities					Fandom Activities -> Depression				
		B	β	t			B	β	t
		2.64 6		-2.467*			4.394		24.948***
dependent variable	fandom activities	.491	.130	3.178**	dependent variable	fandom activities	.022	.083	3.178**
	gender (girl=1)	1.06 7	.262	8.275** *		gender (girl=1)	.062	.057	2.184*
	smart phone dependence	.415	.093	2.798**		smart phone dependence	.094	.080	2.978**
	parents' parenting attitude	.401	.076	2.032*		parents' parenting attitude	-.119	-.086	-2.866**
	peer relationship	.453	.086	2.346*		peer relationship	-.229	-.165	-5.683***
control variables	self-esteem	-.042	-.009	-.213	control variables	self-esteem	-.558	-.449	-14.762***
	subjective evaluation of academic achievement	.046	.016	.487		subjective evaluation of academic achievement	-.065	-.084	-3.266**
	less than 3 million won	-.267	-.041	-1.191		less than 3 million won	.025	.015	.537
	3 million won ~ 6 million won	.088	.022	.639		3 million won ~6 million won	-.062	-.057	-2.116*
	R2		.114			R2		.431	
	adjR2		.105			adjR2		.425	
	F		13.172***			F		77.617***	

n=933, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Conclusion

In order to examine the mutual influence relationship between depression and fandom activities, this study analyzed the impact of depression on fandom activities and, conversely, the impact of fandom activities on depression. The subjects of this study were 933 first-year

high school students who responded to the 4th year of the Korean Children and Youth Panel Survey (KCYPs, 2018), including 443 male adolescents and 490 female adolescents.

Research results show that depression in adolescents increases the frequency of participation in fandom activities. This is a study by Oh and Kang (2018), who looked at the mediating effect of fandom activities in the impact of depression on career identity in adolescents, and Kim and Kim (2018), who looked at the differences in school life and psychological factors depending on the type of fandom activity in middle school students. This is consistent with the results of Additionally, this study found that, conversely, the more youth participate in fandom activities, the more depression they experience. In other words, depression and fandom activity have a mutual influence, and as depression increases, fandom activity increases, and increased fandom activity goes through a cycle of increasing depression again. Fandom is already a culture, and with the development of media, it is a social phenomenon that teenagers can easily access through the Internet and smartphones. Rather than controlling it, we will look at the psychological and emotional aspects of youth engaging in fandom activities so that it can be an activity to relieve various stresses in life and strengthen a sense of belonging and solidarity through peer relationships (Na, 2017), and provide various ways to relieve stress. Support should be provided to expand the channel.

Based on these research results, it is suggested that research on fandom activities should be conducted more actively and in a multifaceted manner in order to approach adolescent depression. Previous studies have shown that youth fandom activities have a positive effect on resolving conflicts and psychological difficulties caused by academic stress, escaping reality, vicarious satisfaction, seeking role models, providing a place for group experiences, satisfying the need for recognition, and improving school adaptability. It was found to have an effect. In this study, it was confirmed that fandom activities can increase depression, so continuous observation is needed to see if the negative tendency in the psychological and emotional state of teenagers who actively engage in fandom activities does not become stronger. Fandom activities are a subculture that plays an important part in the daily life and lives of teenagers, and through participation in fandom activities, the tasks and developmental tasks of adolescence are achieved. Therefore, it is necessary to specifically consider what fandom activities mean to teenagers and what experiences they have within the fandom as members of the fandom. Second, since gender, smart phone dependence, parents' parenting attitude, peer relationship, self-esteem, grades etc, have been shown to be factors affecting fandom activities and depression in teenagers, positive participation in fandom activities increases and negative tendencies toward depression decrease. Therefore, these factors should be considered important in order to increase positive participation in fandom activities and reduce negative depressive tendencies. This study has the limitation of not considering a wider range of variables due to the use of panel data. In the future, there will be a need to examine the influence of fandom activities through various research methods, and it will be necessary to confirm whether there are differences in fandom activities depending on gender and age. In addition, it will be necessary to study changes in the content of fandom activities and changes in immersion in fandom activities as teenagers grow through longitudinal research, and to study changes in society's views and perceptions of fandom activities according to changes in the times.

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