



# Journal of Social and Political Sciences

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**Mulya, S. N. M., & Mulyana, A. (2022). Parasocial Interactions: JKT48 Fans in Forming Relations with Idols and Social Environment. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 5(3), 108-115.**

ISSN 2615-3718

DOI: 10.31014/aior.1991.05.03.368

The online version of this article can be found at:  
<https://www.asianinstituteofresearch.org/>

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Published by:  
The Asian Institute of Research

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# Parasocial Interactions: JKT48 Fans in Forming Relations with Idols and Social Environment

Siti Ntara Muthmainah Mulya<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Mulyana<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Corporate & Marketing Communications, Mercu Buana University, Jakarta, Indonesia

Correspondence: Siti Ntara Muthmainah Mulya, Corporate & Marketing Communications, Mercu Buana University, Jakarta, Indonesia. Tel: +62 821 2017 1001. E-mail: [taramulya@gmail.com](mailto:taramulya@gmail.com)

## Abstract

JKT48 is the first idol group in Indonesia, founded in 2011, and the sister of the Japanese idol group, AKB48. JKT48 is also known as one of the popular music in Indonesia with fans who are still active until now. With the concept they have, namely "Idol You Can Meet," fans can directly interact with the JKT48 members they like. In this article, researchers will analyze the relationship between JKT48 fans' parasocial interactions with idols and their social environment. To understand the motives, motivations, and experiences of JKT48 fans, this study uses a qualitative-phenomenological model with Alfred Schutz's model. The results of this study found that JKT48 fans are loyal to JKT48 members with different motives and motivations in supporting JKT48 members they like, so they can spend tens to hundreds of millions of rupiah to support JKT48. In addition, fans are also closed to their true identities as JKT48 fans, such as in the family, friends, and office, because being a fan of JKT48 is still taboo in society.

**Keywords:** Parasocial Interaction, JKT48 Fans, Fandom, Popular Music

## 1. Introduction

Almost everyone has a sense of interest and liking for idol figures who are celebrities, singers, basketball players, football players, and others. JKT48 fans love the figure of the idol group JKT48 who has been in the world of music and entertainment in Indonesia for almost 10 years since 2011. Parasocial interactions depict from the side of fans with idols in JKT48 by looking at their idols who are at the JKT48 Theater. Not only interacting, but fans can also participate and interact with idols they like.

JKT48 is a sister group of AKB48 and JKT48 is the first idol group in Indonesia. JKT48 fans also interact with JKT48 idols that they like, and they can meet their idols at the JKT48 Theater, Mall Fx Sudirman, F4 Floor. JKT48 originated from the existence of AKB48 which debuted in 2005 and had fairly high popularity in Japan from 2005 until now (2022). This AKB48 Idol Group is produced by Yasushi Akimoto; in addition to showing singing and dancing skills, AKB48 also has the concept of "Idol You Can Meet."

JKT48 Theater is used to watch the JKT48 Theater setlist presented by 16 members and is also a means for fans to meet JKT48 members who they like at JKT48. With the same concept as AKB48, JKT48 fans can directly meet

the idols they like. They can also immediately see the development of their idols at JKT48 by visiting it at the JKT48 Theater located at Mall Fx Sudirman, 4th Floor, South Jakarta.

JKT48 activities organized by JKT48 are a way for fans to live a good relationship with idols and know the development of JKT48 members they like. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, fans can still support and meet JKT48 members who they like with activities online media carried out by JKT48.

JKT48 fans are also someone who enthusiastic about JKT48, such as participating in JKT48 activities from attending the JKT48 Theater, JKT48 Handshake Event, JKT48 Video Call, and JKT48 Concerts. Also, they can buying merchandise related to JKT48, such as JKT48 Photo Packs, JKT48 T-Shirts, JKT48 Lightstick, JKT48 TwoShots, and others. JKT48 fans are usually referred to by the term "wota" or "wota JKT48" in general, but actually, the call or designation for JKT48 fans is "JKT48 fans".

Donald Horton and Richard Wohl said: "They give the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with the performer. The conditions of response to the performer are analogous to those in a primary group. The most remote and illustrious men are met as if they were in the circle of one's peers; the same is true of a character in a story who comes to life in this media in an especially vivid and arresting way. We propose to call this seeming to the face-to-face relationship between spectator and performer a para-social-relationship." (Barron, 2015). JKT48 looks like it has its way of responding to its fans by bringing together its fans and idols so that conditions occur in the same environment. The face-to-face relationship between the fan and the idol is a parasocial interaction.

The researcher chose JKT48 fans as the object of research because JKT48 is an Idol Group that appeared for the first time in Indonesia and has a concept that can allow their fans to meet the idols they like at JKT48 even in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. Also, what kind of relationship JKT48 fans expect from their idols, and how do JKT48 fans position themselves in their social environment as JKT48 fans.

In conducting this study, the researcher set the focus of the study on the following:

1. What are the underlying motives for parasocial interactions among JKT48 fans?
2. What is the relationship between JKT48 fans and JKT48 members they like and the social environment of JKT48 fans during activities in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What is the experience that JKT48 fans get?

### *1.1. Conceptual Literature Framework of the Study*

#### *1.1.1. Relational Maintenance Communication*

Relational communication theories focus on the combined views or actions of the relationship members that provide a mutually produced description of their relationship. Relationship maintenance generally refers to a group of behaviors, actions, and activities that individuals use to sustain desired relational states (e.g., closeness an/or intimacy) and definitions (e.g., dating, best friends). Individuals in romantic relationships, cross-sex and same-sex friendships, family relationships, and even work relationships routinely use these behaviors to maintain their relationships. (Stephen & Karen, 2009). Relational communication is communication that has a relationship with each other and carries out this relationship through communication behavior or the results of mutual interaction.

#### *1.1.2. Parasocial Interaction*

According to Rubin and McHugh in 1987, fans have three main motivations for being interested in celebrity figures, and the most referring factors include social, physical, and motivational factors for working on tasks (Stever, 2009). Fans have several factors that influence them why they idolize their idol, such as the social, physical and motivational factors of the idol they like.

Table 1: Factor Motivation for Parasocial Interaction (Stever, 2009).

No	Factor	Keywords	Description
1	Task Attraction	Talented, musical, creative, artistic, entertainer, expressive.	Shows a clear appeal based on the talents and abilities possessed by the celebrity.
2	Romantic Attachment	Sexy, good-looking, attractive, dress neatly, strong, athletic.	Shows a clear attraction based on the target's physical characteristics or has the potential to be a romantic partner. References are made to create a relationship, marriage, sexual or physical attractiveness, or other attractive indicators of personal relationships.
3	Identificatory Attachment A	Role model, honest, generous, considerate, thoughtful, wise, religious, and others.	Want to be a figure like that celebrity.
4	Identificatory Attachment B	Connecting celebrities with themselves.	The celebrity is like a fan's self.
5	Filial Attachment	Friends, sister/brother and family.	Interested in considering the celebrity to be a friend or family figure without any romantic relationship.
6	Coworker Attachment	Collaboration or co-worker.	Want to collaborate or become a co-worker and be involved in working together for the creative world.
7	Hero Worship	Heroes, legends, etc.	The celebrity has a heroic status in the discourse regarding the legendary superstar and is more than just an ordinary person.
8	Infantile Attachment	Strong, exceeding others, meeting needs.	Celebrities meet unmet needs in the lives of fans.
9	Parental Attachment	Protective, protecting/nurturing.	Fans are protectors and nurture or parents against celebrities.

The characteristics of the figure of a fan have some similarities, especially in parasocial interactions. Characteristics are also given 2 levels, such as the level of prosperity of a fan in their finances and also the socialization of fans with the community of fellow fans. In addition, fans have begun to actively use the internet as a place to gather and have the motivation to meet their idols in person.

### 1.1.3. Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interactionism is a way of thinking about the mind, self, and society that has contributed significantly to the socio-cultural tradition of building communication theory. George Herbert Mead as a builder of this symbolic interaction. He teaches that meaning arises from interactions among human beings, both verbally and non-verbally (Morissan & Wardhany, 2009). At the same time, the 'mind' and 'self' arise in the social context of society. The mutual influence between society, individual experience, and interaction became material for theoretical study in the tradition of theories of symbolic interactionism, such as the following Holstein and Gubrium (2001) compendium, "the theory of symbolic interactionism is oriented towards the principle that people respond to the meaning they construct insofar as they interact with each other. Each individual is an active agent in the social world, which of course, is influenced by culture and social organization. He is also an important instrument in cultural products, societies, and meaningful relationships that affect them." (Ardianto & Q-Aness, 2009, pp. 135-136). In this case, it can be seen that the existing meaning of the interaction is established due to the existence of thought processes that influence the individual figure to accept the meaning of the results of interaction with others. There is a self that is seen as how the individual self-figure understands himself, then the existence of an existing society can affect oneself because of the process of social interaction.

## 2. Method

The phenomenological tradition assumes that people actively intersperse their experiences and try to understand the world with their personal experiences (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). In this case, the researcher uses qualitative - phenomenology to find out how the experiences that a person makes in doing something event or event. The

research uses a phenomenological method with the Alfred Schutz model, where researchers will typify fans by forming categories of parasocial interaction and fan experiences because they discuss the personal experiences of JKT48 fans.

### 2.1. Participant Characteristics

Table 2: Participant Characteristics

No	Name	Age	Gender	Job	Educational Stage	Being a JKT48 Fans	Spending Money to JKT48
1	Alif	26 years	Man	Entrepreneur	Bachelor Degree	11 Years	IDR 600.000.000
2	CC (Initial)	31 Years	Woman	HR Coordinator	Master Degree	10 Years	IDR 157.000.000
3	Tantowi Jauhari	30 Years	Man	Employee	Bachelor Degree	10 Years	IDR 140.000.000
4	A. Zahra Annisa	21 Years	Woman	Student	Bachelor Degree	9 Years	IDR 20.430.000

### 2.2. Data Collection

A depth interview is a way of collecting data or information by directly meeting face to face with informants in order to get complete and in-depth data. In this in-depth interview, the interviewer has relatively no control over the informant's response, meaning that the informant is free to give answers (Kriyantono, 2009). Observation can help researchers to understand the context that explains what people are doing. But observation can't help researchers understand why people do an activity, what motivates them and what their desires are (Kriyantono, 2009). In addition to using in-depth interviews, researchers will obtain other primary data using observations to the research site using participant observations. Also, using literature from journals, books, or articles for the secondary data.

## 3. Result

### 3.1. JKT48 as Popular Music Culture in Indonesia

Popular culture is defined by beliefs and values, behavior and values, and by an understanding of history and difference. All of these things belong to a particular social group (Burton, 2008). KT48 is one of the popular cultures that entered popular music in Indonesia by bringing an "idol" mechanism system like AKB48. In this case, popular culture is one of the places to provide a means or place that makes a person channel their expressions and feelings through things he likes and interests. JKT48 fans make this activity a way to channel their expressions and feelings.

Popular music has always been a music idol. A good-looking look always sells well, whether in a live theater or on television broadcasts. Popular music magazines and posters have spread seductive images of popular music performers since the beginning of popular music. As a culture industry geared towards making a profit, the emphasis has always been on seductive sheen rather than artistic aesthetics and aesthetic prowess. And more directing to the visuals in the presence of television. While the appreciation of popular music was essentially in sound (which was transmitted via radio or recording) before the advent of television, small screens featured visual elements of performers and performances (Lie, 2019). JKT48 is one of the popular music that currently exists in Indonesia by providing the JKT48 Theater as a place to offer concerts and music and dance performances from JKT48 members that can be directly watched by JKT48 fans almost every day, just like AKB48, which provides theater as a meeting place between fans and their idols.

According to Mulyana, JKT48 is one of the ways of transnationalization carried out by AKB48 in Indonesia. The emergence of JKT48 in the realm of the country's entertainment industry is a process of globalization of Japanese culture in Indonesia. Homogenization of Japanese culture starts from the concept, the appearance of members, costumes, and song lyrics to product sales. Hall (1992) explains that it is related to popular culture, where culture in everyday life is given to everyone more than just entertainment. Such as performances, expressions, and symbols that spread to human culture (Mulyana, Briandana, & Ningrum, 2019). By applying the concept of "Idol You Can Meet" from JKT48 as their marketing concept, fans can meet their idols directly at the JKT48 Theater by visiting and watching the setlist, but not only in terms of the appearance of the members given by JKT48. But there are also products offered by JKT48, namely selling CDs, music albums, and download cards from JKT48, which will get handshake tickets to shake hands and interact with JKT48 members they like, JKT48 Digital Photobook which contains photos of JKT48 members, and tickets for video calls with JKT48 members.

### 3.2. JKT48 Fans & Fandom

JKT48 fans are referred to as "JKT48 Fans". For JKT48 fandom, in general, ordinary people only know the designation of JKT48 fans as "Wota."

Loyal fans of idols who repeatedly go to the same show are commonly known as Wota (ヲタ). The term of this *spin-off* is from *Otaku* (御宅). The main sign of being a Wota is that he invests a lot of time and money in their favorite female idol. Otaku and Wota are sometimes associated with negative images such as anti-social behavior, social incompetence, obesity, and others (Xie, 2014). Although JKT48 has been around since 2011 and until now (2022), this fandom doesn't have a specific naming in it for its fans and only uses "JKT48 Fans".

Jenkins explains about participatory cultures that there are unique relationships or interests and expressions within fandoms or groups of fans (Lies, Khairul, & Rusmana, 2019). This fandom contains "Idols," idol characters who are identified as well-known people, intelligent, and experts in their fields (Dariyo, 2004). Idols or called "Aidoru," are also used in Japan as something that exists in individuals who can become singers, models, and personalities that can be produced and promoted to an audience (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012). However, JKT48 has been around since 2011, and until now (2022), this fandom doesn't have a specific name.

### 3.3. Concept of "Idol You Can Meet" JKT48

The concept of "Idol You Can Meet" is also carried by AKB48 sister groups such as JKT48. This concept is a way to bring fans together with their idols so that their fans can see firsthand the development and appearance of the idols they like at JKT48, located at the JKT48 Theater, Mall Fx Sudirman 4th Floor, South Jakarta. Currently, several activities are still actively carried out by JKT48 to bring together idols and their fans, including:

1. Setlist JKT48 Theater: Presenting performances such as singing, dancing, and MC performances performed by JKT48 members. The theater setlist will be divided into per teams, namely Team J, Team KIII, and Team T, and also assisted by JKT48. The core members who will be present in the theater setlist show are 16 members, and the schedule of the setlist and members present has been arranged by JKT48 management. To watch the JKT48 theater setlist, fans must pay a fee of IDR 60.000- to IDR 120.000- by ordering through the website or on the spot. The JKT48 operational system creates an attendance count system for fans who come to the JKT48 theater setlist. Fans who have attended attendance 100 times multiples will get an MVP (Most Valuable Participants) reward so that they can hold their attendance with their favorite members in the theater. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the JKT48 theater setlist can only be ordered through the website, and fans who already have an ID Card, such as OFC (Official Fans Club) JKT48, need to pay IDR 200,000 - one time to come to watch the setlist and also there is a limit on the attendance of the audience, which is a maximum of 26 people due to certain protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Handshake Event JKT48: an event where fans can shake hands with the JKT48 members they want. Tickets to participate in this event can be obtained as a bonus by purchasing the JKT48 CD. With activities such as the Handshake Event, fans can chat, talk and hopefully get to know the members better. (JKT48, 2020) Fans who participate in this activity can immediately interact with their idols by spending

IDR 35,000-/ticket or 1 CD, and 1 ticket is valid for 10 seconds talking to JKT48 members during the activity.

3. Video Call JKT48: a service that fans can do to interact with JKT48 members (JKT48, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the handshake event was replaced with a JKT48 video call activity so that fans could still interact with idols they liked. To participate in this activity, JKT48 fans must spend IDR 100,000/50 seconds.

#### 4. Discussion

JKT48 fans like JKT48 because of environmental factors such as being influenced by other people such as ex-girlfriends or school friends. In addition, some fans are interested because they have followed other idols such as AKB48 and K-Pop, which caused them to find out about the existence of JKT48 in Indonesia.

JKT48 fans don't mind the conditions during COVID-19, so during this COVID-19, fans can still participate in JKT48 activities. Even for far fans, it seems that the activities held online are helpful because they can interact with JKT48 members. After all, several events, such as video calls and theater, are also held online.

JKT48 fans can also choose the JKT48 fan environment around them to make friends and socialize. Some fans enter communities such as the fanbase to support the JKT48 members with other fans or join JKT48 fan associations because they both like JKT48 without any differences between the supported JKT48 members. In addition, JKT48 fans also found that the results of the social facilities they got while participating in JKT48 activities also gave them new friends who have different experts and professions. To interact with other JKT48 fans or fans with JKT48 members. Now, JKT48 fans can gather with social media applications such as Line, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Zoom, and Showroom.

The motivation of JKT48 fans to meet and interact is due to a sense of longing because they feel that meeting the JKT48 members they like can give them enthusiasm. Fans think that meeting JKT48 members can also relieve stress caused by the work and college environment and make the JKT48 members like recognize themselves as a person who supports the JKT48 member.

The motivations of JKT48 fans are:

1. Can be considered as a figure of brother/sister (filial attachment)
2. The figure of a parent or who is considered a protector/caregiver due to a large age difference (parental attachment)
3. Considers that JKT48 members are talented and can be developed by JKT48 fans (task attraction)
4. Consider themselves to be like the JKT48 members because of the similarities in their nature and character (identificatory attachment)
5. Interested in a special relationship with JKT48 members, such as dating (romantic attachment).

Fans interpret that spending from tens to hundreds of millions of rupiah is expecting to get feedback from their idols, such as the JKT84 member knows them as his fans, the JKT48 member can enter the senbatsu list, and provide exposure for the fans.

While participating in JKT48 activities, fans have their own influence from the results of their interactions with JKT48 members, such as feeling that they can be more enthusiastic and have good changes in carrying out their activities, such as on campus or at the office. In addition, JKT48 members also affect the pent-up feeling in fans, such as feeling homesick due to the lack of activity of JKT48 members on social media or not being able to meet JKT48 members they like and having new friends from the JKT48 environment. Even though fans have participated in JKT48 activities for more than 5 years, JKT48 fans are still not used to revealing their identity directly to the surrounding environment, such as campus, family, or co-workers.

Fans also get interactions that can be done through verbal and non-verbal communication as long as they have activities to become JKT48 fan figures. Fans can directly interact with JKT48 members and other JKT48 fans by

using offline and online media facilities. Longing and happiness, when encouraged, are non-verbal meanings found by fans when they want to meet or when they meet their idols at JKT48. In addition to factors in the JKT48 environment, JKT48 fans also have their own meaning in other social environments, such as not wanting to show themselves as a JKT48 fan figure in public directly because fans think that being a JKT48 fan is still taboo among the public.

## 5. Conclusion

In parasocial interaction, JKT48 fans can still interact with JKT48 members they like during the pandemic by participating in activities organized by JKT48 such as theater, online streaming, video calls, showrooms to other activities to keep meeting their idols. The interactions that can be carried out are direct communication and virtual or face-to-face meetings, even though they have to incur costs ranging from tens to hundreds of millions of rupiah to continue to support JKT48. The motives carried out by JKT48 fans in participating in JKT48 activities besides providing entertainment and fun, but some make this activity their existence among JKT48.

The relationship between JKT48 fans and JKT48 members during the COVID-19 pandemic still goes well. In addition, JKT48 fans have their expectations in having a relationship with the JKT48 member, such as wanting to be considered a sister, brother, or family figure, to wanting to be able to relate more like dating the JKT48 member they like. In addition to the relationships associated with JKT48 members, fans also establish social relationships with other JKT48 fans to join specific communities and the fanbase to support JKT48 members together.

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