

Digital Humanitarianism and Global Solidarity: The Role of Indonesian K-Pop Fans in Supporting Gaza

Eka Novita Sari*¹, Ainunia Nur Islami²

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga¹

Jl. Laksda Adisucipto, Papringan, Caturtunggal, Depok, Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia
Dompot Sejuta Harapan²

Jl. Mayor Kusmanto Gg. Ketapang, Ngingas Baru, Bareng Lor, Klaten Utara, Jawa Tengah 57438, Indonesia

*Correspondence author: ekanovita973@gmail.com

Abstract. The Al- Aqsa Flood Operation On October 7, 2023, triggered an intense Israeli military response and resulted in genocide in Gaza, with more that 69,000 casualties. This crisis sparked a global wave of solidarity on social media, reflecting a broader shift toward digital Humanitarianism, afrom of tecnology mediated humanitarian practice that enables remote participation in crisis response. This study examines the role of Indonesian K-pop fans in perfoming digital solidarity with Palestine through online campaigns and fundraising initiative in collaboration with local zakat institutions such as Basnaz, Dompot Dhuafa and Rumah Zakat. K-Pop fandom acts as new social agent that bridges popular culture and humanitarianism, forming a transnational philanthopic practice that is locally rooted yet globally impactful. Accordingly, digital humanitarianism can be understood as a social practice that integrates culture, technology, and spirituality, positioning digital solidarity as a new moral expression of youth in confronting contemporary humanitarian crises.

Keywords: Digital Humanitarianism, K-Pop, Digital Solidarity, Philanthropy, Gaza

Introduction

Taufan Al-Aqsa, or *The Al-Aqsa Flood Operation*, launched by Palestinian resistance groups on 7 October 2023, marked a significant escalation in the Israel–Palestine conflict as a response to decades of occupation, human rights violations, and the desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This event not only triggered an intense Israeli military response that resulted in genocide in Gaza, with more than 68,000 casualties, but also generated a global wave of solidarity through social media that challenged dominant narratives and opened new possibilities for the Palestinian liberation struggle. Social media played a crucial role as a space for information dissemination, solidarity mobilization, and cross-border humanitarian coordination. This phenomenon signifies a paradigm shift in global solidarity, which is increasingly mediated by digital technologies and online community participation.

The surge of digital solidarity following the attack created new opportunities for the practice of digital humanitarianism. This concept refers to the use of digital technologies such as social media, crowdsourced mapping, and big data analysis to support humanitarian responses to crises or disasters without requiring direct physical presence. Patrick Meier (2015) describes digital humanitarianism as an effort to realize the potential of the digital revolution in addressing the most urgent humanitarian challenges, in which volunteers and professionals from around the world collaborate online to map and respond to crises in real time, for example through platforms such as Ushahidi. Similarly, Burns (2012) conceptualizes digital humanitarianism as a form of collective intelligence emerging from digital collaboration a type

of global mutual aid that leverages data and online interactions to enhance efficiency and responsiveness in humanitarian action.

Digital humanitarianism has found a distinctive expression within popular culture, particularly among Indonesian K-Pop fans. Through online campaigns, digital fundraising, and the amplification of humanitarian messages, fandom communities practice forms of humanitarian participation that are emotional, rapid, and transnational. They combine fandom affect with global empathy, transforming digital culture from a space of entertainment into an arena of moral struggle and humanitarian solidarity. Accordingly, the digital solidarity practices of Indonesian K-Pop fans can be understood as a new form of popular culture based digital humanitarianism, representing both a technological and moral-social transformation among global youth in responding to humanitarian tragedies such as the genocide in Gaza.

The involvement of Indonesian K-Pop fans in humanitarian solidarity for Gaza represents a significant shift from symbolic online participation toward concrete and organized humanitarian action. K-Pop fans are no longer merely digital movements that publicize idol-related activities or promote social campaigns. Instead, their engagement has evolved into tangible social movements, including digital fundraising for humanitarian and disaster-related causes. Beyond fundraising, these fandoms actively collaborate with local zakat and philanthropic institutions, organically forming new practices of digital humanitarianism. These actions demonstrate not only the fandom's capacity to rapidly mobilize resources and public attention but also the convergence of cultural affect, moral consciousness, and religious practice within the context of global humanitarianism.

This study aims to analyze the practices of digital humanitarianism carried out by Indonesian K-Pop fans in response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza following the 2023 Al-Aqsa Flood Operation. Specifically, the study examines the role of social media in facilitating solidarity mobilization, digital fundraising, and the formation of transnational philanthropic networks involving collaboration between fandom communities and local zakat institutions. Through this approach, the research seeks to broaden understanding of how popular culture is transformed into a site of humanitarian action and its implications for contemporary digital philanthropy practices.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the practices of digital humanitarianism carried out by Indonesian K-Pop fans in response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza following the 2023 Al-Aqsa Flood Operation. The object of the study focuses on digital solidarity and social media-based philanthropic practices, while the research subjects include Indonesian K-Pop fandom accounts actively engaged in solidarity campaigns, digital content such as posts, hashtags, and campaign materials, as well as local zakat and philanthropic institutions involved in the distribution of donations.

Data were collected through online observation (digital ethnography), content analysis of narrative and visual communication, and documentary analysis of donation reports and humanitarian campaign archives. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through processes of data reduction, categorization, and interpretation, linking empirical findings to the theoretical frameworks of digital humanitarianism and popular culture studies. To ensure validity, this study applies source and methodological triangulation. The scope of the research is limited to digital solidarity practices after October 2023 and does not aim to measure the



quantitative effectiveness of donations, but rather emphasizes the social meanings and dynamics of digital solidarity.

Results and Discussion

Forms of Digital Humanitarianism Practices among Indonesian K-Pop Fans

K-Pop fans are predominantly young social groups with a high level of digital engagement, where almost all of their activities are shared through social media. Information consumption among these fans is also largely mediated by social media platforms. These digitally based activities have further evolved into forms of expression, campaigning, and alignment with particular social and political events. In this context, K-Pop fans utilize social media as a space for practicing digital humanitarianism by voicing injustice and expressing solidarity.

Since the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation in Gaza in 2023, Indonesian K-Pop fans have actively conducted online campaigns through hashtags such as #ARMY4Palestine, #FREEPalestine, and various other solidarity-related hashtags within their respective fandoms. Beyond hashtags, they also articulate their support through visual content and emotionally driven narratives. This form of solidarity does not remain at the level of symbolic expression but transforms into organized humanitarian action. Fundraising initiatives are carried out through integrated digital platforms such as Kitabisa.com or through collaborations with zakat and philanthropic institutions. For example, NCTzen Indonesia collaborated with Dompot Dhuafa and Medical Emergency Rescue Committee (MER-C) Indonesia to channel humanitarian donations.



Figure 1. Fundraising initiative by NCTzen Indonesia
(Source: Instagram @nctzenhumanity)

K-Pop fandoms function as networks of digital volunteers capable of operating across geographical boundaries and time zones. Their established familiarity with online coordination, role distribution, and mass mobilization enables rapid responses to humanitarian crises. Consequently, these digital humanitarianism practices reflect the transformation of fandoms from popular culture communities into social actors actively engaged in global humanitarian issues.

The Role of Social Media in Mobilizing Solidarity

Social media remains the primary driving force of mobilization, with platforms such as X (Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok being used to disseminate alternative information about the genocide in Gaza. The cross-border speed of digital communication enables information about aid blockades and attacks in Rafah to reach audiences across the globe. Hashtags such as #AllEyesOnRafah, #FreePalestine, and fandom-specific campaigns (for example, those initiated by NCTzen Humanity) are combined with emotionally charged visuals, fan art, and

edited videos that connect idol-centered empathy with humanitarian issues. This strategy has generated a significant impact on global public attention, with single posts receiving thousands of views. For instance, the song “SOS” by Seventeen has been widely used as background music in videos portraying the Palestini an struggle.



Figure 2. Video support for Palestine
(Source : Tiktok)

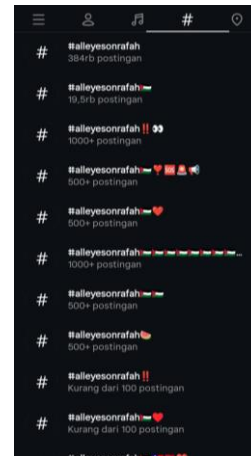


Figure 3. Number of hashtag users
(Source : Instagram)

These digital narratives encourage mass participation and contribute to the formation of transnational collective consciousness, as conceptualized by Durkheim as a system of shared values and beliefs that bind individuals within a social community (Durkheim, 1893/1984). Within the context of the network society, digital media plays a crucial role in accelerating the formation of such consciousness through emotional connectivity and shared identity (Castells, 2012). During the 2024–2025 period, the intensity of online interactions increased significantly, marked by boycott actions against brands associated with SM Entertainment, which sparked global discourse while simultaneously generating new waves of donations. This phenomenon reflects the logic of connective action, in which collective mobilization occurs without formal organizational structures, instead emerging through digital networks and interconnected personal expressions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Large-scale fanbase accounts function as key actors in this mobilization process, possessing the capacity to generate rapid virality, mobilize thousands of donors, and facilitate cross-fandom collaboration for shared humanitarian goals.

Collaboration with Local Zakat and Philanthropic Institutions

Fundraising initiatives carried out by K-Pop fans are not merely informal efforts to collect financial contributions; rather, they demonstrate a growing awareness of the importance of integrity and legal accountability. This awareness encourages collaboration with competent and legitimate institutions such as Dompot Dhuafa, Rumah Zakat, Kitabisa.com, and Human Initiative. Such collaborations play a vital role in enhancing accountability and public trust in online fundraising practices, aligning with arguments that institutional legitimacy is a key factor in the success of digital philanthropy (Madianou, 2015). Through the involvement of formal organization such as the collaboration between NCTzen and MER-C Indonesia—the funds collected can be distributed more effectively and transparently to victims of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. These collaborations reflect the emergence of a transnational philanthropic model that is deeply rooted in the local Indonesian context, as explained by the concept of *glocalization*, which refers to the interaction between global dynamics and local practices (Robertson, 1995). Religious values, the culture of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), and

Islamic philanthropic practices intersect with global digital fandom culture, producing a distinctive pattern of solidarity (Benthall & Bellion-Jourdan, 2009). Thus, the digital humanitarianism practiced by Indonesian K-Pop fans is not only global in its issue orientation but also local in its mechanisms, values, and moral foundations.

Popular Culture Affect and Moral Consciousness

Affective attachment to K-Pop idols, which often takes the form of parasocial relationships one-sided yet emotionally intimate connections functions as a primary entry point for the development of global humanitarian empathy among fans. In Indonesia, which hosts a large K-Pop fan base, this emotional bond encourages fans to move beyond purely aesthetic appreciation and begin internalizing the social values represented by or associated with their idols. When an idol such as Jae Park (eaJ), for example, leads a “Free Palestine” chant during a concert, the moment triggers fans’ emotional connection to the issue of Gaza, which is subsequently understood as part of fandom loyalty. This affective dynamic shifts popular culture from being merely a form of entertainment to becoming an ethical medium that stimulates moral awareness, prompting fans to support groups perceived as oppressed, to learn about global issues through online communities, and to mobilize digital solidarity.



Figure 4. eaJ at Prambanan Jazz (paragraph 1)
(Source: X @ej)



Figure 5. Movement mobilization
(Source: Instagram @rumahzakat)

The transformation of popular culture affect into humanitarian solidarity practices is clearly evident in the Xkwavers community, a multi-fandom network of K-Pop and K-Drama fans based in Indonesia. Xkwavers an acronym for *Extraordinary Kwavers* was founded by Fuad Naim, a public figure known within Indonesia’s Muslim youth *hijrah* movement. This community demonstrates a strong digital presence across multiple social media platforms, with more than 82,000 followers on Instagram and over 7,000 followers on X. In addition to producing fandom-related content, Xkwavers regularly organizes study sessions specifically designed for K-Pop fans by integrating popular culture with Islamic values. Its programs include spiritual strengthening, emotional management, and mental health awareness through initiatives such as *Xschool*, *Unlock*, and *XK Playground*.

Ni’am’s (2025) study indicates that Xkwavers not only constructs digital solidarity discourse on social media but also organizes fundraising activities, awareness campaigns, and collaborations with philanthropic and zakat institutions, thereby forming concrete and structured practices of digital humanitarianism. Within Indonesia’s religious social context, the digital solidarity mobilized by K-Pop fans is shaped by moral and religious values, where humanitarian empathy is understood as part of spiritual responsibility. Campbell (2013)

conceptualizes this integration of online practices and religious values as *digital religion*. Accordingly, Indonesian K-Pop fandom, through communities such as Xkwavers, represents the emergence of new social actors within digital society that connect popular culture, technology, and spirituality in responding to contemporary humanitarian crises, while simultaneously demonstrating how popular culture affect can be transformed into philanthropic practices imbued with religious ethical values.

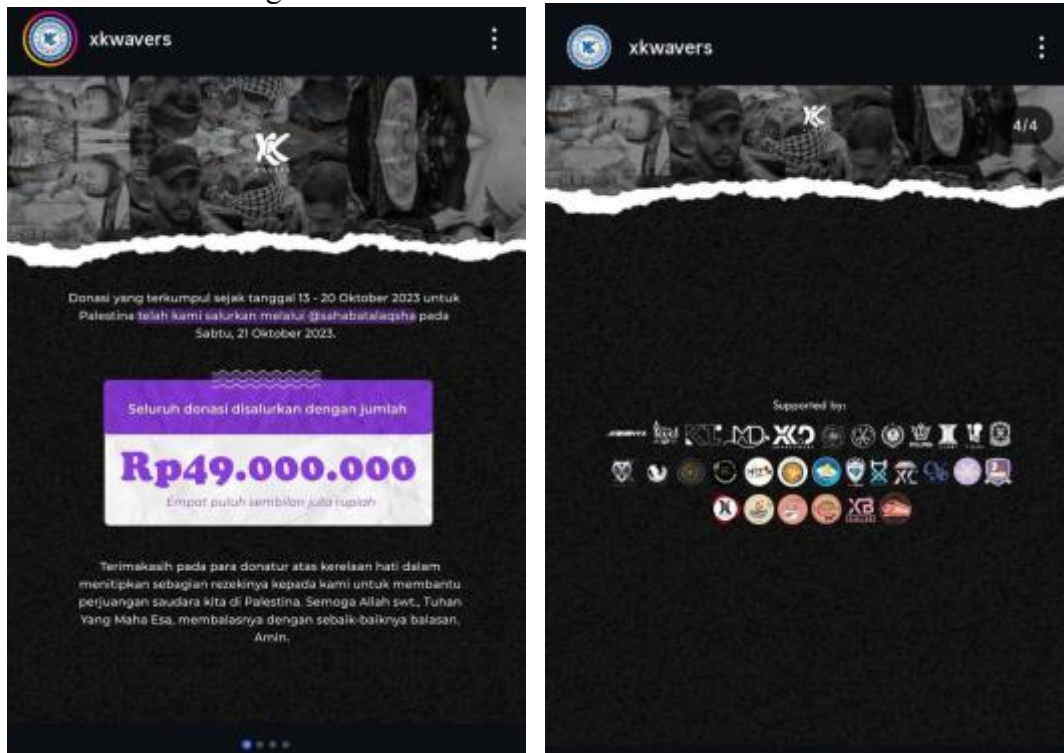


Figure 6. Xkwavers movement with K-Pop fandom for Palestine
(Source: Instagram @xkwavers)

Digital Humanitarianism as a New Social Practice

Digital humanitarianism can be understood as a new social practice that integrates culture, technology, and spirituality in responding to contemporary humanitarian crises, including the conflict in Gaza. This practice is no longer limited to the use of technology as a purely technical instrument—such as social media, big data, or digital platforms but has evolved into a space of socio-cultural collaboration involving new actors, including popular culture-based communities such as K-Pop fandoms. Patrick Meier (2015) conceptualizes digital humanitarianism as an effort to realize the potential of the digital revolution in addressing the most pressing humanitarian challenges through global volunteer participation, the use of open data, and coordination via digital networks. Similarly, Burns (2014) defines digital humanitarianism as the organization of social and institutional networks mediated by digital technologies, enabling individuals both on the ground and in remote locations to collaborate collectively in managing humanitarian responses. Thus, digital humanitarianism represents not only technological innovation but also a shift in social relations, knowledge production, and notions of citizenship within global humanitarian practices, where the participation of ordinary citizens and digital communities becomes a central element.

Fandoms within popular culture particularly K-Pop fandoms can increasingly be understood as new social agents in contemporary humanitarian responses. Unlike conventional humanitarian actors such as states, international NGOs, or formal humanitarian institutions,

fandoms operate through affective networks, digital relationships, and community-based voluntary participation. Emotional attachment (*affective ties*) among fandom members enables rapid, decentralized, and transnational mobilization of solidarity. Within the context of digital humanitarianism, fandoms function not only as disseminators of information but also as producers of meaning, mobilizers of resources, and drivers of platform-based philanthropic action. Chouliaraki (2013) refers to this mode of engagement as *post-humanitarian engagement*, in which humanitarian participation is mediated by emotions, identity, and everyday digital practices. Meanwhile, Meier (2015) emphasizes that non-traditional actors such as online communities and ordinary citizens are increasingly playing a significant role in the digital humanitarian ecosystem. Accordingly, K-Pop fandoms can be positioned as non-state humanitarian actors that expand the landscape of humanitarian response, while simultaneously challenging the boundaries between entertainment, activism, and philanthropy in digital society.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite enabling broad and rapid participation by non-state actors such as K-Pop fandoms, digital humanitarianism faces several structural challenges. One major issue is the risk of *slacktivism*, namely forms of digital engagement that are symbolic, short-term, and lack sustained commitment. Morozov (2011) criticizes forms of digital activism that rely heavily on online expressions—such as posts, hashtags, and one-time donations—arguing that they may create an illusion of participation without producing deep social transformation. In the context of digital solidarity for Gaza, fan engagement often intensifies during peaks of conflict escalation but tends to decline as public attention shifts elsewhere.

Another significant challenge is the fragmentation of public attention on social media, which complicates the maintenance of consistent humanitarian narratives. Social media operates through algorithmic logics that prioritize novelty, emotional intensity, and instant engagement, causing complex humanitarian issues to compete with entertainment content and other trending topics. Chouliaraki (2013) describes this condition as a feature of *post-humanitarian communication*, in which solidarity is framed emotionally but frequently loses its structural and political context. As a result, digital solidarity risks becoming shallow and fragmented.

A further challenge concerns the sustainability of movements beyond periods of major crisis. Tufekci (2017) argues that many social media-based movements possess strong initial mobilization capacity but are weak in building long-term organizational structures, leadership, and sustainable strategies. In the context of Indonesian K-Pop fandoms, although collaboration with zakat and philanthropic institutions helps strengthen the impact of humanitarian actions, reliance on global crisis momentum remains a significant constraint. Therefore, digital humanitarianism requires stronger institutionalization and more stable integration to ensure that it is not merely reactive, but can function as a sustainable social practice of humanitarian engagement.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Indonesian K-Pop fandoms function as significant non-state actors in contemporary digital humanitarianism, particularly in responding to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza following Operation Al-Aqsa Flood in 2023. Through practices mediated by social media, K-Pop fans are able to transform affective engagement with popular culture into

concrete humanitarian actions, including digital solidarity campaigns, amplification of humanitarian narratives, and organized fundraising conducted through collaboration with formal zakat and philanthropic institutions.

The findings of this study affirm that digital humanitarianism should not be understood merely as a technological innovation, but rather as a social practice embedded within cultural, moral, and religious dynamics. The integration of K-Pop fandoms with Islamic philanthropy reflects a form of glocalized solidarity, in which the global issue of Palestine is mediated through local values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), religious ethics, and trust in zakat institutions. In this context, digital solidarity emerges as a new moral expression of younger generations that combines popular culture, spirituality, and social responsibility.

Social media functions as the primary infrastructure of connective action, enabling rapid mobilization, cross-border participation, and the formation of transnational solidarity networks without reliance on formal organizational structures. Nevertheless, this practice also faces challenges, including the risk of slacktivism, fragmentation of public attention due to algorithmic logics, and limitations in sustaining movements beyond moments of crisis. Although collaboration with zakat institutions enhances legitimacy and accountability, further institutional strengthening remains necessary to ensure that digital humanitarianism does not remain purely reactive.

Overall, this study contributes to the development of digital sociology and humanitarian studies by positioning popular culture fandoms as emerging humanitarian actors that expand the landscape of philanthropy and global solidarity. The study highlights that digital communities rooted in popular culture particularly within the context of the Global South possess substantial potential to shape humanitarian practices that are ethical, participatory, and grounded in local values.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Dompot Sejuta Harapan (DSH) Klaten as a philanthropic partner that provided support and practical contributions to strengthening humanitarian solidarity, as well as to Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta as the academic institution supporting the research and writing process of this article. The authors also gratefully acknowledge all parties who contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of this study.

References

- Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739–768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>
- Benthall, J., & Bellion-Jourdan, J. (2009). *The charitable crescent: Politics of aid in the Muslim world*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Burns, R. (2014). *Rethinking big data in digital humanitarianism: Practices, epistemologies, and social relations*. *GeoJournal*, 79(4), 477–490. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-013-9509-x>
- Campbell, H. A. (2013). *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds*. London: Routledge.



- Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the internet age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2013). *The ironic spectator: Solidarity in the age of post-humanitarianism*. Polity Press.
- Durkheim, É. (1984). *The division of labor in society*. New York: Free Press.
- Madianou, M. (2015). Digital inequality and second-order disasters: Social media in the Typhoon Haiyan recovery. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603386>
- Meier, P. (2015). *Digital humanitarians: How big data is changing the face of humanitarian response*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.
- Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. PublicAffairs.
- Ni'am, M.F. (2025). *From Fandom to Frontline: Indonesian K-Poppers, Islamic-Pop Activism, and Digital Solidarity for Palestine*. *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, 20(1), pp.63–90. DOI: 10.14421/s56vt305.
- Ritzer, G., & Stepnisky, J. (2018). *Sociological theory* (10th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Robertson, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. In M. Featherstone, S. Lash, & R. Robertson (Eds.), *Global modernities* (pp. 25–44). London: Sage.
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. Yale University Press.
- Xkwavers. (n.d.). *Xkwavers — Extraordinary Korean Wavers*. Retrieved December 9, 2025, from <https://xkwavers.id/>