

Turning Café into K-afé – An Exploration on Fan Identity, Interactions and Placemaking in Thai K-Pop Fan Cafés

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Article information	Abstract
Article history: Received: 4 Oct 2025 Last revised: 22 Apr 2026 Accepted: 22 Apr 2026 Available online: 27 Apr 2026	Recent sociolinguistic research increasingly engages with K-Pop's semiotic complexity, yet the intersection of fan identity and public space remains underexplored. This study examines how fans, as active participants in the K-Pop "fanscape" (Kim, 2017), construct both personal and place identities through geosemiotic elements (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) in fan-organized cafés in Bangkok. Drawing on ethnographic data, the results show that fans use linguistic elements both to mediate identity and to organize interaction. The interactions work with spatial arrangements to construct a sense of collective identity. The interdiscursive blending of artistic and commercial signs which transforms the fanscape into a hybrid space of both consumption and production reinforces the identity construction. The study contributes to a broader understanding of how identity and place are co-constructed through semiotic practices in contemporary K-Pop fan culture.
Keywords: K-Pop Fandom Fanscape Interaction order Geosemiotics Placemaking Bangkok	

INTRODUCTION

K-Pop, despite its origin in South Korea, has transformed from a South Korean national music genre into a global phenomenon, shaped by government policy shifts in the 1980s, western cultural influences, and strategic investments by music labels (Lee, 2023). International collaborations have further fueled its expansion, solidifying its presence in global pop culture. Additionally, language plays a crucial role in shaping this cultural movement, from the release of English, Japanese, or Chinese versions of K-Pop songs to the ways people around the world talk about K-Pop music, performances, artists, and fandoms.

Sociolinguistic studies increasingly investigate K-Pop due to its nuanced and multicultural nature, providing us deeper insights into ongoing cultural phenomena in pan-Asian context. For example, Chun (2017) discovered through the analysis of metalanguage in YouTube comments that linguistic hybridity is salient in K-Pop cultural scene, emphasizing both global and local aspects. Likewise, Lee (2018) examined fan interactions in online space and found out that while fans used Korean to index the "Koreanness" (Harkness, 2015) in K-Pop, their own native languages were used to emphasize their national identity. A more recent study from Samosir and Wee (2022) demonstrated how international fans contribute to the diffusion,

translation, and glossing of K-Pop-related codes, thereby shaping fans' identity through language. Collectively, these studies underscore the pivotal role of fans and fandoms in constructing K-Pop's cultural landscape through the use of linguistic means: from words to discourses.

Building on these insights, namely the identification of hybrid language practices in online K-Pop discourse, this study demonstrates how fans extend such linguistic hybridity into physical spaces, deploying transliteration, code-mixing, and translation to enact simultaneous local and transnational identities. Moreover, this study focuses on fans and fandoms as dynamic, active participants in the contemporary K-Pop consumption cycle. While many sociolinguistic studies have used K-Pop as a lens to explore the relationship between language, media, and society, studies of the linguistic and semiotic landscapes of K-Pop fandoms as public spaces remain quite limited (except Kim, 2017; Kusumaningrum et al., 2023; Phillips, 2018). Applying foundational concepts from linguistic landscapes (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) and semiotic landscapes (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010), this study examines the construction of fan identity through the interaction of language, visual elements, social interactions, and physical spaces, focusing on K-Pop fan cafés in Bangkok. While previous sociolinguistic studies (Chun, 2017; Lee, 2018) have centered on digital interactions such as YouTube comments and blogs, this study shifts the focus to physical fan spaces, demonstrating that the connection between language, media, and society in K-Pop extends beyond online environments into the offline world.

Fan cafés are fan-organized events, typically held in cafés to celebrate an artist's birthday or other special occasions. Although the artists themselves do not attend, the cafés serve as informal fan gatherings where attendees socialize and share their admiration for the artist. In this sense, fan cafés resemble fan meetings, fostering community among fans. This practice, while rooted in South Korean fan culture, has become a global phenomenon and extends beyond the music industry to other media sectors such as literature and film, for instance, the Harry Potter Café documented by Simonetta (2024). In Thailand, fan cafés have become particularly prevalent in the K-Pop context, reflecting the strong influence of K-Pop culture in the country, as noted by Ferguson and Thanyodom (2024). Fan cafés provide a rich example of the material semiotic construction of fandom and the creation of "fanscapes" (Kim, 2017): spaces where fans express and exhibit their identities. Moreover, analyzing fan-hosted café events highlights the active role of fans as agents in the modern K-Pop cultural scene.

Employing geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), which focuses on the materialization of discourse within geosemiotic elements in physical spaces, we analyze K-Pop fans' process of placemaking and identity construction in K-Pop fan cafés in Bangkok. We focus on interaction within the space, visual elements displayed in public space, and spatial dynamics – relation between participants, visual elements and their emplacement within the spaces. Therefore, this paper addresses the following research questions: How do K-Pop fans construct place and identity through geosemiotic elements in fan cafés, and how do they contribute to the broader understanding of the fanscapes within the K-Pop scene?

PREVIOUS STUDIES AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

K-Pop and placemaking

Placemaking, originally a concept in socio-architectural studies, refers to the strategic shaping of a neighborhood, town, city, or region's physical and social character through arts and cultural activities (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Ellery et al. (2021) outline key themes of placemaking, emphasizing how it fosters community attachment and cultivates a sense of place. In recent years, this concept has been incorporated into linguistic and semiotic landscape (LL/SL) studies, which explore how physical spaces are shaped through cultural materials (Kailuweit, 2019; Li et al., 2024; Zimny, 2017). In this context, placemaking involves the embedding of social meanings into physical spaces, transforming them into sites of cultural and identity expression (Li et al., 2023).

Since K-Pop evolved into a global cultural phenomenon, various spaces have integrated K-Pop elements to create commercialized environments where K-Pop becomes the central theme. Phillips' (2018) studies focus on investigating placemaking in Shin-Ōkubo (cf. Nambu & Ono, 2024), a so-called "K-Pop district" in Tokyo. Her study highlighted the role of visual marketing in this transformation, including banners promoting artists managed by recording companies and collaborative photo booths with K-Pop artists. Phillips also observed non-commercial fan activities in the area, such as public K-Pop dance cover practices. She concluded that while commercialization is a significant factor, fan engagement plays an equally crucial role in shaping Shin-Ōkubo as a space where people publicly perform their K-Pop fandom, intertwining identity, public participation, and consumption.

Comparable patterns of K-Pop-inspired placemaking are evident in Southeast Asia. Kusumaningrum et al. (2023) explored "Hallyu-themed cafés" in Jakarta, using the case of "Loonami House" as an example. This café combines Korean food and beverages with a K-Pop gallery, often referred to as a "K-Pop Museum." The space caters not only to fans seeking an immersive "Korean" experience through visual elements such as artist photographs, photo corners, and themed menu items, but also functions as a venue for both K-Pop and broader community gatherings. This illustrates how K-Pop's commercialization materializes in physical spaces while simultaneously carrying social and cultural meanings.

In the Thai context, Wichitsakonkit (2021) investigated the Korean restaurant and bar "Jjan!" in Bangkok. Although the study primarily addressed business planning, it revealed that the establishment's "Koreanness" is shaped by K-Pop music and related events, such as cover dance competitions. Together, these Asian case studies demonstrate that K-Pop plays a central role in constructing Korean identity within localized spaces, emphasizing its significance in K-Pop-related placemaking.

Unlike previous studies which revealed the major role of top-down institutional placemaking, the present study identifies a contrasting model: fan cafés exemplify bottom-up, participatory placemaking in which non-institutional actors temporarily reconfigure commercial spaces through collectively produced semiotic resources. Moreover, while placemaking has been

explored within linguistic and semiotic landscape research (Cocq et al., 2024; Kailuweit, 2019; Yao, 2024), few studies have examined how placemaking operates in K-Pop contexts from a geosemiotic perspective. To fill this gap, this study adopts geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) as its main analytical framework, allowing a detailed examination of how fans utilize linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic resources, configure interaction orders, and employ place semiotics to transform everyday public venues into temporary yet affectively rich fanscapes.

Geosemiotics and the materialization of discourses in spaces

In linguistic landscape studies, which examine language in the material world, space and emplacement play a crucial role in shaping meaning. A no-smoking sign, for example, functions regulatively in a school but ironically in a smoking area, illustrating that meaning depends on its spatial positioning. To address this, Scollon and Scollon's (2003) propose the framework of geosemiotics to capture the meaning constructed through material objects and their relationships to human interaction and place. This approach facilitates an understanding of materialized discourses as a "semiotic aggregate" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 315).

Geosemiotics comprises three distinct subsystems. The first subsystem is the interaction order (Goffman, 1983, 2017), which consists of routines and rules that govern everyday social exchanges. Scollon and Scollon (2003) expand this concept to clarify how discourses are constructed and interpreted within specific contexts and how they shape meaning in the spatial realm. The second subsystem is visual semiotics (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). This subsystem emphasizes the processes of visual production and perception in meaning-making. The final subsystem, place semiotics, explores the interaction between semiotic elements and spatial realms or public spaces. Scollon and Scollon (2003) categorize place semiotics into two types: language-based, which addresses code preference and scripts, and space-based, which focuses on emplacement and the materialization of discourses in places. These systems work together as a semiotic aggregate: meaning emerges through the interplay between interaction, visual representation, and spatial emplacement.

Previous research has applied this framework to varied contexts. Lou (2007) analyzed the revitalization of Chinatown in Washington D.C., demonstrating that the Chinatown is represented simultaneously as a traditional and contemporary space through the language choice, visual composition, and emplacement, revealing the social dynamic in the area. Likewise, Abas (2019) explored "foodscapes" in ethnic restaurants in Bloomington through the analysis of storefront signs alongside semiotic elements in the restaurants, revealing how semiotic resources materialize cosmopolitanism. Recent study by Demaj and Vandenbroucke (2024) employed geosemiotics to analyze ethno-political graffiti in Kosovo. Code preference, inscription, materiality and visual saliency are used to display different political messages and illustrate conflicts in the country as contested geopolitical space.

While most studies employ geosemiotics to address placemaking in macro socio-cultural contexts such as multilingualism, cosmopolitanism, diaspora, and politics, as well as to investigate the semiotic construction of institutional and permanent spaces, the framework

is underutilized in studies of pop culture and in temporary spaces. Thus, this study aimed to expand the framework beyond “conventional” context. K-Pop offers a rich context for such an analysis, as placemaking within K-Pop culture is shaped significantly by the interaction between artists and fans (cf. Chun, 2017; Kim, 2017; Phillips, 2018). It is a predominantly visual culture, as evidenced by the production and consumption of visual elements such as albums, photobooks, and photocards (Oliver, 2020). Placemaking in K-Pop is also a growing trend; for example, Kim (2017) highlights how fans create public gardens in idols’ names by raising funds to donate trees and flowers, integrating fandom into urban landscapes. Therefore, geosemiotics provides a comprehensive framework for understanding K-Pop fanscapes, as it highlights the interplay between human interaction, visual elements, and spatial organization in meaning-making. Note that this paper will focus primarily on the interplay of the interaction order and place semiotics, treating visual elements as they mediate this relationship. Therefore, only visual semiotics related to the interaction order and place semiotics, such as visual signs implying the interactional structure or spatial relationship, will be presented and analyzed in this paper, since the full analysis of visual semiotics in these four fan cafés are addressed in another separate paper.

Fandom as an interactional unit in geosemiotic system

Hills (2002) defines fandom by first examining the term fan, derived from fanatic, referring to individuals deeply fascinated by specific media entities. He highlights the communal aspect of fandom, how fans engage in collective activities. Expanding on this, Duffett (2013) emphasizes that fandom involves not only participation in group activities but also emotional dedication and a desire for distinct practices. Epps-Robertson (2023), using BTS’ fandom, ARMY, as an example, demonstrates that a key goal of K-Pop fandom is to collectively support artists through established practices such as voting in music show awards, streaming music videos to boost visibility, and even creating material changes in public spaces (e.g., fanscapes like public banners, cafés, and philanthropic events).

From a geosemiotic perspective, the characteristic of K-Pop fandom aligns with Scollon and Scollon (2003) emphasized the concept of ‘with,’ originally proposed by Goffman (2017). ‘With’ refers to a group whose members are perceived as being together, characterized by mutual attention, social interaction, and routinized practices, both in physical and virtual spaces. In linguistic terms, this often manifests through deictic references, such as “they,” used to signal group belonging.

As a ‘with,’ fandom cultivates a strong sense of membership through repeated communal practices and attention to in-group status such as participating in the voting event during the music shows. However, K-Pop fandoms diverge from the described ‘with’ in Scollon and Scollon’s (2003) framework in two ways. First, K-Pop fandoms consist of subgroups that form hierarchical structures within the larger fandom (Epps-Robertson, 2023). In other words, a K-Pop fandom consists of multiple nested ‘withs,’ rather than being a singular ‘with.’ Second, K-Pop fandoms primarily exist in online and virtual spaces, extending Goffman’s concept beyond traditional physical interactions. This distinction is evident in Sun’s (2020) study of Homma, fans who produce and circulate high-quality photos of K-Pop artists online, reinforcing

both the hierarchical organization of fandom and the prominence of digital interaction. However, these online interactions are often materialized offline through events such as fan cafés, where ‘withs’ within the online space is reconfigured in physical form. A K-Pop fan café, therefore, functions as a site where K-Pop digital online fan practices are spatially, temporally, and physically articulated. In these senses, treating fandom as a form of ‘with’ captures the mediated dimension of fan interaction central to this study.

These theoretical perspectives on fandom and interactional units in the geosemiotc system provide a conceptional foundation for understanding how K-Pop fans organize themselves and perform membership through the display of semiotic elements in places and spaces.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data for this study come from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in four K-Pop fan cafés in Bangkok, each organized to celebrate the birthday of a specific artist: Miyeon (i-dle¹), Changbin (Stray Kids), Ningning (aespa²), and Jungkook (BTS) (see Table 1). These cafés were selected to capture diversity in fandom size and gender representation, with two male and two female groups included. The selection process was informed by the first author’s prior involvement in multiple fandoms as a Thai K-Pop fan, supplemented by pilot observations of fan activities. Larger fandoms were distinguished by frequent, large-scale events and hierarchical organizational structures, whereas smaller fandoms were characterized by more intimate, horizontally organized practices and personalized engagement. This range allows for a broader understanding of how fan practices vary across different fandom scales and gendered contexts.

Each café was temporarily transformed by fans into a themed space for the occasion, using decorations, visual displays, and other material arrangements. These transformations created unique fanscapes in which physical design and social interaction were intertwined, producing spaces that were at once celebratory, participatory, and identity-affirming.

Table 1
Fan cafés investigated

Artist	Group	Gender	Fandom Size	Details
Changbin	Stray Kids	Male	Mid-sized	10–11 August 2024 at Once Café, Siam Square
Jungkook	BTS	Male	Very Large	7–8 September 2024 at Sanset Café, Sathorn
Miyeon	(G)I-DLE	Female	Small	3–4 February 2024 at NCOT Café, Saphan Khwai
Ningning	aespa	Female	Large	18–20 October 2024 at Err Café, Siam Square

The ethnographic fieldwork at each café was conducted by the first author. Despite fan cafés ephemeral nature, lasting to 2–3 days, observations showed that the semiotic arrangements

¹ As of May 2025 (KTimes, 2025) (G)I-DLE has rebranded as i-dle. In this article, the former name is used when referring to data collected prior to the rebranding.

² The capitalization and styling of group names in this article follow the official usage as presented on the artists’ or record labels’ official websites and promotional materials.

within each café remained largely stable throughout the event. Therefore, each café was documented at a single time point, typically during the afternoon, which was identified as the peak visiting hour through observation, in order to record the most active fan interactions. For Jungkook's café, which operated in multiple sessions (see 4.2 spatial arrangement and interaction order), the focus of the documentation was also on the afternoon session.

Normally, each fan café typically lasted two to three days. In this study, the first author visited each site for one day, spending approximately 2-4 hours³ per visit. Fieldwork began with participant observation, during which the first author engaged in fan practices, such as writing messages and receiving giveaways, while documenting visual elements in the café, including banners, posters, photos, sticky notes, cardboard cut-outs, giveaway items, balloons, and food decorations. Each distinct visual element photographed was treated as a unit of analysis; duplicate images of the same element were filtered during coding to avoid distortion. Fieldnotes were also recorded.

At each café, the first author was accompanied by a companion, an active fan of the respective fandom who regularly participates in fan practices and attends K-Pop events. These companions were approached through pre-existing rapport. They offered additional perspectives, helped mediate contact with other community members when needed, and enabled the author to balance insider engagement with analytical distance.

Following observation, semi-structured ethnographic interviews were conducted with both fan café organizers and the fieldwork companions. Organizers were contacted via X, the main communication platform for Thai K-Pop fandoms. Selection focused on individuals who held primary responsibility for event organization, often named directly in promotional tweets. As key informants, these organizers provided insights into fandom engagement, the functions of fan cafés, and fandom structures. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was recorded for transcription.

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Chulalongkorn University. All participants, including companions and organizers, were fully informed of the study's purpose and provided consent prior to participation. Personal information was kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used in all analyses. All photographs used were granted appropriate permissions.

A total of 327 photographs were collected, alongside with four sets of fieldnotes corresponding to each ethnographic field visit, and a total of 161 minutes of interview. The data in this study were coded using MAXQDA. The coding process was based on Scollon and Scollon's (2003) unit of analysis for each semiotic subsystem. This includes the interaction order (frontstage and backstage, multimodality, sense of time, routinized practices, interaction unit, and distances) and place semiotics (emplacement, genre, and multilingual signs). A conceptual

³ Each café visit (2-4 hours) was part of a year-long engagement involving continuous online observation on X, where the first author interacted with café hosts and followed event activities. In this sense, the fieldwork encompassed both online and offline dimensions of fandom practice, with each visit serving as a focal point within a broader ethnographic engagement.

diagram illustrating the intersections of the three analytical dimensions in geosemiotics (interaction order, visual semiotics, place semiotics) as applied to fan café contexts is provided in Figure 1 below.

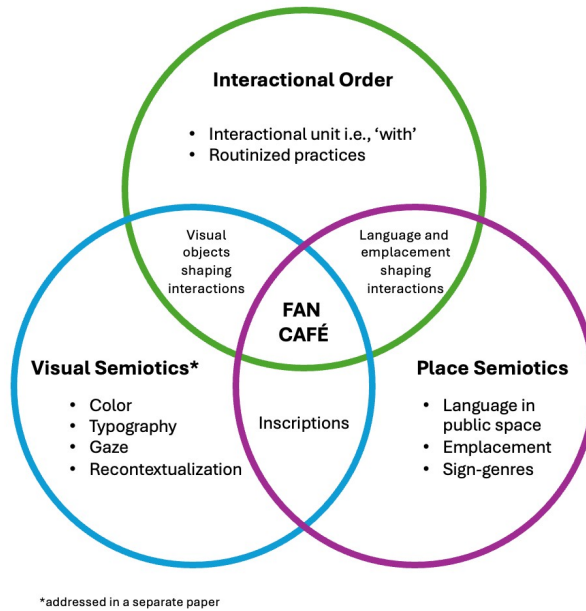


Figure 1 Conceptual diagram illustrating the intersection of three analytical dimensions in geosemiotics

RESULTS



Figure 2 Inside Miyeon's café

In Figure 2, we can see three elements of geosemiotics realized into material level in Miyeon's café. Although the interaction order is not directly observable in the objects themselves, it is shaped by the interactional spaces created through the emplacement of various items on the table, such as giveaway merchandise, food and drinks, and a speaker playing (G)I-DLE's music.

Giveaway items often initiate exchanges between the café host and attendees, who briefly converse about the artists and express appreciation for the gifts. Food, drinks, and music serve as ambient mediators of interaction, subtly linking participants through shared sensory experiences and reinforcing a sense of collective identity as “fans attending the café.” The visual semiotics can be observed through visual elements such as pictures used in the banners or color used in texts. These components are not only for aesthetic purpose, but also serve as key meaning-making resources in the café. The placement of large-scale idol portraits on café walls or banner backdrops creates a sense of presence and emotional attachment, while the use of specific colors, often associated with a particular idol or group, reinforces group identity. Lastly, the emplacement of each semiotic element and the language displayed in the space reflect the ongoing interaction and social dynamics within the scene. The tables were arranged closely together, allowing attendees to sit within personal distance (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). This spatial setup not only enabled casual conversation among participants but also fostered a sense of intimacy and closeness that reflects the social atmosphere of a small-sized fandom.

These three subsystems work dependently; an absence of a system can result in an incomplete construction of fanscape as a geosemiotic system. This is demonstrated in an interview excerpt with Zone (pseudonym), the companion attending Ningning’s café with the first author, where the first author mentioned Ningning’s birthday café without fans by the time they attended.

First author: คิดยังงี้กับคาเฟ่ที่ตอนแรกมีแค่ของตกแต่งแต่ไม่มีคนเลย

What’s your opinion on a café with only decoration but without fans at first?

Zone: เอ่อตอนแรกก็ดูไม่ค่อยมีชีวิต เหมือนก็เห็นแต่รูปแต่พอหลัง ๆ มีคนถ่ายรูป มีคนนั่งเขียน เอาอะไรนะ เหมือนจะมีไอทีติดขอบแก้วอะ โอ cup sleeve ถึงรู้สึกว่ามันไม่เงียบเหงาไป

Well, at first, it looked lifeless, like there were only pictures. But afterwards people took some pictures, wrote messages, took what, like the thing that sticks around the cup, cup sleeves. Then I feel it’s not too quiet.

From the interview excerpt, it can be inferred that without interaction order, visual semiotic or place semiotic alone cannot be deemed as “fanscape.” The analysis section below will cover the display of language in public space as place semiotics, interaction between the interaction order, i.e. interaction units and place semiotic, fanscape and categorization of sign-genre (Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

Language and identity in the fanscape

An analysis of photos from fan cafés revealed that four languages, Thai, English, Korean, and Chinese, dominate the linguistic landscape. In Bangkok’s K-Pop fan cafés, Thai predominates as the infrastructural code of the fan cafés, used in the signs giving information and regulations. This reinforces the localized character of the cafés. In contrast, the symbolic or preferred code varies across artifacts and should be considered as a dynamic choice made for a specific purpose. This distinction aligns with Landry and Bourhis’ (1997) differentiation between the informational and symbolic functions of language displayed in public signs.

In Figure 3, both Thai and English appear on a sign, with Thai functioning as the preferred code for two reasons. First, the Thai script occupies a central, visually prominent position, while Changbin's name in English appears above it in a smaller, different font, and the Thai text forms part of a fixed event logo rather than a deliberate communicative choice. Second, although the phrase "set giveaway" is in Roman script, it follows Thai syntactic structure (head-initial) rather than standard English (head-final) syntax (Huebner, 2006). This suggests that the English text is embedded within a Thai discourse framework. Therefore, such patterned usage reflects Thai as the dominant semiotic code in this fanscape.

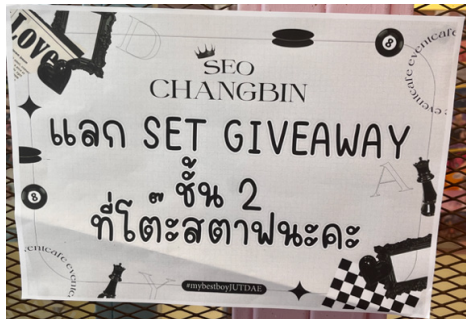


Figure 3 An instruction sign in Changbin's café written in both Thai and English
 (Translation: 'trade [your receipt] for the giveaway set at staff's table on the 2nd floor')

A different pattern emerges in Miyeon's café. Here, the English head-final structure "Giveaway Set" (Figure 4) is preserved, consistent with the use of Latin script, and the sign appears solely in English, without Thai. In this context, English functions as the preferred code. While this may appear at odds with the local Thai setting, it reflects and signals the global orientation of the K-Pop movement, emphasizing its transnational appeal rather than contradicting the local context.



Figure 4 English sign with English structure in Miyeon's café

Beyond Thai and English, other scripts in the fanscape serve mainly symbolic purposes. Korean script (Hangul), for example, frequently appears in artist names, emphasizing cultural association rather than conveying information. In Figure 5, the name 미연 ('Miyeon') is prominently displayed in Hangul. English functions as the preferred code, evident from its central placement and repeated use throughout the sign to ensure comprehensibility. Hangul, in contrast, acts

as a secondary code, positioned peripherally with a slanted font, intended less for reading than to evoke a sense of “Koreanness” (Milak, 2023), thereby enhancing the café’s authenticity and emotional resonance.



Figure 5 A poster at Miyeon’s café containing both English and Hangul

Within the fanscape, certain scripts are employed to write languages not typically associated with them, reflecting common transliteration practices in fan cafés. Korean and Chinese, for instance, are frequently rendered in Roman script, particularly for name-dropping, i.e., mentioning artists’ names. Figure 6 (a-d) shows four artists’ names in English transliteration, a practice that enhances readability and ensures wider comprehension among diverse audiences. In Figure 6d, Ningning’s name also appears in simplified Chinese, with the preference for Chinese language and script in her café discussed later in this section.



Figure 6 Artists’ names transliterated into Roman script
(a) Miyeon (b) Changbin (c) Jungkook (d) Ningning

Figure 7 illustrates another instance of Korean being transliterated into Roman script outside of name contexts. The Korean word “Jutdae” (meaning ‘principle’), a fan-given nickname for Changbin, originates from a VLOG episode in which he encouraged a member to maintain their own “standpoint.” Rendering “Jutdae” in Roman script allows international fans to read and share the term, facilitating the global circulation of Changbin’s cultural identity. This practice exemplifies K-Pop’s glocal identity, blending local (Korean) and global (English) elements (cf. Santos & Saisuwan, 2023). The use of capital letters further underscores the term’s significance to Changbin’s persona.



Figure 7 The poster of this event with the hashtag #mybestboyJUTDAE

Playful transliteration extends further: Thai phrases are sometimes re-scripted in Hangul (Figure 8), combining local identity with the symbolic appeal of Korean script. This mirrors Lee's (2018) findings that fans use native languages alongside Korean to emphasize national belonging while simultaneously participating in K-Pop's global semiotics. Through these practices of transliteration, K-Pop emerges as a global cultural movement, shaped by fans' creative and playful mixing of languages and their semiotic expressions within the fanscape. This playful manipulation of language, where fans adapt and reshape words for style and enjoyment, highlights the transnational fluidity of K-Pop culture and its ability to cross linguistic and cultural borders. Furthermore, the handwritten sign conveys a sense of personal emotion and immediacy, fostering an intimate and participatory form of fan expression. Its casual handwriting reflects individual effort, which reinforces the bond between fans and the artist. This is further supported by the fact that, in all of the cafés examined, a common routine practice is the writing of congratulatory messages on sticky notes.

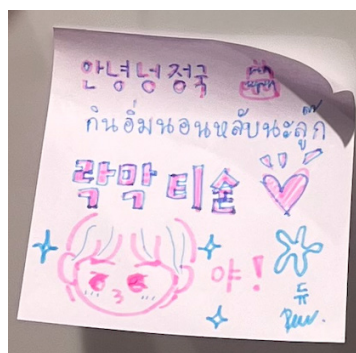


Figure 8 A congratulatory message at Jungkook's café with Thai words transliterated into Hangul
(Translation: 안녕녕정국 (annyeong nong Jungkook) 'Hello nong⁴ Jungkook'
กินอิ่มนอนหลับจะดี 'Eat and sleep well, my son',
รักมากทีสุด (rak mak ti sut) '[I] love you the most')

⁴ A kinship term in Thai referring to a younger sibling. Often used by Thai K-Pop fans to address artists.

Although previous examples highlight the symbolic role of Korean in fanscapes, Ningning's café presents a notable shift in code preference. Chinese emerges most prominently in Ningning's café, where simplified and traditional Chinese scripts index her national identity. In contrast to the Korean-dominant performances typical of K-Pop (Choi, 2023), Ningning's fans foreground Chinese as the preferred code in signage and congratulatory notes (Figure 9).



Figure 9 Chinese script in Ningning's Café

(a) Ningning's Chinese name on a banner

(b) A banner (Translation: 'Whoever I point at will get rich!')

(c) Fan-written congratulatory message (Translation: 'Happy birthday [to] my Ningning')

In Figure 9a, Chinese text appears in a larger font above the smaller English group name, positioning Chinese as the primary code. Its symbolic function is evident in banners like Figure 9b, which invokes cultural motifs to invite participation, and in the numerous fan-written Chinese notes displayed on message boards like Figure 9c. While K-Pop idols typically perform in Korean, the prominence of Chinese highlights how fans reconfigure linguistic hierarchies to foreground Ningning's nationality, framing her both as a K-Pop performer and a symbolic representative of China. These practices demonstrate how language use within fanscapes mediates transnational identity construction between global K-Pop aesthetics and localized cultural affiliations.

As demonstrated in previous cases, handwritten notes in the fanscape serve not only to express the intimate connection between artists and fans, but also to help shape routine interactions, particularly in settings with little to no opportunity for fan-to-fan interaction. In such contexts, numerous regulative signs, that is, signs instructing visitors on how to behave in the space, are often present. This is especially true in cafés lacking individuals who would typically manage the interaction order, such as café hosts, as illustrated in Figure 10 and Figure 11.

In Figure 10, participants at Jungkook café were seated far apart (see blocked 'with' in section 4.2), making direct instruction difficult. Handwritten signs were thus used to regulate behavior, but their intimate form, enhanced by features like a hand-drawn smiley, softened the directive tone and preserved the fanscape's emotional atmosphere.

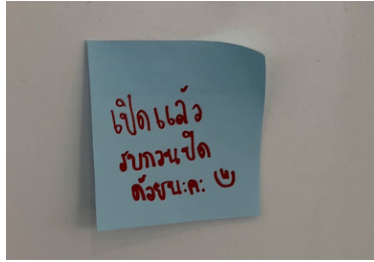


Figure 10 Handwritten regulative sign in Jungkook's café
 (Translation: 'Please close this after opening it')

In Figure 11, handwriting in the signs indexes the virtual presence of the café host, reinforced by playful language. For example, in Figure 11a, a handwritten sign with Ningning's picture directs participants to place congratulatory postcards in a designated area, framed as if from Ningning herself. The use of “มะมี” ('Mommy') to address fans reflects a fandom discourse positioning Ningning as a cherished daughter, explored further in the next chapter. Through informal phrasing and visual cues, the inscription compensates for the lack of live interaction, shaping both interaction order and Ningning's fan-constructed identity.



Figure 11 Handwritten instruction signs in Ningning's café

(a) A sign instructing participants to place congratulatory postcards in the designated area

(Translation: 'Mommy, place the postcard here!!')

(b) A sign prompting participants to scan the QR code for payment

(Translation: 'Scan and pay here')

(c) A sign advertising fan-made goods and prices

(Translation: 'Keychain (for sale): scan 50 Baht and take one' / 'Ningning bracelet: 100 Baht each, scan and take')

To conclude, this section illustrates how the material display of language actively shapes fanscapes by mediating identity and structuring interaction. The choice of linguistic codes, Thai, English, Korean, or Chinese, signals both the artist's identity and the targeted audience. These multilingual practices illustrate process of glocalization (Robertson, 1995) which refers to the global circulation of local forms (in this case: local meanings of the semiotic elements) made possible through mobility (Blommaert, 2016) dynamic circulation of meanings across time and space. Such movement resulted in the process of resemiotization (Iedema, 2003),

the transfer and recontextualization of semiotic elements from a Korean or global context into Thai café spaces. This process reveals how fans navigate tensions between Korean cultural specificity and Thai localization. Despite these transnational flows, the cafés remain locally anchored: infrastructural signage and interactional norms are predominantly shaped through Thai linguistic practices. Thus, the linguistic landscape of the fanscape does not simply represent either global or local identity but constitutes a co-constructed, glocalized identity emerging from their continual negotiation.

Not only does their salience is produced through code preference, but it is also constructed through inscriptional features such as font, layout, and material form. The size, placement, and stylistic treatment of writing highlight particular languages and render them contextually significant. Additionally, handwritten notes, whether for congratulatory messages (bottom-up) or regulative signs (top-down), serve as a key geosemiotic strategy for producing an affective, intimate atmosphere. In sum, written language, whether printed or handwritten, within fanscapes functions beyond its informational or symbolic role, simultaneously organizing routinized practices and cultivating intimacy that implies fan identity construction.

Spatial arrangement and interaction order

This section examines how spatial organization and interactional practices jointly structure the fan café experience. Fan cafés are not simply commercial settings but carefully orchestrated spaces where fandom identities and relationships are enacted. To analyze these dynamics, we focus on both the physical arrangement of the cafés and the interactional processes that unfold within them, paying particular attention to the practice of fanning, defined here as a routinized set of embodied and material activities through which fans participate in the café and recognize one another as co-members of a fandom.

As shown in Figure 12, the layout of K-Pop fan cafés can be broadly divided into three zones: the commercial area, the interactional area, and the artistic area. Note that these areas often overlap with each other and have no clear-cut boundaries. The commercial area is the first point of entry, typically consisting of the cashier counter and, in some cases, a registration desk (e.g., Changbin's and Jungkook's cafés). Here, interactions are largely transactional and hierarchical, as fans are required to purchase food or drinks, sometimes above a set threshold, to access giveaways or other participation rights. This commercial exchange functions as a rite of passage (Van Gennep, 2019), transforming casual visitors into active café attendees.

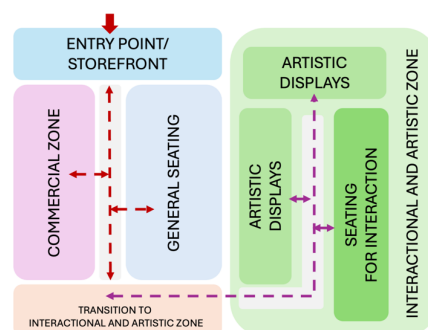


Figure 12 A generic structure of K-Pop fan cafés investigated

After passing through the commercial threshold, participants typically move into the interactional and artistic zones. The interactional area is furnished with tables and seating, facilitating fan-to-fan engagement through chatting, sharing experiences, or distributing fan-made giveaways. These encounters take place within a shared ‘with’ (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), where the sense of co-presence among attendees is central. By contrast, the artistic area is curated as a visual and affective gallery, displaying posters, cutouts, fan art, and decorative objects. Interactions in this zone are oriented primarily toward material and symbolic engagement with the artist, often through photographing or silently appreciating displays.

Together, these zones structure the practice of fanning. Fanning encompasses not only the engagement with decorations, music, and themed food, but also the interactions among participants, whether through small talk, giveaway exchanges, or collective activities such as platform events. It is through these routinized and recognizable practices that fans index belonging, negotiate proximity, and co-construct the affective atmosphere of the café. Documenting these processes through photographs and fieldnotes allows for a geosemiotic analysis of how spatial arrangements and interaction orders jointly produce the fanscape.

Because the interaction in each area is different, and each café is designed with a different spatial arrangement, each café event produces a distinct type of ‘with,’ shaped by the interplay of spatial arrangement and routinized practices. These are classified along two criteria: whether a collective identity naturally emerges among attendees and whether interpersonal interaction occurs beyond the commercial zone. If collectivity arises spontaneously, the ‘with’ is considered ideal; if it requires externally imposed activities, it is forced. When no collective identity forms, but limited interaction occurs, the ‘with’ is blocked; if interaction is entirely absent beyond transactions, it is absent. Figure 13 illustrates this classification.

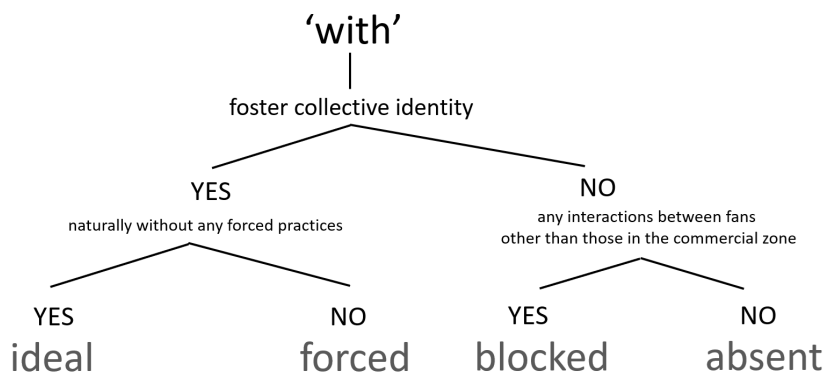


Figure 13 Categorization of ‘with’ in K-pop fan cafés investigated

The first type of ‘with’ identified is the blocked ‘with,’ in which participant interaction is constrained by the spatial and organizational structure of the fan café, particularly the commercialized routines in the commercial zone. Figure 14 illustrates the layout of Jungkook’s café.

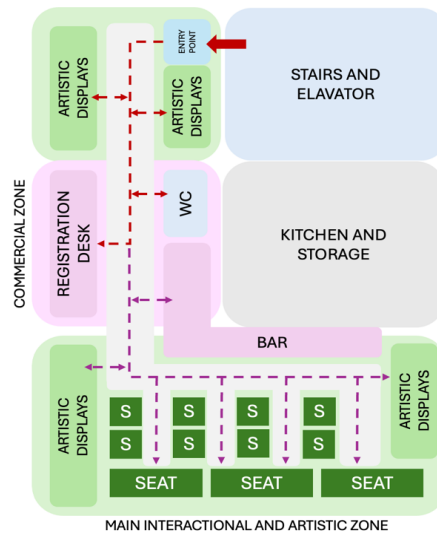


Figure 14 Spatial layout of Jungkook's café

This café occupied a commercial building without a traditional storefront. Entry was through a small door directly into the space (Figure 15), where attendees encountered prominent artistic displays such as large cardboard cutouts. Participation required pre-registration and online pre-payment, and each visitor was allotted a fixed 90-minute timeframe to engage in fan practices such as ordering refreshments or taking photos. The rigid temporal and procedural structure limits opportunities for spontaneous interaction.



Figure 15 Entrance to Jungkook's café

Additionally, the café's seating, arranged as separated individual spots, discourages casual socializing. The requirement for pre-registration further limits spontaneous encounters, unless fans had coordinated with friends in advance. This effect is amplified by the fandom's size; as noted in methodology section, BTS's ARMY is exceptionally large, often resulting in weaker personal connections when compared to smaller or mid-sized fandoms. These factors create a more individualized fan experience and restrict interaction within the fanscape, ultimately reducing the sense of collective identity. This diminished collective feeling is illustrated in an

interview with Leti (pseudonym), a companion attending Jungkook's café, reflecting on the event's atmosphere.

First Author: เป็นกันเองน้อยลงเรื่อย ๆ นี่รู้สึกมันเป็นเพราะอะไร
 Why do you think it is becoming less casual?

Leti: น่าจะเพราะคนไม่ค่อยคุยกันหรือ ไม่รู้แต่คนที่ต่างถ่ายรูปแล้วก็กลับปะ ต่างถ่ายรูป ลงรูป แล้วก็กลับ แต่ว่าอันนี้น่าจะแล้วแต่เนเจอร์คนไป อย่างกูเป็นพวกชอบพูดอะ ก็เลยแบบว่าถ้าแบบมีแจกของก็จะคุยกับเค้าแบบเป็นไงมาไงชอบใครดีมานานหรือ ยังแบบสัมผัสภาษณ์เลื่อยะ [...]
 It might be because people don't really talk to each other? I don't know. But people just take pictures and leave, take pictures, post them, and then go. But I guess this depends on the nature of the attendee. As for me, I like talking, so if there's a giveaway or something, I'd talk to people who hand out giveaway items, like asking how they're doing, who they like, or if they've been a fan for long, kind of like an interview. [...]

First Author: แล้วทำไมถึงคิดว่าครั้งนี้แบบ มันอาจเป็นเพราะว่าเค้าจัดเป็นรอบ ๆ ด้วยมัย
 Why do you think this time it's like, it might be because they organize it in separate rounds?

Leti: อืมใช่ [...] เหมือนเคยไปคาเฟ่ที่จัดเป็นรอบอยู่ แต่ว่ารู้สึกไม่จอย รู้สึกเป็นเหมือน คือยุ่งไม่ทันทำอะไรที่ต้องลูกแล้ว อะไรเงี้ เหมือนมันแค่ถ่ายรูปอะ ไปละ ละต้องไป มันนั่งจุ่มไม่ได้
 Um, yeah [...] I've been to a café that was organized in separate rounds, but I didn't enjoy it. It felt like, I hadn't done anything and I had to get up and leave, something like that. It felt like you just took pictures and left. You have to leave. You can't really settle in.

The absent 'with' emerges in settings where interaction is effectively nonexistent due to spatial constraints, as observed in Ningning's café. Unlike conventional fan cafés (e.g., the generic layout in Figure 12 or Jungkook's café in Figure 14), Ningning's café was hosted in a grab-and-go kiosk with minimal seating (Figure 16 and Figure 17). The typical circulation path connecting commercial and interactional zones is absent, leaving participants' movement unstructured and limiting opportunities for social engagement.

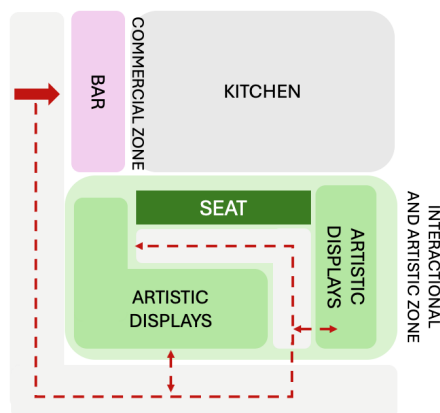


Figure 16 Spatial layout of Ningning's café



Figure 17 Err café hosting Ningning's birthday café with packed decorations and limited seats

The café's spatial openness shown in Figure 15 stems from its physical limitations. Its compact and informal setup lacked designated fandom staff (aside from the café employees unaffiliated with the fandom) to manage participant movement, resulting in no gatekeeping: visitors could freely enter, take giveaway items, write messages, or photograph the artistic displays, even from outside the venue (Figure 17). With only a single narrow counter seat, interaction was largely confined to individual exchanges with staff during ordering, unrelated to the K-Pop fan café. No fan-to-fan interactions were observed, and engagement remained limited to material objects, preventing any shared experience. Unlike the other three cafés studied, Ningning's café did not play her music, likely due to the open-space setting, further reducing potential interaction, a contrast which will be elaborated in Changbin's birthday café. These conditions indicate that extreme spatial constraints inhibited collective identity formation, resulting in an absence of participant interaction, or an absent 'with.'

The ideal 'with' reflects Goffman's (1959) notion of co-presence, where fans interact as a socially cohesive group, supported by the café's spatial design (Figure 2, Figure 18).

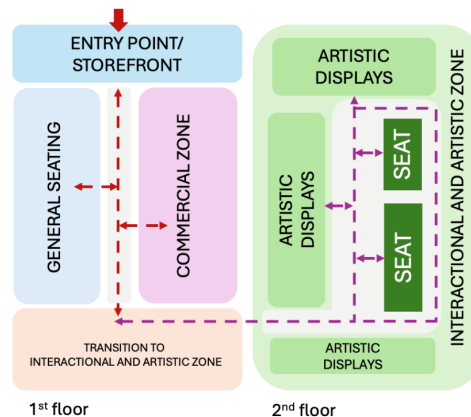


Figure 18 Spatial layout of Miyeon's café

In Miyeon's café, the first floor served commercial purposes, while the second floor was organized as an interactional and artistic space. Two rectangular tables formed a connected central table, with a purple circulation line indicating easy movement around them. This fluid

layout encouraged fans to join or leave freely, fostering informal interaction. Fans could participate in collective conversation regardless of seating, while the host and core fandom members welcomed newcomers. The space promoted horizontal engagement, allowing voices and interactions to circulate across the room. Fans discussed K-Pop topics, like (G)I-DLE's recent comeback, while simultaneously performing everyday aspects of their identity (e.g., studying, working, gaming). This combination of spatial openness and inclusive social dynamics enables co-performance of fan and personal identities, exemplifying an ideal 'with.'

In contrast, forced 'with' appears at Changbin's birthday café, where spatial constraints necessitated externally reinforce collective identity via platform events. The café's layout (Figure 19) shows that, while the first floor resembles Miyeon's café, the second floor mirrors Jungkook's, with more separated tables and a dividing wall that prevented interaction between attendees on opposite sides. The space was crowded, with extra chairs added and limited mobility, and seating was assigned rather than self-selected, often placing fans beside strangers. Although some social interaction occurred, the cramped arrangement hindered organic group cohesion.

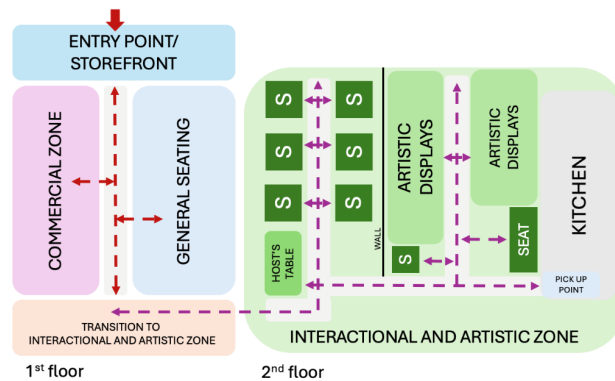


Figure 19 Spatial layout of Changbin's café

Collective identity is instead fostered through a platform event: a 4 PM lucky draw requiring all attendees, from both artistic and commercial zones, to gather in the interactional area. This temporarily unified participants through coordinated activity rather than voluntary engagement. Additionally, shared responses to Stray Kids' "Back Door," where fans synchronized gestures at familiar cues, exemplified collectivity arising from the soundscape rather than spatial arrangement. These examples illustrate that, even under physical constraints, collective identity can emerge through structured fan practices or perceptual cues, rather than purely through freely organized interaction.

In summary, the four types of 'with' identified in K-Pop cafés, blocked, absent, ideal, and forced, are determined by spatial arrangement, which shapes both the potential for collective identity and the extent of participant engagement. Blocked and absent 'with' appear in areas where the space inhibits the development of shared fan identity, typically within commercial zones constrained by administrative processes. In Jungkook's café (blocked 'with'), interaction is limited to small, separate units due to seating and procedural barriers, while in Ningning's café

(absent 'with'), severe spatial restrictions in the interactional and artistic zones eliminate interaction entirely.

Conversely, ideal and forced 'with' occur mainly in interactional and artistic areas, where the layout either facilitates or compels collective engagement. In Miyeon's café (ideal 'with'), fans freely chose where to sit, participating in open, inclusive conversations across a communal table; interaction flow naturally, allowing participants to negotiate their identities within a self-directed shared space. In Changbin's café (forced 'with'), spatial fragmentation limits spontaneous interaction, so collective identity is externally prompted through a platform event that gathers all attendees into the interactional zone, producing temporary cohesion through structured coordination rather than voluntary engagement.

These four configurations demonstrate how place semiotics and interaction order work together to enable or restrict collective identity, shaping the fanscape as a socially meaningful space. Fans engage not only with material objects but also with one another, constantly negotiating individual and collective identities. By linking the four types of 'with' to specific spatial zones in each café, it becomes clear how spatial design transforms ordinary venues into sites of fan interaction and identity formation.

Furthermore, the different configurations of the 'with' observed here can be understood as physical manifestations of the fandom's pre-existing social structure. As discussed in Section 2.3, larger fandoms usually consist of multiple nested and hierarchical 'with,' whereas smaller fandoms like (G)I-DLE exhibit more cohesive structures. Consequently, the blocked or forced 'with' found in mid-sized to large fandom cafés are not merely products of spatial arrangement as discussed earlier in this section but rather spatial realization of these hierarchical fan structures.

Commercial or artistic? – categorization of genre in fanscape

Genre or sign-genre (Androutsopoulos & Chowchong, 2021; Androutsopoulos & Kuhlee, 2021; Scollon & Scollon, 2003) refers to types of discourse shaped by the interaction order and the surrounding social environment. In their geosemiotic framework, Scollon and Scollon (2003) identified four types: infrastructural, regulatory, transgressive, and commercial. Androutsopoulos and Kuhlee (2021) later expanded this to include commemorative, artistic, and didactic genres. This section revisits sign-genre to investigate its role in K-Pop fanscapes, particularly in relation to identity construction and placemaking.

In the cafés studied, the most relevant materialized genres are commercial and artistic. Commercial discourse involves promotional activity (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), while artistic discourse encompasses signs recognized as creative works by the fandom, including commissioned fan-made content (Androutsopoulos & Kuhlee, 2021). Rather than existing as strictly separate categories, these genres often blur in fan cafés. Fieldwork revealed this ambiguity in various fanscape elements, posters, banners (Figure 20a), cardboard cutouts, and free fan-made giveaways (Figure 20b), which function both as promotional tools and as artistic expressions. For instance, the banner in Figure 20a advertises a birthday café while simultaneously serving as an artistic tribute to the artist. Such hybrid signs are common across the fan cafés observed.

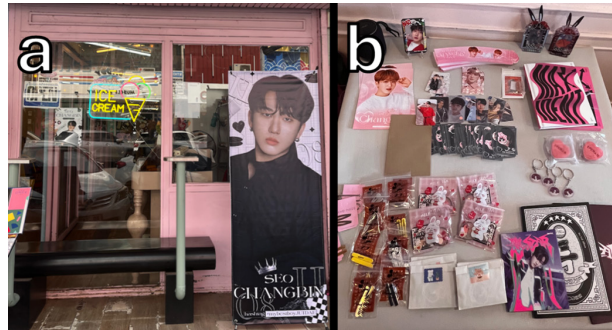


Figure 20 Genres in Changbin's café

(a) Storefront banner promoting the café (b) Giveaways in the café

This blurring of genre became especially apparent in an ethnographic interview with Grace (pseudonym), a Jungkook café host, who noted that all giveaways were commissioned and that the team incurred extra design fees for their commercial use.

First Author: มีเหตุผลมั้ยครับว่าทำไมต้องจัดเป็นรอบ ๆ แล้วก็คิดค่าบริการเข้างาน

Do you have a reason for organizing the event in separate rounds and charging an entrance fee?

Grace: มีค่ะ อันนี้คือมันจะไม่ได้เป็นค่าบริการเข้างานอะคะมันจะเป็นเหมือนคือ มองว่ามันจะเป็นเหมือนการหารรวมกันอะคะ แบบว่าอะ ตอนนี่เราเก็บค่าน้ำไปเลย เพื่อที่เราจะไปบอกยอดร้านน้ำให้ชัดเจนว่า เรามียอดเท่านี้ให้เค้าเตรียมของให้พอ อะ แล้วก็อย่าง giveaways อะคะทุกอย่างมันก็มีค่าใช้จ่าย เราเองไม่ได้มีทุนอะไรแบบนี้อะคะ [...] อย่างแก้วกระดาษอันนี้ก็จะตกอันจะเจ็ดแปดบาทต่อแก้ว อันนี้ไม่รวมค่าออกแบบ ค่าออกแบบจะมีหนึ่งค่าออกแบบ คุณสองเป็นค่าเชิงพาณิชย์ด้วย

Yes, we do. It's not really an entrance fee. It's more like a shared contribution. Like, for example, we collect the drink fee before so we can clearly inform the café of the expected amount of attendees and ensure they prepare enough supplies. And those giveaways, everything adds up to cost, and we don't have any funding of our own to cover those expenses. [...] For example, this paper cup costs around seven to eight baht per cup. This doesn't include the design fee. The design fee includes a base design fee, and then it's multiplied by two for the commercial usage fee.

Although the giveaways at the café were fan-made and freely distributed, their production still involved costs. Fans need to purchase licenses to use commissioned photos from artists or designers, giving these unofficial items a commercial dimension. To cover these expenses, participants in the café were asked to contribute, though not labeled as an "entrance fee," functioning as a shared cost for the giveaways. This demonstrates that even seemingly non-commercial fan creations are linked to economic considerations. At the same time, these items retain their artistic quality, as they are non-official products recognized by the community as creative works rather than official merchandise.

Importantly, this economic logic is not limited to large, hierarchical fandoms such as BTS's ARMY. Ethnographic observations across different fan cafés reveal that all fan-hosted events

operate within a similar structure: the use of an existing café space requires hosts to guarantee a steady income for the café owner throughout the event. As a result, participants are typically required to purchase drinks or food, at regular prices, as a condition for receiving giveaways and participating in further events. This arrangement transforms the space into one that is simultaneously artistic and commercial. Nevertheless, the degree of this blending varies by scale. In smaller fandoms such as (G)I-DLE's Neverland, the commercial-artistic overlap exists but is less formalized in comparison to those by BTS's ARMY. Thus, the blending of genres should be understood as a scalar phenomenon depending on fandom size.

Therefore, the dual artistic and commercial nature of these signs reflects fans' affective and economic labor. Creating and distributing them expresses devotion to the artists, while their public display simultaneously promotes the artist, extending K-Pop's marketing informally. This highlights how artistic discourse within fanscapes carries commercial value, as well as explains why there is no clear-cut boundary between commercial zone, interactional zone, and artistic zone in the fan cafés. Overall, the fanscape emerges as an active site of production, where fan identity is negotiated through both creative expression and economic participation, and where emotional devotion and promotional labor intersect and blur.

Considering these dynamics, sign-genres in fanscapes resist rigid classification. Rather than assigning them to a single category, it is more productive to view them as layered or interdiscursive discourses (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). In K-Pop fanscapes, fan-made materials simultaneously serve as aesthetic expressions and informal promotional tools, blurring the boundary between emotional creativity and market-oriented purpose. This interplay between genres transforms the fanscape into a productive space, where fan, artist, and place identities are co-constructed through semiotic and spatial practices. Through linguistic and semiotic strategies, fans actively shape their own identities, as well as those of the artists and the space. In doing so, they enhance the visibility and influence of the artists within the cultural market.

CONCLUSION

This study examines K-Pop fan cafés in Thailand as dynamic fanscapes through a geosemiotic lens, highlighting how fans construct identity through spatial and semiotic practices. Based on ethnographic investigation, fans shape three interconnected layers of identity: their own identity as fans, the mediated identity of artists, and the place identity of the café. Linguistic choices, such as the interplay between Thai, Korean, English, and, in some cases, Chinese, index these identities fluidly, while inscription styles (e.g., handwritten signs) convey affect and intimacy. Spatial organization into commercial, interactional, and artistic zones structures fan engagement, with the formation of collective identity depending on how these zones were designed and enacted. Finally, fan-made signs blur aesthetic and commercial genres, positioning fans as both emotionally invested participants and informal promoters. Taken together, the findings suggest an interconnected relationship between fandom size, routinized practice, and semiotic practices. While larger fandoms tend to produce more complex and segmented interaction orders, resulting in highly commercialized and formalized practices, smaller fandoms exhibit more cohesive and intimate interaction orders that emphasize active participation over

economic logic. This illustrates how fandom's social structure is materially deciphered into inscription and spatial arrangement, resulting in the fuzzy boundary of artistic and commercial genres within the fanscape.

The identity construction observed in this study, through the material realization of interaction order and place semiotics, highlights the transformative process of placemaking, during which multilayered identities become embedded in space. This process not only reflects Epps-Robertson's (2023) observation of how K-Pop fandom transcends national boundaries through offline practices, but also aligns with Ellery et al.'s (2021) view of placemaking as fostering collective identity and a shared sense of place. In line with other studies on K-Pop placemaking in the Asian context (Kusumaningrum et al., 2023; Phillips, 2018; Wichitsakonkit, 2021), this study shows that beyond visual and interactive elements, spatial and material design, as well as language use, whether in content, code, or inscription style, play a crucial role in shaping place. Ultimately, these geosemiotic elements articulate diverse identities and transform the fanscape into not only a site of consumption, but also one of production and identity construction, resonating with Kim's (2017) conceptualization of fanscape.

In conclusion, the interactional practices and spatial-semiotic arrangements within fan cafés contribute to the layered construction of artist, fan, and place identity. This identity work also plays a role in amplifying the artist's popularity. By transforming an ordinary café into a "K-afé," fans reconfigure a space of consumption into one of production, asserting themselves not merely as consumers, but as active agents in the promotion and informal commercialization of K-Pop.

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