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The Use of Memes as a Medium of Expression for Boy Group Treasure Fans on Social Media X

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Abstract

This study examines how fans of the South Korean boy group TREASURE use memes as a medium of expression on social media X, particularly in the context of the TREASURE TOUR [PULSE ON] IN JAKARTA. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to interpret the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in memes. Data were collected through digital observation and documentation of relevant posts on X using concert-related keywords and hashtags. Purposive sampling was used to select memes containing visual and verbal signs associated with fans' expressions and concert experiences. The analysis categorizes the memes into three phases: before, during, and after the concert. The findings reveal that memes serve as symbolic communication through which fans express enthusiasm, anxiety, panic, happiness, nostalgia, longing, and solidarity. Before the concert, memes predominantly represent anticipation and anxiety surrounding ticket purchases; during the concert, they communicate happiness, euphoria, and emotional closeness to the idols; and after the concert, they convey nostalgia, longing, and emotional exhaustion. Through their denotative and connotative meanings, these memes transform individual concert experiences into shared expressions of fandom identity and collective belonging. This study contributes to digital communication and fandom studies by demonstrating how memes function not merely as entertainment content but also as culturally situated forms of emotional expression and symbolic interaction within the TREASURE fandom

Keywords: Memes, Medium of Expression, Treasure Fandom, Social Media X, Roland Barthes' Semiotics

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital communication technologies has transformed how individuals interact, construct identities, and express themselves in public spaces. Social media platforms are no longer used merely to disseminate information; they also provide spaces for establishing communities, negotiating meanings, and developing relationships based on shared interests (Ananda Ade Salsabila & Haerani Nur, 2025). One prominent example is K-pop fandom, in which fans actively participate in cultural production and social interaction rather than functioning solely as entertainment consumers (Lisa & Irma, 2025). Fans engage in various digital activities, including sharing information, creating content, and expressing emotional attachments to their preferred artists. Consequently, digital fandom has become an important context for understanding how emotions, identities, and collective experiences are communicated.

In fandom studies, fans are recognized as active participants who produce, circulate, and reinterpret cultural materials (Amesz & Candraningrum, 2025). Their activities extend beyond purchasing albums and attending concerts to producing fanworks, maintaining online communities, and exchanging information (Rachmasari et al., 2024). This phenomenon reflects participatory culture, in which audiences actively contribute to cultural production rather than merely consuming media (Ivanaomi & Hendriyani, 2025; Vasthia Devi, 2022). Song and Feng (2022) demonstrate how multilingual K-pop fans use creative linguistic practices to negotiate relationships and strengthen community membership, while Yoon (2022) highlights how fans' social and cultural positions influence their experiences of transnational K-pop fandom. These perspectives suggest that fandom should be examined not only as a form of participation but also as a communicative practice through which fans construct shared meanings and identities.

Social media platform X, formerly Twitter, provides an important space for these practices because users can circulate content, participate in hashtag-based conversations, and respond to current events. K-pop fans use X to exchange information, discuss artists' activities, and communicate personal experiences (Hasan & Utami, 2025). The global circulation of K-pop has further encouraged digital engagement and the development of transnational fan communities (Zuhriyah & Sapira, 2026). Previous research has identified interaction patterns and influential actors within K-pop fan networks on Twitter (Maharani et al., 2025). X also provides opportunities for personal expression and interaction within fandom communities, including through anonymous accounts (Andaru & Aesthetika, 2024). Thus, the platform functions as a social environment where fans negotiate identities and maintain relationships (Constantia et al., 2020). However, interaction patterns alone cannot fully explain the meanings communicated through fan-generated content, particularly its visual and verbal elements.

One prominent form of digital expression in online fandom is the internet meme. Memes combine images, written text, and other semiotic resources to communicate humour, satire, emotions, and commentary on particular events (Munthe et al., 2026). They are not simply humorous images but digital cultural texts that can be circulated, adapted, and reinterpreted within online communities (Firdaus & Mahadian, 2019). Ntouvlis and Geenen (2025) demonstrate how ironic memes contribute to digital literacy and online identity construction, while Huang et al. (2024) emphasize the interaction between visual and linguistic signs in meme-based meaning-making. Darvin (2022) further illustrates how platform practices and users' creative choices shape identity performance in digital environments. These studies indicate that meme interpretation requires attention to both the visible signs and the cultural knowledge shared by the communities that produce and circulate them.

Within fandom communities, memes can communicate enthusiasm, anxiety, happiness, disappointment, and emotional attachment to idols. They frequently incorporate fandom terminology, humour, facial expressions, and cultural references understood by community members (Sabina et al., 2026). Through these practices, fans develop shared vocabularies, emotional connections, and solidarity (Mawardani et al., 2025). Pyun et al. (2024) identify relationships between K-pop fandom activities on social media and cultural engagement, while James (2025) conceptualizes K-pop fandom participation as an affective practice connecting online and offline experiences. Similarly, Kurniawan (2025) discusses memes as a medium of interpersonal communication, and Tulloch (2023) highlights their intertextual characteristics and multiple possible meanings. These findings reinforce the importance of understanding memes as communicative resources through which individual experiences can become shared cultural expressions.

This phenomenon is particularly relevant to TREASURE, a South Korean boy group under YG Entertainment that debuted on August 7, 2020 (Nurfadilah & Sulastri, 2023). Its

fans, known as TREASURE MAKER or TEUME, use social media to exchange information, interact, and express their experiences through digital content (D. T. Putri & Syaifuddin, 2024). The 2025–2026 TREASURE TOUR [PULSE ON] IN JAKARTA concert series offers a specific context for examining these practices. Concert experiences may generate different emotional responses across three phases: anticipation and ticket-related anxiety before the concert, excitement and performance-related experiences during the concert, and gratitude or nostalgia afterward. Memes shared on X can therefore provide insights into how fans represent and communicate these experiences. Rachmasari et al. (2024) discuss shared experiences in fan culture, while T. N. Putri and Miftahuddin (2024) examine social media in relation to mental health in the digital era. These perspectives help contextualize the emotional dimensions of online fandom.

To investigate these meanings, this study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Memes combine visual elements, captions, expressions, and contextual references that may communicate meanings beyond their literal representations. Previous research has demonstrated the relevance of Barthes' semiotics in examining denotative and connotative meanings in memes circulated on Twitter (Wahjono et al., 2025). In Barthes' framework, denotation refers to the apparent meaning of a sign, connotation concerns culturally associated meanings, and myth explains how signs can reproduce broader cultural values and assumptions. This framework enables the examination of how TREASURE-related memes represent emotions, relationships, and shared experiences within a particular fandom context.

Despite growing research on internet memes, digital participation, and K-pop fandom, further investigation is needed into how memes communicate experiences surrounding specific fan events. Previous studies have examined meme communication (Firdaus & Mahadian, 2019; Kurniawan, 2025; Munthe et al., 2026), fan interactions on social media (Maharani et al., 2025; Hasan & Utami, 2025), and digital participation in K-pop fandom (Pyun et al., 2024; James, 2025). Other studies have explored meme-based identity construction and multimodal meaning-making (Darvin, 2022; Huang et al., 2024; Ntouvlis & Geenen, 2025). However, limited attention has been given to the interpretation of visual and verbal signs in memes associated with a particular TREASURE concert in Indonesia, particularly across the pre-concert, concert, and post-concert phases. This study addresses this contextual and interpretive gap by examining how memes communicate fans' emotional experiences and shared meanings through digital expressions.

Accordingly, this study examines the use of memes as a medium of expression among TREASURE fans on social media X, particularly in relation to the 2025–2026 TREASURE TOUR [PULSE ON] IN JAKARTA concert series. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, it investigates the denotative and connotative meanings of selected memes before, during, and after the concert. The study contributes to digital communication, popular culture, and fandom studies by providing a context-specific understanding of memes as digital cultural texts through which fans express emotions, negotiate meanings, and represent shared experiences.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to examine the use of memes as a medium of expression among TREASURE fans on social media X. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on interpreting the meanings conveyed through visual signs, verbal expressions, humor, symbols, and references to shared fandom experiences rather than measuring the frequency of these phenomena statistically (Yuliani, 2018). According to Sugiyono (Sugiyono, 2017), qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of meaning

rather than statistical generalization, while (Lexy J. Moleong, 2017) explains that qualitative inquiry seeks to understand phenomena comprehensively through descriptive accounts. Accordingly, this design enabled the researchers to examine how memes represent fans' emotional experiences and how their meanings are constructed within a particular social and cultural context.

The study focused on the relationship between the observable elements of memes and the meanings attributed to them within the TREASURE fandom. This approach is appropriate for analyzing social media content because online posts should be interpreted in relation to their communicative context, temporal setting, and the interactions through which meanings are produced. Methodological discussions of social media research emphasize the importance of contextualized interpretation rather than treating digital content as isolated data (Wang & Liu, 2021; Tikka et al., 2023).

Research Object and Data Sources

The object of this research was memes created, uploaded, or circulated by TREASURE fans on X in connection with the 2025–26 TREASURE TOUR PULSE ON IN JAKARTA concert series. The data comprised meme images, accompanying texts, screenshots of conversations, quote posts, and other visual uploads containing humor, fandom symbols, or expressions related to fans' experiences (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). These materials were selected because they provided visual and verbal signs that could be examined through semiotic interpretation.

Relevant posts were identified through searches using keywords and hashtags associated with TREASURE and the Jakarta concert, including "TREASURE Jakarta," "PULSE ON Jakarta," "TEUME Indonesia," "TREASURE ticket war," and "TREASURE concert" (Ph.D. Ummul Aiman et al., 2022). The search strategy was intended to identify content directly connected to the research focus. Because social media content is continuously produced, circulated, and recontextualized, the researchers treated the posts as context-dependent cultural texts rather than as a complete representation of all TREASURE-related content on X.

Data Collection and Sampling

Data collection was conducted through digital observation and documentation (Ulum, 2020). The researchers observed relevant posts on X from March 25 to May 26, 2026. The observation period was intended to capture expressions associated with the concert experience before, during, and after the event. Relevant posts were documented through screenshots, post URLs, upload dates, and available conversational context to support subsequent interpretation.

The study employed purposive sampling, in which data were selected according to criteria aligned with the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2019). The selection criteria were as follows: (1) the post was created, uploaded, or circulated by a TREASURE fan or was demonstrably connected to the TREASURE fandom; (2) its content was related to the Jakarta concert; (3) it contained expressions, humor, symbols, or references relevant to fans' experiences; (4) it included visual or verbal elements suitable for semiotic interpretation; and (5) sufficient contextual information was available to interpret the post in relation to the concert or fandom. These criteria follow the study's focus on content that can be meaningfully examined through semiotic analysis (Aunia et al., 2026).

The selected memes were organized into three analytical categories: before the concert, during the concert, and after the concert. This categorization provided a temporal framework for examining how expressions and meanings varied across different stages of the fandom experience. The scope was deliberately limited to memes related to the specified concert rather than all TREASURE memes circulating on X (Widiastuti et al., 2020).

For transparent reporting, the final manuscript should specify the number of posts identified during the initial search, the number excluded after screening, and the final

number of memes analyzed. These figures were not reported in the available Method section and should therefore be added from the original data records rather than estimated. The researchers should also clarify whether repeated posts, duplicate memes, deleted posts, or posts without sufficient contextual information were excluded.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to interpret the signs and meanings represented in the selected memes. Denotation refers to the directly observable elements of a meme, such as the image, text, facial expression, gesture, or depicted situation. Connotation concerns the meanings associated with these elements within a particular cultural context, including enthusiasm, anxiety, panic, solidarity, humor, longing, and emotional closeness to the idols (Sunaryanto & Rizal, 2024). The analysis also considered how recurring representations could express broader fandom values and shared cultural assumptions. This additional interpretive level should be applied consistently whenever the findings discuss myth or the naturalization of fandom values.

The analytical procedure comprised five stages. First, the selected posts were organized according to the three phases of the concert experience: before, during, and after the concert. Second, the researchers described the visual and verbal elements of each meme, including its images, captions, symbols, expressions, and relevant contextual information. Third, they identified the principal signs and interpreted their denotative meanings. Fourth, they examined the connotative meanings of these signs by considering the relationship between the meme's textual and visual elements and the context of the TREASURE fandom. Fifth, they interpreted recurring meanings in relation to fans' emotional expression, communication, identity, and solidarity. This procedure follows the study's semiotic orientation and its concern with the meanings communicated through memes (Wahjono et al., 2025).

Throughout the analysis, interpretations were considered in relation to the documented post and its available context rather than inferred solely from an image in isolation. This contextual approach is consistent with methodological discussions emphasizing the need to connect social media material to the circumstances in which it is produced and circulated (Jensen et al., 2022; Tikka et al., 2023). The analysis was qualitative and interpretive; consequently, the findings are intended to explain the meanings evident in the selected memes, not to establish how frequently all TREASURE fans experience particular emotions or to generalize statistically to the entire fandom.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

. Thinking Based on the results of digital observations of TREASURE fans' posts on social media X, it was found that memes were used as a medium of expression to convey fans' emotional experiences in responding to the 2025–26 TREASURE TOUR PULSE ON IN JAKARTA concert series. The memes that emerged were not only humorous, but also contained social, emotional, and symbolic meanings related to the fandom experience. The research data were in the form of meme images, meme texts, screenshots of conversations, quote posts, and visual uploads containing elements of humor, symbols, and fan expressions, as in accordance with the focus of the research which made memes the object of analysis (Andaru & Aesthetika, 2024).

Observation data was obtained through searching uploads on X with keywords and hashtags such as TREASURE Jakarta**,** Pulse On Jakarta**,** Pulse On Ticket, War Ticket Pulse On, Outfit Pulse On**,** Meet TREASURE, and TREASURE IN JAKARTA**.**Relevant posts were then documented through screenshots, link recording, upload dates, and the context of the conversations accompanying the memes. The data were grouped into three phases of the fandom experience: before the concert, during the concert, and after the concert. This

division was used because memes in the context of concerts can serve as a medium for fans to express different experiences at each phase (Anggraini & Setyanto, 2019).

Table 1

Digital Observation Data and Documentation of TREASURE Fan Memes on X

Keywords/ Hashtags	Documentation Source	Denotation	Connotation	Fandom Culture
Crying Pulse On, Pulse On Jakarta	https://x.com/aiurskiest/status/1993155257783009582?s=46	Denotatively, the post depicts fans going through the process of purchasing concert tickets. The TREASURE members' facial expressions and ticketing information suggest the situation leading up to ticket sales.	The tense or sad expressions represent fans' anxiety, financial pressure, and fear of not being able to secure tickets. The ticketing page is not only seen as a place for transactions, but also as a symbol of competition and uncertainty.	In K-Pop fandom culture, the willingness to save and spend money on concerts is seen as a form of loyalty and sacrifice for idols. Financial hardship is then conveyed as humor that fellow TEUME members can understand.
War Ticket Pulse On	https://x.com/_jiuniews/status/2008864789356052662?s=46	Denotatively, it looks like someone is praying or hoping before buying a TREASURE concert ticket.	The prayer gestures convey fans' hope, resignation, and anxiety in the face of competition for tickets. The ticket purchasing process is considered incompletely controlled, as it depends on the network, queuing system, and ticket availability.	Term *war ticket*naturalizes ticket buying as a battle. Successfully securing tickets is seen as a shared victory, while the struggle to secure them becomes an integral part of the fan experience.
Outfit Pulse On	https://x.com/bluerxxj/status/2039592081937912161?s=46	Denotatively, the upload shows clothes, accessories, or clothing combinations prepared for attending the TREASURE concert.	Clothing serves more than just a physical necessity; it also serves as a medium for displaying fan excitement, creativity, and identity. The choice of specific colors, accessories, or styles demonstrates	In fandom culture,*concert outfit*positioned as part of the ritual of attending a concert. Performances are seen as a form of participation, an expression of identity, and proof that fans are part of the TEUME community.

			fans' efforts to adapt their appearance to the concert atmosphere and their idol's image.	
War Ticket Pulse On	https://x.com/peachfairydust/status/1992755478229852435?s=46	Denotatively, a TREASURE member is seen raising both hands, accompanied by the words "Bismillah" before the ticket purchase process.	These gestures and writings symbolize fans' prayers, hopes, and efforts to secure tickets. Religious expressions are used alongside humor to illustrate the seriousness of fans' preparations for ticket sales.	The struggle to obtain a ticket is positioned as if it were a life struggle that requires effort, prayer, and luck. Religious humor becomes a shared code that creates anxiety in the face of*ticket war*feels lighter and more collective.
Meet Treasure #TREASUREinJAKARTA	https://x.com/jhwanversee/status/2049149434223907136?s=46	Denotatively, the post shows the TREASURE members on stage, appearing small because the fans are quite far away. Circles or zooms are used to indicate the presence of specific members.	Hyperbolic captions create the illusion of closeness between fans and idols. Despite the physical distance, the photos are constructed as personal experiences, as if fans were meeting or taking photos with the TREASURE members in person.	In fandom culture, closeness with idols doesn't have to occur through direct interaction. Digital documentation, imagination, and fellow fans' confessions are thought to foster symbolic closeness between fans and their idols.
TREASURE concert	https://x.com/stillchs7/status/2046488580915368406?s=46	Denotatively, the posts show fans' reactions to TREASURE's concert performance. Reactions are displayed through facial expressions, video clips, or humorous captions.	Cries, screams, and exaggerated expressions represent the fans' happiness, admiration, and euphoria. Hyperbole is used to illustrate that an idol's performance has a powerful emotional impact.	In K-Pop fandom culture, overly emotional reactions are considered normal and have become commonplace. Hysteria isn't interpreted as a negative loss of control, but as a symbol of enthusiasm, love, and attachment to idols.
Thankyou	https://x.com/ji	Denotatively, the	The thank you	In fandom culture, the

Pulse On	hoonregutulip/status/1981605839711739935?s=46	upload displays the concert moment and the thank you message after the PULSE ON series of events took place.	message conveyed satisfaction, emotion, happiness, and appreciation for the experience gained during the concert. The post also marked the end of an event considered significant by fans.	post-concert thank-you speech becomes a closing ritual that demonstrates the emotional connection between fans and idols. Concert memories are positioned as precious experiences to be treasured, shared, and remembered together.
PULSE ON Jakarta	https://x.com/bluerxxj/status/2048197151671595025?s=46	Denotatively, the upload shows the atmosphere of the PULSE ON concert in Jakarta, such as the stage, audience, lighting, and the appearance of TREASURE members.	Concert documentation reflects fans' pride, joy, and emotional connection to the concert experience. Humorous or emotional captions transform moments from the show into personal experiences that can be shared with other fans.	In fandom culture, concert attendance and ownership of documentation symbolize participation and closeness to idols. Capturing and sharing concert moments is seen as a way to preserve collective memory and strengthen identity as part of a TEUME.

Based on the analysis results in the table, memes uploaded by TREASURE fans on social media X not only function as entertainment content, but also as a sign system that represents fans' emotional and social experiences. The meaning in memes is formed through the relationship between visual elements, such as photos of TREASURE members, facial expressions, concert atmosphere, ticket purchase screenshots, clothing, and edited images, with verbal elements such as captions, hashtags, hyperbolic expressions, and internal fandom terms. Using Roland Barthes' semiotics, the meaning of memes can be understood through three levels, namely denotation, connotation, and fandom cultural myths (Rapar et al., 2021).

In the pre-concert phase, memes themed “Nangis Pulse On” and “War Ticket Pulse On” show that the ticket purchasing process is not understood as a normal transaction. Denotatively, the memes show the ticket sales page, the anxious expressions of TREASURE members, prayer gestures, and writings such as “Bismillah.” However, connotatively, these signs represent the anxiety, financial pressure, hopes, and fears of fans not being able to get tickets. The expressions of TREASURE members, which initially had their own context, were transferred by fans to the context of ticket sales, thus transforming them into symbols of their emotional states.

The use of the term "*war ticket*" reinforces the meaning that purchasing tickets is perceived as a battle. The word 'war' connotes competition, strategy, preparation, and the possibility of winning or losing. Fans must prepare funds, electronic devices, internet

connections, and punctuality to successfully obtain tickets. At the mythical level, the process is positioned as a struggle fans must overcome to meet their idols. Successfully obtaining tickets is then perceived as a victory, while failure becomes an emotional experience shared by the TEUME community (Harisnanda et al., 2023).

The “Nangis Pulse On” meme also demonstrates the myth of financial sacrifice as a form of fan loyalty. Ticket prices and other concert-related expenses create economic pressure, but this pressure is conveyed through humor. In fandom culture, the willingness to save, reduce expenses, and provide for concert expenses is often seen as a genuine commitment to supporting an idol. Memes transform personal financial concerns into a collective experience because other fans can identify with and relate to the same situation.

Beyond ticket purchases, the outfit preparation in the “Outfit Pulse On” meme also carries a broader meaning than just clothing choices. Denotatively, the post depicts the clothes and accessories to be worn to the concert. Connotatively, clothing serves as a medium for displaying creativity, enthusiasm, and identity as a TREASURE fan. The choice of specific colors, styles, and accessories serves as a signal that connects the fan's appearance to the concert concept or their idol's character. On a mythical level, concert attire is considered part of the ritual of attending a concert and a means of demonstrating membership in the fandom community.

During the concert, the “Meet TREASURE” meme and the hashtag “#TREASUREinJAKARTA” demonstrated the construction of symbolic closeness between fans and idols. Denotatively, the photo shows TREASURE members on stage, appearing small due to the distance between the fans. The use of circles, arrows, or image enlargement helps indicate the position of certain members. However, the caption referring to the photo as a meeting or group photo creates a connotative meaning of the illusion of closeness. Fans transform general concert documentation into a personal experience, as if they have interacted directly with their idols.

At the mythical level, the closeness between fans and idols doesn't always have to be forged through face-to-face encounters. Digital media allows fans to create closeness through photos, captions, imagination, and responses from fellow fandom members. Hyperbolic claims like "selfie with idol" are interpreted humorously by fellow TEUME. This demonstrates that the meaning of memes depends on the cultural knowledge possessed by community members. Audiences outside the fandom might only see concert photos from a distance, while TEUME understand the humor, context, and emotional meaning contained within.

Posts themed "TREASURE Concert" featuring crying, screaming, or hysterical expressions also demonstrate how fans construct euphoria during concerts. Denotatively, the posts show fans' reactions while watching TREASURE's performance. Connotatively, these exaggerated expressions convey happiness, admiration, and emotional attachment to the idol. In K-Pop fandom culture, hysterical reactions are not always interpreted as negative behavior, but as a sign of fan enthusiasm and love. Hyperbole becomes an acceptable form of communication because it has a shared meaning for community members.

In the post-concert phase, the posts "Thank You Pulse On" and "PULSE ON Jakarta" demonstrate that concert documentation serves as a means of preserving memories. Denotatively, the posts depict the stage atmosphere, TREASURE members, the audience, and expressions of gratitude. Connotatively, the documentation conveys feelings of happiness, emotion, pride, and loss as the concert concludes. The expressions of gratitude are not only directed at the idols but also serve as a form of appreciation for the shared experience shared with fellow fans.

At the mythical level, concerts are positioned as valuable experiences that don't end when the show is over. Photos, videos, memes, and captions keep the concert experience alive in the digital space. Fans can reminisce, retell, and share these experiences with

other members of the community. Concert documentation ultimately forms TEUME's collective memory, a shared memory of the atmosphere, members' performances, interactions, and emotions that emerged during the concert.

The use of hashtags such as "Pulse On Jakarta," "#TREASUREinJAKARTA," and "TREASURE concert" also plays a crucial role in connecting posts from various accounts. Denotatively, hashtags serve as markers and groupers of information. Connotatively, hashtags serve as a digital gathering space for fans to share experiences, humor, documentation, and emotional reactions. Hashtags create a sense of togetherness even when fans don't know each other or are in the same location (Firdaus & Mahadian, 2019).

Memes also form a symbolic boundary between fandom members and audiences outside the fandom. Terms like war tickets, TREASURE member names, references to specific performances, and jokes about concerts can only be fully understood by those knowledgeable about TREASURE. These signs serve as an internal code that creates a sense of community exclusivity. The ability to understand memes is one sign of belonging to TEUME.

Overall, the research results show that TREASURE fan memes on social media X have expressive, communicative, and identity functions. The expressive function is seen in the use of memes to convey anxiety, happiness, admiration, and nostalgia. The communicative function is seen when personal experiences are shared and elicited responses from other fans. Meanwhile, the identity function is formed through the use of symbols, internal terms, hashtags, and humor understood only by the TREASURE community.

Through Roland Barthes' perspective, the emotional meanings in memes do not emerge directly, but are formed through the relationship between visual signs, verbal signs, the concert context, and the fandom's cultural codes (Aunia et al., 2026). At the denotative level, memes simply display objects such as ticket pages, outfits, stage photos, member expressions, and concert documentation. At the connotative level, these objects transform into symbols of anxiety, sacrifice, hope, closeness, happiness, and loss. At the mythical level, memes naturalize fandom cultural values such as loyalty to idols, financial sacrifice, the struggle to obtain tickets, symbolic closeness, and solidarity between fans.

Thus, memes are not just funny images or spontaneous responses to concerts. They are a cultural communication medium used by TREASURE fans to give meaning to their experiences. Through memes, individual experiences are transformed into collective ones, while fans' emotions are organized through shared symbols and codes. Social media X then functions as a space where the identity and solidarity of the TREASURE community are formed, maintained, and displayed to the public.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that memes shared by TREASURE fans on social media platform X function not merely as humorous digital content but also as symbolic resources through which fans communicate emotions, negotiate collective meanings, and express their identities within the fandom community. The findings reveal three interconnected phases of meme-mediated expression surrounding the TREASURE TOUR [PULSE ON] IN JAKARTA concert: before, during, and after the concert. Before the concert, memes concerning ticket purchasing, financial pressure, and outfit preparation communicate anticipation, anxiety, hope, and the perceived sacrifices associated with attending a live performance. During the concert, memes expressing exaggerated emotional reactions and symbolic closeness to TREASURE members represent excitement, admiration, and affective engagement. After the concert, memes and concert documentation help fans articulate nostalgia, gratitude, and the desire to preserve shared experiences. These findings suggest that the meanings of memes emerge through the interaction of visual

representations, textual captions, concert-related experiences, and shared cultural knowledge among fans.

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of meme-based expression within a specific K-Pop fandom and a concert-centered Indonesian context. Rather than treating memes as isolated humorous artifacts, this research situates them within the temporal progression of a collective cultural event. By examining memes across the pre-concert, concert, and post-concert phases, the study illustrates how the communicative functions of memes develop alongside fans' changing emotional experiences. Furthermore, applying Roland Barthes' semiotic framework enables the analysis to move beyond the immediately visible content of memes toward their connotative meanings and the cultural assumptions they may reproduce. The findings therefore offer a context-sensitive account of how ordinary digital content can become a resource for expressing fandom membership, interpreting collective experiences, and maintaining emotional connections within a networked community.

The findings are consistent with research that conceptualizes internet memes as multimodal texts through which digital users construct and communicate social meanings. Ntouvlis and Geenen (2023) demonstrate that ironic memes can function as meaningful multimodal texts whose design conventions are associated with the construction of online group identities. Similarly, the present study shows that the meaning of a TREASURE fan meme cannot be adequately explained by its image or caption alone. Its interpretation depends on the relationship between visual expressions, textual elements, concert references, and the audience's familiarity with fandom-specific conventions. However, whereas Ntouvlis and Geenen focus on ironic meme practices and digital literacies, the present research foregrounds the emotional progression of a fandom experience surrounding a live concert. This distinction extends the discussion of digital identity by demonstrating how meme meanings are situated not only within shared online conventions but also within a particular event and its associated emotional experiences.

The findings also resonate with Song and Feng's (2022) study of multilingual K-Pop fans on Chinese social media, which illustrates how participatory practices and shared linguistic resources help maintain fan–idol relationships and establish community membership. In the present study, expressions such as "war ticket," fandom-specific references, and humorous representations of encounters with TREASURE members similarly depend on shared interpretive knowledge. Such expressions function as cultural resources that enable fans to recognize one another's experiences and establish a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, the present study differs in its primary analytical emphasis: rather than examining trans-scripting and multilingual naming practices, it investigates the interaction of visual and verbal signs through Barthesian semiotics. This comparison suggests that fandom identity can be communicated through multiple semiotic resources, including linguistic choices, visual manipulation, humor, and references to shared events.

A further comparison can be drawn with Yoon's (2022) discussion of fan positionalities in the transnational circulation of K-Pop. Yoon emphasizes that K-Pop fandoms should not be understood as homogeneous communities because fans occupy different social and cultural positions. The findings of the present study reveal a shared repertoire of symbols and emotional expressions among the TREASURE fans represented in the selected posts. However, this apparent commonality should not be interpreted as evidence that all fans experience the concert or fandom membership in the same way. Rather, the memes illustrate how particular experiences are made communicable through recognizable cultural codes. Differences in financial circumstances, access to concert tickets, physical attendance, and familiarity with TREASURE-related references may influence how individual fans interpret or participate in these expressions. Thus, the findings complement research on transnational fandom by showing how shared symbolic

practices can facilitate belonging without necessarily eliminating differences among community members.

The role of social media participation in sustaining fandom engagement is also relevant to Pyun et al. (2024), who investigate relationships between K-Pop fandom activities on social media, attitudes toward the Korean Wave, and cultural openness. Their research places social media engagement within a broader framework of cultural participation. The present study contributes a more context-specific perspective by examining the symbolic content through which such engagement becomes visible in everyday online communication. For example, memes concerning ticket purchasing, concert outfits, performances, and post-concert memories provide observable representations of how fans communicate their involvement in a cultural event. However, the present qualitative analysis does not establish whether meme participation directly increases cultural openness or produces measurable changes in fan attitudes. Its contribution is instead to explain the meanings conveyed through particular forms of participation.

Research on platform-mediated fandom further helps explain why the findings should be interpreted in relation to the technological environment in which they emerge. James (2025) conceptualizes K-Pop fandom participation as an affective process shaped by the relationship between fans, artists, and platform infrastructures. This perspective is compatible with the present finding that emotional experiences surrounding a concert continue to be communicated through digital posts before and after the physical event. The use of hashtags, image-based humor, and concert documentation enables experiences associated with a particular occasion to remain available for circulation and reinterpretation. Nevertheless, the present study does not directly measure platform algorithms, content visibility, or the mechanisms through which X distributes posts. Consequently, platformization provides a useful interpretive perspective rather than a directly tested explanation of the observed patterns.

The relationship between memes, identity, and digital communication can also be examined through research on internet meme intertextuality. Tulloch (2023) demonstrates that memes can communicate complex meanings through references that are more readily understood by audiences familiar with their intertextual contexts. A comparable process appears in the TREASURE memes analyzed in this study. Images of members, exaggerated captions, and references to concert experiences acquire meanings that extend beyond their literal content because fans connect them with shared knowledge of the group and the event. Similarly, Darvin (2022), in examining TikTok practices, discusses how memetic forms can shape identity performance and community formation within platform-specific environments. Although the platform and empirical context differ, both studies support the interpretation that digital content formats provide resources for performing identity and negotiating belonging. The present study extends this discussion by tracing how meme meanings relate to the temporal phases of a concert and by interpreting their denotative, connotative, and mythic dimensions.

The similarities between the present findings and previous research can be explained by several shared characteristics of digital communication. First, memes combine visual and verbal resources in formats that can be rapidly circulated, adapted, and reinterpreted. Second, their meanings often depend on shared cultural references, allowing users to communicate complex experiences through relatively concise content. Third, social media platforms facilitate the circulation of these expressions beyond face-to-face interactions, enabling users who may not know one another personally to participate in a recognizable communicative practice. These characteristics help explain why memes can simultaneously serve expressive, communicative, and identity-related functions across different online communities. The findings are therefore consistent with previous

research on participatory fandom, multimodal digital texts, and online identity construction (Darvin, 2022; Ntouvlis & Geenen, 2023; Song & Feng, 2022).

Nevertheless, differences between the present study and previous research must be interpreted in relation to their respective contexts, analytical objectives, and methodological choices. Research focusing on multilingual practices, ironic memes, or platform-based identity performance examines particular dimensions of digital communication that are not identical to the concert-centered experience investigated here. The TREASURE memes analyzed in this study are closely associated with ticket competition, financial preparation, concert attendance, emotional reactions to performances, and the preservation of post-concert memories. These contextual elements shape the connotations that can be attributed to the selected posts. Furthermore, the use of Roland Barthes' semiotic framework directs attention toward the production of meaning within visual and verbal signs, whereas studies employing interviews, surveys, or other forms of digital analysis may prioritize participants' reported experiences, measurable relationships, or broader patterns of online participation. Differences in findings should therefore not automatically be interpreted as contradictions; they may reflect differences in research questions, data selection, analytical frameworks, and social contexts.

The cultural context also requires careful interpretation. Expressions such as "war ticket" and "Bismillah" in the analyzed material combine the language of competition with a culturally recognizable expression of hope or prayer. Within the specific posts examined, these expressions can be interpreted as ways of communicating uncertainty, anticipation, and the perceived difficulty of securing concert tickets. However, their meanings should not be generalized to all Indonesian K-Pop fans without further evidence. Similarly, the humorous representation of financial sacrifice may help fans communicate shared concerns, but it does not establish that all fans experience the same financial pressures or interpret such sacrifices as necessary expressions of loyalty. These examples demonstrate why contextualized semiotic interpretation is important: the meanings of digital symbols are shaped by the particular communities and circumstances in which they circulate.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is its contextualized explanation of memes as resources for symbolic communication within a temporally structured fandom experience. The findings suggest that meme-mediated expression can be understood through the interaction of three analytical dimensions: the semiotic construction of meaning, the communication of emotional experiences, and the expression of community membership. At the denotative level, memes display recognizable objects and situations, including ticketing interfaces, concert outfits, stage photographs, and fans' reactions. At the connotative level, these representations communicate anticipation, anxiety, happiness, admiration, nostalgia, and other emotional associations. At the mythic level, recurring representations may normalize broader cultural assumptions about loyalty, sacrifice, symbolic closeness to idols, and collective belonging. This interpretation is consistent with Barthes' semiotic orientation while grounding its application in the specific empirical context of TREASURE fandom.

The contribution should not be understood as the invention of a new semiotic theory or as proof that all fandom memes follow a universal sequence. Instead, the study provides an empirical illustration of how established semiotic concepts can be applied to memes associated with successive phases of a concert experience. The pre-concert, concert, and post-concert distinction helps organize the material and makes visible the changing emphases of fan expression: anticipation and uncertainty before the event, heightened affective responses during the event, and memory-making and nostalgia afterward. These phases are best understood as an analytical structure derived from the study's research design, rather than as a universal model of fandom behavior. Future

comparative research could examine whether similar patterns occur in other K-Pop fandoms, concerts, and digital platforms.

The study also contributes to fandom research by highlighting the role of shared cultural codes in the transformation of individual experiences into communicable collective expressions. A meme may originate from an individual post, yet its meaning can become socially recognizable when other fans understand its references, circulate it, or respond to it. This process illustrates how symbolic communication can support community identification without requiring direct interaction among every participant. At the same time, the findings indicate that shared codes may create boundaries between insiders and outsiders because some references require specific knowledge of the group or concert. Thus, memes can facilitate belonging while also making the interpretation of fandom communication dependent on cultural familiarity. This dual function provides a useful direction for further investigation of identity, inclusion, and exclusion in networked fan communities.

Practically, the findings suggest that memes can provide entertainment organizations, artist-management teams, and concert organizers with contextual information about how fans communicate their experiences. Expressions concerning ticket purchasing, outfit preparation, performances, and post-concert memories may help these stakeholders recognize the emotional dimensions of fan engagement beyond conventional indicators such as ticket sales, view counts, or promotional reach. However, the study does not demonstrate that meme engagement directly increases attendance, purchasing behavior, or loyalty. Any application to marketing strategy should therefore treat memes as qualitative indicators of fan expression rather than as independently validated predictors of consumer behavior. Concert organizers may also consider recurring expressions of ticket-related anxiety and financial pressure when reviewing the clarity of ticketing information and the accessibility of concert-related communication.

From an academic perspective, the study offers an empirical case for integrating semiotic analysis with research on participatory culture, digital communication, and fandom identity. It demonstrates the value of examining the relationships among visual signs, verbal expressions, cultural references, and event-specific contexts rather than interpreting meme images in isolation. For digital literacy education, the findings provide material for discussing multimodal meaning-making, online humor, contextual interpretation, and the circulation of cultural symbols. Students could examine how the same image may convey different meanings to different audiences, how captions transform visual interpretation, and how cultural familiarity affects the understanding of online content. Such applications should emphasize critical interpretation and cultural sensitivity rather than assume that every meme has one fixed meaning.

At the policy and community level, the findings support efforts to promote responsible and context-sensitive digital participation. Educational institutions and digital literacy initiatives may use meme analysis to help learners recognize the relationship between online expression, cultural identity, and audience interpretation. Fandom communities may also benefit from reflecting on the ways humor can create solidarity while potentially excluding people unfamiliar with particular references. These implications should be understood as recommendations derived from the interpretive findings, not as interventions whose effectiveness has already been tested. Future studies could evaluate the usefulness of meme-based learning activities, examine the relationship between fan engagement and online well-being, or investigate how concert organizers respond to fan-generated digital communication.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focuses on memes associated with the TREASURE TOUR [PULSE ON] IN JAKARTA concert series on X. The findings therefore reflect a specific fandom, platform, and event-related context and cannot automatically be generalized to other K-Pop communities, musical genres, or social

media environments. Second, the use of purposive sampling means that the selected posts were chosen for their relevance to the research objectives rather than through a representative sampling procedure. The analysis consequently identifies interpretive patterns in the selected material but does not establish how frequently these patterns occur across the entire TREASURE fandom. Third, the qualitative semiotic approach emphasizes the interpretation of visual and verbal signs. Without interviews or other direct engagement with the original creators and audiences, the analysis cannot conclusively establish whether the meanings identified by the researchers correspond to the intentions of meme creators or the interpretations of all viewers.

Fourth, the division of the data into pre-concert, concert, and post-concert phases provides a useful analytical structure, but it may not capture the full diversity of fans' experiences. Emotional responses can overlap across phases, and not all fans necessarily attend the concert in person. Fifth, the platform-specific nature of X limits conclusions about how the same memes might be interpreted, circulated, or transformed on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Finally, the study's interpretation of cultural myths and shared meanings is necessarily contextual. Alternative readings may emerge among fans with different experiences, financial circumstances, cultural backgrounds, or levels of familiarity with TREASURE. These limitations do not invalidate the findings; rather, they define the scope within which the interpretations should be understood.

Future research could address these limitations through comparative studies involving multiple K-Pop fandoms, concert events, and social media platforms. Combining semiotic analysis with interviews, digital ethnography, or audience-response analysis would help distinguish the meanings inferred by researchers from those expressed by creators and audiences themselves. Longitudinal research could also investigate how memes and their associated meanings change as fans move from anticipation to concert participation and subsequent remembrance. In addition, mixed-methods research could examine the circulation, engagement, and interpretation of memes alongside qualitative accounts of fandom identity and emotional experience. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how memes operate as expressive resources within digital communities while maintaining the contextual sensitivity of semiotic analysis.

CONLUSSION

Based The application of Roland Barthes' semiotic perspective further demonstrates that the meanings of these memes extend beyond their immediately visible images and textual elements. At the denotative level, memes represent recognizable objects, situations, and concert-related activities. At the connotative level, these elements communicate deeper emotional and cultural meanings shaped by the experiences and shared codes of the TREASURE fandom. Consequently, the interpretation of memes depends not only on their visual and verbal components but also on the cultural context in which fans produce, circulate, and understand them. The principal contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how memes operate as expressive, communicative, and identity-related resources within a specific K-Pop fandom context. By focusing on the TREASURE fandom and its concert experience in Jakarta, this research provides a contextually grounded understanding of how individual emotional responses can be articulated through digital content and connected to a broader sense of collective belonging. The findings contribute to digital communication and fandom studies by positioning memes as meaningful cultural texts rather than simply as instruments of online entertainment. These findings also highlight the importance of recognizing fan-generated content as part of contemporary digital participation. Understanding the symbolic meanings embedded in memes can provide useful insights for researchers examining online communities, popular culture, and audience engagement. Nevertheless,

this study is limited to selected memes related to the TREASURE concert on X; therefore, its findings should be interpreted within this particular fandom and platform context rather than generalized to all K-Pop communities. Future research could compare meme practices across different fandoms, examine fan expression on other platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, or combine semiotic analysis with interviews and digital interaction analysis to investigate how audiences interpret and negotiate the meanings of memes. Overall, this study establishes that memes are meaningful forms of digital expression through which TREASURE fans communicate emotions, negotiate shared meanings, and articulate their identity as members of a fandom community.

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