

## **MEDIA TRANSFORMATION OF ALTERNATE UNIVERSES (AU) USING K-POP ARTISTS' VISUAL CLAIMS INTO NOVEL FORM**

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### **Abstract**

Alternate Universe (AU) is a form of popular fiction that is much loved by today's young generation. In the AU form found on social media, the storyline is built not with narrative but with pictures containing chats between characters and also photos with visual claims of K-Pop idols. There is a preference tendency among the younger generation, who are also K-Pop fans, to read AU in the form of fanfiction which presents light plots and conflicts with visual claims using K-Pop group idols as the characters. However, in its development, a debate emerged that the AU could not be considered a work of fiction because it did not have narratives that build a storyline from the conflict raised like a literature work such as a novel. This research uses a virtual ethnographic method interviewing seven AU writers to find out the processes of transferring media of fictional stories from pictures containing conversations to short messages or uploading stories on social media with visual claims using the faces of K-Pop idols into complete works of fiction in the form of a novel. This data was used to determine the obstacles in creating narratives in novels based on their AU works. Apart from that, direct observations were also carried out by comparing AU works and novels from the author's titles to find out how descriptions were developed into a narrative form and sentence formation in paragraphs in the novel. This research aims to explain the processes of converting AU's work into a complete novel. From the interviews and comparisons between the AU form with the novel form, it was found that there was a change in the storyline, especially in the development of conflict because AU works were felt to be too light and, often, the conflict was not strong enough to form a work of fiction in the form of a novel. Apart from that, there are also several novels that still include pictures containing typical AU short messages in the novel because the scenes are too difficult to shift into narratives. There were many parts that ended up being replaced and changed to create a complete novel.

**Keywords:** Alternate universe, novel, media transformation AU to novel, narration, visual claim.

## **INTRODUCTION**

As one of the most influential types of literature, novels have the ability to open eyes, arouse feelings, and make readers think. Novels are not only entertainment, but also an effective tool for spreading messages, fighting injustice, and celebrating the beauty of life. As a medium that continues to develop, novels provide new innovations and inspiration. However, along with the development of the era with increasingly rapid technology, currently fictional literary works are not only presented through novels.

Nowadays, teenagers use social media more than literacy. The majority of teenagers today stare at screens for more than 9 hours every day. We can conclude that, in this case, gadgets are more interesting than books (RNM & Rachmani, 2022). Currently, there is an increasing trend among the younger generation read Alternate Universe (AU) or fanfiction (Ihsania et al., 2020). This phenomenon reflects the changing preferences and needs of young

readers, as well as a reflection of the increasingly dominant power of popular culture in everyday life.

The development of the publishing world is very real where young writers today do not only rely on their writing skills but also their ability to use social media and online writing platforms (Shahrani & Rohmiyati, 2017). Many novels are adapted from stories uploaded on the Wattpad platform or pieces of conversation that are often found on Twitter (now X) and TikTok. This form of story is called an alternate universe.

### **Fanfiction Phenomenon in Indonesia**

Fanfiction is a writing in which fans use media narratives and pop culture icons as inspiration to create their own texts (Black, 2006). Fanfiction, which often depicts parallel worlds or realities that are different from the commonly known, attracts readers by offering endless new possibilities. As a reflection of limitless creativity, alternative fiction offers readers the opportunity to escape from everyday reality and venture into fantastical and enchanting worlds.

Fanfiction is a written work that originates from the culture of a community that follows a pre-existing fictional story or is based on a particular idol figure. Korean Idol Fanfiction is a subcategory of Real Person Fanfiction that includes fanfiction with Korean Pop or K-Pop idols. In contrast, Real Person Fanfiction (RPF) is a category of fanfiction with characters adapted from idols or public figures in the real world (Oktaviananda et al., 2023). This type of fanfiction is widely found in Indonesia. This fanfiction can be found on X, Wattpad, TikTok, and Youtube with many readers.

On the other hand, fanfiction offers a platform for fans to interact with their favorite works and explore their favorite characters in new and different contexts. In fanfiction, it is possible to build a picture of the realization of this pleasant and desired ending by the reader (Kustritz, 2016). By writing fanfiction stories, readers have the opportunity to reconstruct plots, develop characters, and explore interesting concepts in the world they know. Fanfiction also allows readers to engage in active communities, share stories, and interact with fellow fans. Therefore, fanfiction is considered as a transformative work that opens up categories of interpretation in a wider society (Fathallah, 2017). In the end, it is clearly seen how fanfiction changes popular culture texts in the concrete industrial sense today.

### **Types of Fanfiction that Readers in Indonesia Love**

One important element in fanfiction is the alternate universe (AU) realm. Alternate universe (AU) is an important element in fanfiction that provides space for writers and readers to explore their imaginations without the limitations of the original story (Agustine et al., 2022). This helps enrich the fandom's experience and create unique and interesting new stories. According to Anjani (Pujiastuti et al., 2022), alternate universe is a story that is usually found on Twitter in the form of a thread with a limited number of characters created by fans. Writers can use alternate universes to create engaging stories, provide new experiences for readers or viewers, and explore thought-provoking ideas. Thus, the alternate universe world is not just a place for fictional stories, but also a mirror of human's real world. The depiction of this alternate world provides reflections of human's curiosities, fears, and dreams, broadening our horizons and helping us understand the world in new and inspiring ways.

There are several examples of AU concepts that were initially popular in fanfiction that later developed into published novels. Among others are "Fifty Shades of Grey" by EL James, "After" by Anna Todd, "The Mortal Instruments" by Cassandra Clare, and "Blue Bird" by Rainbow Rowell. These examples show how the concept of AU fanfiction can develop into a stand-alone work widely accepted by public. It also shows how creativity in the world of

fanfiction can provide inspiration and a foundation for commercially successful novels. Based on this, this study aims to explain the process of transforming AU works into complete novels.

Alternate universe (AU) has become a phenomenon that is widely discussed on social media since the rise of generation 3 K-Pop culture. Initially, AU was only consumed by fans. AU is a work of fiction that uses K-Pop idols as its characters and the characters change their original attributes, such as gender, race or ethnicity, occupation, name, and social status (Sauro, 2019). These K-Pop idols are made into other figures, who have new identities as fictional characters and are usually paired with other idols or fictional characters as if they live in a new world. Face claim is important where the fictional characters created will be represented by the chosen K-Pop idols. Face claim is a method where the visuals of real figures such as artists or idols are claimed to be the visuals of characters created by the author. Face claim is widely used by AU authors where the fictional characters in the work are represented by K-Pop idols. Fanfiction authors start their imagination by describing the visuals of their idols or their idols' looks. However, sometimes writers start their imagination by creating fanfiction based on their idol's visuals or their idol's name, although sometimes they differentiate the storyline and the characters played by the artist/idol (Zarnuji, 2020). This face claim method itself is used to attract readers from the idols' fans.

## **METHOD**

The method used in this study is virtual ethnography. According to Hine as quoted by Rachmaniar & Anisa (Rachmaniar & Anisa, 2023), virtual ethnography is a method that questions the general view of the internet and turns it into a means and medium of communication. Thus, face-to-face or direct interaction is not required. The virtual ethnography method is a research approach that combines ethnographic principles with the use of digital technology to study human interactions in the cyberspace or online. This method adapts the traditional principles of ethnography that are usually used to understand the culture and life of people in the real world, in the context of digital space.

The virtual ethnography method allows researchers to explore and understand various aspects of life and social interactions in cyberspace, as well as understand how digital technology influences the way we communicate, interact, and form online identities. This method has been used in various fields of research, including sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, and communication science.

## **Participants**

The participants of this study were seven AU writers. Interviews were conducted to find out how the process of transferring AUs uploaded online can be presented in the form of fictional scripts. In this interview, three writers who use Wattpad and four people who use X or TikTok were selected. The selection of writers was based on the media for making AUs themselves because the process would be very different. In addition to the results of interviews with the authors, to broaden the perspective, this study also interviewed ten AU readers who had read at least AU works from the seven authors.

## **Observation Scheme**

In research using the virtual ethnography method, researchers are usually involved in direct observation and participation in online communities, such as discussion forums, social media groups, or online games. They use data collection techniques such as participant observation, online interviews, digital content analysis, and observation recordings to document and analyze interactions between community members.

According to Achmad & Ida (2018), several procedures in the virtual ethnography method include five steps:

a) Proactive Community Identification

The first step, the researcher conducted an observation in selecting the community to be entered. The community chosen was the virtual community of AU readers on X and Wattpad.

b) Access Negotiation

In this second step, the researcher enters the virtual community of AU readers on X and Wattpad by following accounts that produce AU works. Through these accounts, the researcher can interact with AU readers who follow the accounts.

c) Making Contact

The third step, the researcher tried to engage in the virtual community of Au readers on X and Wattpad. This involvement is in the form of AU reading experience, interacting through the comment column with the AU reader community and AU writers.

d) Interviews (Electronic and/or Face-to-Face)

The next step is the interview. The interview is conducted in a semi-structured manner online using a synchronous chat form (real-time interaction).

e) Returning Research Results and Analysis to Community

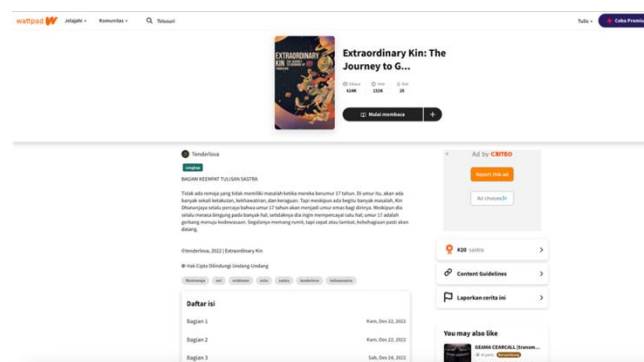
The final step, the research findings are returned to the participants for feedback and if necessary, rework will be carried out.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

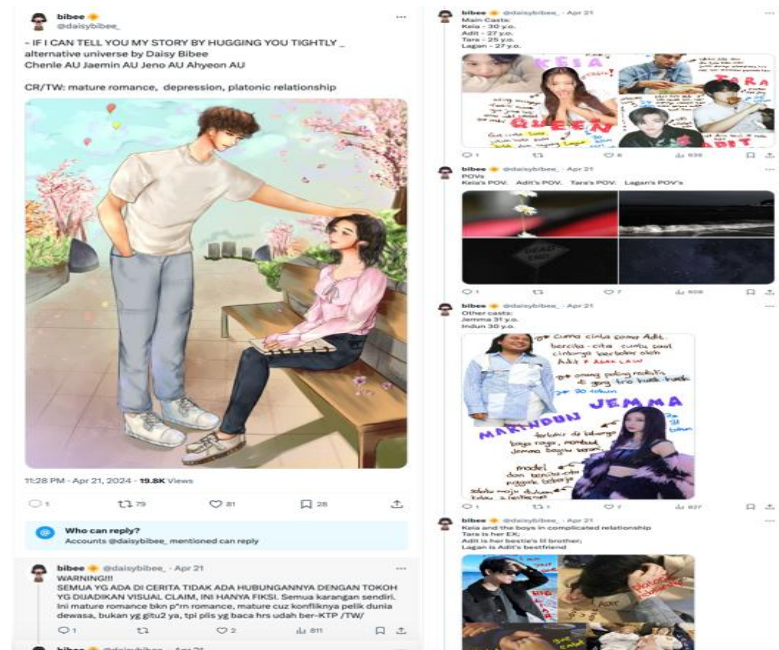
### Differences of AU Stories on Social Media Platforms

The characters of the AU stories on Wattpad and X or TikTok are very different. On the Wattpad platform, the writer will use narration as shown in Picture 1. However, on social media like X or TikTok, the form in short chat fragments on fake Whatsapp or other fake social media as shown in Picture 2.

Picture 1. Alternate Universe in Wattpad



Picture 1 is an example of one of the AUs on Wattpad. Wattpad is a platform that contains various works of fiction and non-fiction. Explicitly, Wattpad is more like a digital library where readers are free to choose and save stories they want to read online or offline. In addition, Wattpad is also equipped with a news feed feature to see updates from friends such as new story recommendations, a notification feature to see more personal notifications, and a message feature to send messages to other users.



Picture 2. Alternate Universe in X

Picture 2 is an example of AU on the X platform. The AU story on X is written into a thread. The thread can be connected into several parts. What makes AU on X more interesting is that each thread is accompanied by an illustration of a picture, photo, or snippet of a fake WhatsApp message that usually takes a photo of a K-Pop Idol that is modified with a new name. Like the thread in X, readers can comment and respond to each story segment in the thread.

From the examples above, it is clear that AU works on the Wattpad platform are very different from the AU forms on Twitter or TikTok. In AU works on the Wattpad platform, the story is almost perfect where the story has descriptive paragraphs just like a published novel manuscript. Meanwhile, in the AU form on Twitter or TikTok, there are more in-depth snippets of fake WhatsApp short messages or fake X tweets and also fake Instagram uploads. It is very rare to find an explanation in paragraph form in AU X or TikTok.

### The Process of Transforming AU into A Novel

It is not without reason that a work is chosen for publication after previously being published online. This is clear because no author who rejects his work will have the opportunity to change it from being read for free to being sold. Authors must clearly distinguish their serialized stories or novels published on Wattpad from those published in books. In addition, there is a difference between book readers and Wattpad readers who have different demographics (Nurkhodijah et al., 2020). Seeing the forms, it is believed that the process of converting AU into a novel will certainly be diverse. From the results of the interviews conducted, several findings in character development will be presented. In character development, the focus will be on how writers can create fictional characters in their scripts where visually they use the face claim of K-Pop idols who are real figures.

Based on the interview results, an explanation was obtained regarding the process carried out by the author when converting AU into a novel:

- a) Concept Development.

The author must choose the theme and important elements of the alternate universe that he wants to adapt. This can be the world, characters, and key events that are the core of the story.

b) Character Development.

The author must explore the characters in the alternate universe. Ensure that the characters have clear depth, background, and motivation.

c) Plotting.

The author develops a storyline that is suitable for the novel format. This includes mapping the story structure, determining turning points, conflicts, and resolutions.

d) Draft Writing.

The author begins the writing process by compiling an initial draft. At this stage, the author must maintain consistency with the elements in the alternate universe.

e) Revision and Editing.

Once the initial draft is complete, the author needs to revise and edit their work to ensure that the storyline flows well, the characters develop, and there are no plot holes.

f) Test Reading.

Involving beta readers to provide feedback on the story so that the author can make changes based on the input.

g) Publication.

After all revisions are done and the manuscript is ready, the author can proceed to the publication stage, either through a traditional publisher or independently.

Apart from the primary interviews conducted with the seven AU authors, additional interviews were also conducted with ten AU readers who had at least read AU works from the seven authors. This additional interview was conducted to compare the initial form which was still in AU and the final form which had become a novel from the perspective of readers who might not know the media transfer process.

In the question related to character development, there were results related to the physical depiction of characters and the depiction of characters from the emotional, psychological, and habits that shape the character of the character. Character development is a way for the author to show changes in the characters created along with the movement of the plot (plotting) where changes in the way the character deals with situations are described by their reactions when faced with certain situations. Changes in a person's personality, behavior, and thinking are known as character development. In addition, in some situations, a person may try to change or improve the way they behave. Hurlock classifies changes in personality patterns into three main categories. First, there are quantitative and qualitative changes; second, some are heading in a better direction and some are heading in a worse direction; and third, some changes occur gradually and some occur quickly (Masni, 2016).

Characters in literary works are characters that symbolize humans, which makes the story more interesting and real because these characters act like humans who have psychological characteristics. Characters in literary works are also described through the storyline from the beginning to the end of the story (Diputra, 2022). Basically, the characters created in AU works themselves are still created characters that are the result of the author's own imagination even though they use the face claim of figures that exist in the real world. The use of this face claim does not limit the author in creating character figures in their writing. Face claims help authors to promote their writing on social media and online platforms because it is undeniable that their readers usually come from fans of the idols whose visuals they use. Face claims themselves are not used at all in the process of translating from AU to novels. Not because the authors feel they don't need to use the face claim in their novels, but among AU authors there is an unwritten rule that prohibits AU authors from bringing their idols into the

form of commercial novels. It is suspected that writers and publishers must take care of royalties to the artist company that houses the idols if they use the idol's visuals.

### **Obstacles in Transferring AU into Novels**

Based on the process of translating Au into a novel, AU writers feel they have experienced several obstacles. AU writers have almost the same goal, which is to improve their writing skills, both fiction and nonfiction. Most AU writers are still new to writing, so there is still a lot that needs to be improved regarding vocabulary and grammar (Nurkhodijah et al., 2020).

Another obstacle is the issue of royalties, especially when AU is published in novel form by a publisher. Authors and publishers get financial benefits, but K-pop idols whose faces are used for face claims do not get financial benefits, especially when fanfiction successfully influences the perception of the artist in the eyes of the general public and other fans, both positive and negative perceptions (Oktaviananda et al., 2023).

Apart from the royalty issue, public outrage is also the reason that idol visuals in the use of face claims are abandoned in the process of converting AU works into novels. Until now, fanfiction monetization is still a frequent debate on social media. Most netizens believe that making money from fanfiction is unethical, especially for K-pop idol management (Oktaviananda et al., 2023). Public outrage is an expression of anger from a group of people towards a certain thing. This public outcry has become a trending topic on X several times with various hashtags involving K-Pop idols whose faces were used as AU face claims. It is suspected that publishers want to reduce problems if the AU work is published under their company. Both writers and publishers will be attacked from various social media if they continue to use idol visuals in published novel manuscripts.

From the results of the interview, Wattpad writers felt that it was easier for them to describe their characters in novel manuscripts because the form of their AU was already a collection of prose that resembled a novel. They have also used narratives to describe the characters of their characters. In using face claims, they only include one or two images as a sweetener, not as part of their AU. So, the presence or absence of face claims does not interfere with their writing at all. Meanwhile, for AU writers on TikTok and X, photos of idols are widely used in short message fragments, used to describe activities or situations. So in the process of transposing, the authors of AU TikTok and X have to work harder. In addition, their AU story needs more changes to become a novel script. The author must change the short message fragments into prose.

From the side of the interview conducted with ten readers, they stated that this face claim really helps them to imagine, imagine the characters in the story. The idols are a medium that really helps readers imagine what happens and the situations that the characters go through because they feel close to the idols. With the real existence of the idols, they can clearly imagine how they laugh, run, eat, and do other activities.

In addition to being a medium for imagination, face claims often determine whether readers will read the AU or not. AU readers only read AUs that use the face claims of the idols they like or idolize. So the use of idols in face claims is very important and has a big influence on AU works. However, in reality, this face claim can also cause a '*latah*' phenomenon that makes fans who read the AU call the idol by the fictional name of the character.

The results of an interview with the author with the initials T whose work was inspired by 7 dreams which tells about the universe of seven siblings stated that the use of face claims helped him form a community, readers and followers of his account. By creating stories using K-Pop idol visuals, he was able to gain hundreds of thousands of followers and every time his book was sold out. The support of this community was very large and made him the author he is today.



The author with the initials S whose work has sold more than 10,000 copies with his work with the trope stranger to lovers stated that the visuals of K-Pop idols were the key to his book sales with extraordinary numbers. K-Pop idols helped him to have a large readership for his works.

However, lately many readers do not like how these fictional works are associated with their idols. They also feel that the use of idol face claims should be illegal if their work is commercialized.



In the past, there were many novels circulating on the market that used idol covers and were displayed in bookstores. It used to be normalized, but now it will become a big problem and will be discussed by fans. As happened above where fans of the idol whose face was used in the picture protested the use of their idol's face claim. In the thread it was mentioned that fans protested the use of their idol's visuals.





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Some fans also called out the disruption that occurs when their idols are made the face claim of an AU story because readers will start calling their idols by the names of the AU characters. They hate it when their idols' identities are changed. They feel like the readers are stealing their idols' real identities.

The issue of idol face claims has long been a debate and has caused many fans to hate works that use the faces of their favorite idols. Although many people enjoy it, many are now no longer accepting writing that uses K-Pop idol face claims.

This rejection phenomenon clearly has a big impact on writers. Writers who rely on K-Pop idol visuals for their work are starting to decrease. They also started to distance their work from K-Pop idols, but the results were less than optimal, especially for promotion. Judging from sales, books with idol visuals have many fans. Sales are also very high. Until now, sales of novels from this AU still have high numbers.

## CONCLUSION

The development of the publishing world today shows that young writers not only rely on their writing skills, but also their ability to utilize social media and online writing platforms, such as Wattpad and Tiktok, to create alternate universe (AU) works. The AU phenomenon, especially those involving K-Pop idols, has become very popular among fans and is often done using the "face claim" method, which associates fictional characters with real visuals of idols.

Through research with interviews with AU writers on Wattpad and TikTok, it was found that the process of translating AU into novels requires a different approach. Writers on Wattpad tend to have a more structured narrative, while on TikTok and X, there are more short message fragments. The interview results also showed that the use of face claims is considered important by readers to imagine the characters, although in the translating process, writers tend to leave this visual aspect to avoid royalty issues and public reaction.

Overall, although face claims can attract readers, writers must adapt to the creative process when translating AU into novels, as well as considering the ethical and public dynamics that accompany it.

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