

Metacritique of P-Pop Culture: Visual Consumption, Fandom, and the Formation of a Filipino Cultural Criticism

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ABSTRACT

This study is a metatheoretical analysis, or metacritique, that examines existing research on P-pop culture, particularly the fandom of the girl group BINI (BLOOMs), to articulate a Filipino-oriented framework of cultural criticism. Instead of relying on empirical data, the study critiques the theories, arguments, and methodologies used to conceptualize fandom as a domain of contemporary popular culture. Drawing on Mirzoeff's Visual Culture Theory (2015) and Jenkins' Participatory Culture Theory (2006) as external lenses, and the Filipino Psychology of Enriquez (1992) and Covar (1997) as the internal grounding perspective, the study reveals that dominant interpretations remain shaped by Western epistemologies. However, these can be localized and enriched through *loob*, *damdamin*, and *pakikipagkapwa*, which function as indigenous analytical categories. The study proposes the P-pop Metacritique Framework, a model that bridges global theories with Filipino sensibilities, underscoring that a Filipino metacritique is rooted in interiority, affect, and relationality.

Keywords: metacritique, P-pop culture, fandom, *loob*, *damdamin*

INTRODUCTION

With the ongoing expansion of popular culture in the Philippines, Pinoy Pop, or P-pop, has become a powerful medium for art, identity, and discourse among Filipino youth. Groups such as BINI represent the modern Filipina who is creative, resilient, and visually progressive. Meanwhile, their fandom, BLOOMs, functions as an active community of fans participating in digital spaces through fan art, edits, dance trends, and branded engagements.

In the previous study, "*Here with You: Visual Culture and Fandom Identity of BLOOMs*" (Alajar, 2025), it was found that the fandom's visual consumption is not merely an act of appreciation but an active process of meaning-making. Using Nicholas Mirzoeff's (2015) Visual Culture Theory and Henry Jenkins' (2006) Participatory Culture Theory, the research demonstrated that fandom serves as a site of *pakikipagkapwa* (relational engagement), collective identity, and emotional connection.

However, there remains a lack of meta-critical studies that examine how such research is read, contextualized, and valued. Most analyses of P-pop still rely on Western frameworks and are not fully grounded in Filipino perspectives of *loob* (inner self), *damdamin* (emotional depth), and *pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity). From this gap emerges the purpose of the present study to conduct a metacritique, or a critique of existing critiques, in order to reveal the limitations, contributions, and possibilities of developing a distinctly Filipino mode of reading and interpreting P-pop culture.

A. Scope and Delimitations of the Study

Although the study is conceptually grounded, it acknowledges several limitations. Its reliance on secondary, largely self-referential sources narrows the range of perspectives available for metatheoretical evaluation.

Because the analysis is primarily anchored in the researcher's earlier work, there remains the possibility of interpretive bias and constrained objectivity. Furthermore, the absence of empirical or ethnographic validation, such as lived fan accounts or observational data, limits the groundedness of the study's theoretical claims, particularly those involving affective engagement and behavioral patterns within fandom. By identifying these methodological constraints, the study positions the P-pop Metacritique Framework as an initial theoretical intervention that can be expanded and empirically tested in future research.

B. Statement of the Problem

This study aims to conduct a metacritical analysis of existing research on BINI (BLOOMs) fandom and the broader field of P-pop culture. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do existing studies describe fandom as a space of visual culture and identity?
2. What theoretical lenses dominate these analyses, and how do they either limit or expand the understanding of the local context?
3. How can the Filipino concepts of *loob* (inner self), *damdamin* (emotional depth), and *pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity) be integrated into the formation of a Filipino-oriented metacritique?
4. What new model or framework of Filipino meta criticism can be developed for the study of P-pop culture?

C. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on two major theories previously applied in earlier research but reexamined here at a metacritical level. First, Nicholas Mirzoeff's (2015) Visual Culture Theory explains how images are created and interpreted as constructions of power, identity, and representation. At the metacritical level, the study investigates how Mirzoeff's lens aligns with—or perhaps falls short of—capturing the local experiences of BLOOMs, the fandom of BINI. The analysis focuses on how fans interpret visual forms—from music videos and fashion aesthetics to fan-generated content—as reflections of their collective identity.

Second, Henry Jenkins' (2006) Participatory Culture Theory emphasizes the active role of fans in producing, sharing, and assigning meaning to media content. Through a metacritical reading, the study explores how the notion of “participation” is often framed within a Western perspective of individual production and how it can be translated into a Filipino understanding of participation as *pakikilahok bilang kapwa*—a relationship grounded in emotional connection, shared experience, and collective action. In this sense, fandom is examined not merely as a media practice but as an ethical and cultural relationship among people.

In constructing a Filipino metacritique, the study also integrates the principles of Filipino Psychology developed by Virgilio Enriquez (1992) and Prospero Covar (1997), emphasizing the concepts of *loob* (inner self or consciousness), *kapwa* (relational identity with others), and *dangal* (moral and cultural integrity). These elements serve as the foundational lens for understanding fandom not simply as a technological or aesthetic space, but as an artistic and human domain where identity is built through participation, empathy, and collective sentiment.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a metatheoretical design, or metacritique, which systematically examines how existing studies conceptualize, theorize, and interpret P-pop fandom. Rather than gathering empirical data, the study interrogates theoretical lenses, methodological choices, and ideological underpinnings embedded within prior research.

A. Corpus of Analysis

The study primarily utilized the researcher's own work, “*Here with You: Visual Culture and Fandom Identity of BLOOMs*” (Alajar, 2025), which served as the primary text for metacritical analysis. Additional related

studies were also analyzed to develop a broader understanding of P-pop fandom and visual culture discourse. These include: *Filipino Stan Phenomenon* by Clamor et al. (2020), which explores the dynamic relationship between fandom and participatory culture; Abanes' (2023) *Visual Fandom and Emotional Attachment: The Case of SB19 A'TINs*, which highlights fans' emotional connection to their idols; Mirabueno's (2024) analysis of *BINI's Talaarawan*, which emphasizes artistic representation and national identity in music; and Gonzales' (2022) *The Rise of P-pop as a Field of Research*, which situates P-pop within the academic context of cultural studies. Taken together, these texts form the basis of a metacritical synthesis that not only describes fandom as a cultural product but also redefines it as a space of Filipino participation and collective identity.

B. Methodological Translation of Filipino Values

To strengthen the study's theoretical precision, the concepts of *loob*, *damdamin*, and *pakikipagkapwa* from Filipino Psychology were operationalized into concrete analytical tools for metatheoretical critique. *Loob* served as a hermeneutic depth criterion for evaluating the internal coherence, ethical reflexivity, and intentionality evident in the interpretations in existing studies, particularly in their attention to fans' interior experiences and moral agency. *Damdamin* served as an affective-phenomenological lens, enabling the assessment of how prior research accounted for emotional resonance, reciprocity, and the collective sentiment embedded in fan practices, as well as the extent to which emotional dimensions were recognized as legitimate sources of cultural meaning. Meanwhile, *pakikipagkapwa* operated as a relational-ethical indicator, guiding the examination of whether interpretations respected communal relationships, mutual care, and the ethical dynamics that shape fan communities, and determining whether fandom was framed merely as individual behavior or as a relational, communal, and ethically situated practice. Together, these three lenses provided a culturally grounded methodological apparatus that moved the metacritique beyond abstract theoretical application toward a more nuanced, Filipino-informed understanding of fandom.

C. Steps in Metacritical Analysis

The metacritical analysis followed a systematic process for examining existing studies on P-pop culture, particularly the fandom of BINI (BLOOMs). The first phase involved describing the key features of the selected texts such as their objectives, theoretical bases, and methodological designs—using *Here with You: Visual Culture and Fandom Identity of BLOOMs* (Alajar, 2025) as the main corpus, supported by related works by Clamor et al. (2020), Abanes (2023), and Mirabueno (2024). The second phase applied thematic metacritical analysis across three dimensions: theoretical, by analyzing the use of Visual Culture and Participatory Culture theories; methodological, by identifying whether the approaches were descriptive, interpretive, or empirical; and cultural, by assessing the localization of these theories within a Filipino framework. The third phase engaged in reflexive and critical evaluation on epistemological, methodological, and ideological levels to uncover the knowledge bases, limitations, and dominant ideologies shaping fandom studies. In the fourth phase, theoretical questions guided a deeper reading on how fandom, identity, *kapwa*, and collective experience are represented, and what implications arise from Western frameworks in understanding local culture. The final phase examined the historical and socio-cultural contexts of P-pop and fandom as postcolonial expressions linked to the decolonization of Filipino cultural criticism. Altogether, these stages illustrate metacritical reading as a process that reveals the dynamic intersections of theory, culture, and power within Filipino popular culture.

D. Content of the Metacritique

The metacritique comprises three key components that enable a deeper examination of existing studies on P-pop fandom. First, the summary of texts describes the main objectives, theoretical lenses, and conclusions of each study, presenting the overall direction of the research before engaging in in-depth analysis. In Alajar's (2025) study, for instance, the fandom of BINI is portrayed as a collective space of visual participation, using the theories of Mirzoeff and Jenkins to explain how Filipino youth construct their identity in the digital age. In this way, the summary serves as an initial step toward understanding the ideological and cultural dimensions of fandom. Second, the critical analysis of arguments investigates the logic, validity, and contextual relevance of each study's ideas. This phase examines whether the applied theories fit the local context, how the concepts of *loob*, *damdamin*, and *kapwa* are reflected in fandom studies, and how the visual representations of Filipino

youth acquire cultural meaning. Through this process, the analysis identifies both the strengths and limitations of existing interpretations while opening the possibility of expanding them through a Filipino-centered lens. Third, the overall evaluation synthesizes all findings and leads to the development of the P-pop Metacritique Framework, which integrates Visual Culture Theory, Participatory Culture Theory, and Filipino Psychology—particularly the values of *loob*, *damdamin*, and *kapwa*—as interpretive lenses. Through this integration, the study proposes a new approach to understanding popular culture that is not solely anchored in Western theories but grounded in Filipino cultural consciousness. Ultimately, the metacritique emphasizes that fandom is not merely a space of entertainment but a modern site of participation and identity formation that expresses the collective identity and cultural meaning of Filipinos in the digital age.

E. Ethical Considerations

Since this study is metatheoretical and does not involve direct interaction with participants, its primary ethical consideration centers on the responsible use, interpretation, and citation of existing research. The researcher ensures that all texts used as the corpus—including *Here with You: Visual Culture and Fandom Identity of BLOOMs* (Alajar, 2025) and related studies by Clamor et al. (2020), Abanes (2023), Mirabueno (2024), and Gonzales (2022) are utilized with full respect for the authors' intellectual property rights, originality, and scholarly ownership.

The study strictly adheres to the standards of academic integrity and intellectual honesty by properly citing sources and avoiding plagiarism, misrepresentation, or distortion of ideas. All interpretations and metacritical analyses are presented as the researcher's own readings, while maintaining explicit acknowledgment of the sources. Furthermore, all information derived from published works is used exclusively for academic purposes and not for commercial or political intent. When dealing with sensitive statements or subjective interpretations from previous researchers, the study approaches them with respect, professionalism, and awareness of cultural sensitivity.

Above all, as a Filipino-oriented metacritique, this study is conducted in accordance with the ethics of *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (Enriquez, 1992)—a perspective that recognizes the dignity of others as fellow researchers and contributors to the shared pursuit of knowledge. Thus, every act of reading, critique, and evaluation is guided by respect, empathy, and intellectual responsibility, all directed toward advancing Filipino thought in the fields of criticism and popular culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the results of the metatheoretical analysis based on existing studies on P-pop culture, particularly the fandom of BINI (BLOOMs). The analysis was conducted using the lenses of Mirzoeff's (2015) Visual Culture Theory, Jenkins' (2006) Participatory Culture Theory, and the Filipino Psychology frameworks of Enriquez (1992) and Covar (1997). Through metacritique, the study examined the theories, arguments, and methodologies employed by previous researchers to determine how the concepts of visual culture, participation, and Filipino sensibility are expressed and integrated within fandom studies. From this process, the findings of the metacritique are organized and presented according to the study's four main research questions.

Description of Existing Research on Fandom as a Space of Visual Culture and Identity

Based on the metacritical analysis, existing studies commonly describe P-pop fandom as a space of visual creativity and identity formation. In Alajar's (2025) study, the fandom of BINI, known as BLOOMs, is portrayed as a collective force of visual participation in which fans are not merely consumers of content but creators of their own symbols of connection and patriotism. Practices such as fan edits, digital artworks, fan cams, and online tributes become expressions of emotional engagement and cultural participation.

Meanwhile, the works of Clamor et al. (2020) and Abanes (2023) also discuss fandom as a form of participation in media culture; however, these studies remain largely framed within Western concepts of subculture and affective labor. Such readings acknowledge fandom's links to the global digital system but tend

to lack localization in the Filipino context. Overall, the metacritique reveals that Alajar's (2025) "Here with You" provides a more grounded interpretation by situating fandom within the framework of a Filipino affective community, where participation emerges through shared emotion, relational engagement, and visual unity.

Dominant Theoretical Lenses and Their Limitations or Extensions in Understanding the Local Context

The analysis revealed that existing studies on P-pop fandom are predominantly framed through Western theoretical lenses, particularly Visual Culture Theory and Participatory Culture Theory. These frameworks have been instrumental in explaining fandom as a field of visual representation and participatory creation. However, the metacritique also identified their limitations, as such perspectives often center on notions of individual production, technological agency, and capitalist participation.

From a local standpoint, participation is not merely an act of involvement but an expression of *pakikilahok bilang kapwa*—a relational process grounded in empathy, connection, and shared emotion. In this view, fandom transcends the digital economy, becoming a medium of human connection and collective meaning. Thus, while Western theories provide valuable analytical tools, they require contextual adaptation and reinterpretation to align with Filipino sensibilities. This is precisely the effort undertaken by Alajar (2025), who bridges theory and emotion within the framework of Filipino cultural experience, creating a dialogue between global theory and indigenous affective understanding.

Integration of the Concepts of *Loob*, *Damdamin*, and *Pakikipagkapwa* in Building a Filipino Metacritique

The findings of the metacritique reveal that the concepts of *loob*, *damdamin*, and *pakikipagkapwa*, developed by Virgilio Enriquez (1992) and Prospero Covar (1997) in Filipino Psychology, serve as the foundation for a Filipino mode of reading fandom. These are not merely cultural values but analytical lenses applicable to the metatheoretical study of popular culture. Covar's notion of *loob* represents the innermost dimension of the self—the *kaloob-looban* that gives rise to conscience, emotion, and action. Within fandom, *loob* is reflected in the fans' deep awareness and internal connection with their idols and fellow members, transforming aesthetic admiration into shared empathy and meaning. When used as a metacritical lens, *loob* encourages an analysis that reaches emotional and cultural depth—a dive into the intentions and lived experiences within cultural discourse. Meanwhile, Enriquez's *damdamin* goes beyond emotion to signify embodied sensitivity and relational attunement.

In the BINI fandom, *damdamin* manifests in creative expressions such as fan edits, reaction videos, and digital artworks that embody affection and collective identity, showing that critique must also *feel* and empathize to be authentically Filipino. Finally, *pakikipagkapwa*, regarded by Enriquez as the core of Filipino personhood, refers to a relational ethics of treating others as equals endowed with dignity and feeling. Within fandom, it is visible in mutual support, respect, and care among members, forming the ethical dimension of community life. As a metacritical perspective, *pakikipagkapwa* grounds criticism in humility, compassion, and social consciousness. Altogether, these three concepts function as epistemological pillars of a Filipino metacritique that views fandom as a human and cultural space of emotion, empathy, and shared meaning. Thus, Filipino criticism emerges not only as theoretical or visual analysis but as a moral and cultural reflection—one that is rooted in *loob*, flows through *damdamin*, and engages with *kapwa*, embodying a distinctly Filipino consciousness and identity.

The Developed Model or Framework of Filipino Meta criticism in the Study of P-pop Culture

From the results of the metacritique, the P-pop Metacritique Framework was developed as a new model of Filipino meta criticism. This framework integrates Visual Culture Theory and Participatory Culture Theory as external analytical lenses, and Filipino Psychology as the internal grounding perspective. Through the concepts of *loob* (inner self), *damdamin* (emotional depth), and *kapwa* (relational identity), fandom is understood as a space of visual participation, cultural creation, and collective identity.

The model demonstrates that fandom is not merely a by-product of media but an active arena of cultural formation and national sentiment. In this sense, P-pop becomes a reflection of Filipino youth—using visual

culture not only for participation but as a means of expressing identity and connecting with others. The P-pop Metacritique Framework thus contributes to the decolonization of literary and cultural criticism, advancing a critical discourse rooted in the lived experience, emotion, and consciousness of the Filipino people.

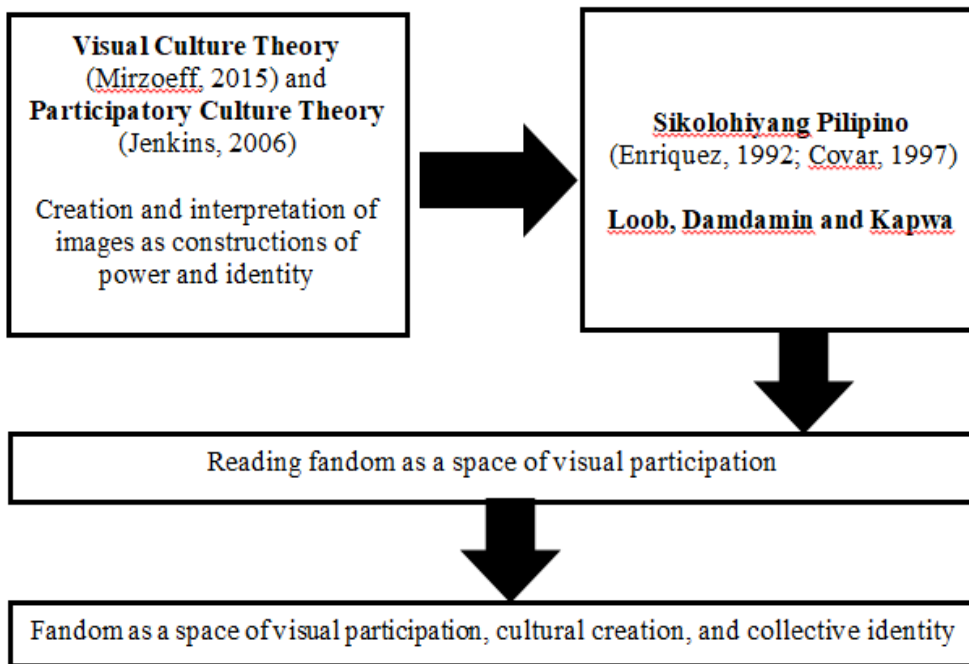


Figure 1. The Developed P-pop Metacritique Framework

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The metacritique revealed that existing studies on P-pop culture portray fandom as a creative, visual, and collective space of identity formation. Through various forms of participation such as digital art, fan videos, and online community engagement, fans are not merely consumers of media content but active creators of meaning. Fandom, particularly that of BINI’s BLOOMs, emerges as a cultural sphere shaped by distinctly Filipino values such as empathy, respect, and shared emotional connection.

In analyzing the theoretical lenses, the study found that Western paradigms such as Mirzoeff’s (2015) *Visual Culture Theory* and Jenkins’ (2006) *Participatory Culture Theory* remain dominant. While these frameworks offer valuable insights into visual power and participation, their scope remains limited in articulating local sensibilities. Most studies tend to emphasize the technological and productive aspects of fandom while overlooking its emotional, relational, and cultural dimensions. The metacritique therefore underscores the need to reorient and indigenize theoretical frameworks, adapting them to Filipino language, sentiments, and cultural consciousness.

Through the application of Filipino Psychology by Enriquez (1992) and Covar (1997), the study identified *loob*, *damdamin*, and *pakikipagkapwa* as central to constructing a Filipino metacritique. *Loob* represents the inner connection between emotion and consciousness; *damdamin* embodies the collective energy and affective expression of fandom; and *pakikipagkapwa* provides the ethical foundation for community interaction. These three concepts act as bridges that translate foreign theories into cultural readings grounded in Filipino experience. In this sense, criticism becomes not only an intellectual discourse but also an enactment of empathy, connection, and humanity.

As a synthesis of the metatheoretical analysis, the study developed the P-pop Metacritique Framework, a new model of Filipino meta-criticism that integrates Western theories with the indigenous sensibilities of Filipino Psychology. Through *loob*, *damdamin*, and *kapwa*, fandom is redefined as a space of visual participation, cultural creation, and collective identity. From this perspective, fandom is not simply a media by-product but a living representation of Filipino youth who use visual culture to express themselves, connect with others, and participate in society.

The study recommends using the P-pop Metacritique Framework as a foundational lens for future research in popular culture, arts, and media studies in the Philippines. It can also be incorporated into the teaching of literature and literary criticism to cultivate students who are critically aware and culturally empathetic. Moreover, continued metacritical studies on P-pop, visual arts, and digital participation are encouraged to further enrich the Filipino discourse in literature and cultural studies.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that metacritique is not merely an examination of theories but a translation of Filipino consciousness into the act of interpretation itself. The P-pop Metacritique Framework represents a decolonized form of criticism, one rooted in *loob*, flowing through *damdamin*, and engaging with *kapwa*. In this way, P-pop culture becomes a mirror of the contemporary Filipino: creative, critical, and continuously shaping identity amid globalization.

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