

## Representation of Popular Korean Culture (K-POP) Industrial Identity through A Virtual Ethnographic Approach

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### ABSTRACT

The popularity of Korean pop (K-Pop) culture can be seen through the growth of a massive fan base without age restrictions, and is currently the largest in the music and entertainment industry. K-Pop fans who occupy a fandom are known as *K-Popers*. This present study explains the representation of identity in essence, as according to Hall - is related to the use of language, and represents a "blurring" of meaning by a cultural industry aiming for commercialisation. The result of this research shows the process of blurring meaning by talent agencies that produce K-Pop idols as the main product that represent them by carrying important values that will be adapted and consumed by fans with strong loyalty and emotional connection. The agency is a cultural business industry that sells its "products" such as K-Pop idols that they have introduced to fans, and refers to their "existence" that is consumed by fans. This study used a virtual ethnographic approach with data collection techniques through participant observation and interviews. Each of these main products has its own unique concept as every fan will feel special and exclusive as K-Pop music is a sense of "individuality" developed by the K-Pop culture and industry. Based on the results of observations on Instagram, we can find various types of fans to describe how they adapt the meaning that is sold by the agency through the products they sell.

**Keywords:** *Popular culture, K-Pop idol, identity, culture industry, identity representation.*

### INTRODUCTION

The debut of Korean culture industry, namely drama and music, began around the 20th century with Japan and China as the first consumer countries to broadcast such Korean products. Based on the fame gained through this, South Korea began to market and to introduce their culture and tourism through the dramas they produce and the globalisation of the South Korean entertainment industry was at its inception (Valentina & Istriyani, 2013).

*K-Pop*, from Korean Popular word (Korean Pop Music) is a type of popular South Korean Music (Ri'aeni, 2019), thus *K-Popers* refer to K-Pop fans who occupy the fandom, particularly In Indonesia - as to denote someone who likes K-Pop idols (Munica, 2021). The popularity of this culture is evident from the growth of a massive fan base and is considerably the largest in the global music and entertainment industry. The term *fandom* is used to describe fans who idolise the same K-Pop idols, and the naming of this fandom is officially determined by the agency or management overseeing the said idol group. Joli Jenson (1992) in Sari (2012) describes that the image drawn from the activities carried out by fan groups will not be separated from the image "deviations". There are two types of pathology that are typical, male fans relates to the "obsessed individual" while type female fans are the "hysterical crowd" (Sari, 2012).

Modern Korean pop music started in 1930, where it was from the Japanese occupation that it experienced a lot of development and growth, but there had been restrictions or ban on consuming Japanese culture by the Korean government resulting from the pain of

colonialism. So much so, that the flow of entry and exit Japanese culture in Korea is very minimal and limited. In 1998, after South Korea was free from all forms of colonialism from Japan, the government lifted the ban on Japanese cultural restrictions on South Korea. Consequences arising from the liberation of the prohibition saw young people in South Korea becoming more interested in the results of Japanese culture than his or her own country. This phenomenon was viewed negatively by most South Koreans, especially the elderly who remember the Japanese occupation (Taqwin, 2016).

The era of modern music era rose again around the 1950s with various shows from western pop music at the American military base in South Korea. It was then from there that modern Korean pop music began and was known as the "*oldies*" period in the 1960s, where various genres of Korean music were influenced by western pop music. In the 1970s, pioneer Cho Young Pil introduced the rock music genre to the public. A competitor music genre at that time was the trot music genre that was influenced by Japanese enka music.

The history of K-Pop cannot be separated from the *hallyu wave* that spread South Korean entertainment culture to various countries such as China that became a major market share around the late 1990s. K-Pop saw its roots in 1992 with the emergence of group *Seo Taiji and The Boys* consisting of three members, namely Seo Taiji, Yang Hyun Suk, and Lee Juno where the initial direction of this music genre came from American western pop music with a combination of rock genres and hip-hop (Etikasari, 2018). The development of *hallyu* in East Asian and Southeast Asian countries saw the transformation of Korean pop culture, particularly in Indonesia; evidenced by the emergence of the "Asian Fans Club" (AFC), an Indonesian blog containing news about the Korean entertainment world. AFC was founded on August 1, 2009 by Santi Ela Sari. Based on statistical data from Alexa's Pagerank site, AFC is the largest "Korean Entertainment" site in Indonesia. Meanwhile, in terms of demographic characteristics, almost all of the AFC visitors are from Indonesia; most of them are women under 25 years old with internet access at home and at school (Valentina & Istriyani, 2013).

The impact of *hallyu* is realised when audiences imitate *hallyu* culture in the form of clothes and ways of talking, food, and lifestyle. Henceforth, this is not just placing K-Pop as a part of popular culture, but as a form of cultural imperialism (Laura & Wahyuningratna, 2021). Recent research conducted by iPrice (2020), an e-commerce aggregator, shows that there are three main idol fan groups that spend a lot of money on fan-idol activities. The group for *BTS* would on average spends IDR 20.4 million while *Twice* fans would spend up to IDR 11.7 million. Meanwhile, the *Blackpink* fandom or the *Blinks* would spend an average of IDR 9.4 million to fulfil their desire as fans.

The "in-house training" system adapted by talent agencies for idols in South Korea shaped such cultural products and has provided rapid economic growth for South Korea, so much so that this initiative was able to remedy the economic crisis in 1997. The focus of the South Korean state shifted to a creative industry, initially focusing on the economic development through the goods industry. Then the role of agencies was to mobilise the creative industry by processing available media in an effort to spread the Korean Wave (*hallyu*). This was a big part of K-Pop's success in spreading its influence globally and being able to sustain its popularity until today. At first, K-Pop was underestimated and was burdened by racist sentiments. Even so, at present, K-Pop can now be included into all aspects of life and has the power to influence a community.

The cultural industry system is pinnacle in encapsulating and producing cultural products. K-Pop agencies are companies engaged in the entertainment industry by creating music and entertainment idols as cultural products with various classifications and

prerequisites that must be met by K-Pop standards before entering the K-Pop industry and presenting themselves to consumers and the agency itself. There are three agencies that have earned the nickname both nationally (South Korea) and internationally as "BIG 3". They are 3 giant agencies that have become pioneers in the development of K-Pop today. The three agencies of "BIG 3" are SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment.

The purpose of this study was to explore how the Korean cultural industry permeates in virtual spaces among K-Pop fans and how it influences their actions through the representation of identity formed through their K-Pop agencies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Identity Representation*

Representation, according to Stuart Hall (1997), is the process of producing and exchanging meaning between community members where it works through a system of representation. There are two important components contained in the representation system, namely the ideas existing in the individual's mind and language. The ideas in our minds have meaning and they can only be communicated through the existence of language. Therefore, the success of understanding meaning in this representation system requires communities with the same background so that they can achieve a shared understanding of meaning. If there are differences in background, it will lead to different understandings of meaning, and this happens in every community where there are differences in meaning in each community (culture).

Stuart Hall (1997) divides identity into 3 different concepts: the first is the concept of an enlightenment *subject*, the concept that humans are centred and unified subjects and have the nature of self-awareness. What concerns the individual is the formation of a person's "identity" as he has a desire to form an identity for himself, rather than because of the influence of the ruling domination. The second is the concept of a *sociological subject*, the identity formed from the relationship between the social area of the individual being or also known as the "*significant other*". This concept divides the individual into two areas: the "inside" area relating to the personal realm and the "outside" area relating to the social realm. The third is the concept *postmodern subject*, a concept related to historical values brought by individuals who are brought from birth to death as a construction that is built on oneself to provide satisfaction for oneself or *constructs a comforting story*.

### *Culture Industry*

Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) in their book entitled *Dialectic of Enlightenment* define the concept of cultural industry as products that are produced for mass consumption with large production rates, which will affect the nature of consumption adjusted to a previously designed plan. Consumers here are acting as neither king nor subject but as an object. The motives of the cultural industry in gaining profit will determine the nature of the various forms of culture produced. As the function of industry in general is to produce a product, the culture industry is engaged in producing culture with a standardisation process where these products have the same form in all commodities. However, even though cultural production conforms to existing standards, the culture industry here includes a sense of individuality in each of its products in the sense of "affecting the individual atmosphere". The sense of individuality that the culture industry puts into its products serves as a form of blurring the standardisation applied by the previous culture industry so that consumer awareness can be manipulated. In

short, individualisation here is an ideological process in an attempt to hide the process of standardisation of the culture industry.

The sense of individuality arising in the consumers of culture industry is the one in which consumers perceive that the products they consume are really intended for them and they feel privileged towards these products (Arviani, 2013). Popular culture Korea is an amalgamation of western and Asian values to produce a single style of Korean culture combining which becomes an attractive cultural and economic model to follow and create interest (Jalaluddin & Ahmad, 2011).

#### METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted through virtual ethnography by utilising social media platforms. The main location of research is through *Instagram* to observe the development of the K-Pop account fanbase in the digital space. Data analysis technique through cyber media analysis (AMS), a new method developed by ethnographers as an approach to bridge the online *and* offline world was deployed in this study.

There are two important points to consider in conducting the AMS analysis method virtually; the first is that field research is a cultural reality that has traces of cultural artifacts used as data sources. Cultural artifacts that are used as data source narratives are in the form of a virtual space for K-Pop fans in the form of a *fanbase* where three representations of agencies, idols, and fans can be obtained through the digital footprint. Secondly, virtual ethnography must focus on the target group or community, henceforth we analyse the results of digital observations from the Instagram K-Popers community.

The results of observations in the form of news, photos, and videos on information traffic on Instagram are the main information in this study. Observations were carried out for twelve months from December 2020 until December 2021. The Instagram accounts must be still active today and consistently updates information and news about K-Pop, and interacting virtually with the K-Popers community on Instagram. The Instagram groups that fit this criteria include official instagram K-Pop Group and Agency (@smtown; @yg\_ent\_official; @jypentertainment; @bts.bighitofficial; @officialstarship; @weareoneexo; and etc), indonesian fanbase account (@nctzenarea, @supportygfamil, @fanbase.7bts, etc), Korean news portal instagram account like @coppamagz; @fyi.korea; officialkvibes; @panncafe; @koreadispatch; @kfm.korea and etc).

Posts both in the form of pictures, music videos, comments to articles related to K-Pop are used as reference for the researchers. More than 100 posts were collected from these Instagram accounts and sorted for validity and credibility as well as its authenticity. As supporting data for these observations, the researchers conducted interviews with several informants, some of whom were admins of fanbase accounts that had been previously followed. In this study the research targets K-Pop fan groups so that the specifications of the research subject are clear. The interview that took place involved five informants: three fanbase accounts including @haechan.noona with 41,800 followers, @dreamiespage with 54,500 followers, and @fyidreamies.id with 55,600 followers. The other two are personally active fan accounts.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### *Korean Culture Industry Political Economy*



Source: <https://instagram.com/smtown.ijang>

Based on the results of a collection of observations on digital footprints on fan accounts on Instagram, official agencies, as well as news from various sources, the following data has were analysed:

#### *SM Entertainment*

SM Entertainment was founded by Lee Soo Man in 1989 under the name SM Studio, before renamed to SM Entertainment Co., Ltd in 1995. Lee Soo Man introduced a new modern model, namely the In House Training system in managing a cultural industry by prioritizing quality from a cultural product. It was inspired by the work system of the Western entertainment industry, which at that time was growing very rapidly while pursuing further studies in California. The "in house training" production system is a training system carried out by the agency for prospective idols before deciding to debut with all aspects of talent that have been prepared where idols already have selling points in the audience.

An *allkpop* article (2011) highlighted that Lee Soo Man was the first man Korean entertainment industry to introduce a systematic and scientific training management system. The SM Entertainment agency itself, as the driving force for its breakthrough in "in house training" to create its cultural products and has several audition systems. The *Saturday Audition* held every Saturday being the toughest because it is based on the direct selection by by SM Entertainment founder (Lee Soo Man) and several staffs of talent search management. A second audition is known as *Street Casting* is done by casting in the streets or public places. The next audition that is widely known by fans is the SM Global Audition, an online audition process that can be followed by various countries outside of South Korea.

SM Entertainment has been innovating and developing its products so that they are able to steal the market's attention by participating in selling the identity of a product as the loyalty that fans bring to an idol group. Based on information in the article released by *billboard.com* (2017), the NCT (Neo Culture Technology) boy group is also a form of new innovation from SM Entertainment in developing a new group system where the company (agency) utilises a unit system. This system applies a system without member limits and

includes idol members from several countries. So far, not only South Korea but also China, Japan, and America have joined. However, quoted through *Koreaboo.com* (2023) through SM Entertainment co-CEOs Lee Sung Soo and Tak Young Jun announced that NCT, which originally had a limited expansion concept of both units and members, is now scheduled to end through the debut of NCT Tokyo (tentative name) and become the last group from the NCT Universe section.

#### *YG Entertainment*

YG Entertainment, one of the major South Korean companies with its consistency in the type of hip-hop music genre, was founded by Yang Hyun Suk, a member of Seo Taiji and The Boys; a group that became the initial foundation for the birth of modern K-Pop music. YG Entertainment itself is often the choice for audition participants because it is known as an agency that provides complete freedom for idols to create and to express the type of music they want to introduce to music lovers. Even though it is known as an expert in hip-hop music and intense rap, YG Entertainment does not make idols stick to this music genre.

Based on the website page *ygfamily.com*, YG managed to establish itself as one of the largest agencies in South Korea to become part of Big 3 along with SM Entertainment and JYP Entertainment. The peak success of Big Bang boy group debut became the main spear for YG Entertainment to focus on the production of idol groups which was then followed by the debut of the girl group (2NE1) which was immediately known as a monster rookie and became one of the class A girl groups in its time before being declared disbanded in 2016. YG Entertainment through the idea of GD, one of the members of the Big Bang group, became a pioneer of the use of lightsticks for fans at concerts as a characteristic of fan identity.

At the time of writing, YG's last survival was YG Treasure Box (YGTB) which was held in 2018. According to the *soompi.com* (2018), Yang Hyun Suk revealed that this survival is a place to reveal every male YG trainee, and will be judged and monitored through broadcasts with criteria that have been set as a condition for debut. YG Entertainment held an idol survival show event featuring every trainer from the agency to be competitive and further to develop the talents and potentials existing in the trainers. This method is effective enough to attract fans first through and to follow the flow of fan growth so that each trainer can show off their potential and attract fans so that in their debut they already have a core fan base that follows the development of idol survival shows. In addition, YG Entertainment also introduced the concept of a mini album, which is another version of the album with a total number of tracks that are much less than the original album.

#### *JYP Entertainment*

With the characteristic of *easy listening music* and the success of the upbringing group that always manages to attract attention, JYP Entertainment, which was founded in May 1997, has consistently been a part of the line-up of Big 3 major entertainment companies in South Korea. The founder of JYP Entertainment himself, Park Jin Young, was a young composer who at that time had auditioned at SM Entertainment before deciding to pursue his career by establishing his own agency. *failurebeforesucces.com* (2022) posited that JYP Entertainment's success lies in the formation of girl group "Wonder Girls" in 2006 that entered the second generation of K-Pop with hit song entitled *Nobody* and managed to enter the hot 100 billboard chart. That popularity brought JYP Entertainment to a cooperative agreement with Jonas Group and opened the way for the Jonas Brothers' world tour in several cities. Until today, JYP Entertainment is indeed known as one of the agencies that has almost always successfully

gained popularity for debuting girl groups, from *Wonder Girls*, *Miss A*, *Twice*, *Itzy* to the newest one, *Nmixx*.

### *Soft Power Idol K-Pop as a Cultural Product*

#### *a. Able to Deconstruct Masculinity*



Source: <https://instagram.com/smtown.jjang>

The face of the word "beauty" is often attached to the female gender and belong to women. The meaning of "beautiful" for women has been well deconstructed by male idols, so that the use of the meaning of beauty focusing on women only is considered too old-fashioned because basically "beautiful" is a subjective meaning for each individual for both women and men.

The role of K-Pop in deconstructing masculinity where male idols are able to present beauty products well is able to influence most of the fans' thinking construction initially perceiving that beauty products belong to women and now changing into things that are recommended or can be said as mandatory for everyone, both men and women, to show that the attitude as a person who loves himself by being able to take good care of his body through beauty treatments that were once considered taboo has become common.

*b. Diplomacy Tool by the Government*



Source: <https://instagram.com/panncafe>

State diplomacy often uses K-Pop as a bridge that combines political life with the need to attract the masses' attention. Like the Exo group in the blue building meeting President Donald Trump, the Red Velvet group which was sent to North Korea to build good relations in 2018, Super Junior group member Choi Siwon became UNICEF's national ambassador for the East Asia and Asia Pacific region, and in 2020 the group BTS became a speaker at the United Nations. The reason for choosing K-Pop idols on a socio-political scale is to attract the masses' attention. The involvement of K-Pop idols, of course, will attract fans to follow the developments that the Government wants to target politically to achieve its main goals. The enthusiasm of fans for K-Pop idols has successfully become a part of the Government's political contribution and pride for the fans of K-Pop idol groups. Thus, the existence of idol groups they like is recognised by the government.

Current K-Pop artists, among them DBSK, *Super Junior*, *SNSD*, *Shinee*, *Big Bang*, *2PM*, *FX*, *EXO*, *Red Velvet*, *Icon*, *Winner*, *Black Pink*, *Twice*, *BTS*, *NCT*, *Rain*, *BOA*, and many others have become actors in diplomacy for South Korean culture through K-Pop music (Alam & Nyarimun, 2017).

*c. Sense of Virtual Community Fandom K-Pop*

The power of K-Pop fandom is well known as a big power in the virtual space of social media where K-Pop fans are often considered as influential because of fandom's power to trend a news or case. Shared interests and goals when trying to trend a moment are parts of the *sense of virtual community* that is built between the interactions that exist among fans. The term mutual or mutual invitation is what shows a new era of social relations stratification that is usually the standard of society when communicating directly. This term is mostly used by fans to add to their relationship in the virtual world in which they do not know each other physically and some do not even know the real identity of their virtual friends, but the virtual



power that is woven from a strong sense of solidarity. The main reason for building a *sense of virtual community* from K-Pop fandom is the power of K-Pop idols' popularity in building and growing a fandom so that the bigger the fandom, the more complex will be the bonds, but the greater will be the power they have.

For example, in research conducted by Yasmin and Fardhani (2020) regarding the ARMY fandom of the BTS group through the existence of the ARMY community, they have a close solidarity relationship that mutually reinforces one another where it is not uncommon. These ARMY's hold routine gatherings which are usually held when available certain events such as birthdays of BTS members, BTS anniversaries and BTS comeback moments. Media used by K-Pop fans, especially social media, is the main source for obtaining various information, getting K-Pop products and also connecting with each other among K-Pop fans (Nurul Akqmie et al., 2019).

#### *d. The Influence of K-Pop Idols in Lifestyle*

The glitter of the K-Pop world doesn't stop on the stage only, but from various sides of the life of K-Pop idols, it continues to be a concern for many audiences. Some of the items used by idols often become trendsetters for their fans, so it is unsurprising that world-class fashion brands use K-Pop idols as models to make them brand ambassadors. The culture of luxury life has been closely attached to the world of entertainment. For the artists who look at all points as a mandatory item, some of them make them not only as a symbol but also as a form of investment.

The great interest of K-Pop fans has paved the way for the goods industry to use K-Pop as their access to win the hearts of consumers. For example, the phenomenon of collaboration between BTS and McDonald's shows the fans' enthusiasm to buy products that have been labelled with the BTS name. The consumption of signs and symbols attached to a group has almost become consumption for fans. Fans have their own emotional level in a sign attached to their idol group. The loyalty that is built from their emotional strength is what the product wants to lift, because in reality a fan tends to have a strong desire to buy a K-Pop idol sign from a product rather than being interested in the product itself.

#### *e. South Korean Government Regulations Relating to Regulation Regarding Working Time System*

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of South Korea (Kompas, 2019) in 2020 made some reforms in several policies, one of which was the policy regarding employee working time which should not be more than 52 hours per week, and also regulations regarding trainee contracts at agencies where currently each trainee only has a contract of less than three years and the agency has an obligation to provide financial support during training by trainees. The new regulation states that trainees have three years only to compete and to develop their potential until they enter the debut line-up at an agency. This regulation is considered as a form of government protection from child exploitation where the increasing popularity of K-Pop also brings great interest in children to aspire to become K-Pop idols so that many minors are starting to live trainee lives who are known to be hard to become K-Pop idols. The attention of the South Korean Government is considering the implementation of this policy.

On April 21, 2023 the South Korean government through the National Assembly's Culture, Sports and Tourism Committee officially passed a Bill to protect underage Korean Pop (K-Pop) artists. The Bill aims to prevent exploitation and protect the health of artists. The draft law regulates the duration of work for underage artists such as artists aged 15 to 19 years may not work more than 35 hours with a maximum of 7 hours a day. Artists aged 12 to 15 years are allowed to work 30 hours a week with a maximum of 7 hours a day (Ultimagz, 2023).

#### *K-Pop Fan Consumption Model*

K-Popers always collect items related to the idol, such as albums, light sticks, posters, photo books, and other items related to the idol (Setyarsih, 2016). Fan consumption of the *main product* produced by the agency divides several criteria of fans in a fandom depending on their personal consumption value of products produced following the *main product*, for example: merchandise, albums, and others. The criteria the researchers found successfully are as follows:

##### A. *Quota Capital Fans*

*Haha, yes, it's the same as just quota capital, streaming with votes and if it's about album concerts or other things, don't buy it.*

Interview with @anonim fan account (2020, 11 November).

The term quota capital fan is a term quite well-known among Indonesian fans. Indonesian fans themselves are the ones with a very good digital power base, so the meaning of this quota capital refers more to fans who support their idols in a virtual sphere such as music video streaming culture and voting culture. Finally, regarding the power of quota capital fans in trending an idol group moment, those fans will usually trend moments such as their idol's birthday on Twitter and idol group achievements in an award ceremony, and fan demands for agencies to treat their idols fairly. The power of fandom trending this moment can be seen on Twitter as the main base for fans of quota capital to show the strength of their fandom.

##### B. *Solo Stan and Akgae Fans*

*Solo Stan* and *Akgae* are terms for fans who like only one person in a group. Even though it looks the same where fans only support one idol in the group, the use of the term *solo stan* with *Akgae* cannot be compared. The term *solo stan* tends to be positive as where the fans support one idol without bringing down other idols, they still move as fans who are able to have an open mind. In contrast to *Akgae*, these fans are those who really like one idol in one group but more in negative way, where *Akgae* will not hesitate to utter hate speech against other idols and even to their favourite idol's member group, just to favor their idols. The *akgae* phenomenon has become one of the toxic phenomena in the KPOP world because the presence of *akgae* can lead to several conflicts and even fanwars among fans.

##### C. *Sultan's Fans*

*"Fans with all capital, while we can do to support them"*, interview with one of admin fanbase @fyi.dreamies (2020, 11 November)

Sultan's fans are a popular nickname among fans to name fans who are able to participate in all series of activities officially run by the agency as part of the idol group's schedule, whether it is comeback albums, concerts, fansigns, or product ambassador activities (example: cosmetic products). For fans of the Sultan it is not a problem to follow the whole series, releasing more material for the sake of his idol is a form where they emotionally consider that it is their expression in appreciating the hard work of his idol.

Several big agendas are also often prepared by the sultan's fans for the big days of their idols such as idol birthdays, the anniversary of idol groups, and so on. There are so many fans with this Sultan type but the most popular one is China Bar. China Bar is a part of the fans that always looks forward to the artist's projects and also a part of the fans that is quite respected as a loyal fan base that is able to help increase the popularity of idols with all projects that are well planned.

#### *D. BIM (Bias is Mine) Fans*

The type of BIM adherent fan or called *Bias is Mine* is a part of the toxic fan type with an excessive obsession with his idol where such fans hope to have his idol as a lover or clearly such BIM adherent fans feel that they have rights over his idol. Many types of BIM fans encountered are those who feel excessively disappointed when their idol is exposed to a dating scandal, and in the K-Pop world dating itself is a scandal category for an idol and is still considered taboo so that many idols avoid dating scandals or even some of them think again about starting a dating relationship to interact with other idols of the opposite sex, because even a slight mistake can lead to dating rumours that trigger trouble within the fandom.

#### *E. Sasaeng Fans*

Sasaeng fans are a part of the fan type considered the most toxic among other types of fans because those who fall into this category are the type of fan who has a reckless and obsessive attitude to the point of being able to hurt their idol. Sasaeng fans often take action as stalkers, in contrast to fansite masters who are professional fans to the point of obtaining permission from the agency to follow their idol's agenda. Sasaeng fans follow their idol's agenda illegally by buying information on their idol from certain parties who intentionally commercialise the idol's personal data for their own benefit.

### *5. Korean Wave Representation of the Success of K-Pop Cultural Products*

The massive development of K-Pop culture supported by globalization has become a toll road for South Korea to market widely to various countries regarding modern culture which they keep developing as one of the creative industries with synergy between the South Korean Government, Agencies, and Global Markets. There are important points that need to be underlined in the discussion of the culture industry here. In general, just like industrial systems in every industrial business value in which there are, of course, central actors who play an important role in managing the industry, in this K-Pop study there are two important actors who work behind the scenes and become. The success of the K-Pop culture industry is mainly due to the Agency and the Government. Both have a role as the center of capitalism which has the main capital to develop their products.

There are several important points in discussing the process of representing the identity of the cultural industry here:

a. *K-Pop Narratives Massively Ordained through the Popular Culture Industry Aiming at Hitting The Target, Namely Fans.*

There is no doubt about the worldwide popularity of K-Pop, as almost all aspects of our daily life cannot be separated from K-Pop promotions, both virtual and real. At first K-Pop was still underestimated compared with *western music* and *jazz*, but now due to the massive promotion and several regulations set by the South Korean Government to develop K-Pop to get its current place, K-Pop has its own *soft power* with large fan power, making K-Pop one of the most popular music types. It is one of South Korea's great strengths in raising the image of the country and the country's economy.

b. *The K-Pop Culture Industry Enters and Is Accepted by the Audience*

The acceptance of K-Pop by the audience has been seen from the great dominance by K-Pop fans so far, and it seems that several other industries, whether retail, technology or transportation industries, understand very well how K-Pop has a great influence on their fans, so they take advantage of the popularity of K-Pop idols as a means of promoting their products.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the agency developed the possible use of new technology to maintain the relationship between Korean artists and their fans. During the pandemic Artists and agencies management also needs to work hard to maintain their fan base through streaming sessions, concerts to call personal videos (Nurul Akqmie et al., 2021).

c. *The Success of Capitalism in Exploiting the Culture Industry by Creating A Pseudo-Need for Fans to Enjoy The Cultural Output of New Meanings Regarding K-Pop.*

The representation of identity, according to Hall (1997), is essentially related to the use of "language" which is used to represent a meaning in which there are obfuscations of meaning by a cultural industry aiming for commercialization. The process of blurring meaning by the agency as a producer here produces K-Pop idols as the *main product* representing the agency carrying important values which will be adapted and consumed by fans that then play their loyalty emotionally as fans and are used to gain profits aimed at by the agency as a cultural industry company. Each of the *main products* has its own concept so that every fan who is one of the idol group *booths* will feel special and exclusive, but for a moment we will pull back that the essence is the same, namely K-Pop music. It is in line with Adorno and Horkheimer who developed the meaning of "individuality" in the culture industry where "affecting the individual atmosphere" is the main value raised by the culture industry, even though we know that the standards in every culture industry are the same, and so are the blurring of meaning and a sense of individuality. The agency built for fans is said to have successfully remembered that the dominance of K-Pop is growing so rapidly in various sectors that is able to attract many people. In the concept of "*the circuit of culture*" there is a pattern of representation in the K-Pop culture industry, K-Pop cultural industry entertainment agencies building values and meanings from K-Pop representation with new meanings through their *main product*, i.e. K-Pop idols. Then all things related to the *main product* will be consumed by K-Pop fans (K-Popers) and considering the extraordinary reception by the audience, the Government has developed new regulations related to K-Pop to support and to facilitate the development of K-Pop further.

## 6. *Political Economy, Soft Power, and Identity Representation in the K-Pop Culture Industry*

The form of relationship between political economy, soft power and identity representation is a reciprocal one that influences each other that results from mass power, namely fandom (fans) where this is influenced by cultural products, K-Pop idols produced by industry. In accordance with Hall's (1997) concept of identity representation where there is a cycle of interconnected diagrams before forming a circuit of culture, these 5 things are representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. As applicable in the Hall concept, these circuits give and influence each other, where representation forms an identity that is produced by a community before gaining acceptance and being consumed by the audience and before finally the audience has adapted it and makes it its identity that was represented earlier in a regulation binding the community.

The relationship between Hall's (1997) representation is related to the production and consumption processes that exist in the 5 elements in the cultural circuit existing in Hall's Representation theory where in the identity production and consumption process targeted by K-Pop entertainment agencies there are Political Economy practices. That is, the form of the political economy is when identity is produced and then through the distribution stage through the existence of K-Pop idols who work as *main products* in this industry. Media politics is used in order to spread the form of identity that has been represented by K-Pop idols, thus for fans who begin to absorb and consume the media they will take the meaning of identity, thus the process of distributing the meaning of identity by K-Pop idols goes well, according to the target of the K-Pop idols. The company's media and this also contribute to its selling value in the market so that the higher the identity value that is absorbed by fans and is able to attract the global market with its popularity, the higher will be the economic value. In connection with the work system of the culture industry by relying on the representation of Hall's identity to attract the market, what is being traded is an identity or meaning that attracts audiences with the illusion that the product is intended for that consumer only.

Well, really, everything is like just for the sake of numbers.. Everyone has their own time, not as long as the above continues.. Our idols have hard work, we fans also try our best. Continue to know in the word flop is this, with fans from other groups, if it's like that, I can't stay silent wkwkw

Interview with @haechan.noona (2020, 11 November)

Globally, in this current era, it can be said that K-Pop plays an important role in several sectors because it is able to attract the fans' sympathy and empathy to act emotionally through *campaigns* that often involve K-Pop idols. From the relationship between identity representation, political economy, and soft power, it can be concluded that an agency will form an identity and present it through K-Pop idols. Through the use of media, economic politics is used in the distribution stage to generate the popularity of a group and to gain fandom power to be able to have soft power to influence the community. The influence of K-Pop idols in a community will return to the stage where identity is successfully absorbed and economic value increases based on the emotional loyalty of fans to K-Pop idols.

## CONCLUSION

Globalisation, which opens the way for K-Pop to enter the world stage so that it can be recognized by many people, is inseparable from the role of important actors behind the big names of K-Pop. K-Pop, which used to be underestimated but now has begun to gain its position because of the role of entertainment agencies starting to brand K-Pop as popular culture that is close to fans. The agency's efforts in this branding process become a part of the representation system that is ultimately consumed by fans. In this era, there were four major agencies that played their roles as big entertainment companies in South Korea: SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, JYP Entertainment, and Hybe Corporation.

Economically, the role of the media is quite important in the process of distributing its products so that in some political events the media is used to attract public sympathy and to introduce the image of an idol to attract more popularity among fans. To the point where K-Pop idols are able to gain high popularity and are able to influence globally, this is where the soft power of the K-Pop idols is formed. The influence of K-Pop idols in a community will return to the stage where identity is successfully absorbed and economic value increases based on the emotional loyalty of fans to K-Pop idols.

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