

**The New Pied Pipers:
The Globalization of K-pop and the Role of Parasocial Relationships**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses the commonly cited concepts surrounding globalization and hybridization to explore the ways in which parasocial interactions and relationships develop between American fans and K-pop groups. A qualitative content analysis of WeVerse, V Live, and YouTube comments has been conducted to get in-depth knowledge of the ways that fans interact with their idols. From various postings on these sites, 50 English-language comments were sampled from each. These public posts showed the varying intensity of fan interactions with idols over social media. Reactions were most present in video livestreams and official K-pop account posts relating to promotional activities and idol birthdays. Many posts show a collection of fan infatuation and longing for some real-world relationship, be it friendly or more intimate. From this, it can be concluded that parasocial relationships are better developed through interactions over social media sites, which has only become a viable option in the last decade. Furthermore, globalization and hybridization are catalysts for new cultural phenomenon like K-pop to emerge in the American mainstream. While globalization has been pushed forward by the expansion of the internet, hybridization has solidified its place as a joining of cultures from different countries. In the area of K-pop, this is seen by the combination of English being mixed in with Korean lyrics to create a catchy chorus or the use of instrumentation reminiscent of American pop and hip-hop and rap.

Keywords: Globalization, Hybridization, K-pop, Parasocial Relationship

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to my parents who have always supported me and encouraged me throughout my life. I love you both so much!

I also was to dedicate this paper to Dr. Nancy Morris who inspired me to attend graduate school and continue my studies in media. Thank you so much for pushing me to do my best these past few years.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Korean popular music, better known as K-pop, has been listened to worldwide with the emergent popularity of the boy group, BTS (방탄소년단), but K-pop's existence in American pop-music culture has been around much longer than the mid-2010s. It was actually in the early 2000s that younger audiences in America were introduced to the genre. While the songs are in another language that is not commonly heard in the United States, the catchy use of English words, flashy dances, and fashion has caught the attention of audiences young and old. The internet has played a crucial role in the growth of popularity for the K-pop genre as it has become the source of outreach to people across the globe. There are instances in K-pop in which the impact of its globalization is apparent. For example, the first day of the United Nations meeting in September 2021 had country ambassadors debating sustainable development goals. The live stream of the speakers was bombarded with BTS fans spamming the live chat with sentiments about or directed towards the boy group. In the comments section of the live stream, separate from the live chat, it is all related to BTS as well (United Nations, 2021). This was because the boy band was speaking at the conference on behalf of the Korean president. They were there to represent South Korea, not to promote their recent musical releases. This illustrates the power of these fans and their ability to build up a group to the point of being important enough to be considered as representatives of a country for an important event, like attending the United Nations' meeting.

I started listening to K-pop in 2008 when I first heard *Nobody* by the Wonder Girls in a clothing store. I did not know the song was in Korean at the time, I just liked watching the flashy music videos and listening to the catchy songs. As I got older there would be certain events that

would bring me back to the world of K-pop, like other PSY's *Gangnam Style* or even with a simple video from BuzzFeed. I became interested in this topic once again in 2015. I began listening to K-pop after I had watched a video on a YouTube channel called *The Try Guys: Try K-pop*. In this video the YouTubers would watch and mildly critique the various music videos of K-pop groups. This led me to do my own research into what K-pop was. Ever since then, I have been invested in learning about the culture, language, and music industry itself.

The notable rise in K-pop's popularity internationally, with boy groups like BTS or NCT, has left me wondering why such music has gained traction in countries other than South Korea, especially in the United States. In this thesis I will examine the various instances of globalization and hybridization of K-pop, the history of the genre and the companies associated with it, the popularity of different K-pop generations, and the power that fans have. More specifically, I will study the perceived relationships of fans and K-pop groups (Oh & Lee, 2014). This includes a closer look at the importance of parasocial relationships and interactions between K-pop groups and their fans.

With the aid of the digital age and new media, like YouTube, people have access to numerous genres with music by international artists. In the recent decade, K-pop has maneuvered its way into not just the American mainstream media, but also international media. The rise of K-pop has not been a new occurrence for the public in the US and can be assumed to have started around the time of PSY's music video *Gangnam Style*. There is a longer history of promotional activities and outreach of Korean music marketing outside of Korea (Shin & Kim, 2013). The internet has become the primary mechanism of marketing and advertising of K-pop to viewers. Such marketing styles create a specific fan culture, molding those who are a part of it into a creation of relative closeness with the singers or idols. This leads companies to take advantage of

the influence they have over fans through para-social relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956). David Horton and R. Richard Wohl were social scientists who first defined and explained the phenomena of the perceived relationship between a spectator and performer. The term they used to describe this relationship is “parasocial relationship” or “parasocial interaction.” These imaginary relationships, in turn, produce a profit or provide free advertisement through the fan base. Applying the studies of globalization and cultural hybridization will help to better explain how mainstream popularity occurs. Both sides of this discussion must be analyzed, from the perspective of the fans and companies. Another theme that will be addressed throughout this thesis is how parasocial relationships are a cornerstone in the power and success of marketing from South Korea to Western countries, for the purpose of this research, the United States.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization and Hybridization

The growth of global trade and consumerism has translated into growing influence of the corporate sector. When it comes to the cultural industry, the United States is one of the largest contributors to hybridization in the areas of film, television, and music. A point of reference in literature surrounding globalization comes from the research of Jan Nederveen Pieterse, among others. Globalization and cultural hybridization are well represented by the genre of K-pop. This thesis will reference the studies of globalization in the book by Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (2015), as a springboard into the application of the study of K-pop and its marketing attributes. This helps us understand what exactly globalization is, including globalization in the context of modern hybridization of cultures (Nederveen Pieterse, 2015). Globalization refers to the growing interconnection between cultures and countries. To put it another way, it is easier than ever to learn about others and talk with people on the other side of the world.

When discussing the theory of globalization, there is another effect that the interconnection between cultures creates: hybridization. To hybridize certain aspects of a culture is best described by Marwan Kraidy (2002) as an offshoot of when “transcultural dynamics between tradition and modernity blend.” Hybridity is a shift in the integration of global and local cultures that can occur whether or not there is profit involved. In this context, Korean pop media can be viewed as being more culturally fluid because of the way it is marketed to audiences no matter where they are from. With streaming services like Netflix or Hulu, Korean films have a larger platform to reach general audiences, and the same goes for K-pop music with streaming sites like YouTube or Spotify. On the other hand, hybridization can also be a cultural mixture

that is created to offset domination of a singular majority. In the context of capitalism, Kraidy states, “hybridity is enlisted as a natural dimension of global strategic marketing, predicated on conquering diverse niche markets,” (Kraidy, 2002). With the openness of cultures trying to hybridize, in this case America and Korea, there is room for appropriation. This is evident when looking at K-pop groups’ style, video concepts, and musical influence.

There are many songs, lyrics, and music videos of current popular Korean hip-hop/R&B artists like Dean, best known for R&B, and Zico, a rapper formerly a part of the group Block B, with many more artists like them. This is one example of cultural hybridization where musical stylization and fashion interact with the Korean experience. This means that while the music may sound “Americanized” the content of the lyrics relates to the artist's struggles or experience in Korea. As will be mentioned later, Seo-TaiJi used their platform to bring the problems of the youth to the forefront of music. As seen the with emergence of Seo-TaiJi and the Boys, there began a movement based on the influence of African American culture and hip-hop/rap. Jae-Young Yang has described this as “the first Black music that is constructed and appropriated both culturally and musically,” (Yang, 2015, p. 106).

Another example of hybridization in action is seen with the cultural crossover of K-pop group members with differing nationalities like GOT7, NCT, or Blackpink¹. They produce music directed towards a specific audience population, like GOT7 targeting the Japanese audience with songs in the local language. With groups such as these, their companies can market better in different countries. To appeal to people from diverse cultural backgrounds, idols speaking specific foreign languages are added to the mix. Commonly spoken languages within a K-pop

¹ GOT7 debuted in 2014, Blackpink in 2016, and NCT in 2017. Combined, these groups have members from the United States, Canada, Thailand, mainland China, Australia, Japan, and even Germany.

group are English, Chinese, and Japanese. I would speculate that the primary goal of Korean music companies is to successfully promote in South Korea, and the secondary goal is to be able to successfully promote overseas. A recent example can be seen with the K-pop boy group BTS who has been one of the few to accomplish this achievement in not only Eastern Asia, but also the world. While there are other K-pop groups with members fluent in English and with more English-language songs, BTS has been able to be successful with their usual Korean-language songs. If a song is catchy enough, then the language of the lyrics does not always matter. When looking at the growing attempts of promotions in the United States, there tend to be one or two members of a group who speak fluent English. Outside of the English language, K-pop groups are made by their companies to learn Japanese because that is the next most popular location of promotional activities (Ryoo, 2009).

Continuing a look at the use of the English language mixing with Korean, there is a particular insistence to use English names for idols, groups, songs, and lyrics. As studied by Jin Dal-Yong and Ryoo Woong-Jae (2012), the inclusion of English has been growing since the 1990s. In terms of English names, the rate of use for idols' English stage names has grown from 34% in the early 2000s to 82% by 2010 and continues to grow. The lyricism of K-pop songs has also developed overtime to incorporate English words. While there are artists who have songs entirely in Korean like *Wrongful Meaning* by popular K-pop artist Gun Mo Kim or *울고 싶지/않아* ("I Don't Want to Cry") by Seventeen, other songs like the Wonder Girls' *Nobody* have a greater incorporation of English lyrics. The chorus of *Nobody* uses English in the hook in the chorus with the lyrics, "I want nobody, nobody, but you..." (2008). This is part of the evolution of English integration into K-pop. The use of English lyrics in K-pop grew from 18% to 44%

from the 1990s to the 2010s even later this can be seen in SNSD's *Gee* (2010) or 2NE1's *Come Back Home* (2014). The increased use of English language appropriation in K-pop lyrics went from the use of words like "oh yeah," "yo," "oh," and so on intermingled between lines changed and "utilized English lyrics is the nature of the linguistically hybrid local music," (Jin & Ryoo 2012). As of 2020, more K-pop groups that are determined to market in the U.S. have a growing library of English-only songs. NCT has been known to do this, and even Monsta X has an album with only English songs on it as well.

Such promotions have been enhanced with the national conventions called K-con, where Korean culture is celebrated and is able to be experienced by foreigners, including performances and meet-and-greets with K-pop idols. In-gyu Oh writes about this use of the Hallyu Wave, also known as the Korean Wave, which has been a catalyst for the explosion in popularity of the last decade. Globalization and the growing cultural hybridization of the genre has played a crucial factor in its popularity in the United States (Oh, 2013). As Nederveen Pieterse has written, globalization is the growing awareness of interconnection of cultures (Nederveen Pieterse, 2015). In addition, the hybridization of not just music, but fashion of K-pop has brought in large, international audiences who can understand certain themes portrayed in these cultural platforms. Included in this are those who write and produce the music. American composer and songwriters are hired by Korean music companies to create the music that ends up a K-pop album (Jin & Ryoo, 2012). While there are newer groups mentioned, like BTS, the K-pop groups were seen promoting on popular television shows in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Dal-Yong Jin references appearances by K-pop singers PSY, who appeared on various talk shows, and even Ailee, a Korean American idol from Colorado, who attended the Grammy music award show in 2013 (Jin, 2016). He goes on to argue that K-pop is just another version of American pop music

(Jin, 2016, p.128). Given the varying aspects of American music and culture that K-pop uses, there are many overlapping features that could constitute this genre as being a hybrid of American pop music.

The aspect of international fan culture is also something to be touched on when researching K-pop. Kyong Yoon's article includes interviews with Canadian fans of K-pop, talking about their experience with K-pop in its multiple platforms (Yoon, 2018). Parallel to the work of Yoon, Woong-Jae Ryoo looks at the acceptance of transnational media that is not representative of the importing country. He argues that the Korean Wave and K-pop have shown an indication of transformation of global culture and economy (Ryoo, 2009). What this means is that the popularity of not just K-pop, but Korean culture has transformed the way in which researchers can view cultural flows. America was known as the country of cultural exports, with their influence spreading across the world. This was termed a "one-way flow" (Nordenstreng & Varis, 1974; see also Mattelart, 2009) however, this is no longer the case, as the United States has begun to accept the influence of other cultures. Shifts in cultural flows are bound to take place, and everyone experiences it whether they know it or not. The takeaway is that because it is easier to communicate with other people, there are those who decide to take advantage of different forms of cultural flows can profit.

This reversal of marketing from the US to South Korea has changed along with the development of technology because of the focus migrating to mediated interactions on the internet. This includes organized events by fans and other events or marketing techniques by companies, which will be discussed later. In-gyu Oh and Hyo-Jung Lee have researched the involvement of government in South Korea's "post-developmental society" and the reinvention of the idol for the internet (Oh & Lee, 2013). Their article searches for the ways in which the

government has played a part with investments in the export of Korean popular music. In an article for *Management Decision*, You-il Lee and Michael Hobday suggest the future of the commercialization and commodification of Korean culture in Northeast Asia, yet from this the South Korean government has been able to go beyond the origin country into other parts of the world (Lee & Hobday, 2003).

Another form of hybridity is seen with the reinterpretation of other cultures with traditional Korean culture. When discussing K-pop and the Western influences on the genre, the topic of cultural appropriation must be addressed because of the recurrence of fans calling out these stereotypes. Cultural appropriation is not a common occurrence in the sense that the groups are constantly coming out with new music that includes what could be considered cultural appropriation, but it is the fans that are there to pick out when they believe it is happening. Fans are usually the ones to make comments on concepts or styles of these comebacks that they accuse of being instances of cultural appropriation. Examples of this includes the use of Black hairstyles or AAVE (African American Vernacular English) (Ainsworth, 2015), these can be seen in both styles with Korean idols having cornrows, or in the case of AAVE, the use of words like “finna” or replicating a “blaccent.” K-pop idols use this “accent” to sound “more black” and there are many fans who choose to call out these disrespectful and hurtful stereotypes. There is a twitter account, @badkpopaave, which will post about instances of such language within K-pop. By mentioning this, I only hope to bring to light some of the issues that arise within K-pop fandom. It is language like this that can break a fan’s view of their favorite idols. At least on the part of some fans, they do their best to correct idols and explain why what they say is wrong and hurtful.

One group that has been held accountable and admitted to their mistakes is Stray Kids, who have apologized for inappropriate and racist stereotypes of the Black community in the United States. There have been other instances involving something as serious as blackface being present in performances of K-pop, most notably, Mamamoo (Herman, 2017). While there were international fans who were calling out to the group asking them to do better and acknowledge what they had done wrong, they never did. There is no straightforward way to deal with these actions. Many fans and people outside of the K-pop fandom address instances of appropriation through comments on various sites and posts. In certain cases, this could be interpreted as part of the parasocial relationship. This means that fans can take it upon themselves to reach out to idols or their music companies and somehow try to convince them to acknowledge the issues of cultural appropriation. International fan bases can play an important role by educating in addition to supporting K-pop idols.

History of K-Pop

From Trot to Seo-TaiJi

K-pop that is known worldwide now, is only just a recent occurrence in comparison to popular music in other countries. The flashy fashion, catchy songs with English words, and elaborate choreography are a creation from the 1990s. The slow integration of American musicality and fashion that can be seen is the power of globalization and in turn the ways Korean youth culture hybridized Black American culture aids in understanding the formation of K-pop.

There are many songs from the present day that are reminiscent of previous generations. Yu-Jeong Chang looks at the roots of Korean popular music with the bases beginning with “trot” and “ballad” styles of genre that originated during the Japanese occupation between 1910-1945

(Chang, 2015). John Lie (2014) studied the emergence of South Korean music as an export and analyzed the larger economic and the cultural impact K-pop has internationally. Lie includes a detailed history of South Korean popular music, the economic modernization, and cultural construction. Such origins of K-pop groups and their promotion in the West include artists like Rain, BoA, Wonder Girls, and Girls Generation. These artists are associated with different eras or generations of K-pop: generation 1, 2, 3 and so on.

The Big 3 + 1

The Korean companies that are primarily studied when looking at profitable international marketing are “the Big Three”: SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment. However, Big Hit Entertainment, which owns the groups BTS and TXT, must be added onto the list of powerhouse music companies due to its rapid financial gains in the past 5 years. Western pop singers have a different fan culture than those involved in K-pop. It is common place for K-pop fans to know what groups are under specific music companies. Learning about different companies is one part in the processing of joining the K-pop fandom.

SM Entertainment was founded by Lee Soo-man in 1989. It was originally named SM Studio before it officially took on the name SM Entertainment in 1995 (Salmon, 2013). Lee Soo-man had a background in music before he founded SME. He was a folk and rock singer and later turned his sight toward music production and business. SME was one of the first companies to take interest in the international production of music, opening a joint music label with Japan’s Avex Group (Salmon, 2013). Any idol debuting under the label SM is seen as upholding the image of top-tier production and precision. They are trained to be perfect in all areas of performance; this includes visuals, dancing, and singing (Shin & Kim, 2013).

YG Entertainment comes next in the line of creation with the companies that are being talked about. Former member of Seo-TaiJi and Boys, Yang Hyun-Suk, started YGE in 1996. Many of their artists follow the style of hybridized hip-hop/rap begun by Seo-TaiJi and Boys a decade earlier. Many of their idols are trained to have individuality that leaves an impression. They are considered going against the status-quo and more carefree in their choreography and presentation of idols (Shin & Kim, 2013).

JYP Entertainment was founded in 1997 by solo artist Park Jin-Young (JYP Entertainment, n.a.). Much of his musical knowledge and discography has been inspired by R&B and soul music. But overall, there is fluid duality that idols training under JYP have. Yet, with the company's knowledge of their fanbases, they produce songs that are more popular in South Korea. These songs end up being extremely popular amongst "relatively middle-aged and elderly people," and therefore JYPE is considered one of the most "Korean" out of the "Big 3" (Shin & Kim, 2013). This was a surprising find as K-pop is created for younger audiences, but that does not mean that all ages cannot enjoy it.

HYBE Entertainment is the youngest of these four companies. Before it was HYBE, this monumental company was a struggling business started by Bang Si-hyuk in 2005 (n.a., 2021). Under the name, Big Hit Entertainment, the company had only two groups and one soloist. The first idol group was an all-girl group; however, they were disbanded due to some scandals. After that, all that was left was BTS and 8Eight. In 2015, the popularity of the BTS group began to snowball leading to stadium world tours. HYBE has absorbed PLEDIS and has been promoting their groups as well as promoting their "newer" boy groups TXT and ENHYPEN. With their growing popularity in the United States in 2017, BTS' company Big Hit Entertainment saw a growth of 172.7%, amassing to 24.5 billion KRW (20.3 million USD) as stated in their full-year

audit of 2016 (Herman, 2018). Most recently, their company's revenue shot up to 587.2 billion KRW (507.9 million USD) which was a 95% gain from the year prior (Kelley, 2020). During that same year Big Hit acquired many of PLEDIS,' another Korean music company, groups, such as SEVENTEEN and GFRIEND (recently disbanded) (Kelley, 2020). Even with the early age of the company, they have truly become a powerhouse, rivaling that of the "Big 3".

Generations

Just like music anywhere else, there are ways in which K-pop is grouped to organize everything. These classifications are referred to as generations. There are currently four generations of K-pop. It is commonly understood in the K-pop community where these generations start and end, and which groups or artists are associated with them (Herman, 2021). This is usually learned through social media like Twitter, or the fan run app, Amino. The organization of the generations is learned through the posts on social media and how people define the eras of the K-pop groups. When grouping K-pop generations it is like the grouping of generational ages in the United States (i.e., Boomers, Gen X, etc.) From this, a better understanding can be developed as to how international fan interaction with K-pop idols have evolved over the past 30 years.

The first generation is the beginning of Korean popular music, as it is known today. This includes Seo-TaiJi and Boys, H.O.T., Fin.kl, and many more. This was in the 1990s, a time when South Korea was becoming a more democratized nation, importing more products and cultures from overseas, specifically American media (Lie, 2015). Seo-TaiJi and Boys were one of the first artists to introduce the musical sound and lyricism of the Black community in the area of rap and hip-hop in 1992. Much of their music was considered radical and a bad influence on the youths of the time (Méndez, 2017). The topics of their songs included societal pressures, which

can be heard in *Come Back Home*, as well as criticisms against the government during the 1990s. Other K-pop groups of later generations that critique with similar styles are BTS (Gen-3) and Stray Kids (Gen-4), except their lyrics now revolve more around issues of mental health. Seo-TaiJi and Boys were the beginning of a musical revolution that pushed South Korea from the strict censorship of post-Japanese occupation almost forty years since the split of Korea (Méndez, 2017).

In the mid-1990s, artists like Tiger JK and Yoon Mi-rae expanded on the genre of hip-hop and rap. Both have been leaders in the growth of the genre and have been educating the general South Korean public about issues of cultural appropriation. Yoon Mi-rae herself is from Texas, born into a family with a Korean mother and Black father. She faced criticism for being biracial, not only in America, but in South Korea too. Living in a country that claims to be culturally homogenous like South Korea, Mi-rae has been made to take on a role of speaking for not just Americans but the Black community as well (DT MFBTY, 2015).

In the early 2000s, the second generation now starts the promotions of K-pop artists in surrounding countries; those being primarily China and Japan. Later Gen-2 artists are involved in attempts to promote K-pop in the West. Two early solo artists attempted promotions in the early 2000s to no avail. While BoA and Rain were household names in the mainstream music scene of South Korea, their companies found promotion in the United States hard. They discovered greater success in Japan, which is where BoA gained most of her success and following when she debuted. By the mid to late 2000s, groups like Wonder Girls and SNSD made some headway into the music scene of America. Wonder Girls were even one of the opening acts for the Jonas Brothers and had a film on Nickelodeon (which is still available to watch on YouTube).

By 2012, third generation K-pop groups are more well-known now in the United States, though they are beginning to be overtaken by disbandment and a growing 4th-gen. 3rd-gen artists that are well-known are BTS, Twice, Got7, Blackpink, EXO, and NCT. A commonality amongst all these groups is their presence within the mainstream media in the United States. All have made appearances on morning and late-night talk shows. Blackpink made a statement by performing at Coachella and BTS has attended multiple American award shows, even winning many awards at these events as well. The awards won come from the AMA's and Billboard Music Awards, not to mention the various other nominations that they have received.

K-pop is currently in the fourth generation as of 2018. Groups like ITZY, Stray Kids, Aespa, and TXT have made large strides for their time. To be considered a 4th – Gen idols would have to debut starting in 2017. In an article from South China Morning Post, journalist Tamar Herman writes about a study done by Twitter on K-pop groups, their followers and commonality of interactions or posts. They found that 4th-gen idols debut internationally an average of 13 months sooner than those of the 3rd-gen idols. This happens from faster outreach through Twitter and other social media, building a more solid foundation for fan interest in international tours. Twitter also stated that the 4th-gen posts an average of 7 thousand tweets a day, 3rd-gen has 3.5 thousand tweets, and 2nd-gen has 1.2 thousand (Herman, 2021).

The Internet

The internet has been a defining factor in K-pop's reach internationally. This is true for many reasons as the internet has made the world a much smaller place. A person does not have to go far to find literature, movies, and more from a simple search on Google or Bing. Another term that can be used to this disappearance of virtual borders is the “global village.” The global village is a concept by media theorist Marshall McLuhan that explains the distribution of

information and the blurring of cultural boundaries (Levinson, 1999). Globalization, the global village, and hybridization all culminate in the popularity of K-pop in America. The leading medium that has enabled international promotion of K-pop and the increased application of the theories I have discussed is the internet. Without this mode of transference of cultural content, K-pop would have a harder time breaking into mainstream media in America. The promotional expenses would not be worth reaching out to an audience that only has exposure to such a genre on a singular music station, such as MTV.

Streaming

The popularity of YouTube and other social media have been an added source of both exposure and revenue for Korean music companies, none more so than YouTube. Not only by looking at total view counts on individual music company channels, but on other channels that have promoted anything involving K-pop, no matter how mundane, videos like these can bring in hundreds of thousands of views. As mentioned earlier, a livestream from the United Nations in 2021 had over one million viewers during the original broadcast. Later that same day, there were over six million views (Vigdor, 2021). Even looking at just the United Nations YouTube channel, the top 12 videos have four videos involving BTS, all of which with BTS mentioned in the title have a total view count of 68.7 million. The other eight videos total only 41.1 million views in comparison (United Nations, n.d.). This observation shows just how large their impact has been.

Streaming is a key factor in the success of K-pop groups. Fans work together posting “streaming guides” online that explain how to properly stream the music. What it means to “properly stream” is to follow specific guidelines or goals that have been made by the fans to help the groups gain an immense number of views within the day of a music videos or songs’

release (Veltman, 2021). Such intense streaming is noticed not only by mainstream media but has been accounted for by Korean music shows for years. Platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and other Korean music streaming sites have been counted towards music shows and music awards.

YouTube

Gangnam Style by Korean artist PSY was the first YouTube video in the domain's history to reach one billion views in 2012 (Gruger, 2012). This was an incredible milestone to reach at the time. Since then, K-pop has broken streaming records in other areas, most notably most streams within the first 24 hours. In 2021 with the release of *Butter* by BTS, it broke the record for exactly that, earning 108.2 million views (Rolli, 2021). YouTube is a core source of outreach for K-pop groups apart from Twitter. The follower count of the “Big 3” companies and HYBE, have counts in the tens of millions and view counts that are even larger. SMTOWN’s YouTube channel has 23.5 billion views and 29.7 million subscribers and has been active since 2009 even though it was created in 2006 (SMTOWN, n.d.). JYPE’s YouTube channel has 16 billion views and 23.5 million subscribers and has been active since the channel was first created in 2008 (JYP Entertainment, n.d.). YGE’s YouTube channel has 1.7 billion views and 6.5 million subscribers. They had a similar start with their presence and activity on YouTube as SMTOWN. Finally, BANGTANTV’s YouTube channel (BANGTANTV, n.d.) has 15.2 billion views and 64.2 million subscribers. What is fascinating about BANGTANTV is that compared to the other three, this channel is solely dedicated to one group. The other three channels are company channels, and even still, groups that are under these labels do not have followings that compare to BANGTANTV. The account of HYBE Labels has a similar follower count to BANGTANTV of 64.3 million subscribers, but now there is a view total of 21.6 billion views (HYBE Labels, n.d.).

Music videos, practice dance videos, and other such videos are the many ways in which these companies produce content to keep fans engaged.

Music Videos

Music videos function not only as a promotional tool for idol groups, but their views will also count towards their chart numbers on Gaon and Melon, music competition shows, and awards shows like the MAMAs (Kim, 2018). Importantly, music shows are popular shows where idols perform to promote their recent music. Each is different and held on a specific day of the week. Also, they are each owned by different broadcast stations. The week begins with Sunday's *Inkigayo* on SBS. Tuesday is *The Show* on SBS MTV. Wednesday is *Show Champion* on MBC Music Core. Thursday is *M! Countdown* on Mnet. Friday is *Music Bank* on KBS. Finally, Saturday is *Music Core* on MBC. All these shows have their specific ways in which points for the performers can be summed up. 50% of all votes for all network's music shows are counted from digital downloads. Three of the six music shows count streaming services like YouTube, as much as 20%. All shows consider physical copy sales as well (Kim, 2018). Music shows are one example of fan involvement with the idols' promotions. The more the idols win the longer they stay on the show. Their success lies in the dedication of their fan bases. In a way this entices or guilts fans into helping their favorite groups out.

Practice Dance Videos

There is no recorded information of what the first practice dance video was, but it is assumed to be from BoA in the early 2000s as she was one of the first idols to have cameras in her practice room to give a behind the scenes look of what goes into choreography (Park, 2021). This opened the floodgates to a constant production of dance practices today. While not

mentioned in any interviews or literature at this time, these dance videos were an important part in popularity growth amongst the K-pop fandom around the world. Fans can learn the choreographies to these dances or at least the “key points” which are considered the dance movements performed during the chorus of a song.

In an article from the Korea Times, Michelle Cho from the University of Toronto discusses the importance of dance practice videos in the K-pop fandom. Cho states, “Learning K-pop choreography strengthens the fans’ embodied sense of connection with their K-pop idols, as well as with the fan community,” (Park, 2021). The hundreds of YouTube channels that are K-pop dance covers can be used to support this statement. At the conventions that are hosted throughout the years, dance groups perform and there is even an event for fans to join in random dance competitions. These competitions are just like one would imagine there is someone in the center dancing and everyone around watches. The point of the random dance is for fans to run to the center of the circle and dance the choreography of whatever K-pop song’s chorus is playing. Not only do fans participate in these sorts of games at events or conventions, but idols also play along to this sort of game on certain Korean variety shows. For example, on shows like *Weekly Idol* or *Idol Room*, the hosts would have groups performing random dance to their songs, showing their professionalism in adjusting to musical changes and showing a goofier side to the idols as they would make mistakes like fans would.

Vlogs and Reality

The first vlog from BTS was January 7th, 2014. Many of these videos include a single camera view of a BTS member who speaks in a way that feels personal and as though they are directly speaking to the individual viewer. It creates an atmosphere of being a part of the group, learning about their experiences while debuting and growing with them. For BTS their vlogs

have turned into more of a reality show setting. With various shows like *BTS Bon Voyage*, fans get to watch the wandering show of BTS while they are traveling in other countries, all the while they would be playing games for coupons or other rewards.

Other groups have chosen to produce similar styles of reaching out through video with reality series on YouTube or to be bought specially on a certain app or website. On YouTube there are series such as *Time to TWICE* or *Going Seventeen*. On WeVerse, V Live and YouTube, BTS has multiple reality shows uniquely produced for each site. However, these specific videos must be purchased by the fans to be able to view them.

Some idols may participate in reality shows to be grouped to create a new K-pop group. This could be a short-lived group, with a 1-year contract, something like WannaOne or I.O.I. Or there could be longer lasting groups with the traditional 7-year contract, like Monsta X or Twice. Through variety shows, the fans get a look at the various personalities of the group members. Returning to the groups on 1-year contracts, these idols come from other companies. They participate in reality shows to show off their own talents in singing or dancing and to also be a promotional “item” for the company they are representing.

Live Streaming

Live streaming is common in K-pop. V Live is one example of a dedicated app for K-pop idols and artists to host live streams. Fans can send messages and likes to the idols as the stream is on. Sometimes idols will read questions or comments, interacting with fans. There are hundreds of hours of content for fans to watch through if they were inclined to do so. This is another form of media that keeps fans believing in some sort of relationship with the idol, just as expected with parasocial relationships. V Live is meant to be a place that makes fans feel as

though they are having a private, one-on-one experience with the idols. However, compared to other social media platforms available for live streaming, V Live is more known as a censored and directed platform. Idols can be directed by staff behind a camera, being told how to act and what to say (Lucas, 2021). This may not always be the case, but often, there is some involvement of management during this form of live streaming.

Over the past few years, the social media app TikTok has grown in popularity. Originally known as Musical.ly, the Chinese company Douyin started a partnership with American company ByteDance to create the application that known today (Dean, 2022). As of 2022, it is estimated that 1 billion people will use TikTok each month. With such a high volume of users, this app has created a new way of marketing for consumers. TikTok is another social media that allows for live streaming. Live streaming of concerts has become more common. This means that other fans who can attend concerts in person are using their phone and stream for others who are unable to go. While these types of recordings are illegal due to the violation of the artists' portraiture rights and copyright, attendees continue to do so to enable other fans (Kim, A, et al., 2018). Because of bots buying tickets before fans, they are then resold for almost ten times the original price. VIP tickets end up being almost \$2,000, when they originally were \$200. The cheapest tickets start at \$50. These ticket scalpers hike up the prices, and still make hundreds of thousands of dollars because fans are desperate enough to pay for them. The Twice concert in Oakland was sold out, and many of their other concerts have been very full. For many, it seems as though they are willing to pay whatever they can to see these idols perform live. I was lucky enough to experience this firsthand recently with Twice's III World Tour. While scrolling through TikTok I came upon this live stream of them performing in Oakland and was able to watch more than half of the concert.

The spread of COVID-19 near the beginning of 2020 meant that international promotion work would not be feasible for these Korean music companies. Dozens of events were cancelled. Most notably, BTS' cancelled their 2020 Map of the Soul tour in 2021, with an almost sold-out concert series (Frater, 2021). Originally, tickets were put on hold during the beginning of the pandemic, but the tour has since been cancelled. Many other K-pop groups suffered the same fate as BTS.

The companies adapted quickly enough to start airing online concerts. People would still pay for tickets to attend, but it would not be as expensive as it would be if it were in person. There was now also the possibility for international fans to attend more fan meetings with idol groups and have one-on-one video chats with them.

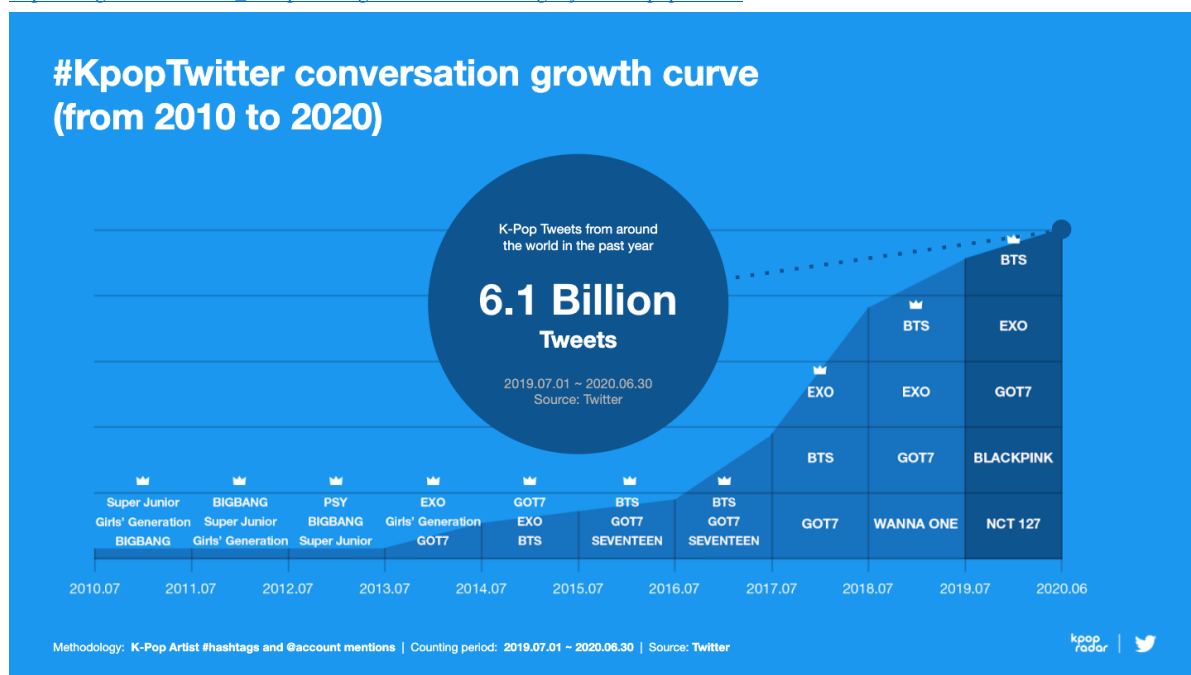
Other Social Media

What must be looked at is exactly how different social media has shaped and aided in international promotion of K-pop artists. The common use of the internet and platforms such as Twitter and YouTube have been hot beds for fans and their exploration into their favorite K-pop artists. TikTok is newer to the scene, but nonetheless is having a similar impact like with YouTube. The usage of #K-pop is seen in many websites; this is thoroughly discussed in the research in an article called *Comparative Trends in Global Communication Networks of #K-pop Tweets*. The focus of this article relies on Twitter, but similar analysis can be applied to other social networking sites (Kim et al., 2013). This also serves as a basis for comparative trends that occur on the now popular app of TikTok, which uses similar hashtags.

Twitter is the largest platform that K-pop idols and groups use. Yet, often, Twitter is used as a more promotional tool rather than interactive technology for idol to fan communication, and

vice versa. Twitter is the most prominent platform in which K-pop fandoms reside. What I mean by this is that in a study in 2020 done by the company itself. In a recent study by the company itself, Twitter found that there has been a drastic increase in the popularity of #K-pop. Their research was conducted through searching K-pop artists, hashtags use, and “@account mentions”. This can be seen in the graph below. It highlights the major groups that were popular or trending during that year. A shift occurred in 2013 with groups EXO and Girls Generation (SNSD). Around 2016 to 2017, is when BTS, a major catalyst in the skyrocketing popularity of K-pop, begins to break into the mainstream in the United States. In just 10 years, there has been a visible population growth of K-pop fans.

Figure 1 - Source: Kim, Y.J. 07.01.2019-06.30.2020,
https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/insights/2020/Celebrating10yearsofKpopTwitter



Instagram is another hub of activity for K-pop idols. While every group has their own account, the activities are run strictly by their managers. They are told what to say and what images to post. Depending on the age of the group, they may be allowed to run their own public Instagram accounts. Blackpink is a K-pop group, each with their own account, however it is

uncertain as to whether they have full control over it as many images posted are brand advertisements of sorts. The members of BTS recently opened individual public Instagram accounts. Within one day of opening, I saw that all seven members had amassed over 25 million followers. What was even more amusing is that comments had been turned off. This is uncommon for idols accounts as it was just a straightforward way of seeing comments and interactions of their followers.

For K-pop groups, their promotional attempts include joining in on dance or other audio trends. Other things that they do are use the core moves from their dances to create dance trends. It is not too often that they become popular as the choreographies are more complicated than the viral dances.

Fancafes and Fanclubs

Fan cafes or fanclubs are online sites that act as a fan's headquarters for all information related to their favorite artists. These sites can be run by artists' companies or by fans themselves. There is a difference between fancafes and fansclubs, this being required payment for memberships. Fancafes are free to join while fanclubs are a monthly subscription. On the other hand, fanclubs are exclusive to only domestic citizens or foreign residents in South Korea. The benefits that come from joining a fan club include priority entry for music show recordings, early tickets for fanmeets and official fanclub only merchandise.

One of the major websites that host fancafes is Daum. While it is free to join, there is of course an option to have membership and get access to more benefits. With the free version, fans only have access to reading official news releases and recording information and how to apply for weekly music shows. Members of fancafes can "level-up" the more the more they pay

(Harmonicar, 2016). This gives them access to viewing posts from idols, live chats with other fans, access to boards with notes from idols to the fans. Daum is geared towards Korean fans and is not user friendly for foreigners who do not know the language. Companies like SME, JYPE, and YGE no longer use Daum and instead post news on their own websites.

WeVerse is a newer fan café that people can join. It was created by HYBE in 2019. The name WeVerse originates from the word universe. Instead of “uni” meaning one, “we” replaces it to make a site where everyone exists in an online world, this includes the idols as well as the fans. All HYBE artists can be found on WeVerse as well as artists from YGE and other groups from smaller companies. BTS has one of the top fan cafes with over 14 million users. With one of the most internationally popular K-pop boy groups, BTS, this application lends toward the exclusivity of artists. They can only be found on WeVerse and on no other fancafe or fanclub website. Just like with other fancafes and fanclubs, there is exclusive merchandise that can be purchased on WeVerse. On top of that, there is exclusive content which can be images or videos meant only for WeVerse. This exclusive content can be obtained yearly for \$20 or \$160 (WeVerse). With something like WeVerse, access to exclusive content may be attractive to fans just because they then have the possibility to purchase limited edition or rare items that others may not. Looking at the WeVerse Shop app, this is associated with the official application, I found that many of the items that were listed were sold out. Many member-specific items were gone. This includes pajama sets, sweatpants, sweatshirts, and more, the prices of which ranged between \$65 to \$200.

Bubble and LYSN are similar apps. The main objective of these applications is to create an environment where the user feels as though they have one-on-one contact with their idols of choice. Usually, users need to pay for a weekly or monthly subscription. From there users can

send texts to idols and they will receive messages back. However, there is not much written on how these apps work, so I hypothesize two basic methods in which the messages are read by the idols. The first way is where a general message is sent out at certain days and times that is not direct to any one message received from the fans on the app. The second way would be that idols are able to see what is texted to them and can send out messages responding to a specific user. The major point to keep in mind is that while the fans can directly message the idols, the idols cannot directly message one person. When they send out a message, it is sent to everyone paying to be able to message them.

Marketing

In the world of K-pop, fans are knowledgeable about where their favorite artists come from. These companies all have their own unique styles that define both the companies themselves and their artists. As mentioned earlier, there used to be a well-known group of Korean music companies called the “Big 3.” This included SM Entertainment (SME), JYP Entertainment (JYPE), and YG Entertainment (YGE). However, these “titans of K-pop” have been given a run for their money with the rapid growth and development of HYB Entertainment (HYBE).

Albums

A crucial factor when creating a new album for their artists, Korean music companies must also worry about the ways in which to package the CDs to make them appeal to fans and make them want to purchase one physical copy, or even more if they so choose. The general make-up of a physical “album” is as follows: specific package design, different photoshoots for each version, photocards, miscellaneous small items like stickers, special photocards (standees or

hologram), and posters. One of the factors that can make purchasing physical copies attractive is the multiple versions that come out. What is meant by this is that there is usually a series of two or four versions of an album. Each package can have different photoshoot stylizations, different photocards, and so on. The one that remains the same between all versions is that the music on the CDs is the same. For example, when BTS' album *Wings* was released in 2016, the purchasable physical copies were "W", "I", "N", "G", and "S". The interesting fact about these specific versions is that each letter has a different pairing of members, and it was known which letter had the groupings. Usually, it is random chance that a fan has when purchasing an album regarding who may appear more in the photos. Another example can be seen with GOT7's *Breathe*, which had dedicated photoshoots to each member, letting the fan have the chance to pick a copy of whomever their bias was. The importance of such choices means that the fans have the choice to either buy one copy of a physical album or if they feel the need to do so, buy multiples of the same so that they may have a complete collection. In the case of BTS's *Wings*, that would mean having the spine of each album spell out the word "wings." For GOT7, that would be having each member's individual photoshoot which would be a total of seven copies of the same album.

The enthusiasm surrounding photocards is nothing new. Through social media sites like Instagram and Twitter, fans can trade photocards as if they were baseball or Pokémon cards (Jess, 2021). Photocards are another factor considered when buying physical copies. Think of it like trading cards. A fan collects and collects until they have a complete set. Here is a fun math problem: if EXO decided to have an album photoshoot dedicated to each member of the group, how likely would it be for a fan to buy the specific member photoshoot they wanted? There are a total of nine members, and it does not say on the packaging which member of EXO, it is all

random. Of course, the obvious can be stated that there is a 1 in 9 chance that the fans will get the one they want, an 11% chance to be exact. On top of that, there are three photo cards of each member, making a total of 27 total cards to collect and there are only two in each album. Again, all of this is a random chance at pulling the photocards the fan wants and there is always a chance of duplicated being pulled as well. To make this even more interesting, let us say that there is a chance of winning a raffle ticket to enter a fan meet and greet. This is not a definite ticket, but a chance of getting a ticket to attend a meet and greet. With all this information, it is difficult to say at what point a fan may or may not continue to buy the same album. It is different for each individual fan and what they wish to receive by purchasing. The point of this exercise is to portray the variety and randomness of choices that consumers have when buying physical copies. There is no way to tell what someone will get.

Examples of this consumerism can be seen in videos on YouTube or TikTok. Fans will show off the multitude of physical K-pop albums that they have. Many of these videos show a well-organized collection on a shelf containing different versions of the same album.

K-pop idols have almost always been a part of multi-national promotions. Many would have albums that were not only Korean but Japanese as well. These Japanese albums would only have songs for those albums, and they would not be available in Korean, except for the title track. During their trainee days, if idols were from other countries, part of their teaching would include learning Korean. On top of that, they would learn Japanese. As Western countries, and especially the United States, have become a burgeoning consumer base of K-pop, SM and JYP have been creating groups with at least one English speaking member. GOT7, NCT, and Red Velvet are just a few examples.

K-Pop Groups “Paving the Way”

This section focuses on the notable differences between some of the most popular K-pop groups currently. Each of these groups has been chosen as they best highlight the various marketing strategies of the various companies.

BTS

One of the most popular K-pop groups in the world now is BTS. They debuted as a seven-member group in 2013. They were introduced to the world under the music production company Big Hit Entertainment. It was not until their album *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt. 1* in 2015 that they began to see success. Just one year later in 2016, they released their second full-length album *Wings*, along with a repackaged album called *You Never Walk Alone* in early 2017. During the few months between the release of *Wings* and *YNWA*, BTS was brought into the spotlight of mainstream Western media.

In 2017 BTS began to appear at American music award shows such as the AMAs and Billboard Music Awards (McIntyre, 2021). They have performed on a variety of American talk shows including Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel, and more (Zemler, 2021). As of 2022 they have been nominated for a second time for the Grammy’s “Pop Duo/Group Performance” (Grammy 2022). BTS was also the first and only K-pop group to ever perform on *Saturday Night Live* (Herman 2019).

The impact that BTS has made on the world has been just as much as One Direction, and The Beatles. While this is a big claim to make, the comparison lies within the power of international fandom. Of course, The Beatles started 50 years earlier than BTS, a Korean boy group that has only been around for almost 10 years, but their rise in popularity within the United

States is comparable (Ty, 2021). Even more so, it is remarkably interesting as to how a Korean boy band did become as popular in the United States as it has because of the language barrier.

In addition, they have made an impact on the South Korean economy, winning national honors such as *Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism Commendation* in 2016 (Park, 2016) and *Special Presidential Envoy for Future Generations and Culture* in 2021 (Choi, 2021) to just name a few. The appointment by the Korean government as a special envoy meant that they would be heading the United Nations for a second time, but it would be the first time as representation for their country (Choi, 2021). In 2018, BTS was invited to the United Nations in coordination with UNICEF to help promote “Generation Limited.” This is a still-running campaign focused on the education of today’s youth and providing other accommodation to youths as well (Vigdor, 2021).

Most recently, BTS has leaned into adding completely English songs into their musical repertoire. Both *Dynamite* (2019), *Butter* (2020), and *Permission to Dance* (2021) have all been attempts at solidifying their popularity in the United States.

2NE1 to Blackpink

2NE1 was YGE’s second girl group. Promoted as a hip-hop/rap girl group in 2009, they had four members, one rapper, one visual, one lead vocalist, and one sub-vocalist. They disbanded in 2018, parting ways and promoting their solo activities separated. Their significance within the industry was their individual stylization referring more towards Western hip-hop clothing and they also were seen as going against the Korean beauty standard as well. In 2016, YGE’s third ever girl group debuted. Another hip-hop/rap based musical group with four members, Blackpink. However, one of the things that made them stand out from the beginning

was their physical appearance. Many fans compared them to 2NE1, stating that they are a prettier “copy and paste” version of 2NE1 (Kim, 2016).

SNSD and Twice

Known in English as Girls Generation, SNSD (pronounced so-nyeo-si-dae) was the first successful girl group with nine members. Under the management of SM Entertainment, SNSD took over South Korea, earning them the nickname, “The Nation’s Girl Group.” Each generation has their differing titles such as this (Chosun, 2016). Under the company JYP, Twice has taken the title of “The Nation’s Girl Group” for the third generation of K-pop idols. This has been one of the only other successful nine-member girl groups since SNSD. Larger girl groups became more common after others saw the success of SNSD. Even now, another commonality amongst 4th generation idol groups is that they have a large group size. Rather than 5 or 7, there are 9 or more. This gives companies the ability to work with more talent and to also appeal to a more diverse audience.

Super Junior to EXO to NCT

SM most popular boy groups both nationally and internationally involve Super Junior, EXO, and NCT. What makes it so is the mixture of nationalities. Contrary to GOT7 there was a focus for SM groups to have members that were either Chinese or Japanese, as these were two countries where there had been more promotion. Starting with Super Junior, the group had two versions with different members, Super Junior and Super Junior M. The “M” stands for mandarin. After Super Junior came EXO with a similar group build. This means that there were two groups, EXO-K and EXO-M. The “K” stands for Korean and “M” for “Mandarin.” However, SM has had problems with their international idols, most notably, three of the four

Chinese members of EXO leaving because of unfair treatment (Kpopbehind.com, 2014). In 2016, the company continued the implementation of large boy groups, creating an ever-growing group with three or more units. NCT is the largest boy group project under SM Entertainment with a total of 23 members and counting. Their ages range from 20 to 28, but it is important to note that this group has been around since 2016 and so the youngest members were 14 years old at the time of their debut. The diversity of the group in not just nationality but age played into the grouping of sub-units. Instead of having something like EXO-K and EXO-M, NCT has NCT Dream which consisted of the youngest members of NCT to make a 7-member group. Other NCT sub-units include NCT U and NCT 127. There is only one sub-unit created for promotional activities in China and that is WayV.

SuperM and Girls on Top

SuperM had a huge fan base compared to other K-pop groups because they had already debuted and built a following beforehand. This was important, as this would be a group composed of the best and most popular artists from SM, nothing like this had been done before. Such a group combination brings different fan groups together for an even larger audience. Their popularity was big enough in the United States to get them on American morning shows and a Nickelodeon show called *All That* (Travis & Han, 2020).

Just as SuperM, Girls on Top was built with the base model of SuperM, grouping idols from various groups under SM into a new super group. However, the purpose of these groups is for it to be a rotating unit with members from different girl groups in the company of SM Entertainment (Chan, 2022). This will keep the current fans engaged in the different rotating idols who would be a part of the group as well as continually gaining even more recognition for

having already well-trained idols being placed into an “ace group,” a group who is considered one of the top idol groups in Korea

The Future Starting with Aespa

Aespa is a new girl group from the company SM. They recently debuted at the beginning of 2021 as a four-member girl group. As mentioned in a Twitter post from the official SMTOWN account, “SM Entertainment’s new girl group #aespa to debut this November/Name combining ‘ae’ derived from ‘Avatar X Experience’ & ‘aspect’/Various innovative activities to come with the theme of ‘Experiencing a new world via the encounter of the ‘avatar,’ your other ‘self’,” (Liew, 2021). With Aespa, SM is looking to go into the realm of virtual reality. Seen with the imaginary group K/DA, created by Riot Games, Aespa looks to have both live, human performances, as well as holographic. K/DA has performed at the *League of Legends* championship tournament in Incheon, Seoul in 2018 (Alexander, 2018). Through augmented reality, the human performers were on stage along side their avatars from *League of Legends*. Similarly, each member of Aespa has a digital version of themselves, yet these virtual idols are considered as individual people separate from the idols. There has not been much venture towards the use of the AI that are a part of Aespa.

Company Awareness

It is common for K-pop fans to know who their favorite idols work for. Fans may have preferences depending on promotions, music genres, style, and more. The attributes mentioned earlier are something learned as someone new to liking K-pop would see the differences over time. Other considerations that international fans look at are the surface level of companies and the negative impacts they can have on themselves as well. Rather than an idol making a mistake

and having to apologize for it, Korean music companies are to blame in other situations. This includes overworking idols, forced diets and weight restrictions, poor promotions, or treatment of idols. Companies represent idols as much as idols represent their companies. Statements on various social media sites like Twitter and Reddit highlight the growing disillusionment around the “Big 3”: SM, JYP, and YG (Brown, 2021).

SM has been working towards international domination with groups like NCT, SuperM, and, as of 2022, Girls on Top. SM has been viewed by fans as a more traditional and Korean influence on music. That being so, the mentioned groups have sounds that are straying into who knows what. The music has sounded clunky and very digital (Brown, 2021). Even now, SM is in talks with American television companies to create *NCT Hollywood* to find the next member to add to NCT for a new sub-unit (Herman, 2021). NCT already has a total head count of twenty-three, with four sub-units. However, there are a few details that contain verified information as to the outcome of the series, whether it is to find a singular new member for NCT or to create a new group. More promotional efforts include *NCT Lab* which involves the individual members having their own singles and other such activities. The first to come out of this project is Mark’s single *Child* (2022).

In recent years, there has been a growing concern around the ways in which YG promotes their artists. With the wave of controversies involving iKon and, more notably, their most popular group Big Bang, and even the founder Yang Hyun-Suk (Brown, 2019), the company has had to rely heavily on their most popular group Blackpink. BI of the group iKon was found to have taken LSD on multiple occasions and has been sentenced to a four-year probation (Yeo, 2021). It has recently been announced that Big Bang would be making a comeback in Spring 2022 as a four-member group instead of five. This is because one of the

members will be facing a 3-year prison sentence for his involvement in the now infamous “Burning Sun Scandal” (Herman, 2021). This scandal was because of a bust at Burning Sun nightclub owned by Big Bang member Seungri. The club was found to host prostitution, with Seungri facilitating these interactions for investors and illegal gambling outside of South Korea. There were a few other K-pop idols involved in instances of prostitution at Burning Sun as well. Yang Hyunjin-suk was also involved as he tried to cover up the information coming out about Seungri’s gambling habits outside of the country. Big Bang is a mainstay of the company and surely will have a notable return to the stage since their hiatus in 2018.

More anger arises from the fans in the promotional activities of the group. It has been known that YG tends to take time between each artists’ album releases, however Blackpink has had the most trouble. The girl group debuted in 2016 and since then have only released three EPs, two singles, and one album as of 2022. In comparison to other K-pop groups, there is extraordinarily little activity related to music. With long breaks between their comebacks, Blackpink instead are used as models and ambassadors for assorted brands (Brown, 2021). Even worse, fans of Blackpink have become enraged in recent months with the rumors going around that a new girl group is going to debut (Brown, 2021). Overall, there has been a fall for the YG company. The lack of promotions for their artists and the exodus of others has led to this point.

In comparison to YG, JYP Entertainment has been well-known for overworking some of their artists, specifically, Twice. This popular girl group has had a frequent presence over in Japan. With 3 of the 7 members being from Japan, they use this to their advantage. Their comebacks in Japan are almost as frequent as in Korea. JYP does have a large presence in Japan compared to most other South Korean music companies, besides SM. There is a JYP Japan where they recruit new idols to train. Just in 2021, a new girl group, NiziU, was created for

promotion only in Japan. Fans have taken notice of the treatment of JYP's groups and the difference in promotion between girl groups and boy groups. Sophie Victoria Brown mentions in her writing about a post on the website Reddit, "a fan marked: 'JYP is a weird narcissistic character that would have a bigger budget for his own music videos than his boy groups. He has a clear preference for his girl groups which ultimately sucks because GOT7 and Stray Kids do not deserve to be sidelined and experimented on'," (Brown, 2021). There are many other Tweets with similar takes on promotional activities of certain groups and about the company itself.

BTS has made HYBE what it is today. Their musical genre overlaps with that of YG, but the themes and storylines that are produced in their albums create an evolving experience. For BTS, their music videos for their album *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt. 1* all the way until *Wings* had fans guessing and theorizing that they all tied in together. This was confirmed with items in the *Wings* music videos that made callbacks to previous music videos. There were also hints towards songs that were to come out later in their career, like *I'm Fine* (2018). TXT was the next group to come out since BTS' debut in 2013 and they have had an extraordinarily strong start to their careers. Running of the popularity of BTS, TXT have been able to grow their own fandom off some of BTS.' ENHYPEN is the newest of the bunch and was HYBE's first group created through a reality competition show.

American fans have been very vocal with their support of BTS. The groups' dedication to their fans has resulted in an even stronger dedication in return. A running joke on the internet is that if someone with a large platform were to say something bad about the boyband, it would "incur the wrath of ARMY," BTS's name for their fans. James Corden and Jimmy Fallon have been at the brunt of this anger before, receiving anger messages on Twitter and even death threats (Nolan, 2012). A fandom like ARMY can either work for or against you. Besides EXO-

Ls (international EXO fans) and Aghases (GOT7 fans), ARMY has had a chokehold on social media. As previously mentioned in this thesis, the United Nation livestream that included BTS was flooded the whole time with purple hearts. The purple heart emoji got it popularity amongst the fandom because of BTS's Taehyung saying, "I purple you" which means "I love you" (Minjjixx, 2018). Even since its use by Taehyung, posts related or sent to BTS regularly have the purple heart emoji somewhere in it.

Names for groups of fans are an important part of the K-pop fandom. These names are usually made by the music companies themselves but present the names like the idols came up with them. Certain names can have meaning like with ARMY. BTS in Korean means "Bulletproof Boy Scouts," so the name ARMY is a callback to the military while BTS is associated with body armor. The previous iteration of the BTS logo was that of a bulletproof vest, which has now been redesigned as doors that look like they are either opening or closing. ARMY is also an anagram for "Adorable Representative MC [Master of Ceremonies] for Youth." While ARMY has a more in-depth meaning and association with BTS, other groups fan names are more superficial, like rhyming with the K-pop group name. Some fan names rhyme with the K-pop group's name or it may incorporate some theme or concept of the K-pop group. Examples of this are Red Velvet with ReVeluv, Stray Kids with Stays, and ITZY with Midzy.

Gender Roles

As with any performer, there are certain standards and stereotypes that follow them. Girl groups are expected to act, sing, and dance a certain way, and the same goes for boy groups. As the idols get older, certain clothes they wear become more revealing. For girls, they are made to wear shorter dresses and skirts, to the point where viewers can see how visibly uncomfortable, they are. There are various fancams of idols stiffly dancing so their skirt does not rise or idols in

groups covering each other if there is a fashion mishap (KpopStarz, 2020). The choices that stylists can make for girl groups are done to keep the attention of the male audiences and fans. This is common in marketing as companies make decisions based on the fan demographics. Yet, when looking at the demographics of fans for many of the popular groups, the majority tend to be female fans, with outliers of Twice and IZ*ONE having majority male listeners (Laffan, 2020). There are also specific dances for idols that sexualize both male and female artists. At times they do make jokes about it, however, many still realize that idols are people and may not feel comfortable with the comments being made about them. Fans have been observant enough to see the idols discomfort and have created various compilation videos of idols adjusting their outfits. Many of the videos show recordings of female idols pulling down the bottom of the skirts as it would ride up too much while they would dance.

Power of the Fandom

Certain names like ARMY, Aghase, and EXO-L are important to include. These are all names for fans of K-pop groups. Fandom names are an important part of the K-pop community and unity of fans. Through these names a stronger sense of community and closeness is established between the fans and idols. There is a specific fan culture that is associated with K-pop compared to other music genres. Included in this fan culture are dedicated fanclubs/fancafes, fan chants, idol specific merchandise, and rules for streaming. There tends to be competitions between fans and their favorite groups, creating a heated dynamic between them. The dedication of these fans is not always a singular direction. There is the term “multi-stan” for those who follow more than one group. The dedication of fans can vary from group to group. This means that solo-stans are fully dedicated to one group, all their attention and money go to them,

whereas multi-stans spend their time with divided attention among multiple groups (Romano, 2020).

During idols' birthdays, fans put together events where they get together to celebrate. This could be parties at certain locations, or even donations and gifts. Usually, fan sites will help to organize donations towards foundations that the idol supports. Other ways in which fans show support are buying promotional advertisements. As crazy as this sounds, fans spend thousands of dollars buying advertisements on buses or billboards to celebrate the birthdays. One notable example of this is BTS's Taehyung. For his 27th birthday fans bought a full-page print ad in US Forbes magazine, which cost \$50,000 (Koreaboo, 2021).

Parasocial is the Key

The idea that parasocial relationships play an even larger role than ever before is a complementary factor. These one-sided relationships are taken advantage of by those who oversee the performer or the performer themselves. What is meant by this is that whatever persona the performer is expected to have by the fans is fulfilled. As Horton and Wohl have studied, "His appearance is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for, and integrated into the route of daily life. His devotees 'live with him' and share the small episodes of his public life-and to some extent even of his private life away from the show," (Horton & Wohl, 216, 1956). This idea is further discussed in the present technological day through the features of social media in the articles written Kum-Ju Hwang and Qi Zhang, who focus on parasocial relationships in the context of digital Chinese celebrities and emotional stimuli of the fans (Hwang & Zhang, 2018), and Hyo-Jin Kim, Eun-Ju Ko, and Ju-ran Kim, who in turn look at the use SNS (social network sites) for celebrities to encourage purchase decisions (Kim et al., 2015).

There is a push for K-pop idols to continually promote brands that they are representing. In livestreams, labels of certain snacks and beverages are covered, even the phones they have may just be for show and are not their personal phones. BTS is a brand ambassador for many companies, one of which is Samsung. There have been pictures that the members have taken of themselves where viewers can see the phone being used. Instead of a Samsung phone it is an Apple iPhone. The importance of this occurrence is because of the contractual obligation K-pop groups have with companies is presented as previously mentioned with BTS and Samsung. If the members had flaunted their iPhones, then that would be a violation of their promotional contract with Samsung and their products. The images where fans saw the iPhones being used were instances that they were able to see the structural design but not the logo of the Apple product. The group members would try to hide the logo with their hands to prevent unwanted ideas that they were promoting.

When another brand is accidentally used by a K-pop idol, fans will flock to their own stores to order the name brand products. Or when on V Live after a concert V, talks about a famous ramen brand in Korea, Shin Ramyun. He immediately slaps his hand over his mouth, while the other two members, Jungkook and Jimin, try to fix his slip up as if he had meant something else. Eventually, they gave up and cut the livestream and then started another. Even though Shin Ramyun is a popular brand by itself, BTS are not sponsors for the brand and therefore are not allowed to be promoted in any fashion, even if it is accidental.

In an article talking about the issue of idols promoting brands, it was mentioned that Jungkook himself had stopped sharing what brands he uses because they continue to be sold out. Something as simple as fabric softener has been sold out because fans find out that he uses it (Koreaboo, 2021). Another instance of this is when EXO's song *Lotto* (2016), mentioned the

brand Chateau Wine lipstick, with its iconic wine bottle shape, and it became the most popular lip tint to buy during the time of the song's popularity (Ang, 2016).

Just going on the social media app TikTok and searching for the hashtag “parasocial” can bring up hundreds of videos containing that subject. For the purposes of this research, it is important to note that there are plenty of these videos that pertain to K-pop idols. One TikTok audio has been used 5789 times. It comes from the account @omarbigsisister, and the video currently stands at 214.6K views. In the video, the creator mocks, “wah, wah, wah. Parasocial relationships are unhealthy. I don’t give a para-f***!!! This is my best friend (holds up Taehyung photocard) this is my best friend,” (@omarbigsisister, 2021). If you look up #parasocialrelationships on TikTok, there are hundreds of videos using this hashtag, adding up to 5.2 million total views.

The intensity of parasocial relationships can vary. Simple enjoyment and turning to these idols for comfort through their music or videos is one form of a parasocial relationship. However, there are more powerful feelings of connection that can lead fans towards financial risks, like with buying concert tickets, albums, or other merchandise. These splurges on K-pop related items can become taxing as albums are already expensive, usually starting at \$28 and going up from there, and there are fans who like to buy in bulk. Tickets are also an issue as mentioned before. The prices of tickets can be inflated to more than five times their original cost. The most extreme cases come from fans who turn into stalkers, placing themselves into the personal lives of K-pop idols. These types of fans are called sasaengs (사생). Sasaeng is the Korean term for someone who is overly obsessive with K-pop. They are known to be dedicated to following and harassing idols. There are certain fan clubs run by fans that are known on social

media sites to cross the line of parasocial interaction. They invade the privacy of idols, finding their homes, following them to locations and on their flights as well. There have not been any serious incidents with American fans, but there are plenty of examples from those in South Korea. Events like trespassing, car accidents, and even attempted kidnapping are all very real experiences that idols have endured (Koreaboo, 2018). This is a quick look into the darker, more unhealthy side of parasocial relationships. Fans go far to insert themselves in the personal lives of idols, not taking into account who may be harmed.

Early on in their career, idols may be forced to follow a “no dating ban.” This is not overtly mentioned by some companies, but others like JYP make it known that this ban exists. The point of these dating bans for idols is that (1) idols can focus on their careers and schoolwork and (2) keep up the appearance of availability to fans. Companies know that if an idol is found to be dating, it can lead to a loss of fans and even times will lead to idols who are dating to be kicked out of groups. An instance of this was when Hyuna, a solo artist and former member of 4minute, and Dawn, former member of Pentagon, announced without the permission of their company, Cube Entertainment, that they were dating. Soon after, both were kicked out of the company and have since found successful careers under P Nation. They have recently announced that they are engaged. During this controversy, there seemed to be more backlash from international fans directed at Cube rather than the artists themselves. The company’s stock also plummeted when it was announced that they would be leaving (yckim124, 2018). Recently Chen of EXO and Bobby of iKon had children and got married (yes, in that order). There were angry comments and death threats towards these members, and fans also threatened to stop following their groups (Zhu, 2020). Now, these types of fans do not exist in a large enough number to make a serious dent in their profits, but the threats are a problem. These types of

reactions to idols dating, getting married, or having kids always have differing dialogues in their fandoms. South Korea is known for having a more conservative social structure. There is a distinct division of genre roles in communities. A strong traditional attitude towards marriage and having children still exists as well. It is frowned upon to have children outside of wedlock, which can then lead to those in a situation such as that to get married (The Korea Herald, 2010). This is not too dissimilar to how social norms were in the United States not too long ago.

The commonality of harsh reactions is because of the perceived appearance of availability that these once single idols had. Chen and Bobby had been secretly dating their partners for years before they announced their weddings. As any young person does, idols date, but it must remain a secret to keep fans oblivious and enamored with groups. The idea that a fan may have a chance at winning the love of a K-pop idol or having a “fanfiction moment” needs to be kept alive for a group and company to profit. This is no different than any other boy or girl group around the world.

This literature review contained descriptions of some of the more popular K-pop groups and their companies as well as the different avenues in which fans can interact with idols. Globalization and hybridization are important factors in the general understanding of what K-pop is, but they are not the only theories. Parasocial relationships and interactions have their part in K-pop’s presence in other countries. So, how and why is K-pop popular in western countries now? Where are there instances of parasocial relationships?

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The research conducted for this thesis was done using a qualitative analysis, with some incorporation of quantitative data. The qualitative analysis looked at various comments posted by fans. The quantitative data shows the numbers of likes and comments within K-pop live streams as well as the number of live streams themselves.

In order to understand the role of parasocial relationships and globalization, I chose to look at the several ways in which fans portray their feelings in the comment section. 50 English-language comments (see Appendix A) from each group's various YouTube, WeVerse, and V Live videos and posts were chosen. I examined posts from January 2020 to March 2022 for evidence of varying dimensions of parasocial interactions and perceived relationships that the fans have with idol groups. There were three sites chosen for the qualitative analysis. These sites best represent the varying degrees of interaction between idols and fans, and company mediation in these settings. YouTube is comparable to the Wild West, there is not much that fans are not able to post or reply to. V Live is better monitored by moderators, and WeVerse is run by the music company HYBE, so it is assumed that this has the strongest implementation of censorship on what can be posted by users. From each of these sites, these interactions include a mixture of one-way and two-way conversations. What this means is that on a site like YouTube, the comments are expected to be one-way from fans to idols. The YouTube videos that were included in the analysis varied in their content and post date. Many of the comments from YouTube were chosen to best show the variation of written parasocial relationships from the perspective of the fan. In the cases of WeVerse and V Live, comments are expected to have reactions and or replies from the idols that they are directed towards.

To better understand parasocial relationships in K-pop, I looked for the diversity of comments and the different ways fans express their perceived relationships with the idols. It was quite common for certain groups to have many fans proclaiming their love for the group. Instead, I looked at varying ways in which this was said rather than counting “I love you’s.” These varying expressions will justify the idea that there is a greater instance of parasocial relationships. The amount of comments and likes will also express the dedication of fans and their viewership.

The specific groups that are included in this analysis are BTS, Blackpink, Stray Kids, and Aespa. These groups were chosen as they contain all four mentioned Korean music companies that have been throughout this thesis, as well as two boy and girl groups, and two third generation and two fourth generation groups. In addition, these four groups best represent the most internationally popular K-pop groups currently. The starting year of 2020 has been chosen as this is the year that Aespa debuted, so there is an opportunity to show how a brand-new group starts to interact with fans. If other dates were chosen, there would have been a significant gap between groups such as BTS, Blackpink, and Stray Kids debuted between 2013 and 2017. The inclusion of multiple sites is because of the varying activities of each group and is discussed in the following section.

On an important note, the high activity of the fans and their comments makes it difficult to get far into what is posted during the live streams. For example, as I was looking back through one of BTS’s videos that had around 6 million views, I spent five minutes scrolling back through the comments and I was unable to get more than a few minutes. There are timestamps included with the comments, so I would see a comment with the timestamp of 5:50am as the latest, and a few hundred comments back it would only show a timestamp of 5:46am.

The quantitative analysis is only conducted on V Live as it hosts a higher rate of interaction between fans and idols as the app is primarily used for live streaming. This analysis is conducted by looking only at posted live streams. From these posts, the number of comments, likes and views were the primary focus. Only live streams are examined from these groups, promotional or pre-recorded videos are not included, making a total count of 495 videos. This choice has been made because there is an increased rate of interaction with live streams compared to anything pre-recorded. Also, YouTube is the main source of comments that revolve around posts of pre-recorded content.

Overall, there are no risks or ethical issues that produce the analysis of these comments as they are publicly available on all the studied sites.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

Looking at the qualitative analysis of YouTube comments, there are overlapping comments between all four groups. This includes comments using words like, “queens/kings,” “masterpiece,” “I miss you,” and “I love you.” All these comments are examples of parasocial interactions, with fans implying that they are in direct contact with the group members as individuals.

The comments are a compilation retrieved from various videos posted by the groups from over their years of activity on YouTube. The posts varied from simple sentences as previously mentioned, but lengthier posts were found under videos for the boy groups rather than girl groups. For BTS and Stray Kids, there were more instances of romantic sentiments, compared to Blackpink and Aespa, whose comments were based in the context of friendship. All four groups did contain mentions encouragement for more music to be put out by the artists. These comments can be found in the appendices section.

However, YouTube does not have much response from K-pop idol accounts. Notably, BTS had the most diverse range of comments. Many of them pertain more to them being an inspiration and being a considerable influence on people’s lives. I would also like to point out that as I was looking through comments on various videos. I did see the same messages being posted by different accounts with very scantily dressed women in the profile pictures. These are bots and can be found anywhere and everywhere on YouTube. While this does not totally impact the overall analysis, it was frustrating to see, and there were some other fan accounts that were calling them out. The reason this is frustrating is because these bots can take away from genuine reactions and experience of parasocial interactions as they can copy and paste the same comments that have been posted by other fans.

The inclusion of WeVerse is specific to BTS. This was found to be the best app that has a visible and noted question and response between the idols and fans. What “best” means in this analysis is that there are plenty of interactions between the idols and their fans to examine. Stray Kids, Aespa, and Blackpink are not on this app as they are not under the label HYBE. Within a month, it was common to see at least one member responding to posts for about 30 minutes in one day. This is not every day, but there is increased interaction on posts that BTS members respond to.

One of the most evident occurrences on all the sites is the amount in which they are used by the idols during promotional events. BTS had increased activity on both V Live and WeVerse because of a small tour that they are having in Seoul and Las Vegas during March and April 2022. Stray Kids have comparable results with increased activity on YouTube and V Live with their “Maniac” comeback in March 2022. Aespa has no new posts on V Live since December 2021, and the videos that had been posted to their channel were only promotional videos for their comeback, no livestreams. Finally, Blackpink has not posted to V Live since February and any vlogs after then are behind a paywall. That means that to view the previous live streams a membership with the Blackpink V Live account is required.

Continuing with V Live comments, in a recent live stream after the Grammy’s 2022, the group members of BTS were reading incoming comments when Jin shouted out that someone said “Marry me Yoongi”. This led into some short banter about how whenever they do live streams, even if it is by themselves, there are always people commenting that sentiment. Taehyung even states, “Come to think of it, I always get a wedding comment for Suga-hyung whenever I do V Live” (@cuddlywonnie). Other comments that were recurrent were about BTS’s performance at the Grammy’s, particularly when Taehyung was physically close to the

American pop singer, Olivia Rodrigo, for the opening skit as he “whispered” in her ear. A fan with the username @cziellah had stated multiple times throughout the broadcast, “Taehyung I saw you with olivia. I’m hurting! You broke my heart.” Many others shared similar sentiments. @mica wrote “also I got a bit jealous of V and Olivia, anyone else?” (See Appedix B, 18-21). Most other comments besides those were of fans saying they missed the live stream because they were asleep or in school. Others were praising BTS for their hard work after them not winning an award (BTS, 2022). These live streams are popular because of the intimate atmosphere created. As with the example of BTS live streaming after the Grammy’s, BTS really blurs the line that separates them from the audience. Instead of going out to after parties to celebrate, they choose instead to take time to talk with the fans for an hour or so. The line of celebrity and fan is clear cut when on talk shows or performing on stage. Live streams can imitate a reality of face-to-face interactions.

On V Live there is a higher rate of interaction with the videos compared to YouTube and WeVerse combined. Different from other platforms, V Live allows its users to continuously like videos by “giving hearts.” This means that fans can constantly press the heart button on their screen and watch as the hearts fill the screen. Furthermore, the likes are then not as representative of the view count and the likes can end up being double that of the views. BTS had 23.9 million views, 993.3 million likes for March videos. The most popular video was a video from Jimin “오랜만이에요” [“It’s been a while”] from April 23, 2018. During the live stream, over 185 million people tuned in at some point, and 27.5 million comments. There were 3.2 billion hearts given which is the most out of the four groups looked at for this thesis. Blackpink’s most popular video had 701 thousand views, 3.1 billion likes, and 158k comments.

It is a solo video with member Rose titled “채스백” posted on March 12, 2018. Stray Kids have 3.4 million views over 13 videos, 182.8 million likes, and 1.6 million comments. Their most popular livestream was from September 13, 2020. In it, they were promoting a new project of theirs called “SKZ’s Room Limited Version.” This video gained 3.1 million views, 634 million likes, and 31 million comments. Aespa appears to only have staff posted videos. There are no solo vlogs or livestreams posted like other groups. Upon further research into this, I found no notable reason as to why this group does not livestream or interact with their fans. All of it is run by the staff and company. For these four groups, it was found that in the past two years, they have drastically varied posting of live streams. Only live streams are examined from these groups, no promotional or pre-recorded videos, making a total of 495 videos. 388 of these videos are from Stray Kids, 100 from BTS, 6 from Blackpink, and 1 from Aespa.

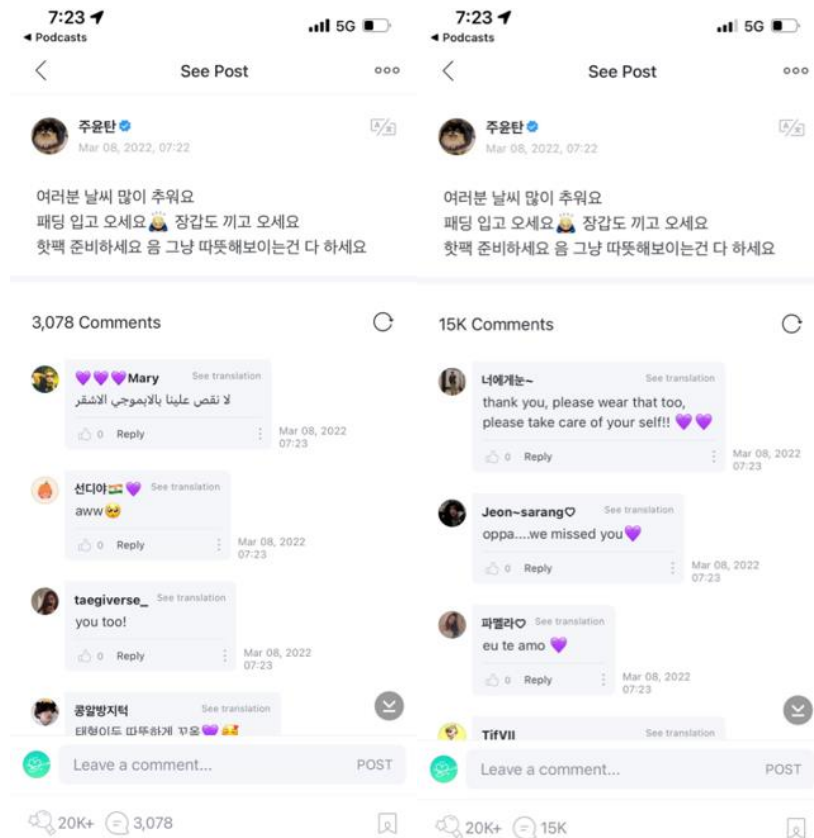
With the high activity of the fans and their comments, it is difficult to get far into what is posted during the live streams. For example, as I was looking back through one of BTS’s videos that had around 6 million views, I spent five minutes scrolling back through the comments and I was unable to get more than a few minutes. There are timestamps included with the comments, so I would see a comment with the timestamp of 5:50am as the latest, and a few hundred comments back it would only show a timestamp of 5:46am.

As opposed to V Live, YouTube could be considered a passive environment because not everything is happening at once. Videos are posted and then fans post comments after the fact, in contrast with live streams that occur in real time on V Live. There was less activity from BTS, Blackpink, and Aespa. As expected, Stray Kids had more videos with content as they are beginning to promote their new album and world tour. BTS has 6 videos that are less than two

minutes each with a total of 14.1 million views, 85.6k comments, and 3.3 million likes. Blackpink videos are less than a minute long with 5.7m views, 36.6k comments, and 796k likes. Stray Kids has six videos, thirty minutes or less, with a total of 3 million views, 17.7k comments, and 540k likes: 2 vlogs and 4 “reality shows” in total. The comparison of the videos also show the effort that K-pop groups put into creating content other than music. YouTube videos can range from regular music videos or promotional videos to vlogs and mini-reality shows.

WeVerse is host to artists affiliated with HYBE. BTS has the largest presence on the site with 15 million followers. This is also the social media that they are the most active on. Something interesting about the website is that you cannot see the true numeric values of interaction on each post. The count is cut off at 20,000. When viewing the number of comments and said interactions, I am unable to tell what the true number is. Even after looking for ways to get the full number, I still was not able to find anything above the 20,000 marker. Therefore, it can be inferred that over tens of thousands of comments exist under each post. As previously mentioned, BTS has 15 million followers, so it is not too much of a stretch to surmise that more comments and likes to exist. The interactions for BTS on different sites also provide support as the high frequency of comments in just a few minutes of their live streams or text posts. The choice to include a site that excludes three of the four K-pop being analyzed was because of the consistent and physical documentation of idols interacting with their fans. There is a moment in time that can be captured to support how quickly fans are to hop onto whatever social media to comment. This is harder to see when on live streams or static sites that do not automatically refresh comments like on YouTube.

Figures 2 & 3 - iPhone screenshots from WeVerse



Within the first minute of posting on WeVerse, a BTS member's post accumulates roughly 3,000 to 15,000 comments. These images were taken in the same minute the post was posted and then I quickly reloaded the page for it to show 15,000 comments. Figures 2 and 3 show this. In it was not a BTS member that posted, instead it was one of the members' pet dog, Yeon-Tan. There is no explanation as to why this specific pet has been chosen to have an account in WeVerse as there are other pets the members have that could technically have accounts like Yeon-Tan. This mass flooding of fan comments to a post can be seen in a comparable situation. RM of BTS had posted a long note to the artist message board and in the same way as Yeon-Tan, within the first minute there were 15,000 comments and more than 20,000 likes. Again, WeVerse does not show the real number of interactions, it only goes up to "20K+". On March 16th, 2022, for one hour, BTS's Taehyung responded to questions from fans

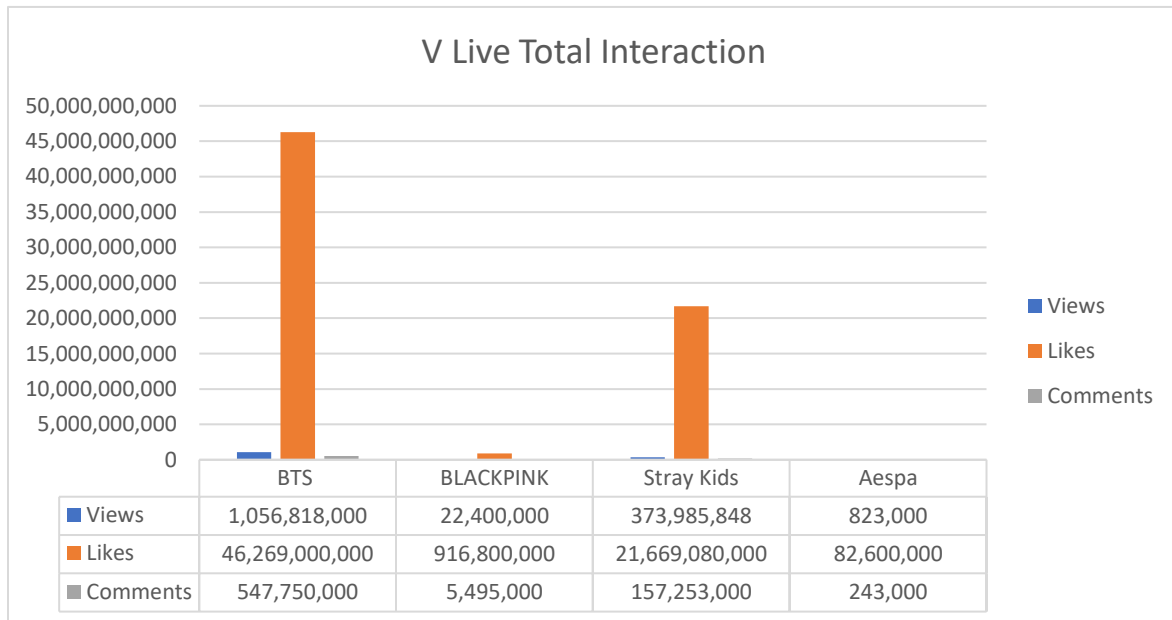
that were posted to WeVerse. He answered a series of mundane questions like, “What are you doing now?” and “What are you watching?” When he posted responses to these questions, fans rushed to their accounts for a chance to have some interaction with him, some for recognition. An increased rate of interaction is seen in the comments added after Taehyung’s response. On a post by 김곰돌군 늘행복하기 regarding a change that Taehyung had made on BTS’s Twitter account, there were no replies or likes from other users on WeVerse. Once Taehyung himself responded to the post, over 21K comments were added, all of which were directed to him.

Out of curiosity I searched back to the very first post from BTS on WeVerse and amazingly, people are still commenting on it to this day. It was a post from Jimin on 30 January 2019 saying, “안녕하세요“ [Hello]. As of writing this, there are six comments that have been posted on March 13, 2021 since Jimin first wrote on the message board. Looking at the most recent post by Namjoon on March 13, 2022, there is a pattern of postings that can be established. By comparing Jimin’s post from 2019 and Namjoon’s in 2021, there is an abundant use of purple heart emoji. Taking what is seen from BTS’s V Lives, it can be assessed that any post by BTS will have fans commenting the emoji, not matter the context.

As expected with promotions related to musical comebacks for K-pop artists, there is a higher rate of interest and response. This increased interest encourages companies to post more, which begins the cycle of interaction between fans and idols, with mediation done by the music companies. Out of the four groups studied for the content analysis, Stray Kids is the K-pop group that interacts the most regularly with their fans, BTS is second, Blackpink third, and Aespa fourth. This was an unexpected outcome in the research, as I thought BTS would come out on top. However, I should have been thinking of the commitment of the group versus the total

following of the group. BTS does have running titles for member specific videos, however they do not have those videos numbered like Stray Kids.

Figure 5 - Bar graph representing total counts of various fan interactions on V Live app from March 2020 to March 2022



What can be determined by studying Stray Kids' videos is a commonality for each member to have a specific video title with a running episode count next to it. Looking at Bang Chan, his video live streams are usually one hour long, and can rack up over a million comments, and the total video count for his specific live stream is 148.

Both groups have many comments during their live streams that have evolved over the course of time. This means that at the beginning of the video or live stream the idol member hosting would get hundreds of thousands of comments asking, "How are you doing?" And then as the video continues the questions that begin to come up things such as "Where is [insert group member name here]" or just questions being asked about touring, comebacks, and other activities. For BTS, their live streams are inundated with purple heart emojis in addition to the

examples of comments. Many of these sentiments are to be expected when looking at comments and applying the understood meaning of parasocial relationships.

In comparison, the groups Blackpink and Aespa did not receive as much interaction, nor did they post frequently. When looking at Blackpink's V live, there is a point at which they stop live streaming and instead focus on live streaming through the membership side of the platform. This membership makes fans pay monthly to access exclusive content from the artists. So, in the case of Blackpink, they reduced their accessibility to fans which led to a drastic decrease in likes and comments. Furthermore, when I was looking through the exclusive content, I could not view the images or videos, but I could see how many people had liked the video and how many had commented. Now looking at Aespa, there is a total lack of interaction between the artists and their fans. I was only able to find one live stream that was done in 2020.

After completing this data collection of V Live videos, I was curious as to why there was such a difference between the frequency of live streams between the boy groups and girl groups. Looking briefly through a few other K-pop girl group accounts on V Live, there was a significant lack of live streams. I am not sure as to why there is such a significant difference between boy and girl groups and their interactivity with their fans. I would speculate that there may be more malicious or sexual comments directed towards female artists during their livestreams. The overt sexualization of artists, K-pop or not, is something that is dealt with and is mitigated through moderators.

Overall, it looks like boy groups put more effort in live streaming and connecting with their fans. When comparing the past three years of V Live postings, there was a spike between mid-2020 to 2021. This was due to the pandemic and has since dropped. Studying just the first

two months of the past three years, 2022 is already starting slow in activity. All four groups have not been regularly active as they had the past few years.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This thesis asked the question of how and why K-pop has become so popular in the United States now. Looking at the musical genre of K-pop through the lens of globalization and cultural hybridization, a blending of cultures – that is, hybridization – between America and South Korea is clearly occurring. It is evident that globalization has an important role in the interconnectedness between countries, allowing people to talk and learn from one another. K-pop is popular in the US due to a combination of company marketing and interpretation of cultural hybridization, parasocial relationships, and ease of access to content on the internet. The phenomenon of K-pop is well and alive internationally because of all these facets.

The hybridization of K-pop can be seen with its use of English words during a song's chorus, the instrumental music that is reminiscent of American pop genres, or perceived appropriation of Black American culture. The ever-developing field of technology fuels the cultural shift and flows between countries, as defined by globalization. The vast internet has allowed people to gain access to content from other cultures and can take certain aspects of those cultures to mix with their own, creating a new, hybridized phenomenon.

Groups that have had more success in the United States are BTS and NCT because of at least one of their members being native English speakers or fluent in the language. This aspect of a K-pop group appeals more to the general audience of America who may not listen to music that is not in English. Other determinant factors for the success of K-pop in the United States come from cultural adaptations of how the music sounds, with similar lyrical vocalizations, beats, and instrumentals to that of American pop music. The composition of K-pop is best explained by Dal-Yong Jin (Jin, 2016) as that of hybridized American music that has been appropriated for the audience of international audiences. Of course, the internet and various platforms have played an

integral role in promotional activities for K-pop groups. It would be much harder for musicians to reach new fans across the world without it.

Fan dedication is what keeps a musical group going, whether or not it is in K-pop. The fans provide income as well as promotional support. The stronger the parasocial relationship is for the fan, the more likely they are to purchase all merchandise related to K-pop idols, especially in the case of purchasing physical CDs. In the case of K-pop, there is a blatant attempt at a continuing narrative of closeness with fans with idols creating fan group names like ARMY, or through perceived one-on-one interactions through live streaming or meet-and-greets. Activities like the ones mentioned are the main ways in which Korean music companies can mediate and encourage the growth of parasocial relationships, as well as moderate fan interaction with idols. The power of a fan lies with their ability to organize and communicate over the internet to promote K-pop groups and their music by creating guides for streaming or purchasing. There can varying degrees of how someone experiences a parasocial relationship. Unhealthy parasocial relationships are seen not just from self-insertion into a K-pop idol's life, but also financial or emotional issues that can be experienced by the fan as well.

No matter where a K-pop group is in the world, K-pop fans will work to reach out and interact with their favorite idols. When studying parasocial relationships created by K-pop fans, I looked at the social media sites WeVerse, V Live, and YouTube. What I found was that, in order to foster relationships with fans, K-pop groups BTS, Stray Kids, Blackpink, and Aespa, use different methods and social applications to give fans a sense of a relationship. BTS and Stray Kids took a path of active live streaming every few weeks, whereas Blackpink and Aespa relied heavily on pre-recorded promotional videos. V Live was the most popular application to interact through live streams for both the idol groups and their fans. Rather than commenting on a pre-

recording, fans prefer to be able to have the ability to “talk” to their idols in the moment of filming. I was not able to touch on generational differences and preferences of interaction methods but with technological development there will be evolving ways in which interaction will occur.

In order to better understand more about the effect of parasocial relationships in the context of K-pop, recommendations for further studies should include surveys and interviews for K-pop fans. Personal stories and progression of interest for K-pop fans can best support the theory of parasocial relationships and interactions, along with increased importance of parasocial relationships in the marketing of K-pop. This thesis has concluded that Korean music companies have used technological development, like the internet, to their advantage to reach larger audiences. Globalization has grown faster because of the internet as well, so K-pop is able to be easily promoted through streaming sites for anyone to access. Fans in turn build parasocial relationships with K-pop groups that aid in the dispersion of K-pop to other people as well as turning fans into committed consumers. These modern technologies have also allowed for the influential flow of cultures from one to another, creating new cultural hybrids such as K-pop.

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APPENDIX A

YOUTUBE COMMENTS: 50 ENGLISH-LANGUAGE COMMENTS FROM VIDEOS ON OFFICIAL YOUTUBE CHANNELS FOR BTS, BLACKPINK, STRAY KIDS, AND AESPA BTS

1. People need to understand that BTS aren't a distraction, they're an inspiration
2. wish you [BTS] all the best for your concert!!! Although I couldn't attend to any of your concert, jut feel I'm with you guys at there...I'm watching you through live. Definitely in future I will attend to a BTS concert one day!
3. BTS is not just idols. They're a boys dream, dedication, passion, intelligent. They are inspirational. They inspire all army.
4. Happy birthday suga. Proud of how far you've gotten in your career, hope you had a great birthday.
5. people need to understand that BTS aren't a distributor, they're an inspiration. BTS I love you.
6. being a fan girl is one of my passion, protecting bangtan is my mission, to love and Stan them is my bests decision, but marrying my bias is just an imagination.
7. I just know that the day I'll meet them face to face, will be the bestest day of the best day as of my life. Wait for me BTS!!!
8. I hope one day every army go there to watch there live throw I purple u BTS. I love you from my core of heart. You guys are my inspiration.
9. after exams I would be coming to LAS VEGAS TO SEE BTS finally my dream is going to be fulfilled I am excited and happy

10. I am sooo excited for BTS world tour and I wish all members are healthy always smile.
Saranghaeyo BTS, ARMY forever. I wanna salute there efforts for us, thank you so much
BTS to make our life more happier.

11. hello, I have been flowing since three years ago, since I knew you, my life has
completely changed. Now you are an important thing in my life, and I cannot abandon you.
You taught me many things. On the occasion of Suga's birthday, I did not attend any party. I
can say happy birthday to our little kitty Yoongi

12. I wish that the one who's making us happy may always be happy too...

13. (Taehyung) I swear by whom I take the oath that you have become a soul to my soul and
that you are equal to my heart a whole world.

14. how I wished that BTS would distribute hearts to all ARMYs

15. My lives!!!! MY UNIVERSE...MY BABIES

16. always happy Bangtan Boys, we are distant supporters, you must not be close and you
don't know we will always support and pray for you

17. I wish I could be there someday. BTS in our lives as one star that lights up our darkness. I
purple you.

18. You are my everything 방탄소년단 사랑해

19. BTS I love them so much and they are a source of comfort for me

20. hi BTS I want tell you something. You may not know but your songs are big strength to
me. Thank you all

21. hi BTS, I love you soooooo much but the thing is I can never say or scream something in
the big stadium cus I can never come to a concert as I am on the other side of the continent
and I can never ever see you i my life it breaks my heart when I think that but do you know

what impinging I am with you in my sleep I even started to learn korean...for you.. but ... I can never speak korean...to you. I wish I could cry but it would just make it worse I wish you could say my name n stage if you read this comment then please say my name in your next performance. I love you Namjoon, Jin, j hope, v, kookie, Jimin, suga

22. Jimin' s beauty is out of this world! It is angelic beautiful, including angelic voice and angelic dance. He is a happening one in a billion years.

23. it's amazing how music can heal someone, and it is more amazing how these hoys do it

24. BTS I love you thanks for inspiring me, and being with me in my worst time to make me happy

25. Love you BTS ARMY

26. really hoping I can see y'all again someday

27. yoongi my wish for you is don't hide the pain you feel again, please

28. love you BTS (this specific user posted the same message for three days in a row)

29. i hope parents realize that BTS is a relief factor for this generation and not a waste of time

30. I even got a second job to attend the next concert

31. I purple you in a way that I managed to learn your songs so I could sing along with the group. I may not be able o dance with you, but I feel you and am extremely grateful for that

32. BTS KINGS!!!

33. BTS isn't only dancer and singer they are army's king in the world

34. all the bet to the boys for their pure hard work

35. I've become such a big fan love your songs so very much. It would be cool to meet you guys ahh

36. thank you for bts to give your beautiful songs and amazing dance keep going and stay blessed and we are here ways supporting you
37. im so happy that there going to live again <3.. I hope they feel better
38. theyre our inspiration
39. BTS for ever
40. loving BTS isn't even a mantra, it's just what we do. We show it in our actions, in our streaming and buying and ultimately in our unconditional support. Loving them and showing them is the easiest thing in the world. WE LOVE YOU BTS>
41. happy birthday Yoongi!!! Really hope you're gonna read this!
42. im so proud of you son
43. I love Taehyung. He is my everything
44. no matter how sad or painful it is, I live now because everyone in BTS is there. Thank you very much! I love you!
45. they give us confidence. They give us happiness, they give us respect, and they are the perfect inspiration of every army's. Thank you for being our best friends and making us happy. Army's forever
46. its great that all human beings are as strong and enduring as you [BTS]. Thank you, BTS for teaching me how to love myself.
47. I hope you stay happy BTS
48. miss you BTS
49. happy birthday yoongi pops. Army will always love you. I love you so much

50. bts is not just a band or singers only without them, the source of our happiness, the sources of our smile and our love for myself, they are not human without them, angels I love them from the bottom of my heart

Blackpink

1. it almost seems unreal getting a comeback after a year
2. even that we didn't get a wrapping Jenny, even that we didn't get a "BLACKPINK in your area by Jisoo, even though Rosé didn't sing high notes and even though we didn't get a dance break by Lisa, we got an amazing song with rap, vocals and a group breakdance.
3. I Think the reason why do you really makes BLACKPINK come back it's because it's big. And when I say big, it's just big. Like just look at those background props damn. Their music videos are so grand it's like throwing money everywhere. I'm not complaining though
4. many years already passed but I still can't get over how bop this song is
5. Black pink is a group with four perfect visuals. They all are unmatched and carries a bag of talents with themselves
6. happy birthday BLACKPINK and to us blanks. I'm so happy to be part of this fandom. Can't wait to see what the future holds for us
7. I remember when we were all listening to it as much as possible to reach 1 billion. Now it's already 1.7 billion. Almost 1.8 billion. Unforgettable song. Unforgettable Queens.
8. I'm proud to be blink, I love you guys you helped me a lot in my tough times with your cheerful songs
9. Their charisma, choreography, vocals, angelic voice is everything
10. Whenever I listen this song I just get goosebumps everytime!
11. Popular opinion; this song is never getting old and forever will be iconic

12. When I woke up two hours ago the views were 27 million now it's 29 million I'm so proud of these girls and this fandom ice xclamation point let's keep this up! Fighting!
13. This song will always be legendary, you can't get tired of it
14. The biggest girl group in the world
15. I hope blackpink have more legendary collaborations with other artists like this one in the future!
16. I really love this music video, it feels so different than the other music videos
17. This song is really really great. I don't know why other blanks don't like this. For me, it's a masterpiece. Even my mom, she's 8 not kpop fan, liked this song. We just need, jisoo with more lines in this song
18. This is blackpinks cutest, sweet, collaboration video ever
19. Blackpink makes everybody smile with their amazing music
20. It's just so nostalgic to see their very first songs of when they first debuted. They are now one of the biggest kpop groups in the world. We are proud of you black pink
21. This song is so addictive I can't stop listening to it
22. Love this song and video, the girls are beautiful, and their dance choreography is off the hook. Blackpink is one of my favorite kpop girl groups with Jennie and jisoo being my faves within the group. Jenny really slays it on her opening rap and jisoo... Well, jisoo always captures my heart!
23. The first song I listened to was boombayah, when I was little, I became a blink without noticing, and now I am quite a blink

24. Yep, they keep breaking records it's the first debut song in kpop history crossing a billion so early! And are still rocking, it's black pink alright! Any legend blinks still watching this debut masterpiece?
25. Black pink will always be the legendary kpop group
26. Best debut song forever
27. Black pink songs are giving me confidence to be an independent woman
28. Jennie and jisoo give us these perfect lyrics Congrats girls you deserve to be praised again and again you did well
29. Jenny is an insane ace. She can rap in any style, any speed, great tone, and with so much charisma. And when she sings, she can hit both lower notes and higher notes. So versatile and unique, she can do any style. A true gem
30. I hope that the decade of life will be renewed, we love the beauty of jesu, the cuteness of Rosie, the cat Lisa, and the luxury of Jenny. These girls really made me love myself. They are the true gem of allkpop. We wish them all success and will do everything we can to make them succeed even though they are already successful. As for me, as a blank, I will continue to adore them for the rest of my life and for the last breath in my life, and I want to tell YG not to dispense with this jewel
31. Blackpink's visuals and vocals can't be compared to anyone else is; They are always iconic
32. Jesu, Jenny, Rosé, and Lisa are all talented. Beautiful, kindhearted and supportive they are the lovesick girls
33. Love everything about Lisa

34. Song won't ever get old for me. If I had to choose one song, to listen to for the rest of my life. I'd pick this song for sure!
35. I don't even understand Korean, but their voice is amazing that still makes me watch this in 2019
36. I really like this song. I'm officially staning this group. And I don't know her name, that girl in orange hair, I think the one who rapped, is wearing the boots as Leanne of Little Mix in the music video power haha
37. Today is my birthday and this is the best gift I can ask for!
38. Jisoo's beauty and talent has killed the song
39. Two years past but it's still so addicting. Blackpink will be forever legendary
40. This video was the first time I was introduced to the world of black pink and instantly became blank. I remember, that at the time, I was literally stunned when I saw Jenny for the first time, since she did fit my personal description of perfect beauty and pushed it even further. I literally could not believe she was real for a second period but all of the girls are what I consider a solid 10 out of 10 and the music and dance choreography they produce also. We mortals don't even deserve that level of Polish they provide, I always look at them and can't help but feel inferior to them. Everything about them screams luxury and I absolutely love it
41. I admit I wasn't a fan but this is beyond my expectations I love it
42. This is the song where I realized jisoo can be an actress and now she is one. I still can't get over her role as youngro and just hoping she would have more acting offers soon. And also hoping for their comeback this year

43. I remember when we were trying to make it reach 50 million and now we're trying to make it reach 600 million. So proud of my girls!
44. Oh my gosh my jaw dropped jisoo's visual here! They are so pretty here
45. I am dead. I've never seen a music video like this. This is out of this world. I love black pink so much
46. Is it possible to have such a legendary band group again in the future? Black pink always makes me speechless. Love you so much
47. Jisoo is so *** **** flawless, all the girls are of course, but jisoo owns my heart. What an absolute Angel
48. I'm still obsessed with this. When will blackpink make a comeback
49. Kim jisoo I love you, you are amazing and a beautiful woman
50. Still waiting for a comeback

Stray Kids

1. Stray kids isn't just a K pop group. They are the ones who never disappoint u
2. stray kids once again proving that they put out some of the hardest hitting, most refreshing records in the business since they've debuted. It's really stray kids versus stray kids at this point. Waits for world tour announcement
3. I am shocked... I am amazed... The song, lyrics, dance, visuals, voices, duality, and the music video blew my mind
4. Stray kids are making us maniacs for them with this comeback
5. Felix's part is so addictive
6. You guys are really amazing. Nobody can get this song out of his mind, especially rap changbin, not to mention the crazy and amazing music video

7. The rap line ate that up and left no crumbs
8. Stand straykids for a better life!
9. This song is actually addicting though. Even if we weren't trying to stream it, I'd come back to watch this multiple times a day
10. Hyunjin. It was certainly your musicality that drew me to you first period you have such a playful but easy tone which highlights and gives definition to every stray kids song. You don't have fixated on a set rapping style. You are experimental vocally and lyrically and I found myself charmed by your voice due to the versatility of it. I also love your singing style for similar reasons you are just as diverse of a singer as you are rapper. It is really peaceful and harmonious; And blends perfectly with the rest of your members. I love how you don't hold anything back when you're singing and I can really feel the emotion and work that you pour into each line that you sing. Similarly to your singing and rapping, your body knows no limits when you are met with a choreography. You dance with a ferocity and a passion that no other performers can possess. You take each choreography and sincerely make it your own, which is honestly a blessing to watch. When you are dancing you can be yourself and express your emotions with the beauty of your body movements. You can lose yourself easily into your dance and you are so comfortable and trusting of your own abilities. For this generation specifically, you have transformed music and given new meaning to what it can and should do for people. You are changing the world each day that you continue to share your artistry and dance; And we are so lucky to be alive right now to get to be a part of the history that you are making. At the same time that I love your music and dance, I love your personality as well. I love that sometimes you keep by yourself, but other times, you are goofy and outgoing. As I mentioned before, you are extremely freeing to be around and those

who spend time with you can relax and be themselves in your presence. I know that nobody can attest to these qualities quite like your members. Seven different personalities, and they all love you and cherish you for their own special reasons. They've looked to you and have modeled their perseverance off of how you strive to not let the difficult times hold you down and prevent you from success. You have opened your heart up to all seven people, although you come from different backgrounds, and that has encouraged them to all to have such a strong loving relationship with one another... I hope you don't overwork yourself because you are perfect just the way you present yourself to us. We will support you and be there for you for the rest of our lives! I pray that you and your loved ones stay safe, and find happiness and worth in the future. Happy birthday Hyunjin, and we adore you so much!

11. Let's not disappoint Chan. Let's hit 50 million or even more

12. Words cannot express how much I love this song, the one that made me fall in love with stray kids. Here everything is insane, the video, the rap, the melody, the choreography, the outfits, the visuals and, above all, the energy! I'll never forget Thunder era

13. Bro this song is so lit. I listened to it like five times a day

14. This bit is just unreal! This song will definitely be my favorite. Chan in a white shirt is delightful. My heart just sinks

15. I really can't wait for whatever they do next period if thunderous and no easy or this amazing I can't even imagine what kind of masterpiece they'll deliver with oddinary

16. I want to say something, good for straykids even if they can't read it. Their songs are very beautiful. Listen to them every so often. Thanks to stray kids I'm not sad anymore. I'm going to tell truth truths one I'm too happy to be stay and two straykids world domination... I love so much straykids

17. Stays make the stray kids stay
18. Popular opinion- everyone agrees that I. N. Isn't human, he is an Angel
19. I could see the dedication and hard work of these boys and know why so many love them. My shorts page were filled by them so I wanted to come see this song. Not disappointed at all. Keep it up boys. You are going to make it big
20. Straight kids never disappoint us
21. Stays y'all should stream harder this upcoming comeback
22. Been blasting this song every day, got me through my toughest times
23. It's so cute how everyone is sharing their own story with stray kids
24. Imagine if Chan is here reading all our comments! Stray kids. You make us stay. Thank you
25. Stanning straight kids is one of the best decisions I've ever made
26. Even if Felix isn't your bias, he is still your bias
27. They deserve the entire universe
28. I only wish Chan knew how much we loved him
29. To be honest I would give up my life to marry one of the members of stray kids
30. Stray kids I love you guys
31. I'm so proud of you boys I'm so happy
32. We did well guys... don't be disappointed. YouTube is just being a *****. We did awesome. Our boys did awesome
33. Stray kids have dominated the world and my heart
34. I'm never going to get over it, seriously, SKZ is just an extraordinary group. The versatility of their music, there is no one like them

35. Stays let's do our best for our boys
36. Stray kids said on fan ship that we are the best fandom and they are proud of us. Please we can't let them down! Stream the music video to 50 million this week so we can get a win!
37. Felix is so perfect, he literally has a very powerful deep voice, too magical beauty, and an imposing presence, Felix I love you my Prince
38. It's so weird to think about the first time I watched this music video I was not a kpop Stan or a stay and I had no idea who the members were on their names or their insane talent. But now I know so much about them and their personalities and sometimes I feel like we're actual friends
39. Strive harder stays like how stray kids spoil us
40. Confirmed: stray kids are not human, they're 100% pure talent
41. I just want to say thank you to straykids for changing my life, I love you
42. Hyunjin is otherworldly perfect why can't he be my husband on top of that multi talented gem it's impossible to resist his charms
43. Straykids made me realize that the world isn't a lie
44. This song never gets old
45. I want to thank straykids. Because of them, my life is not boring anymore and they're already my inspirations
46. Girls don't want boyfriends, girls want SKZ to get a lot of wins
47. My heart and soul belong to the best boy group SKZ

48. I will never shut up about how Hyunjin fits into the dark and sensual concepts, it feels like he was born for it without practice, it's amazing how a two second scene can convey so much to us, Bang Chan and Hyunjin and iconic duo

49. I just wish don't stray kids know how much we love them

50. This song is a pure masterpiece

Aespa

1. Their voices are so addictive

2. every comeback shows that every member of Aespa is an all rounder. they never disappoint

3. No one compares to these girls. They are legendary

4. I miss them so bad and I can't wait for their next comeback, I need SM group to make comeback

5. They are my Queens

6. Their visuals are really unreal, especially Karina, she's like not a human, yes she is a goddess. Every comeback, I'm really spoiled by their appearance

7. I'm so addicted to this song

8. Giselle is so smooth and clean WTF like OMG girl

9. It's been on repeat for almost three weeks straight now

10. Am I the only one obsessed with how Giselle sings?

11. Ningning you are doing absolutely great. You are the best vocalist in Aespa. I believe you will shine bright in the future.

12. But these are not four girls these are four goddesses among us mere mortals

13. Why are their songs so addictive

14. Two months later and I'm still obsessed with this song watching it almost everyday on YouTube
15. Keep slaying girls
16. I just wish I could text ningning all the time because then I could tell her that she is amazing, beautiful and I love her
17. No matter what they say, no matter what they do, this is still the most epic debut!
18. They are so iconic
19. 4th generation leaders
20. This whole video is aesthetically pleasing, vocals are top tier, and the song arrangement is to pirg. Plus they introduced their AI concept in this song
21. no one is doing it like them
22. We must protect Aespa at all costs
23. This is the new standard of kpop
24. Everyone agrees that Aespa is melting everyone's heart with their dance
25. Karina's charisma is what makes her really stand out. Her moves are always on point
26. I think ningning is the prettiest member and I think she should have the lead dancer and visual positions in my opinion
27. Karina is so amazing, she's the complete member
28. Finally seeing Karina getting the credit and recognition she deserves for her dancing and not others bringing her down for their own bias
29. Ning Ning looks gorgeous even with messy hair
30. the way Karina dances is just so mesmerizing
31. Aespa is the full package. True Queens indeed

32. I want to be friends with Gisele and hang out with her! She seems so chill, nice, and fun
33. Am I the only one fangirling over Karin's hair? I think it has its own fandom
34. This group is perfect. I am not worthy
35. Winter and carina's stage presence are insane no wonder they were picked to be in the group girls on top
36. The blueprint, the standard, the queen, next level
37. No matter how hard they try, no one will top this!
38. For me, this is the queen among experimental music and no other song can dethrone it
39. I am so proud of us. We helped them get the song of the year for the Korean Music Awards
40. This song is a masterpiece
41. I will never get tired of this song
42. It's been a year since Aespa has debuted. They have achieved many things and I'm proud of their success.
43. Seeing the girls in New York makes me want to go there today
44. As long as Aespa is around, my life will never be boring
45. I can't be the only one who audibly gasped when the camera panned to show the girls
46. I literally got so emotional when they saw their outdoor advertisement in Times Square I am very happy that I have been supporting them since the beginning even though they got a lot of hate since their first day but we are there for Aespa, no matter what happens we will always support each and every member
47. Popular opinion: Aespa makes everyone's day better and brighter
48. Giselle is the most relatable K-pop idol ever LMAO especially as an international fan

- 49. Winter sitting down in the glass room while everyone else is panicking is such a mood
- 50. I feel like I could just listen to Giselle talk all day

V LIVE COMMENTS SCREEN SHOTS

Live stream date: March 6, 2022

2.



Live Chat Replay 6,144,528
Chats that appeared during the live broadcast.

AM 5:25 Riya 💖💖 JHOPE TELL JIMIN TO MARRY ME 😍
 💖💖💖💖💖 JHOPE TELL JIMIN TO MARRY ME 🥰💖💖💖
 💖

AM 5:25 Nadiaa 나도 사랑 해요 💖💖💖💖

AM 5:25 둘리나 I LOVE YOU BTS. HELLO I'M FROM RUSSIA
 🇷🇺🇷🇺🇷🇺🇷🇺💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖💖
 💖💖

AM 5:25 N.sh💖 🇸🇦 كيوت

AM 5:25 Jijo Sheq Sharif 6A Na WHAT HAPPEND
 HELLOOOOOOO

AM 5:25 💖Cielo Mae Lor💖 bye

AM 5:25 VC bye bye

AM 5:25 parkjmelly 만나러 왔워서 고마워요

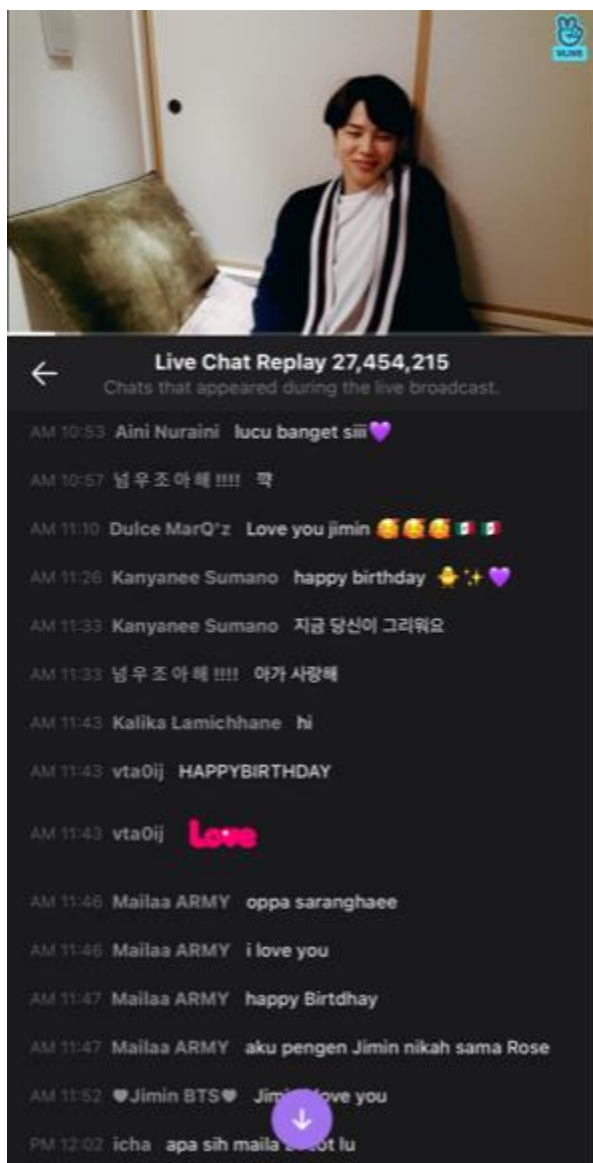
AM 5:25 Nagma💖 😍

AM 5:25 KIMCHITAR 태형지수 진짜야?

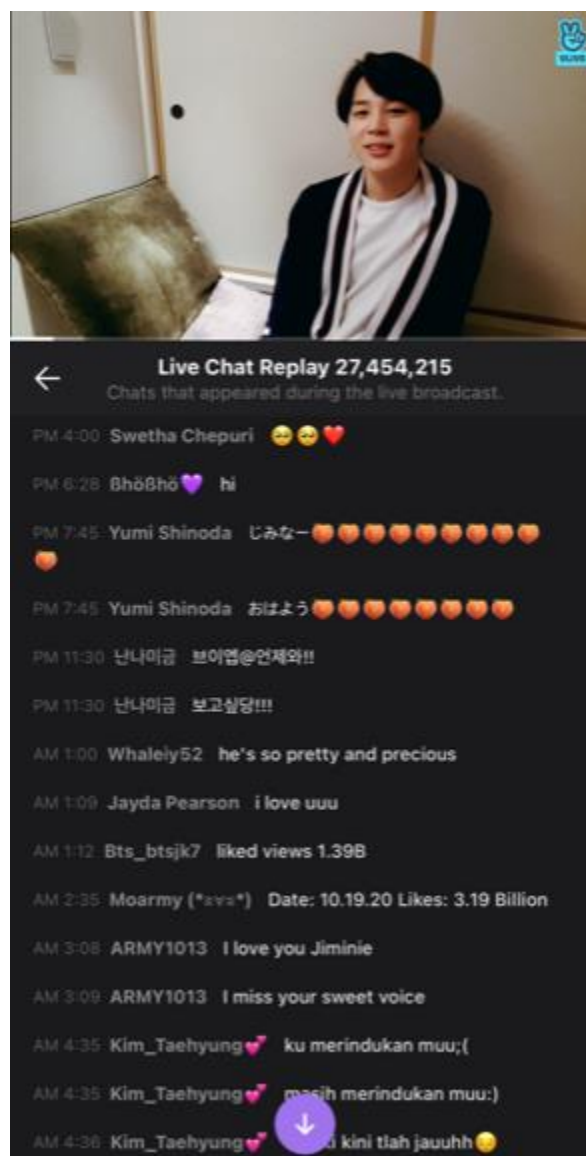
AM 5:25 🇮🇷Fateme💖 تهکوک زیادی اینجا برای فلیم خطریه

AM 5:25 maryam byee Arm

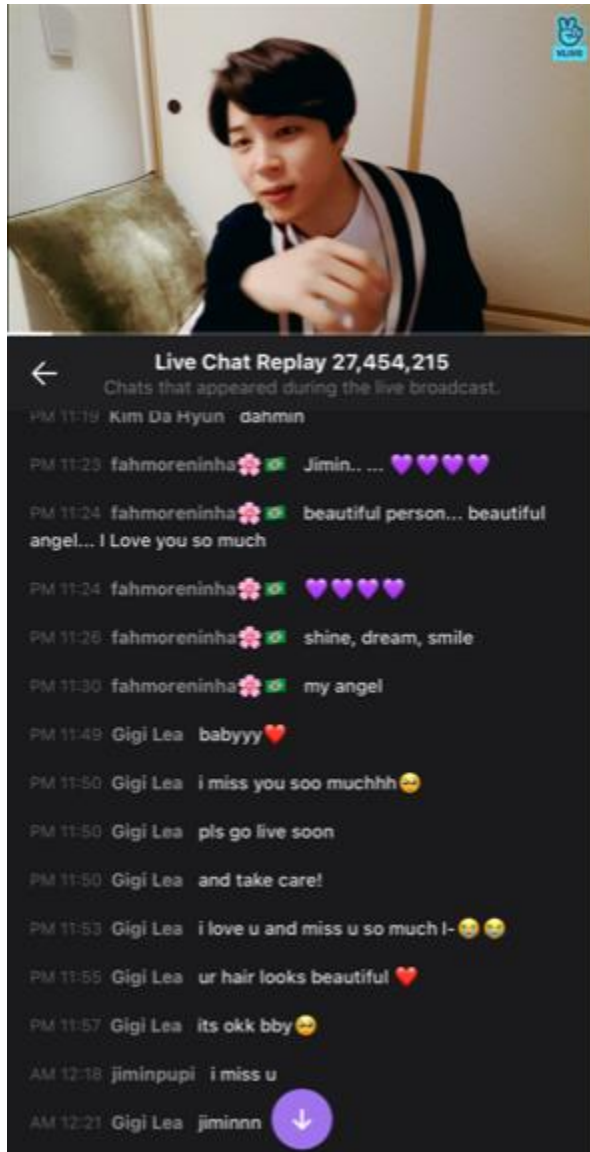
5.



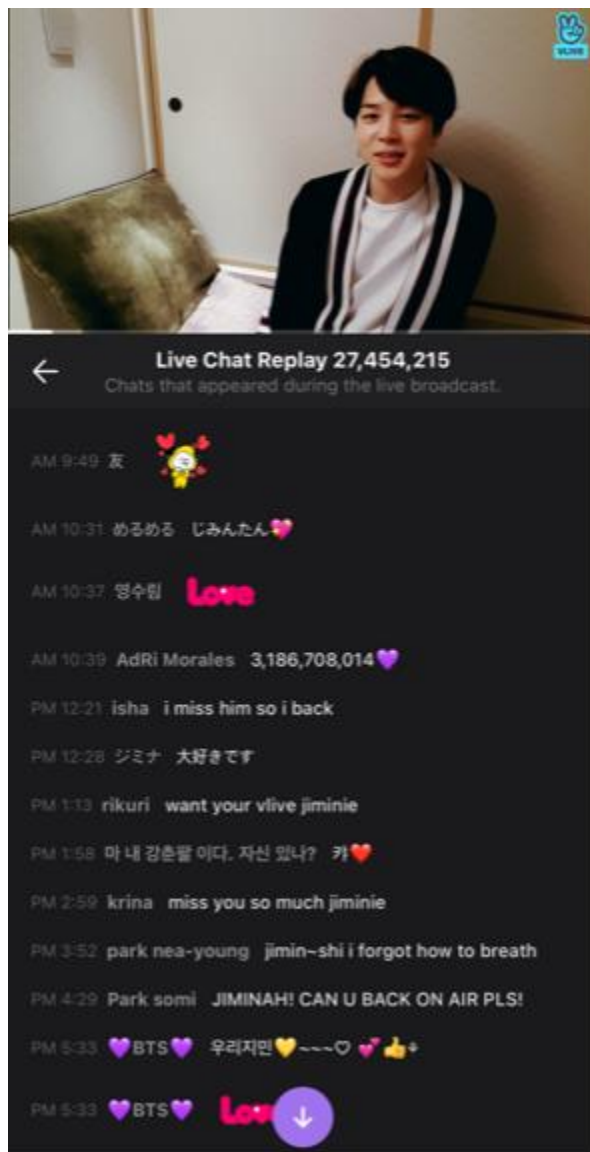
6.



7.



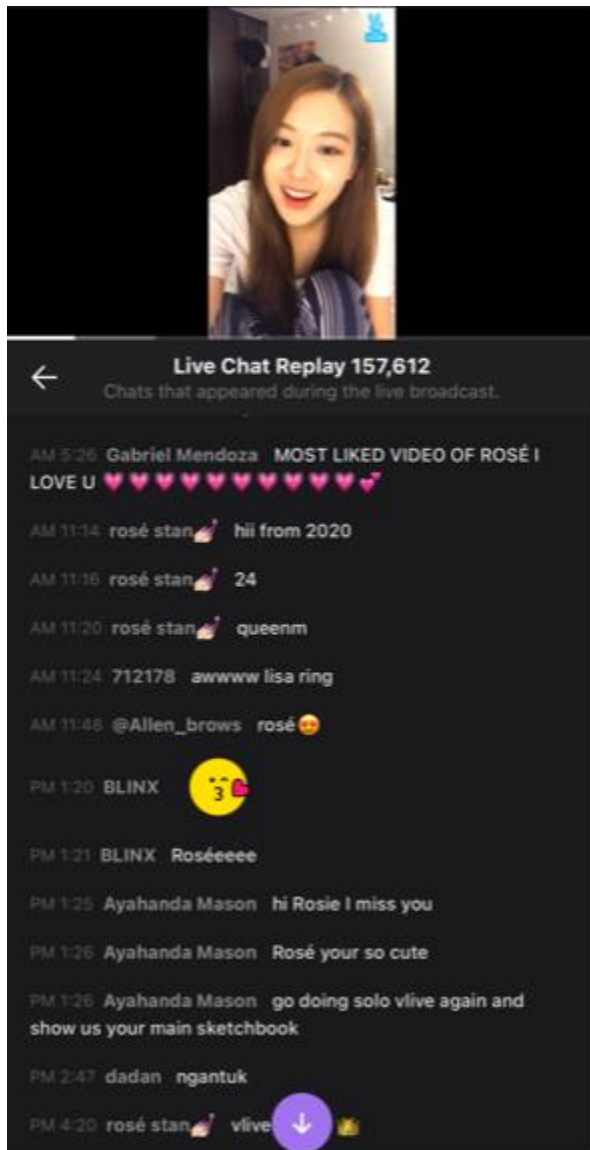
8.



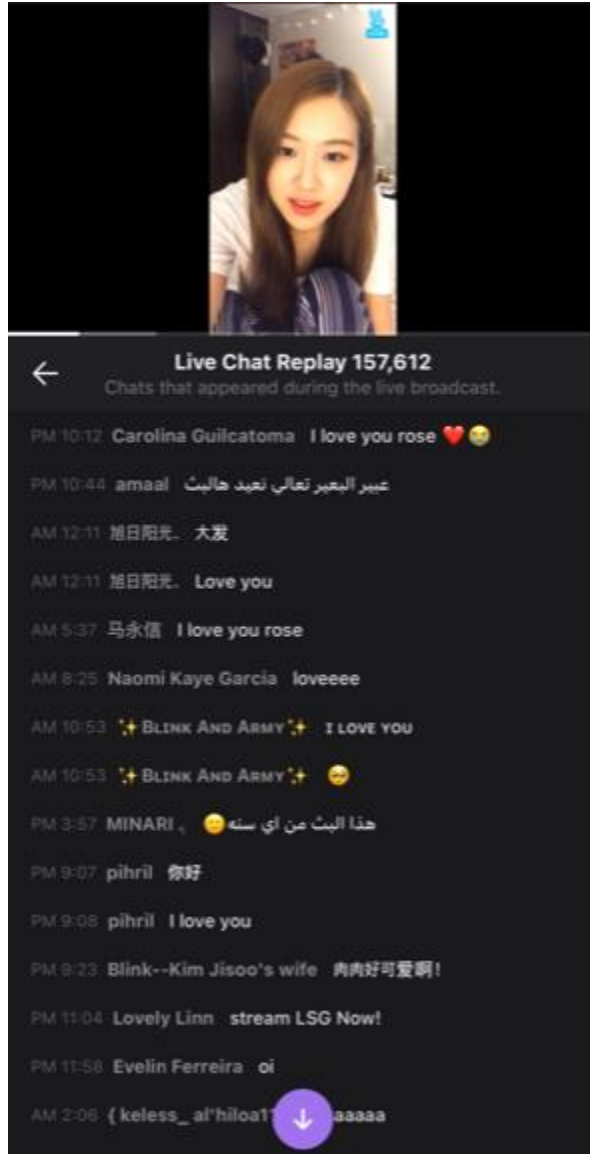
Screenshot from **채스백**

Live stream date: March 12, 2018

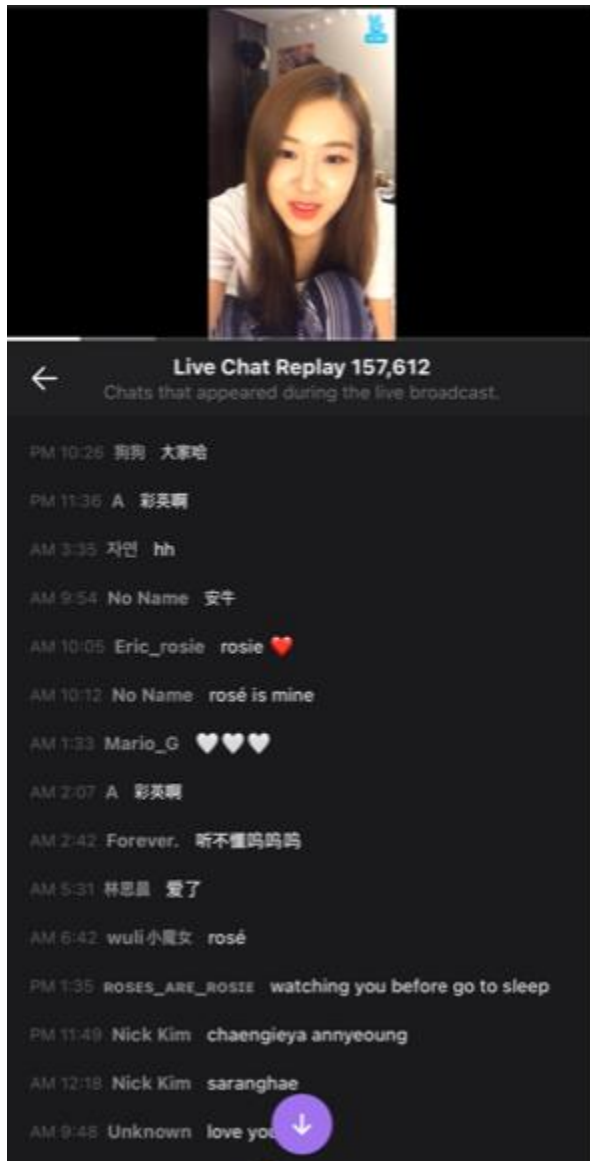
9.



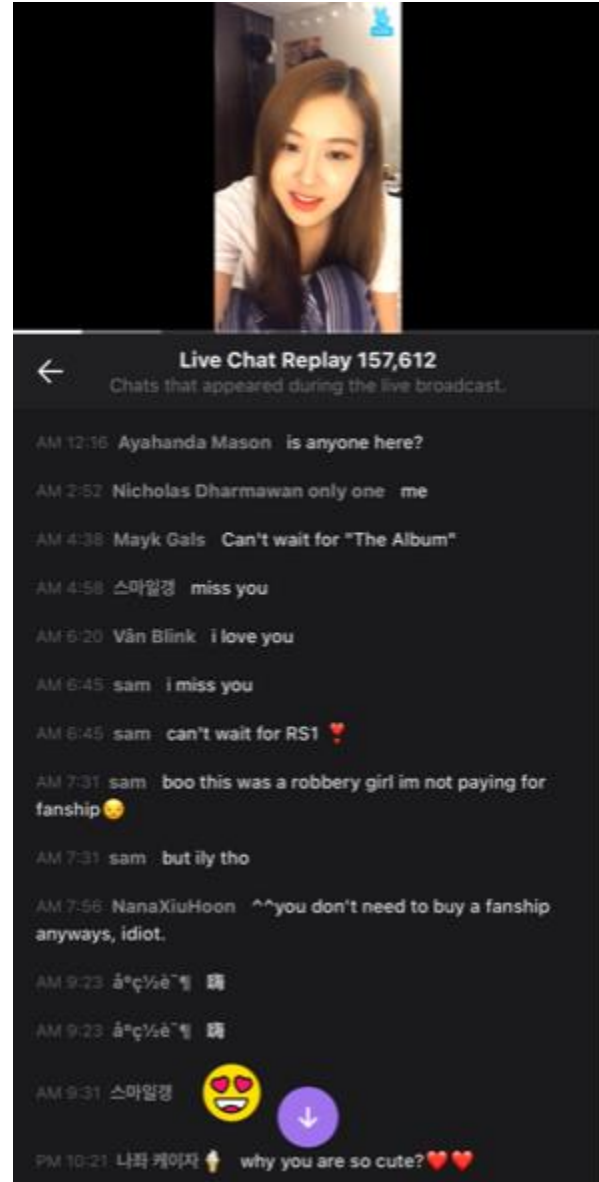
10.



11.



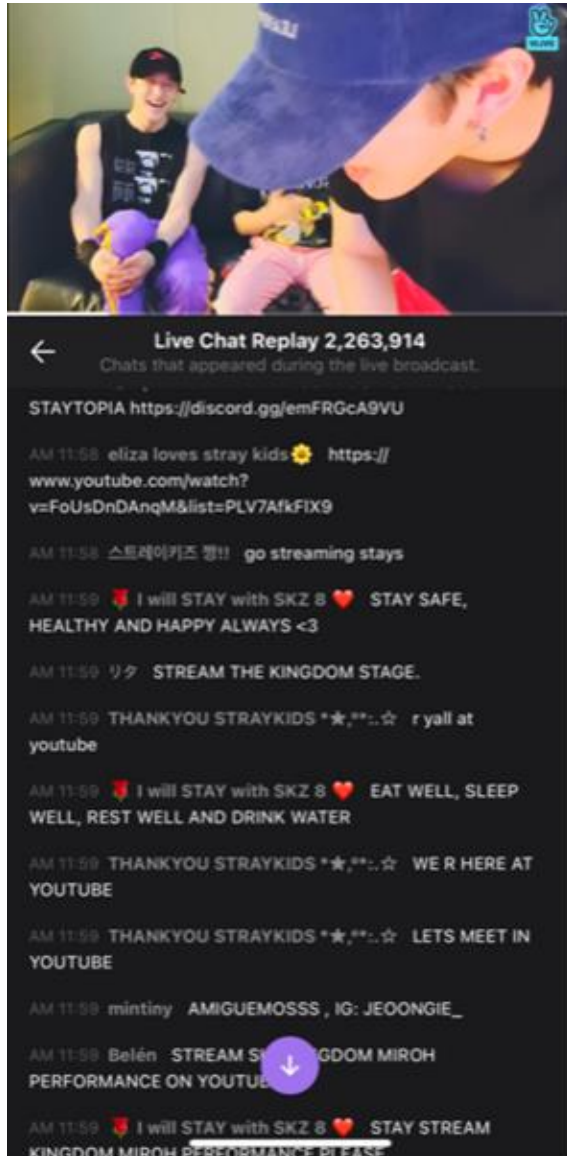
12.



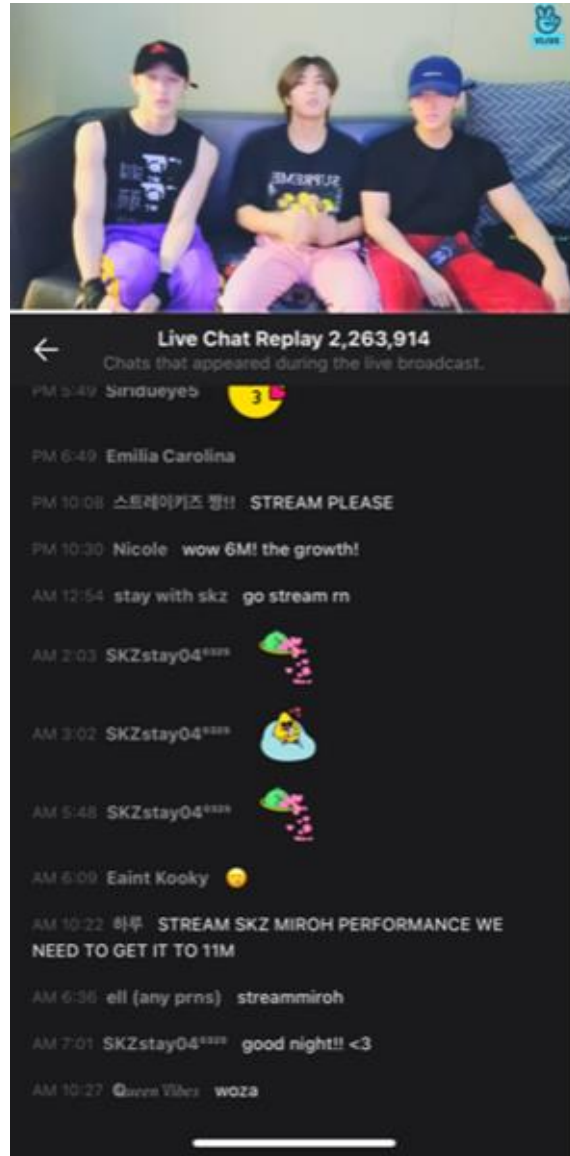
Screenshots from *Chan's Room Ep. 100 – Special Guests*

Live stream date: April 4, 2021

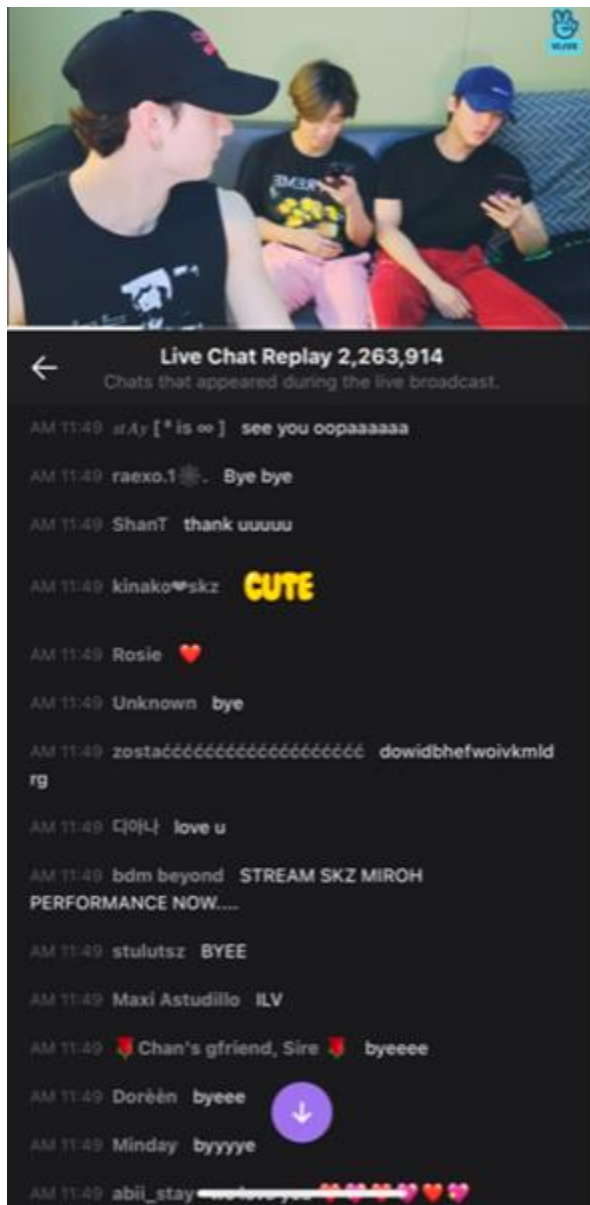
13.



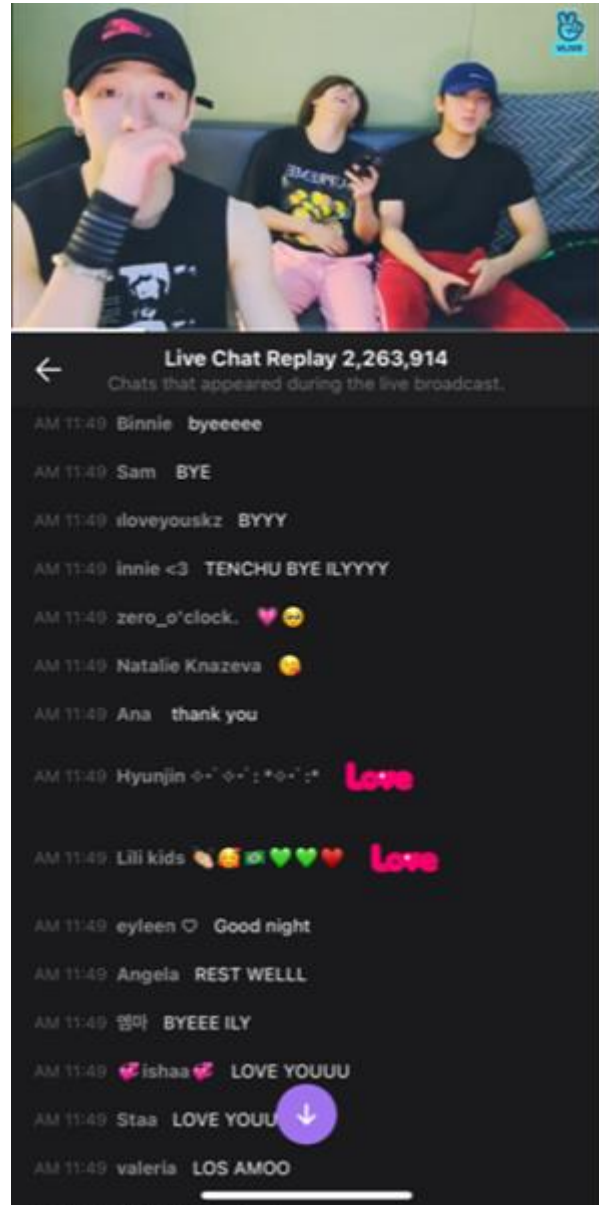
14.



15.

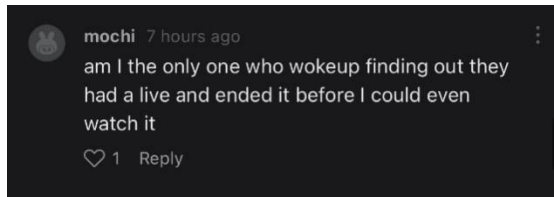


16.

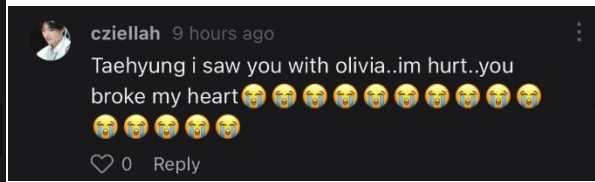


Screenshots from *I PURPLE YOU*
Live stream date: April 3, 2022

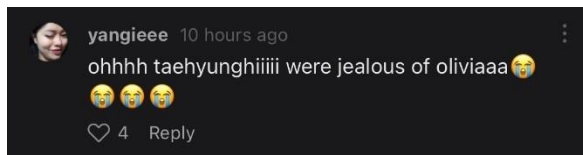
17.



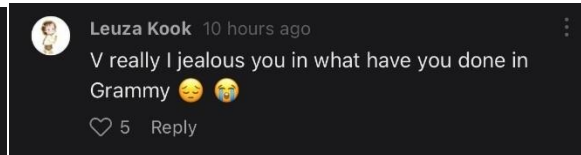
18.



19.



20.



APPENDIX C

WEVERSE COMMENTS SCREEN SHOTS

1.



2.



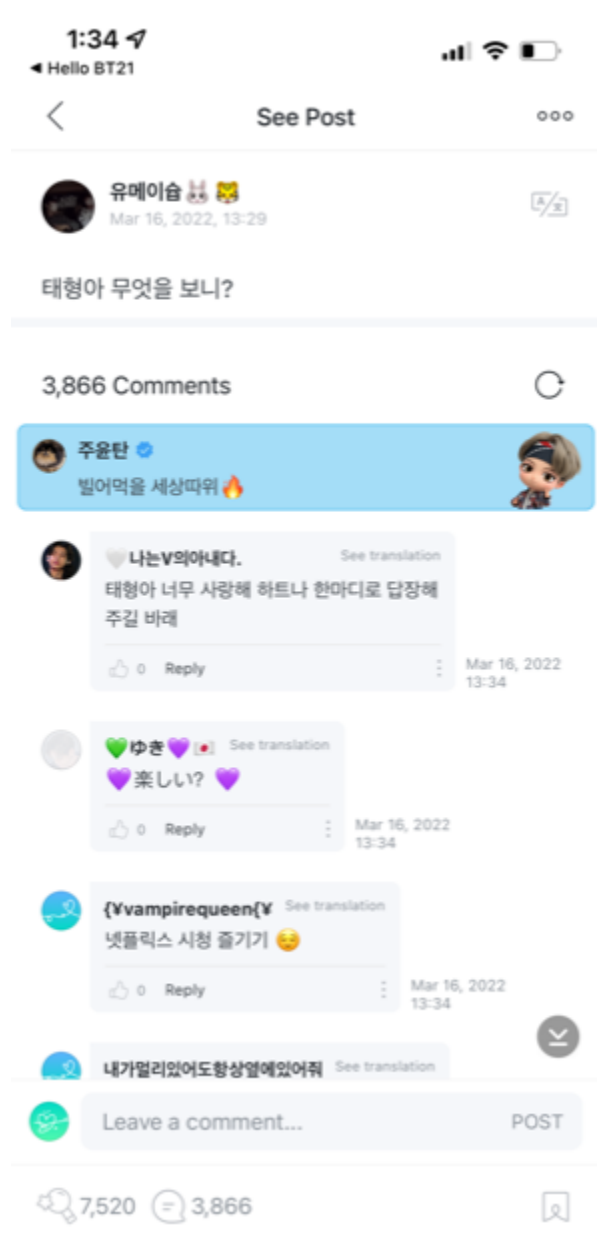
3.



4.



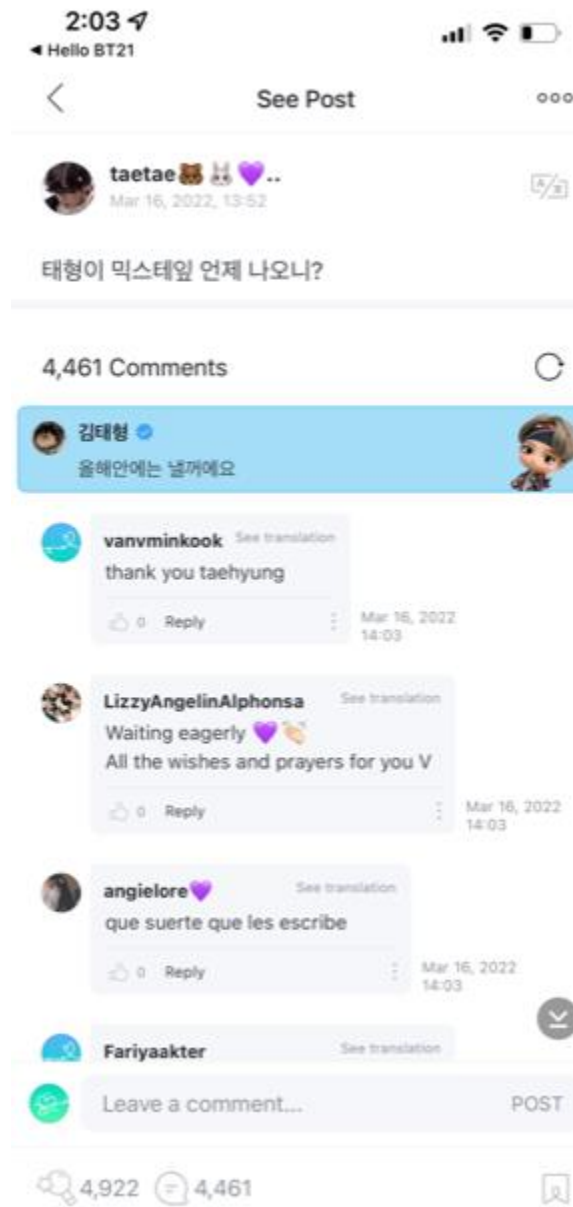
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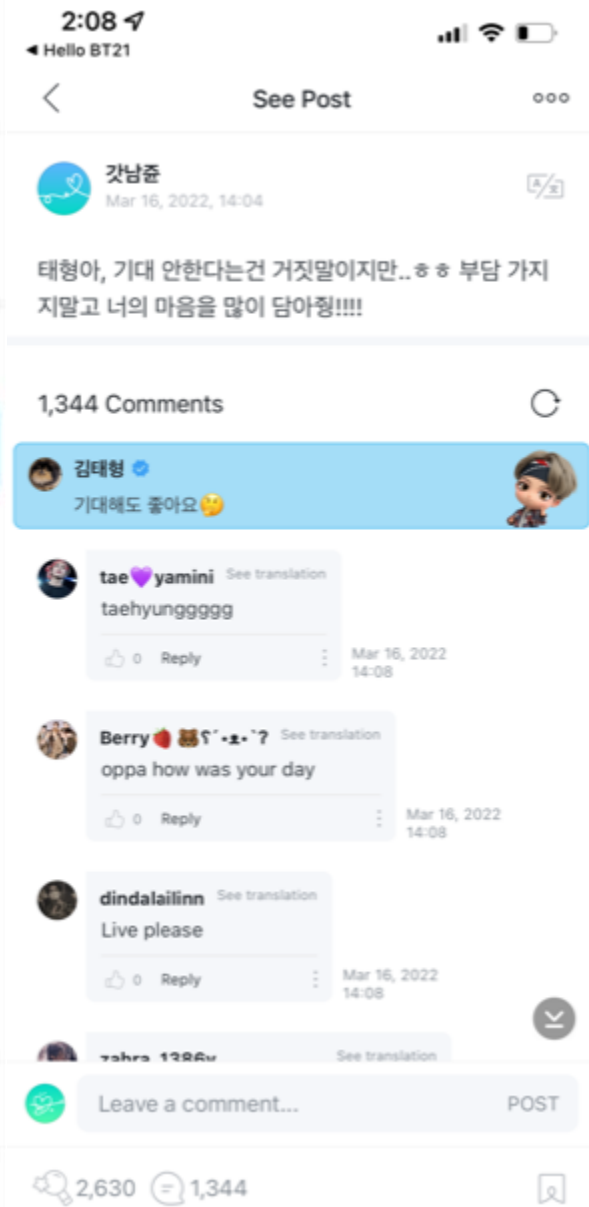
6.



7.



8.



9.

