

## The Role of the Bali's Korean Pop Fandom in Supporting South Korea's Soft Power

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### **Abstrak**

*K-Pop menjadi fenomena global yang diusahakan oleh pemerintah Korea sebagai bagian dari diplomasi budayanya, dengan bantuan aktor lain seperti penggemar K-Pop. Keberadaan K-Pop tidak lepas dari komunitas penggemar setianya yang disebut sebagai fandom. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi fenomena fandom K-pop di seluruh dunia dan perannya dalam globalisasi K-Pop. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui peran fandom K-Pop sebagai aktor non-negara dalam diplomasi publik Korea Selatan dan dalam mendukung penyebaran K-Pop sebagai budaya global. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dimana data primer diperoleh melalui wawancara dengan anggota fandom K-Pop di Bali. Selain itu, data sekunder diperoleh melalui studi literatur. Penelitian ini menggunakan konsep diplomasi publik dan soft power. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa fandom K-Pop berperan sebagai 'referee' sedangkan publik sebagai penerima (receiver). Sebagai 'referee', fandom K-Pop tidak hanya bertindak sebagai konsumen saja namun juga berperan sebagai distributor dan produser. Temuan studi ini bermanfaat untuk memahami pentingnya aktor non-negara dalam penyebaran budaya populer sebagai bagian dari diplomasi publik seperti yang terlihat di Korea Selatan.*

**Kata-kata kunci:** *Fandom K-Pop; Korea Selatan; diplomasi public; soft power*

### **Abstract**

*K-Pop has become a global phenomenon embarked by the Korean government as part of its cultural diplomacy, with the help of other elements such as K-Pop Fans. The existence of K-Pop is inseparable from its loyal fan community called fandom. This research thus aims to explore the phenomenon of K-pop fandom around the world and the role it plays in the globalization of K-Pop. The objective of this research is to examine the role of K-Pop fandom as a non-state actor in South Korea's public diplomacy and in supporting the dissemination of K-Pop as a global culture. This research applies qualitative descriptive method where primary data are obtained through interviews with members of K-Pop fandom in Bali. In addition, secondary data will also be obtained through studying past literatures. Furthermore, this research utilizes the concept of public diplomacy and soft power. In the end, this research found that, K-Pop fandom, plays its role as a referee while the public is the receivers. As a 'referee', not only they act as a consumer of K-Pop, but K-Pop fandom also serve as a distributor and producer. The finding of this study is beneficial to understand the significance of non-state actors in the dissemination of 'pop' culture as part of public diplomacy as seen in South Korea.*

**Keywords:** *K-Pop fandom; South Korea; public diplomacy; soft power*

## Introduction

Nowadays, popular culture has become an instrument of diplomacy, specifically, as a part of state's soft power. South Korea is one example of a country that has successfully implemented soft power through the dissemination of the *Hallyu* culture (the Korean Wave). The success of the *Hallyu* has even entered "The Second Wave" marked by the increasing popularity of Korean Pop (K-Pop). K-Pop is form of South Korean pop music included in South Korea's public diplomacy.

The popularity of K-Pop itself has disseminated in many countries, especially in Asia. This can be seen by the popularity of the "Gangnam Style" where its music video became one of the most successful videos in the history of Youtube as the fastest video to get 1 billion views. Increasing number of South Korean singers, boybands, girl band is accompanied with increasing number of international fans too, including here in Indonesia (Tech Times, 2014). In Indonesia especially Bali, the Korean Wave has greatly influenced the young people. The South Korean artists such as Psy, Lee Min Ho, Super Junior, EXO, BTS, Blackpink, and others are also idolized by the young Indonesians.

The success achieved by K-Pop is supported not only by the South Korean government but also by the K-Pop idol stars and the public as non-state actors, both inside and outside of South Korea. The increasing popularity of the K-Pop idols cannot be separated from the role of their fans around the world. Starting with their love for K-Pop, the fans formed a community called fandom. Fandom stands for the Fans Kingdom, a fan community of the South Korean idols. Every boy band or girl band in South Korea has a fandom. The members are not only South Koreans but also international fans from other countries, as example K-Pop fandom in Bali.

The communities of K-Pop lovers and fandom are growing in Bali. The existence of K-Pop fandom in Bali can be seen from the increasing number of Korean restaurants. One of them is called K-Pop Station in Denpasar, and the visitors are dominated by a group of young people who are parts of the fandom. Another example is when K-Pop artists visited Bali, the fandom members were excitedly welcoming them at the airport. In 2017, the iKONIC Bali fandom jostled to welcome iKon at Bali's Ngurah Rai International Airport (Soejoethi, 2019). This also happened in 2019 when Super Junior and TVXQ visited Bali (Srikhandi, 2010).

The K-Pop fans are one of the most fanatic fandoms. The dynamic of the K-Pop fandom is also interesting because members of the fandom do not know each other before joining in the community, but they are united by their interests in the Korean music and culture. Through fandom, they are keeping themselves updated to the South Korean entertainment world. The idolizing of K-Pop stars is expressed by buying VCDs, DVDs, various

merchandises, watching concerts, and so forth. It is common for the K-Pop lovers to be very obsessed with things related to their fandom or South Korea in general. This phenomenon makes the Balinese youths know a lot about South Korea, not only the music but also the culture and values.

In the study of International Relations, this phenomenon is important because culture is one elements of soft power possessed by a state. Furthermore, culture can also influence the behavior of others. The focus of this research is to analyze the role of K-Pop fandom in supporting the South Korea's soft power through the dissemination of K-Pop, with the limitation of K-Pop fandom in Bali.

This research referred to several previous studies that have a similar theme, namely the Korean Wave and public diplomacy. The first, a research by Dwirezanti (2012) about the role of the Korean Wave in the South Korea's public diplomacy for the 2005-2010 periods which analyzed Korean Wave programs run in 2 ways, i.e. in one direction by only involving the Korean state as the main actor and in two directions by involving other countries. She found that the Korean government as a state actor is the main actor in making the policies and utilizing the Korean Wave as a diplomatic tool. Her research pointed out on the importance of synergy between government and non-state actors in the success of public diplomacy to produce soft power. However, this research did not specifically discuss K-Pop and the role of non-state actors in supporting the public diplomacy and South Korean culture.

The second, Alam and Nyarimun (2017) studied about K-Pop music as a diplomacy tool in the South Korea's soft power. This research looked at the role of K-Pop in increasing the South Korea's soft power, namely the economic benefits and positive image before the international community. The economic benefits were increasing number of tourists in South Korea and the selling of K-Pop music merchandises or products. In addition, the large number of K-Pop fans who keep up with South Korea and their idols via the internet created the good image of South Korea (Alam & Nyarimun, 2017). Alam and Nyarimun (2017) also explained that the progress of K-Pop music was supported by various parties, including the South Korean government and actors outside the country such as the artist managements, k-pop artists, and internet or social media. This research stated the important role of various actors, both state and non-state to realize the soft power, but it did not examine the role of fandom as non-state actors in the South Korea's public diplomacy.

Lastly, a research by Zahidi (2017) examined a case study of KSCC Community as a cultural diplomacy of the Republic of Korea in Indonesia. The Korean Studies and Culture Center (KSCC) in Malang, Indonesia, is a community aiming to provide a platform for those interested in the Korean

culture. Based on the research, it was found that the members joined the community because they like K-Pop, followed by their liking to the Korean language, history, food, and others. The KSCC community is an evidence of Korean cultural diplomacy (Zahidi, 2017) by disseminating other Korean cultures. This research helped to understand that the community and its members also acted as means and actors in disseminating the Korean culture. However, this research only discussed the Korean culture disseminated through the KSCC community, while no focus on the K-Pop dissemination through fandom was elaborated.

Based on these three literature reviews, there is an urgency to see the role of non-state actors such as fandom in supporting the South Korea's foreign policy. It is interesting that non-state actor such as K-Pop fandom whose members come from other countries also plays a role in the dissemination of K-Pop as a part of the South Korea's diplomacy policy.

This study used descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative method is based on research procedures that produce descriptive data, in the form of written words of observed behavior (Moleong, 2007). The implementation of this descriptive research method is not limited only to the collection and compilation of data but also to analyze and interpret the meaning of the data. The analysis was carried out based on the primary data and secondary data. The primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews prepared in advance. These interviews were conducted with the key informants selected by purposive sampling, namely 44 K-Pop fans in Bali who were the members of various communities and fandom. The informants consisted of 2 men and 42 women with varying age ranges (15-35 years), educational backgrounds, and works. During the interviews, the verification and cross-checking of secondary data were carried out with the information from the informants. In the interviews, the activities, methods of interaction, and the role of fandom that supported the dissemination of K-Pop as a source of the South Korea's soft power were explored. The secondary data were obtained from books, journals, and documents found on the official websites related to the South Korea's cultural diplomacy and the dissemination of K-Pop by fandom.

### **Soft Power: A Conceptual Framework**

In the development of the International Relations discourse, diplomacy no longer focuses only on relations between countries, but also on the relations among international communities. Traditional diplomacy which relies solely on the government in carrying out diplomatic missions is no longer effective in conveying diplomatic messages to another country. Therefore, public diplomacy activities that involve public participation will be necessary to complement traditional diplomacy activities. In

other words, if the traditional diplomacy process is developed through the mechanism of government to government (G to G) relations, public diplomacy emphasizes more on the government to people or even people to people relations (people to people diplomacy). The difference between public and traditional diplomacy is that public diplomacy involves a far wider group of people on both sides (Leonard, Stead & Sweming, 2002).

Public diplomacy shows the increasing role of non-state actors in international relations. According to Geeraerts (1995), non-state actors in international relations includes multinational companies, NGOs, mass media, interest groups, religious groups, and diasporas. This public diplomacy is done not only through formal meetings or interviews with diplomats but also through other ways which poses an opportunity to influence the opinions of other countries and their policies such as through movie actors, art galleries and music, media groups and journalists, communities and non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurs and their production, politicians, political parties and experts, academics, universities, religious leaders, religious groups, and so on (Batora, 2005). This is in line with Mori's explanation that "public diplomacy is not only through the exchange of programs sponsored by the government such as culture and education, but also through non-governmental organizations and non-government activities such as sports, films, books, fashion, popular culture, drama series, international news, and also the internet" (Mori, 2006).

Public diplomacy is aimed at increasing public knowledge about a country, increasing the appreciation of a country's people, increasing a country's relations, and influencing society (Leonard, Stead & Sweming, 2002). Public diplomacy aims to foster positive public opinion from other countries through interaction with the interest groups. In short, public diplomacy is defined as an effort to achieve the national interests through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign audiences. Therefore, public diplomacy is one of the instruments of soft power (Hennida, 2009).

The concept of soft power was first introduced by Joseph S. Nye in 1990. Power according to Nye is the ability to influence others to do what we want. Also, Nye defined soft power as the ability to get what we want from others by generating attraction rather than coercion or payments (Bajora, 2012). Soft power is the ability to change the perception or outlook of others with co-optive means. It is also associated with co-optive power where soft power can influence and shape what the other party or actor wants (Nye, 2005). Co-optive power can be obtained through agenda-setting and attraction. Agenda-setting is the first stage of the overall stages in the policy for the benefit of a state, while attraction is generated from the attractiveness of the country. When a state uses soft power, it will use more interests and sources of power such as culture, ideology, and policy



as the ability to influence or shape what other parties or actors want (Nye, 2005). When the wider communities have a favorable view towards states which use soft power, it will be easier for them to carry out its interests to other countries because they have created a positive image in the eyes of the people from other countries.

Nowadays, soft power is important for a state. In addition to the government and the people, it also involves other actors that have international impacts, such as media (internet), entertainment industry (drama industry, television, music, film, animation, and games), and commercial-product industry (multinational corporations). The actors in soft power are called “soft power referees” and “receivers”. “Referees” are the parties that are sources of referrals that use soft power, while “receivers” are the targets intended by soft power.

**Table 1. Sources, Referees, and Receivers in Soft Power**

TABLE 1  
SOFT POWER SOURCES, REFEREES, AND RECEIVERS

Sources of Soft Power	Referees for Credibility or Legitimacy	Receivers of Soft Power
Foreign policies	Governments, media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)	Foreign governments and publics
Domestic values and policies	Media, NGOs, IGOs	Foreign governments and publics
High culture	Governments, NGOs, IGOs	Foreign governments and publics
Pop culture	Media, markets	Foreign publics

Source: Nye, 2011: 16

The relationship between the sources, “referees”, and “receivers” in soft power can be seen in Table 1. From this table, it can be seen that popular culture is one of the sources of soft power.

Not all popular culture can be used as an instrument of soft power however, because the core of soft power lies in state’s intentions. Specifically, it depends on whether state as a primary actor in International Relations acknowledge the use of pop culture as its tools for soft power. If the government does not recognize it as part of its policies, the instrument does not count as the source of soft power for a country. Pop culture as instrument of cultural diplomacy can be a source of soft power if there is a good relationship between the referees (references to the credibility and legitimacy of soft power), in this case, namely the media and the market and the recipients of soft power, namely the people from other countries.

K-Pop is the South Korea's soft power instrument because it is supported by the government and is officially stated in the public diplomacy policy. In this study, K-Pop can be a source of the South Korea's soft power if there is a good relationship between the referees namely the fandom and the soft power recipients, namely people from other countries, especially Indonesia.

To analyze the role of K-Pop fandom in supporting the South Korea's soft power through the dissemination of K-Pop, the primary and secondary data were analyzed using the concept of public diplomacy and soft power. The concept of public diplomacy is used to describe the role of fandom as a non-state actor in the South Korea's public diplomacy. Public diplomacy was carried out by fandom by using K-Pop as instrument diplomacy. The concept of soft power is used to describe the role of fandom in disseminating K-Pop as part of South Korea's soft power as the reference source that used soft power or as "receivers", i.e. targets to be targeted as the soft power recipients.

### **K-Pop and Fandom as Part of the South Korea's Public Diplomacy Policy**

Nowadays, popular culture is one of the instruments of public diplomacy grabbing the attention of countries in the world, including South Korea. South Korea acknowledges the importance of culture to project its soft power abroad, as stated by the South Korean president during his ruling era in 1993-1998, Kim Young Sam, "We live in an era where culture holds control over the destinies of nations" (Strinati, 2016). The importance of culture outlined in the South Korea's public diplomacy. Through its public diplomacy policy, South Korea introduced, disseminated, and promoted popular cultural products called the Korean Wave or *Hallyu* such as films, dramas, animations, online games, music, fashion, and food. This popular cultural diplomacy is part of the South Korean government's policy to help improve the economy of South Korea (Hat and Iwabuchi, 2008).

Korean-Pop (K-Pop) is part of Korean popular culture utilized by South Korea's government as a tool of its public diplomacy. The success of the dissemination of K-Pop to foreign countries including Indonesia is inseparable from the active role of the government. The South Korean government pay full attention to the promotion of its culture abroad, including K-Pop through cultural diplomacy evidenced by the establishment of the Basic Law for the Promotion of the Cultural Industry in 1999 where it is subsequently incorporated into the official government policies, such as the 2006 White Paper, the Principal goals and Direction of Korean Cultural Diplomacy, and the 2008 White Paper. The culture was also discussed in the Korea's global vision specifically about the Soft Power point which stated that,

The Republic of Korea should seek attributes of a soft power as it builds up its capacities to become a global actor. That is to say, a state that combines the strengths of an advanced global economy and self-reliant defense capability with significant educational, cultural, and artistic potential is accordingly needed and respected by the international community (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Republic of Korea, 2008).

In 2009, the South Korean government launched a cultural diplomacy plan, where it aims to take advantage of the Korean Wave as the instrument of policy to project its soft power (Kim, 2011).

The effort of the South Korean government in supporting the plan has been extraordinary, not only by encouraging its citizen to always innovate but also by providing institutions to accommodate ideas and thoughts related to the dissemination of culture. The institutions related to this are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT), the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST), Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE), Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Korean Cultural and Information Services (KOCIS), Korean Foundation (KF), and Korean Culture and Content Agency (KOCCA). These institutions worked in synergy with each other to support the Korea's cultural diplomacy.

Both the policy and its supporting institutions work together to highlight the importance of popular culture as instrument of the South Korea's diplomacy carried out to promote Korea's national interests, to build the national image of South Korea as a pioneer in the field of culture, to encourage the cooperation with other countries by cultural exchange, and to strengthen the national competitiveness by enhancing national image. In the end, the cooperation was aimed at increasing Korea's soft power. This is consistent with Leonard's explanation that public diplomacy is aimed at increasing public knowledge about a country, increasing the appreciation of a country's people, increasing a country's relations, and influencing society (Leonard, Stead & Sweming, 2002). The Korea's public diplomacy is aimed at fostering the positive public opinion from other countries through the interaction with the interest groups.

Even though none of the policies and institutions specifically regulated K-Pop, K-Pop is an important part of *Hallyu*. Since 2002, the South Korean government has adopted various strategies with K-Pop and K-drama as the core of cultural diplomacy in promoting national image. Some of these included the formation of the Council on Nation Branding in 2009, the adoption of interesting slogans such as "Dynamic Korea", and the appointment of K-Pop stars such as BTOB, EXO, and BTS as tourism



ambassadors. Support provided by the government does not stop at encouragements, but it also provides financial support. About 1% of the national budgets is allocated to the cultural industry in the form subsidies and low-interest loans. Along with that, it also launched institutions to promote and expand K-Pop exports and established a cultural department at various universities. In 2014, the South Korean government had an investment fund of US\$ 1 billion allocated for the expansion of popular culture (Leong, 2014).

The cultural industry policies issued by the government were largely influential on the public diplomacy especially through pop culture. However, the policy alone is not enough to widen the dissemination of K-Pop abroad. The success of the Korea's popular culture diplomacy needs help from other parties. This research found that other actors were involved in the development of K-Pop music so that they could become instrument of diplomacy in the South Korea's soft power. The success of K-Pop as the prominent Korean popular culture is also attributable to the role of non-state actors. According to Seo Min-soo, the current success of K-Pop was mainly attributable to the consumer factors, namely the fans that enjoy and like K-Pop music (Korean Culture and Information Service, 2011).

K-Pop lovers will form a fan group or community called fandom. The dissemination of Korean Waves to various groups around the world has led to various fan communities or fandom in various countries. Fandom is a term used to refer to subcultures, and activities related to fans and hobbies. Fandom is part of a fans' interest in their idols, in which there are certain values and actions or behaviors carried out by the fans and their presence in a group (Lenson, 1992).

A fandom is characterized by the feeling of closeness and belonging because of mutual interests. This in turn, created lots of loyal fans who were distributed into fandom according to their idolized and famous boy band and girl band. K-Pop fandom membership can come from outside South Korea and is not limited to one region or one country, but also from across countries. They interacted with each other online and offline to share information related to K-Pop and actively participating in various activities related to their idols.

Each of these fandoms also has their own names, for example ARMY for BTS' fan group, EXO-L for EXO's fan group, ELF for Super Junior's fan group, Shawol for SHINee's fan group, V.I.P for Bigbang's fan group, BLINK for Blackpink's fan group and many more. K-Pop fans who are the members of a well-known community or fandom are unified. In addition to having the name for each group, the fandom also has a different color as its identity, such as purple for BTS' fandom, rose pink pastel for Girls' Generation's (SNSD) fandom, silver for EXO's fandom, and light yellow for

Bigbang's fandom. This color identity is shown through various attributes such as balloons, shirts, light sticks, banners, and so on. This becomes the uniqueness of K-Pop music.

The important role of fandom as a non-state actor in the dissemination of K-Pop as instrument of the Korean cultures shows that diplomacy has now developed into modern diplomacy in which the government is not the only actors but also non-state actors. Public diplomacy is used by South Korean government to introduce K-Pop. K-Pop itself has shown its role as instrument of diplomacy where it involves not only the state but also non-state actors such as the K-Pop artist management, the entertainment industry, the business world, the K-Pop artists, and fandom as part of the public.

By including public to a cultural diplomacy, popular culture will expand even more widely since other parties other than the government is involved. Public diplomacy has put a highlight in the importance of public's perspective in shaping state's policy. Non-state actors is highly needed as a complementary for the government in order to build mutual understanding between the referees (references to the credibility and legitimacy of soft power) and the receivers of soft power through culture as one of the instrument of diplomacy. The role of fandom as part of the public diplomacy in disseminating South Korean popular culture is not to replace the government's role but rather to support the South Korea's public diplomacy policy.

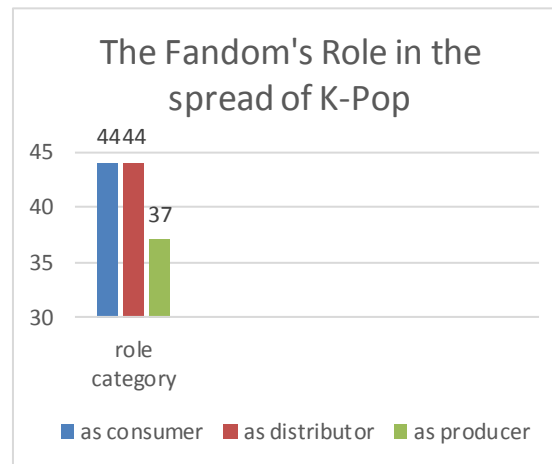
### **The Role of K-Pop Fandom as Referee in the South Korea's Soft Power**

Fandom is basically a social bond. There is something that binds its members, namely the same likings for idols, girl bands, or boy bands. There are no standard rules on how a person can be called a fandom member because fandom membership is voluntary and is based on the attraction to the K-Pop culture. Jennings (2007: 54) stated that the most important thing in the music fan community is to do things together so that they can give a sense of collective identity related to their idols. The activeness of fans can be seen from their participation in the fandom. The K-Pop fan groups form offline and online communities to share their interests. They work together to share knowledge and content related to their idols (Leung, 2012: 69-70). Interestingly, the habit starts from just sharing information to finally creating a special group that can also produce fan content.

K-Pop as a source of the South Korea's soft power cannot be separated from the existence of fandom because the essence of soft power lies in how the state as an actor in International Relations deliberately and consciously uses the instrument. K-Pop as an instrument of cultural diplomacy is seen as a source of the South Korea's soft power when there exists a good relationship between referees (referral to the credibility and legitimacy of soft power) i.e. the media and market with the receivers of the soft power

from other countries. Fandom in Bali acts as a receiver of soft power from other countries, while fandom as a market also acts as a referee.

**Table 1. The fandom's role in the spread of K-Pop**



The role of fandom in disseminating the South Korean culture can be seen through interactions between the fandom members and between fandom and the public. 44 respondents in this research stated that the interaction was carried out in two ways, namely offline and online meeting (fandom members, personal interviews, 2019). They interact through social media such as fan page, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp group, and Line. They also hold a gathering of fellow fans to be able to gather and have fun together. This event is usually held at restaurants serving Korean food. In this event, they carry out all kinds of activities such as raising donations for disaster victims and charities, fans supporting their idols activities, planning birthday projects for their idols, and watch concerts together. They regularly meet and exchange information about their idols.

K-Pop fandom in Indonesia, especially in Bali, acts as receivers when they become consumers, namely K-Pop recipients from the media and foreign public. This can be seen from their online and offline interactions. Online fandom members act as consumers, namely recipients and seekers of information related to K-Pop and their idols. It is evidenced by how fandom members seek information and join communities or fandom to get the latest information about their idols through the fan pages, fandom applications, WhatsApp groups, Line, and other social media.

In addition, K-Pop fandom in Bali has also become a reference (a source of reference for credibility and legitimacy of soft power) in the dissemination of K-Pop when acting as a distributor and producer. In carrying out its role as a distributor, the fandom acts as a source of information. Apart from the idols' official account and fan base, individual

fans are also a source of information for other fans and public in general. They share information and various products related to their idol such as music videos or site links to vote for their idols and share videos related to their idol activities. According to *Swari* (fandom member), the disseminated information was related not only to music and idols but also to South Korean socio-culture such as the Korean learning video with BTS boy band and learning video to cook Korean dishes (*Swari*). This various content is shared through group chat and social media. The goal is that fans and other people can easily access and enjoy the shows or works from their idols. This causes K-Pop and the information related to it to widely spread.

The fandom also plays a role in disseminating the culture through streaming and voting projects. Streaming and voting online projects are important aspects, in addition to their consumption of products related to their idols. Their activities on the internet have a significant influence on their idols' career. The fandom liveliness is very important to the development of the idols. According to Yasintha (2019), this is because the idol popularity is calculated from the hash tags, the number of viewers on YouTube, and how active the fans vote for their idols. This then results in many fans' activity in cyberspace, such as trending topics, the highest search results on search engines, and the most viewed videos on Youtube (Yasintha, 2019).

Pramesti (2019) further explained, "In order to bring my favorite group songs at top of the charts, the fans usually will continue to replay the songs and video clips until they reach the highest position." The time difference in several other countries compared to South Korea do not stop the fans from streaming and voting. Like fandom in Bali, they are willing to stay up all night to replay their idols' music videos or songs and vote for them so that their idols get the first position (Pramesti, 2019). For example, the boy band BTS with the song entitled "Boy with Luv" even managed to break the Guinness World Record as "The Most viewed YouTube music video" and "The Most viewed K-Pop group music video on YouTube". The video has a total of 74.6 million views on the video streaming platform on the first day of its release in just 37 hours, 37 minutes (Kompas, 2019).

In addition to consuming K-Pop products from their favorite girl or boy bands, the fans also produce contents related to K-Pop. Individual fan and fandom often make the cover of song and dance videos and then upload them on YouTube, create blogs or fan pages about their idols which feature fashion style, make-up, and other idols' activities, do costume play, become a photographer in a K-Pop event, sell the photos and merchandises such as posters, key chains, t-shirts, light sticks, and others (Kompas, 2019). Those activities prove their love for their idols. The behaviors of these fandom members play the role of referees, namely as a K-Pop reference source that can eventually disseminate K-Pop and other Korean cultures in general. Through the interaction carried out by the community or fandom members, K-Pop and also other South Korean cultures are disseminated. Fandom is

a facility for expanding the Korean culture. Fandom or community serves as a platform for information sharing, so that Korean culture will be spread faster and more massive. Thus, the fans play a big role in the spread and popularity of K-Pop and other South Korean cultures in the world. As explained by Tanabe et al., "By buying, eating, wearing, watching, listening to, and exchanging ideas about these products fans may, through every day practices dislocate (rather than resist or subvert) political and economic spaces." (Otmazgin and Ben-Yari, 2012: 20). It can be said that fans are the direct recipients of the cultural diplomacy which eventually will also affects politics and economy.

Soft power is important for South Korea so the state involves non-state actors who have an impact on the public internationally, one of which is the fan groups. Referring to the concept of sources, referees, and receivers in soft power, according to Nye, K-Pop fandom plays its role as a referee and receiver in South Korean soft power. When associated with K-Pop as a cultural instrument in projecting South Korea's soft power, fandom acts as a referee. K-Pop fandom, which began as soft power receiver, also plays a role as referee through the roles of distributor and producer.

### **Conclusion**

K-Pop is one of the popular cultures which serve as a source of South Korea's soft power. In expanding soft power, it requires the involvement of non-state actors who have an impact on the public internationally, one of which is the fan groups. When it comes to popular culture as a part of the public diplomacy, it can be said that K-Pop fandom is influential. Fandom as a non-state actor can be a diplomatic agent that establishes relationship through the interaction of fandom members.

K-Pop fans in Indonesia, especially in Bali, are not only consumers (K-Pop recipients who come from the media and foreign public), but also referees as a source of reference for the credibility and legitimacy of soft power when these fans join the K-Pop community and fandom. The role of referees can be seen when the fandom acts as a distributor and producer through online and offline interactions with other fandom members and the public in general. The role of producers is carried out by making video covers of both songs and dances which are then uploaded on YouTube, creating blogs or fan pages about their idols' fashion styles, make-up, as well as activities, doing costume play, becoming a photographer in a K-Pop event, and selling the photos and merchandises such as posters, key chains, t-shirts, light sticks, and others. With regard to the production, fandom also disseminates the culture through streaming and voting projects.

K-Pop has a large fandom/community that comes from various countries and participates in the dissemination of other Korean cultures. Hence, the fandom or community does not force every member to purposively disseminate the Korean popular culture or even like it. The



dissemination of the Korean culture happens because of the fans' love for their idols. Fandom is influential not only in the K-Pop consumption, but also in the production and distribution of the K-Pop content. This has a major impact on the dissemination of the Korean culture. Unconsciously, they are not only a consumer, but also actors in supporting the spread of South Korea's soft power abroad.

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