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# From Celebrity Fandom to Korean Brands Consuming: The Extensive Lifestyle of 'Wannable' Fans in Jakarta

Raden Roro Nisrina Salma Hanifah<sup>1</sup> and Dessy Kania<sup>2\*</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The current phenomenon sees that South Korea's popular culture is growing, so it has so many fans scattered around the world, including in Indonesia. Many K-Pop fans in Indonesia will show a variety of behaviors shown by K-Pop fans so that they can be assessed the stages in which fans they are to their K-Pop artists. Wannable itself is a fandom name of the South Korean group called Wanna One and Wanna One itself has been disbanded due to his expired contract period. The study aims to find out how celebrity worship behaviors and parasocial interactions on the lifestyle of K-Pop fans. The approach used in this study is qualitative with phenomenological methods and uses an interview technique in depth with one-person triangulator and four people informants. The results of this study show that the four informants who are a Wannable are in the intermediate stage and level in the conduct of an intense-personal idol in celebrity worship and identification attraction in parasocial interactions. This is because they are still rationally minded and able to position themselves as a fan. It can be known that Indonesian fans are not too fanatic with idols.

## Keywords

Celebrity worship; para social interaction; radical fandom; Korean pop culture; Korean product brand

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## INTRODUCTION

Korean Wave or Hallyu is a phenomenon in which popular culture originating from South Korea is present, grows, and develops in Indonesian society. In Indonesia, the Korean Wave has been known since the early 2000s. Since then, Indonesian have become interested in getting to know about Korean culture and also K-Pop.

K-Pop is a type of music from South Korea that focuses on pop music combined with dynamic dance movements (Nastiti, 2020). As

quoted by SINDONEWS.com, Jakarta 29/09/2019 - "Based on the report of *The Korean Times*, out of a total of 73.12 million K-Pop fans spread throughout the world, Indonesia is the third country with the most number of K-Pop fans around the world."

Every K-Pop idol has a different fan name and is commonly referred to as Korean Pop Lovers. Korean Pop Lovers are incorporated in a fandom, the designation of the fandom itself has become the fan identity of the idol artist he likes because the fandom itself shows which idol fans

<sup>1</sup> Viu, 6/F, Goldin Financial Group Centre, 17 Kai Cheung Road, Kowloon Bay Hong Kong, Hong Kong 852, HK

<sup>2</sup> Department of Communication Science, Universitas Bakrie, Jl. HR Rasuna Said Kav. C-22, Jakarta, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author: [dessykania@gmail.com](mailto:dessykania@gmail.com)

like and support. Wanna One is one of the boy groups that have been active since 2017, they are a temporary group because it only has a 1.5 year contract period, but Wanna One is one of the boy groups with a large number of fans in Indonesia and in the world. Wanna One itself has a fandom with the name Wannable which is a combination of the group names, namely Wanna One and Able, which means that they can achieve whatever they want.

As a fan, buying items related to his idol is a form of support for idols (Pertwi, 2013). The feeling of happiness when meeting an idol artist directly makes fans feel closeness to the idol they like. Fans will feel that they have a close relationship with idol artists, it's called a parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction is also related to the term celebrity worship because at certain stages in celebrity worship it is shown parasocial interaction. Consumption of watching concerts carried out by Wanna One fans will have their own views that can be seen from their lifestyle as K-Pop fans which will provide their own pleasure.

There are fans who can overreact at the idols but there are also fans who are able to put themselves where they should be and not over react at the idols. Because of this in this study we can see how K-Pop fans react to their idol is absolutely different at each other fans and they are on the different stage at celebrity worship and parasocial interactions stage, not always being a K-Pop fan is a negative thing.

Therefore, this study uses the theory and concept of lifestyle from Solomon M. R., Celebrity Worship from McCutheon. L. E., and Parasocial interactions from Horton, D., Wohl. R. R. to know the fans reaction when they do a 'fangirling' thing in their life. The goal is to know the lifestyles, the celebrity worship stage, and parasocial interaction stage from a Wannable's fandom.

## **METHOD**

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with phenomenological research

methods. Phenomenological research seeks to understand the meaning of various events and human interactions in specific situations. Bogdan & Biklen, 1982 (Sutopo, 2002: 27) explains that the phenomenological approach emphasizes various subjective aspects of human behavior in order to understand how and what meaning they form from various events in their daily lives.

To get credible data, there is one triangulator who is a K-Pop influencer and four informants who are Wannables. They were chosen because according to this research which required a K-pop fan, had attended concerts, bought merchandise, and joined a community. Data collection technique using two ways, Online Data and Online Research. The data analysis technique used in this qualitative research is the Interactive Model from Miles & Huberman (in Sugiyono, 2012), as follows: (1) Data reduction, (2) Data Display, (3) Conclusion and Verification (Conclusion Drawing and Verification).

In this study, the concepts used by the author will be described in dimensions and indicators, there are: (1) Celebrity Worship with three dimension (Entertainment-Social, Intense-Personal, and Borderline-Pathological), (2) Parasocial Relations with three dimensions (Task Attraction, Identification Attraction, and Romantic Attraction), (3) Lifestyles with AIO dimensions (Activities, Interest, and Opinions).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Extensive Lifestyle of Wannable Fans**

The lives of dedicated fans, or "wannables," of a particular group or individual have become a fascinating area of study, shedding light on the profound impact that popular culture can have on the daily routines and behaviors of ardent supporters. (Maltby et al., 2004) These fans often exhibit a deep psychological attachment to their chosen celebrity, with their sense of identity and fulfillment becoming intricately tied to their fandom.

K-Pop fans have activities that they will usually do together with other fans, such as

creating events to celebrate birthdays or K-Pop idols anniversary, making donations for people who need, attend K-Pop concerts when they come to Indonesia, and buy merchandise with a big scale.

Seeing from how K-Pop fans who have different economic backgrounds make each of them will have different forms of fangirling activities. The average K-Pop fan in Indonesia will collect money in advance by saving, so they can carry out the activities that previously mentioned, this is what makes the lifestyle of K-Pop fans with individuals in general different. K-Pop fans have their own 'saving' pattern so they can carry out their activities as a fan and they can manage their money because of that, like one of informant tell about:

*“Actually it’s not like an activity, but when I become a K-Pop fan, I can manage my own money. I have a target to achieve with that. Everyday, my expenses are regular, and I know what I want to achieve, and I can be more enthusiastic about saving my money. Then my fangirling life can be smooth as I want.”* (Interview with Izza, July 15th 2020).

Based on what informants say, it can be known that being a K-Pop fan can make a positive impact as long as they can handle what they're doing and always do a positive thing in their life. Saving money is one of the positive activities that K-Pop fans do.

With the activities held in Indonesia regarding Korean culture, then a culture was formed among K-Pop fans which began to be applied by K-Pop fans in Indonesia. One of them is a café event where initially this activity was only carried out by fans in South Korea, but in 2018 this event became booming and began to be carried out by many K-Pop fans in Indonesia, including Wannable itself. In addition, if K-Pop fans hold a café event, they will not get the slightest profit, they will only have expenses without any income from holding a café event. But they are always happy with what they do. It's like one of informant said, that:

*“We like to hold café events. Usually the committee is searched for via Twitter and I like to be the part of the list to become the committee. Besides that, I also like to go to café events with my friends, which are usually there once a week and of course that was a different event, depending on who the member, group, or celebrate something. I can relieve my stressed feelings too because I can meet my friends.”* (Interview with Vivi, July 14th 2020).

Based on what the informant said about the event, the café event itself is usually only in South Korea. It is only Korean fans who always hold a café event, but in 2018, the café event culture is begin start in Indonesia.



**Figure 1.** Café events that Wannables (Stars Sparkle Community) held in Indonesia when one of Wanna One's member had a birthday

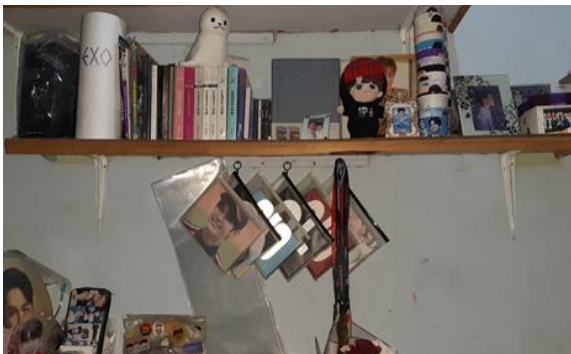
This figure is one of the café events that K-Pop fans do in Indonesia. The café event can be created by individuals or by a community group, but generally they are held in groups. An activity like this showed that K-Pop fans had a different lifestyle with other people because the café event itself can be held once a week which means some fans will have a different routine from other people and they will have special expenses to visit or create the café event.

### **Celebrity Worship and Korean Brands**

Celebrity worship is described as an obsessive and excessive affection towards idols by fans, creating a one-sided imaginary relationship. This emotional influence significantly affects fans' perceptions of brands or products, leading to a

strong urge to purchase items associated with their idols (Irvani et al., 2022).

In the celebrity worship stage, k-pop fans in Indonesia stop at the intermediate or intense personal stage, this is because the most prominent behavior is when they are willing to spend a lot of money to buy various kinds of merchandise related to their idols or buy expensive concert tickets and they have attended concerts many times starting from Wanna One until when former members of Wanna One did their solo activities. In the second stage, Wannables did not hesitate to buy merchandise from Wanna One because they felt they had appreciated Wanna One's hard work in making their album. Because they feel there is a bonding or similarity with the idol, often they will buy items related to their idol, whether it is the item used by their idol or even the food consumed by their idol.



**Figure 2.** Some Wanna One merchandise that on of the informant have

This figure showed that Wannables usually collect all the albums of Wanna One because they know that Wanna One is a temporary group so in the future there will not be another album of Wanna One and beside that unofficial merch such as slogan, doll, and cup holder also on their collection. Collecting all of this makes them happy and feels like they always support Wanna One members.

Being a K-Pop fan not only makes them like celebrities, but automatically K-Pop fans will be carried away with the culture, from the country of South Korea itself and the most prominent thing is seen from how they will use the product

brands advertised or used by these celebrities. In addition, K-Pop fans will indirectly have a "Korean" lifestyle, in the sense that they will imitate language or behavior, buy and use products originating from South Korea. That way, the value of celebrity favors in Korea will be in line with the nation's brand value, tourism brand value, country-of-origin image value for Korean products and also the global brand value for Korean products. Nation brand itself means that there are those who can be used as the identity of a country which will then make it an identity and have their own uniqueness or differentiator. Like South Korea, which made K-Pop its nation brand, considering that the entertainment industry is one of the main factors that makes South Korea attractive to various countries. South Korea is building a nation brand through the global export of K-Pop culture, including in Indonesia.

The development of Korean culture in Indonesia made many Korean products enter Indonesia. The rise of Korean culture, often referred to as the "Hallyu wave," has had a significant impact on consumer behavior in Indonesia. As Korean music, television shows, and celebrities have gained widespread popularity, Indonesian consumers have increasingly embraced Korean products, particularly those endorsed by their favorite K-pop idols. (Mineri & Purnomo, 2023) (Fibrianto et al., 2020)

The global cosmetic industry has experienced significant growth in recent years, with the market projected to reach USD 380.2 billion by 2027 and a 5.3% annual increase (Sudaryanto et al., 2022).

Most of the fans use Korean products because their idol artists are brand ambassadors of these products. The selection of a brand ambassador not only has an influence on small circus on a brand, but also plays a role in the increase in the image or selling power of a product (Jamil, 2024).

AS an example, Wanna One, who at that time became a brand ambassador for skin care

products, namely Innisfree, so that fans want to buy products that Wanna One also advertises. Even though the Wanna One version of Innisfree is not sold directly in Indonesia, many Wannables buy it with the help from people who do open the service to buy Wanna One thing in Korea and then sell them to international fans, so even if the product is not launched in Indonesia, Wannable can still own it.



**Figure 3.** The situation of Innisfree store when they have Wanna One product version

Based on figure 3, Innisfree is a skin care product from South Korea and at that time Wanna One is one of the models for Innisfree product. When customers buy the item, they will get Wanna One's poster as the gift. Although only a poster for the gift, hundreds of fans are known to be willing to queue to get the poster of Wanna One. In the circulating photo, fans, mostly girls, are lined up along the street near the Innisfree store. It showed that because of the K-Pop idol, some product can easily sold out because of the fans that can buy one item in large quantities.

Not only skin care, consuming Korean food also makes K-Pop fans feel satisfied that he has tried the food consumed by his idol artist. Foods that are usually consumed by Korean celebrities in general are tteokbokki, ramyeon, jajangmyeon, bokkeumbap, kimchi jjigae, odeng, bibimbap, kimbap and so on. In Indonesia, there

are many restaurants and small shops that sell specialties from South Korea.



**Figure 4.** Korean Street Food

Figure four is a street food that usually showed on the drama or reality show Korea. This street food always makes the fan feel curious about the flavor because when Korean artists eat these foods, they always make them look so delicious. Because of this Korean food can spread easily to other countries, even in Indonesia itself there are so many Korean stores or Korean restaurants that sell Korean food ranging from street food or heavy food. Korean food is becoming a trend in Indonesia because there are so many Korean fans buying the food, and then it becomes a habit of Korean fans, whether it is for K-Drama fans or K-Pop fans.

### **Parasocial Interaction Wannable Fandom**

In the ever-evolving landscape of modern media and entertainment, the concept of parasocial interaction has become increasingly prevalent, particularly in the context of fan-celebrity relationships. Parasocial interaction, defined as the illusionary experience where spectators perceive media-mediated representations, such as celebrities or influencers, as engaging in a reciprocal relationship with them, has been a subject of growing interest among researchers (Buvár et al., 2022) (Maltby et al., 2004) (Lou,

2021) (Kim & Kim, 2022). The rise of social media platforms has further amplified this phenomenon, as these digital spaces enable more direct and immediate interactions between fans and their idols. (Kim & Kim, 2022)

Wannable fandom, as a distinct subculture within the broader K-pop fan community, exhibits unique characteristics that reflect the intricate nature of parasocial relationships. The emotional connection between fans and their idols in K-pop boybands, such as Wanna One, is often described as a parasocial relationship, where fans develop a sense of intimacy and attachment to their favorite celebrities despite the one-way nature of the interaction (Yan & Yang, 2020) (Yugiputri & Halim, 2022).

With the understanding of parasocial interactions as one-way interactions, hallucinatory feelings can also be said to be familiar to K-Pop fans. This is because only fans have different dreams about K-Pop idols. Although at the level of parasocial interaction the four informants did not reach the romantic attraction level for reasons previously explained. But even so, the feeling of hallucinations about an interaction with Wanna One cannot be denied considering how the four informants felt that there was a similarity between themselves and their favorite members, resulting in feelings of hallucination or just wishful thinking. It's like one of informant tell about:

*“Because I'm falling deeply in love with Jihoon and Guanlin, I only think of them as younger siblings. I mean the two of them are below my age so I would just think of them as younger brothers. Think of them as a younger sibling that I like and someone I will always support.”*  
(Interview with Verina, July 16th 2020)

K-Pop fans usually think that they are treating their favorite member based on the idols age, this is because when you love a younger idol you just only can treat them as their age, the fantasy cannot go too far. But when it comes to older idols, they usually think that the idols are their boyfriend/girlfriend. Most K-Pop fans feel that

way, but not all K-Pop fans think their idol is their sibling or boyfriend/girlfriend.

They often have a high imagination when there is an update from their favorite member so they will respond in various ways. For example, quote some tweet on Twitter that contains an expression of their feelings when they see uploads from K-Pop artists themselves. Things like this can be called parasocial interactions, considering that only fans feel their own pleasure when content is uploaded from these K-Pop idols. They assume that there is intimacy, but it is not. This is due to the increasing intensity of K-Pop fans who tend to want to know everything about K-Pop idols so that they can ignore the boundaries between reality and imagination.



Figure 5. A example of K-Pop fan when their react to K-Pop idols update on Twitter

This figure is one example that K-Pop fans usually do when their fav is updating something. On that figure a former member Wanna One, Bae Jinyoung with his new group called CIX uploaded a photo teaser for their new album. The fan is reacting to the photo with a tweet “Omg Bae Jinyoung is really handsome. My son looks more mature, I’m crying \*with sobbing and love emoticon\*”, from that tweet we can see the K-Pop fan called Bae Jinyoung as her son and of course something like this only K-Pop fans who feels meanwhile the idols don't even know anything. The parasocial interaction can simply be seen from something like this.

## CONCLUSION

This research concludes that in the lifestyle of K-Pop fans, there are routine activities that are only done by K-Pop fans so that it makes a different lifestyle. The Wannable lifestyle is not only related to Wanna One, but also develops into buying behavior towards a brand and also culture from Korea. The celebrity worship stage experienced by Wannables in Indonesia, stops at the borderline-pathological stage because of the existence of socio-cultural differences that make Wannables limit or refrain from crossing boundaries in carrying out their hobby activities. However, in their home country or South Korea, there are many fans who are at the borderline-pathological stage because they have crossed the line as a fan, they are called sasaeng. The level of parasocial interaction experienced by the informant who is a Wannabe is also only at the attraction identification level because they feel there are some similarities with Wanna One members, this will usually happen when a fan already has a lifestyle or habit where they will find out information about Wanna One. The limitation of research in this study is that there are changes in the research process and flow due to the Covid-19 pandemic which is still quite high in Indonesia so that the data obtained is less diverse. Besides that, the lifestyle of the Wanna One fandom, whether it was when Wanna One was still active or had disbanded. Celebrity worship behavior can only find Wannables who only reach the intense-personal level. Therefore, it is hoped that further research can find a fan who is indeed at an extreme stage in the celebrity worship stage or parasocial interaction itself, because a fan must have dreamed of being lover, even a wife of a K-Pop idol and fans who do everything they can do to form romance with idols.

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