

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Problem

Korean Pop or shorten as K-pop has become the leading cultural products of Korean cultural industries in the latest years. K-pop has begun to gain attention from worldwide audience as soon as there is new growth potential in K-pop with well-composed music and multi-talented singers, such as Psy as well as idol groups since 2008. As a result, South Korea receives an increase from only \$16.4 million revenue in 2008 to \$360 million in 2015 (Yoon & Jin, 2017). The significant increase becomes a proof that K-pop industry has notably influenced global audience into consuming K-pop media contents and messages.

Three generations of the Korean Wave have existed in spite of the contradictions between the time periods. The first generation of the Korean Wave, Hallyu 1.0, happened in 1997 to mid-2000s. The second generation of the Korean Wave, Hallyu 2.0, occurred in mid-2000s to mid-2010s. The third generation of the Korean Wave, Hallyu 3.0, follows in mid-2010s until present (Song, 2020). Each generation of Korean Wave signifies the constant change and development of the cultural industry as well as its products.

The Korean Wave has developed into a global phenomenon where the popularity of Korean popular culture and its cultural products rapidly gain worldwide attention outside of South Korea (Jin & Yoon, 2017). The growth

of Indonesian K-pop fans is inseparable from the roles of Indonesian media (Zahidi, 2017). Based on the recent data provided by Twitter from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, there were 7.5 billion tweets about K-pop on Twitter platform. Regarding the top 20 countries with the most number of K-pop fans on Twitter, Indonesia holds the first rank on the chart, followed by Japan, Philippines, South Korea, the United States of America, Brazil, Thailand, Mexico, Malaysia, India, Turkey, Argentina, United Kingdom, France, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Vietnam, Peru, and lastly Colombia. Indonesia also attains the most number of K-pop related tweets from the year 2020 to 2021 (Kim, 2021). With the most number of K-pop fans and the most number of tweets about K-pop according to Twitter, Indonesia takes the lead in the dissemination of K-pop culture.

Characteristic	Share of respondents
Very popular	59%
Quite Popular	29.8%
Popular only for a few people	9.4%
Not really	1.8%

Figure 1.1 Popularity of South Korean Pop Music (K-Pop) in Indonesia in 2019
Source: (Statista Research Department, 2021)

A report released by Statista Research Department in August 2021 states that 59% out of 500 Indonesian respondents aged 15-59 years old considered K-pop as very popular in Indonesia. The survey was done in Indonesia from October 4, 2019 to October 20, 2019 through online panel with the question “How popular is K-pop in your country at the moment?”.

Supported with 29.8% of the total respondents who deemed K-pop to be quite popular in Indonesia, it is no doubt that K-pop has thrived in Indonesia among its citizens.

Fans are seen as highly enthusiastic with strong passion and partisan as well as intense emotional attachment of devotion toward an object or a person (Wang, 2020). Many K-pop fans have common characteristics in terms of media consumption and participation. Thus, they join themselves together in a fandom. Still, they are not absolutely homogenous but they may possess several similar characteristics that bring them closer to each other. The fanatics typically absolutize their fandom and its ideologies where they presuppose there is an essential connection between their fandom and the external organizations of meaning (Grossberg, 1997). As a result of this notion, fanaticism may establish certain norms in the fandom as a way to connect with both the idol's and the fan's lived identities.

1.2. Identification of the Problem

As K-pop fans keep emerging and growing in size across the world, they develop their own fan culture. Culture is the way of life through the representation of symbols that individuals share among each other a group, consisting of language, norms, beliefs, habits, and so forth (Kurylo, 2013). Thus, fan culture refers to the customs and the social behavior of fans in a particular fandom which are constructed to form a group identity.

The media industry is always searching for ways in keeping fans' engagement to ensure there is constant loyalty to the media and the object it portrays (Chin, 2016). Fan culture develops from a shared enjoyment between fans of a particular popular culture (Duffett, 2013). In K-pop fan culture, there are a number of practices conducted by K-pop fans to stay loyal to their idol. One of the practices is merchandise collection.

K-pop has grown beyond delivering music but also offering collectible items for fans to purchase. Most K-pop albums provide merchandises other than the CDs themselves. An album usually consists of CDs, photobook, lyric book, *lomo* cards, and photocards. K-pop fans commonly seek for photocards when they first unbox the album package. Photocards are printed with K-pop idols' selfies with their autograph on the backside. K-pop fans may trade these photocards and exchange them with fellow K-pop fans. The photobook is a compilation of K-pop idol group photoshoots of teaser pictures and promotional pictures. Several other additional pictures are printed as *lomo* cards or are included in the lyrics book combined with the photobook (HowExpert & Ho, 2017). These small merchandises are inserted in each album for every purchase as complementary items for fans to collect.

K-pop fans commonly collect idols' photocards whom they are enthusiastic to complete their collection of a favorite member or all members of a group. It becomes a shared practice among K-pop fans to trade photocards with other fans in order for them to get their favorite group member's photocard (Meinawati, et al., 2021). Some K-pop fans only like one person in the group

which is often defined as *solo stan* whereas those who support all members of the group equally without picking certain members as their favorites are included in *One True (OT)* followed by the total number of members of the group (Safitri, 2018). Either *solo stan* or *One True (OT)*, both represent how fans incorporate feelings of affection in their *fangirling* lifestyle.

It is common for K-pop fans to hold cup sleeve events to celebrate K-pop idols' birthdays, anniversaries, comebacks, or achievements (Andina, Barokah, & Satriawan, 2020). K-pop idols' comebacks can be understood as the release of a new album or a new single after they take a break or hiatus (Lee, 2019). Cup sleeve sets come with different items of merchandises which are unofficially produced by individual fans or fan bases. They use images of their idols on cup sleeve, photocard, or polaroid designs for euphoria which are then sold at certain price.

What undermines the development of fan culture is the notion of participatory culture where consumers of media also act as contributors or producers (prosumers) in mass communication (Jenkins, 2006). Media studies and cultural studies may help in understanding K-pop fan culture where it puts emphasize on the process human communication taking place through a certain media to develop a shared cultural behavior (Williams, 2004). For that reason, this research will focus on how fan culture develops in a fandom community, specifically the practice of merchandise collection in NCTzen fandom, as a part of participatory culture influenced by the role of mass communication.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

This research attempts to describe how merchandise collection practices are conducted as a manifestation of K-pop fan culture of NCTzen in Indonesia. The activities of merchandise collection among NCTzen includes photocard trading and fan-produced merchandises.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to uncover how K-pop fan culture of NCTzen in Indonesia is manifested through merchandise collection practices. Photocard trading and fan-produced merchandises create a fan culture among fans of NCT boyband which is able to be analyzed in terms of its process.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is to give insights and to inform the readers about how merchandise collection practices become a part of K-pop fan culture of NCTzen in Indonesia.

1.6. Limitation of the Study

This research is limited to personal reasons of NCT boyband's fans or better known as NCTzen which consciously or unconsciously engage in K-pop fan culture by practicing merchandise collection activities. How these K-pop fan culture practices in other areas in Indonesia may or may not differ according to personal interests.

1.7. Organization of the Study

The writing structure of this research is comprised of:

1.1.1. Chapter I

This chapter describes the conditions that occur in social-cultural context regarding K-pop fan culture. It is followed by an interest from the researcher to study the gap between what should apply (*das sollen*) and what happens in society (*das sein*) through problem statement.

1.1.2. Chapter II

This chapter contains the scope of the proposed topic of K-pop fan culture of NCTzen manifested through merchandise collection practices. In relation to the study, the object of research can be understood as where the researcher aims to build a context related to the topic of research.

1.1.3. Chapter III

This chapter consists of literature review of the model used to study merchandise collection practices of NCTzen in Indonesia as a sociocultural behavior in K-pop fan culture. It becomes a tool for deep analysis to answer the research problem while paying attention to the approach used.

1.1.4. Chapter IV

This chapter explains the qualitative approach used by the researcher to study K-pop fan culture of NCTzen in Indonesia regarding merchandise collection practices. The reasons for using certain approach is also described.

1.1.5. Chapter V

This chapter elaborates the raw data from the qualitative data collection methods without additions or subtractions of the data. Analytical tools are used to interpret the raw data obtained about merchandise collection practices as a shared behavior of K-pop fan culture. The discussion answers the research problem.

1.1.6. Chapter VI

This chapter concludes the answers to the research question asked by the researcher. Concrete opinions and inputs are stated to develop the topic of research in the future.