KOREAN SOFT POWER: K-POP MEDIA CONSUMPTION

THROUGH THE LENS OF ATTRACTION PSYCHOLOGY

by

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A THESIS

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This research examines whether attraction psychology can be used as a lens to understand the transcultural consumption of K-pop music, a culture medium I identify as a South Korean soft power resource. A tertiary qualitative content review of prior scholarship containing interviews with non-Korean K-pop fans in a variety of different countries was conducted. In order to perform a comparative analysis, the articles selected are studies about non- Korean K-pop fans in general, and BTS fans specifically. Using content analysis in Dedoose, articles were coded for elements of attraction including proximity, similarity and reciprocity, all of which have been determined by prior psychological research to be crucial in forming and maintaining relationships. Positive dissimilarity was also coded for since it came up in one source specific to parasocial relationships. From the coding, significant evidence was found that fans experience satisfaction of these elements of attraction through their consumption of K-pop. There were also differences in what codes applied in certain populations and between sources specific to BTS versus more generally about K-pop. In probing these comparisons this research suggests a further investigation into how soft power's attraction is defined and may function on an individual level.

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Introduction

My research combines three interdisciplinary topics—K-pop, soft power and attraction psychology—to examine international media consumption and fanship. K-pop music, and the Korean Wave (Hallyu) that it is a part of, is the media I have chosen to situate this research in because of the growing popularity over the last several decades and my own interest in this media and country. Soft power is important to this research because it informs the larger implications of media consumption and the power of transnational communication and fandoms. Moreover, soft power resources have the potential to be non-hegemonic. Therefore, research surrounding this topic has the potential to be relevant to nations that are not global powers and looking to develop their influence within the global sphere. K-pop is a prime example of this because of the size of the fandoms their groups generate, their international influence, and the amount of revenue these groups provide for South Korea. Attraction psychology is the lens I choose to explore K-pop fanship because of the potential it has to inform on the behavior potentially underlying soft power political dynamics. K-pop has been explored academically within psychology (Laffan, 2021; S. Lee et al., 2021), but not to my knowledge specifically within the realm of interpersonal attraction.

The vast and varied research that has emerged surrounding K-pop and Hallyu, particularly in recent years, has made it evident that K-pop and its success is marked by a number of elements including but not limited to: Orientalism[1], fetishization, K-pop's use of hybridization, the Asian American model minority status in the US and other countries, and the crisis of masculinity in America met by the soft masculinity performed by K-pop idols (Song &

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[1] Orientalism is a concept explained by Edward Said in his book, *Orientalism,* published in 1978. In his book, he describes Orientalism as a way that the West often considers those from Asian or Middle Eastern descent which is often riddled with stereotypes such as the East being exotic or dangerous (Said, 1978).

Velding, 2020). It is because of all these elements and more that it has been able to become a successful soft power resource for South Korea. But I haven't seen a psychological take that looks specifically at interpersonal attraction psychology or one that aims to truly define soft power's "attraction" in relation to the individual. There have likely not been many psychological approaches to this topic because it may be considered simplifying a complicated, multidimensional system that psychology alone cannot explain. As well as the fact that a wide range of prior research (North & Hargreaves, 2009; Hanser, 2010) has been conducted on the psychological benefits of music (as cited in J. H. Lee et al., 2021). Nevertheless, for the purposes of creating a full understanding of why and how K-pop has been successful as a soft power resource and how soft power works, it is important to break down the attraction of K-pop on a psychosocial level. There are definitely larger power systems at play which could be further explained by a political science approach. However, the optimist in me hopes that if more people understood soft power and how it functions, other non-hegemonic cultures could create their own media soft power resources that could be successful on a transnational level.

   With that in mind, the overall aim of this thesis is to investigate the extent to which fans' transnational consumption of K-pop can be explained through a psychological framework, specifically several principles of attraction. While none of this research can be deemed causal, I hope to investigate the following questions:

1. In prior scholarship on transnational and transcultural K-pop fans, what evidence is there that the principles of attraction—proximity, reciprocity, and similarity—can be used to describe their consumption of this media?

2. If there is evidence in prior research, which principles of attraction are satisfied most frequently in this consumption? How do certain principles interact when they occur at the same time?

3. If the prior scholarship is specific to BTS fans, what differences, if any, are there in the evidence of attraction taking place?

I hypothesize that through my analysis I will find some evidence of the principles of attraction being satisfied. Moreover, previous research will likely provide evidence of some interaction between one or more elements. I also expect there to be differences in attraction that can be seen evidenced based on what population research was done in and whether the source was specific to BTS versus more general.

Background

The Korean Wave (Hallyu)

There is considerable literature on the Korean Wave (Hallyu) both describing the process through which the media reached global markets, and attempting to explain what made this content so globally popular. Jun (2017) and others explain the wave's various aspects in terms of phases. Hallyu is explained as spanning four phases, each stage representing a different element of Korean cultural exports. In 1997, the first "phase" began and was focused on Korean dramas and other visual content (Jin, 2018, p. 405; M. Kim, 2022). The second phase within this definition is K-pop, which really started to take off in the early to mid-2000s (Jun, 2017). Other sources explained the stages of Hallyu slightly differently. For example, Choi & Maliangkay (2014) explains the phases by not assigning a single medium to each stage, but instead looking more at the global reach of Hallyu within each phase. Scholars such as Sung (2010) look at Hallyu's spread to outside of Korea and shine light on the inner workings of their entertainment companies. Sung (2010) looks at Hallyu in Taiwan and compares it to how Korea and Taiwan reacted to and consumed Japanese media and popular cultural exports. Moreover, the importance of media consumption in international relations is seen in the banning of Japanese content until 2004. This was due to tensions between Japan and Korea related to their post-colonial relationship (Sung, 2010). Overall, there doesn't appear to be a consensus within scholarly literature on what "stage" Hallyu is in currently, but the rise of digital technology is credited with increasing Hallyu's reach and influence in Western markets (Laffan, 2021).

Hallyu is often marked by the support it receives from the Korean government and it has been often used as a form of public and foreign diplomacy. In 1993, Korea's first civilian president in 60 years was inaugurated. With it came a greater push toward popular culture and

cultural exports which were invested in as a solution to the major financial crisis the nation faced (Choi, & Maliangkay, 2014, p. 3). Public diplomacy was made a priority in Korean diplomacy during the Lee Myung-Bak administration between 2008 and 2013 (Sevin et al., 2020, p. 98). The goal of these increased efforts was to improve the country's image. With these changes, Hallyu and K-pop began to occupy the role of a brand representing the nation as a whole. The success of these efforts is evident in a 2020 study that looked at the perception of South Korea via Twitter. The results were a domination of K-pop-related messages followed by security and global politics topics (Sevin et al., 2020, p. 106). Though these were excluded from the "official network" analyzed in the study, the influence of Hallyu and the government's use of it to push other messages was still evident (Sevin et al., 2020 p. 113).

The big questions that seem to be being asked by academics currently is why and how did K-pop, and Korean popular culture in general, become as widely popular as it is today. Some research analyzes technology systems or the marketing behind certain idol groups whereas other research approaches it from a psychosocial perspective analyzing group fandom and individual behavior. For example, Jin (2018) credits "technological affordances in TV-less cultural activities, a branding of the impurity of local popular culture, and freedom of popular culture" to its success (p. 417). A significant number of studies have also been conducted in other countries where general Korean media consumption has increased to try to determine why this media appeals to these specific international audiences. For example, Yoon (2016) investigated the rise of K-drama consumption in Eastern Europe including Romania and Hungary. This study found that the cultural values that the dramas conveyed influenced the consumers perception of South Korea overall and subjects vocalized wanting similar values for their own nations as well as media that reflected this (Yoon, 2016). Another study looked at Hallyu in Taiwan. Taiwan was a

market in which Hallyu historically struggled to compete with Japanese soft power resources and experienced tension due to Korea's relations with China. However, Korean media consumption in Taiwan experienced a rise between 1999 and 2009 (Sung, 2010). The factors identified as potentially accounting for this shift were confidence, the quality and an evident group identity and nationalism conveyed through Korean media content (Sung, 2010).

Other research has focused on transnational reception to specifically K-pop. Transnationalization is considered the "movement toward integration at the international level" (Mattelart, 2000, p. 61). Most often these studies interrogate what it is about Korean media that appeals to these international audiences (Oh & Chae, 2013). Others correlate Korean media consumption to participation in local social change movements or alternative culture (Koo, 2020). Such research has been done all across the world including Israel, Laos, Spain, Iran and Indonesia to name a few (Lyan & Levkowitz, 2015; Yoon, Min & Jin, 2020; S. Kim, 2022; Koo, 2020; Irwansyah & Lestari, 2020).

K-pop History and Genre

K-pop is a hybrid music genre known for its girl and boy groups, complicated dance routines and generally upbeat music. Groups usually consist of between three and 23 members, called "idols," who have all gone through rigorous training in dance, vocals, foreign language proficiency and stage presence prior to the group's debut. There are several big milestones within K-pop's spread globally. In the 1990s and early to mid 2000s some of the first modern Korean pop groups began to debut. In 1992, Seo Tae-ji and Boys debuted as a self-produced hip hop boy group. This group combined Western diatonic scale, rap and coordinated dance into their music (Lie, 2012). Their sound and use of dance in performance would create the mold for

Korean pop and R&B going forward. Nowadays, groups are organized based on their "generation," with early groups making up the "1st generation" of K-pop and the newest groups making up the 4th generation. However, one of the most important global milestones for Korean music was in July 2012, when Psy released "Gangnam Style," breaking YouTube records for streaming and comments (Choi & Maliangkay, 2014, p. 8). This video's success, though not the typical definition of K-pop, marked the first exposure of many to Korean music.

With this in mind, it's impossible to talk about the rise of K-pop without crediting technology's role in its dissemination. YouTube, other social networking platforms, and fan apps, including Weverse and Bubble, all allow for the spread of content and resulting participatory culture that surrounds K-pop fan behavior (Ono & Kwon, 2013, p. 209). In 1996, the introduction of MP3 players was the first step in allowing for music to be free from physical restraints such as CDs and cassettes, and more individualized than whatever was being played on the radio by broadcasting companies (Lie, 2012). Then, YouTube's launch in 2005 allowed the spread to take place further outside Korea and Asia. Lie and others posit that decreased costs associated with spreading content online allowed resources to be shifted toward appealing to a larger global audience aesthetically which could serve to offset language barriers (Lie, 2012, p. 353).

Prior field research found that K-pop fandom across the world exists both digitally and in-person. Through platforms including V-Live, Amino, Bubble, Weverse, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, fans are given "access" to their idols including content from dance practices, vacations, dorms, performances and even video calls or text exchanges. Fans also meet in groups to celebrate idol birthdays and share information about their favorite groups. Fan clubs have been found to be typically well organized with many raising money to post birthday announcements,

send gifts to idols, or donate to local organizations (Koo, 2020; S. Kim, 2022). Many articles also acknowledge that K-pop fandom crosses into the realm of academia and social justice. Several articles feature scholars self-identifying as "aca-fans" whose research derives from their own personal interest in the genre (Lynch, 2022; Yoon, 2022). Others point out the ways in which K-pop fandom coincides with efforts to help social justice movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 (Suh, 2022). This ties in with other analysis that situates K-pop and its growing popularity as a subversion of Western cultural hegemony (Suh, 2022).

These efforts, which seem to take place outside of typical fan activities, contribute to the classification of global fans who engage with K-pop content in this way as "pop cosmopolitans." According to Jenkins' (2006) definition, pop cosmopolitanism categorizes the expansion of cultural knowledge as a result of consuming media from other cultures whether as a marker of identity or for one's own use or interests (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins' research did not explore the psychology behind pop cosmopolitanism, but one factor thought to contribute to the rise of pop cosmopolitanism is the role that hybridity has had in shaping K-pop as a genre. K-pop is a hybrid genre of music whose lyrics often incorporate a mixture of Korean and English words. The music itself draws largely from R&B (Choi & Maliangkay, 2014, p. 3), but also a wide range of other music genres including electronica, soul, reggae, hip-hop and Eurodance (S. Kim, 2016, p. 139). The trainee structure of Korean entertainment companies also is reminiscent of the training Motown artists would undergo (S. Kim, 2016, p. 144). Past literature has both criticized and praised this hybridity with some sources arguing that it borders on simply "reproducing Western music styles" (Choi & Maliangkay, 2014, p. 3). Others assert that the lack of individualism present because of uniformity and coordination present in the groups' appearance and dancing turns away Western audiences (Choi & Maliangkay, 2014, p.20).

The logic behind pop cosmopolitans and hybridity was challenged by later research on media consumption which suggested that audiences may prefer media more closely relevant to their personal linguistic or cultural background, known as the cultural proximity thesis (Yoon, 2017, p. 2352). Jenkins et al. (2013) later combined cultural proximity and hybridity by suggesting that the key to making cultural products transnationally spreadable lay in mixing familiar and cultural elements. An example for this argument is seen in H. Lee (2018) who observed that consumers of Korean dramas enjoyed the storylines that were similar to British Regency romance novels but were less raunchy and conservative due to Korean norms. However, Lee also concluded that it was the difference in format and inextricable cultural elements in Korean dramas that served as the main appeals to Western consumers and fans (H. Lee, 2018, p. 377). Regardless, both hybridity and cultural proximity have long been recognized as relevant areas of research within K-pop fan studies and continue to be brought into discussion in current scholarship.

Bangtan Sonyeondan

The group Bangtan Sonyeondan, better known as BTS, is the largest boyband in the world and has the most international influence within K-pop. The group debuted on June 13, 2013 and consists of 7 members: Kim Seok-jin (Jin), Kim Namjoon (Rap Monster), Min Yoongi (SUGA), Jung Ho-seok (J-Hope), Park Jimin (Jimin), Kim Taehyung (V) and Jeon Jungkook (Jungkook) (S. Lee et al., 2021). Over the 10 years since the group's formation, they have become enormously successful in generating economic capital for South Korea. As of a 2018 report, Chung (2018) explained that it was estimated that BTS generates about $3.54 billion in economic value to South Korea each year and about $1.26 billion in added value each year (as

cited in S. Lee et al., 2021, p. 1518). Aside from that, the group has accumulated worldwide

prestige through numerous records and awards. For example, at the 2017 American Music

Awards BTS became the first K-pop boy group to perform at a big American award show (Jin,

2018; Lynch, 2022). Their success has continued in recent years with their music video premier

of their song, "Butter" breaking YouTube streaming records and the group receiving consecutive

Grammy nominations in 2021 and 2022.

Media outlets have often suggested that BTS's international influence has produced soft

power for South Korea. This is in line with the research of soft power scholars including G. Lee

(2009) who said, "International celebrities can play important roles in spreading theories and

discourses" (p. 209), as well as serve as ambassadors for international culture. Because of these

factors there is a lot of academic literature on them as a group as well as research on fan

reception of BTS. Prior research on the group has focused on the impact and conditions present

that allowed the group to dominate global pop music, but also the influence of technology and

social media on the global music industry (H. W. Lee, & Kim, 2020). Other sources have

investigated the group as a brand or through the lens of business (Parc & Kim, 2020).

Soft Power

For quite some time the main source of knowledge on soft power came from the work of

Joseph Nye Jr., who first wrote about it in the 1980s. Most recent sources refer to his work on the

subject and he seems to be the expert on the matter. Hard power, according to Nye, relies on

threats and "carrots," which Nye refers to as induced benefits that are dangled and used as

leverage (Nye, 2004). In his 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*,

Nye explained a different kind of political power. He proposes soft power as getting others to

want the same results that you want through less coercive measures. One part of this according to Nye is "attracting others to do what you want" through "attractive power" (Nye, 2004, p. 5-6). According to Nye, a nation's soft power depends on three resources: culture, political values and foreign policy (Nye, 2004). Culture seems to be the most relevant resource in the context of the discussion of K-pop. Nye says that cultural resources can be used to promote soft power when that country's culture includes universal values because it can produce a sense of duty and a relationship with that country (Nye, 2004). Nye also seems to hint at the impact of perception in his 2011 consideration of the topic, "the production of soft power by attraction depends upon both the qualities of the agent and how they are perceived by the target" (Nye, 2011, p. 92). This suggests that there may be potential merit in looking at attraction through a psychological framework. Nye's definition has shifted over the years as more scholars weigh in on the topic, sometimes being called "smart power," and acting in tandem with hard power. However, all definitions rest on attraction as crucial in generating power for a state and its actors.

Nye's definition of soft power has been criticized frequently for a variety of reasons, one of which being that Nye's framework for soft power takes a hegemonic approach to the concept and is lacking a framework that non-global power nations can apply to produce soft power (G. Lee, 2009). G. Lee (2009) argues for a differentiation between soft power outcomes and what he calls "soft resources" that are used to obtain this power. Lee lays out five categories of soft power that can be attained through these resources[2]. This is useful for our consideration because K-pop and Hallyu can be considered a soft resource used to achieve soft power through "manipulat[ing] other countries' way of thinking and preferences" (G. Lee, 2009, p.125). With

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[2] Lee's five categories are: soft power aimed at promoting peaceful images to improve security of a country, soft power that looks to gain support for security and foreign policies, soft power that aims to shape preferences and thinking of other countries, soft power aiming to promote or maintain unity within a community of countries, and soft power aimed at improving domestic support or the approval rate of a leader (Lee, 2009).

Lee's logic in mind, international celebrities play a role in this particular category of soft power which is relevant to the idol structure that K-pop utilizes.

Others have taken issue with Nye's definition of soft power because it lacks a specific structure to describe the mechanism of attraction (Solomon, 2014). Nye observes that "At a personal level, we are all familiar with the power of attraction" (Nye, 2004, p. 5). But how this is facilitated and what area of thought can be used to understand this on a deeper level are left obscure. Some including Hayden (2012) have expanded Nye's work by using language, identity and, more recently, affective frameworks to explain attraction as a "reaction to compelling attributes" (as cited by Solomon, 2014, p.724). The concept of affective investment builds off of individual and collective identity concepts facilitated through language. Solomon (2014) discussed this in the context of war on terror narratives, however it is unclear whether it explains the extent to which actors can also generate affective investment aside from their messages.

Several companies and digital indexes have aimed to track and quantify the soft power of nations over the last couple of decades. The Anholt-Ipsos Nation Brand Index launched in 2005 conducts annual assessments. In 2021, the index included 60 countries with South Korea ranking 23rd on this index in both 2020 and 2021, though the actual score increased between the two years. Similar in nature, Soft Power 30 by Portland Communications, in partnership with the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, has analyzed countries' soft power since 2015. The resource uses a combination of metrics; both objective data and international polling from which acquired data is normalized and used to calculate a nation's soft power score. The data collected takes into account attraction generated through digital, enterprise, culture, education, engagement, government and polling to rank the top 30 scoring countries' soft power. Within their system, South Korea was ranked 19th as of 2019, the highest spot the country has held since the first

analysis in 2015, and one of four Asian countries appearing on the list, the majority of which are European or otherwise Western (McClory, 2019). According to the results of the index, digital was South Korea's strongest area of generating soft power, ranking 5th overall within the sub index (McClory, 2019). This is not surprising considering the role their media plays in facilitating international relationships with the country.

The rise of attempts to quantify a nation's soft power demonstrates the relevance of soft power on a global level. However, the fact remains that the most successful producers of soft power are nations that already possess significant hard power. Furthermore, these methods still leave ambiguous the individual ways that attraction is produced in the formation of soft power.

K-pop, Psychology and Attraction Psychology

K-pop is a growing research field due to the surge in popularity within the past two decades. Research in K-pop covers a wide range of topics including marketing, gender and sexuality studies, psychology and foreign diplomacy. It is a rapidly increasing area for research as idol groups continue to tap into the Western markets.

In the realm of psychology, there have been several studies conducted on various topics exploring the connection between psychology and K-pop consumption. Relevant material starts within the realm of fandom studies. Fan consumption research originally derives from the participatory culture of sports fans (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010; Laffan, 2021). One theory used to explain fan consumption is social identity theory, which says that an individual person's identity is composed of a personal and social version of the self which is based on self-categorization into groups (Tjafel et al., 1979). Two definitions that describe social identity are useful in situating this discussion: fanship and fandom. Fandom explains psychological

attachments to other fans with shared interest. Reysen and Branscombe (2010) found in a study

comparing sports fans and non-sports fans that fans categorize themselves into ingroups and

outgroups, which demonstrated this group behavior. Fanship is "an individual's psychological

attachment to their fan interest," and by comparison places interest on the individual instead of

the group behavior (Schroy et al., 2016, p.151). The same study by Reysen and Branscombe also

found that fanship was related to a positive social identity and positively correlated to collective

happiness (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). In terms of maintaining fan identification, a study by

Schroy et al. (2016) investigated predictive factors of fanship in members of furry and anime

fandoms. The researchers found that belongingness, entertainment, family and sexual attraction

feelings associated with the content predicted greater fanship in furry fans, and feelings of

family, belongingness, self-esteem, eustress, escape, sexual attraction and entertainment

predicted greater fanship for anime fans (Schroy et al., 2016). Specific to K-pop, Laffan (2021)

found that K-pop fanship was associated with increased psychosocial benefits including

happiness, self-esteem and social connectedness. A scale has even been developed to assess the

level of fanship in psychological studies, called the Fanship Scale (Laffan, 2021). With this

context, fandom research has explored the group identity side of K-pop fans, whereas fanship

research has aimed to capture the individual meanings that fans form surrounding K-pop.

Because attraction is an individual experience, fanship is more relevant to this discussion than

fandom.

Psychological research behind parasocial relationships has also helped lay the

groundwork for understanding fan behavior. In 1956, Horton and Wohl described parasocial

relationships as "one-sided relationships that individuals develop with characters they encounter

in the mass media" (Kurtin et al., 2019, p. 30). This research started with radio personalities and

has grown since the rise of social media to attempt to explain the complexity that the blurring of the private and public self has created in explaining these relationships. Now, because of increased access via digital content, fans can catalog specific behavioral information and patterns that previously would have been impossible including mannerisms, facial expressions and small personal details, similar to a face-to-face relationship (Kurtin et al., 2019, p.33). A 1987 study argued that parasocial relationships with celebrities fit into models assessing patterns of relationships carried out in real life (Kurtin et al., 2019). Other research into parasocial relationships and social media impact found that the constant access provided by platforms including YouTube encouraged the production of parasocial relationships (Kurtin et al., 2018). Specific research on parasocial relationships with musicians has suggested that they occupy a unique space because the character they play is themselves (Kurtin et al., 2019, p.32). Stever (1994, 2009), looked at musicians using the lens of fandom to determine what motivated fans' attempts for interacting with celebrities (as cited by Kurtin et al., 2019). Stever's research found that three areas of interest were:

> "Task attraction, (I like the celebrity because (s)he is the best at what they do), 2) romantic attraction (I like the celebrity based on sexual/romantic feelings), and 3) identification/social attraction (I like the celebrity because (s)he is like me or because I want to be like him/her)" (as cited by Kurtin et al., 2019, p.36)

A 2019 study tested the relationships between these types of attraction. It found that exposure to the musician was negatively related with physical and social attraction and had no relationship with task attraction. These types of attraction evaluated by Stever have not been used to evaluate K-pop, and a typical dialog surrounding fandom overall is the assumed attraction to the artist, especially for female dominated fandoms. This research seems to challenge this, suggesting that increased exposure leads to decreased attraction (Kurtin et al., 2019, p.43). This may imply that the best way to learn about attraction to K-pop groups is to look closer at theories outside of

social, physical or task attraction. Some scholars have even turned to interpersonal attraction literature to explain how consumers relate to media personas within parasocial relationships (Konjin & Hoorn, 2017). With these conclusions drawn from parasocial relationship research, it feels reasonable to evaluate fan behavior with K-pop groups and artists through the lens of interpersonal attraction psychology.

Principles of Attraction

Attraction takes many forms. It can be romantic, sexual, or something milder (Berscheid & Hatfield, 1978). Attraction psychology is usually discussed in relation to social psychology within the realm of interpersonal relationships, which can apply to friends, family members or romantic relationships. However, it has also been explored in the context of groups, marketing and global relations. According to Stagnor et al. (2011), two things that influence initial attraction are similarity and proximity in interpersonal relationships (pg. 341).

Proximity means that the likelihood that two individuals will be attracted to one another increases when two individuals are located closer geographically (Berscheid & Hatfield, 1978, p. 29). Segal (1974) found that proximity had a stronger effect on attraction than other characteristics commonly associated with attraction (Berscheid & Hatfield, 1978, p. 29). Past research on proximity outside of attraction has focused on friendship, ethnic relations and other areas. Its importance to attraction has also been attempted to be challenged in favor of other factors. Newcomb (1961) predicted that proximity was only most influential in early stages of relationships but did not find a consistent diminishment of proximity's influence on attraction over time (as cited in Sykes, 1977). Barnlund and Harlund (1953) did find that proximity was

important in initial attraction to different sororities at one university, but this became less important in favor of prestige in later stages of a relationship (as cited in Sykes, 1977).

Other research related to proximity that is important for consideration is the concept of mere exposure. Mere exposure is closely related to proximity and says that the more you are exposed to a stimulus, the more you like that stimulus regardless of the context of exposure (Peters & Salzieder, 2018). This tends to be considered in a variety of areas including marketing, bias and preferences, whereas proximity is more related to interpersonal relationships. Attraction has also been studied in the context of online dating and the factors that digitally influence attraction. The setting in which initial attraction in interpersonal relationships takes place has been shifting with the rise of online dating. That is to say, proximity is now being facilitated both digitally and non-digitally. In relation to such research, prior scholarship has even compared the process of creating a profile of oneself to the way performers present themselves to audiences (Peters & Salzieder, 2018).

Similarity means that an individual shares demographics, preferences or attitudes with another. Prior research by Reid and Davis (2013) found that people are more attracted to people with similar viewpoints and who changed their viewpoints over time to match their own (as cited in Peters & Salzieder, 2018). Other research by Tidwell & Eastwick (2012) clarified that this applied specifically to perceived similarity as opposed to actual similarity (as cited in Peters & Salzieder, 2018). This follows other existing research which states relationships with people we are similar to are reinforcing because it validates our own concepts of self to some extent (Stagnor et al., 2011, p. 332). However, sometimes those who are different to us are found attractive when we look up to them or want skills they possess. This is known as "positive

dissimilarity" (Konijn & Hoorn, 2017). While this poses a different draw, it can be said to be attraction facilitated by the desire to be similar to another or an appreciation of difference.

Finally, reciprocity is also another factor that has been found to be key in forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships. This principle addresses the fact that relationships are more attractive when they are balanced and both parties feel like they are getting an equal amount out of said relationship. However, this often is more relevant in the discussion of maintaining attraction, such as in longer-term relationships, than initial attraction. Burleson (1983) found reciprocity within attraction has been found in both individual and group settings (as cited in Montoya & Insko, 2008). Also known as the reciprocity effect, this element of attraction is considered complex and has been found to take place cognitively, affectively and behaviorally (Montoya & Insko, 2008). It has also been demonstrated to be closely related to social-exchange theory, interdependence theory and research on attitudes. Affective attitudes relate to how a person feels toward the attitude object. Cognitive attitudes relate to beliefs and thoughts about the attitude object, and behavioral attitudes relate to how you act toward the attitude object (Montoya & Insko, 2008). Prior research on the complex relationship between these three elements of reciprocity found that benevolent intentions (trust) mediated attraction received from another and reciprocity for both affective and behavioral attitudes (Montoya & Insko, 2008).

In sum, research within the realms of soft power and psychological considerations of interpersonal attraction seem to come very close to touching in various areas. Yet, in my research I did not find a consideration of soft power that used the psychological principles of attraction to attempt to clarify Nye's definition of soft power. This project will attempt to find evidence of attraction being satisfied within transnational relationships to K-pop though a qualitative analysis

of prior transnational K-pop literature to demonstrate a potential gap and area of consideration for furthering research on soft power. Furthermore, scholarly literature on BTS will be evaluated in comparison to general K-pop literature to see if different elements are potentially being satisfied that may contribute to their international success as a group.

Methodology

My project took the form of a qualitative content analysis in which I drew from previously published scholarship on K-pop fandom and fanship. A program called Dedoose was used to help facilitate and organize my analysis. Dedoose allows users to import documents and create codes that can then be annotated for across a variety of media. After documents were annotated, Dedoose allowed interactions between codes to be visualized in pie charts, tables, etc. None of this research was in any way causal and different research would be needed to determine whether such a relationship existed.
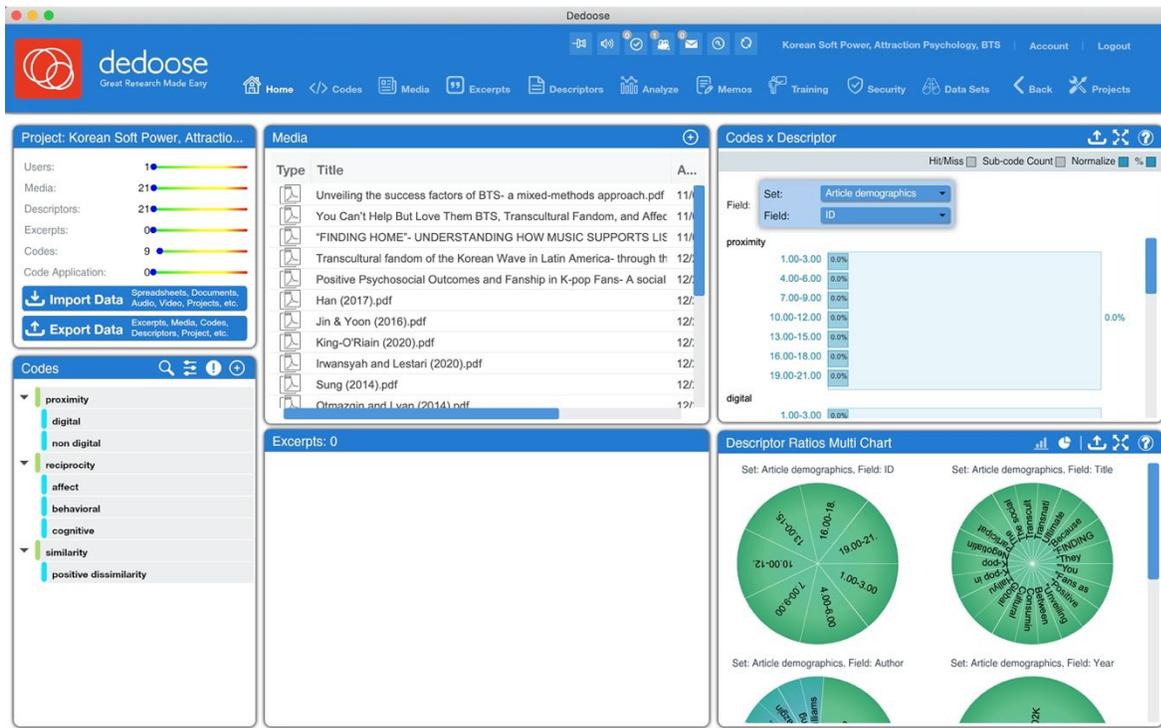

Figure 1: Dedoose Home Page

Dedoose is a digital research platform specializing in qualitative, mixed method data analysis. It was created in 2006 by academics at UCLA.

In an effort to find prior literature to analyze, the following parameters were used. First, articles were to be academic in nature. The aim of using academic articles as opposed to

analyzing journalistic articles or text mining on fan platforms or social media was to attempt to bring together years' worth of research that had been doing just this, while approaching this topic from a different angle. Second, articles had to be transnational, meaning that they looked at K-pop consumption outside of its native culture. This was because K-pop had been studied so much due to how it managed to travel across the world despite differences in language, religion and culture. Third, articles that used interviews in their methods were selected. Yin (2003) argued that interviews were useful for our consideration because they were very reliable and allowed for a phenomenon to be explored through the perspective of the individual (as cited in S. Lee, 2021). This research was interested in K-pop fanship, therefore articles that utilized interviews in their research allowed for free verbal articulation of fan opinions. Initially, this thesis was only going to consider sources that specifically focused on BTS. However, I decided to also include studies not done on one particular group because of the potential for comparison.

Using these parameters, I collected 38 scholarly articles containing qualitative research on K-pop fan consumption. Some of these articles came from the interdisciplinary databases Academic Search Premier and Project Muse. These articles were collected using the keywords "K-pop," "K-pop fandom," and "K-pop fan psychology." Other keywords that were useful in collecting articles were "BTS" and "interview." The rest of the journal articles were collected and supplied by Dr. Dayna Chatman and several Media Studies graduate students at the University of Oregon. The articles selected were published after 2014 up until 2022. I chose to include articles published in this time frame because BTS debuted as a group in 2013. By selecting scholarship done after this date, we could assume that research takes into account the impact of platforms including YouTube and Facebook among others which were crucial in the spread of BTS and other groups emerging within the same timeframe.

Two exceptions were made for articles that did not meet the "interview" parameter. I chose to include "'Finding Home': Understanding How Music Supports Listeners' Mental Health Through a Case Study of BTS," because its methodology included "free text responses" (Jin et al., 2021). Because the use of free text responses implied an ample amount of freedom of expression from the participants in this study, the inclusion of this source made sense because it matched the original rationale of pulling articles that relied on interviews. Another exception was made to include "Ultimate bias. Memorabilia, K-pop and fandom identities." This article did not include interviews but did mention informal conversations via Instagram (Guerra & Sousa, 2021). These conversations achieved the same goal as interviews in trying to gain individual perspectives from fans.

Articles were read once to determine whether they fit the parameters, then were imported into Dedoose in text format. I was left with 19 academic articles that included transnational K-pop consumers and utilized interviews or similar methods. In Dedoose, articles were stored with several pieces of information in the "Descriptors" section. First, the year, author, title of the article and the population the article was doing research on were noted. Additionally, the articles were marked as "general K-pop" or "BTS specific." This was done after the article had been read for a second time. This resulted in 15 articles that were deemed "general K-pop" and 4 articles that were "BTS specific." Because of this discrepancy, all results in this section were normalized to account for the difference.

ID	Year	Author	Title	Population	BTS or General K-pop
1	2021	Lee et al.	"FINDING HOME": UNDERSTANDING HOW MUSIC SUPPORTS LISTENERS' MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH A CASE STUDY OF BTS	US & Philippines	BTS specific
2	2020	McLaren & Jin	"'You Can't Help But Love Them': BTS, Transcultural Fandom, and Affective Identities"	Canada	BTS specific
3	2022	Lynch	"Fans as transcultural gatekeepers: The hierarchy of BTS' Anglophone Reddit fandom and the digital East-West media flow."	US or Europe	BTS specific
4	2017	Han	K-pop in Latin America: Transcultural Fandom and Digital Mediation	Latin America	General K-pop
5	2020	Irwansyah & Lestari	Participatory Fandom of Army BTS Indonesia in the Digital Comic on Webton Apps	Indonesia	BTS specific
6	2016	Jin & Yoon	The social mediascape of transnational Korean pop culture: Hallyu 2.0 as spreadable media practice	Canada, few American	General K-pop
7	2020	Chiyoko King-O'Riain	"They were having so much fun, so genuinely . . .": K-pop fan online affect and corroborated authenticity	Europe and US	General K-pop
8	2019	Min, Jin, Han	Transcultural fandom of the Korean Wave in Latin America: through the lens of cultural intimacy and affinity space	Chile	General K-pop
9	2014	Otmazgin & Lyan	Hallyu across the Desert: K-pop Fandom in Israel and Palestine	Israel & Palestine	General K-pop
10	2014	Sung	K-pop Reception and Participatory Fan Culture in Austria	Austria	General K-pop
11	2016	Williams	Negotiating Fan Identities in K-pop Music Culture	Singapore	General K-pop
12	2017	Yoon	Cultural Translation of K-pop Among Asian Canadian Fans	Asian Canadian fans (non-Korean)	General K-pop
13	2019	Yoon	Transnational fandom in the Making: K-pop fans in Vancouver in the making: K-pop fans in Vancouver	Canada	General K-pop
14	2018	Yoon	Global Imagination of K-pop: Pop Music Fans' Lived Experiences of Cultural Hybridity	Canada	General K-pop
15	2022	Cicchelli et al	"Because we all love K-pop": How young adults reshape symbolic boundaries in Paris, Manchester, and Philadelphia	Manchester, Paris and Philadelphia residents	General K-pop
16	2022	Yoon	Between universes: Fan positionalities in the transnational circulation of K-pop	Canada	General K-pop
17	2019	Malik	The Korean Wave (Hallyu) and Its Cultural Translation by Fans in Qatar	Students in Qatar (Qatari, Egyptian, Syrian)	General K-pop
18	2021	Guerra & Sousa	Ultimate bias. Memorbilia, K-pop and fandom identities	Portugal	General K-pop
19	2020	Yoon, Min & Jin	Consuming the Contra-Flow of K-pop in Spain	Spain	General K-pop

Figure 2: Dedoose Descriptor Chart

This chart displays all the data stored with each article imported into Dedoose.

Most of the articles collected could be categorized as media studies, or more specifically transnational and/or transcultural fandom studies. There were also a few studies that could be classified as media studies or fandom studies with an emphasis on psychology. Furthermore, within the 19 articles collected, all continents other than Africa appeared to be well represented. I would have liked to have found an article that specifically focused on African K-pop fans, however the one I collected in the initial collection was excluded because it used a closed-end survey, and therefore did not meet the parameters (J. Lee, & Kim, 2021). This could be an area to consider in the event of a future expansion of this thesis. Canada was also very represented in the articles with six articles' populations coming from the country. However, in many of the articles, the authors emphasized the fact that the participants were recruited in a national population, but that might not represent their country of origin (Cicchelli et al, 2022). Canada is also considered one of the most multicultural countries in the world, therefore this did not pose an issue.
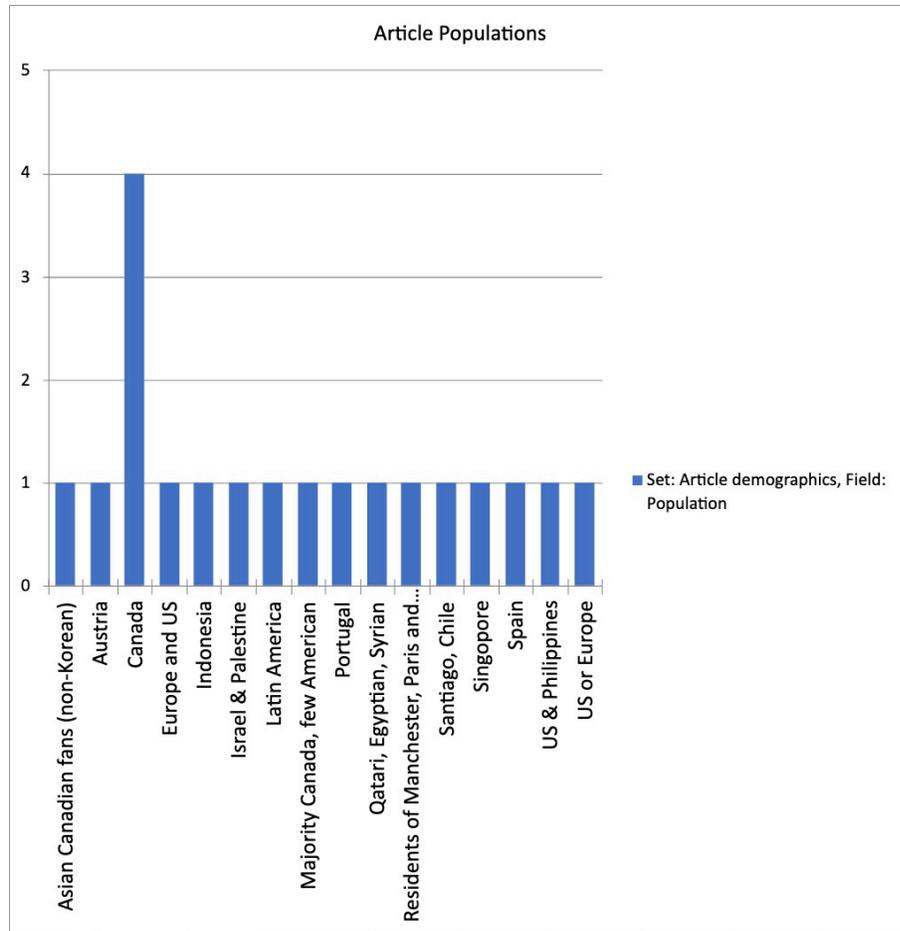
Figure 3: Dedoose Population Frequency

This bar chart represents the frequency of article populations. This is representative of national identity, not necessarily ethnic identity.

Although many factors have been determined to influence attraction, I narrowed down the codes that were utilized in this qualitative content analysis to proximity, similarity and reciprocity. Within Dedoose, I used close textual analysis whereby I looked for words and phrases that indicated that one or several principles might have been satisfied by a fan's relationship to this media. A section was coded for proximity when the literature indicated evidence that fans had proximity satisfied in their relationship with K-pop idols and their content. For example, if one study included a fan talking about watching K-pop on YouTube and falling in love with a group through that platform, this was seen as potentially satisfying

proximity because they were able to access the content and be exposed to it, which was crucial to begin liking something. Because fans' relationship to K-pop could be considered a parasocial relationship and the role that digital platforms had in facilitating exposure to K-pop, I was also interested in tracking whether any potential satisfaction of proximity was accomplished digitally or by other avenues. Therefore, there were two child codes for proximity: "Digital" and "non-digital."

Content was coded for similarity if evidence was found that there were qualities about K-pop that resonated as familiar or similar to a fan's own experience. For example, if a fan noted that the music reminded them of their own country's music, the phrase was coded for similarity. On the other hand, the child code of "positive dissimilarity" was also accounted for in coding. Positive dissimilarity suggested that evidence existed that K-pop satisfies something that was not similar to their life experience, but that they wanted for themselves or enjoyed despite the differences. These two factors resembled the debate between cultural proximity and hybridity. Therefore, it made sense to consider both in relation to psychology.

Finally, content was coded for reciprocity if evidence was found that fans received either affectively, behaviorally or cognitively from their relationship with K-pop media. This might have looked like a fan talking about how a certain group made them feel happy or not alone (affective), how they liked certain things a group they're interested in did for their fans (behavioral) or that their relationship with the media caused their thinking or beliefs to change for the better (cognitive). It could be argued that fans provided their support and labor in promoting the K-pop group or idol, therefore in order for the relationship to be reciprocal they must have received certain benefits on their end in order for the relationship to be balanced. Important to consider in this analysis was the difference between K-pop idols displaying

reciprocity and fans displaying reciprocity. A fan who displayed reciprocity might not guarantee that it was also being received. Therefore, special attention had to be paid to ensure proper evaluation of the extent to which K-pop potentially satisfied principles of attraction.

After all coding was completed, Dedoose's analysis section was utilized to draw comparisons and observations. The specific functions I used included the "Code Co-Occurrence" chart, which populated the number of times certain codes were applied together. I also ran Descriptor x Code comparisons specifically with the BTS vs. general K-pop descriptor and the population descriptor. These visualizations allowed differences in codes applied —if any appeared—within different populations and between BTS fans versus fans recruited based on general K-pop fanship to be made evident.

Results and Analysis

After coding each article and double checking for coding consistency afterwards, there were 306 total codes applied in the 19 articles. This included 56 code applications for evidence of proximity being satisfied, with 34 counts of this proximity being satisfied digitally, and 29 counts of proximity being satisfied non-digitally. Reciprocity was the most frequently applied code with 60 applications. Specifically, affective reciprocity was applied 31 times, and behavioral and cognitive reciprocity were each applied 18 times. Finally, similarity and positive dissimilarity were each used 30 times. Initially, positive dissimilarity was going to be a child code of similarity, but after comparing it to the other child codes under proximity and reciprocity, it seemed better suited as a root code since more frequently evidence was found for either one or the other being satisfied.
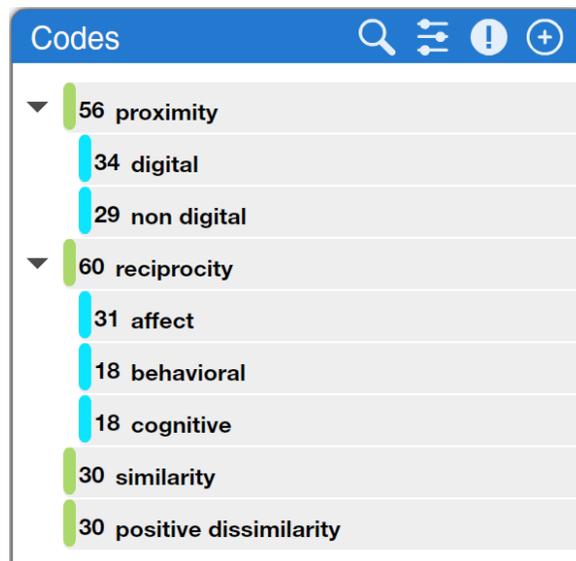

Figure 4: Dedoose Explicit Code Counts

This screen capture from Dedoose shows how the coding was distributed.

Considering the total number of codes applied with the initial research questions, it is evident that the first hypothesis was correct, and that prior research suggests that fans may have several elements of attraction satisfied in their relationship with K-pop media. We can also see that, while reciprocity was satisfied the most frequently, there was not a wide margin between it and proximity. The lack of a wide margin between codes suggests that fans are attracted to K-pop media for a variety of reasons. What's more, there was also evidence of several codes co-occurring at once. This indicates that the prediction for the second research question was also correct. The following sections break down each code, examine patterns, instances of co-occurrence, how codes differed based on population and whether the source was specific to BTS or representative of general K-pop fanship.

Proximity

Overall, proximity was the second most frequently used code. This is not surprising considering the role that proximity has in facilitating attraction in interpersonal relationships. If someone is never exposed to a certain person or thing, there is no opportunity to grow to like it. For this reason, proximity is normally pointed to as the most crucial condition that allows for initial attraction (Stagnor et al., 2011). Also, it is not surprising that "digital" was applied more frequently than "non-digital" because the aim was to consider populations of K-pop fans who were not naturally physically proximate to their idols as compared to native Korean fans. Additionally, the time frame of the articles used in coding are all after the rise of YouTube and other social media platforms, and the age demographic in each generally represents a demographic of individuals who have grown up with the Internet.

Digital

Digital was typically applied in instances where fans referenced a social media platform where they either discovered K-pop or used it to further their access to K-pop. Examples from the codes include Twitter, Reddit, Facebook, and most frequently YouTube. These included references to both content created and circulated by official entertainment agencies representing the various groups, and fan-created content.

An interesting pattern that also emerged was the role that other digital media played in initially exposing participants to K-pop. Several fans credited their previous consumption of K-dramas, anime, manga and J-pop with their eventual discovery of K-pop. For example, in Otmazgin & Lyan (2014), the researchers summarized, "About two-thirds of the fans we interviewed (eleven out of eighteen), both Israeli and Palestinian, told us that they started to listen to K-pop after becoming fascinated with Korean TV dramas and listening to the drama's background songs" (p. 40). This may point to the influence of algorithms on K-pop's spreadability, as well as reasons why Hallyu is so successful. The various soft power resources often pipeline into one another, leading to a self-reinforcing network. This particular example of Asian media's influence on one another will be looked at more closely in the similarity section.

Non-Digital

Though there were more observed examples of proximity being satisfied digitally, there were also many mediums fans referenced that can be ways of satisfying proximity non-digitally. These ranged from attending concerts and fan signings[3], to collecting albums and other

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[3] A fan signing is an event where fans can pay to meet the idols face-to-face, exchange in conversation and get merchandise signed by their favorite idols.

memorabilia, to attending K-pop events put on by Korean cultural embassies (Sung, 2014). One fan even mentioned having a room in her house that was decked out in K-pop fan items (Malik, 2019). This particular fan was from Qatar, a country that has not typically been a tour stop for K-pop groups. With this context, one can understand that the merchandise fans collect and store may serve to satisfy proximity to K-pop and reinforce attraction in that way in the absence of opportunities to engage with the idols and their music in person. Therefore, having objects like this could be crucial in facilitating a similar soft power resource in another country.

Co-Occurrence Within Proximity

While there were distinct patterns that emerged for "digital" and "non-digital," coding also revealed that several times the two child codes co-occurred in a single response; nine to be exact [see Figure 5]. Often fans pointed to being exposed to K-pop by a friend who was already a fan, which was then followed by them seeking out digital means to access the media. For example, one subject from Latin America said, "My friend told me about K-Pop and we started watching music videos of Super Junior. I liked them. So then I began to search for other K-Pop idol groups" (Min et al., 2019, p. 611). The word "search" implies that the participant continued their exploration digitally, though the initial introduction to K-pop was facilitated by an already existing interpersonal relationship. While this points to the influence of sharing within K-pop fandom, it can also be argued that it was powered by individual interest generated by the initial exposure, making both digital and non-digital proximity crucial. The opposite pattern also took place as described by a fan in Yoon et al. (2020),

> One day, I accidentally came across K-pop on YouTube. I thought the K-pop idols sang and danced very well. Among K-pop groups, my favourite is EXO. I

went to a couple of K-pop concerts [held in Spain], although they were quite
expensive. These days, I go to the K-popAcademy four times a week (p. 132)

Here, social media led to the introduction to K-pop, but further proximity to the idols, their

music and lifestyle was satisfied by attending concerts and seeking out other opportunities to

further engage with it. This resembles interpersonal relationships that begin online through a

dating app or some other means, which often are later taken offline (Stagnor et al., 2011).

However, a closer look at comparisons based on populations reveals that this largely could have

to do with the resources the fan has access to as well as their physical location.

Population Comparisons

Evidence for proximity was found in all sources except Irwansyah & Lestari (2020),

whose population was from Indonesia, and J. H. Lee et al., (2021), whose participants were from

the US and the Philippines. Overall, there was not a large margin between populations in terms

of frequency of evidence, plus it is probable that frequency in this particular study is most

indicative of the specific types of questions asked by each interviewer. Despite this, in the

studies specific to Latin America and Chile, there were several instances of initial proximity

being satisfied by non-digital means, such as a friend telling them about K-pop, followed by

future proximity having to be satisfied by digital means because in-person opportunities to

engage with K-pop, such as concerts or travel to Korea, were not an option. This followed a

similar pattern for most other articles where evidence for proximity being satisfied was found.

However, several of these fans in these articles cited economic limitations and lack of

opportunities locally within Latin and South America as the reasons for this. The participants in

Han (2017) vocalized exactly this explaining,

> "The Internet is the only medium that we have to stay informed about K-pop artists since media like TV or radio no longer do it. We had to learn ways to communicate with Korea and other countries in order to receive information. We had to learn how to use Korean applications (Naver and Line), and yes, it has transformed our use of digital media." (p. 2258)

This compared to fans in Vancouver who mentioned traveling to the U.S. to attend concerts (Yoon, 2019), highlights the diversity in relationships individuals have with K-pop and how, similar to real relationships, their interactions may be influenced by factors like class. This indicates that the method of attraction may differ based on population, though it is unclear whether it has a positive or negative affect on fans' attraction to K-pop. Still, the fact that physical proximity to K-pop idols has not deterred the investment of these fans and even led to them obtaining new skills, speaks to the success of the industry in crafting fan's ability to have a digital relationship with their idols and thus diverse ways of satisfying attraction.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity was the most frequently occurring code applied, and, while not by a large margin, it is important to consider what it means in terms of K-pop fanship. Reciprocity at its most basic level comes down to cooperation and receiving equally in a relationship (Schweinfurth & Call, 2019). Considering the symbiotic relationship between entertainment companies and fans in terms of fan-generated content and fan streaming efforts[4], it is not surprising that evidence for reciprocity being satisfied was found as often as it was. The majority of the time, reciprocity was coded in tandem with either affect, behavioral or cognitive.

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[4] Fans will often self-organize to reach certain view and comment goals on YouTube and other platforms when a new song is released, or a previously released song is nearing a big milestone. Leading up to the release fans will release detailed instructions via Twitter or other sources on how to properly stream in order to maximize the number of views counted by the platforms. These efforts are done to show support for a groups' hard work and to help promote the song.

However, there were a few instances where it was unclear what kind of reciprocity was being observed by fans. For example, one fan said, "(If I could meet my favourite K-pop idols), I would say 'Thank you'" (Yoon et al., 2020, p. 142). In this case, it is unclear why the fan is appreciative of the idols, but it is evident that she is receiving positively from the relationship which contributes to attraction to the idols and media.

Affect

Affective reciprocity was the most common form of reciprocity observed in all of the articles with 31 code implementations. Most excerpts included fans explaining the emotions that consuming K-pop media and interacting with their idols elicited for them. This narrative was exemplified by one fan who stated,

> "I found K-pop and the culture and the community during a very rough time in my life. And I'm still going through a few rough times, but it's . . . it's kept me going, and it's given me some purpose, and it's given me a community, and . . . I don't know what I would do without it." (Yoon, 2022, p. 197)

Fans expressed a wide variety of emotions K-pop elicited in them including peace, happiness, pride and making them feel safe and like they had a home. This is in line with Laffan (2021) and others' use of social identity theory to explore positive psychosocial benefits connected to K-pop fanship and other fan identities (Schroy, 2016).

Affective reciprocity also often went hand in hand with other forms of reciprocity. Overall, affect co-occurred with cognitive reciprocity seven times and behavioral twice. For example, one fan showed evidence of receiving both affectively and cognitively when they said, "'K-pop has changed my personality. I was quite aggressive before. I have a calmer personality since I started listening to K-pop. Shinee released a new song entitled Fire when my father passed away. It was a coincidence, but the song consoled me'" (Min et al., 2019, p.613). This

suggests that fans often perceived ways they received cognitively as also being affectively

supportive. There were not any obvious patterns in terms of coding based on population. This is

significant because it means that people from diverse national identities and backgrounds may be

universally receiving affectively by consuming K-pop.

Behavioral

There were 18 excerpts where behavioral reciprocity was satisfied. This means that the

actions of K-pop idols are to some extent important to how they are overall perceived by their

fans, whether they are the idols' acts themselves or set up by their entertainment companies. In

the excerpts found throughout the articles, actions ranged from everything from participating in

charitable campaigns, like BTS's partnership with UNICEF (McLaren & Jin, 2020, p. 120), to

how hard the idols work to produce music and perform to the quality they do. For example,

Yoon et al. (2020) observed,

> "In particular, the fans were inspired by K-pop idols' work ethic and shared a
> sense of growing up with the idols and other fans. The interviewees often
> expressed their gratitude to their K-pop idols, who 'work so hard – much harder
> than singers in Spain or the US.'" (p.142)

The dialogue of perceived hard work in comparison to musicians from other countries was

common throughout the articles. This displays co-occurrence with positive dissimilarity, which

will be covered in more depth later on. It also seems to allude to being able to grow up with the

idols because of the documentation of their trainee days. This could suggest that the extent to

which proximity is satisfied early on may lead to greater appreciation for idols' efforts because

fans have been able to parasocially bear witness to it.

There was also evidence of English-speaking fans expressing appreciation for groups

who incorporated English words into their songs or performed covers of English songs. On this

one fan said, "...I kind of like that they're implementing English into there, because it means that they're kind of more accepting towards international, rather than just staying in within their own confine" (Yoon, 2018, p. 379). This effort to appeal to international, English-speaking fans is evidence of what has been termed localization. That is, adding some English lyrics attempts to appeal to a specific audience by somewhat catering to them. However, the groups do so while also still aiming to appeal to a larger global audience. The combination of these two has been termed "glocalization" or the use of both globalization and localization tactics to appeal to a larger audience (Robertson & White, 2007). Furthermore, given the positive reaction from the fan, the effort paid off, as it was perceived as done on behalf of their deepening relationship with global fans.

Cognitive

There were 18 code applications for cognitive reciprocity, and admittedly this was the most difficult code to recognize as occurring. There could be several reasons for this, one being the fact that people are not always aware of what they think or believe and how that changes over time. Coming to terms with your own thoughts and beliefs is a very individual process that takes time and reflection, which is not always possible for people based on their situation. Another possibility could be the need to further define what cognitive reciprocity looks like when it is satisfied. Nevertheless, there was a common thread among the examples of K-pop exposing them to other global perspectives and allowing them to learn. This was especially true for fans from Latin America. These sources, Min et al. (2019) and Han (2017), included eight out of the 18 times the code was used. One fan said, "K-pop has changed me. I used to be so uneducated and ignorant, but now I know that Korea is divided, and South Korea is a democratic country" (Min

et al., 2019, p.614). This tells us that the education that engaging with K-pop provided positively reinforced the fan's sense of global intelligence. The fact that this was especially prevalent in Latin American populations points to K-pop as a touch point for global education for nations in the global South.

Learning facilitated by K-pop was also seen in other sources, in Yoon (2022), a fan explained, "K-pop helped shape me as a person because it opened me up to a whole other culture. Because I grew up in such a White area, this new culture [made me feel] like "Whoa!"; it sort of helped me grow as a person" (p.194). This seems to suggest that tolerance was developed for a new culture because of their exposure to K-pop. Furthermore, the reactions from the fans demonstrate that K-pop, on top of many other things, is satisfying the desire fans have to learn about the world and grow as an individual.

Co-Occurrence Within Reciprocity

A little less than half of the results for cognitive reciprocity demonstrated co-occurrence between affect and cognitive, as previously explained. These examples included fans discussing how their own self concepts had shifted since their engagement with K-pop. One fan said,

> "It makes me become more into music and also teaches me how to dance. It has different styles of dances. And once I learn one dance, I can improve, improve and improve and try to upload my dance [on YouTube] because it might be a great way to improve my dancing too…And their [K-pop idols'] potential regarding singing skills and acting skills is so good…it will also encourage me a lot and …K-pop makes me grown up I think." (Yoon, 2017, p.2359)

Here we see that K-pop has caused the fan to consider new interests and think about the future in a new way. The skill of the idols is seen as inspiring and something to strive for. In this way, K-pop ensures its own future existence by shifting perspectives on this kind of entertainment, while also serving as role models.

Similarity

There were 30 instances of similarity being applied. The evidence found of similarity being satisfied can be broken into two main groups: Western audiences who had already been consuming other Asian media, and those in non-Western countries drawn to it because of its cultural proximity to their native culture.

The first group is similar to the previously explained instances of proximity being satisfied by other Asian media, and there were a few instances of the two codes co-occurring surrounding this observation. One fan mentioned, "I have noticed that a lot of people are interested in anime or manga and then stumble across K-pop somehow through either YouTube recommendation algorithm or a friend who says, 'Oh, you like Asian stuff. There's a different kind of Asian stuff'" (Yoon, 2019, p.181). This, as previously suggested, could be credited to algorithms. However, it also suggests elements of Orientalism and fetishization, such as the problematic consumption of Asian media as one homogenous unit.

The second pattern relates to cultural proximity. Examples of this kind of similarity applied to both diasporic Asian K-pop fans as well as other transnational audiences. Asian diasporic fans talked about K-pop as allowing them to connect with their pan-Asian identity. For example, a fan said, "For Asians…it just feels kind of natural to like the music of your own people, right? (...) There's always this Asian humility in K-pop" (Yoon, 2022, p.195). This is significant because in this fan's perspective, K-pop is representative of Asian-ness overall as opposed to specifically Korean culture.

At the same time, non-Asian transnational fans also found similarities to their own cultures. One fan explained, "Their culture is similar to mine, the way they treat other people

[…] I am not that familiar with British culture. I have learned a lot about it, but in terms of what I know, Korean is more similar to Pakistani. It feels familiar" (Cicchelli et al., 2022, p. 12). Another fan said,

> "I'm Nigerian, so… that's kind of like, something that I'm used to, I'm used to big dances, I'm used to vibrant colours, I'm used to "out there" kind of songs and heavy beats. That's what drew me in; it's very similar to my culture that they also kind of share." (Cicchelli et al., 2022, p.12)

In this way, K-pop seemed to offer a diasporic bridge that allowed those outside of Asian identity to connect with their own cultural norms and values. This is important when considering K-pop as a soft power resource because this suggests universal appeals to diasporic audiences, which Nye pointed to as crucial within soft power resources.

Aside from the two main patterns, there were also instances of fans perceiving similarities in personality to them and idols which caused them to select that idol as their favorite or bias[5]. For example, one fan explained why she biased Suga of BTS, "I am like him, he can be moody and doesn't like to move. I am like that too. He speaks his mind—in his rap, but also about his life. I think we would have a lot in common if we ever spoke together" (King O'Riain, 2020, p.12). This identification with the idol suggests social identity theory is at play, with the fan identifying the idol based on the personality type they had already self-categorized themselves as. At the same time, it is also related to reinforcement and reward theories of attraction introduced by Byrne (1961) which proposed, "Any time that another person offers us validation by indicating that his percepts and concepts and congruent with ours, it constitutes a rewarding interaction and, hence, one element in forming a positive relationship" (as cited in

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[5] Within K-pop, a bias is an individual's favorite member of a group. Biases are often qualified in other ways including ult [ultimate] bias. More than one member of the same group may be biased, and fans often talk about their bias changing overtime.

Berscheid & Hatfield, 1978, p. 65). This suggests that fans perceiving similarities in idols to themselves served to reinforce their own sense of self but also their attraction to the idol.

Positive Dissimilarity

According to psychology, people often prefer those of similar age, ethnicity, profession, gender and cultural background (Konjin & Hoorn, 2017). However, sometimes differences are attractive. There were 30 instances of positive dissimilarity applied throughout the articles. In many instances, the excerpts included comparisons to other forms of music the fans had previously consumed. One fan compared Latin American music to K-pop saying, "'K-pop harmonizes the rhythm and melody with vocals. Latin American songs only talk about love'" (Min et al., 2019, p.615). This demonstrates that fans were drawn to music outside of their native culture. Sometimes this was seen as a way to be unique and set themselves apart from others in their communities. Other times, they recognized values within Korean culture through K-pop that they wanted for themselves. In both cases, consuming difference served as a form of identity formation for these fans.

This also applied to the specific styles of the idols, largely surrounding the soft masculinity[6] that K-pop idols tend to embody. Min et al. (2019) observed that one fan was, "...attracted to the embodiment of a different kind of masculinity found in Korean male idol groups. She added, 'K-pop idols have an absolutely different style and different type of masculinity. It's so cool when male singers apply makeup'" (p.610). Previous research has explained that soft and hard forms of masculinity are often used interchangeably in order to

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[6] Soft masculinity is often also called versatile masculinity and it is characterized by a level of androgyny and milder manners (J.J. Lee, 2020).

create a sense of balance (Kim & Lopez, 2021). The reception of fans to the soft masculinity of K-pop has often been described as racialized and as a result fetishized, but also as in conflict with hegemonic masculinity (J. J. Lee, 2020). This is interesting to consider in relation to soft power because of how soft power has also been described as non-hegemonic or at least possessing the potential to be. This also suggests that physical attraction must be taken into account within soft power resources.

Frequently, differences in quality between K-pop and other cultures' music production were pointed out by fans. One fan explained, "'I have noticed that K-Pop invests a lot to make a strong visual image. Even the small agencies make great music videos. American Pop doesn't invest as much in making a visual production'" (Min et al., 2019, p. 615). Other fans pointed out the overall creativity and sophistication of storylines in their music videos (Malik, 2019). Overall, the emphasis was on K-pop being of a higher caliber than other music media that they consumed. This has been explained in Choi & Maliangkay (2014) as K-pop serving as augmented entertainment. This idea was proposed in contradiction to hybridity, as a way of explaining K-pop's success and tied to the role that idols serve as cultural diplomats, similar to the ideas presented in G. Lee (2009) which position international celebrities as particularly influential soft power resources.

However, 22 out of the 30 times positive dissimilarity was found, it also occurred with another code. This could indicate that difference is often offset by another attractive element. There were seven co-occurrences with reciprocity. This seems to indicate that fans are receiving in other ways as opposed to solely being attracted by difference. However, co-occurrence also surprisingly took place three times with similarity. One fan explained, "[The recent Korean wave] is a mixture of Eastern and Western cultures, so allows people to be exposed to the both

cultures. It's not too traditional, not too unfamiliar" (Jin & Yoon, 2016, p. 1287). These co-occurrences seem to suggest that similarity and difference both play a role in K-pop's success as a soft power resource. This promotes a combination of the augmented entertainment dialogue with hybridity in order to maximize the attractiveness of a soft power resource.

Code Co-Occurrence

There were numerous instances of code co-occurrence, some of which have already been mentioned. However, there were also instances of up to five different codes being found within a single excerpt from one fan. Figure 5 shows the Code Co-Occurrence Chart with all of these interactions displayed.

Figure 5: Code Co-Occurrence Chart

This chart shows all the ways that codes interacted with each other throughout all the articles. Totals may be higher than the actual code application count because the chart accounts for co-occurrence with child codes.

In Dedoose, these individual boxes can be clicked, and the respective excerpts associated with each code interaction displayed. One excerpt from King O'Riain (2020) had five codes applied: proximity, digital, reciprocity, behavioral and positive dissimilarity. The fan said,

> "You are closer to your idols in K-pop. You know much more about them than mainstream (American) musicians. I think because it (K-pop) is so different to Western music and they are so talented, they are writing, producing, dancing. And particularly (MonstaX) . . . they interact quite a lot with fans. They post pictures, they post videos, they have fan meetings, so I think the interaction with the fans is very different to the Western idols. It is daily basically they are posting pictures and videos, so yeah . . ." (p.11)

This tells us that this fan judged closeness to the idols based on the access they had into their everyday life, and that this is seen as a service to the fan. However, it was how K-pop contrasted to Western artists that made it stand out. That is to say, the K-pop artists have become the

standard for fan service and accessibility, and Western celebrities have not been able to satisfy this to the extent that it is being demanded.

Another excerpt had four codes satisfied: proximity, digital, reciprocity and affect. The fan said, "If you follow them [K-pop idols] on Twitter, Instagram, or their own personal social media, you get to see them. They're actually really fun, or goofy or they're big dorks, and they're lovable, and they're people" (Yoon, 2017, p.2361). This example is interesting because proximity, the principle crucial for initial relationship formation, and reciprocity, the principle crucial for maintaining relationships long-term were both expressed by the fan as being satisfied. Additionally, the expression of them being "people" seems especially important, and that accessibility through digital proximity as well as the way the idols are emotionally supportive to fans plays a significant role in making the idols feel "real."

To return to the second research question, based on the evidence found through coding, it is clear that the prediction that code co-occurrence would take place is correct. However, the fact that code co-occurrence took place so frequently suggests that fans have complex relationships to their K-pop idols, regardless of how proximity is achieved, what kind of reciprocity is received or how similar they or their culture are to the idols and the values they embody. These findings represent robust evidence that fans' relationships to idols and K-pop overall are very similar to "real" interpersonal relationships.

Conflicting Evidence

Finally, while this project focused on the satisfaction of principles of attraction, there were also several instances of fans detailing their frustration that proximity was not being satisfied as much as they would desire. Many of these were individuals who did not live in big

cities and therefore could not attend concerts because they were not as easily accessible. This frustration escalated in Williams (2016), which focused on sasaeng[7] fans in Singapore who took proximity into their own hands by stalking groups as they arrived at the airport and traveled to their hotels. One fan in this study explained, "I feel like I get to know more about and get closer to the idol I love. If I go to a concert, there are thousands of people attending, so the idol would not know who I am. But if I become sasaeng, they will recognize me" (Williams, 2016, p. 85). This example emphasizes the fact that for this fan, attraction is present, but proximity currently being offered digitally and non-digitally is not enough. This is similar to expressions of how American artists were not proximate enough, though there was no evidence presented that any efforts by fans to increase this proximity themselves would take place as a result.

There were other instances where appeals to similarity to transnational audiences were perceived negatively. For example, one fan from Yoon et al. (2020) said, "The lyrics in English or Spanish make me nervous. They sound strange to me. I don't even understand the K-pop lyrics written in Spanish" (p. 140). This example speaks to the fact that sometimes attempts to attract have the opposite effect (Berscheid & Hatfield, 1978). However, it also speaks to the existing investment and attraction if English and Spanish-speaking fans would rather listen to Korean music than music by Korean artists that incorporates other languages.

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[7] Sasaeng fans, as described by Williams (2016) are fans who are often referred to as crazy or delusional and take their fandom a bit too far. Fans often fear being labeled as sasaeng and try to reassure other fans, that they do not fit this label. Common behaviors for sasaeng fans include stalking, putting cameras up to track the movements of idols and going to the idols' homes.

BTS Specific versus General K-pop

After normalizing the results to account for the difference in source count, it became evident that discrepancies existed in codes satisfied for sources specific to BTS versus generally about K-pop.
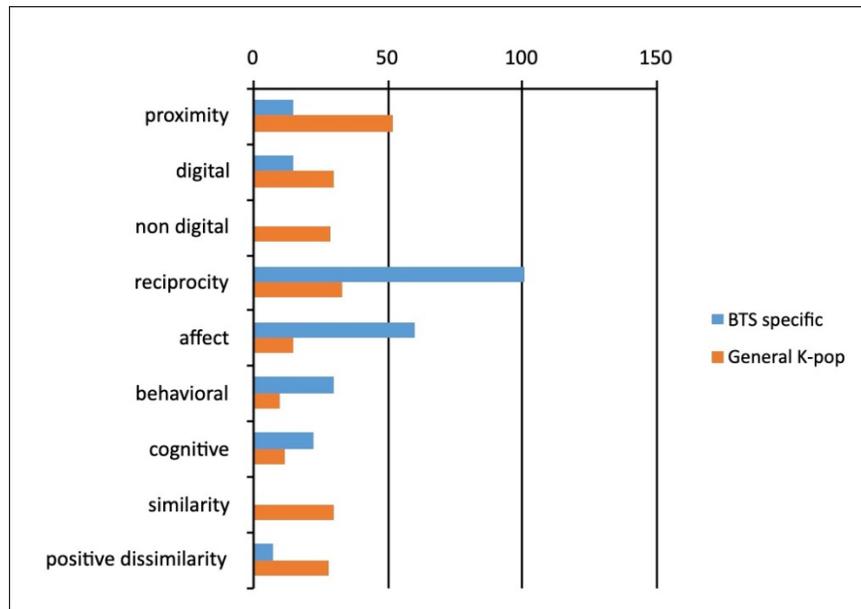

Figure 6: Dedoose Codes-BTS vs. General K-pop (Normalized)

This source shows the normalized results of code application for sources classified as BTS specific versus general K-pop.

As seen in Figure 6, sources specific to the study of BTS fans included proportionally more evidence for reciprocity being satisfied. This is difficult to fully assert given the influence that the types of questions asked in each study may have on the excerpts included in each. However, because 27 out of the 60 total reciprocity codes came from BTS specific sources (when normalization was not accounted for) despite there only being four articles classified as BTS specific, this occurrence is significant. This was true for all of the child codes; affect, behavioral and cognitive.
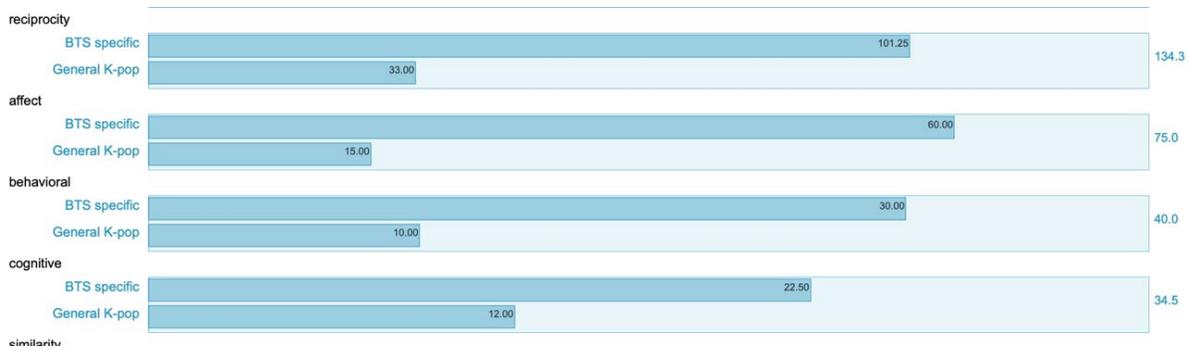
Figure 7: BTS Specific vs. General K-pop Reciprocity Normalized Codes Chart

This chart shows the normalized results for the reciprocity codes and child codes for BTS specific sources versus sources that are more generally about K-pop.
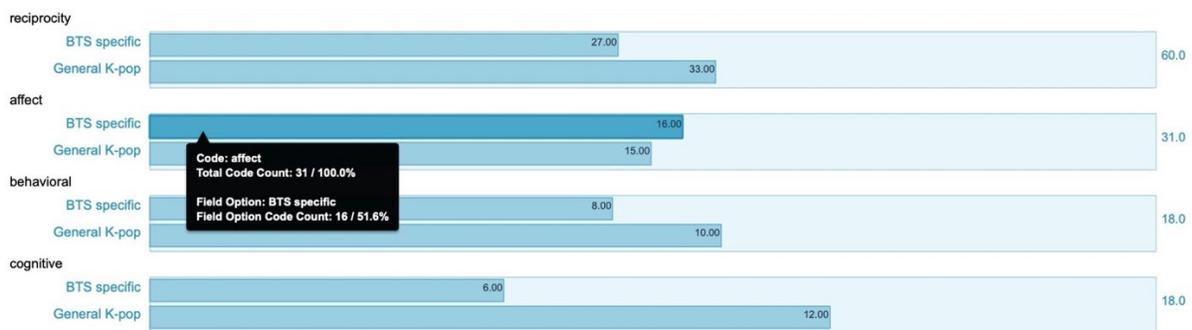

Figure 8: BTS Specific vs. General K-pop Reciprocity Non-normalized Codes Chart

This chart shows how reciprocity and its child codes were distributed without normalization for BTS specific and general K-pop sources. This reflects the actual number of times a particular code was applied as opposed to taking into account proportions of BTS specific versus general K-pop sources.

The specific coded excerpts from the articles express a wide variety of emotions in instances of affective reciprocity. Whereas many of the general K-pop sources included examples of positive emotions or described it as stopping any negative emotions, BTS fans seemed to express that their music welcomed them to feel any emotions, good or bad. For example, one fan said,

> "Their music has the power to invite me to reflect about subjects that I often avoid, like fears of failure, imperfectness, hopeless-ness, and loss. But those are things that I need to face to learn about myself. Listening to their music feels like learning the journey of life together with them...sometimes painful, some-times

playful, another time full of anger, and there are joys and comfort too, but never alone." (H. J. Lee et al., 2021, p.361)

In this example, listening to BTS encouraged self-reflection for the fan, which they attributed to them and their music. Several other examples were found in J. H. Lee et al. (2021), "But when I listened to Zero o'clock, it was the first time that I cried just because I was sad. At that point of time I realized how important was BTS for my life. After I actually cried and let out my feelings I feel a lot better now" (p. 361). Here the fan attached meaning to specific BTS songs which they now associate with their own experiences. This was seen again when another fan explained,

> "The messages in the music keep me positively motivated to not give up day to day. My husband died of cancer in December 2019 after two years of treatments. […] Certain songs like Not Today kept me focused on pushing through during my husband's treatment and Spring Day is still my song for grief. Even Life Goes On has made me feel seen and understood. I stay focused on my personal value and persistence and on forgiving myself for failures through the music […]" (J. H. Lee et al., 2021, p.362)

These three examples emphasize the affective reciprocity that listening to BTS's music satisfies for them. More importantly, it references specific negative experiences that were improved by learning that their emotions were understood by others, which was communicated through music.

Behavioral reciprocity, when normalized, also showed proportionally more evidence within BTS specific sources. Fans commented on how their actions seemed to go a level further than other K-pop idols. One fan in Cicchelli et al. (2022) said,

> "Just the fact that BTS went [to California] to experience parts of American culture, they met Black people, they weren't acting afraid to be in America like, "Oh my god. I'm going to get shot." […] I could see there was an effort to know where hip-hop, where pop came from. That really made me feel respected as a Black fan. […] In them, I saw, [that] K-Pop can be inclusive. K-Pop can be this give-and-take where they can be them, and I can be me, but we don't have to lessen ourselves to respect one another." (p. 13)[8]

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[8] This source is not classified as BTS specific. However, the quote was pulled because of relevance to this discussion.

This fan clearly expressed appreciation for the actions which contributed to their overall perception and attraction to the group. Additionally, we can see the ways that the satisfaction of behavioral reciprocity led to affective reciprocity also being satisfied as it was their actions that made the fan feel their identity was respected. It is obvious how this participation in the experience of Black culture may have aided in cultivating a relationship with international fans and particularly Black fans, especially given the credit that K-pop owes hip-hop and other music styles created by Black artists.

Furthermore, one third of the codes for cognitive reciprocity came from BTS specific sources. One fan explained how BTS had shifted her own self-concept,

> "Um, they actually helped me get out of a 28-year toxic relationship. I, I uh, give them credit, and…I am just now learning to love myself. So, um, if they were not allowed to sing what they believe in, what they want, what's happening to them, even now the songs that we have, and they probably wouldn't be as popular as they are…I think it's, especially because I focus more on BTS than on the others I think might be part of the reason that I feel that way? It's because of, um…cuz of their words and cuz their…their expression…but yeah they're helping me learn to love myself." (McLaren & Jin, 2020, p.120)

The narrative of "learning to love yourself" is a common one within the BTS fan community and among ARMY. This is largely because of BTS's album series "Love Yourself." The series consists of three albums released between 2017 and 2018 that depict different stages of learning to love and accept yourself. Given this and the response from this fan, it is clear that the messages of BTS through their music have made them think about their own relationship with themselves, to the point where they have changed their thoughts and begun to act in their own best interest. Other articles did not include this same narrative, which points to the fact that this message may be specific to this group.

Other BTS vs. General K-pop Comparisons

Even though more evidence of positive dissimilarity was not found in the BTS specific sources when the results were normalized, it is important to point out that their fans often commented on specific things that BTS did that set them apart and made them appeal to fans more in comparison to other groups. One fan said,

> "I feel like that is one of the main reasons why I would actually be a fan of BTS, because I feel like they are more authentic than the rest. There are other (K-pop) groups who are very robotic, would be the word. They are manufactured. They have to watch everything they say and do. Whereas BTS feel a bit different. Even when they win the likes of awards and stuff, or after the American Music Awards, they came on V Live immediately after winning it to say thank you to their fans. They feel more involved with their fan base I guess and less like they are being controlled" (King O'Riain, 2020, p.14)

This shows that positive dissimilarity could be an influence when choosing what group to support within the K-pop mediaverse, not just a matter of K-pop setting itself apart from other styles of music and other parasocial relationships with fans. It also points to the role that authenticity may play in BTS's success and how diving into what specifically makes them more authentic could be of interest to future research.

Finally, there was also evidence of fans both receiving affectively and sharing in the success of BTS. One fan described this when they said,

> "[When I saw BTS performing at the American Music Awards,] I was really proud, actually. I felt like a proud mom watching my kid go and graduate high school or something. Because I've been listening to them for such a long time and then seeing the recognition that they deserve and having a bunch of other people get exposed to them, I'm really grateful." (Yoon, 2019, p.187)

This seemed to go beyond other examples of fans having affective reciprocity satisfied. The individual in this situation experienced the success of BTS as a credit to their talent, but also as a reflection of herself. This points to the suggestion that BTS fans may take identifying with the group within their sense of self to a level further than other K-pop fans. In addition, this

connection may serve to reinforce the relationship even further because the groups' successes are also seen as their own.

Given the differences in how frequently reciprocity was coded for and the other differences in attraction found in BTS specific sources versus general K-pop sources, it is clear that the prediction for the third research question was correct. BTS through their actions and music may satisfy reciprocity more or to a greater caliber than other K-pop groups. Based on psychology's definition of reciprocity, this could mean the relationship BTS fans have with their idols is more balanced. In other words, fans seek to give to the group as much as they receive. This would imply that BTS fans receive more than other fans and therefore provide reciprocity in terms of streaming and record sales, leading to the groups' monumental popularity.

Attraction to K-pop as Soft Power

How do these results apply to soft power? As Nye reminds us in his 2004 book, soft power resources like K-pop do not directly produce soft power, However, they do produce the sentiments and opinions that lead to its production. The impact of K-pop's influence on soft power is felt in Sung (2014) when an Austrian fan explained,

> "I love Korea. I have never been to South Korea, but I really want to save money and travel there. I like their tradition, how they are, and the language. I am also very curious and want to know how Korea managed so well. With the war and all that, they still doing [sic] very well. The landscape is also very nice from the drama. It looks really nice there and gives better image to me. Before, when we talk [sic] about Korea, they always talk about the [sic] North Korea and all that, but through music everybody can believe South Korea is in the form. Not all the time about political things, but people really lives [sic] there, and they are happy."
> (p. 60)

This excerpt demonstrates what prior scholarship has called the global imagination of K-pop (Yoon, 2018). In consuming K-pop and other Korean media, the fan has constructed an image of

South Korea that is largely positive, and has even, according to the fan, managed to transcend the dialogues surrounding North Korea. When the fan says "people really lives there" it seems to indicate that the Korean media they consume has served to humanize Korea and cement it in reality, while also encouraging this global imagination. This excerpt also displays the commitment to Korea that K-pop has fostered, to the extent where they are willing to invest money and even travel to Korea in order to experience the imagined narrative of the nation, they themselves have conceived. That is to say, attraction and cultivation of soft power has led to the production of economic resources for Korea. Many similar examples showed this commitment through learning the Korean language. A fan from Malik (2019) explained, "I first started to learn the Korean language from listening to K-pop lyrics from K-pop music bands, repeating simple phrases of lyrics over and over again, which makes it easy for fans to pick up Korean words" (p.5744). The idea that K-pop is a tool that many fans have used to begin to learn the Korean language is novel because it means their media serves as a way to preserve the language. Other sources also suggest that it is trendy to learn the language in order to fully engage with the content. This is a prime example of how K-pop serves as a gateway into the culture as a whole, which is something all successful soft power resources should strive for.

According to Nye, soft power involves attracting others to do what you want, getting others to buy into your values and ultimately shaping the preferences of others. Given this, the examples provided demonstrate that K-pop serves as a soft power resource for Korea. Moreover, by using psychology's definition of attraction, specifically the principles of proximity, similarity and reciprocity, we can form a new understanding of Nye's soft power that provides a clearer definition of what "attraction" actually means. That is, we can understand that soft power involves attracting others to do what you want, by forming a relationship, digitally or non-

digitally, with them that is mutually beneficial in the areas of affect, behavior and cognition. Soft

power attraction can also be understood as cultivated through appeals to similar or exposure to

different values.

Conclusion

From this research, I argue that K-pop idols, groups and their interactions with their fans may be designed similarly to interpersonal relationships, which contributes to their success as soft power resources. Whether this is truly intentional is unclear, but given our results based on observations from previous research that conducted fan interviews, it appears that there is evidence that three of the most crucial elements for forming and sustaining relationships, proximity, reciprocity and similarity are satisfied for fans by idols and their music. Additionally, positive dissimilarity may represent a new area of attraction relevant to transnational media studies.

In terms of the value of studying K-pop and Korea, Choi & Maliangkay (2014) explained it best:

> "The steep climb of Korea up the slippery ladder of cultural productivity signifies an unprecedented "mutiny", which could potentially imperil the centuries-long stability in global cultural hierarchies. It is so because Korea is a small country in Asia, a nation with a long history of colonial cringe, cultural obscurity, and economic dependency. For that matter, the sudden rise of Korea as a cultural upstart transmits a glimmer of hope to those with similar historical experiences of having been cultural subalterns. The ascendancy of K-pop, therefore, signifies much more than a levitation of a popular music genre from Korea." (p. 12)

I think it is too soon to say whether K-pop truly signifies a shirking of Western media dominance. There are still many who are not open to consuming content outside their culture or even in a different language. Nevertheless, the impact that K-pop and the Korean Wave have made globally represent a glimpse at what other nations might achieve if they make efforts to develop media that appeals to a transnational audience. I argue that the best way to further interrogate this involves incorporating considerations of universal values combined with knowledge on how individuals form relationships with other people.

Limitations and Future Directions

Potential limitations present within this research include the use of prior scholarship as opposed to a design using actual interviews. Such a design was outside the scope of this project, as it was designed to test attraction psychology as a useful lens. Future research could interrogate which elements of attraction had the greatest impact based on region or whether a combination of elements at different stages of fanship were more useful in one region versus another.

 In addition, the articles pulled used subjects which are predominantly female. Much of this was due to the design of the studies, as well as the typical demographic of K-pop fans. Some research has been done on fans who fall outside the typical "fangirl" identity. Ha (2015) explored adult male fandom, specifically Korean "uncle fans" participation in fan activities. However, this was through the lens of alternative masculinities as opposed to interrogating what specifically about the media appealed to the fans (Ha, 2015). Male K-pop fans or fans of other identities could be influenced differently by different elements of attraction.

During coding, it was sometimes unclear whether the fans were experiencing attraction, specifically reciprocity, from the idols themselves, or their music. For example, many fans referenced certain songs that made them feel specific emotions. However, it was unclear whether these emotions were in relation to just the music, or if the fan saw the music as an extension of the idol or group themselves. The distinction between the two could be important for nations looking to promote soft power resources similar to South Korea's idols. This could be an area of further study specifically in reference to K-pop, as it is not a new area of study in relation to the impact of music on individuals. It is evident that there may be lots of cross over in research on parasocial relationships to musicians and the psychological effect of music on individuals. This suggests a future combination of the two in order to understand the way they may collaborate

within soft power resources. Finally, there were also instances where affective reciprocity was experienced in relation to the fandom itself as opposed to idols or their music. These instances may point to the value of doing future research that explores a holistic attraction to being a K-pop fan.

In relation to the future study of BTS, it will be interesting to consider the impact BTS's entrance into the Korean army will have on the group and K-pop as a whole. In December 2022, the group's oldest member, Jin, began his two years of required service that all adult men must complete in South Korea by the age of 28, or 30 for idols, unless they have an exemption (Lendon & Seo, 2022). One of the other members, SUGA, received surgery on his left shoulder in 2020 and may complete his service outside of active military duty. The other members are likely to start their service in the next couple years, since BIGHIT Music announced they would likely return as a group around 2025 (Lendon & Seo, 2022). This has the potential of adding a new variable into the conversation of proximity because digital content that could facilitate proximity will be more limited during the two years each of the members are serving their country. There is likely discourse on the impact of military service on a group's following that already exists. But given their global popularity and the fact that the Korean government had debated exempting BTS, and by doing so introducing a new precedent, BTS surely represents a new area of study.

Other future questions of interest in the study of K-pop as a soft power resource and attraction's role in this include, Will K-pop idol groups be effective in generating soft power in the future? Or is this simply a phase? How can this soft power be maximized in terms of transnational influence when considering factors like the limited number of tour destinations

possible? Are soft power resources that rely on human affective labor and fan labor be ethical?

And, how can K-pop's success be replicated within a different non-hegemonic nation?

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