

South Korean Pop Music Through the Lens of the Foreign Public

Is K-pop a Type of Soft Power?

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Foreword

There are numerous people that I would like to show thanks to for helping me in making this thesis possible. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Erik Mobrand who always provided me with support, and very wise and helpful words when I felt stuck, and unsure about what to do next. I also want to thank all the hundreds of participants who took the time to answer my survey and provided very interesting and insightful responses. Furthermore, a big thanks to the leaders and participants of the SI-sessions who taught me a lot, and my friends and family who provided me with strength and was always very helpful, and supportive, and last but not least I want to extend my gratitude to the Asian Studies Centre, and all my teachers, because without them I would not have reached this far.

List of Abbreviations

BTS: Bangtan Seonyeondan

K-drama = Korean drama

K-pop = Korean pop

Abstract

K-pop is one of South Korea's most famous cultural phenomena, and this thesis will delve into its impact outside of Korea's borders. The paper briefly discusses the background of the Korean Wave, and then dives right into the cultural form of K-pop and its connection with cultural diplomacy and soft power. The main focus of the thesis is to discuss the foreign perceptions of K-pop and that is done by analyzing the qualitative open-ended survey that I created which received 345 responses in total. The survey received a mix of responses but the majority still answered that they had good impressions, and a great connection between soft power and K-pop could be seen.

Keywords: South Korea, K-pop, foreign perceptions, soft power, cultural diplomacy

1. Introduction

Drawing inspiration from my personal experience and what first made me interested in South Korea, I wanted to delve deeper into the power of South Korean culture, or more specifically the cultural form that is K-pop. In this thesis I pay special attention to if K-pop has had an influence on the foreign public, and I do so by conducting an open-ended survey and analysing the results. In the survey I ask the participants questions like their impressions of K-pop, if K-pop has piqued their interest in South Korea, or if K-pop perhaps has had no effect on them at all. In connection with the results of the survey, and previously researched material I also discuss the connection between K-pop and soft power. I chose this research question since South Korean culture, specifically K-drama, is what first made me interested in the South Korean language and ignited a spark in me to want to learn the language, and from there I grew curious about South Korea as a country and I later moved there to learn and experience the country. Initially I thought that I would focus on South Korean culture as a whole, but later I decided to choose just K-pop because of big names like BTS who are known for having a great global presence. The theory of this thesis will be soft power since I am evaluating the impact of K-pop, and if K-pop has had an impact on foreigners to the point that it can be seen as a powerful soft power tool. All in all this thesis will mainly touch upon the topics of foreign perceptions of K-pop music, but it will also look into a bit about the background of K-pop, and how institutions and sometimes the Korean government has used K-pop as a tool to attract the foreign public.

1.1 Research Question and Aim

The aim of this thesis is to review the foreign public's perceptions of K-pop, and to discuss the connection between K-pop and soft power. I strive to find the answers to the question by discussing former works on cultural diplomacy and soft power and connect it with the international community's perceptions and influences. In this thesis I analyze and discuss already written material on the topics of K-pop, soft power, and cultural diplomacy, and then combine it with the survey responses of 345 participants who has some kind of opinion on K-pop. The research question I will answer is "How does the foreign public perceive K-pop, and can K-pop be seen as a form of soft power?".

1.2 The Research's Relevance to the Field of Asian Studies

K-pop is known as a global phenomenon and has attracted the attention of many countries worldwide (Romano, 2018), and this thesis focuses on how the international audience has

been influenced by it. In order to gain an insight into this topic I have conducted an open-ended qualitative survey where I ask for the foreign public's opinions. The topic is relevant to the field of Asian Studies since the thesis analyses the impact of South Korean culture in the outside world, and even though work similar to this has been done before, I feel like my research gives a wider variety of opinions from a bigger amount of people.

1.3 Disposition

The thesis will start with introducing the topic, followed by the research question and aim, and then a brief discussion on how my area of research is relevant to the field of Asian Studies, and it also goes into the background of the Korean wave, since K-pop is connected to the Korean Wave, and one should understand the first in order to gain a better grasp of the latter. Secondly, I go into the literature review where I discuss K-pop, and go into the cases of two specific K-pop groups, namely BTS and Blackpink, which then is followed by discussing a few of K-pop's specific influences on the international community. Additionally I discuss K-pop's connection with cultural diplomacy, and last but not least I explain the research gap between former works and my own thesis. Thirdly, I dig into the soft power theory and the relevance that it has to my thesis, and I also discuss the relationship between K-pop and soft power. Fourthly we have a discussion of my methods of choice, which consists of qualitative content analysis, but the analysis section is only a qualitative open-ended survey, and goes into how the specific data was collected, and how the data was analyzed, and what kind of limitations existed and ethical concerns. This is followed by the main part of this thesis which is an analysis of the survey results, and lastly it will all be wrapped up in a conclusive summary.

1.4 What is the Korean Wave?

As mentioned in the article by Dal Yong Jin and Tae-jin Yoon (2017, Pp, 2241-2242), the Korean Wave, or Hallyu as it is called in Korean, symbolises the rapid growth of Korea's cultural industries on the global market in the late 1990s. When an interest for Korean culture first started growing in other Asian countries some Asian audiences found that it would be a short lived trend, since popular culture that was well received in other countries had never been developed in Korea before. However, they were wrong. Since the start of developing popular culture in the late 1990s, Korea has continued to develop a variety of other forms of popular culture that has been well received in other countries (Jin & Yoon 2017, Pp, 2241).

The Korean Wave originally began with a few well-made television dramas that gained popularity in East Asia, and after that local cultural industries developed several cultural forms, such as K-pop, digital games, and animations, which gradually made its way into the global markets. In its turn, the interest in Korean popular culture and digital media caused the growth of other relevant areas, for example tourism, Korean cuisine, and Korean language (Jin & Yoon 2017, p, 2242).

2. Literature Review

The literature review will discuss former works on the topic of K-pop, the connection between K-pop and cultural diplomacy, the impact of famous K-pop groups, such as BTS and Blackpink, followed by examples on how these groups have influenced the international community, as well as briefly discussing some of the global K-pop fandoms impacts, and lastly it will also look at the research gap that my own thesis will contribute with within this field.

2.1 K-pop

As mentioned above Dal & Yoon (2017, p, 2241) talked about how the Korean Wave is a symbol of the rapid growth of Korea's cultural industries on the global market in the late 1990s, and how K-pop is one of the cultural forms that grew in popularity after the Korean Wave. Aja Romano (2018) explains that K-pop is specifically short for Korean pop music, and that thanks to a distinctive amount of addictive melodies, slick choreography, production values, and attractive artists who work their butts of learning to sing and dance in the studio, K-pop has really become a global phenomenon (Romano, 2018).

2.2 BTS and Blackpink

K-pop music is one of the cultural forms that grew after the Korean Wave, but what are some examples of boy and girl groups that are representative of K-pop. In this section I will present two of the most famous groups within K-pop today. The first one is the boy group BTS and the other one is the girl group Blackpink.

BTS is one of the biggest name within K-pop today. The K-pop group consists of seven members: RM, Jimin, J-hope, Suga, Jungkook, Jin and V, and their album Map of the Soul:7

reached number one on iTunes in over 91 countries and regions over the world. The group has got over 26 million subscribers on youtube, and BTS is the first K-pop group ever to top the US album charts. It is therefore not an overstatement to say that BTS is the group that is taking over the world (BBC, 2020a). Why is BTS famous then? One of the reasons mentioned is that their music is very likeable, and that they cover topics that many other bands might not, like bullying, mental health and elitism. Secondly BTS is known for their slick dance routines and spectacular music videos. Last but not least, social media has also played a big part in the reason why BTS has become so big (BBC, 2020a).

News about BTS has been widely covered in magazines such as the Diplomat (Suntikul, 2019), South China Morning Post (2019), and CNN (Wilkinson, 2018). Suntikul (2019) wrote about that BTS has become an unprecedented international sensation, and that the band brings in around 3.6 billion dollar to the South Korean economy every year, and Suntikul also states that “the international popularity of BTS, and Hallyu in general, is an example of the proliferation of Korean “soft power” via the savvy crafting of an image and a message that resonates across cultural boundaries” (Suntikul, 2019). South China Morning Post (2019) discusses how BTS has made history as being the first Korean group to perform at Wembley Stadium in London, and Wilkinson (2018) brought up how BTS was the first K-pop group to address the United Nations (UN) where they told young people to believe in themselves.

According to an announcement by Big Hit Entertainment, who manages BTS, the band also donated 1 million dollars in support of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (BBC, 2020b). In an article by Laura M. Johnson in CNN it was explained that the reason why BTS donated the money was because they had themselves been victims of prejudice when they were abroad or in other situations, and they did not feel like prejudice was something that should be tolerated (Johnson, 2020). Together with their company BTS discussed what they could do as part of their overall message speaking out against prejudice and violence, and this is what they came up with together (Johnson, 2020). Via their official twitter account (방탄소년단, 2020) BTS also tweeted that they stand against racial discrimination, condemn violence and that everyone has the right to be respected and that we all should stand together (BBC, 2020). The BTS fans, once they heard the news about BTS donation, started a tag on twitter called #MatchAMillion in an attempt to match BTS donation (BBC, 2020b), and within 25 hours the fans had matched the donation (Johnson, 2020).

Aside from talking about Self-love at the UN, and donating money to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement BTS has also publicly showed their support for a cleaner future, and a better climate (ABB Formula E, 2020). In 2019 the world famous band, became global ambassadors for Formula E, “Formula E aims to accelerate the mass adoption of electric vehicles and in turn tackle air pollution and counteract climate change” it says in an article on ABB Formula E’s website, that discusses the collaboration between them and the widely known K-pop band BTS (ABB Formula E, 2019). By joining together in a collaboration both ABB Formula E and BTS hoped to BTS many fans, and others of the younger generation to embrace clean energy by becoming future drivers of electric vehicles (ABB Formula E, 2019). BTS support for ABB Formula E and a cleaner future can also be seen in the organizations promotional video which includes the band (ABB Formula E, 2020).

There is also another famous K-pop group that I would like to mention, Blackpink. Blackpink is a four member girl group consisting of members; Jisoo, Lisa, Jennie, and Rosé (Moon, 2019). The group debuted in 2016, and has had great successes with their music. The group’s song “Ddu-Du-Ddu-Du” reached 730 million views on youtube and became the most viewed song by a K-pop group, and their song “Boombayah” made them the fastest musical act to hit No.1 on Billboard’s World Digital Songs chart at the time (Moon, 2019).

Blackpink has also used their fame and social media platform to talk about the climate just ahead of the UN Climate Summit in the UK, COP26, which gained a lot of attention. In the video (Blackpink, 2020) mentions the impact of the current climate changes and reaches out to their fans and encourages them to take care of the climate, and it reached over 2million people and had over 400 000 likes. In the comment section you can also seen tons of fans praising them for raising awareness, and the love for the band seems to grow even more (Blackpink, 2020). Several articles are also posted after the uploading of the video praising the band, and one article includes a statement from the British ambassador to South Korea which states “I am very happy to be with Blackpink and YG Entertainment. I hope all Blinks around the world will join the journeys to protect the planet.” (Alpuerto, 2020).

2.2.1 K-pop Groups Influences on the International Community

There are quite a few articles that speaks for K-pop’s positive influences abroad. Joanna Chen (2017) discussed that K-pop, and music overall, simply had a way to make peoples

lives better, and mentions three factors as to why this is. Firstly, some K-pop songs contains hopeful and uplifting messages that provides comfort during difficult times. Examples of songs are ‘tomorrow’ and ‘not today’ by BTS, which encourages people to stay strong when they are struggling, and other songs following similar themes are B.A.P’s unbreakable and Ambers ‘beautiful’. Secondly, K-pop also provides the listeners with a whole new world to escape to, and thirdly some people create communities around K-pop, and for shy and introverted people this is great as it creates an easier way for them to find likeminded people from all over the world (Chen. 2017). An article in the Sydney Morning Herald by Sarah Hare (2017) discussed K-pop’s rising popularity in Melbourne, and how K-pop fans enjoyed K-pop because of the pretty group members, and the dancing and singing which was different from what could be seen in the west. K-pop also opened up the market for local entrepreneurs, for example, Julia Kim’s medical skincare clinic as well as her permanent K-pop merchandise store in Melbourne became more popular thanks to K-pop (Hare, 2017). Choetsow Tenzin (2020) brings up how it is not just the art form of K-pop that attracts the fans in America. “Korean music brings dimension to the fan-artist experience through personalized lyrics and pioneers Asian representation for the American music industry” Tenzin writes (Tenzin, 2020). K-pop brings up topics like social issues in the community. The song “Mama” by EXO is about technology’s negative impact on society and our relationships, and missA brings light to slut shaming and judging people based on their looks through their song “Bad Girl, Good Girl”. These kind of social messages can not as easily be found in the American music industry. Furthermore, the K-pop stars openness and connection to their fans often strengthens the fans loyalty and engagement to the stars. K-pop stars are also expected to keep a clean and responsible image, and such a model behaviour is a bit more rare to find within the American music industry. (Tenzin, 2020).

An article by Park Ji-won in the Korea Herald (Park, 2020) specified how comments by K-pop fans in romanized Korean could be found sprinkled throughout the comment section on the internet. The comments the fans posted were inspired by the Korean lyrics of their favourite songs, and Park explained the comments as being “short and sweet cultural references” , and that it was a way for the fans to communicate directly with their idols (Park, 2020). Furthermore, since Korean is not a language that is often used outside of the country, the fact that global fans used these short romanized Korean words was interesting to Koreans since it showed that the country’s soft power had spread via K-pop and the nation’s powerful entertainment industry. The words commonly used by international fans online were “oppa”

(which basically means “older brother”), “Daebak” (meaning “awesome” or “Jackpot”), and “saranghae” (meaning “I love you”). A few people wrote more difficult words like “deolminjeongeum”, a combination of the words “idol” and “hunminjeongeum”, which is the title of an ancient treatise about Korean phonology and script. The term Deolminjeongeum is a sort of meme that conveys the idea of the K-pop-driven language craze that is taking place overseas (Park, 2020).

Additionally, The K-pop-driven international interest in the Korean language has also led to TV production companies and private institutions creating K-pop based educational content. In August last year the education subsidiary of Big Hit Entertainment, Big Hit Edu, launched “Learn! Korean with BTS”. Big Hit Entertainment is the management company of BTS, and their video content featured members of the popular K-pop group, which was all a part of the company’s business diversification strategy. That same month the cable channel WeeTV also released their show “K-language school”. K-language school featured celebrity hosts and aimed towards teaching Korean language and culture in ten different languages; Japanese, French, Khmer, Spanish, Thai, Urdu, Russian, Chinese, Nepalese and Malay. The show gained attention from the public after having successfully appeared in TV shows (Park, 2020).

As was mentioned above BTS also donated one million dollars to Black Lives Matter because they felt that prejudice was not something that should be tolerated, and after hearing of this news the fandom of BTS, also called Army, started a twitter tag called #MatchAmillion and after 25 hours the fans had matched BTS one million dollar donation to the BLM movement (BBC, 2020; Johnson, 2020). This shows that fans of BTS also look up to them and attempts to follow their example.

Provided above are some examples that shows K-pop’s positive influences on the foreign public, but I also wanted to bring up some of the less good influences that K-pop can have in order to provide an insight into both sides. However, finding material that discussed the negative influences of K-pop was easier said than done. Yu Lim Lee et al., (2020) discusses the perceptions of the Korean Wave and cultural hybridity in Malaysia and Indonesia, and whilst they did not really bring up any negative influences, they did bring up some negative impressions of K-pop. The negative opinions included that K-pop was too girly, artists had too many plastic surgeries, fans of K-pop were too fanatic, and that listening to K-pop songs

was too tiresome. Some comments also included that content included in the Korean Wave is shameful, and goes against religion (Lee et al., 2020, p, 12-13).

2.2.2 The Political Achievements of the Global K-pop Fandom

It is not always about the influence of the actual K-pop groups, but even the K-pop fandom has seemed to have made some pretty big impacts.

Furthermore, an article in Vox by Aja Romano (2020) brings up that the K-pop fandom used fancams, “a video closeup filmed by an audience member during a live performance by a K-pop idol group”, to jam police apps in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Another article concerning the K-pop fandom is the one published in the Washington Post by Travis M. Andrews (2020), which discussed that it was said that K-pop fans and TikTokers were responsible for the discrepancy at Donald Trump’s campaign rally in Tulsa. The campaign announced the event of the rally taking place in Tulsa via Twitter, which lead K-pop fans to spread the registration information on social media, telling people to sign up but to not actually attend the rally (Andrews, 2020). The next day a woman, Maryjo Laupp, put up a video on TikTok also telling people to reserve tickets to the rally, but to not go, and soon many fellow TikTokers posted videos doing just that. In the end there were many people who had signed up to the rally but not at all as many showed up. (Andrews, 2020).

The reason why I wanted to include this short section on the political impacts of the K-pop fandom is because I found that it was an interesting addition to the topic. I think that this proves that K-pop groups has had a big influence on their fans, and the impact they have had on their fans has led to quite remarkable things (BBC, 2020; Johnson, 2020) Not only does K-pop provide fans with good music, and a community of people that they can connect and become friends with, but also provides fans with someone to look up to and follow. Thanks to the community, and the use of social media and fancams, fans came together and fought in support of a cause they believed in. Furthermore, as was mentioned in the previous section, the fans see BTS, whom they love and admire, donating money to the BLM movement and as they want to follow in their steps and contribute with a donation too.

2.3 Cultural Diplomacy and its Connection with K-pop

To start with generally identifying the meaning of cultural diplomacy I would like to cite Irena Kozymka (2014, p, 9);

the classical notion of cultural diplomacy entails culture as a component of traditional diplomacy, and it has been mostly confined to the promotion of one nation's culture abroad to strengthen relations with other nations, to enhance cooperation or to promote national interest.

and the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (n.d.);

cultural diplomacy may best be described as a course of actions, which are based on an utilizes the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond; Cultural diplomacy can be practiced by either the public sector, private sector or civil society”

With the direct referencing to these two sources an understanding of cultural diplomacy's inherent meaning is gained. Cultural diplomacy is a course of actions that states, institutions or civil societies use to promote their culture abroad. These cultural diplomatic actions can also be used to promote national interests, enhance socio-cultural cooperation between countries, and strengthen relationships (Kozymka 2014, p, 9; Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, n.d.).

Joanna Elfving-Hwang (2013) brought up that South Korea are very serious when it comes to their image overseas. According to Hwang, state-led cultural policies has, especially since the early 1990s, been driven to show the country's cultural accomplishments overseas as a form of cultural diplomacy (Elfving-Hwang 2013, p, 14). Gunjoo Jang & Won K. Paik (2012) discussed that South Korea used cultural diplomacy in order to improve their image abroad. Jang and Paik (2012) stated that the South Korean government tried to use the Korean Wave as a to their advantage in order to improve it's cultural and public diplomacy overseas (Jang & Paik 2012, p, 196) (MOFA Republic of Korea, n.d.). For example, in the paper it is said that the Korean Wave helped South Korea in building a positive relationship with Taiwan, and also gave the Taiwanese people a positive image of South Korea. Furthermore, the texts also stated that “In Malaysia, the Korean Wave has contributed to enhancing favourable images of Korea, increasing Malaysians' interest in Korea's society and culture, such as language and living” (Jang & Paik 2012, Pp, 196, 201). Seung Ho-Kwon and Joseph Kim

(2014), also supported this in their work where they discussed the Korean Wave in general, and how the successive governments for the last two decades deployed development oriented policies for the cultural industries (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p, 424). Kwon and Kim also stated that the remarkable growth of, amongst others, the music industry could not be explained without considering the role of the government, and their support in the development of these industries (Kwon & Kim, 2014, p, 424).

Kim Arin (2018) discussed that K-pop is more than just a music genre, and that it is also a part of South Korea's statecraft. Arin states that K-pop is not all about attracting and influencing the foreign public by topping billboard charts and appearing on the Ellen show, but K-pop is also used within diplomacy. For example, when president Moon Jae-in made his first state visit to China he was accompanied by actress Song Hye Ko, and the famous K-pop group EXO (Arin, 2018). Jenna Gibson (2020) also mentioned the 2018 concert in Pyongyang that was created by the South Korean government in order to celebrate the first summit between South and North Korea. The concert included the popular K-pop band Twice and singer Baek Ji-young, and the clips from the concert gained widespread attention on youtube.

Gibson (2020), however, also mentions another opportunity where K-pop were showcased overseas, but rather than the government being the reason for it being showcased, it was the work of entertainment company Big Hit Entertainment and the institution Hankuk University, who came together and created educational material featuring the K-pop group BTS, which then the government-facilitated Korea Foundation joined in a sponsored to help spread it in language schools overseas.

As Kwon & Kim (2014), Kim (2018), and Gibson (2020a & 2020b) mentions the South Korean government has been involved in creating opportunities for K-pop to be shown to the world. Sometimes the government has been directly involved in the promotion, and sometimes they have been supporting others in spreading South Korean culture abroad. Times where presidents bring K-pop stars along for state visits can be seen as a more direct involvement of the government, whilst other times the government takes a more supporting role in helping companies and institutions promote South Korean culture overseas. As was mentioned in the quote by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (n.d.), Cultural Diplomacy can be practiced by the government, but also by institutions or the civil society.

2.4 Research Gap

What does my thesis provide to the research field of K-pop and soft power that has not already been provided? I believe that my thesis provides the personal perceptions on the topic of K-pop from a wider range of people from different parts of the world. Usually when it comes to specifically analyzing the perceptions of K-pop, a lot of the material that I have found narrows it down to one, or a few countries, but I am providing responses from people from several countries, genders and ages. Therefore, I think that my research gives even more insight into the topic, and one can see that K-pop is something that is known in many countries around the world, and enjoyed by people of many ages, genders and nationalities. Furthermore, I don't only look into the positive influences and impressions of K-pop, I also discuss the negative influences and impressions, and that is something that I don't think a lot of other work does. Most of the material that I have come across brings up the positive sides, except for the work of Lee et al., (2020), which also brings up some of the negative opinions. However, I think that my work adds even more opinions from both sides, and from people from a wider variety of countries.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theory that I am using in this thesis is soft power. According to Joseph Nye Jr (1990) Soft power, or co-optive power as it is also called, is when a state achieves the outcomes they want in world politics by getting other countries into wanting to follow their lead, or getting other countries to want the same thing as they want (Nye 1990, p, 166). I chose this theory because this thesis looks at the foreign publics perceptions of K-pop, and if K-pop has had the power to attract or influence the foreign audience into liking South Korea.

3.1 Soft Power Framework

As was briefly explained above I chose soft power as the theoretical framework since this thesis is looking at the international community's perceptions of K-pop, and through analyzing their answers I also attempt to answer the question if K-pop can be seen as a soft power tool.

Nye (1990 & 2008) is the person most people will direct their attention to when it comes to soft power. This is because, as Julia Valieva mentions in her piece on cultural soft power in

South Korea, Nye was the one who created the concept of soft power in the early 1990s (Valieva 2018, p, 208). In his 2008 piece on soft power Nye discusses that, overall, power is the ability to influence others into getting the outcomes that you want. Three ways that one can affect others are mentioned. The first one is threats of coercion (sticks), the second one is inducements and payments (carrots), and the third and final way is to attract others into wanting what you want (Nye, 2008, p, 94). The third way is the way that is also called soft power, or co-optive power, and it is the power that will be discussed throughout this thesis. In quite simple terms, soft power can be explained as the power to influence and attract without using force through threats or use of military and economic weapons (Nye, 2008, p, 95).

In Valieva (2018, p, 208) it is mentioned that the main components of soft power are culture, political values and foreign policy, and Gregory Holyk (2011) in his piece called “Paper tiger? Chinese Soft Power in East Asia” mentions that there are five types of soft power; political, economic, cultural, diplomatic, and human capital soft power (Holyk 2011, p, 224).

Gibson (2020) in her article on how South Korean pop culture can be seen as a source of soft power, noted that it is important to be aware of the difference between nation branding and soft power. Nation branding being “a country generally promoting a positive but relatively shallow view of itself”, whilst soft power;

takes the appeal of soft resources – attractive pop culture fixtures like movie stars and pop icons, tourist attractions, and a welcoming environment for study abroad programs– and combines them to create, and solidify, new long-term changes in how people think about or interact with the country in question.

The British Council (n.d.,) sums it up really well by stating that soft power is;

A country’s soft power is its ability to make friends and influence people - not through military might, but through its most attractive assets notably culture, education, language and values. In short, it is the things that make people love a country rather than fear it; things that are often the products of people, institutions and brands, rather than governments.

In this thesis we work with the cultural soft power, more specifically the soft power that is K-pop, and the influence that it has had on the international community.

3.2 The Connection between K-pop and Soft Power

The discussions in this section brings up the connection that exists between soft power and K-pop. The topics in this section are a bit similar to what was discussed in the literature review, and this is because soft power has to do with how some countries attracts other countries by making use of the soft resources they have at hand, so naturally the discussion here is how K-pop has influenced foreigners. I use the works of Valieva (2018) to explain the background of South Korea's use of soft power and Gibson (2020), Park (2020), and Hare (2017) to give a brief account on examples were the connection between soft power and K-pop can be seen.

Valieva (2018) stated that it was around twenty years ago that South Korea first turned to soft power. Because it was first then that South Korea seriously considered how important it was with cultural technologies and public diplomacies when it came to promoting an attractive image of the country worldwide (Valieva 2018, p, 209). The president back then, Kim Yong Sam, was the one who realized that a national cultural identity, and its popularization abroad, in the face of growing globalization and international economic rivalry, was extremely important. That is why the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Korea, in the years 1996-1997, chose ten cultural symbols that would represent the Korean national identity; National traditional costume (Hanbok), The Korean alphabet (Hangul) Korean cuisines like Kimchi and Bulgogi, The Buddhist temples Bulguksa and Seokguram, Korean martial arts (Taekwondo), Korean ginseng tea (Koryo insam), traditional dance of masks, Confucian sanctuary (Jongmyo), mountain complex and national park (Seoraksan), and last but not least world famous Korean-artists (Valieva 2018, p, 209). Korean ginseng tea (Koryo insam),

Gibson (2020) discussed that Korean pop culture has risen in popularity throughout the world, not because of any direction from the government, but with support from the government. This in its turn, according to Gibson, made it easier for South Korea to attempt converting their deep well of soft power resources into active soft power (Gibson, 2020)

Gibson mentions a few successful events where South Korean pop culture could be seen as a source of soft power. One example is the 2018 concert, with well-known singers Red Velvet and Baek Ji-young, that the government organised in Pyongyang to celebrate the first summit between South Korean president Moon Jae-in and North Korean supreme leader Kim Jong-un. The concert was successful since it gained attraction from fans around the world, and not because the government was lecturing foreign audiences about their policies, but rather because they appealed to the general interests of their international fans. Clips from the concert that was uploaded to youtube reached a combined amount of 3 million views (Gibson, 2020).

Furthermore, Gibson mentions instances where the South Korean government was not directly involved, such as times when popular singers promoted South Korean culture by featuring traditional instruments, architecture, and clothing in their performances as well as their daily lives. A specific example is when BTS member Jungkook was spotted shopping an outfit from a small designer selling modernized hanboks, and the designer was overwhelmed with overseas orders due to this (Gibson, 2020). Another instance is when Hankuk University and Big Hit Entertainment, BTS management company, joined forces and created a series of textbooks that included BTS for foreigners wanting to learn Korean. The South Korean government did take notice of the textbook project, however, and the government-affiliated Korea Foundation ended up announcing that it would engage in a partnership with Big Hit Entertainment and Hankuk University to sponsor language classes that would feature the text books. The textbooks were to be featured in six universities located in four countries around the world, one example being the prestigious Middelbury Language Schools in the United States (Gibson, 2020).

Park (2020) also discussed how K-pop made foreigners more interested in the Korean language, and how this had lead to institutions jumping at the opportunity of creating K-pop related educational material to create an interest amongst foreigners to learn the Korean language. Hare (2017) brought up that K-pop's increasing popularity had opened up the market for national entrepreneurs, one example was Julia Kim's store that sold K-pop merchandise which became increasingly popular.

Valieva (2018) focused more on the background of South Korea's use of soft power, and how the South Korean government came to realize that they needed to make use of cultural

technologies and public diplomacies in order to attract the international community, as well as the need for them to create a cultural national identity to have a cultural presence worldwide. Gibson (2020) Park (2020) and Hare (2017) provided a bit more specific examples of the K-pop and soft power connection, and gave examples of holding concerts to celebrate summits between country leaders, as well as Korean singers featuring cultural symbols in their performances and daily lives.

4. Methodological Framework

The method used when explaining the main part of this thesis, the analysis section, is an open-ended qualitative survey, and the survey only. Since I received over 300 responses I did not feel the need to use any other method to gather the foreigners perceptions of K-pop. However, when it comes to the sections building up to the analysis I am using qualitative content analysis, and I am using a mix of second sourced academic material, but I am also using a lot of media sources, or mass media outputs as Alan Bryman (2012, Pp, 544-553) explains it. Mass media outputs includes sources that can be found on the internet like newspapers, and magazine articles. The reason why I am not only using secondary scholarly material is because a lot of the material about K-pop and specific K-pop groups exists in the form of non-academic material like newspapers and magazines, whilst topics on soft power or cultural diplomacy can more easily be found in academic journals. I will go into all this more specifically, but first of all I will briefly talk about the ontology and epistemology of the thesis.

4.1 Ontology and Epistemology

With the help of Bryman (2012) and Hashil Al Saadi's (2014) work I will attempt to discuss the epistemology and ontology of this thesis.

Al Saadi (2014, p, 1) explains that ontology is the study of 'being' and that it is concerned with the concept of 'what is'. This means that it is concerned with the structure of reality or what is possible to know about the world. Bryman (2012, p, 32) and Al Saadi (2014, Pp, 1,5) presents two ontological positions, objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism implying that social phenomena are external facts that can not be reached or influenced, asserting that the meanings and existence of social phenomena are independent, and not affected by the work of social actors (Bryman 2012, Pp, 32-33). However, constructionism states the

opposite of what objectivism does, by asserting that social phenomena are not independent from social actors, and instead are being accomplished by social actors (Bryman 2012, p, 33).

Epistemology, is how we gain knowledge about the world (Al Saadi 2014, p, 2). The two epistemological positions mentioned are positivism and interpretivism (Bryman 2012, p, 27-32; Al Saadi 2014, p, 2-4, 7). Positivism, similarly to objectivism, takes the stance that the world is independent and can not be affected by anyone. Henceforth, we as researches can not influence or affect the knowledge of the world. Interpretivism, similarly to constructionism, believes that there is a connection between social actors and the social world, and that they affect each other (Al Saadi, p, 7).

My thesis discusses the global cultural phenomena that is K-pop (Romano, 2018) and whether or not it can be seen as a soft power tool. Hence, I would say that the ontological approach of the paper is constructionism. Because, in order for there to exist soft power there needs to social actors that makes use of these soft resources and promotes them abroad. Soft power cannot grow without the aid of social actors, they are intertwined (Bryman,p, 33).

Epistemologically, I believe that this research is taking an interpretivist stance. In order to understand soft power one has to understand the social world. The fame of K-pop abroad and its connection with soft power can not be understood without researching, exploring and understanding the social world (Al Saadi 2014, p, 3,7).

4.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Bryman (2012, p, 289) explains the concept of qualitative content analysis well in his book on social research methods, and according to him “content analysis is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts”, and “it is a very flexible method that can be applied to a variety of different media”. Bryman also gives a few examples on what kind of media content analysis can be applied to, including visual images of magazines, gender roles in animated cartoons, radio and television news programmes, the lyrics of popular songs, and so on (Bryman 2012, p, 290).

Furthermore, Bryman (2012, p, 543) also goes into the method of using documents as sources for data, which I briefly want to bring up since that also has to do with my own thesis.

Content analysis can be applied to documents, texts, visual images, and animated cartoons (Bryman 2012, p, 290). Bryman also brings up that there are several types of documents, personal documents, which can be both written, and visual, official documents from the state, and official documents from private companies, mass-media outputs, like magazines, and newspapers, and last but not least virtual documents that appear on the internet (Bryman 2012, Pp, 544-554). For this thesis qualitative content analysis sections the kinds of documents that I include in my thesis are mostly mass-media outputs. I mostly focus on widely known newspapers, such as the Washington post, the Korea Herald, South China Morning Post, the Diplomat and so on, and I try my best to narrow it down and only use material that has been published since 2010 to keep it as contemporary as possible, but there are a few pieces that are older.

As was mentioned above, I use qualitative content analysis to answer the questions that shows up before I can go into the actual analysis, and answer the questions about the foreigners perceptions of K-pop. With the help of qualitative content analysis I answer questions like, what is the Korean Wave and K-pop?, what are the relationship between K-pop and cultural diplomacy?, the relationship between K-pop and soft power?, and more. Simply with the help of qualitative content analysis I can answer the questions that are necessary to be able to understand the analysis

4.3 Qualitative Survey

In order to gather information on the public perceptions of K-pop, I conducted a short survey, or self-completion questionnaire as it can also be called (Bryman 2012, Pp, 231-243), that contained sufficient open-ended questions that I sent out to different people that are friends, friends of friends, or simply strangers that I got in touch with through online groups. I aimed to reach out to as many people, and groups as possible. With the survey I attempted to gather responses from people of different ages, and from different foreign countries, that has heard of and created an opinion of K-pop, or actively listens to K-pop and has or has not been greatly impacted by it. Bryman (2012, p, 232), explains that the self-completion questionnaire is more beneficial when you want to reach out to a bunch of people, that are more geographically dispersed, and that is what I aimed to do. I wanted to reach out to as many people as possible and although around 80% of the participants were Swedish, all in all there were people from around 30 different nationalities, so the survey still contains a variety of

answers from people of different nationalities. The reason why I wanted to use a survey and not, for example, semi-structured interviews (Bryman 2012, Pp, 469, 471) was because I did not narrow it down to one specific foreign country that had been visibly influenced by South Korean culture, or even a specific audience abroad that has been influenced. I accepted responses from all countries and all ages, and I also accepted responses from those who had not been influenced by K-pop but still had an opinion. Hence, the survey provided a quicker way to reach out to more people from different countries, and different ages, old and young, and in that way a variety of stories from a variety of people were able to be collected.

The qualitative survey is the only method I used when it came to answering the main research question of this thesis. The reason why I chose to stick with only the qualitative survey is because it received over 300 responses, and that is enough to show what the foreign public's perceptions of K-pop are. The participants provided a mix of responses, both positive and negative, which gave me a really good collection of answers and I was able to provide a good insight about what people thought about K-pop.

4.4 Data Collection

Firstly, when it comes to the data for the survey, I gathered personal opinions of a variety of different people that had not grown up in South Korea. I gathered respondents by asking friends, friends of friends, and strangers. I posted on my facebook wall, and in facebook groups, as well as posted in a kakaotalk group for a language café in Seoul, where there existed quite a lot of foreigners. The survey asked questions regarding the impression the foreign public has of K-pop, if K-pop piqued their interest in South Korea as a country, if it made them want to travel or live in South Korea, if K-pop made them interested in something else South Korean, and if putting K-pop on the global market has made South Korea more well-known as a country (El Sayed, 2021).

For the qualitative content analysis I searched on google, google scholar as well as the other databases I have to my availability, mostly through the university, where I could gain access to articles from a variety of different journals, such as JSTOR and Taylor & Francis. When it came to news articles I found them by searching for “K-pop”, “soft power”, “Korean Wave” and “cultural diplomacy” on google and google scholar, and then picked the newspapers or magazines that seemed most reliable. I mostly used bigger well-known newspapers, like the

Korea Times, the Korea Herald, the Washington Post, the Diplomat, and VOX (Park, 2020; Arin, 2018; Andrews, 2020; Suntikul, 2019; Romano, 2018 & 2020).

4.5 Data Analysis

As I have already explained my thesis consists of two methods, but only one method is used within the analysis section, a qualitative open-ended survey. The qualitative content analysis is only used in the sections needed to support the main analysis of the thesis. The reason for this is because my survey reached over 300 participants and I did not feel the need to combine that with other already existing academic material. Hence, when it comes to the background and examples of K-pop's connection with cultural diplomacy and soft power I analyze a variety of non-academic and academic material, but for the specific data relating to the main question of the foreigners perceptions of K-pop I only use the results of this the survey that I present below.

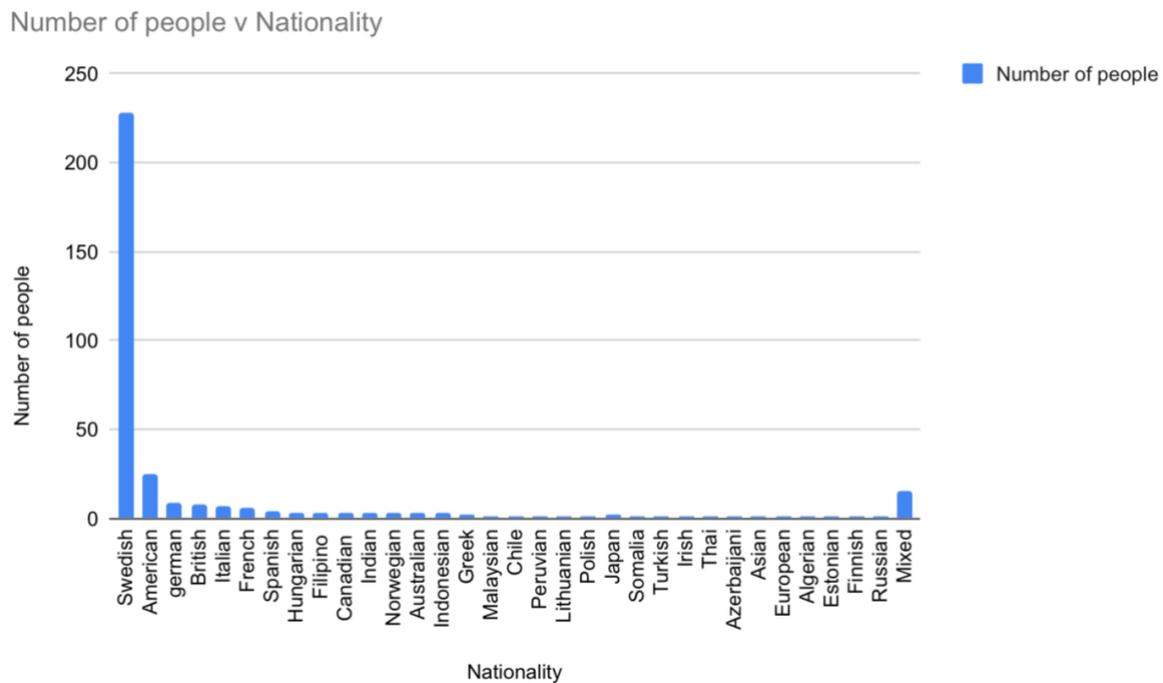
My data analysis consists of a short survey (El Sayed, 2021a & 2021b) with mainly qualitative open-ended questions, but it also included a few quantitative questions like nationality, age, and gender. The open-ended qualitative questions asked were the following; (1) What is your impression of K-pop? (2) Has K-pop piqued your interest in South Korea as a country? (3) If yes, has K-pop led you into wanting to visit or maybe even live in South Korea? (4) Has K-pop made you interested in something specifically South Korean (e.g culture, music, fashion, food etc)? (5) If yes, can you specify more specifically what K-pop has made you more interested in? And (6) Do you think that by putting K-pop on the global market, South Korea has become a more well-known country world-wide? Why?

In order to gather the information I first created a Google Forms survey in the end of February, and advertised the survey in messenger chat groups, my facebook wall, different Facebook groups, and on Kakaotalk. I also always made sure to ask people to share it with people that they knew, so the survey also reached friends or family of friends in some cases. It only took around one week for me to gather a decent amount of participants, but I decided to wait around three weeks and tried to scrap together some more participants as time passed, but some groups did not accept my request to join, and other efforts like, twitter, just did not work since I did not have enough followers. In the end I had, however, accumulated around

347 answers, but two respondents answers were removed since one was from South Korea and the other one answered inappropriately and their answers seemed like a joke.

Below, I provide three graphs that shows the nationalities, ages, and genders of the participants, and in connection to each graph I explain a bit more about my choices. The reason why I am only providing graphs for these three questions, when the focus of the thesis is the remaining six questions, is because most of the other questions were open-ended and very broad, which made it difficult to create an overall quantitative graph. Therefore I pay more attention to those questions in the analysis and try my best to guide the readers through the answers. If the case is that one would like to see proof of all the results for the whole survey, I provide two google sheet documents which I have referenced in my bibliography (El Sayed, 2021).

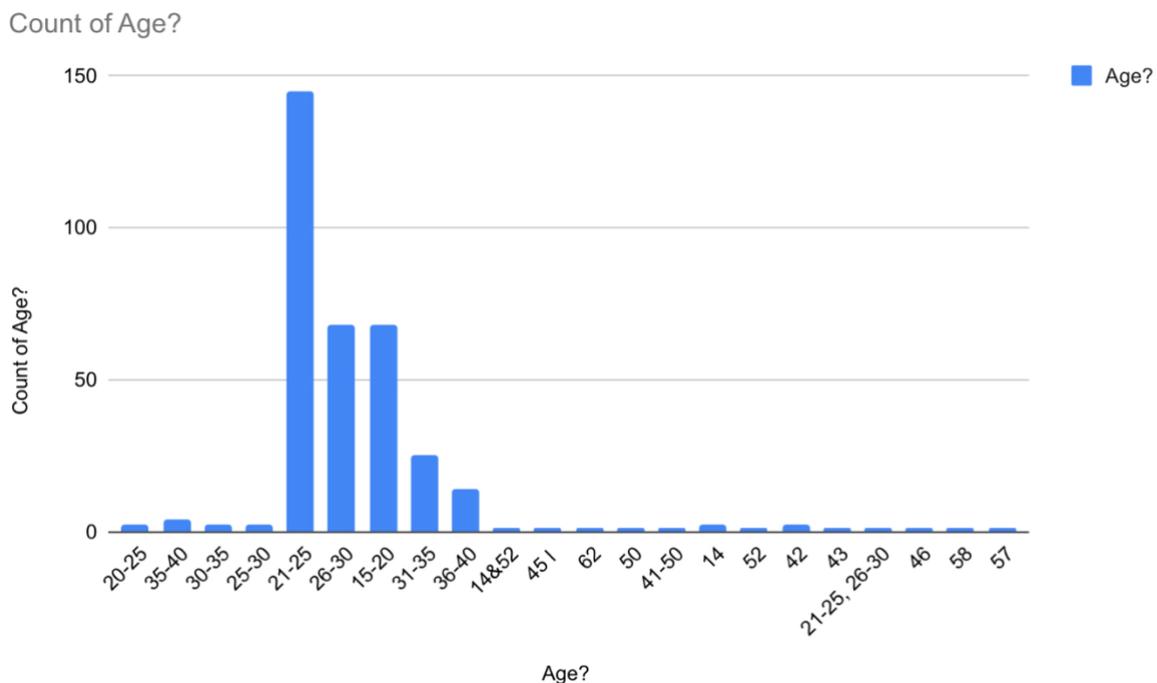
Graph 1: Nationality of Respondents



I tried to reach as wide a range of nationalities as possible. I, in no way wanted to limit myself, because I wanted to know the opinion of anyone and everyone that did not grow up in South Korea. I reached out to people in my class via messenger, who comes from a variety of

places around the world, and I asked them to reach out to people that they might know as well. I wrote on my facebook wall and in a variety of facebook groups, both those who were K-pop focused and those who were not focused on K-pop specifically. I also wrote in a kakaotalk group of a language café in Seoul and reached out to the members that grew up outside of South Korea. Some groups were groups that I knew off in Sweden, and were Swedish, but a good amount of groups were more international. So, my intention was to reach as many internationals from as many countries as possible. In the end the vast majority was Swedish but as you can see above there were also around 30 other nationalities. The way I went about and created the graph for the nationalities was that I counted the results and noted it down on a paper, and then I inserted all the nationalities, along with the number of people from each country in Google Sheets, and converted it all into the graph that can be seen above (El Sayed, 2021b).

Graph 2: Age Range of Respondents



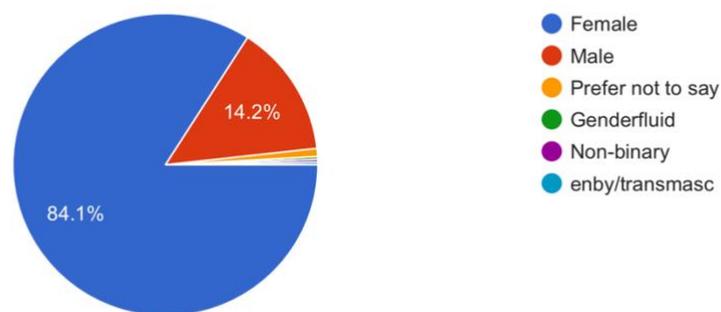
Due to a mistake one can see that it says ages 20-25, 25-30, 30-35, and 35-40 in the beginning, but this was because I wrote the age range wrong at first and had to change it after some people had already responded to the survey. The categories was immediately changed to 21-25, 26-30, 31-35 and 36-40, but around the twelve first respondents still answered according to the first options so that might cause some confusion. Personally I still believe

that the answers can be seen somewhat clearly, and that this does not cause to much problems. One can also see that there are people who have not answered according to the provided age ranges, which is because I also had an option that said "other". I wanted to reach as many people as possible, so that is why I did not have an age limit and welcomed people of any age. The clear majority is ages 21-25, followed by people in ages 26-30 and 15-20, and then 31-35, and 36-40 (El Sayed, 2021a).

Graph 3: Gender of Respondents

Gender?

345 responses



When it came to gender I tried to keep it as open to as many people as possible, and besides male and female, I included a "prefer not to say" and an "other" option so that the participants could freely decide what they wanted to answer. The results were clear, and the majority was female, but it was nice to see that there still existed a little variety. It should however be pointed out that there was a mix of answers between the genders, so there was no clear connection with gender and how they responded, which will be discussed further in the analysis (El Sayed, 2021a).

The other six questions received a wider variety of answers and therefore it was quite difficult to gather all the answers into a quantitative graph. Therefore, I went ahead and made the decision to just explain it in a qualitative fashion in the analysis below. However, to briefly provide information on how I analysed the results for the other questions, I want to mention that I analyzed each question separately and to make it even clearer I divided each question into themes

4.6 Limitations

This part will look into possible challenges attached to the use of a qualitative open-ended survey as well as content analysis.

First of all I would like to discuss the limitations of the qualitative open-ended survey. There are several ways to gather peoples opinions on a topic, but when you want to reach a wider audience it was easier to do a survey since it could be distributed via my social channels and in that way reach more people. However, there existed a few limitations which I unfortunately realised afterwards. This was my first time conducting a survey and as I wanted to do a qualitative survey analysis, I decided to go with 9 questions, where five of the questions were meant to be open-ended questions, meaning that the participants could freely write as much as they wanted. However, the questions I decided to use were quite broad, so it turned out to be quite a challenge when 345 people participated in the survey and gave a wide variety of responses, so I needed to analyze them by hand. This led to there being some unforeseen challenges to the analysis when it came to the need to provide clear and analytical responses. Furthermore, some of the responses in the survey was not grammatically correct, but considering I quoted many of the responses to provide an insight into what the participants said, and quotes and direct references are not supposed to be changed at all, I did not make any changes to the grammar or spellings. Also, not all of the responses were in English, some of the responses were in Swedish, so the translation might not be 100% correct in some cases, but I did try my best to make everything as clear, and as easy to follow as possible, despite this.

When it comes to content analysis it is a very flexible method, and I wanted to analyze a variety of material to get as good an insight into the research area as possible. There existed quite a good selection of both scholarly material, and non-academic material, such as newspapers, that looks into the topic of K-pop, cultural diplomacy, and soft power, and the global effect that it has, and has had. However, it was sometimes a bit difficult to find reliable material that discussed topics directly related to K-pop. Often the material discussed the whole Korean Wave's connection to cultural diplomacy and soft power, and not just K-pop's connection. Since K-pop is a part of the Korean Wave, however, one can make the assumption that when they speak of the Korean Wave, they mean all of the cultural forms, including K-pop.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

When it comes to ethics all of the material that I make use of in my thesis are already published publicly, and the survey I am conducting is anonymous from names, and only information like nationality, gender and age are provided. Everyone who has taken part in the survey are also aware of that I am using the survey for my masters thesis and therefore knows that I will discuss the results. I am quoting the responses of some of the participants in my analysis, but since there are no names or other very clear identification factors I believe that I am still maintaining their anonymity.

5. Analysis

The analysis of this thesis consists of the survey responses from 345 people that are of a variety of nationalities, ages and genders. The biggest chunk of respondents are from Sweden but in total there are people from around 30 nationalities, which can be seen in the graphs in the data analysis section, and the quotations provided in this sections also provides an insight into the different people who participated.

5.1 Survey: The Foreign Public's Opinions of K-pop

Soft power is the idea that power can come from attracting or co-opting others into wanting or liking something (Nye, 1990 & 2008), and the main focus of this thesis is to analyse the participants perceptions of K-pop, and by analyzing the answers of the participants is a cultural form that can attract the foreign public into liking and giving South Korea a good image, and maybe even want to visit or live in the country.

In the end of February I opened up a short open-ended qualitative survey via google forms. I reached out to people via my social media channels and asked family, friends, friends of friends and strangers to answer my survey. I used myself of platforms such as messenger, wrote on my facebook wall, different facebook groups, and the Kakaotalk group of a language café in Seoul that included both foreigners and Koreans. Some groups that I reached out to were K-pop focused and other groups did not have that focus at all, there were also some groups that were Swedish but also those who were more international. Furthermore, I reached out to a few facebook groups that I did not get accepted in and therefore could not share my survey, and I also tried to post on twitter but due to not being active and not having

enough followers on twitter that did not work out. In the end, however, I received around 345 replies from both people who enjoyed K-pop, as well as those who did not but still had an opinion. In total the survey consisted of nine questions, but the main focus was on six questions that asked for their opinions related to K-pop. Five of the six questions were open-ended and allowed the participants to answer whatever was on their mind, and one question was initially meant as a yes or no question but quite a few participants made use of the “other” option and gave a more extensive answer (El Sayed, 2021a). Except for the initial three questions asking for nationality, age and gender, which have already been discussed in a bit more detail above, the questions asked in the survey was, (1) What is your impression of K-pop?, (2) Has K-pop piqued your interest in South Korea as a country?, (3) If yes, has K-pop led you into wanting to visit or maybe even live in South Korea?, (4) Has K-pop made you interested in something specifically South Korean (e.g culture, music, fashion, food etc)?, (5) If yes, can you specify more specifically what K-pop has made you more interested in?, and (6) Do you think that by putting K-pop on the global market, South Korea has become a more well-known country world-wide? Why?

To start of, before diving into the analysis of the survey, I think it is important to explain exactly how I decided to go about presenting it all. As explained a few times before, what I am analyzing in this thesis is the foreign public’s perceptions of K-pop and I have done so by sending out a questionnaire with a total of six different questions, five of them open-ended, but I still received a varied amount for all the questions. I decided to divide it into sections and analyze it question by question, and within each question I also made further divisions to discuss themes that showed up. For each question I started of with giving a brief overview of the responses, and then I provide specific themes, and within each theme I quote a few specific replies that I received. Since there were 345 responses in total there was no way that I could provide them all in this section, so instead I chose a few to give a picture of what the respondents answered. I tried to keep it at a minimum of two quotes and a maximum of six quotes after each answer, but this was not always possible, and sometimes I just provided one answer because I felt it was relevant. At the end of each quote, I provided the participant number, the nationality, gender and age within brackets so as to give the reader an idea as to who answered what. I tried to include answers from different people of different nationalities, ages, and genders but this was not always a possibility, however I still think that the point came across fairly well throughout the analysis.

5.1.1 What is your impression of K-pop?

The first question I asked was very broad since I wanted to know what kind of impression the respondents got after listening to K-pop. No matter whether the answers were negative, positive, or both. I tried to divide the answers into two subgroups, positive, and negative. However, it turned out to be a bit of a difficulty since there was a big amount of responses and it was very varied, so I divided it into several themes to make the results come out more clearly.

A lot of the answers were positive, and said that K-pop is something that they enjoy listening to. K-pop music is energetic, fun, catchy and colourful was a response that showed up quite a few times (El Sayed, 2021a), and specific responses included;

“Fun, energetic, powerful” (Participant 38: Thailand, male, 21-25)

“Catchy, energetic, stylish, fun, modern” (Participant 72: American, male, 36-40)

“ I love it. I think it’s a great way to learn a new language and I find k-pop more engaging and fresh than other music” (Participant 12: British, female, 21-25).

”My impression of K-pop is that it has changed so many peoples life’s and mostly for the greater” (Participant 181: Swedish, non-binary, 15-20)

I like how bright and colorful it is, and how they put great focus on the visual aspect and aesthetics (graphic designs on their merch, music video design, as well as fashion and makeup) the songs are also good and catchy and there’s a wide variety of music genres! I like how they are experimental instead of how western music tends to be very similar and how they usually not try new things that aren’t trendy so that’s why I think K-pop is more fun. Also how the fashion and makeup isn’t limited to women but everyone is free to express themselves and break gender norms (although there can of course be discussions about how contradicting this is can be seeing as Korea is still very conservative (Participant 258: Swedish, female, 21-25)

In some cases people said that K-pop had a positive influence on their life, or that it was life-changing for them;

It has had a very positive influence on my life, at first I thought it was very cool because of the dance and music (it differs from western music) which led me to research the culture and language. Kpop is definitely a global phenomenon that is doing its best at spreading the word about Koreas cultural heritage.

(Participant 36: Swedish and British, female, 15-20).

“The beginning of my journey of accepting myself as Asian in a Western world”

(Participant 46: Norwegian, female, 15-20).

”K-pop is the best thing that could have happened to me, sure it’s music but kpop saved my life and at the moment it is the motivation that keeps me going everyday and standing up for what I believe in” (Participant 190: European, male, 21-25).

“K-pop is one of my closest friends that never left. K-pop, to me, is a sense of belonging. A home. K-pop is what saved my life.”

(Participant 282: Sweden, female, 15-20)

Mostly in a positive way because I find home to a place where I feel home and I mostly get friends that like kpop too. Kpop is something I can talk all day about. I have autistic and I can say Kpop is my special intresse which is a typical thing for people with Autism (Participant 302: Sweden, female, 26-30).

”Kpop can help me to reduce my stress and give me inspiration about their hardwork” (Participant 341: Malaysian, female, 15-20).

There are also those who did not really have a great impression from the beginning, but started loving or liking it after a while;

”Initially I found it very annoying with the large groups and choreography. But after a few months I fell into the rabbit hole and now I enjoy some groups and fell in love with one group” (Participant 13: Canadian, female, 26-30)

“It’s cringe and weird but somehow catchy and fun. The more time goes by, the more I seem to accept it”. (Participant 136: Swedish, male, 21-25)

There were quite a few comments that pointed out that, although the music was good, the industry in itself was very problematic and bad. Some responses pointed out that the industry put an extreme amount of pressure on the idols, other comments included things like that the industry sexualised girls and a lot of artists fell into mental illness due to extreme pressure (El Sayed, 2021a). Some examples include;

“It has high production value with its music, dance, advertisement etc. However has too strict restrictions on its artists, such as the celebrity culture, health and so forth. In order words, the K-pop industry isn’t overall healthy with their stalkers, artist scandals, restrictions.” (Participant 50: Swedish, male, 21-25).

“Love it, but girls might be a bit to sexualized”
(Participant 166: Russian, female, 31-35)

For me as a person who listens to K-pop a lot it has mostly had a positive impact on me. The lyrics of like 99% of kpop songs are truly inspiring as well as relatable which is why i think kpop has so many fans. It has literally saved so many lives and the way you can befriend someone one day and the next be best friends just because you like the same music is beyond me. I have gained my closes friend through kpop and even if I stop listening to kpop some day I know that we will be best friends for life. Kpop groups are also extremely generous, BTS for example, donated 1 million towards the BLM movement and as a responds their fans ”ARMY” matched their donation of a million dollars. On the other hand the kpop industry is very problematic, a lot of the time the health of the group are not taken seriously, and they are usually pushed way too hard both physically and mentally (Participant 318: Swedish, female, 15-20)

The industri have drilled them to be wellspoken towards fans and press etc, good dancers, singing well, acting etc. But they have become nothing than a product for the industry to make a lot of money. The person behind the ”product” suffers most of the time great stress, depression, pressure, not able to be with their own family, hard core diet and are forced to do things that is not what they really though the industry was

about. Hence Satanic worshipping behind close doors, but in front (in public view, have to give signs, spells and videos with lot of occultic symbols).

(Participant 132: Swedish, female, 50).

"Dark industry with a colorful front"

(Participant 89: Mexican-American, female, 21-25).

There was one response that brought up that they listened to the music but had themselves had a negative experience with K-pop;

I started listening to K-pop around 9 years ago. Back then I absolutely loved it and listened to it constantly. I was already sold on Japanese music and Asian music/cultures in general, and K-pop was this perfect mix of amazing beats, fashion and a language I started to learn. But the more I grew up the more involved I got in women's rights movements, gender equality, LGBTQ+ questions etc etc, because I am a queer woman. And the more interested I became in those things the more issue I took with K-pop-culture, and South Korean culture in general. Both a close friend of mine and I developed eating disorders in high school which were partly triggered by how idols were non-stop talking about their beauty standards, and having idol after idol talking about their insane diets. I was also diagnosed with anxiety and depression, which was triggered whenever I would hear how idols would talk badly about minorities. The more I started paying attention the more I noticed how problematic K-pop-culture can be, and it's really difficult supporting an industry like that. I still listen to K-pop but I think it's incredibly important to be aware of how problematic this entire industry is (Participant 265: Swedish, female, 21-25)

Some people used to love K-pop but had started liking the industry less, or fell out of love with it all completely after discovering some unattractive truths about the industry;

Used to love it but then I lived 7 years in Korea and developed the impression that it's basically: money making money. Highly objectifying of women and people in the business (well especially under big companies) are on starving diets and training plans like slaves, only to become famous while earning a very meager salary. Sexual

abuse is rampant and producers make young women's bodies available to themselves through overwhelming pressure (Participant 161: Swedish, male, 36-40).

I started listening to K-pop in 2011 and especially to the bands BigBang, Shinee, and CN Blue. At first I was a bit sceptical to the music and dances (Ring Ding Dong with Shinee was the first one I watched) but soon I fell in love with it. I like the concepts around it, the fan culture, the music videos and the artists. However over the years, even do I still love Kpop, the bands and the music, I've started to become more sceptical towards the industry and the entertainment companies and how hard they push their artists. I feel like we started talking a lot more about mental illness and I hope it will be taken seriously in the entertainment industry so that we can see a change. It also feels like a lot of the fan culture has become too extreme. I've always been skeptical to the sexualisation of Kpop girl band and have a hard time watching music videos with the female bands. And I also feel it is sad with the obsession with appearance, both for male and female artists, and all the surgeries. It feels like the entertainment companies are like artist factories making perfect products to a very high cost - their health and lives. I believe it has to be possible to find a better balance. (Participant 129: Swedish, female, 31-35)

Then there were those whose impression were not good at all;

"Awful music" (Participant 167: Swedish, female, 15-20)

"over-produced, soulless, exploitation of band members"

(Participant 290: Swedish, female, 31-35)

"I am not a fan of K-pop because the industry are using young kids to push over their limits and most of them end up in depression or having other disorder due to being under so much pressure" (Participant 307: French, female, 31-35)

"A bit too bubbly for my taste" (Participant 152: Swedish, female, 21-25)

There were a lot of variation in the answers for this question. Several different themes showed up. Some people liked it, and some even said it had a positive influence on their

lives, or that it had changed their lives. Then there were those who did not like it at first but started to love it after some time passed. There were also those who had mixed feelings, and enjoyed the music but disliked the industry, and those who, even though they liked K-pop, had themselves been negatively influenced. Last but not least there were those who did not find K-pop good at all. However, despite there being a varied amount of replies most people admitted that they at least had a good impression of the music.

5.1.2 Has K-pop piqued your interest in South Korea as a country?

With this question I wanted to know if K-pop had piqued their interest in South Korea as a country. The majority said that K-pop had either clearly piqued their interest, or in some way piqued their interest in South Korea as a country, and a few said that K-pop had not piqued their interest in the country at all (El Sayed, 2021a).

As written above the answers were mostly positive;

“Definitely! I have always been interested in going to Japan, but since kpop became a bigger and bigger part of my everyday life (keeping me alive with all their positive energy and bubbly music ESPECIALLY during the pandemic) now I have to go to Korea as well” (Participant 55: Sweden, female, 15-20).

“Yes and inspired me to study Korean” (Participant 9: British, female, 25-30)

“Ofcourse. Before listening K-pop, I was interested in South Korea, but it made me strong” (Participant 11: Japan, female, 30-35).

“Yes it did. Kpop was like the door to Narnia, it made me want to see what’s more to it, so I discovered the rich Korean culture, food and traditions”
(Participant 71: Sweden, female, 26-30)

“absolutely. Kpop has helped me find an interest in the language and culture as well”
(Participant 174: Swedish, male, 15-20)

There were also those who had not become more interested in the country after having listened to K-pop;

“No. Absolutely not. South Korea is so much more than that. The architecture, the culture, and lifestyle is what piqued my interest.”

(Participant 305: French, female, 21-25)

“Not at all the video game StarCraft got me into Korean culture in the early-mid 2000s” (Participant 213: Canadian, male. 31-35)

“Not directly, more a case of my interest in Kpop was influenced by my interest in Korea and its culture” (Participant 40: British, male, 36-40).

“No, after two years living there it rather came as a bi product”

(Participant 118: Swedish, male, 36-40)

“Otherway around, I had been to Korea on exchange and as part also participate two concerts and now still listen to Kpop from time to time”

(Participant 23: German, female, 26-30)

The responses were a mix of those which K-pop had greatly, or in some way influenced when it came to their interest in South Korea as a country, and those who K-pop had not at all influenced into liking South Korea. The majority had, however, been positively influenced and had gained an interest in South Korea after having listened to K-pop.

5.1.3 If yes, has K-pop led you into wanting to visit or maybe even live in South Korea?

In this segment I wanted to know if K-pop had influenced the respondents into wanting to visit or even live in South Korea. The majority of the respondents said that K-pop, to some extent, had made them want to visit South Korea (El Sayed, 2021a).

Below are some examples of people who said that K-pop had influenced them to live in South Korea, and people who could see themselves live in South Korea in the future;

“Yes, and I did” (Participant 2: Estonian, female, 20-25)

“Yes. It was part of my decision to move to Korea”

(Participant 74: USA, male, 31-35)

"Yes – after discovering K-pop, I've been gaining a huge interest in visiting Korea, moving, learning the language, eating more Korean food etc"

(Participant 164: Swedish, male, 21-25)

"Yes, I want to live and work there" (Participant 141: Swedish, female, 21-25)

Then there were people who at least mentioned they had visited Korea or could see themselves visit Korea in the future due to K-pop, but any wish of living there was not expressed;

"I have visited Korea 11 times" (Participant 197: Peruvian, female, 36-40)

"Yes, I've always thought about visiting Asian countries like Japan or Korea, and kpop made me wanna do it even more" (Participant 195: Polish, female, 15-20)

"Visit! Unfortunately the conservative lifestyle does not suit me so I would not like to live there. Beautiful and interesting country to visit several times" (Participant 180: Swedish, female, 21-25)

"Yes, visit definitely. Live, maybe not as the language barrier would be a problem and the gender pay is not good for women" (Participant 88: Indian, female. 21-25)

"I'm planning to travel there one day. I would never have had that thought if it wasn't for Kpop" (Participant 210: Sweden, female, 36-40)

"i want to visit, i don't think living there would be good for my mental health"
(Participant 74: Norwegian, female, 26-30)

Ofcourse there were also those who would not like to visit or live in South Korea because of Kpop, and those who live or had lived or visited South Korea but Kpop was not the reason behind it;

“When I was new to Kpop I wanted to visit Seoul for sure. But not anymore”

(Participant 194: Swedish, female, 15-20)

“No. I see kpop as just a plus to living in korea but its not the reason I wanted to stay” in Korea. (Participant 95: Indonesian, female, 21-25)

“Already live here and irrelevant to my decision”

(Participant 40: British, male, 36-40)

“Kpop had no effect on me choosing to move to Korea”

(Participant 5: USA, female, 30-35)

The themes that showed up in this question was a mix of people moving or wanting to move to South Korea due to K-pop, and those who wanted to at least visit South Korea but maybe not move there, and those who said that K-pop had not influenced them to want to visit/live in South Korea. The majority, however, was people who in some way had been influenced by K-pop into visiting or wanting to visit the country.

5.1.4 Has K-pop made you interested in something specifically South Korean (e.g culture, music, fashion, food etc)?

This question was initially meant to be a yes or no question, but considering I included an ”other” option, there was some people who decided to be more explicit in their answers (El Sayed, 2021a). A few examples of the more explicit answers were;

”work culture” (Participant 15: German, female, 26-30)

”Music industry management, monopoly and human rights/ HR related stuff”

(Participant 149: Swedish, female, 21-25)

”Food, culture, and other music” (Participant 206: Swedish, female, 21-25)

”The language, Kdramas”

(Participant 268: Sweden, female, 36-40)

”Not necessarily but I do appreciate South Korean variety shows more and it sparked an interest in Korean bands outside the pop genre”

(Participant 25: American, female, 26-30)

”Music history (50-90s), food, language, and the creation of Hangul”

(Participant 329: Swedish, female, 21-25)

Most of the respondents answered just “yes” or “no” to this question, with the majority answering “yes”, but out of the people who gave more specified answers, one said that they had become more interested other music, culture and food, and others brought up work culture, and human rights.

5.1.5 If yes, can you specify more specifically what K-pop has made you more interested in?

This and the former question belonged together. The former question was supposed to be mainly a yes or no question, and this was supposed to be the question were respondents who had answered ”yes” in the former question gave more specific answers. However, since the other option included an ”other” option some people gave more specific answers in that question, whilst some people gave yes or no answers in this one. So, there were a bit of miscommunication on my part, and I could have written the questions more clearly.

However, most people got it and answered with suggestions of other things they had gained an interest in. The majority answered that K-pop had made them interested in one of the four categories: Food, Culture, Fashion and Language (El Sayed, 2021a).

Some specific examples of what people became interested in through K-pop were;

”Beauty products, food, fashion, drinks, culture”

(Participant 72: American, male, 26-30)

“To try all the different foods, (street food markets), to visit their parks and natural reserves, to take part in their traditions, their culture and heritage, the palaces! As well as the shopping. To visit their tiny cute cafés and to walk along the Han River. There are so many things to do.” (Participant 224: Swedish, female, 31-35)

”Kpop has made me realize that I actually have talent for dancing and it all started with just random dancing into semi serious/ fun dancing but I learned that I have the potential to a great dancer in the future” (Participant 212: Indonesian, female, 14)

“Fashion and culture” (Participant 78: Australian, female, 21-25)

“Food, culture, and fashion” (Participant 175: Hungarian, genderfluid, 21-25)

I actually gained an interest in all the topics mentioned; I learned a lot about Korean culture, went to eat Korean food in Germany, bought Korean clothes, make up and K-pop merchandise and at some point I also started learning the language. I can easily read Korean and am able to understand easier sentences
(Participant 229: German, female, 15-20)

This question initially asked for responses from those who, through K-pop, had gained an interest in something else South Korean like fashion, culture etc,. However there were some respondents that decided to respond eventhough they had not gained interest in anything else through K-pop;

”It has not endeared me to Korea in any way” (Participant 4: Irish, male, 35-40).

”It has not interested me” (Participant 30: Sweden, female, 21-25)

As mentioned above food, culture, fashion and language were the four biggest categories that people had gained an interest in after listening to K-pop, but there were also quite a few other categories that was mentioned. Other answers that popped up were, cosmetics, skin care, dolls, trot music, history, and many more. This shows that K-pop has influenced quite a lot of people to become interested in other things besides K-pop. **(done)**

5.1.6 Do you think that by putting K-pop on the global market, South Korea has become a more well-known country world-wide? Why?

With this question I wanted to know if people felt like the globalization of K-pop had contributed in making South Korea more known as a country worldwide.

Most of the participants said that K-pop in some way had made South Korea more well-known as a country. Out of 345 respondents there were only six people who did not answer the question, and out of those 339 who answered the majority believed that putting K-pop on the global market had in some way, even if it was small, contributed to making South Korea more well-known as a country (El Sayed, 2021a). Specific responses included;

“Yes, most western countries dont really consider the existence of most asian countries so i think kpop and other korean media has put sk in the public eye”
(Participant 61: Mixed Thai and Swedish, female, 15-20)

“yes because it makes more people aware of it and do further research into the country as a whole” (Participant 309: British, enby/transmasculine, 15-20).

“Yes definitely. Kpop is getting well known around the world thanks to the success of groups like BtS or Blackpink. The younger generation (14yo - 20yo I would say) has now an extensive knowledge of korean culture and sometimes korean language because of kpop. Their success among the younger generation means that they have a lot of power (economically but also ideologically) on a big portion of the worldwide population” (Participant 8: Spanish, female, 20-25).

“Ofcourse. K dramas as well. Without it, Korea is in the shadow of Japanese culture. Western people know Japan, more and less China, Vietnam/Thailand and south east asia but do not know very well South Korea” (Participant 17: French, male, 21-25).

“If you check the country’s nation branding efforts, you’ll see it’s an actual strategy that has been going on for years, since the segyewha policy of Lee Myung-bak and the involvement of the Chaebols. It’s been proven and it is widely supported by academia

“that kpop and hallyu have helped South Korea become more acknowledged by citizens of other countries” (Participant 37: Greek, female, 21-25)

“For sure it has contributed in enhancing south korea’s soft power and it is a powerful advertising mean for the country” (Participant 59: Italy, female, 26-30).

As was mentioned above there were a few cases where people did not think that putting K-pop on the global market had made South Korea more known as a country;

“Not really. I think South Korea always been a well known country”
(Participant 151: Swedish, male, 26-30).

“No, it was known before because of the food.” (Participant 105: N/A, N/A, 36-40)

“K-pop has become more global and known. I don’t feel like it has made S Korea as a country more well known” (Participant 82: Indian, female, 21-25).

“No. South Korea became more famous thanks to movies, dramas on streaming platforms such as Netflix, and through Youtubers living and working in the country”.
(Participant 290: Swedish, female, 31-35)

However, it was a question that was not formulated as well as it could have been, and it created a few misconceptions. My intention was not to make it seem like K-pop was the sole reason that South Korea had become more well-known as a country, or that the South Korean government was the main agent in putting K-pop on the market, but in some circumstances the question was interpreted this way and I can understand why. Below I will present two responses that critiqued the formulation of the question.

“I think it is wrong to think of the country of South Korea putting cultural products in general on the global market. The artists, record labels, or film studios are putting them on the market, mostly for increased profit. To some degree there is a joint cultural pride in Korea being well-known, but it’s a business first and foremost. So while I’d agree that Korea is more well known, I’d disagree with the premise of the

question that South Korea the country, or the Korean state is the main agent in this success". (Participant 7: American, male, 35-40)

"I believe it would be unfair to South Korea's automobile and tech industry if one were to say kpop made it more well known. I think it is more politically correct to say that kpop made young people who are yet to take an active interest in industries more aware of South Korea culturally without taking credit away from their industrial giants" (Participant 87: Indian, female, 21-25)

Three themes showed up in the responses for this question, people who believed that putting K-pop on the global market had a part in making South Korea more well-known as a country, people who did not agree with this notion at all, and those who felt that the question could not be phrased in this way. I agree that the question was not phrased in the best way, considering it could easily be misunderstood that I credited the government for being the ones who put K-pop on the global market, or that K-pop was the only thing that made South Korea well-known. It has been explained above that it is not necessarily the government that promotes K-pop on the global market, and that a lot of the times it is the work of the entertainment companies, institutions, and civil societies, so I should have been clearer about these things. However, despite these errors, the majority seemed to understand what I meant and answered that K-pop was indeed part of making South Korea more well-known to the international community.

5.2 Summary of Analysis

Most of the responses to all of the questions above were positive, which in a sense shows how big of an impact K-pop has had on many foreigners. K-pop has reached a lot of people living outside of the country and has had a positive impact on many of their lives, as well as attracted them into wanting to know more about South Korea and see what more it has to offer. Combining these results with what has been discussed about cultural diplomacy, and soft power, it can clearly be said that K-pop has the power to attract and influence the foreign public, and can be called a soft power tool. Eventhough, there were some people who voiced their dislike when it came to K-pop, as well as some people who said that by liking K-pop they had gained an awareness of the bad sides of South Korea's entertainment industry, and

did not enjoy it as much anymore, the majority still had a good impression of K-pop and had been positively influenced by it.

6. Conclusion

Taking the gathered information on K-pop, soft power, and cultural diplomacy and combining it with people's personal opinions, I believe that K-pop can be seen as a soft power tool, just like the South Korean state, companies, institutions, and civil society aims for it to be.

As was discussed above cultural diplomacy is the action of the government, private sectors, institutions and so on, using for example culture, to make an impact on other countries (The Institute of Cultural Diplomacy, n.d.,), and soft power is the power to attract or influence other countries with the use of soft resources, such as K-pop (Nye, 1990 & 2008; Gibson 2020). Looking into the responses of the survey one can see that K-pop had a good impression on them, and it had a positive influence on their lives, it made them want to visit South Korea, and made them interested in other things related to the country, such as the language, food, cosmetics, skincare, culture and fashion. Most of the respondents also strongly agreed that putting K-pop on the global market made the country more well-known (El Sayed, 2021a).

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Twitter

방탄소년단 (@BTS_twt) tweeted on 4th June 2020;

“우리는 인종차별에 반대합니다. 우리는 폭력에 반대합니다. 나, 당신, 우리 모두는 존중받을 권리가 있습니다. 함께 하겠습니다.

We stand against racial discrimination.

We condemn violence.

You, I and we all have the right to be respected. We will stand together.”

#BlackLivesMatter

Available at; <https://twitter.com/BTS_twt/status/1268422690336935943>