

The Influences of K-pop Fandom on Increasing Cultural Contact

With the Case of Philippine Kpop Convention, Inc.*

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Abstract

The Korean Wave could be rapidly spread by the participation of its fans in the world, and social network service became a common communication medium of the fans. The recipients of the Korean Wave build a fandom based on their play culture. This research aims to emphasize the participatory efforts of K-pop fandom for enabling to rethink the Korean Wave's value and for increasing cultural contact between their local areas and Korea beyond supporting K-pop idols. With the case of the Philippine Kpop Convention, Inc., this research discusses the meanings of fan activities promoting K-pop and Korean culture based on local cultural spirit, tolerance and reciprocity in the Philippines. To do so, this research conducts both a face to face interview with the three administrators of fan clubs and with one in the PKCI's partner organization. In addition, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with six people in the ages of 20s. The PKCI's active participation is a key factor for developing the Korean Wave and for bridging social capitals. Person-to-person connections among local people can foster both a motivation to participate in Korean culture including K-pop and a favorability toward Korea. Thus, this study suggests to find a way of developing two-way communications between the Korean Wave

* This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government(NRF-201451A3A2044638).

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receivers and Korean cultural industries.

Key words: Cultural contact, Participatory culture, Fandom, K-pop, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The Korean Wave provides a meaningful opportunity for Korean government to take advantage of newly emerging cultural and public diplomacy to promote Korean cultural assets (Jang and Paik, 2012: 201). In general, the highly popular works contributing for the spread of the Korean Wave are entertainment-oriented genres, such as Korean dramas, K-pops, and Korean films, although the Korean Wave has been defined in various ways. The variety of Korean Wave contents show the cultural diversity and richness of Korea (Ha, 2017: 58). The Korean Wave receivers are likely to experience in Korean culture in order to fully understand the context of films, dramas, and K-pop. As a representative content of the Korean Wave, K-pop is understood as a part of a global trend especially popular among youth (Jang et al., 2012: 80).

The Korean Wave may be spread rapidly by its active recipients and K-pop fandom in general. The number of Korean Wave fans in the world has almost reached 60 million as a result of the syndrome of the Korean drama “The Descendent of the Sun” in 2016. According to the “Global Korean Wave 2016” by the Korea Foundation, there are 1,652 Korean Wave communities consisting of 59,390,000 members in 88 countries. In the Asia and Pacific regions, the number of Korean Wave fans remarkably increased from 20,000,000 to 40,100,000. In the region of the America, the popularity of K-pop contributes to the expansion of Korean Wave fan communities (Star Today, Jan. 25, 2017).

A fandom makes its own identity by showing differences and uniqueness to non-fans as well as by distinguishing itself from diverse fandoms. Previous fandom studies focused on commercial power, subculture, gender, and resistance to irrational conditions regarding pop stars/idols. One of the characteristics

among the Korean Wave fandoms is the use of new media. Social network services (SNS) have become a common communication medium among the fans across national boundaries. The Korean Wave fans actively participated in expressing themselves, replying to other comments, and providing video contents. Also, the fans use SNS to communicate among fans in daily lives.

K-pop fans in some regions express their desire and respect about how Korea has achieved its economic and cultural development; furthermore, those fans anticipate the 'Korean dream' by following Korean culture. The fans not only consume a variety of Korean Wave entertainment contents but also participate in Korean culture, such as through food, language, and traditional events. On the other hand, the negative effects of K-pop fandom are becoming obvious concerns as the popularity of the Korean Wave is increasing. Some K-pop fans show aggressive collective activities for their chosen K-pop stars on SNS.

This research aims to emphasize the participatory behaviors of K-pop fans for enabling to rethink the Korean Wave's value and for increasing cultural contacts based on the case of the Philippine Kpop Convention, Inc. This research explores the meanings of Filipino fan activities promoting K-pop and Korean culture beyond supporting a given K-pop star. The fans' active participation is a key factor for the sustainability of the Korean Wave and for bridging social capitals. It will be further suggested to strengthen friendships between the Philippines and Korea by understanding the fans' motivations and behaviors.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

People in different countries received the Korean Wave depending on political, economic, socio-cultural factors in each country. The diverse responses to the Korean Wave in each country are related to individual interactions to values and experiences in plural time periods. For example, the meaning of consuming

Korean Wave products would be either advanced or low culture through interacting with a global cultural form (Ainslie et al., 2017: 65-66).

Along with the spread of Korean Wave, however, it is also reported that various anti-Korean Wave movements have emerged in Asian countries, especially in China and Japan where Korean Wave phenomena first emerged. Or, some of the Korean Wave content receivers lost interests due to the level of dissatisfaction and tiredness with the Korean Wave contents and/or the benefit-oriented strategies of the Korean Wave industry, such as increasing prices, the commercialization of products related to Korean Wave celebrities (Ainslie et al., 2017: 67-68; Kim et al., 2014: 6-7). Kim et al. (2014) discussed anti-Korean Wave attitudes in China, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore. The problems of Korean Wave products, such as unsatisfying contents and marketing strategies, raise negative issues in the process of exchange (7). Although the anti-Korean Wave attitudes actually appeared in Japan due to political issues, the possible reasons are summarized as: 1) general criticisms of Korea; 2) criticism of youth culture as subaltern culture; 3) misunderstandings and conflicts about history; 4) criticism of the unilateral communication; and 5) expressions of fear over the possibility of losing one's own cultural characteristics. As a solution, the FGD participants in those countries concluded to increase mutual cultural exchanges with Korea (Han et al. and Lee quoted in Kim et al. 6-7).

The Korean Wave and Nation Branding of Korea

Korean cultures shown at historical dramas and family dramas can be a medium of learning Korean culture based on the values, belief, and taste of the participants. The Korean Wave receivers consume the styles of the Korean Wave different from those of their local cultures according to the FGD research (Jang et al., 2012: 85-86). Thus, the theory of Cultural Discount would not be enough to understand the growth of Korean Wave. Rather, the degree of tolerance to accept cultural difference should be considered.

The Korean Wave was meant as a competitive identity maker in order to develop the image of Korea. The contents of popular K-pops and Korean dramas are frequently emphasized to express the spirit and values of Korea and to promote the image of Korea. A nation's image is a perception and opinion of others (foreigners) about a country based on familiarity and favorability through direct and indirect experiences. A nation's commonly perceived image can be constructed by the cognitive, affective, and behavioral response of others. One's cognitions include values, beliefs, knowledge, and experiences in his/her society, such as "language, socialization practices, norms, roles, [and] laws" (Stephan, C. and Stephan, W. 128, quoted in Song, 2010: 43). These cognitive aspects involve the process of analyzing and interpreting information. The affective dimension is about emotional response and attitude. Finally, both the cognitive and affective dimensions result in the behavior dimension, and also the combined response from both cognition and affect causes a resulting behavior (Song, 2010: 43).

A nation's image is a projection of the nation's perception of its own identity, in particular, of its culture and arts – heritage, landscape, and the arts, which Dinnie (2009) calls the "cultural expressiveness" of a nation (Dinnie 147; Song, 2010: 7). Culture is a resource for reaching others because of common values and interests. Also, culture is a source of negative stereotypes and emotional responses. For example, many people in different countries enjoy American music like rock and jazz music, and this is caused for them to feel familiar with or favorable to U.S. culture. People may also think about "freedom as a key value of democracy by enjoying rock and jazz music, and as a result they can build a positive image of the U.S." (Song, 2010: 31). Similarly, the high level of favorability of the Korean Wave has resulted as the increase of familiarity and favorability of Korean culture, such as the character of a people, the common cultural heritage, the language, and the way of life of a people. A nation's image does not simply induce high favorability; it simultaneously results in a cause of behavioral changes, such as relationship-building (Song, 2010: 197-198).

Popular culture fandom has been thought as an object of national cultural policy concerned with nation branding (Lee, 2016: 12). Nation branding, as strengthening a nation's soft power (Nye 2004, Fan 2008) increases the familiarity and favorability of the state by promoting its domestic cultural contents(Lee, 2016: 12; Song, 2010: 43). Fan (2008) defines nation branding as "a cross-cultural communication process that very much resembles the advertising process: awareness-attraction-preference", and as "a nation's brand consists of three sub-brands: political brand, economic brand and cultural brand" (155). The Korean Wave has a positive impact and potential that could promote Korea's soft power approach. For instance, Sung (2010) notes the Korean Wave provided an opportunity for Taiwan and Korea to build a positive relationship and has provided Taiwanese with a new image of South Korea. Moreover, the Korean Wave has promoted increasing cross-cultural ties (Jang and Paik, 2012: 197-198). The impact of popular dramas diffused South Korean culture to daily culture in foreign countries and invited the number of tourists who wanted to experience traditional foods in South Korea. The ways of thinking and living expressed in Korean dramas influenced the viewers to increase consumption of Korean foods and goods (Jang and Paik, 2012: 201).

Korean public organizations, such as Korea Foundation(KF) and Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange(KOFICE), have been dedicated to spreading the Korean Wave contents and to supporting the Korean Wave fan clubs abroad. A fandom is understood as a target of nation branding through the country's popular culture. However, nation branding projects should not treat popular culture fandom as just passionate consumers of domestic popular cultural products without understanding the participatory culture of fandom (Lee, 2016: 12). As a way of building a positive image and relationship with the Korean Wave fans, the Korean Wave industry should develop its management to listen to the fans' voices and reflecting how both the fans and the Korean Wave industry can develop sympathy (Ha, 2017: 59).

The Korean Wave Fandom and Korean Culture Promotion

A fandom can be both a big consumer of and a cooperater with cultural industries. Usually, popular cultural industries are likely to see fandom as a target group for making profits. Recently, active fandom participation has suggested industries re-consider a fandom as a cooperater and manager beyond the consumer role. In the case of the K-pop global fans, they are expanding their participations from promoting their idols to managing a concert that K-pop industry seldom offers due to low net profit.

Fandoms not only promote their specific subjects but also actively consume them by recreating the original subject with high levels of attachment. Popular culture fans consume a specific content, artist, and/or text of mass-produced popular cultural contents in their daily lives. When the fans collect the specific chosen subjects and share common cultural tastes with each other, the fans can build a fandom and kinship (Jeong 37). Popular culture fans express their desires, values, and identity by consuming the subject, and they sometimes follow whatever their chosen stars do. The fans are dedicated to producing transformative and recreative contents, such as fan fiction, fan videos and to providing subtitling or translation services to foreign texts. In addition, they “have become part-time collaborators with official producers seeking to incite and retain dedicated fan audiences, and part-time co-opted word-of-mouth marketers for beloved brands” (Hills, 2010: 58; Chin and Morimoto, 2013: 98). This results in the “curious co-existence of both anti-commercial ideologies and commodity-completist practices” within fan cultures (Hills, 2002: 28; Chin and Morimoto, 2013: 98).

Until recently, the collective behaviors and values of popular culture fans have been regarded as unusual by the general public. Mostly, as Jenkins said, fans have been considered “cultural dopes” and as resistant to the social system and cultural hegemony (Jeong 38). The prejudice towards the fans was challenged after cultural studies rooted in England. The fans were rather understood as active and independent participants with own abilities of

decoding and recreating popular contents (Jeong, 2016: 39). The 'audience research' considers a popular culture consumer as a social independent agent, not as a passive receiver of media contents. According to the 'audience research' by Fiske (1992/2002), a variety of audiences in the world can build a new cultural community, an analytic community of popular culture (Jeong, 2016: 40). This perspective made possible to conceptualize a mass media receiver and fan as a social independent agent.

The cultural studies focuses on the characteristics of fans in terms of productivity and participation in producing transformative texts and accumulating cultural capital like collecting objects and knowledge (Lee (2013) quoted in Jeong, 2016: 41). As McMillan & Chavis (1986) said, a fandom as a community is kept based on belongingness and membership, reciprocal giving, influence on controlling members' private lives, reward and integration, interactive communication and feeling of bonding (quoted in Sohn, 2012: 52). Fans seldom produce and recreate works "purely for the sake of doing so or even for exclusively personal use; fans make these things for other fans to use" (Turk, 2014: 4.1). Thus, a fandom should be studied with economical and socio-cultural characteristics. Attentions on both local contexts and global conditions are kept for understanding a diversity of fandom.

Fiske discussed the relations between fandoms and others (non-fan members). A fandom is discriminated itself from others who cannot agree with or feel about what fandoms pursue for. In doing so, a fandom implies that a fandom is a productive and meaningful activity rather than unconditionally supporting pop stars. A fandom actually critically interprets its chosen stars and contents. According to Jenkins (1992), a fandom can be an alternative cultural community for cultural diversity in society. Then, Fiske saw that each fandom tries to be distinct among various fandoms even when to support a same content or star (Jeong, 2016: 45).

On the other hand, Hills (2002) suggested not to overly understand the resisting ability of fandoms with regards to productivity and cultural capital accumulation overestimated although fandoms show their participatory culture

and make changes. Rather, according to Hills, a fandom consists of difference and colorfulness, not bonding with similarities and common values, and a fandom has been developing diverse subcultures (Jeong, 2016: 44). While developing cultural capital and making differences, a fandom shows its uniqueness through the results of the diverse identities of each fan. A fandom has two-folded desires: it wants to be identified with its own characteristics but, at the same time, it seeks recognition and empathy for what it has achieved.

K-pop, as a part of global cultural content, has been building relations by bridging global (K-pop's universal elements) and local K-pop fans. K-pop fandoms have been establishing a transnational cultural community through the internet and mobile technology. Online community is a social place for the people who share common interest and issues with online users and actively interact with each other. The feeling of solidarity among the people can be developed. K-pop fans delivered the Korean Wave contents through mostly YouTube, Facebook, and online fan pages in order to share the contents with and to build cultural ties with the Korean Wave fans in local and global areas. They actively participate in expressing themselves, replying to other comments, and providing video contents. The fans share information and regularly organize events and community activities in regions through YouTube, SNS, and so on. Their YouTube participation contributes to creating two-way communication between the Korean Wave and its global fans by spreading and re-creating the Korean Wave contents, such as a K-pop cover dance. The spirits of openness, participation and sharing are similar to the characteristics of global fandom communicating through the web and mobile medium.

The Korean Wave fans engage in voluntary activities to elevate their star's image. In Korea, the fans of the idol group 'Shinhwa' started donations in 2007, and the philanthropic activities spread among the Korean Wave fans. The fans in different regions organize associations and social clubs to participate in sociocultural events such as fund-raising, donating to local/global charity,

volunteering in emergency situation, and so on. The philanthropic activities also develop the fans' own reputation. K-pop fans are likely to highly concern their own reputation and to create a "mature image via philanthropy" because they recognize that "their behavior reflects back onto the stars" (Koreaexpose, Feb. 20, 2017).

However, the participatory activities of Korean Wave fans are not always positive. The negative effects of Korean Wave fandoms are also becoming a critical issue as the popularity of the Korean Wave is increasing, in particular that of K-pop. K-pop has different meanings among the Korean Wave fans with a different degree of embrace by local cultures. An online K-pop fandom can have a negative influence and/or struggles while K-pop fans fully use the internet and SNS to support their stars. For example, the Billboard Award is presented to the most popular pop music fandom annually. People mostly expect that either 'One Direction' or 'Justin Bieber,' ranked on the pop charts, would have the biggest and most powerful fandom due to their familiarity in the global pop music market. However, the award was given to the K-pop fandom of T-ara Queens. The Billboard Award's fan-army-off competition is divided into four sections by four music genres: pop, R & B / Hip-Hop, K-Pop, Rock. 'Queens', the name of 'T-ara' fandom, beat all of the competitors in the K-pop section and won over the fandoms of 'One Direction,' 'Beyonce' (R & B / Hip-Hop), '5 Seconds of Summer' (Rock). Although the fandoms participating in the Billboard Award's fan-army-off competition showed rough and harsh activities in order to win, 'Queens' was criticized for its highly aggressive actions (billboard.com, Aug. 19, 2015). Cybervigilantism and othering mechanisms are representative examples found among K-pop fans. Othering mechanisms by the high level of online communications among the global K-pop fans are resulted as confictions, such as presenting "a strong sense of nationalism and even racism." K-pop idol group fandoms sometimes show "assertive and devoted" actions only for protecting the chosen idol groups in a collective manner (Jung, 2012: 3.1).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research conducted both a focus group discussion (FGD) with the Korean Wave fans and a face to face interview and three rounds of email interviews with the members of Philippine Kpop Convention Inc. (PKCI) In addition, this research also observed the fan activities of the PKCI from its Facebook page. This research uses Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method with exploratory and open-ended questions. FGD is one of the main qualitative research methods and is designed to interpret the inherent motivations and reasons of research participants. The FGD was conducted in Manila, Philippines from February 2015, and the six participants of the FGD research were in the ages of 20s. The FGD research participants were recruited by each local partner without any condition. The in-depth interview was conducted with the three administrators of the PKCI and the one active K-pop fan in its partner organization. Then, the two times of email interviews were followed with the interviewees from September 2015 to December 2016. Table 1 and Table 2 show the list of FGD participants and in-depth interviews in Manila, Philippines.

<Table 1> The List of FGD Participants in the age of 20s

Name(Initials)	Age	Occupation	Sex	Belonging to Fan club
N.N	20s	Student	Male	No
A.A.M	20s	Student	Female	Yes
B.O	20s	Student	Female	Yes
S.A.O.B	20s	Student	Female	No
C.S.L.Z	20s	Student	Female	No
D.C.P.C	20s	Student	Female	Yes

<Table 2> The List of In-depth Interviewees in the PKCI and its partner organization

Name(Initials)	Age	Occupation	Sex	Belonging to Fan club
PKCI-A-F	30s	Part-time	Female	Yes
PKCI-B-F	30s	Employee	Female	Yes
PKCI-C-F	30s	Employee	Female	Yes
PKCI-D-F	20s	Free lancer	Female	No

The following three questions need to be addressed to explain the participatory culture of the PKCI and to develop a relationship between the K-pop fans and Korea- in particular, the Korean Wave industry and Korean government organizations:

1. How is K-pop received by local people including the Korean Wave fans?
2. What types of activities of a foreign K-pop fandom contribute to increasing familiarity and favorability (branding) the Korean Wave and Korean culture in general?
3. What are the roles of the PKCI in increasing cultural contact?

DISCUSSION

According to Lipura's survey, 100 Filipinos regarded the characteristics of Korean Wave as the cultural similarity, hybridity, dynamics and freshness. The survey participants considered the hybridity of the Korean Wave between Asian and Western cultures as strengths and felt the familiarity toward Koreans because of experiences with the Korean immigrants in Manila. The popularity of the Korean Wave makes an impact on the 5 areas: 1) respect to Others in both Korean and Philippine societies; 2) building a network and social capital; 3) increase of philanthropy and corporate social responsibilities; 4) increase of trades and tours; and 5) cultural and educational exchanges (Lipura, 2014: 3).

In 2005, Korean dramas were introduced through the local TV channels of the Philippines. K-pop could be spread rapidly due to the familiarity of Korean dramas and the colorfulness of K-pop performances different from the original music of the Philippines. The local people receive K-pop and Korean drama independently by keeping local cultural spirit and taste, according to the FGD participants. For example, some of cultural industries in the Southeast Asia either copied or made boy and girl bands similar to K-pop boy and girl bands in order to achieve the economic and cultural effect shown in

the case of the spread of the Korean Wave. Those glocalized boy and girl bands seem to be popular among local teenagers. Similarly, in the Philippines, some of local boy and girl bands were made very similar to K-pop idol groups, such as 1:43pm, Pop Girl, XLR8. However, they could not earn popularity. Local people regarded those groups as a failure of pinoy-pop because those groups just copied the styles of K-pops rather than reflecting the characteristics of original Philippine music and recreating hybridized pop music. It can be meaningful that the popularity of K-pop is accepted and sustained by the local cultural characteristics.

The participatory culture of the Korean Wave fans have been shown in many aspects, but, first of all, it should be emphasized that their participatory culture could be supported by the global distributions of social media. A participatory culture is a part of play culture among fans and encourages both fans and other consumers to participate in creating a new content and distributing it (Jenkins(1992) quoted in Song, Nahm, and Jang, 2014: 358-359). The appearance of Social Network Service(SNS), such as YouTube and Facebook, promoted the growth of the participatory culture among the Korean Wave fans and changed the ways of consumptions and communications among the fans. According to Shin (2014), the concept of cultural governance is divided in two ways. In a broad sense, a cultural governance is meant as a collaborative and interactive system which consists of a nation, market, and civil society with better flexibility than in past. Then, the concept of cultural governance in a narrow sense can be understood as voluntary and autonomous controlling self-organizing system in a civil society distinguished from a nation and market mechanism (Song and Nahm, 2016: 23-24). Nowadays, the practice of cultural governance is in the transitional process of relieving a distinction between a producer and consumer and of encouraging participation and exchanges in cultural market with the rise of roles and power of private sector. In addition, cultural contents produced by a fan, who simultaneously produce and consume the contents, is rapidly increasing. In terms of distribution of culture, the influences of individuals and fandoms in

a private sector become visible and crucial.

The PKCI, as an umbrella organization among the diverse K-Pop fan clubs in the Philippines, has contributed to the spread of K-pop and to the increase of the familiarity and favorability of Korean culture. The PKCI shows the importance of fan club participation with regards to the localization of K-pop and to possibly make a bridge between the Philippines and Korea.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How is K-pop received by local people including the Korean Wave fans?

In the Philippines, the Korean Wave is concerned as a highly popular foreign pop culture among local teenagers and females in the ages of 20s and 30s. Some of the FGD participants rather see the popularity of the Korean Wave as a niche culture but positively anticipate that the popularity of Korean Wave will be sustainable. The FGD participants showed varied responses on the influences of the Korean Wave depending on gender. The male participants viewed the impact of Korean Wave more broadly, saying that “K-pop is a trend in the world.” They regarded the meaning of Korean Wave as embodying the overall genres of Korean culture including K-pop, Korean drama, and Korean food. On the other hand, the female FGD participants were interested in both K-Pop and Korean dramas and felt more cultural proximity with Korean pop culture than with Western pop culture. They considered “K-pop and Korean life styles” as the meaning of the Korean Wave. All of the FGD participants agreed the influence of Korean Wave in promoting the national image of Korea in the world.

The FGD participants are likely to appreciate both the hybridity of Korean Wave contents and the talented people in the Korean Wave industries. K-pop is mostly meant idol group’s dance music and is likely to highlight visual

expressions, such as the styles and appearance of celebrities. These characteristics of K-pop are different from those of the original Philippine music (OPM) played by traditional music instruments. Two of the FGD participants say that the popularity of K-pop is interesting because most of Filipinos prefer the OPM and/or the mainstream Western music, such as the U.S. pop music. K-pop songs would rather appeal to a group of people who enjoy the styles and 'feminine' images shown at performances than to all age groups.

The Korean Wave entails heavy outlays for the young Korean Wave fan, such as fashion, beauty products, and expensive concerts. In order to keep up with the Korean Wave trends, they may spend more time and money than they can manage. The FGD participants worried about the Korean Wave's aggressive marketing strategies that pushing its fans to spend money more than necessary. In addition, this may result in decreased consumption of local cultural products.

The degree of K-pop consumption is related to the use of SNS and multi-media streaming services among K-pop fans in a socio-cultural environment. The local K-pop fans are a group of people who can use both internet and mobile and easily communicate with other fans. The PKCI and local K-pop fans mostly communicate through social media, such as Facebook, and actively participated in sharing K-pop contents, information, and ideas with other fans. The core values of social media are both shareness and relations (Jin and Yeo (2011) quoted in Song, Nahm, and Jang 2014), and the PKCI fans build social networks by expressing what global fans can sympathize with.

- What types of activities of a foreign K-pop fandom contribute to increasing familiarity and favorability (branding) the Korean Wave and Korean culture in general?

The Korean Wave fans are increasingly willing to learn Korean culture in general by deepening their interests on understanding the Korean Wave contents. The Korean Wave contents stimulates the fans' interest and participation in

Korean culture, such as food, language and life style. For example, since the establishment of the Korean Wave fan club in 2013, the fan clubs of Korean language and culture had been increased in Hungary. 'HHHQ', the hub of diverse-sized K-pop fan clubs, has contributed on promoting K-pop with the promotional and educational activities include publishing journals, books, and music columns of 'So-Nyeo-Sunday' and 'KPop Regen Kedd' in every month. The fan club also provides K-pop lyrics and newspapers by professionally editing and translating them into Hungarian. These activities help local K-pop fans to not only enjoy the music but also learn Korean socio-cultural characteristics. (Nahm and Song, 2016: 57-58)

In the Philippines, the popularity of K-pop, Korean dramas, and Korea films promoted the Korean Wave receivers to learn Korean language and culture. The PKCI members and local Korean Wave fans enjoy a feeling of affinity with K-pop and Korean cultural activities provided by the Korean Cultural Center in the Philippines. The KCC abroad is an important institutional asset in promoting the Korean Wave. One of the basic roles of the KCC is to offer information related to the Korean Wave contents and other nation branded identity markers, such as arts, foods, tourism, and language. The KCC in the Philippines also provides sponsorship to the local Korean Wave fan communities for promoting Korean culture in general.

Direct interaction with local people including K-pop fans can help the KCC to learn about the characteristics of the local cultural environment, including the cultural interests of local people. The KCC abroad also tries to reach the local Korean Wave fan communities for building networks and partnerships. For instance, the KCC in Mexico organized a local support group for promoting Korean culture, called K-culture supporters, and the KCC has offered several opportunities for the supporters to experience the Korean Wave contents. Then, Korean public organizations, such as the KF and KOFICE, have been dedicated to spreading the Korean Wave contents and to supporting the Korean Wave fan clubs abroad.

Also, the Korean Wave fans have recently expanded their participation from

supporting the Korean Wave artists to promoting the images of both the artists and their fans. In many regions, K-pop fans have recently contributed to philanthropy for the chosen stars and for the fans' own reputation. It is common for K-pop stars to engage in philanthropy to improve their image. In the case of K-pop fan activism, K-pop fans initiate fund-raising and charity events in order to donate the money with the name of their K-pop stars. In case of the PKCI, it tries to decrease the negative image of K-pop fans and Korea in local society by helping for local communities in needs.

■ What are the roles of the PKCI in increasing cultural contact?

Fan communities are established by “a process of forming affective relationships among people through multiple sites of engagement beyond national economies or allegiances” as Appadurai (1990) claims (quoted in Lee, 2016: 14). A moment of affinity between a fan and transcultural object is crucial for fans more than cultural similarities or differences (Chin and Morimoto 105). The Korean Wave fans are not only consuming but also learning popular culture for “inter-ethnic cultural understanding” (Oh, 2009: 426).

The PKCI suggests the ways of developing the sustainability of K-pop and the importance of fan participation in promoting Korean cultural capital. The PKCI was established as nonprofit organization in 2009 and has contributed on promoting harmony among local K-pop fan clubs. The PKCI is an umbrella organization among the fifty diverse K-pop fan clubs in the Philippines, and the PKCI makes a bridge among local K-pop fandom. This is different from the some cases of conflicts and attacks among K-pop fan clubs. Each of the fan clubs should have 200 individual fans at minimum in order to belong to the PKCI. According to the email interview with the PKCI administrator, as of May, 2017, there are the six big fan clubs in the membership. Each of the Exo and BTS fan clubs has around 700 members, and that of the Bigbang, Shinee, Got 7, and VIXX fan clubs does around 500 members. All of the rest fan clubs should have at least 250 members each. The PKCI manages more

than three websites including its homepage, but the PKCI page on Facebook is the main resource of communication with both local and global fans.

“First held last December 2009, the Philippine Kpop Convention is the FIRST and the BIGGEST fan-organized Kpop event in the country. Local FCs (Fan Clubs) finally unite under the banner of one event that aims not only to bring Kpop fans together, but also to support a cause that would help less fortunate children through Gawad Kalinga. The Philippine Kpop Convention is also the FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE WORLD.” (Philippine Kpop Convention/Facebook)

In order to fulfill its mission, since 2009, the PKCI organizes its own annual K-pop event, called the ‘PKCI K-pop Convention’, and Table 3 introduces its common program.

<Table 3> Basic Programs of the K-pop Convention

Program	Fandom activity
Concessionaires	Official section
'K-Pop Singing Star' (Cover dance)	Production/ Creation
K-Pop Idols Look Alike	Expression/ Distinction
K-Pop star performances	Participation
Invitation for local artists related to K-Pop	Production/ Creation
Music video screenings	Participation
Volunteer activities	Production/ Creation
Korean food court	Experience of K-Pop derivative contents / cultural exchange
Charity Auctions	Donations/ Sponsorships
K-pop awards	Official section
Kpop merchandise booth	Donations/ Sponsorships
Fanclub booth activities & Fanclub awards	Distinction/ Awards
KPOP Kospay Preliminaries	Expression/ Distinction

According to the interview with the PKCI administrators, in 2015, the PKCI stopped inviting K-pop stars from Korea because of a limited budget and scheduling issues. Instead, the PKCI has invited guest speakers from diverse fields related to the Korean Wave industries, such as a beauty expert, a famous blogger, and so on. Although the number of the PKCI K-pop Convention

audiences was highly decreased due to closing the ‘K-pop star performances’ corner, the PKCI administration committee considered this change as an opportunity of expanding relationships between the PKCI fans and the Korean Wave professionals. In addition, there has been a notable increase in the popularity of K-pop audition programs and cover dance festivals in local areas. These programs are mostly supported by both local and Korean business companies.

The PKCI has received support from the KCC in the Philippines, the PKCI’s local partner organization. Sometimes, the PKCI introduces the KCC’s activity news related to K-pop and Korean entertainment on its Facebook. A collaboration event between the PKCI and the KCC in the Philippines invites local people who are not K-pop fans to participate in diverse kinds of Korean culture, such as the Happy Korean Wave Day event. This event is also held by the KOFICE.

“K-pop Convention is easily recognized by both Korean Wave recipients in Metro Manila and K-pop fans in the Philippines. It is a large scale of cultural event, and its guests are very talented. Including K-pop cover dance, there are various programs to participate and booths that each of K-pop fan club promotes its K-pop artists. You don’t need to be a K-pop fan to enjoy the K-pop Convention. As attending at the convention, I could better appreciate for the culture and passion of the Korean people.” (S.A.O.B, 21, Female)

“Other than K-pop, the PKCI delivers the information about the Korean Wave and Korean cultural events held by KCC and Korean Tourism Center through the PKCI’s Facebook and main website... The PKCI’s event helped open my eyes to various things that I never knew before. I think that those events can help me to better understand Korean customs, history, etc. I can relate to them more easily.” (A.A.M, 20, Female)

“The PKCI uploaded any information related to the Korean Wave and KCC event on Facebook because of the partnership between the PKCI and KCC in the Philippines. We try to share all of information, particularly related to K-pop, with the PKCI members.” (PKCI-B-F)

In order to raise its own reputation, the PKCI annually offers philanthropic program of “charity auction” for local areas in a part of the PKCI K-pop convention. According to the PKCI administrators, the K-pop and its fans have not been fully understood by local people and even have looked down upon. The PKCI is sometimes regarded as ‘a group of females who spends their money and times for valueless K-pop and for only themselves.’ Actually, the part of the non-Korean Wave fans in local area had prejudices against Korea due to careless Korean tourists and/or arrogant Koreans. To decrease prejudices and prevent misunderstandings, since 2009, the PKCI members has not only donated money but also directly got involved in activities for the local community in need. The voluntary activities of the PKCI are types of sociocultural events such as fund-raising, donating to local/global charity, volunteering for emergency situations. Annual voluntary activities, for local communities in an emergency situation, is one of the characteristics distinguishing the PKCI from other fandoms. The activities are expected to not only change the negative perception on local K-pop fans as ‘fanatic for a foreign pop culture’ and/or ‘dissipating money’ but also to improve the image of Korea in the Philippines. The PKCI’s voluntary activities are also influenced from the local cultural characteristics in the spirit of philanthropy and tolerance in a daily life.

“The general public isn’t really aware of the concept of Korean Wave as they mostly only see Korean dramas through local TV channels. Korean Wave remains to be a subculture in the country, and some of local people disregard who are interested in Korean Wave or are part of K-drama or K-pop fandoms as fanatics. Thus, we(the PKCI) want to change the negative images on K-pop fans and to show “we are not wasting money for the useless stuff by participating in voluntary activities” (PKCI-C-F)

Also, the PKCI has tried to introduce the Korean culture to local people. The non-Korean Wave fans in local areas are proud of the Philippine pop cultures, and this is one of the reasons why the non-Korean Wave fans have negative perceptions on the PKCI. The PKCI expects that local people can

change their attitudes to the Korean Wave fans if the people learn and experience Korean culture and life styles easily. For example, the PKCI's K-pop convention offers the opportunities of experiencing Korean culture to local residents without specific occasions or procedures.

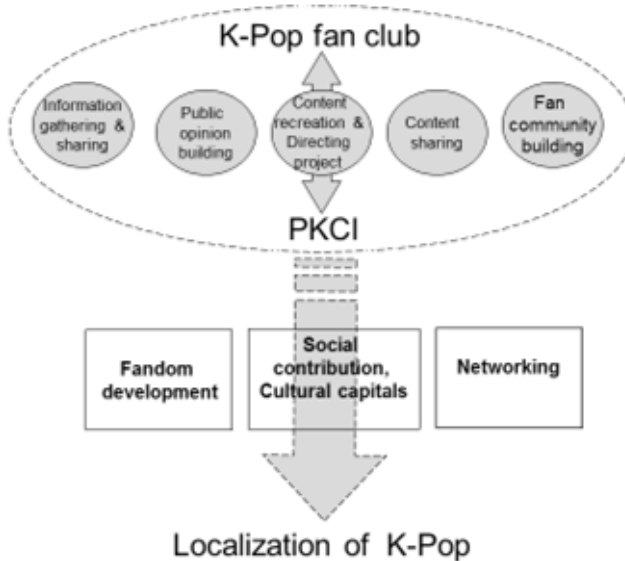
As the FGD participants mentioned, the Korean dramas and K-pop contents can stimulate the interest of local people on learning Korean culture if the familiarity of Korea and Korean people is constantly increased. In general, there are the seven opportunities for foreigners to meet Korean culture; 1) media, 2) institutions and organizations, 3) artists, 4) education (cultural and art education activities), 5) networks, 6) people (peers, family members, and so on), and 7) the internet. These opportunities are provided to individuals in various conditions and also can stimulate them to experience Korean culture, either directly or indirectly. The PKCI's promotion of Korean culture is important because the PKCI members can communicate with and reach to the local people who the KCC does not easily meet. First of all, the PKCI can sympathize with local people.

“However I still consider the Korean Wave as niche market more than pop culture. It is not yet fully accepted in the Philippines, maybe because of the language. (especially K-pop) Others also think that K-pop or Korean Wave fans are cheap and they are still looked down upon. ...One reason also is that because Philippines is too “westernized” that we tend to appreciate Western music more that songs or shows of our neighboring countries. But it is still nice to know that K-pop or Korean Wave is getting recognized(even at as slow phase) and starting to have its own identity through various opportunities shown in local areas.” (PKCI-B-F)

Figure 1 shows the activities and influences of the PKCI as a cultural mediator in the Philippines. As mentioned above, there are about fifty K-pop fan clubs belonging to the PKCI, and they are involved in diverse types of fan activities for both their chosen star and K-pop in general. The PKCI and its K-pop fan clubs actively participate in sharing information and regularly organizing events in order to foster both K-pop and Korean culture. All of the

PKCI fans also regularly communicate with the local receivers of the Korean Wave contents through YouTube, SNS, and so on. K-pop encourages the recipients to learn and experience Korean social and cultural characteristics. Along with the interest in K-pop, the K-pop fans in the PKCI actively extend their participation to improve understanding about Korea and to build diverse kinds of relations among local Korean Wave recipients.

<Figure 1> The Influences of the PKCI in the Philippines



Online community, like the PKCI, consists of bonding social capital based on homogeneity and of bridging social capital with diversity (Miyata Kakuko (2011) quoted in in Song, Nahm, and Jang 2014; 389). By using online and mobile services, the fifty fan clubs of the PKCI membership actively interact with each other regardless of the sizes of K-pop fan clubs belonging to the PKCI membership. The feeling of solidarity among all of the fan clubs can be developed, in particular, when the clubs achieve a big task that an individual fan club can't complete. The fan club members exchange ideas and opinions

for common goals and build bridges with local Korean Wave fans. All of the PKCI members have improved their cognitive and affective elements towards Korean culture and establishes horizontal ties with the local partners of the PKCI, such as the KCC and Korean business organizations. At the same time, the PKCI develops a sense of belonging to local Korean Wave fans by increasing common cultural interests and contacts. By doing so, the PKCI has broadened its roles similar to those of a cultural mediator in the local private sector.

The PKCI members collaborate to accumulate social and cultural capitals contributing to developing K-pop and local society. The PKCI also suggests the impact of informal cultural activities to develop networks on both online and offline.

“The PKCI’s leadership created its own fan culture for enjoying the K-pop based on mutual help, the cultural identity of the Philippines. The K-pop fan communities belong to the PKCI help each other’s activities rather than competitively supporting a chosen K-pop star or group. ... K-pop Convention held by the PKCI became a local cultural festival that serves local people to experience Korean culture.” (PKCI-D-F)

Person-to-person connections among local K-pop fans can foster both a motivation to participate in K-pop and Korean culture and a favorability toward Korea. The FGD participants agree with the purposes of the PKCI activities encouraging ‘people to people’ interactions. The PKCI’s activities imply the impact of socialization on sharing information and participating in diverse cultural activities in person. The PKCI offers educational and philanthropic services for local people. These services are expected to broaden and diversify local participations in Korean culture including K-pop and to also change the negative perceptions of both K-pop fans and Koreans among local people. Likewise, the PKCI has contributed to making bridges between its members and local people and to increasing the familiarity and favorability of Korean culture in the Philippines.

CONCLUSION

This study discusses the importance of K-pop fandom based on a participatory culture of fandom. Previous K-pop fandoms were discussed in terms of commercial power, irrational conditions regarding pop stars/idols, and conflicts among fan clubs. In this study, the PKCI rather shows the positive possibilities of participatory fan cultures. The PKCI acts as a cultural mediator for voluntarily introducing the Korean Wave and Korean culture to local people. The activities are not simple responses to the support from its partner organization, the Korean Cultural Center. These activities are caused by the K-pop fans' own interest on exploring K-pop, Korean values, and Korean culture. The PKCI fandom is a representative of bottom-up fan activism and keeps bridging social capitals through various activities. The PKCI fandom has also been contributing to increasing cultural contacts to Korea. Out of all, it is important that K-pop fandom is a voluntary act for developing the familiarity and favorability of the K-pop, Korean Wave and Korean culture. The interest on K-pop often encourage K-pop fans actively to participate and invite their friends and family members to encounter Korean culture.

It should be noted that familiarity with the Korean Wave is not a panacea, although the Korean Wave can ignite interest in Korea. Regardless of the popularity of K-pop, local people sometimes regard K-pop fans as people wasting a lot of money just on a popular foreign culture. The aggressive marketing of Korean businesses in the Philippines can negatively influence local K-pop fandom. Sometimes, the aggressive marketing strategies and the lack of creativity of Korean Wave products as possible causes for anti-Korean Wave feeling. In order to solve these issues, the KCC can make strategies between branding Korean culture and encouraging direct participation of local people. Local people experience Korean culture broadly more than pop culture products, such as K-pop, and should expand their experiences and understandings about Korean culture by themselves. Although the KCC only provides the parts of cultural activities designed to show positive aspects, the KCC's role can't be

underestimated or misunderstood due to its organizational status. Still, the KCC can offer the opportunities for local people to enter into a new culture and to easily learn about it in diverse ways. Both the PKCI and KCC expect that experiencing Korean culture becomes K-pop fans' subculture.

Thus, it is crucial to communicate with local Korean Wave fans to promote the familiarity and favorability of Korean culture and also to increase practices for understanding the fans' cultural identities. The activities of the PKCI as a cultural mediator show a good example of K-pop fandom to possibly improve cultural contacts between the global K-pop fans and Korea. The effort of bridging social capital through K-pop is to strengthen a friendship with active Korean Wave recipients. Although this process will take a long time, it is necessary for increasing a two-way communication among the Korean Wave fans in the private sector. At the same time, the Korean Wave industry should develop ways of understanding the Korean Wave fans' cultural characteristics and of practicing mutual understanding.

Last, this study only focused on exploring the impacts of PKCI activities promoting Korean culture and building social and cultural capitals through K-pop. The possible negative influence of K-pop fandom was not discussed. It is recommended that future research discusses the activities of K-pop fandom in different regions with regard to the nation branding project of Korea and its negative influences if possible.

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Submitted June 15, 2017; Revised July 17, 2017; Accepted July 20, 2017