

HALLYU AND MULTITRACK DIPLOMACY OF SOUTH KOREA BY SM ENTERTAINMENT

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ABSTRACT

For the past decade, the spotlight of Pop culture global sensation head to South Korea, Hallyu, Korean Wave, known as South Korea's public diplomacy which promotes Korean culture, start to spread in the mid-1990s and got bigger in 2000 with the boom of Korean Pop (K-Pop). As a tool of public diplomacy, Hallyu not only depends on the South Korean Government's direction but also encourages the private sector to take a part in promoting Korea culture. SM Entertainment (SME) as one of the big entertainment management in Korea also take a part, not only through the entertainment industry activity which is the main business but also in promoting public diplomacy through cooperation with Non-Government Organization (NGO) and supporting Saudi Arabia government. SME promotes Hallyu not only through regular public diplomacy also by applying multitrack diplomacy. Using the qualitative methods by applying the Multitrack diplomacy concept, this paper will explain how SME activity does not only reflect public diplomacy but is also part of the Multitrack diplomacy of the South Korean Government.

Keywords: SM Entertainment (SME), K-Pop Culture, Hallyu, Multitrack Diplomacy

ABSTRAK

Selama dekade terakhir, sorotan sensasi global budaya Pop mengarah ke Korea Selatan, Hallyu, Korean Wave, yang dikenal sebagai diplomasi publik Korea Selatan yang mempromosikan budaya Korea, mulai menyebar pada pertengahan 1990-an dan semakin besar pada tahun 2000 dengan boomingnya Pop Korea (K-Pop). Sebagai alat diplomasi publik, Hallyu tidak hanya bergantung pada arahan Pemerintah Korea Selatan, tetapi juga mendorong sektor swasta untuk turut serta mempromosikan budaya Korea. SM Entertainment (SME) sebagai salah satu manajemen hiburan besar di Korea juga turut ambil bagian, tidak hanya melalui kegiatan industri hiburan yang menjadi bisnis utama tetapi juga dalam mempromosikan diplomasi publik melalui kerjasama dengan Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat (LSM) dan dukungan Pemerintah Arab Saudi. SME mempromosikan Hallyu tidak hanya melalui diplomasi publik reguler tetapi juga dengan menerapkan diplomasi multijalur. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan menerapkan konsep diplomasi Multitrack, Penelitian menjelaskan aktivitas UKM tidak hanya mencerminkan diplomasi publik tetapi juga merupakan bagian dari diplomasi Multitrack Pemerintah Korea Selatan.

Kata Kunci: SM Entertainment (SME), Budaya K-Pop, Hallyu, Diplomasi Multitrack

INTRODUCTION

South Korea makes a huge difference in its policy both domestic and international, starting from the Kim Dae-jung administration in 1997. After the long term of conservative President rule, Kim Dae-jung who is a progressive, start to make policies such as Sunshine Policy, which prefer to use soft power not only towards North Korea but also global citizens to promote South Korea. Lucky for South Korea, the next presidential term, Roh Moo-hyun's administration, has a similar direction to President Kim Dae-jung. The progressive leaders prefer to use soft power content on the policy. The progressive leaders made the private sector easier to expand their business, one of them is the entertainment industry with the popularity of Korean drama (K-Drama) start to increase in neighbors countries the media start called this as Korean Wave which was later known as the Hallyu. The popularity of Hallyu drastically increase and widely spread especially in Southeast Asia later in Europe and Latin America the period 2000 – 2010, not only in the drama it also the Korean Pop (K-Pop) music which lead the government to make Hallyu as public diplomacy as one of 3 strategies on Korean diplomatic relations alongside state diplomacy and economic diplomacy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2010).

To support public diplomacy activity, in 2016 Korean government released the Public Diplomacy Act and Enforcement Decree of the Public Act. The Public Diplomacy Act explains how public diplomacy will be run, although the master plan of public diplomacy is centered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) the implementation will not only depend on the government but also encourage the private sector to join and supported by the government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2016). This condition made diplomacy activation easier and reach more levels of community which is the main goal of public diplomacy and also gives more benefit to the private sector in the entertainment industry as this sector made the Korean Wave trend. SM Entertainment (SME) that established in 1995 is one of the big management

company in Korea that has influent in the entertainment industry and play a big role in public diplomacy including the early day of public diplomacy. The artists of SME like High-five Of Teenager (H.O.T) and S.E.S are known as the “gate-opener” of public diplomacy for Korea-China especially with H.O.T popularity with 8 million fans club members only in China also as the Korean artist who held biggest concert in China (Meicheng Sun and Kai Khiun Liew, 2019), later in year 2000 BoA and TVXQ! become the actor of Korea-Japan public diplomacy, with BoA as the first Foreign artist in Japan who topped the Oricon chart known as the successful “testing ground” (Kozhakhmetova, 2012).

Highlighting the highly tense relationship between China, Japan, and Korea, what SME has done a remarkable move, SME pathed the way of public diplomacy especially with the Public Diplomacy Act made SME moves not only affecting their business but also how the Korean Government's position in the global civil community. SME not only grow the value of the entertainment business but also show that SME being an influential actor in the international community by combining innovation, business, and humanitarian approaches with the value Be Kind, Be Humble and Be The Love through Culture Humanity program (SM Entertainment , 2021). The Culture Humanity program is not only applied to the business sector and more activity has been shown over the year with highlight in 2022 SME start cooperation with the government of Saudi Arabia. Understand that McDonald (2012) explains the concept under Conflict Resolution studies, on SME activities case only relate Track will be used. Also not putting aside papers works that have been explaining SME activity with Public Diplomacy, those writing will support the writer to explain the phenomenon as well because SME activity supporting South Korean Government Public Diplomacy Act that leads to other activity that makes it that can be applied to Multi-Track Diplomacy.

METHODS

Research method that used for this writing is qualitative methods by applying the multitrack diplomacy concept as mentioned on the abstract and supported by the information from books and information from the internet such as news, press release of SME and government of states that cooperate with SME to applied the theory. To explain the phenomenon, the writer will use the qualitative method and apply Multi-Track Diplomacy concept (McDonald, 2012) that breakdown into nine tracks which are;

Track 1 Government

Track 2 Non-government or professional

Track 3 Business

Track 4 Private Citizen

Track 5 Research, Training and Education

Track 6 Activism or Advocacy

Track 7 Religion or Faith

Track 8 Funding

Track 9 Communications and the Media

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

SM Entertainment Activity: Business and Global Position

As explained in the introduction to how SME activity slowing down the tension in Northeast Asia, the South Korean government reacted by expanding Public Diplomacy in (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2010), and the government start to hold friendship festivals on some country, one of them is Korea-Indonesia Friendship Festival (KIFF) was held in October 2010 and SHINee who one of SME's artist participating and perform, promoting Korean culture through K-Pop. See the high enthusiasm for K-Pop culture related not only in Indonesia but also to other Southeast Asia countries, the South Korean government expand the cooperation. Although ASEAN-Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) framework was agreed upon by parties in 2005 and signed in

2006 the relationship between ASEAN countries and South Korea grow faster in 2010, pushed by the entertainment business sector with more K-Pop activity related held in ASEAN countries as it encouraged SME to start to expand the business in the ASEAN area with have joint venture company with Thai local brand, True, which was called SM True in 2011 then opened a branch office in Jakarta, Indonesia in 2019. After the opening branch office, more SME activity can be seen like the concert by SME artists like TVXQ!, Super Junior, Girls' Generation, SHINee, etc starting to grow rapidly not only in the two countries where SME has the branch office but also in another ASEAN country.

Another way to expand the business and influence, SME also recruited or scout the talents from overseas, for example, Super Junior has Chinese members and makes a sub-unit called Super Junior M, or EXO also has EXO-M sub-unit, those group means to attract and strengthen more Chinese market (Shinada, 2015). In February 2016, SME announced the new concept called "New Culture Technology" that will be maximizing technology to spread South Korean culture on SM activity and debuted the group Neo Culture Technology or known as NCT who will have an unlimited number of members and will be expanding around the world (SM Entertainment, 2016) with 3 sub-units in 2022 which are NCT127, NCT Dream and WayV also preparing the NCT Hollywood. The New Culture Technology is called the starting point of renewal strategy to bring up of aesthetic by combining art and production creative process through popular media which is pop songs and music videos (Fendler, 2019). In 2020, SME by debuting a girl group called aespa that expresses "avatar x experience" (SME, 2020). What makes it unique is that the member has an avatar that represents the alter ego of the member in the digital world which made SME the pioneer of the concept. SME digital expansion of Metaverse continues with aespa through "Girls" single promotion as recently aespa announced the collaboration with female NFT artist Blake Kathryn (aespa, 2022). This activity is not a regular brand/artist activity that shows not only digital expansion but also women empowerment and SME

domination with aespa be the first K-Pop artist/idol in the world who does this kind of activity.

Culture Technology continues with spreading the value of the creative process not only for their artist-related production but also to the public and the fans. Lee Soo-man, the founder and Chief Producer of SME explained in SME wants to maximize the technology in the digitalization era by combining creativity not only from the artist/idol but also from the fans as well reminding us that K-Pop brings a sense of humanity and empathy which connect to *Be Kind, Be Humble and Be The Love* value (Stanford APARC, 2022). On the other hand, SME signed a metaverse partnership with The Sandbox to create SM digital world called SM Culture Universe (SMCU) or known as KWANGYA (SME, 2022).

In 2016, after President Joko Widodo visited Seoul both states expand their cooperation bilateral. In March 2017 Indonesia-Korea Business Summit was held in Jakarta, President Joko Widodo invites South Korean companies, represented by the big company in different sectors such as CJ group, Hyundai motor, and SME to invest in Indonesia followed by MoU signing by the Indonesian Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM) and Korea Trade and Investment Agency (KOTRA) (BKPM, 2017). To continue to strengthen the business and expand cultural awareness in Indonesia, in 2018 partnering with Trans Media establish a new trend in the media and entertainment industry in Indonesia, as mentioned in the paragraph before SME established the branch office in Jakarta in 2019 it followed by more cooperation of SME with Indonesia with local brand such as Nu Green tea with NCT127, Somethinc with NCT Dream, Neo Coffee with Lucas of WayV and Sasa and Mie Sedaap with Siwon of Super Junior. The brand activation between SME and local brand also happened in Thailand where Super Junior's Donghae and Eunhyuk endorsing Thai local cosmetic product. Those business activities of SME based on *Culture First, Economy Next*, Prawiraputri and Meganingratna (2021) assess SME activity not only company profit related to the economic sector but also bring the awareness of South Korea that received positive response globally.

Multi-Track Actor instead of Public Actor

Take a look on how at the South Korean government uses of soft power after announcing *Hallyu* concept in 2010 and maximized it especially after establishing Public Diplomacy Act, the SME follow along and drastically expand the business which affect the relations with other state. One of them with Indonesia, as mentioned in the paragraph above in 2010 SME participated in KIFF, SME continue participating in South Korean Government activity of Public Diplomacy on 40th years bilateral relations South Korea-Indonesia “Music Bank” in 2013 represent with Super Junior and SHINee (Putri & Tisni, 2021).

Mentioned on previous paragraph that SME recognized as one of big company in Indonesia, SMEs also got recognition in the USA. SM Entertainment Square was given by the Los Angeles City councillor respecting the contribution of SME as well as the producer Lee Soo-man (SM Entertainment, 2020). In inter-Korea relations, SME also takes a part by sending their artist/idol Seo-hyun from Girl’s Generation to on inter-Korea concert in Seoul and having the group Red Velvet perform in Pyongyang in 2018 supporting the Ministry of Unification (Jung, 2018; Lee, 2018).

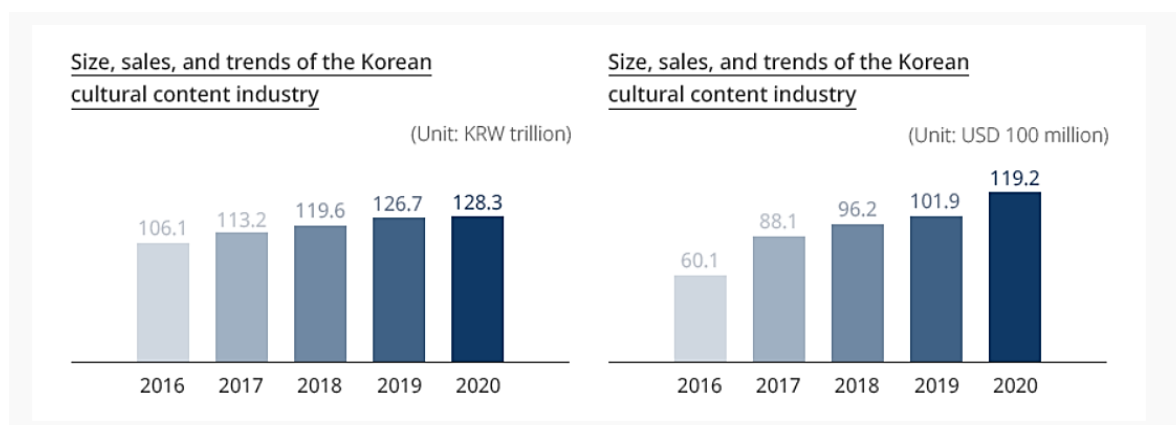
Not only active participating on South Korean government event, SME also actively social contributions at the international level. The activity called “SMile for U” take part in United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) 4, Ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning (SM Entertainment, n.d.). With global citizens as the target of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), SM starts to collaborate with United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2015 and renew the partnership in 2022 (UNICEF, 2022). Not only cooperate, but one of the SME artists, Siwon from Super Junior appointed as UNICEF East Asia & Pacific Regional Ambassador in 2019 (UNICEF, 2019), other SME artists also spot individually supporting UNICEF through private donations one of them is Jaemin from NCT Dream.

Taking a huge advantage not only by business but also with the figure through the artists, SME gives a significant impact on public opinion, especially at the international level. The interaction of the artist/idol and fans affect the emotional side, especially for the fans and it leads to public behavior. With SME artists contributing to doing good, it not only gives the artist and the company a positive impression but also indirectly leads the fans to do good as well. This is usually shown by a “birthday project” where the fans want to celebrate the artist/idol's birthday with a charity event, one the example is the Jeno of NCT Dream birthday in 2021 a fan group in Indonesia celebrated his birthday by holding a charity event and send the donation to 22 orphanages in 22 cities in Indonesia, as the number represents Jeno’s age (Kpop Chart, 2021).

Big business, big research-development-innovation, big influence gives a chance to SME to work not only with private sector but also with government from other states. In June 2022, Saudi Minister of Culture meets Lee Soo-man at SME office with a goal to have cooperation on SME support on Saudi cultural field including music education and training, organizing music event and festivals, and promoting joint musical production (Saudi Press Agency, 2022). This never been happened to other entertainment agency in Korea such as YG entertainment or JYP Entertainment that count as another big entertainment agency. SME advantages in the global public will also be beneficial to the South Korean government, and how the global community acknowledges SME as one professional actor with a big influence in international society show that SME is not only the key player in public diplomacy but also one of a big source of soft power. This kind of activity shows how public diplomacy works through public-to-public activity, supported by the technology that will affect government policy (Hocking, 2005) and how South Korean government aware that K-Pop group is an effective tools in international society (Jolin, 2017). South Korean government benefited from the positive image, especially in the economy creative sector, as well the economic impact. Some of the benefits of the positive image were shown when Incheon was selected as the host city for Asian Games 2014 and

PyeongChang was selected as the host for Winter Olympics 2018. In the economic sector the number of export goods and services, especially in services and economic creative goods and content which SME also contributed, drastically increase especially after the Public Diplomatic Act was released in 2016 as shown on the table below.

Figure 1. Sales data of content sales, 2022. From Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism



Source : Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism 2022 and Content Industry Statistics (as of 2020)

Compare with before the Hallyu era, South Korea's multi-track diplomacy is not given a big impact on South Korea's position, the G to-G relations are the main factor in diplomacy. For example, in the business sector, KIA and Hyundai which are the top carmaker in Korea expanded their business in ASEAN in early 2000 but cannot compete with Japanese car makers since the brand itself is not popular among the ASEAN people. On the other hand, the Korean government also have a scholarship program to promote Korean education started in 1977, the demand is not high, Zamzami (2022) explained in the period the 1970s to 2005 total of the awardee is 971 meanwhile 2007 the government awardee of the scholarship is around 800 persons. The multitrack diplomacy of South Korea changes drastically by implementing the Public Diplomatic Act, involving the private sector like SME give boost to the diplomatic style of Korea.

CONCLUSION

The slogan Culture First, Economy Next has brought SMEs not only as actors of public diplomacy and far beyond. With so many contributions made, the naming of UKM cannot be categorized as an 'ordinary' private sector participating in the Public Diplomacy Law. Through SMEs, the South Korean government has been tracking The Non-government or professional, Business, Private Citizen Research, Training and Education, Activism or Advocacy, Communications and the Media at once which is a huge advantage on the government side.

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