

The Construction of American Pop Identity in the News Media Coverage of the Girl Group KATSEYE

Silvia Dini Azzahra*, Khaerudin Imawan, Aghnia Dian Lestari

Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, Indonesia

Email: silvia.122100168@ugj.ac.id*, Khaeruddin.imawan@ugj.ac.id, aghnia.dianl@ugj.ac.id

Keywords:	Abstract
American Pop; Katseye; Culture; Construction identity; News	The influence of global popular culture and media has prompted debates over how American pop identity is constructed, circulated, and negotiated within the music industry. This study aims to examine how news media construct KATSEYE, a multicultural girl group created by HYBE and Geffen Records, as an American pop and global cultural icon. Employing a qualitative approach, this research applies Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis, which covers textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice, complemented by Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry perspective. Data were purposively collected from news coverage published between June and August 2024, along with interviews with a Cosmopolitan editor and members of the KATSEYE fandom. The findings reveal that media narratives frame KATSEYE through labels such as "the biggest global girl group," positioning the American market as a benchmark for global success. This framing reflects industrial collaboration, algorithmic distribution, cultural commodification, and the marketing of diversity and empowerment. Nevertheless, fandom audiences do not passively accept these discourses; instead, they negotiate them by emphasizing hybridity, authenticity, multicultural representation, personal connection, and artistic merit. The study concludes that KATSEYE's American pop identity is neither fixed nor exclusively controlled by the industry but is continuously reconstructed through interactions among media institutions, entertainment corporations, digital platforms, and participatory global audiences.

INTRODUCTION

High consumption of American pop culture or pop music culture among children, adolescents, and Generation Z today is supported by the rapid growth of social media trends, news content, and various forms of digital information that shape how they perceive global phenomena (Fatimah & Rahma, 2025). This phenomenon forms the background of this study, which examines media discourse surrounding one of the largest collaborative projects in the global music industry, namely the American girl group KATSEYE. The group has attracted international media attention because it has been promoted as "The Biggest Global Girl Group in the World" while carrying the concept of American pop culture, despite claims that the project still incorporates elements of K-pop (Putri et al., 2025).

The concept of American pop culture in this study is understood as a cultural construction associated with values of freedom, innovation, and individualism that are promoted extensively through the media and entertainment industry (Prihatin, 2012). Meanwhile, Zahra et al. (2020) argue that American pop culture not only establishes standards

of entertainment but also defines how social identity is understood and represented. Popular music is therefore not merely a medium of entertainment but also a tool for constructing social identity, enabling individuals, particularly Generation Z, to explore their self-identity (Fatimah & Rahma, 2025). However, this construction also presents challenges regarding the preservation of local values amid the hegemony of global culture (Fernando, 2025). This phenomenon is further reinforced by digital platforms such as TikTok, whose algorithms prioritize certain forms of content while simultaneously limiting the diversity of perspectives available to audiences (Shilfa et al., 2023).

Identity construction refers to the process through which social identity is formed and articulated through language and media practices (Fairclough, 1995). Within this framework, American pop culture is often constructed as innovative, dominant, and inclusive. However, this representation frequently overlooks critical dimensions such as cultural exploitation and embedded racial stereotypes. In line with this perspective, Couldry and Hepp (2018), in *The Mediated Construction of Reality*, emphasize the role of the media in shaping reality and collective identity through processes of cultural mediation in the digital era. For example, research on the metal music fan community by Hecht (as cited in J-SIKOM, 2025) illustrates how personal and collective identities are formed through emotional experiences, cultural expression, and social interaction that foster group solidarity. This perspective is relevant to the analysis of KATSEYE, where the group's identity and that of its members are not merely individual representations but also the result of cultural dialogue between K-pop and American pop culture within the international media sphere (Dewangga et al., 2025; Khedun-Burgoine, 2022; Kim, 2022; Lee, 2024; Sun, 2025; Tuttle, 2026).

One of the most interesting contemporary manifestations of American pop culture is the international girl group KATSEYE, a collaborative project between South Korea's entertainment giant HYBE Corporation and the United States record label Geffen Records (Putri et al., 2025). The group was formed through the global talent competition *The Debut: Dream Academy*, which premiered on YouTube on September 1, 2023. The competition attracted approximately 120,000 applicants, from which 20 contestants from various countries were selected, ultimately resulting in six final members: Daniela Avanzini (United States), Lara Rajagopalan (India), Manon Bannerman (Switzerland), Sophia Laforteza (Philippines), Megan Skiendziel (United States), and Yoonchae Jeong (South Korea). The group's formation was later adapted into a Netflix documentary series that not only depicts the participants' journey toward an international debut but also demonstrates how cultural values and aesthetics were assimilated within a major music industry project (Imawan et al., 2023). International media frequently portray KATSEYE as a cultural bridge between two dominant forces in global popular culture—the United States and South Korea—thereby providing an opportunity to examine how the identity of American pop culture is constructed, negotiated, and represented within media discourse (Kompasiana, 2025).

This phenomenon provides an interesting case for understanding how identity is constructed and deconstructed within media discourse. It is also closely related to the phenomenon of K-pop as an instrument of South Korea's soft power, which frequently interacts with American popular culture. Shim (2018), in *K-Pop: The International Rise of the Korean Music Industry*, explains how K-pop has adopted elements of American popular music to penetrate the global market, and KATSEYE represents a concrete example of this strategy.

However, the construction of American pop identity in media coverage of KATSEYE raises important questions regarding authenticity and representation. Is American pop culture constructed as a symbol of cultural superiority, or is it instead employed as an instrument of American geopolitical influence to maintain dominance within the international music industry? These questions are significant because media discourse often reinforces stereotypes by positioning the United States as the center of popular music innovation while placing other cultures in subordinate or imitative positions (Banks, 2017; Campbell et al., 2025; Knights, 2016; Schwichtenberg et al., 2019; Talusan, 2021).

This study examines how media discourse constructs and influences global audiences' perceptions of the dominance of major United States record labels within the international music industry, particularly through efforts to reestablish the prominence of American pop culture. Specifically, this study aims to reveal how the multicultural identity of a "global girl group" is interpreted and constructed through media narratives surrounding KATSEYE, as well as how these narratives reproduce new cultural standards within the global entertainment industry. Furthermore, the study explores how such narratives shape trends across social media platforms and contribute to the formation of the collective identity of global audiences.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using Norman Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. This method was selected because it aligned with the interpretive nature of qualitative research and the objective of the study, which was to examine the meanings, ideologies, and power relations embedded within media discourse concerning the construction of global pop culture identity in KATSEYE. A qualitative approach enabled an in-depth understanding of social phenomena through the analysis of language, context, and meaning structures within media texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Fairclough's model was chosen because it provided a three-dimensional analytical framework for examining the relationship between text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. Accordingly, this method enabled the researcher to identify how media representations positioned KATSEYE as a global cultural entity reflecting the convergence of two major popular cultural forces—K-pop from South Korea and American pop from the United States—while also revealing the ideological interests underlying this construction.

The research data were obtained from online news articles containing the keyword "KATSEYE" published between June and August 2024, a period when media discourse surrounding the group's identity emerged following its formation. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select relevant and information-rich data from two categories of media. The first category consisted of internationally recognized news outlets, including Billboard, Cosmopolitan, Rolling Stone, and Variety, which are influential platforms in constructing and disseminating discourse on American pop culture. The second category comprised Indonesian national media, including Kompas, Tempo, Detik.com, and ANTARA News, which represented local interpretations of global cultural identity.

The data analysis followed Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. First, textual analysis examined linguistic features, lexical choices, and representations of social actors within the news texts. Second, discursive practice analysis interpreted the findings in relation to the production, distribution, and consumption of media texts, particularly regarding the

discourse of K-pop and the globalization of American pop culture. Finally, sociocultural practice analysis connected the findings with broader social, cultural, and ideological contexts to reveal how media representations of American pop culture contributed to the reconstruction of identity and power relations within the global cultural industry.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Construction article news *Cosmopolitan's* Narrative “*The Biggest Girl Group in The World*”

In the article news *Cosmopolitan*, Maxwell Losgar in a way on purpose construct narrative provocative via the headline “*Can KATSEYE Become The Biggest Girl Group in The World?*” which is not only functioning as lure attention Because show symbol beneficial power reputation for Girl Group Katseye in the scene international. But behind packaging apparent discourse aspirational said, no let go from intervention between HYBE and Geffen Records.



Figure 1: Article headline taken from *Cosmopolitan's*

Based on results interview with source person key and contribute in writing article said *Cosmopolitan's* Senior Editor Maxwell Losgar revealed “*The idea to pose whether KATSEYE has what it takes to become “the biggest girl group in the world” came from a convergence of signs that made the framing feel equal parts playful and plausible.*” According to him, the idea For form KATSEYE image in narrative as big as That born from convergence various the sign that makes framework the felt at a time no messing around and getting in reason. At the same time, the story origin hybrid group This positioning they as kind of ongoing pop experiments in a way real as if A an inviting experiment reader For imagine No only Who self they moment this, but also what is possible they achieve in scale full in the future. In addition Still Lots obstacle yag must they face it like emergence contradiction when controversy Where there is accusation engineering invitation attend event nominations *Grammy award*, performance vocals disappointing, until scandal personal members who actually show that the narrative of “equality” that is constructed just *manufactured products* that are forced and not inseparable from the market expansion strategy of the two giant labels the.

Role as *Gatekeeper* and Industrial Value Articulator

On the content article *Cosmopolitan*, Losgar in a way explicit touch on connection partnership between HYBE and Geffen as marker ambition institutions that have not yet Once happen previously. He emphasized that no there are those that are organic from the process of forming KATSEYE, and describing it as entity organic precisely will felt No sensitive to reality industry.

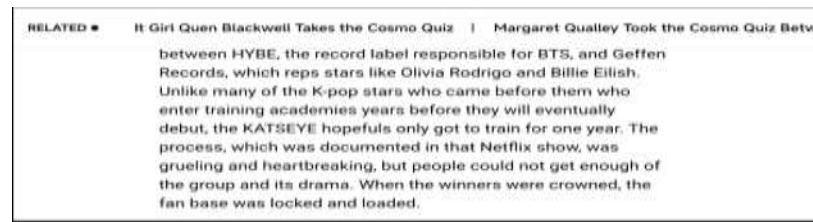


Figure 2: contents discussion article alluding to the Collaboration between Hybe and Geffen Records

Losgar clarify the above text with stated " *I know that a headline has to do two things: function as provocation and a thought exercise. Any label is, implicitly, chasing "The Next Big Thing." That's why they come to places like Cosmopolitan for a photoshoot and interview in the first place. But by naming that aspiration outright, Cosmopolitan allows the reader to participate in the fantasy of future dominance while still understanding it as speculative.*" It means as writer, he realize that positioning they as entity organic precisely will felt No sensitive and not in accordance with existing reality. Informant emphasize importance For meet with readers at the point where they is, and Cosmopolitan readers, he said, are not bad thing If they capable understand the complexity behind screen industry music. Related with effect the presence of the Netflix documentary series, Losgar explain that audience given chance For witness what's at stake in a way directly. Disclosure kind of This usually No appear until much later day in career an artist. A documentary that provides behind the scenes access screen For someone who has known and loved has become the norm during years. However, the Katseye event precisely reversed the formula and it worked recruiting a committed fan base since beginning made For a strategy that fundamentally changes connection between audience and group.

With Thus, Losgar play a role as a gatekeeper who articulates mark Katseye through industrial parameters music like label synergy, and the Netflix documentary series *Pop Star Academy*, and the potential commercial "*the fan base was locked and loaded*" which is precisely Possible No seen directly by the audience layman. News editor position here play a role active in construct identity and philosophy KATSEYE culture to be in harmony with its premium market and brand values represent. He does not only report the concept of "SIS (Soft is Strong)" from their debut EP, but in a way on purpose link it with discourse strength more cultural high, namely with quoting Nicolas Ghesquière, Artistic Director of Louis Vuitton, *who* called fashion "*a formidable soft power.*" Discursive action This is a giving strategy legitimacy culture (cultural legitimacy). Losgar lift discourse about Katseye more from just trend pop music becomes A movement cultural that has symbolic capital equivalent with brand luxury. This is strengthen Cosmopolitan's position Alone as curator taste and show how the media flows main functioning as a transformative bridge product entertainment become asset culture that can consumed by demographics aspirational.

Cultural Legitimization Strategy through Fashion Discourse and Philosophy

On the results interview Losgar mention that narrative of the global strategy being carried out looks clear with support source power that is not limited, plus Again with courage For think beyond traditional debut narrative and there is something later emphasized through their Netflix series, "*There was a clear global strategy with no shortage of resources. There*

was also a willingness to think beyond traditional debut narratives, which is something their Netflix show made very clear". This matter put Losgar as executives who understand "*the intersection of culture, celebrity, and media*" are reflected in How He dampen or selecting narrative originating from from other platforms. If the narrative Netflix's official take on Pop Star Academy may be more emphasizing personal drama, struggle, and individual transformation in the style of reality shows, Losgar adopt element said "*grueling and heartbreaking*" only as background behind For strengthen narrative main about resilience and market readiness. He chose focus on the results "*the winners were crowned*" and the future "*riding the success*", which indicates A perspective sustainability - oriented industry commercial and brand building, not just a momentary viral momentum. With thus, as informant key, perspective Losgar disclose framing mechanism in which a entity culture new processed, given meaning, and positioned in hierarchy industry global entertainment through authoritative and strategic media discourse.

Analysis Construction KATSEYE Identity

Study This propose integration synergistic between Analysis Discourse Critical Norman Fairclough's model is used For unraveling textual strategies and practices discourse in news the with Adorno's Theory of Cultural Industry & Horkheimer functioned For dissect logic commodification, standardization, and pseudo- individuality behind it. If the study *K pop* Lots discuss Korean hegemony and American Pop studies focus on the construction authenticity, research This centralize attention to the point tension between both of them, namely How hegemony American culture instead reproduced and naturalized through news about A products that are capital, production and resources Power man global and hybrid in nature.

Analysis discourse critical or normal known with *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) helps understand Language in its use (Dewangga et al., 2025). Language turns out to be No only just become tool communication, and used as an instrument for do something or means implementing a power strategy. Through lens Analysis Discourse Norman Fairclough's (1995) critique, which separates analysis to in three interrelated dimensions linked among them dimensions text, practice discourse and practice socio-cultural, as well as enriched with perspective from Adorno and Horkheimer's Culture Industry Theory, the phenomenon This reveal No only mechanism production meaning by current media main but also the field fight Where meaning the consumed, interpreted repeat, and even challenged by the audience. *Synthesis* from interview with informant key from side produced by Maxwell Losgar, Senior Editor of *Cosmopolitan* and informant supporters from side consumption active from three Katseye fandom members that is Eyekon Indonesia and Eyekon Singapore which produce description in a way wide about How identity cultural built, disseminated, and negotiated in economy digitalized global attention.

Dimensions Textual: Structure Deconstruction Linguistics and Semiotics

"America -Centric" Context in the Media

In the analysis text news Katseye in *Cosmopolitan*'s focus main on how term such as Biggest global girl group, and "American dream realized" are used For form image certain, where the election term the contain ideology that places American Pop values as gauge measuring global success and tools for reach strong reputation. Structure narrative article often follow the existing formula tested for example affirmative opening Katseye as project strategic For reach legitimacy in the competitive US market, news agencies outlining their "uniqueness"

through lens multinational and competition reality, and the cover that connects fate group with achievement in scene industry American pop music. Van Dijk and Kintsch (2013) highlight that text is not neutral, with emphasis that text contains ideological and reflective dynamics of power. While Fauzan was quoted from Masitoh (2020) discourse consists of on text and context. The text includes all type expression communication, speech, music, images, effects sound, image, and so on. From both perspective the role interpretive can be seen from structure linguistics in understanding discourse, which shows that text not just describe reality, but in a way actively build it. With this, through surgery symbolic word choices and nuances in compilation sentences, analysts can know pervasive ideology something discourse and identify how language can strengthen or challenge narrative the applicable powers.

Perspective This confirms the need to understand good linguistic details and more context the area in which language operates. Through approach comprehensive kind of this, Analysis Discourse Critical (CDA) highlights connection each other dependence between language and society, as well as offer outlook about dynamics underlying complex construction text and conversation. As Fairclough explained, he carry out the domestication process to A entities that are essentially hybrid and formed from combination Korean record label corporation (HYBE) and American label (Geffen). With emphasis narrative on the “acceptance” or “conquest” of the US market, media discourse in general implicit and persistent reproduce hegemony that places the United States as center gravity as well as the main barometer success in global pop culture. However, the completeness analysis only come true when we consider how texts journalism this then read by consumers. This is where fandom perspective provides corrections and nuances. For Hanis, Dwi, Dinda, and Malisa, admitting Power pull KATSEYE's main point is lies in the identity of “global multicultural” or “diversity” international towards those who transcend the boundaries of *the nation - state* certain. They call diversity culture, color skin, and origin proposal geographical member as factor first interesting attention, not claim their “Americanness”. With this, it happened gap between the manufacturer's frame and the reading consumers. The global audience is actually tend accept and celebrate KATSEYE as symbol hybridity post-national, a identity that is actually blur centers culture traditional. The dominant “America -Centric” narrative in media texts, therefore, must understood not as final truth, but rather as effort hegemony that must be continuously fought for and found resistance as well as negotiation in practice the reading.

Dimensions Practice Discourse: Production, Distribution, and Consumption of News in the Algorithmic Era

Related media selection, Researcher prioritizing influential platforms globally, in special choose *British Broadcasting Corporation* (BBC) and the US- based *Cable News Network* (CNN) because role important they as global agenda setter. Considering reputation international those who are honorable and capable they For compete with agent leading global news, narratives produced by the BBC and CNN serve as gauge measuring important for global media discourse (McPhail, 2016; Tian & Stewart, 2005; Xie & Boyd-Barrett, 2015). Research map network production involving HYBE as corporations that produce image globalism as symbolic capital, while distribution discourse happen through a digital platform ecosystem where the algorithms of YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram play a role as *gatekeeper* who determines visibility narrative. From the side production, Statement Losgar with clear to describe how is the press release from *HYBE Label* and *Geffen Records* act as a primary frame,

which is then "remixed" by the editors with the appropriate angle with their media brand for example like *gossip*, *empowerment*, or *behind-the-scenes* and so on. For fulfill appetite news media readers like *Cosmopolitan's* which is still dominated by Gen-Z and Millennials. More important again, logic algorithmic digital platforms become unscrupulous "shadow editors" visible, dictating the news angle that has the potential to go viral and determining the visibility of the content. A distribution strategy is also designed, with precision. For maximize impact this: time publication synchronized with time zone US main content distributed in a way aggressively on visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok, and the format is designed for involvement high (engagement). Practice This is manifestation perfect from circuit commodification information, where the news about KATSEYE packed as products that must be competitive in a crowded attention market. Consumption, as an integral part of circuit this, to be active and measurable. However, data from the fandom shows that track enter they to in the world of KATSEYE often jump over or ignore news portals current main. Dinda found group This through *dance "GNARLY" challenge on TikTok*, on the side Malisa said through recommendation friends who highlight popularity pre-debut on the same platform, while Dwi is interested in a way straight to the music which is "*easy listening*". Findings this is very crucial: even though machine mainstream media distribution Work hard, period contact first and most influential for many fans actually is content culture pure (music, dance, personality) members) that are distributed through peer-to-peer network and cultural platform participatory. In other words, while media industry is trying frame narrative, fandom communities often build experience and meaning they Alone through track more alternatives direct and personal, creating what can called as ecosystem discourse running match parallel with mainstream media narrative main.

Dimensions Socio- Cultural Practices: Ideology, Industrial Logic, and Negotiation Identity

According to Fairclough (1995) discourse is form of "practice" social "which has implications existence dialectics between language and conditions social. Linguistic nature social, meaning linguistics No can release self from influence environment social dimension. In the practice the broadest socio- cultural analysis reach peak its complexity with highlight fight ideology, logic industry, and negotiations identity. First, in realm hegemony and ideology, interview with Losgar reveal interesting paradox. In one side, media such as *Cosmopolitan's* with put Katseye as an " *American Girl Group* " No direct reproduce ideology dominant about the supremacy of the United States market and culture as standard gold. On the other hand, recognition open to HYBE's role and the Korean *survival show format* introduce element hybridity and negotiation to in discourse. Dominance American culture does not challenged frontally, but rather utilized and adapted; US dominance is recognized as Medan battle, while capital and expertise South Korean production is used weapon strategic. From the perspective fandom's point of view, they give evaluation in a way active with reject the rigid limitations of the " *K-pop* " label. Dinda personally explicit state that Katseye is a " *global group* that is hybrid not specific to direction *K-pop*," while Malisa emphasized they as a " *truly global girl group*." For them, the power group precisely lies in its ability transcend and obscure categorization geopolitics old culture. This shows that at the level of consumption, hegemony culture single currently replaced by appreciation to plurality and hybridity as mark intrinsic.

Second, through Adorno and Horkheimer's Cultural Industry lens, KATSEYE with easy identified as standardized formula products designed For minimize risk. As stated by the informant supporters Sister Nasya saw it as combinations that can predicted as a “*girl group*” multinational documentary series competition reality as well as giant label support”. This formula is a business blueprint, a effort For replicate past success with variables new. Commodification process most visible in packaging of " diversity " and " *empowerment*." As identified, the narrative inspiring diversity packed become commodities that can for sale to progressive global audience. However, here again, again fandom perspective provides depth. For Dwi, Dinda, and Malisa, diversity This No just a marketing label empty; that is source pride, uniqueness artistic like part Spanish in "GABRIELA", and the potential For more connectedness wide. They admit mark strategic according to Dwi's narrative " power main they for global markets", but also demanding authenticity in processing. More interesting Again is attitude they to the " illusion " of reality and authenticity. Malisa, who follows journey pre - debut in *The Debut: Dream Academy*, instead see the rigorous and competitive standardization process That as source legitimacy and authenticity. The struggle, discipline, and uncertainty displayed in the program, for they, in fact prove that position members are " *earned, not given*." This means that the standardized format of the Cultural Industry No always seen as enemy authenticity; in context narrative modern meritocracy, he Can converted become stage For prove authenticity through Work hard. However, awareness critical to commodification still There is. Dwi's criticism of clothes that are " too" open and too follow western style " for minor members are example real resistance audience. This is a reading oppositional *reading* against aspect certain from construction identity perceived group forced by logic industry, shows that fandom is not passive masses deceived, but rather critical and selective consumers.

Lastly, analysis reveal formation community interpretive within the fandom that functions as room negotiation meaning. Attachment emotional they built not on the narrative big "market conquest," but on personal and relatable things: lyrics the touching song "*TOUCH*" feeling lonely like statement from Dwi Sari, the individual charisma of each member complements each other complete in accordance with what was conveyed by Dinda, and the story struggle as well as growth that can followed like opinion from Malisa. In room In this case, the dominant discourse in the media is translated reprocessed, sorted, and integrated to in A more narrative intimate about support, personal achievement, and pride collective on A viewed groups as pioneer in define repeat global pop identity.

In a way synthesis, discussion This show that construction The "American Pop" identity for KATSEYE is a dialectical process that is not Once finished. From above, the power media and entertainment industry build discourse through hegemonic frames, distribution strategies algorithmic, and commodification values progressive to be a safe formula. However, from below, community *fandom global* at a time as a knowledgeable and connected "*prosumer*" with matter the as well as No only consume discourse This in a way passive. They are active interpret, negotiate, reject parts certain, and build meaning alternatives centered on hybridity, authenticity experience, and connectedness parasocial. Discourse dominant about American Pop Culture, because That does not Again become the only one valid narrative. In the process of active and critical consumption this, he transformed, weakened, and made into one just from Lots thread in weaving complex identity global pop culture that is fluid, hybrid, and ever-

changing evolved. KATSEYE, with so, not just object discourse, but rather a discursive arena future place identity culture in economy global attention is being debated and formed.

CONCLUSION

This study describes how the KATSEYE girl group, formed by HYBE and Geffen Records, is constructed by the media as a global girl group and an American pop icon. At the industry level, the media plays a central role in intentionally building narratives such as “The Biggest Global Girl Group in the World,” positioning the group as a project designed to penetrate the American market. This represents a strategic collaboration within the scope of the American entertainment industry, where KATSEYE has also been transformed into a mechanism for producing ongoing discourse and generating market value from various controversies surrounding the group. In line with Firmansyah’s study (2022) on the commodification of K-pop idols and the hegemony of Korean culture, this practice reflects the construction of superficial diversity or the illusion of permanent diversity that operates within market homogenization. It also demonstrates how contemporary pop culture transforms identity into products that are packaged, marketed, and consumed to support the mechanisms of the global cultural industry, where cultural meanings and identities become subject to profit-driven logic. KATSEYE’s member diversity is understood as part of its market strategy, even though some of its most vulnerable aspects have been criticized within the highly competitive standards of the American music industry.

The ambition of geopolitical dominance through music and entertainment still exists, but it now operates through more decentralized and democratic spaces, although inequalities remain present. Hegemony can no longer be imposed unilaterally; instead, it must continuously be contested, negotiated, and defended before an increasingly globally connected, informed, and organized public (Fernando, 2025). The traditional theory of cultural imperialism, which depicts a one-directional flow of culture from the center to the periphery, therefore requires reconsideration. The case of KATSEYE demonstrates that the periphery is no longer merely a passive consumer or an endpoint of cultural production but also participates in determining how cultural products are interpreted and represented. More importantly, audiences engage with these products through their own cultural standards, aesthetic preferences, and ethical considerations. KATSEYE, in this context, is not merely a girl group but a reminder that, in the digital era, meaning becomes a contested space. The industry may design narratives as carefully as possible; however, once a cultural product is introduced to the public, it is no longer entirely controlled by the industry. Instead, it becomes shaped by those who celebrate it, criticize it, and incorporate it into their own experiences and identities. As long as spaces for such dialogue remain open, pop culture will continue to evolve as a living cultural phenomenon rather than merely functioning as a commodity.

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