CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of The Study

K-Pop or Korean Pop is one of the most famous music genres that is very famous that comes from South Korea. Entering the year 2011, K-Pop started to spread and become famous in Asian countries, including Indonesia. Based on Salam Korea, the K-drama industry had introduced a drama called 'Endless Love' through television channels in 2002 and it succeeded. It was the second generation of the Korean Wave that entered and became popular in Indonesia. It had a big impact on the channel television industry because it was dominated by famous K-dramas such as *Autumn in My Heart (*Indosiar 2001), *Winter Sonata* (2002), *Jewel in The Palace* (Indosiar 2003), and *Full House* (Indosiar 2005) (Rahmawati, 2020). Starting from there, the other Korean industry named K-POP began to get more attention. It started with the groups called *Super Junior* (2005), *SHINEE* (2008), *Wonder Girls* (2007), *Girls Generation* (2007), etc. Even though the groups debuted before 2009, the second Korean Wave entered in Indonesia in the early 2009 and it became stronger because of the increase in fans of each fandom. The K-Pop industry has been going well and famous until now with so many fandoms. No doubt K-pop groups get better and more famous day by day because they are very good looking and talented.

Idol groups are the main form of multi-group K-Pop ensembles. Every idol plays a specific role in orderly choreography, with the visual elements that each member gets when they are about to debut. It shows that K-Pop companies make standards for K-Pop idols themselves. According to Kim's study in the year of 2017, K-Pop idols are known not only from their singing quality and energetic choreographies, but also their manufactured attractiveness to commercialize, such as girly, fair and delicate skin, sexy face, tall, slim, and well-tone bodies. Not only that, K-Pop idols as the main products are required to be skinny, pretty, handsome, and to have a good attitude and personality, despite whether they really have it or not. Duncum (2002) emphasizes the importance of everyday exposure to popular imagery, which plays a major role in creating our "attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs." (p.6). In one of the K-Pop interviews that was done by K-Pop idol Amber Liu, ex member of *f(x)* basically discussed what people's expectations towards female idols are put under to appear perfect in the industry and what dark effect that they have faced. In that interview, there's the thing that she said regarding the ideal expectations for idols. Amber Liu said, "I think for girls, the biggest thing that, at least in my circle and for myself, is just to be skinny. But for boys, it's definitely a lot more lax. I think for women, there's a bigger emphasis on visuals and how you look.". As it has mentioned before, these K-Pop idols are expected to have a good image in front of people, so that they would have more fans. Also, K-Pop boy idols are expected to have a nice visual, body proportion, stylish, and nice facial expressions. All of the standards in K-Pop industry lead to a parasocial interaction or relationship that the fans have.

The *Hallyu* in Indonesia takes a role in the parasocial relationships among fans through the pictures that their idols upload on social media. The concept of parasocial interaction has been extensively studied in the media literature for decades for the first time by Horton and Wohl (1956). Horton and Wohl consider parasocial interaction as an experience of the viewer of a television and would feel like they are being in an interaction with the television performer (Hartmann, Goldhoorn, 2011). Rubin and McHugh (1987) stated that parasocial interaction is a kind of parasocial relationship with a performer.

Parasocial relationship is a term for a one-sided relationship that someone has with a media persona, such as celebrities or influencers. In Sitasari, Rozali, Arumsari, and Setyawan's study, parasocial relationships are sometimes viewed as an imaginary relationship experienced by fans who idolize celebrities. Meanwhile, a two sided relationship, according to Saarni, is when there's an intimacy feeling between two people, also share genuine of emotions. Unlike one-sided relationship, which is only one individual that feels the intimacy, especially towards TV performers or idols. Also, one-sided relationship happens when the viewers have the urge and tendency to have a real romantic relationship with the TV performers because they get more interested and invested when they tune in to see the performers on a daily basis because that's what viewers and fans do when they like a performer or character. According to Sokolova and Kefi, a parasocial theory is based on the virtual relationship that is viewed as an interpersonal relationship that is considered real by fans. Those

celebrities/idols do not just provide entertainment, but they provide social roles as audience to get involved with the celebrities (Sandvos, 2005).

The parasocial relationship comes from the side of the fans because they tend to like when their idols look 'boyfriendable'. In this case, looking 'boyfriendable' means that those idols are expected to wear clothing based on the fans' expectations. It is common that the jobs of those idols are to sing, dance, perform, write music, and entertain. However, their image, fashion, and gesture are things that fans like. K-Pop idols are always seen performing, singing, and dancing, but on the other hand, they are also actively uploading updates about themselves on social media. Mostly, those K-Pop idols upload their pictures on Instagram and Twitter. From those pictures, fans are able to see and do whatever they want regarding those pictures that the idols upload. For example, the fans can edit, reupload, etc. because the pictures those K- Pop idols upload are owned by the public. Therefore, with the freedom that the fans have, there are so many K-Pop fans that imagine things about the pictures. Those imaginations lead them to have a one-sided relationship with those idols. Especially, when the K-Pop idols look manly and 'boyfriendable'.

Recently, the K-Pop boy groups called SEVENTEEN, NCT, and THE BOYZ became popular because of their songs, performances, and visuals. NCT is the group that debuted under the biggest company in South Korea named SM Entertainment. SEVENTEEN is a group that is under Pledis Entertainment and HYBE Labels. Meanwhile, THE BOYZ debuted under a company named IST Entertainment. They are always updated on Instagram and Twitter by uploading pictures. Based on SEVENTEEN, NCT, and THE BOYZ's social media, they upload pictures on their own official accounts. Mostly, the pictures

they upload are the members wearing casual (not 'working') clothes, such as t-shirts, hoodies, jeans, ordinary pants, etc. with poses that are 'boyfriendable'. K-Pop fans like their idols because of their talent, music quality, acting skill, fashion idols, persona, and unique personalities (Cahyani, Purnamasari, 2019). In this case, fans like to see their idols with their own persona and fashion in pictures that those idols upload. Fans most likely would think that they are in a relationship with the idol because in those 'boyfriendable' pictures, the idols look like ordinary people, which is what the fans like. Also, fans mostly would do *selca day* on social media using their idols' 'boyfriendable' pictures to show people that they have a special relationship, even though they actually don't.

The term 'boyfriendable' comes from the masculinity. The concept of masculinity has been applied to many K-Pop groups, including SEVENTEEN, NCT, and THE BOYZ. According to Levesque, R. J. R (2018), masculinity is a trait related with maleness and manhood. Due to social constructs, masculinity is perceived as the counterpart of femininity. From general perspective, masculinity is a trait of being a man. It can be said that masculinity is complex. According to Beynon (2002), there are things that shape masculinity, such as age, physical, sexual orientation, education, status, lifestyle, culture, beliefs, etc. Based on the hypothesis, the term 'boyfriendable' is when a man has an impressive appearance and actions, so that the man is suitable as a boyfriend. 'Boyfriendable' can be seen from a man's personality, body gesture, fashion, and even pictures. In the pictures of the idols t hat have the possible of parasocial relationship, that there are the elements that lead it to parasocial relationship.

The elements are the fashion that the idols wear in that picture, the language, which is the things that the idols would say on captions, and the spaces which is the place that the idols take in their pictures. The 'boyfriendable' pictures of SEVENTEEN, NCT, and THE BOYZ have similarities in their elements. The first similarity is the clothes they wear. K- Pop idols on their social media mostly upload their pictures of themselves wearing casual outfits, while they are always seen in their 'performing' outfits, such as suits, etc. In those pictures, they are seen wearing casual clothes, such as polo shirts, T-shirts, white shirts, etc. The second similarity is that the gestures, captions, and any other language they put in those 'boyfriendable' pictures. The third similarity is the place that those pictures take, such as houses, restaurants, and bedrooms, which are places where K-Pop idols are rarely seen.

Studies about parasocial relationships in K-Pop fandom have been conducted by several researchers. In 2021, Pramesthi found out in her study that BTS World Game makes fans that play the game feel the 'real' interaction between them and the members of BTS through the game. The BTS World Game has video and voice call contents of the members of BTS to make everything real for fans. She also said that the personalization set in the game makes fans feel special and have a relationship with the members, meanwhile the content is designed for millions of players. Meanwhile, in Zhang's discussion in 2021, they state that the parasocial interaction is constructed on the application called Bubble and it has a negative impact on the parasocial interaction between fans and idols. The interaction and chat feature on Bubble satisfies fans for an intimate and special interaction with their idols. The fans think that they have a special relationship or interaction with their idols when

Bubble is designed for so many people out there. In 2022, Auju, Rizal found that almost all K-Pop fans in Pariaman build parasocial interactions. They build parasocial interactions in the form of attraction tasks and high romantic attachment. Every individual in Pariaman City shows their significant interest for the K-Pop idols by their physical appearance or their celebrity potential as romantic couples, also imagining a more intimate relationship.

This study in particular examines the 'boyfriendable' pictures of SEVENTEEN, NCT and THE BOYZ and its parasocial relationship between them and fans. This study focuses on the 'boyfriendable' pictures of SEVENTEEN, NCT, and THE BOYZ that contain parasocial relationships. This study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis and Horton and Wohl's parasocial interaction theory to analyze and expose the parasocial relationships in the pictures.

1.2. Research Question

How is parasocial relationship exposed in the 'boyfriendable' pictures of SEVENTEEN, NCT, and THE BOYZ?

1.3. Aim of The Study

To analyze and find out the parasocial relationships that are exposed in the 'boyfriendable' pictures of SEVENTEEN, NCT, and THE BOYZ that have the most likes and comments through Instagram and Twitter by using the theories

of Roland Barthes' connotation and denotation semiotics and Horton and Wohl's parasocial interaction.

1.4. Significance of The Study

This study is undertaken to find out the parasocial relationship and to explore the 'boyfriendable' pictures of SEVENTEEN, NCT and THE BOYZ. This study hopes to establish an understanding of the parasocial relationship that K-Pop fans have, especially the fans of boy groups SEVENTEEN, NCT, and THE BOYZ. This study could be of importance to the following: K-Pop fans and future researchers.