

## **“Reception of Choi Siwon’s Transnational Star Image by Indonesian ELF Fandom: An Encoding–Decoding Analysis”**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the synergy between the Korean entertainment industry’s Star System and fandom reception in shaping and reinforcing the global image of Choi Siwon as a transnational figure within cross-border marketing practices. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with three informants from the ELF fandom and document studies of promotional materials, media coverage, and commercial data related to brands collaborating with Choi Siwon. The analysis employs Stuart Hall’s Encoding–Decoding framework to trace how audiences interpret the industry-constructed image. Findings reveal that Siwon’s persona combining roles as an idol, actor, and philanthropist is the result of a systematic Star System that produces a stable and marketable public identity. ELF fandom generally decodes this image dominantly, interpreting Siwon as charismatic, professional, and morally grounded. This interpretation fosters consumption loyalty, demonstrated by increased engagement and product sales endorsed by Siwon, including the Mie Sedaap campaign, which recorded a significant rise in the Indonesian market. These findings confirm that the synergy between the Star System and fandom reception forms an effective global marketing mechanism through celebrity image reinforcement and active audience participation.

**Keywords:** *Star System, Korean Idol, Global Commercialization, Encoding-Decoding, Fandom.*

## 1. Introduction

The globalization of the entertainment industry has positioned celebrity images not merely as cultural representations, but as strategic assets within transnational marketing and communication networks. The production of popular culture is shaped by institutional and economic structures that regulate visibility and cultural labor (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Through digital media, celebrity images circulate rapidly across national borders and reach diverse audiences who actively engage with, reinterpret, and redistribute these images. As a result, the construction and reception of celebrity personas have become increasingly complex, particularly in global popular culture. Popular culture operates as a site where meanings are continuously produced, circulated, and contested (Storey, 2010). Yet a critical gap remains: while industries invest heavily in constructing global celebrity images, the mechanisms through which these images are actually received, interpreted, and leveraged by audiences in specific national contexts remain poorly understood, creating a blind spot in both academic research and commercial strategy.

One influential framework for understanding the production of celebrity images is the star system. Dyer (1979) argues that celebrity personas are industrially constructed through controlled processes such as media exposure, branding, training, and narrative management. Global media power operates through communication systems that regulate visibility, representation, and ideological influence (Mirrlees, 2013). These processes are designed to produce coherent and marketable identities that support both cultural visibility and economic value. In a global context, however, star images do not function as fixed meanings; instead, they are subject to reinterpretation as they move across different cultural and national settings.

This disjuncture between industrial encoding and audience decoding constitutes the central problem of this study. While the entertainment industry encodes specific meanings into celebrity images, professionalism, moral virtue, aspirational lifestyle, audiences do not necessarily receive or interpret these meanings uniformly. Media texts do not carry fixed meanings; instead, they are open to interpretation and negotiation by audiences based on social and cultural contexts, as demonstrated in previous reception-based studies (Qadaruddin et al., 2024). Hall's (1980) Encoding–Decoding model provides a critical framework for addressing this issue by emphasizing audience agency in meaning-making. This finding is consistent with reception studies in the Indonesian context that show audiences tend to adopt dominant–negotiated readings (Sulasmono & Soesantari, 2023). According to this model, audiences may accept,

negotiate, or resist the dominant meanings encoded by media producers, depending on their sociocultural background. Despite its theoretical relevance, this perspective remains underutilized in studies of global celebrity marketing, which often assume a direct alignment between industry intentions and audience reception, an assumption that obscures how meaning is actually negotiated across cultural boundaries.

The consequences of this knowledge gap are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, without examining how audiences decode transnational celebrity images, scholars cannot fully understand how global media texts acquire localized meanings or how celebrity capital functions across different markets. Practically, entertainment industries and brands risk misallocating resources by presuming uniform reception when audiences may be interpreting celebrity images in ways that diverge from, or even contradict, intended messages. This misalignment can lead to failed marketing campaigns, cultural misreadings, and wasted endorsement investments.

These dynamics are particularly evident, and understudied, in the global expansion of the Korean Wave (Hallyu). The expansion of Korean popular culture has been shaped by industrial structures that regulate cultural production and global circulation (Hasna, 2021). One prominent figure within this system is Choi Siwon, whose public image encompasses multiple roles: idol, actor, philanthropist, and brand ambassador. Siwon's case is particularly revealing because his image has been strategically deployed across diverse markets, including Indonesia, yet we lack empirical evidence of how Indonesian audiences actually interpret this carefully constructed persona. While his image is meticulously managed by SM Entertainment, it is also continuously reshaped through fan practices across different countries, creating an empirical puzzle: do fans accept the industry's encoded meanings, negotiate them through local cultural frameworks, or resist them entirely?

Indonesia offers a critical, yet underexplored, context for examining these processes. As one of the largest K-pop markets in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has a highly active ELF fandom that engages in online content creation, promotional activities, and collective interpretations of Choi Siwon's image. Savitri (2023) found that digital fandom practices play a significant role in shaping and reinforcing celebrity images through repeated circulation, interpretation, and interaction within online communities. Moreover, Indonesia's unique cultural context, shaped by Islamic values, collectivist social structures, and localized media consumption patterns, makes it an ideal site for testing whether transnational celebrity images retain their encoded meanings or undergo

significant reinterpretation, Transnational cultural products gain meaning through audience interpretation and contextual adaptation across different regions (Fan et al., 2021).

Previous studies have examined K-Pop fandom, audience reception, and celebrity representation primarily through empirical and reception-based approaches. Jin and Yoon (2016) demonstrated that the transnational spread of K-Pop is strongly supported by digitally networked fandoms that actively circulate and reinterpret idol images across media platforms. Studies on K-Pop idols as brand ambassadors show that celebrity credibility and emotional attachment significantly influence brand image and consumer behavior (Nuraini & Purworini, 2024). Reception studies in the Indonesian context further show that audiences negotiate meanings of Korean popular culture based on social experiences and community dynamics (Tunshorin, 2016). Recent studies highlight that audience interpretation and participatory engagement play a crucial role in shaping symbolic meanings and media perceptions in digital environments (Qadaruddin et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2025). In the context of commercial communication, previous research indicates that celebrity endorsement and brand ambassador practices influence audience perceptions by transferring symbolic value and emotional attachment to brands (Ilmi et al., 2020; Laurensia & Utami, 2023; Mas'ut & Marsono, 2022). However, despite these empirical findings, limited attention has been given to how K-Pop fandoms specifically interpret and reproduce celebrity images within brand endorsement contexts through the operation of the star system, particularly among Indonesian ELF members. This leaves unanswered the question of whether the commercial success of K-pop idols like Siwon in Indonesia stems from successful encoding, active audience negotiation, or entirely localized reinterpretation.

This gap points to three interconnected problems: First, there is a lack of empirical research connecting star-system image construction with audience decoding processes within specific national contexts. Second, existing scholarship on transnational celebrity culture rarely investigates whether audience interpretations align with, modify, or challenge the meanings encoded by entertainment industries. Third, despite Indonesia's significance as a K-pop market, there is limited understanding of how Indonesian fans decode transnational celebrity images, meaning that both scholars and industry practitioners operate without reliable knowledge of how celebrity capital actually functions in this market.

Therefore, this study is necessary and important for three reasons. First, it addresses a critical theoretical gap by applying Hall's Encoding–Decoding model to empirically examine how transnational celebrity

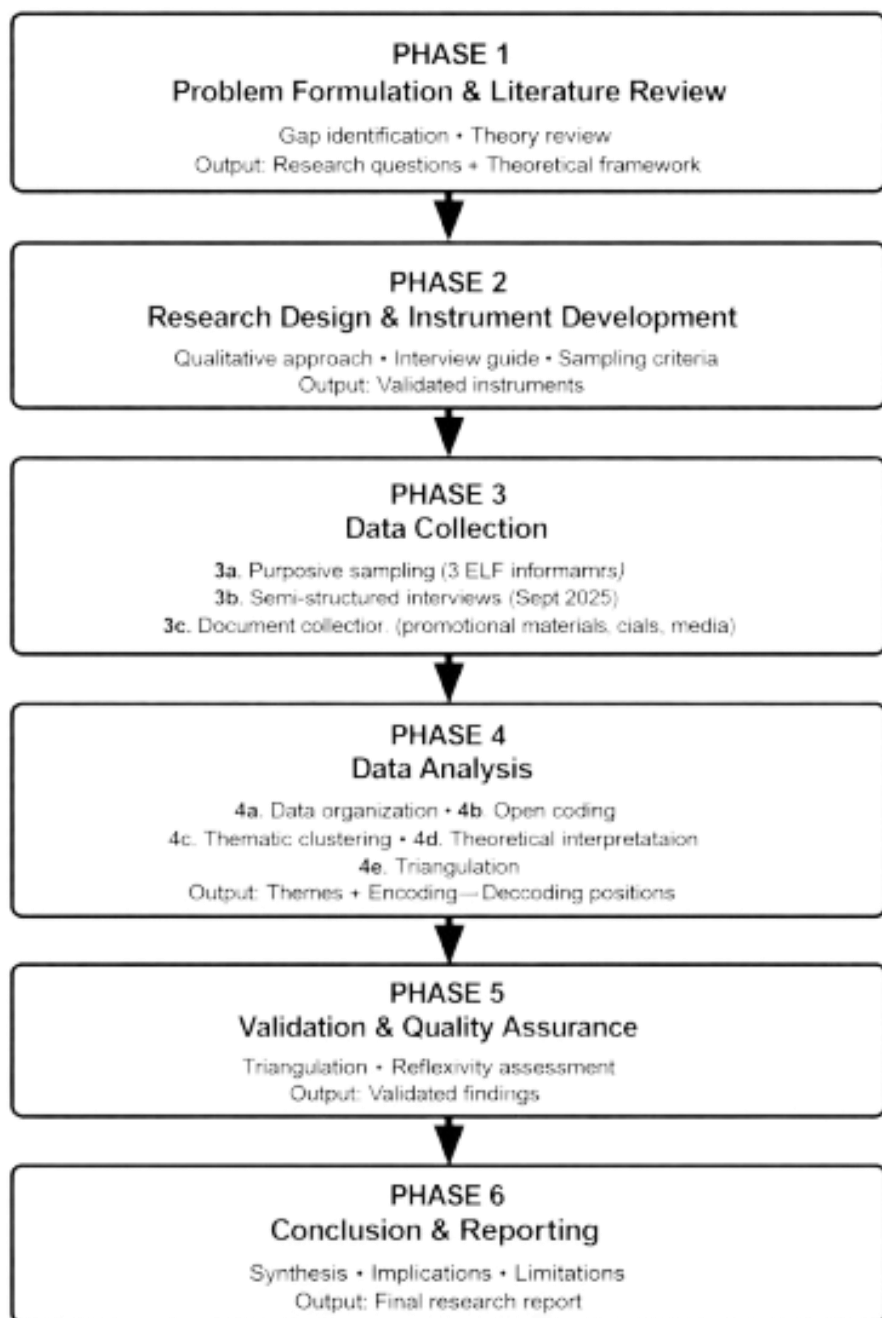
images are interpreted within a specific national fandom context, a perspective that has been largely absent in K-pop and celebrity studies. Second, it provides practical insights for entertainment industries and brands by revealing whether their encoding strategies succeed, require modification, or fail entirely in the Indonesian market. Third, it demonstrates how audience agency shapes the symbolic and commercial value of global celebrities, thereby contributing to broader debates about cultural globalization, media reception, and the power dynamics between producers and consumers in transnational media flows.

Specifically, this study aims to analyze how Indonesian ELF fans interpret Choi Siwon's transnational star image by applying Hall's Encoding–Decoding model. By examining both the industrial construction of Siwon's public persona and the interpretive practices of Indonesian fans, this research seeks to clarify the interaction between star-system encoding and fandom decoding. The findings are expected to contribute to studies on celebrity culture, audience reception, and global marketing by demonstrating empirically how audience interpretations shape, or challenge, the symbolic value of global stars across national boundaries.

## **2. Method**

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the relationship between the industrial construction of Choi Siwon's star image and the ways Indonesian ELF fans interpret that image within a transnational marketing context. Qualitative methods are effective for exploring meaning-making processes and subjective interpretations within social contexts (Sujarweni, 2014). A qualitative design was chosen to capture interpretive processes and subjective meanings that cannot be adequately measured through quantitative methods. As emphasized by Creswell (2013), qualitative inquiry is appropriate for exploring how individuals make sense of media texts within specific social and cultural environments. Accordingly, this study prioritizes depth of analysis and contextual understanding rather than generalizability.

The research process followed a systematic sequential flow from problem formulation to conclusion drawing, as illustrated in Figure 1 below. This methodological structure ensures coherence between the research problem, theoretical framework, data collection procedures, and analytical interpretation



**Figure 1.** Research Flow Diagram

The research followed a systematic six-phase process as illustrated in Figure 1. Phase 1 established the conceptual foundation through gap

identification in transnational celebrity studies and comprehensive literature review of star system theory (Dyer, 1979; Marshall, 1997), Korean Wave scholarship (Jin & Yoon, 2016), and Hall's (1980) Encoding–Decoding model, producing formulated research questions and a theoretical framework.

Phase 2 translated theoretical considerations into methodological procedures by selecting a descriptive qualitative approach and developing a semi-structured interview guide covering three domains: perceptions of Siwon's public image, interpretations of promotional content, and responses to industry narratives. Document analysis criteria were also established, yielding validated research instruments and defined sampling criteria.

Phase 3 involved data collection through three sub-phases: (3a) purposive sampling of three Indonesian ELF informants meeting criteria of five-year minimum fandom involvement and active participation; (3b) semi-structured online interviews conducted in September 2025, recorded and transcribed verbatim; and (3c) systematic collection of institutional materials including SM Entertainment promotional content, advertising campaigns, and media coverage. This phase produced interview transcripts and a comprehensive document corpus.

**Table 1.** Informant Profile

<b>Informant</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Period of Joining the "ELF" Fandom</b>	<b>Involvement in Activities as the "ELF" Fandom</b>
1	Accounting	2011 – Now	Active
2	Student	2015 – Now	Active
3	Student	2017 – 2024	Passive

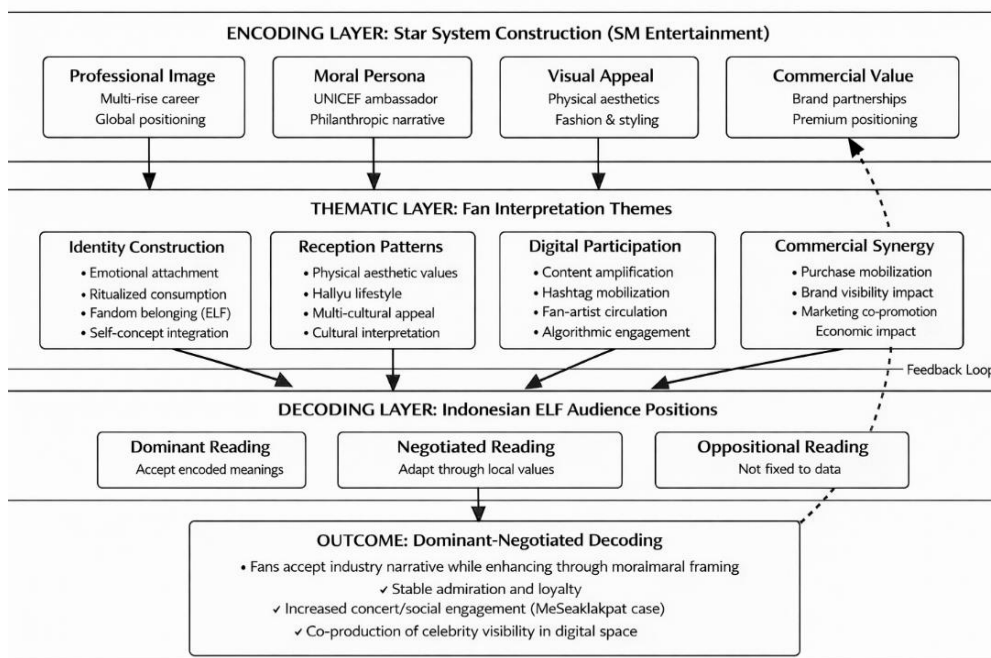
Phase 4 comprised data analysis through five sequential steps: (4a) data organization, (4b) open coding to identify initial patterns, (4c) thematic clustering into categories such as professionalism, moral persona, commercial appeal, and fandom attachment, (4d) theoretical interpretation using Hall's framework to identify dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings, and (4e) triangulation through cross-referencing interview data with documentary evidence. The output consisted of coded themes and an interpretation matrix of encoding–decoding positions.

Phase 5 ensured research quality through source and method triangulation, reflexivity assessment regarding researcher positionality, and evaluation of analytical transferability, producing validated findings with enhanced trustworthiness. Finally, Phase 6 synthesized findings,

articulated theoretical and practical implications, identified limitations, and formulated recommendations, culminating in a comprehensive research report demonstrating the interaction between star-system encoding and fandom decoding in the Indonesian context.

### 3. Result and Discussion

This section presents findings organized around four interconnected themes that emerged from the analysis: (1) identity construction through fandom engagement, (2) reception patterns of Siwon's transnational image, (3) digital participation in image reproduction, and (4) commercial synergy between industry and fandom.



**Figure 2.** Thematic Relationship

The diagram demonstrates how SM Entertainment's encoding strategies (professional image, moral persona, visual appeal, commercial value) are interpreted by Indonesian ELF through four thematic lenses, ultimately resulting in dominant-negotiated decoding positions. The feedback loop indicates how fan participation reinforces the industrial construction of Siwon's image.

#### 3.1 Construction of ELF Fandom Identity in Receiving Choi Siwon's Image

The construction of ELF fandom identity emerges through layered processes of emotional attachment, ritualized engagement, and mediated



exposure to Siwon’s curated persona. The findings indicate that fans do not simply absorb the entertainment industry’s encoded messages; rather, they actively incorporate them into personal identity narratives formed through long-term admiration, group belonging, and cultural interpretation. This aligns with Hall’s concept that decoding is an active process shaped by social experience rather than passive acceptance. This is reflected in statements from informants 1 & 2 who consistently consume Super Junior and Siwon-related content as part of their fandom identity:

*“I happen to be part of his fandom as well, yes, his name is Elf, and I really like to watch Choi Siwon's concert, whether alone or with his group, and I also quite like to consume super junior content content and some of his group members, one of which is Choi Siwon” - Informant 1*

*“You know, because I happen to be a fandom too, yes, I'm part of the elf who often consumes super junior content and some of the group members, one of which is choi siwon.” - Informant 2*

These statements show how the internalization of Siwon’s image is not merely media-driven but emotionally reinforced through the repetition of content consumption, fan discussions, and the symbolic comfort derived from belonging to ELF. This emotional familiarity becomes a medium through which fans negotiate meaning, aligning their perception with the industry yet framing it through personal resonance. Table 2 summarizes how different informants construct their fandom identity and interpret Siwon's image across key dimensions.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Fandom Identity Construction Across Informants

Dimension		Informant 1 (Accounting, 2011–Now)	Informant 2 (Student, 2015–Now)	Informant 3 (Student, 2017–2024)
Duration	&	14 years, Active	10 years, Active	7 years, Passive
Status				
Consumption Pattern		Regular concert attendance, comprehensive content consumption	Active in fandom activities, online engagement	Selective consumption, reduced engagement

Dimension	Informant 1 (Accounting, 2011–Now)	Informant 2 (Student, 2015– Now)	Informant 3 (Student, 2017– 2024)
<b>Primary Appeal</b>	Multi-role professionalism, group loyalty	Humanitarian work (UNICEF), moral character	Physical aesthetics ("biased by million people")
<b>Emotional Attachment</b>	Deep, identity-integrated	Strong, value-aligned	Moderate, appearance-focused
<b>Decoding Position</b>	Dominant-Negotiated	Dominant-Negotiated	Dominant
<b>Key Quote</b>	"I really like to watch Choi Siwon's concert... and consume Super Junior content"	"He's famous for his humanity... quite active in UNICEF"	"Showing a masculine figure... handsome... earned nickname of million people"

The findings indicate that fans do not simply absorb the entertainment industry's encoded messages; rather, they actively incorporate them into personal identity narratives formed through long-term admiration, group belonging, and cultural interpretation. This aligns with Hall's concept that decoding is an active process shaped by social experience rather than passive acceptance. As demonstrated in Figure 3, Siwon's visual presentation emphasizes his centrality through strategic camera positioning, lighting, and compositional prominence, encoding strategies that fans decode as signals of leadership and influence.



**Figure 3.** Choi Siwon as Super Junior Member

Based on Figure 3, visually emphasizes Siwon's centrality through strategic camera positioning, lighting, and compositional prominence. Such visual cues are part of the industry's encoding strategies that construct Siwon as a charismatic anchor of the group. Fans decode these cues as signals of leadership and influence, reinforcing their perception of him as an essential member of Super Junior.

The findings suggest that ELF members practice dominant-negotiated decoding: they affirm the encoded values of professionalism, charisma, and moral integrity while simultaneously negotiating meaning through emotional interpretation and sustained symbolic investment. This results in an identity formation process where the encoded celebrity persona becomes intertwined with fan self-concepts, community belonging, and aspirational ideals.

### 3.2 Reception Patterns of Indonesia Fandom Toward Choi Siwon's Image

Reception patterns among Indonesian ELF illustrate that Siwon's image is understood through cultural frameworks shaped by physical aesthetics, moral values, and symbolic meanings embedded in global Korean media. Table 3 compares how different dimensions of Siwon's star image are decoded by Indonesian fans.

**Table 3.** Comparative Analysis of Reception Patterns by Image Dimension

Image Dimension	Industry Encoding	Indonesia Fan Decoding	Evidence/Impact	Decoding Type
<b>Physical Aesthetics</b>	Masculine, polished appearance	"Biased by million people," discipline indicator	Heightened attention, visual content circulation	Dominant
<b>Professional Identity</b>	Multi-role career (idol/actor/model)	Evidence of growth and versatility	Perceived authenticity, stable admiration	Dominant-Negotiated
<b>Moral Character</b>	UNICEF ambassador narrative	Genuine humanitarian commitment	Enhanced emotional loyalty, trust	Negotiated

<b>Commercial Appeal</b>	Premium brand partnerships (Audi, Mie Sedaap)	Elegance + accessibility	Purchase motivation, product sales increase	Dominant
<b>Cultural Positioning</b>	Global/transnational star	Relatable yet aspirational	Cross-cultural identification	Negotiated

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Indonesian fans interpret Siwon's image through his commercial projects and social involvement. As the face of premium global brands such as Audi Korea and other high-end campaigns, Siwon is perceived as elegant and sophisticated. However, his philanthropic work, particularly as a UNICEF ambassador since 2015, significantly shapes fan reception, positioning him as a celebrity who is not only visually appealing but also morally exemplary.

Informant 3's statement reflects the role of "body capital" in shaping perceptions of idol authenticity and desirability:

*"If the image of Choi Siwon is more like showing a masculine figure and then also handsome, and also he has earned the nickname of a million people in his time, so indeed the image displayed by Choi Siwon is different from other idols."*

Fans view Siwon's physique and aura as indicators of discipline, confidence, and natural leadership, suggesting that his attractiveness functions as a semiotic resource in the decoding process.

Fans frequently cited Siwon's expanded career, from acting, music, modeling, to humanitarian outreach, as evidence of professionalism and personal growth. This interpretation strengthens the perceived authenticity of his public persona and contributes to stable admiration. Informant 2 explained:

*"At least Siwon is like being biased by a million people, yes, everyone must like Suju if you like Suju, you must like Siwon, really. Then yes, that's what makes me interested because he's also quite active in the world, right? Like UNICEF... he's famous for his humanity."*

This reflects a moral reading where fans interpret Siwon's philanthropic involvement as genuine and trustworthy, aligning with Fiske's moral economy of fandom, where ethical behavior elevates emotional loyalty and symbolic closeness. Visual cues, such as refined

fashion, poised body language, and emotionally expressive facial gestures, further encode perceptions of Siwon as elegant, responsible, and relatable.

Overall, Indonesian ELF exhibit dominant-negotiated decoding: they accept the industry's encoded narrative of charisma and professionalism but actively enhance it through moral framing and cultural ideals. While oppositional readings are theoretically possible, none emerged in interviews, suggesting stable admiration supported by emotional, moral, and visual interpretations.

### *3.3 The Role of ELF Fandom in Reproducing and Strengthening Siwon's Image in Digital Space*

ELF's participation in digital spaces demonstrates how fandom has evolved into a dynamic force that co-produces celebrity visibility. Fans act as active distributors of Siwon's image by amplifying official campaigns, circulating fan-edited content, participating in hashtag mobilization, and performing continuous algorithmic engagement.

Informant 3 explained:

*"This idol promotes something or he becomes a star... advertisement or movie star actually, maybe the fans don't need the goods advertised with Siwon, but because the model is Siwon, so those people buy the advertised products."*

Informant 1 added:

*"If for the aspect of the 3, Siwon tuh 3 3 he gets, being biased by a million people, there is no need to doubt it, well, if his popularity is also quite high, so I think it's really effective."*

These insights reveal that ELF contributes to both symbolic and economic reinforcement of Siwon's public persona. Their participation increases visibility not only within fandom spaces but also across broader digital ecosystems.



**Figure 4.** Choi Siwon as SASA Brand Ambassador in 2022

A concrete example can be seen in Siwon's campaign as SASA brand ambassador in 2022 (Figure 4), where ELF Indonesia actively developed digital enthusiasm through positive reactions, fan-cams, and fan-edits to make the product trending on social media. Brand endorsement strategies aim to transfer symbolic value from public figures to products in order to strengthen brand image and consumer perception (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Similar image strengthening occurred in the context of Siwon's films and dramas (Figure 5), which serve as visual artifacts that fans repurpose in various digital practices, creating edits, comparisons, trend posts, and reaction videos.



**Figure 5.** Choi Siwon's First Movie

This aligns with participatory culture (Jenkins) and digital labor theory, where fans perform unpaid work that benefits entertainment agencies through sustained content circulation. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that digital audience engagement plays a significant role in amplifying meanings and strengthening brand or symbolic value through participatory practices (Nugroho et al., 2025). Algorithmic platforms reward such consistent activity, causing Siwon's image to remain visible and relevant. This reveals a shift in power distribution, fans shape visibility while industries maintain narrative control. Setyarsih (2018) demonstrated that fan communities develop social solidarity and collective identity through shared admiration, emotional attachment, and sustained engagement with idol figures.

#### *3.4 Synergi Between the Star System and Fandom in Enhancing Global Marketing Appeal*

The synergy between the entertainment industry and ELF fandom forms a multi-directional structure where meaning, visibility, and commercial impact are co-produced. Agencies construct Siwon's encoded persona, while fans amplify and personalize it across global digital networks. This activity forms a digital ecosystem that strengthens brand

exposure with relatively minimal distribution costs, Informant 1 Highlighted.

*“You know, it's like the one that really can boom or at that time it was really on the rise, right, the noodles are so delicious that they become their brand ambassador, and that's really unique because I don't have any other super junior members who are made Brand Ambassadors with brand brands in Indonesia except for Choi Siwon..” - Informan 1*



**Figure 6.** Choi Siwon as Mie Sedaap Korean Spicy Chicken Brand Ambassador

MIE INSTANT DALAM KEMASAN BAG		
Brand	TBI	
Indomie	70.50%	TOP
Mie Sedaap	16.00%	TOP
Sarimi	3.80%	
Supermi	2.30%	
Sumber: Top Brand Award (www.topbrand-award.com)		

**Figure 7.** Top Brand instant Noodle 2020





**Figure 8.** Poster Film “To The Fore” 2015

Images 4-6 demonstrate how promotional materials gain traction through fan-driven circulation, resulting in both symbolic and economic impact in diverse markets, including Indonesia. The Mie Sedaap Korean Spicy Chicken campaign (Figure 6) exemplifies this synergy, where Siwon's endorsement contributed to the brand's Top Brand status in 2020 (Figure 7) and increased market visibility. Similarly, his role in the film "To The Fore" (2015, Figure 8) benefited from extensive fan promotion across Indonesian digital platforms.

This synergy is asymmetrical yet mutually dependent: the entertainment industry depends on fans to amplify visibility and cultural relevance, while fans depend on industry outputs to maintain community identity and emotional continuity. This dynamic embodies Jung's concept of cultural capitalism, wherein cultural commodities derive value through continual participatory circulation. The result is a hybridized marketing mechanism where Siwon's image becomes both a commercial asset and a cultural symbol shaped collaboratively by producers and fans.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the Korean star system, which emphasizes that celebrity images are systematically constructed to produce coherent and marketable public personas (Dyer, 1979). Choi Siwon's image as a professional, charismatic, and morally grounded figure reflects this industrial encoding process.

Audience reception among Indonesian ELF also aligns with earlier studies applying Hall's Encoding–Decoding framework (Morley, 2005; Tunshorin, 2016), which show that fans tend to adopt dominant–negotiated readings. In this study, fans largely accept the industry-encoded meanings while interpreting them through emotional attachment and long-term fandom involvement.

The similarity of these findings can be explained by the characteristics of the informants, who are long-term ELF members with sustained exposure to Siwon-related media, encouraging alignment with dominant narratives. However, this study identifies a contextual emphasis on moral and humanitarian values, particularly Siwon's role as a UNICEF ambassador, which is less prominent in some previous research. This difference suggests that local cultural values in Indonesia shape how transnational star images are interpreted, even when overall decoding patterns remain similar.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study offers an empirical account of how Indonesian ELF fans interpret the industry-constructed image of Choi Siwon through Stuart Hall's Encoding–Decoding framework. Rather than making broad generalizations, the findings demonstrate that fans primarily adopt dominant–negotiated readings, integrating industry-encoded narratives of professionalism, charisma, and philanthropy with their own emotional attachments and cultural expectations. Although limited to one celebrity and one national context, the study provides insight into how transnational idol images are locally interpreted within active fandom communities.

The analysis also highlights how digital participation among ELF members contributes to the circulation and reinforcement of Siwon's image, though the scope of these practices cannot be generalized beyond the small number of informants involved. Given the restricted sample size, geographic focus, and potential selection bias, particularly the inclusion of long-term fans, the findings should be viewed as indicative rather than representative. These limitations affect the extent to which conclusions about audience decoding or fandom influence on marketing outcomes can be applied to broader K-pop fandoms or transnational fan cultures.

Despite these constraints, the study contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating how the Encoding–Decoding model can be applied to examine the reception of a single idol's curated image within a specific national fandom. Future research could expand this approach by comparing decoding patterns among different fandom segments (e.g., casual viewers vs. core fans), or by examining how distinct media formats,

such as brand campaigns, dramas, or philanthropic content, produce varying interpretive outcomes. More systematic sampling and cross-regional comparisons would strengthen theoretical insights into how star images travel, are reinterpreted, and gain localized meanings within the global circulation of K-pop.

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