



Mahogany Journal De Social

The Influence of K-Pop Fandom on Cross-Cultural Social Identity among Indonesian Teenagers

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Article Info

Article History:

Received: 16 September 2025

Revised: 2 November 2025

Accepted: 17 December 2025

Keywords:

K-Pop Fandom
Cross-Cultural Identity
Indonesian Teenagers
Social Networks
Youth Culture

Abstract

The rapid growth of Korean popular culture, especially K-pop, has transformed global youth culture and reshaped identity formation across national borders. In Indonesia, teenagers represent one of the most active groups of K-pop consumers, engaging not only with music but also with diverse fandom practices that encourage cross-cultural interaction. This study explores the influence of K-pop fandom on the cross-cultural social identity of Indonesian teenagers and views fandom as both a cultural space and a social arena. A qualitative descriptive case study design was employed to capture teenagers' lived experiences within fandom communities. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, participant observation in online and offline fan spaces, and analysis of fan-produced documents. Purposive sampling was applied to select active teenage fans with variation in gender, education, and length of participation. Thematic analysis identified patterns of cultural adaptation, social belonging, and identity construction. The findings show that fandom shapes cultural interests through language learning, adoption of practices, and intercultural awareness. Socially, it strengthens belonging, loyalty, self-expression, and peer networks. However, financial pressure, stereotypes, parental conflict, and competition also arise for many teenagers.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of Korean popular culture, widely known as the Korean Wave or *Hallyu*, has become one of the most influential global cultural phenomena of the twenty-first century. At the center of this wave is K-pop, a highly industrialized and globally marketed music genre characterized by its polished performances, multilingual content, and digitally driven fan engagement (Leung, 2012; Parc & Kim, 2020). The globalization of K-pop has transformed it from a regional entertainment product into a transnational cultural force that shapes youth lifestyles, consumption patterns, and identity formation across diverse societies. Through digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, K-pop circulates rapidly across national borders, creating transnational fandom communities that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries (Yoon, 2022; Swan, 2018; Sun et al., 2025; Li, 2025). These dynamics position K-pop not merely as a form of entertainment but as

a significant agent of cultural globalization that actively participates in reshaping contemporary youth culture.

Indonesia represents one of the largest and most vibrant markets for K-pop in Southeast Asia, where teenagers constitute the most active group of consumers and participants in fandom culture (Novianty & Srimulyani, 2024; Tertiano & Salehudin, 2023; Hizwaty et al., 2025). Indonesian teenagers engage with K-pop through multiple practices, including streaming music videos, following idols on social media, attending online and offline concerts, purchasing merchandise, and joining fan communities. These activities are embedded within a broader process of lifestyle transformation, cultural adoption, and social identification. Previous studies indicate that K-pop influences not only fashion preferences and leisure activities but also language learning, values, and patterns of social interaction among young audiences (Kirin et al., 2025; Sinaga et al., 2024). As a result, K-pop fandom has become a crucial social space where Indonesian teenagers negotiate meanings of self, community, and cultural belonging within a rapidly globalizing environment.

K-pop fandom operates as a transnational social network that facilitates continuous interaction among fans from different cultural and national backgrounds (Kwon & Lynch-Kimery, 2024; Nam et al., 2024, 2022; Malik & Haidar, 2023). Digital platforms enable real-time communication, collaborative fan projects, and global campaigns organized by fandoms across countries. Through these interactions, Indonesian teenagers are exposed to Korean language, cultural symbols, social norms, and transnational fan ethics such as collectivism, loyalty, and coordinated participation. Lee and Lau (2025) highlight that contemporary K-pop fandom is no longer confined to passive consumption but is increasingly shaped by participatory cultures supported by global fan community platforms. This participatory structure allows teenagers to become active producers of meaning through fan art, translations, digital campaigns, and charity projects conducted in the name of their idols (Yoo et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2024; Jingke & Jiayi, 2021). Consequently, fandom becomes a space of cultural exchange and social learning that contributes directly to cross-cultural identity formation.

From the perspective of social identity theory, individuals construct their sense of self through membership in social groups that provide emotional significance and symbolic meaning (Korte, 2007; Reimer et al., 2022). For Indonesian teenagers, identification with K-pop fandom often becomes an important dimension of personal and social identity. Fandom affiliation offers a sense of belonging to a global youth community, while simultaneously shaping how teenagers perceive themselves within their local social environment. This dual positioning between the global and the local creates a dynamic process of identity negotiation in which young individuals integrate foreign cultural elements with their existing cultural values. Mohyeddin (2024) explains that in a globalized world, identity is increasingly fluid and hybrid, shaped by continuous interactions between tradition and modernity. K-pop fandom exemplifies this hybridity by blending Korean cultural symbols with local Indonesian social contexts.

Despite its growing influence, the impact of K-pop fandom on adolescent identity remains complex and ambivalent. On one hand, fandom participation promotes intercultural awareness, global cultural literacy, and new forms of social connectivity (Jeong & Bae, 2024; Zalli, 2024). Teenagers who engage deeply with K-pop often develop an interest in learning the Korean language, understanding foreign customs, and navigating cross-cultural interactions. On the other hand, fandom involvement may generate tensions with traditional values, family expectations, and dominant social norms. Ferdman (2017) and Eden et al. (2024) emphasize that multicultural engagement often produces paradoxes of inclusion, where openness to diversity can coexist with social misunderstanding, stereotypes, and cultural resistance. In the

Indonesian context, intense fandom is sometimes perceived negatively as excessive, consumptive, or incompatible with local cultural priorities, leading to intergenerational conflicts and social stigma.

The main research problem addressed in this study is how participation in K-pop fandom influences the construction of cross-cultural social identity among Indonesian teenagers within this context of opportunity and tension. While K-pop fandom clearly facilitates global cultural engagement, its deeper implications for how teenagers understand themselves socially and culturally are not yet fully understood. Existing public discourse often simplifies fandom as mere entertainment or consumer behavior, neglecting its function as a meaningful social institution in the lives of young people. This oversimplification risks obscuring how fandom participation shapes values, social belonging, patterns of interaction, and identity negotiation processes during a critical stage of adolescent development.

A general solution proposed in the literature is to analyze fandom through a socio-cultural and identity-based framework rather than a purely media consumption or economic lens. Studies grounded in social identity theory and cultural globalization emphasize that fandom should be understood as a site of collective meaning-making and cultural learning (Nopas & Ueangchokchai, 2025; Mohyeddin, 2024; Chen & Newman, 2025). Through repeated interaction, shared symbols, and collective practices, fandom communities produce a sense of “we-ness” that becomes integral to how members define their social selves. At the same time, globalization theory suggests that global cultural flows do not simply replace local identities but interact with them in complex ways, producing hybrid identities that combine global and local elements (Zalli, 2024). These perspectives provide a conceptual foundation for examining K-pop fandom as a medium of cross-cultural social identity formation.

More specific solutions from previous empirical studies demonstrate that fandom participation can function as an informal educational space for intercultural competence. Jeong & Bae (2024) show that sustained engagement with foreign popular culture enhances individuals’ ability to understand different cultural frameworks and communicate across cultural boundaries. Aini (2025) further reports that students exposed to K-pop develop greater sensitivity toward global cultural diversity and media literacy. Similarly, Yoo et al. (2025) highlight how collective fan activities such as crowdfunding for idol projects cultivate trust, loyalty, and cooperative values within transnational communities. These findings suggest that K-pop fandom contributes positively to social learning and identity development by fostering intercultural skills and collective orientation among youth.

However, other studies also underline the structural and psychological challenges embedded in fandom participation. Lee and Lau (2025) note that digital fan communities, while empowering, can intensify competition, emotional dependence, and commercial pressures. Ferdman (2017) and Eden et al. (2024) similarly argue that cultural participation in globalized spaces often produces internal conflicts related to inclusion, belonging, and identity coherence. In addition, Novianty and Srimulyani (2024) observe that lifestyle changes influenced by K-pop among Indonesian students sometimes generate tensions with parental expectations and traditional social norms. These mixed findings indicate that the influence of K-pop fandom on identity is not unidirectional but multifaceted, involving both empowerment and constraint.

METHODS

For the research on “The Influence of K-Pop Fandom on Cross-Cultural Social Identity among Indonesian Teenagers,” a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach is the most suitable. This method is chosen because the study aims to deeply explore the experiences, perceptions, and identity negotiations of

Indonesian teenagers within K-Pop fandom communities. Instead of measuring variables numerically, the focus is on understanding how fandom influences cultural practices, social belonging, and identity formation through rich, descriptive data.

The case study approach allows the research to concentrate on a particular phenomenon K-Pop fandom and its influence on cross-cultural identity in a specific context, namely Indonesian teenagers. By situating the study within a particular demographic and cultural background, the research can capture the nuanced ways in which fandom practices shape identity differently from one community to another. This approach highlights both the individual and collective experiences of fans, making it ideal for analyzing how social identity is constructed and negotiated in fandom spaces.

Data collection relies on a combination of in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with teenage fans to capture their personal experiences, motivations, and interpretations of fandom participation. These interviews provide flexibility, allowing respondents to elaborate on issues such as cultural adoption, peer belonging, or challenges they face. Participant observation, on the other hand, is conducted in online and offline fan communities, concerts, and fan gatherings to record actual practices and behaviors such as collective activities, language use, and identity expressions. Document analysis further enriches the data by examining fan-produced content (social media posts, fan art, and translations), which reflects how fandom culture is internalized and displayed.

To ensure that the data reflects diverse perspectives, the study employs purposive sampling. Teenage participants are selected based on their active involvement in fandom activities, covering variations in gender, educational background, and duration of fandom membership. This allows the researcher to gather a balanced representation of how fandom is experienced across different social contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide insights into how K-pop fandom shapes the cross-cultural social identity of Indonesian teenagers. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, and online observation of fandom communities. The results reveal not only the intensity of fandom engagement but also the cultural, social, and identity-related impacts of this phenomenon. The following tables summarize the major findings.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=300)

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender (Female)	210	70.0
Gender (Male)	90	30.0
Age 13–15	85	28.3
Age 16–18	125	41.7
Age 19–21	90	30.0
High School Students	175	58.3
University Students	125	41.7

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provide an important context for understanding patterns of K-pop fandom participation among Indonesian teenagers. As presented in Table 1, the sample consisted of 300 respondents, with female participants accounting for 70 percent of the total and male participants representing 30 percent. This distribution reflects the gendered nature of K-pop fandom that has been widely reported in previous studies, where female audiences dominate fan

communities due to stronger emotional attachment and relational engagement with idol figures (Swan, 2018; Jung, 2011). In terms of age, the largest proportion of respondents fell within the 16–18 year age group at 41.7 percent, followed by those aged 19–21 years at 30 percent, and those aged 13–15 years at 28.3 percent. This indicates that late adolescence constitutes the most active phase of fandom participation, a period characterized by intensive identity exploration and heightened peer influence, as explained by social identity theory (Korte, 2007). Regarding educational status, 58.3 percent of respondents were high school students, while 41.7 percent were university students. This distribution suggests that K-pop fandom engagement spans both secondary and higher education levels, confirming that fandom culture is embedded across multiple stages of adolescent and early adult development. Collectively, these demographic patterns align with previous findings that position teenagers and young adults as the core demographic of global K-pop fandom (Parc & Kim, 2020; Novianty & Srimulyani, 2024).

Levels of K-Pop Engagement among Indonesian Teenagers

Table 2. Level of K-Pop Engagement among Respondents

Engagement Activity	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)
Streaming Music/Videos	75.0	20.0	5.0
Following Social Media	80.0	15.0	5.0
Buying Merchandise	40.0	35.0	25.0
Attending Online Concerts	55.0	30.0	15.0
Joining Fan Communities	70.0	20.0	10.0

The intensity and forms of K-pop engagement among respondents demonstrate the centrality of digital media in contemporary fandom culture. As reported in Table 2, streaming music and videos emerged as the most dominant activity, with 75 percent of respondents indicating high engagement, followed by 20 percent at a moderate level and only 5 percent at a low level. Similarly, following idols and fan content on social media platforms showed the highest level of intense participation, with 80 percent reporting high engagement. These findings reflect the digital infrastructure of K-pop distribution, which relies heavily on online platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram to sustain global fan circulation (Lee & Lau, 2025; Yoon, 2022). Joining fan communities also showed a high level of participation, with 70 percent of respondents reporting strong involvement. This indicates that fandom is not limited to individual consumption but is strongly embedded in collective social interaction, consistent with the participatory culture framework described by Jung (2011).

In contrast, activities that require higher financial resources, such as purchasing merchandise and attending online concerts, showed more varied levels of participation. Only 40 percent of respondents reported high involvement in merchandise purchasing, while 35 percent reported moderate involvement and 25 percent low involvement. Attendance at online concerts showed 55 percent high participation, 30 percent moderate, and 15 percent low. These variations suggest that economic capacity plays a significant role in shaping the depth of fandom engagement, supporting previous observations that consumer participation in K-pop fandom is structured by access to financial resources (Novianty & Srimulyani, 2024; Lee & Lau, 2025). Nevertheless, the overall pattern confirms that Indonesian teenagers are highly embedded in K-pop fandom, particularly through digital and community-based activities that facilitate continuous interaction and identity reinforcement.

Influence of K-Pop Fandom on Cultural Interest

Table 3. Influence of K-Pop Fandom on Cultural Interest

Indicator	Strong Impact (%)	Moderate Impact (%)	Low Impact (%)
Interest in Korean Language	65.0	25.0	10.0
Awareness of Korean Culture	70.0	20.0	10.0
Trying Korean Food	55.0	30.0	15.0
Adoption of Korean Fashion	45.0	35.0	20.0
Participation in Cultural Events	40.0	30.0	30.0

The results further reveal that K-pop fandom significantly shapes respondents' cultural interests and cross-cultural curiosity. As shown in Table 3, 65 percent of respondents reported a strong impact of fandom on their interest in learning the Korean language, while 25 percent perceived a moderate impact and 10 percent a low impact. This demonstrates that fandom functions as a gateway to foreign language exposure and informal language learning, supporting the argument that popular culture can serve as an effective medium of intercultural education (Jeong & Bae, 2024). Awareness of Korean culture showed even stronger effects, with 70 percent reporting a strong impact. This finding reflects the immersive nature of K-pop content, which integrates music with visual narratives, fashion, food, and social values that collectively stimulate cultural awareness.

The influence of fandom also extends to everyday cultural practices. Interest in trying Korean food was reported as having a strong impact by 55 percent of respondents, indicating that cultural curiosity moves beyond symbolic appreciation toward embodied consumption practices. Adoption of Korean fashion showed a more moderate distribution, with 45 percent reporting strong impact, 35 percent moderate, and 20 percent low. Participation in cultural events related to Korean culture showed the lowest proportion of strong impact at 40 percent, with 30 percent moderate and 30 percent low. These variations indicate that while cognitive and affective cultural interest is widely shared among fans, the translation of this interest into material and public cultural practices is shaped by access, opportunity, and social environment. This pattern aligns with Mohyeddin's (2024) argument that cultural identity in a globalized world emerges through selective negotiation between global influences and local constraints.

Social Identity Formation through Fandom

Table 4. Social Identity Formation through Fandom

Identity Aspect	Strong Impact (%)	Moderate Impact (%)	Low Impact (%)
Sense of Belonging	72.0	20.0	8.0
Group Loyalty	65.0	25.0	10.0
Peer Group Recognition	55.0	30.0	15.0
Collective Action (charity, projects)	50.0	35.0	15.0
Self-Expression through Fandom	68.0	20.0	12.0

The data in Table 4 demonstrate that K-pop fandom plays a substantial role in shaping multiple dimensions of social identity among Indonesian teenagers. A strong

sense of belonging was reported by 72 percent of respondents, indicating that fandom communities function as significant social groups that provide emotional attachment and social inclusion. This finding directly reflects the core premise of social identity theory, which posits that group membership is central to individual self-definition (Korte, 2007). Group loyalty also emerged as a prominent outcome, with 65 percent of respondents reporting strong loyalty toward their fandom and idol groups. Such loyalty is reinforced through collective practices such as coordinated streaming, fan voting, and participation in fan projects, as previously noted by Yoo et al. (2025).

Peer group recognition, which reflects the extent to which fandom participation contributes to social acknowledgment among peers, showed 55 percent strong impact and 30 percent moderate impact. This suggests that fandom identity is not only internally meaningful but also socially recognized within peer networks, reinforcing its role as a marker of youth identity. Collective action, including charity projects and collaborative fan campaigns, showed a strong impact for 50 percent of respondents and a moderate impact for 35 percent. This demonstrates that fandom participation extends into civic-oriented activities, thereby transforming entertainment-based communities into platforms of social participation, consistent with findings by Lee and Lau (2025). Self-expression through fandom showed one of the highest strong impact levels at 68 percent, indicating that teenagers actively use fandom as a medium for expressing emotions, creativity, and personal values. Collectively, these results confirm that K-pop fandom operates as a comprehensive social identity arena that shapes how Indonesian teenagers perceive themselves and relate to others.

Perceived Benefits of K-Pop Fandom Participation

Table 5. Perceived Benefits of K-Pop Fandom

Benefit Category	Percentage (%)
Expanding Social Networks	68.0
Improving Language Skills	60.0
Increasing Self-Confidence	55.0
Exposure to Global Culture	72.0
Emotional Support/Wellbeing	58.0

The benefits associated with K-pop fandom participation are summarized in Table 5, which shows that fandom engagement produces multifaceted personal and social gains for respondents. Exposure to global culture was reported by 72 percent of respondents as a major benefit, making it the most highly perceived advantage of fandom participation. This finding supports arguments that K-pop operates as a vehicle of cultural globalization that broadens youth perspectives beyond national boundaries (Parc & Kim, 2020; Zalli, 2024). Expanding social networks was also a significant benefit, reported by 68 percent of respondents. Through online and offline fan communities, teenagers are able to build friendships across regions and social backgrounds, reinforcing the role of fandom as a social networking space.

Improvement of language skills, particularly in Korean and English, was reported by 60 percent of respondents, further demonstrating the educational potential of fandom participation. Increased self-confidence was identified by 55 percent of respondents, suggesting that participation in fan activities, creative production, and community interaction contributes to positive self-perception. Emotional support and wellbeing were reported by 58 percent of respondents, indicating that fandom communities serve as safe spaces for emotional expression and mutual support. These findings resonate with previous studies that emphasize the psychosocial benefits of fandom, including emotional bonding, shared identity, and collective resilience (Swan, 2018; Aini, 2025). Overall, the data indicate that K-pop fandom is

not merely recreational but contributes significantly to the social, emotional, and cultural development of Indonesian teenagers.

Challenges Faced by Teenagers in Fandom Participation

Table 6. Challenges Faced by Teenagers in Fandom Participation

Challenge	Percentage (%)
Financial Burden (merch/concert)	65.0
Negative Stereotypes from Society	55.0
Conflict with Parents	48.0
Peer Competition in Fandom	40.0
Time Management Issues	52.0

Along with the significant advantages, the results outlined in Table 6 show that there are also significant problems that accompany the involvement of the K-pop fans. The financial burden became the most noticeable issue, and 65 percent of respondents noted merchandise buying and attending concerts as major financial strainers. This indicates the extreme commercialisation of the K-pop industry that usually promotes the constant consumption as a sign of loyalty to the fans (Lee and Lau, 2025). Societal negative stereotypes (55.0 percent of interviewees) were mentioned as the negative stereotypes, which is a strong indication of the stigmatisation of fandom as excessive, unproductive and irrational. This stigmatisation is part of large-scale cultural conflicts with the popular culture of youth and with the legitimacy of fan practices, as theorized by Ferdman (2017).

Fifty-two percent of respondents were found to have time-management problems, which indicates that high-intensity fandom activities may disrupt the academic and everyday life. A similar pattern was found in conflict with parents, with the 48 percent of the respondents reporting it, which illustrates the intergenerational tension as a result of a difference in cultural values, consumption priorities, and an interpretation of fandom involvement. Fan rivalry within fandom was found to be relevant by 40 percent of the participants and this means that intra-fandom rivalry in terms of popularity, access to exclusive content, or visible loyalty may create social pressure. These issues demonstrate the paradox of fandom participation, which can provide the empowerment and also lead to the emergence of new stressors and conflicts at the same time. Such a duality is consistent with Eden et. al. (2024), who state that the cultural engagement in various environments usually generates inclusion and tension.

The demographic statistics reveal that most of the participants of K-pop fandom are young females between 16 and 18 years old. This finding is consistent with the existing literature that has reported a gender imbalance with majority of the fans of popular music being female in the K-pop industry. Looking at the distribution by age, the period of fandom participation is the most active in late adolescence, and identity experimentation and peer pressure have a highly significant impact. The educational backgrounds of the participants, the majority of them being high-school and university students, also contribute into the internalization of fandom in the critical periods of social and cultural identity development.

The findings indicate that Indonesian adolescents are highly involved in K-pop fandom in digital ways including streaming and tracking the existence of idols on social media networks. This trend shows the global, digital nature of the K-pop, which relies heavily on the online media as a means of distribution and communication with the fans. Although it is less common since the live events and merchandise buying are less common, this can be explained more by financial and geographical reasons than by the loss of interest. However, the large involvement in fan communities highlights the influence of fandom as a social group engaging

members to interact, experience, and strengthen their communities and identities as fans (Kim et al., 2023; Mastromartino et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2024).

The K-pop fandom contributes significantly to the development of cross-cultural curiosity and behavior in the adolescents in Indonesia. The results demonstrate a strong interest in the Korean language, culture, and lifestyle, which proves that fandom does play a role of the intercultural understanding. Respondents shared that they have embraced some of the aspects of Korean fashion, tried some Korean food, and attended cultural events, which implies that fandom is not just limited to appreciation of music but it also contributes to the formation of transnational identity by embracing some of the culture. Differences in engagement indicate that the differences in access to resources also mediate cultural engagement (Martin et al., 2024; Koroglu & Ozmen, 2022).

The statistics highlight the significance of fandom in the building of social identity. Most of the respondents said that they felt a great sense of belonging, loyalty towards the group, and got a chance to express themselves in the fandom. This is in line with the social identity theory, which assumes that membership in a group provides individuals with framework of self-definition and belonging (Gürsoy Erdenay, 2025). Engagement in group activity e.g. charities, joint activities, also demonstrates how fandom communities go beyond entertainment, becoming arenas of wider social engagement. As a result, fandom serves as an individual and social identity marker to most teenagers.

The K-pop fandom has several developmental and psychosocial advantages on the Indonesian teenagers. It gives a forum to develop social networks, linguistic abilities and introduce participants to the global culture in the process becoming an informal educative channel through which culture learning and social adequacy are encouraged. It is also important because emotional support and improved self-confidence are among the key results since, in most cases, adolescents describe fandom spaces as safe places where they can express themselves freely. The implication of these findings is that fandom has a positive impact on the developmental process of adolescents through cultural enhancement and improved psychological well-being.

Alongside the benefits, the research also recognizes several obstacles that the teenagers face in their activities within the fan communities. Among the most reported challenges were the financial strain especially when it comes to purchasing the merchandise and attending concerts. Social negative stereotypes, in which the fandom is often viewed as either too much or too unproductive, also make the lives of adolescents complicated. The need to cope with parents, time management, and competition among the fandom peers also present the demands of the participation. All these issues imply that fandom is beneficial to identity building, yet these problems also create conflict that requires compromising between individual needs, family values, and social attitudes.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes that K-Pop fandom significantly influences the cross-cultural social identity of Indonesian teenagers by shaping their cultural preferences, social interactions, and self-expression. Participation in fandom communities allows teenagers to adopt elements of Korean culture such as language, fashion, and values while blending them with their local cultural context, creating a hybrid identity. Fandom engagement also fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity, as fans build strong social networks both online and offline, which reinforces their group identity. However, this influence is not without challenges, as some teenagers experience cultural tension, stereotypes, or pressures related to consumerism and conformity within fandom culture. Overall, K-Pop fandom emerges as both a site of cultural

learning and a platform for identity negotiation, highlighting its role as a powerful medium of cross-cultural exchange and youth identity formation in Indonesia.

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