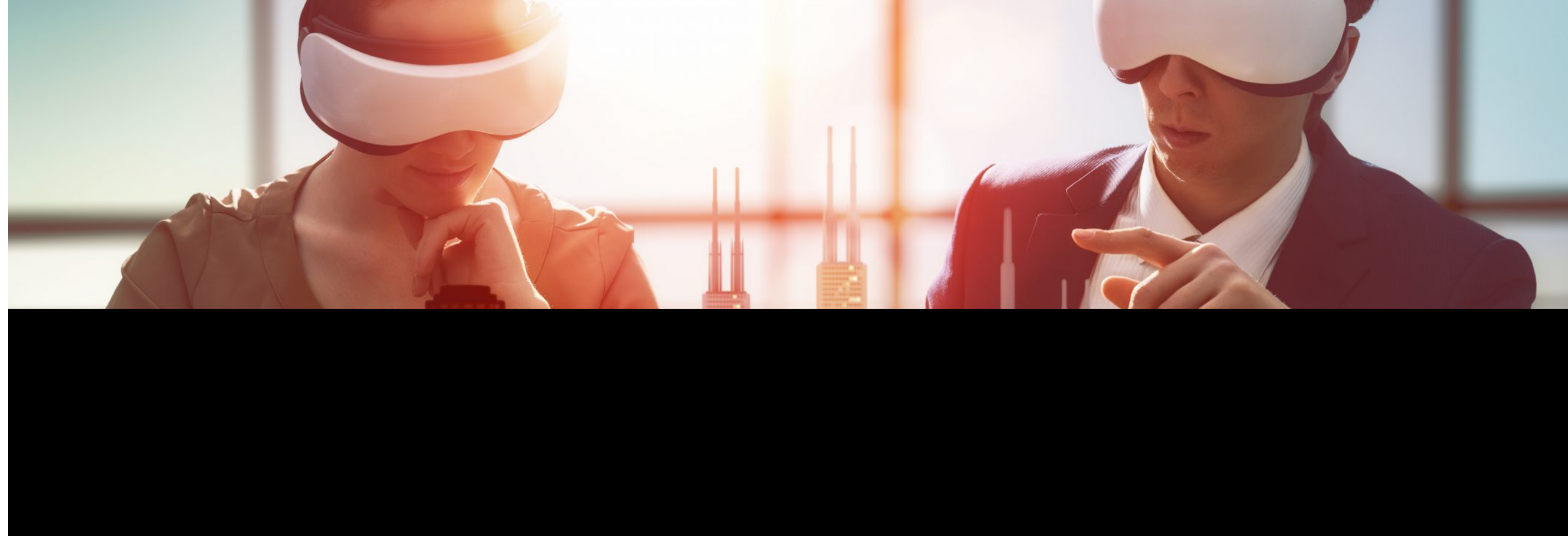




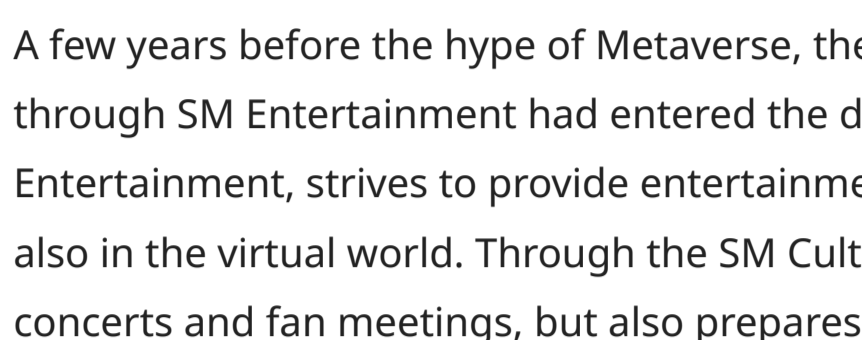
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Metaverse: From K-Pop to Public Service

Penulis: Admin PMB BRIN - 14 Maret 2022

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[Masyarakat & Budaya, Vol. 25, No. 18, Maret 2022]

By Ranny Rastati (BRIN researcher)

A few years before the hype of Metaverse, the South Korean entertainment industry through SM Entertainment had entered the digital world. Lee Soo Man, the founder of SM Entertainment, strives to provide entertainment not only in the conventional realm, but also in the virtual world. Through the SM Culture Universe concept, SM not only holds concerts and fan meetings, but also prepares virtual idols and celebrities.

In November 2020, SM Entertainment officially announced the debut of a girl idol group named Aespa. Aespa is a combination of names from avatar, experience, and aspect which means experiencing a new world through avatar. In their debut single, entitled Black Mamba, Aespa also introduced their four avatars. These avatars were then referred to as ae-Aespa. ae-Aespa is depicted as living in a metaverse called Flat on the planet Kwangya. On several occasions ae-Aespa is shown interacting with Aespa in the real world.

Aespa consists of four members: Karina, Giselle, Winter, and Ningning. Not only present in the real world, each Aespa member also has an avatar that can make appearances in the virtual world. This concept makes Aespa an icon of the future of the entertainment world presented by SM Entertainment. SM Entertainment has even collaborated with Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), one of the prestigious universities in South Korea, to run K-Pop and metaverse projects.

Before the metaverse terminology was widely known to the public, Aespa's concept was considered confusing and bizarre. Many people criticize the urgency of creating idol avatars that specifically provide entertainment in the virtual world. But now, after world musicians such as Snoop Dog, Justin Beiber, and Ariana Grande performing concerts in the metaverse Lee Soo Man's vision of Aespa is finally understood.

Long before Aespa, South Korea turned out to have had the first virtual singer named Adam who debuted in 1998. In the form of three-dimensional (3D) animation, Adam was created to improve the image of South Korea as a technology country. Having experienced brief popularity, Adam's fame waned due to the increasing number of other virtual singers in South Korea such as Cyda and Lusia.

K-Pop in the Metaverse

During the COVID-19 pandemic, BTS held the first paid online concert called BANG BANG CON: The Live on June 14, 2020. The concert can be accessed through the streaming service Weverse. The ticket priced between 29,000 KRW to 39,000 KRW (approximately \$24-32) (US BTS Army, 2020b). Even though it was online, the concert was watched by 756,600 people from 107 regions in the world (Kompas, 2021). In fact, BANG BANG CON: The Live recorded in the Guinness World Record as the online concert with the most audience in the world.

Shortly after, BTS held the second online concert MAP OF THE SOUL ONE on Weverse on October 10, 2020. Even though the ticket price was quite expensive, from around 49,000 KRW to 101,000 KRW (approximately \$41-84) (US BTS Army, 2020a), the online concert was a huge success. This online concert was watched by 993,000 people around the globe (Willman, 2020), including Indonesia, and broke the Guinness World Record of previous BTS concerts.

The success of the BTS concert shows the potential for online concerts and virtual fan engagement that will be even more phenomenal on the metaverse platform. Thus, HYBE (BTS agency) plans to work on a BTS non-fungible token (NFT) project in the form of a digital photo card. Besides HYBE, YG entertainment (Blackpink and BIGBANG agencies) also launched NFT and games in collaboration with Binance. In addition, JYP has also collaborated with Zepeto, South Korea's largest metaverse platform. However, the South Korean entertainment agency's massive migration plan has received a lot of criticism from fans because it is considered bad for the environment.

South Korea's Efforts to Build K-Metaverse

The high global enthusiasm for the metaverse has made South Korea aspire to become one of the world's leading metaverse countries. This is not surprising because South Korea is the fourth-largest gaming market. In addition, games are the largest cultural export from South Korea. To realize the South Korean metaverse or K-Metaverse, several efforts have been made by the government. For instance, the establishment of a metaverse school, establishing a metaverse hub to support start-ups, financial assistance for small and medium enterprises, and regulatory innovations to accommodate the metaverse (CNBC Indonesia, 2022).

In addition, the South Korean government also provided funding of 7.5 million dollars for the development of K-Metaverse from the Digital New Deal 2.0 program fund (Lifestyle Asia, 2022). Digital New Deal 2.0 is a South Korea national plan in artificial intelligence and digital for healthcare, infrastructure, and the economy. The development of K-Metaverse is a public-private partnership with 500 private companies involved, including Samsung, SK Telecom, and Hyundai Motors (Kim, 2021).

The Seoul city government also plans to develop Seoul Metaverse platform by the end of 2020-2026. The fund that will be disbursed by the city government is around 3.9 billion KRW (approximately \$3.3 million). Various public services will be provided in the K-Metaverse such as a virtual mayor's office, business and investment services, tourist zone, and file administrative complaints (Anugraha, 2021). Then, what about Indonesia?

Indonesian Metaverse

In August 2021, the Jakarta Creative Economy Committee as a strategic partner of the Jakarta City government participated in introducing NFT through the Jakarta Metaverse exhibition. For the exhibition, Jakarta Metaverse collaborates with KaryaKarsa and TokoCrypto to showcase various NFT of creative economy actors. Jakarta Metaverse was also expected to help creative economy actors to be creative in the midst of creating a new economic ecosystem through the metaverse (Komite Ekraf Jakarta, 2021).

Indonesia has a metaverse development company named WIR Group. Together with the government, WIR Group will pioneer the Indonesian metaverse. Not only collaborating with the government through the Ministry of Communication and Information and the Ministry of Investment/Indonesian Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM), WIR Group also collaborates with enterprises such as Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI) and Bank Negara Indonesia (BNI) for developing banking services in the metaverse.

In the future, the metaverse will not only covers entertainment and business industries, but also public services. Besides, the metaverse also can be used as a means for religious worship, such as virtual Islamic teaching (pengajian) and virtual churches. With all the potential, we still have to be aware of the various issues that may occur. For this reason, it is necessary to obtain metaverse literacy in order to get the benefit offered by metaverse. (editor: Al Araf Assadallah Marzuki)

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Tentang Penulis:

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