

How Fans of Korean Music Mobilized Anti-Israel Sentiment

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In the past decade, popular music from Korea—known as K-Pop—has gained a broad international audience, and the devotees of the genre have developed a reputation for their enthusiastic and sometimes aggressive activity on social media. **Amos Hervitz**, **David Siman-Tov**, and **Javier Shocron** explain the way the online “K-Pop community” has used such platforms as Twitter and TikTok to generate an intense sense of fellow feeling, and in turn directed that feeling toward political aims. In one case, for instance, K-Pop fans appear to have engaged in the organized sabotage of a political rally for Donald Trump. They have also turned their considerable influence against Israel:

During Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 2021), the K-Pop community engaged in a cognitive campaign to promote pro-Palestinian messages, including the distribution of anti-Israel content. The campaign also included an attempt to harm social-media companies. . . . At first, the campaign was spread by users identified as Palestinians, such as a user named Bashar, who claimed that social-media companies are pro-Israel and therefore contribute to the suppression and blocking of the Palestinian narrative while promoting Israel’s messages.

This campaign did not achieve the desired impact. . . . However, a significant turning point came when the K-Pop community rallied to help the Palestinian campaign. This change took place when a Malaysian influencer (username Ad-Dien), who is identified with K-Pop, shared the Palestinian campaign, leading to its broad distribution among many users affiliated with this community. They began amplifying the campaign and significantly increased its spread.

With the support of the K-Pop community, the anti-Israel campaign mushroomed and included hundreds of thousands of tweets against Israel every day, reaching tens of millions of users. The community’s involvement in the campaign was especially blatant because seven out of the ten central accounts involved in mass distribution of the campaign’s content were affiliated directly or indirectly with the K-Pop community.

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