



## A Symbolism Analysis of the Deadly Sins of the Saja Boys from the *K-Pop Demon Hunter* Movie

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**Abstract.** The animated film KPop Demon Hunters quickly became a worldwide hit, reaching the top of Netflix's global charts with over 33 million views in just two weeks. The highly acclaimed film KPop Demon Hunters has been the subject of some research due to its notable accomplishment. Yet, none of the research above discusses the symbolism that is richly put in the movie. Thus, the research attempts to elaborate on the representation of symbolism in order to provide an alternative viewpoint of the Kpop Demon Hunters, particularly the well-known villain, the Saja Boys. In order to study the underlying meaning of the Saja Boys, the author employs the qualitative method and applies Vrabel's study of deadly sin in relation to the religious symbol. This study concludes that the members of the Saja Boys represent symbolism of the deadly sins, which are anger, envy, greed, lust, pride, gluttony, and sloth. These vices are shown from the behavior of the Saja Boys, such as barking towards fans aggressively, being envious of one's freedom and happiness, stocking food as much as possible, giving sexual gratification through physical appearance, and being overly proud of it. Not only that, the members of Saja Boys also portrayed the action of overconsumption and laziness.

**Keywords:** Deadly Sins; Kpop Demon Hunters; Literature; Movie; Symbolism.

### 1. BACKGROUND

With more than 33 million views in just two weeks, the animated movie *KPop Demon Hunters* topped Netflix's global charts and swiftly became a global hit (Lee, 2025). The plot of KPop Demon Hunters centers on Huntr/x, an all-female K-pop group consisting of Rumi, Mira, and Zoey who serve as the world's covert protectors. Beyond the glitz of the stage, these international celebrities battle their evil counterparts, the Saja Boys, to defend their fans from supernatural dangers. This film has received high praise from critics for its captivating story and visuals.

*The Guardian* believes that the key to *KPop Demon Hunters* success is its sense of engagement with reality. The film challenges the typical princess or talking animal hegemony by making the main characters a K-pop group. In result, younger children can watch with wide-eyed admiration that used to be projected to Disney princesses. The audiences admire young adult characters with significant responsibilities that are carried out with an aspirational big-sister energy (Hassenger, 2025). In addition, Euny Hong from the *New York Times* (2025) mentioned that *KPop Demon Hunters* reflects how young people's cultural identities are changing and merging into mash-up styles that do not favor one over the other. These concepts are shown by the film's protagonist, who resembles real-life K-Pop singers and appears extraterrestrial rather than Korean, white, or any other race. The hybrid or mash-up is no longer a freak show that can only be appreciated ironically, which is why the audience loves it. On top of that, *K-pop Demon Hunter* has a distinctly Asian flavor and is further adorned with

adorable comic-book elements, which unleashes a far more playful approach to computer animation. This explains why, rather than being repulsive, the violence is equally visually appealing (Debruge, 2025). All in all, *KPop Demon Hunters* undoubtedly demonstrates its superiority in terms of storyline, character development, and visuals.

Due to its prominent achievement, some research has been done to analyze the highly appreciated movie *KPop Demon Hunters* (Fan & Supalakwatchana, 2026; Yoo, 2025). First, Fan & Supalakwatchana examined the seven dimensions of Korean Wave culture in *KPop Demon Hunters*, from idol aesthetics and K-pop soundtracks to food culture, language, and mythological motifs, in a manner similar to or even more intricate than K-dramas and movies. Thus, intentional integration of Korean terms, food, and landmarks can support soft power campaigns and encourage interest in language learning, travel, and cultural goods, providing a model for cross-media cultural promotion (2026). Second, Yoo's analysis of *KPop Demon Hunters* (2025) shows that although it lacks cultural education programs and immersive experiences to deepen understanding of Korean traditions, it exhibits excellent tourism marketing. In short, aligning with Fan & Supalakwatchana, Yoo believes that animated cultural content is an effective vehicle for soft power and cultural diplomacy.

All in all, the studies above have highlighted how *KPop Demon Hunters* movie has become a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy and global influence. Yet, none of the research above discusses the symbolism that is richly put in the movie. Whereas, the American Koreanist, Professor Emeritus Mark A. Peterson from Brigham Young University said that there is a tendency to merely depict the native cultures without providing a thorough explanation, as is the case with some other films that feature native culture, such as *Mulan* with the Chinese tale, *Moana* with the Polynesian myths, and *Coco* and the *Dia de los Muertos* (2025). For example, Peterson further explained that even though it has mentioned several times, many audiences have not gotten a clue of what *honmun* means. In fact, it was easy to decipher: "Hon" means spirit, and "moon" means gate, making it a spirit gate – which is a bold reinterpretation of a traditional Korean shamanic "gut" ritual (Park, 2025).

Considering the layers of meaning in *KPop Demon Hunters*, the writer believes it is important to study the symbols represented by the Saja Boys in *K-Pop Demon Hunter* movie. "Saja" means "lion." One could assume that the boy band chose the name to represent power and strength, just like the lion. Interestingly, Park (2025) believed that the boys are more than just endearing idols. *Jeoseung-saja* also hints at a legendary character who leads souls to the afterlife and resembles a grim reaper. Although cast as villains, the Saja Boys' attractive appearance and swagger have won them a devoted global fan base (Ku, 2025) to the point that

Netflix offers an official membership of the Saja Boys (Yusron, 2025). Thus, to offer a perspective on current phenomena, the research aims to elaborate on the representation of the Saja Boys' member symbolism by answering the research question below:

- 1) To what extent do the Saja Boys represent the symbolism of deadly sins?

## **2. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **Symbolism**

The writer applies the theory of symbolism (2023) and the discussion of deadly sin proposed by Vrabel (2020) in relation to the religious symbol to interpret the underlying meaning of the Saja Boys. Symbolism is a literary device that uses symbols—such as locations, people, marks, words, or abstract ideas—to represent something beyond the literal meaning. The concept of symbolism is present in all facets of our daily lives and extends beyond literary works. In addition, McMahan, Funk, Day & Coleman (as cited in Kinasih, 2020) stated that it is important to note that symbols in literature rarely have a single, unambiguous meaning. Therefore, even though in prose and poetry a symbol most commonly represents something unnamed, it may be difficult to decide exactly what is represented by a symbol, though the general meaning is clear. Throughout history, religious symbolism has been arguably the most “acceptable” form of symbolism, given that it has been sanctioned by religious authorities who have dominated society for the majority of human history. Religious symbolism has its origin in the earliest human civilization (2023, p. 25).

### **The Seven Deadly Sins**

One of the most significant religious symbols is the seven deadly sins. The Seven Deadly Sins is a classification system of transgressions or misconduct – anger, envy, greed, lust, pride, gluttony, and sloth – that were popularized by the Catholic Church. These seven vices are so pervasive that they can be found in both popular and academic culture, as well as in our daily lives (Vrabel, 2020, p. 4851), one of which is the *KPop Demon Hunters* movie.

## **3. METHOD**

The writer uses the qualitative method. The qualitative research methods are best for addressing many of the questions researchers have in mind (Given, 2008, p. xxix). In analyzing the literary work, the writer chooses a movie entitled *KPop Demon Hunters*. As a limitation, the writer focuses on the members of the Saja Boys as the subject of research, who are named Jinu, Mystery, Abby, Baby, and Romance. Nuriadi (Ayuretno & Kinasih, 2024, p. 510). The mimetic perspective affirms that literary works should not be seen as inferior sciences since

they are imitations, copies, reflections, and representations of human lives and reality. Readers can use literature as a mirror to comprehend what and how life is. So, even though the Saja Boys are a made-up boy band, readers can still learn about the symbolism of deadly sins from them.

The data collection procedure starts with finding the topic of the research. After that, the writer watched the film *KPop Demon Hunters* (Jimenez et al., 2025) intensively and repeatedly to understand the storyline and characters deeply. Then, the writer read the elaboration of the deadly sins by Vrabel (2020). Next, the writer found the dialogue transcript by downloading subtitles and finding samples (screenshots) that match the theory. Lastly, all data subtitles and screenshots from the film were listed and classified as proof in analyzing the problem of this research. Then, the data analysis was conducted by analyzing the characters and how they represent the deadly sins. Therefore, this study aims to study the representation of deadly sins among members of the Saja Boys.

#### **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The Saja Boys are a fictional, demonic boy band from the Netflix animated movie *KPop Demon Hunters*, acting as the main antagonists who pose as K-Pop idols. The group consists of five people, led by Jinu, with members named Mystery, Abby, Baby, and Romance. In this section, the writer discusses how each member symbolized the deadly sins.

##### **Findings**

###### ***The representation of Anger***

Anger is triggered when a person feels frustrated by a real or perceived threat. Anger is triggered when a person feels frustrated by a real or perceived threat. Even though scholars disagree about whether anger is always undesirable or if it might serve a useful purpose, anger, as an affective state, can cause aggressive impulses when it is unchecked, which could lead to an increase in violent behavior (Vrabel, 2020, p. 4852). In the animated film *KPop Demon Hunters*, an example of the Saja Boy being easily irritated is shown by Mystery, who barks at the fans for no reason, as shown below.



*Figure 1. Zoey is hitting Mystery's head for barking at the fans [00:45:23/01:39:37]*

Mystery : [barking]

Zoey : No! Bad Saja Boy! [00:45:23/01:39:37]

From the scene above, it can be seen that the Huntrix and the Saja Boys are having a fans meeting together. Out of nowhere, Mystery is barking at the fans. Seeing this bad behaviour, Zoey is hitting his head to stop him barking. Since there is no proof that the fans are bothering Mystery, his act of barking at them without cause can be interpreted as an aggressive impulse.

### ***The representation of Envy***

Envy is an unpleasant feeling that arises when someone compares themselves negatively to a similar person to make an upward social comparison. Envy, for instance, arises when a person recognizes that they lack something that belongs to someone else, such as a personal quality (like beauty), an achievement (like getting a good grade), or a possession like financial wealth (Vrabel, 2020, p. 4852). In this case, an expression of envy was shown by Jinu, who is envy on Rumi for not being influenced by Gwi-Ma.



*Figure 2. Jinu is envious of Rumi for not hearing Gwi-Ma's voice in her head [00:39:56/01:39:37].*

Jinu : Huh. I know what it feels like to have them.

Rumi : Feel? You're a demon. Demons don't feel anything.

Jinu : Is that what you think? That's all demons do.  
Feel. Feel our shame, our misery. It's how Gwi-  
Ma controls us. Do you not hear him in your ear?  
Rumi : What are you talking about?  
Jinu : Huh. You're lucky. I'll never forget the first time  
I heard him. [00:45:23/01:39:37]

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that Jinu is envious of Rumi for not being controlled by Gwi-Ma. This feeling of envy is shown in the scene when Jinu is having a conversation with Rumi, asking her if she heard Gwi-Ma's voice in her head. Jinu further explains that it is how Gwi-Ma controls the rest of the demons by constantly reminding them about their shame and misery. Surprisingly, Rumi says that she has no idea of what Jinu is talking about. When he hears her, Jinu admits that he envies her for not being able to hear Gwi-Ma's voice.

Vrabel, p. (2020, p. 4852) stated that, in general, the purpose of evoking envy is to motivate people to focus their efforts on overcoming this sense of inferiority. This leads the writer to believe that his actions toward the end of the narrative have been motivated by this jealous feeling. Jinu admits that he betrayed Rumi at the award ceremony because he had to stop the voice in his head immediately, even if it meant losing trust.



**Figure 3.** *Gwi-Ma is threatening Jinu to turn the voices in the head up [01:00:43/01:39:37]*

Gwi-Ma : You betrayed your own family. You left them  
behind.  
Voice : [woman whispers] You killed your family.  
Gwi-Ma : Don't forget about our deal, Jinu, because I can  
turn those voices up.  
Voice : [woman] They're going to die.  
Gwi-Ma : Or they can be gone. [01:00:43/01:39:37]

The excerpt above shows how controlling Gwi-Ma is. Gwi-Ma is reminding Jinu that he is capable of turning up the voices in the head and making Jinu suffer more with his guilt. And, he can make the voices in his head go away. Jinu is motivated to betray Rumi by claiming that the agreement they are making is a lie because of his urgent need to silence the voices in his head.



*Figure 4. Jinu admits that he tricks Rumi into trusting him [01:09:48/01:39:37]*

Rumi : How could you do this?  
 Jinu : It was all a lie.  
 Rumi : It was real! What we had was real. I know it was!  
 Jinu : The things I said? I just needed you to trust me.  
 That's all. [01:09:48/01:39:37]

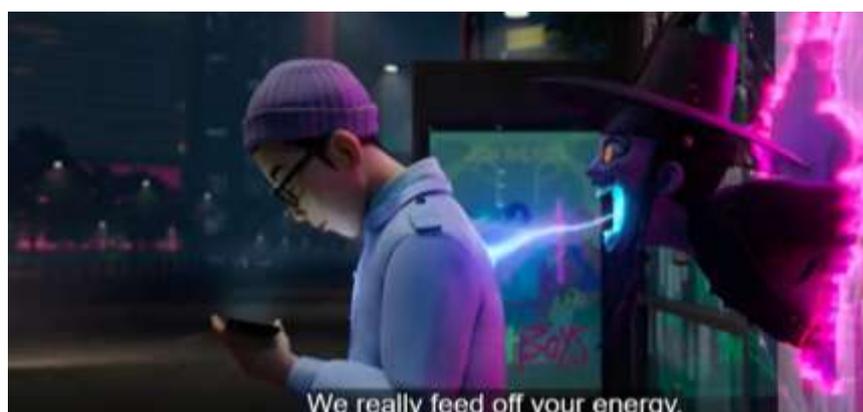
The excerpt above shows that Jinu's envious feeling has motivated his action. Jinu has been so troubled by the voices in her head since the beginning that he envies Rumi for not being able to hear them. In the end, Jinu admits that he has been lying to gain Rumi's trust in order to achieve Gwi-Ma's promise to silence the voices in his head.

### ***The representation of Greed***

When someone has an overwhelming desire to acquire more goods, assets, money, or possessions, it is known as greed. In other words, greed is the desire to obtain more material goods or elevate one's status while being dissatisfied with one's existing material possessions or status (Vrabel, 2020, p. 4852).

Jinu : I know, and that soul is just a starter. So let me  
 get back to work, and you'll be feasting in no  
 time [00:34:05/01:39:37]

It is evident from Jinu's response above that they view souls as nothing more than food. In the excerpt above, Jinu responds to Gwi-Ma by saying that the demons will soon be feasting because they gained a lot of followers in just one night. To do this, Jinu requests permission to continue attracting the fans. The Saja Boys' speech, which has a connotative meaning as seen below, illustrates the dissatisfaction of obtaining one soul and the greed of gaining more fans.



**Figure 5.** *The demon is taking the fans' souls [00:49:04/01:39:37]*

Romance : Hey, everybody.

Abby : Our fan club just hit 50 million fans.

Romance : We have to give a shoutout to Huntrix. We couldn't have done it without their support.

Mystery : And to our fans, thank you. We really feed off your energy.

Reporter : In other news, the amount of missing person reports have tripled in the last 24 hours.

Mystery : We're so excited to show you what's next.

[00:49:04/01:39:37]

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that the Saja Boys are giving a speech after getting 50 million fans. The Saja boys appreciate the fans for their support. They thank the fans as the boy band is feeding off their fans' energy. On the other hand, the reporter said that in the past 24 hours, the number of missing person reports has tripled. While the scene depicts more fans' souls pouring into the demons' world, as shown in Figure 6, Mystery's message becomes more ironic as he claims that The Saja Boys are eager to show the fans what's coming up.



*Figure 6. The souls are coming to the demons' world [00:49:12/01:39:37]*

As mentioned before, greed is the desire to obtain more material goods or elevate one's status. By using that definition, the writer finds out that the scenes and conversations above demonstrate the Saja Boys' desire to gain more souls. Consumed by greed, the Saja Boys want to show their fans their next plan, which actually aims to obtain more souls, even though the demons' world is overflowing with souls. They obtain more food by doing this, on the one hand. At the same time, Jinu wants to gain Gwi-Ma's approval to silence the voices in his head and raise his status.

### ***The representation of Lust***

An increase in sexual gratification, promiscuity, or desire brought on by psychological and physiological stimuli is what defines lust, also known as sexual desire or libido (Vrabel, 2020, p. 4852). The way the Saja Boys provide fans with physiological stimuli, as depicted in Figure 7 below, is one of the deadly sins that are instantly apparent in the film.



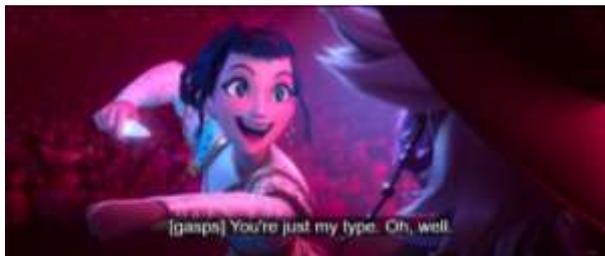
*Figure 7. Romance and Baby are spreading love in the air to the fans [00:27:18/01:39:37]*

From Figure 7, it can be seen that both Romance and Baby Saja are giving love in the air to their fans. Surprisingly, despite their sudden debut, many female fans are falling in love with them right away, even in their first public appearance. Moreover, in the next scene, it can be seen that Abby, knowing that his body is an asset, mimeographs his abs and gives the copies to the fans as shown in Figure 9.



**Figure 8.** Abby is mimeographing his abs to lure his fans [00:44:56/01:39:37]

The fans have never heard of the Saja Boys before, yet they instantly liked what they saw both on the launch day and the fans' meeting day. None of the fans know who the members really are, their background, or their intentions. Yet, fans from all generations instantly loved his appearance. What is worse, during the final battle between the Huntrix and the Saja Boys, Zoey and Mira still show how attracted they are to the physical appearance of their enemies, as shown in Figure 9 and Figure 10.



**Figure 9.** Zoey is seeing Mystery's face for the first time and falls for it [01:22:44/01:39:37]



**Figure 10.** Mira is still attracted to Abby's abs that makes her feels hot [01:22:51/01:39:37]

As seen in Figure 9, Mystery's normally hair-covered face is finally revealed to Zoey as a result of the impact of the battle. Surprisingly, instead of hating the demon, Zoey's response shows admiration by saying that Mystery is just her type of man. And, as a result of seeing Abby's abs, Mira, who is now fighting with Abby, cries popcorn. It means that even to the very end, Abby still manages to influence Mira with his physical stimuli, or sexiness.

### ***The representation of Pride***

Vrabel (2020) defines pride as an extreme form of self-centeredness that results in an overwhelming amount of self-love and disregard for others. The example of the Saja Boys' pride can be seen from Abby's confidence in luring the fans.



**Figure 11.** Abby is proud that his abbs lures the Huntrix to them [00:31:21/01:39:37]

Jinu : [chuckles] Wow. Did you really follow us in here?  
 Abby : I knew they would. That one's always looking at me.

It's clear from the passage above that Jinu is shocked that the Huntrix's curiosity would take them to the men's public bathroom. In response to that, Abby proudly said that he knows that the Huntrix would follow them to the bathroom as one of them is always admiring him. Thus, as fans do, they would follow their idols everywhere they go.

### ***The representation of Gluttony***

Gluttony is defined as overconsumption or overindulgence in pleasures or desires. In the past, gluttony was primarily defined by overindulging in food. Consequently, it has been proposed that an excessive appetite could account for health issues like obesity, at least in part (Vrabel, 2020, p. 4852). The representation of gluttony can be seen from the scene when Baby Saja is overconsuming hot chili sauce in the game, as represented in Figure 12.



**Figure 82.** Baby Saja is drinking bottles of hot chili sauce effortlessly [00:29:37/01:39:37]

In the scene above, it can be seen that the Saja Boys are invited to a game show named *Who Can Chug the Most Hot Sauce?*. During the game, all the members are asked to drink the hot sauce from the bottle. The rest of the members cannot finish the task except Baby Saja. In

fact, Baby Saja even defeats the co-host by drinking the hot sauce effortlessly. Without doubt, the action of overconsuming the chili sauce can be seen as the representation of gluttony.

### ***The representation of Sloth***

The term "sloth" describes a lack of drive and an inability to utilize one's skills (e.g., procrastination, lack of effort, laziness). While some academics contend that sloth may be an impulse to simply avoid something burdensome, others have proposed that sloth is the feeling of shame that follows gluttony (Vrabel, 2020, p. 4853). The example of 'slothing' can be seen in Figure 13.



**Figure 13.** Baby Saja is being piggybacked out of the stage after the show [00:31:00/01:39:37]

In Figure 13, it can be seen that Baby Saja is piggybacking one of the members of the Saja Boys. This scene shows Baby's lack of effort in walking or running backstage. Align with Vrabel's theory, that sloth is the feeling of shame that follows gluttony. The action of being piggybacked happens after Baby Saja winning the game show *Who Can Chug the Most Hot Sauce*. It can be seen that Baby is not walking after his overconsumption of chili sauce.

### **Discussion**

In short, the findings above have shown that the members of the Saja Boys represent symbolism of the deadly sins. First, the representation of anger can be seen from how Mystery easily gets irritated and barks at the fans for no reason. Vrabel (2020) stated that anger at the emotional level can cause aggressive impulses, which could lead to more violent acts. For someone who cannot regulate his emotions and lash out at people by barking cannot be seen as a normal action. Second, the findings also demonstrate how Jinu's feelings of jealousy drive him to take action. Previous studies have frequently pointed out the negative aspects of envy, linking it to negative traits like hostility, sabotage, and aggression (Yang & Tang, 2021). Here lies the reason why Jinu decides to betray his agreement with Rumi. Instead of breaking his curse and working on a better life with Rumi, he decides to drag Rumi with him into eternal suffering because he cannot escape Gwi-Ma's torture.

Third, although the demons' world is full of souls, the Saja Boys stand for greed because they are attempting to acquire more souls for food. According to a psychiatrist, philosopher, and lecturer at Oxford, Neel Burton (as cited in Wahyudi, 2024), greed can arise from trauma in the early stages of life due to the absence, inconsistency, or neglect of parents. As a result, when they become adults, they are vulnerable to being focused on "replacements" for the love and security they did not have. The effort to find such replacements will distract from the attention and pain they experience, while providing comfort and a number of other compensations. In this case, the Saja Boys – especially Jinu, long for security for four hundred years. Yet, what he gets is pain from Gwi-Ma. Thus, by obtaining as many souls as he could, he distracted his attention from the suffering he was experiencing. He hopes to win Gwi-Ma's approval and end the torment in his head by doing this.

Next, the Saja Boys represent the symbolism of lust and pride. The Saja Boys offer sexual gratification by showing the abs and giving a false illusion of love. Research by Huang (2024) showed that the feminization of male idols is the most well-liked sexualization strategy among fans. Male idols, like Mystery, weaken masculinity and lessen aggression by adopting a feminine appearance, such as long hair. They put men and women on equal footing through this special way, or even put men below women, showing broken and weak images to arouse the desire of female fans. Huang argued that in a social environment where feminism is on the rise, showing broken images is able to gain women's favor and satisfy women's demand. That is why Zoey still falls for Mystery until the final battle. Furthermore, there is another significant way that male idols are sexualized. Wearing see-through tops and exposing their waists are two ways that male idols may attract their fans, just like what Abby always does in his appearance. Here lies the reason why Abby is so proud of his sexiness, knowing that it would lure Mira to the men's public bathroom. Last, both the representation of gluttony and sloth can be seen in Baby Saja. As mentioned before, Baby Saja even defeats the co-host by drinking the hot sauce effortlessly. In Asian countries, it is reported that a person consumes 2.5–8 g of chili pepper daily (Siebert et al., 2022). The action of Baby drinking a bottle of hot sauce represents overconsumption. Additionally, Baby's lack of effort when running or walking backstage symbolizes "sloth." Even though there is no explanation of why Baby Saja is being piggybacked, he is not in a condition that hinders him from walking; his fellow is carrying him to the backstage area.

Overall, the discussion above demonstrates that the deadly sins are represented by the Saja Boys. Considering this, we need to take into account what Sobur stated (as cited in Olivia & Kinasih, 2023), that movies have the strength to influence various social segments, which

means a movie maker has the potency to influence or to create a perspective in society with the meanings they wanted to deliver in their movie. As stated in the introduction, the Saja Boys have a genuine fan base that adores them, much like the real boy band. Therefore, it is highly likely that the Saja Boys' actions could have an impact on their admirers. On top of that, a research Ramadhan & Purwaningtyas (2024) stated that in the form of fulfilling love and support for K-Pop idols, the fans would repay their idols by doing things that support them, such as streaming to increase the rating of their idol's music videos, voting so that their idols get awards, or buying official merchandise from their idols. Considering the strong attachment that has been elaborated by Ramadhan & Purwaningtyas, it is hoped that this research provided an alternate perspective of the Saja Boys to the fans.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the members of the Saja Boys represent symbolism of the deadly sins, which are anger, envy, greed, lust, pride, gluttony, and sloth. These vices are shown from the behavior of the Saja Boys, such as barking towards fans aggressively, being envious of one's freedom and happiness, stocking food as much as possible, giving sexual gratification through physical appearance, and being overly proud of it. On top of that, the members of Saja Boys also portrayed the action of overconsumption and laziness. Lastly, as a suggestion for further research, more in-depth symbolism can be learnt in its relation to Korean culture.

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