

Appendix A: Case study background

Key individuals and groups

- *HYBE Corporation (HYBE)*: South Korean multinational entertainment company established in 2005 (“Hybe,” 2025). HYBE oversees multiple subsidiaries—such as ADOR, Belift Lab, and Big Hit Music—and is well known internationally as the management company behind BTS.
- *ADOR*: South Korean record label. It was founded in 2021 as an independent subsidiary under HYBE and was formally led by Min Hee-jin (“Hybe,” 2025). ADOR is the label behind the girl group NewJeans.
- *Min Hee-jin*: South Korean music producer, art director, and graphic designer. She is the former CEO of ADOR, a subsidiary of entertainment company HYBE Corporation, and the former executive producer of K-pop girl group NewJeans (“Min Hee-jin,” 2025)
- *Bang Si-hyuk*: South Korean music executive, record producer, and songwriter who is a founder of the record label Big Hit Music and the chairperson of HYBE Corporation. He is often referred to as “Hitman Bang” (“Bang Si-hyuk,” 2024)
- *NewJeans*: South Korean girl group formed by ADOR. The group is composed of five members: Minji, Hanni, Danielle, Haerin, and Hyein. Mainly produced by Min Hee-jin, they debuted in 2022 (“NewJeans,” 2025).
- *ILLIT*: South Korean girl group formed by Belift Lab. The group consists of five members: Yunah, Minju, Moka, Wonhee, and Iroha. The group debuted in 2025 (“Illit,” 2025)
- *Dahn World*: A controversial religious organization (also known as Body & Brain or Dahn Yoga), founded in South Korea by Ilchi Lee in the 1980s. While it promotes meditation, yoga, and personal development, it has faced longstanding allegations of cult-like behavior, including coercive recruitment practices, financial exploitation, and emotional manipulation (Woo, 2011). HYBE was speculatively linked to it in online discussions surrounding the controversy, though no verifiable evidence has been presented.

Summary

In April 2024, a management conflict emerged between HYBE and Min Hee-jin (Min), CEO of ADOR, the subsidiary responsible for launching *NewJeans*. On April 22, 2024, HYBE accused Min of attempting to seize control of ADOR, triggering an internal audit and widespread media coverage.

According to Min and ADOR executives, prior to April 22, they submitted a whistleblower letter to HYBE raising concerns that HYBE’s new girl group, ILLIT, had copied aspects of NewJeans. Shortly afterward, on April 22, 2024, HYBE publicly accused Min Hee-jin and other ADOR executives of attempting to seize control of ADOR, leaking business secrets, and making unauthorized personnel requests, launching both an internal audit and a broader investigation.

Min publicly denied these claims in a two-hour-long press conference on April 25, 2024, where she presented her account of the dispute.

The controversy quickly expanded beyond the official dispute into a broader public issue. Online commentary introduced unverified narratives and speculative claims, including alleged ties between HYBE

and the religious movement Dahn World, accusations that ILLIT copied NewJeans' style, and speculation about political motives behind HYBE's actions.

The conflict played out through press conferences, petitions, court proceedings, and public statements, attracting intense national and international attention due to HYBE's central role in the K-pop industry and NewJeans' global prominence.

The dispute remains unresolved, and many conspiracies circulating at the time have not been verified. This case study focuses on the period from April 22 to May 16, 2024, capturing the initial emergence of the conflict, Min's April 25 press conference, and the wave of public commentary and unverified narratives that followed. The study does not extend beyond May 16 because on May 17, 2024, HYBE chairman Bang Si-hyuk issued a public response, which triggered a new wave of statements, conspiracy claims, and petitions. These later developments expanded the controversy substantially, but they fall outside the scope of this analysis.

Timeline of key events

- April 22, 2024: HYBE accuses Min Hee-jin and other ADOR executives of attempting to seize control of ADOR, leaking business secrets, and making unauthorized personnel requests. HYBE initiates an internal audit.
- April 25, 2024: Min Hee-jin holds a two-hour press conference denying HYBE's allegations and presenting her account of the dispute.
- May 17, 2024:
 - Bang Si-hyuk makes his first public response.
 - Members of NewJeans submit petitions to the Seoul Central District Court in support of Min, opposing HYBE's attempt to dismiss her as ADOR CEO.