

## The Rise of K-pop Through Social Media

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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives** Korean pop music (K-pop) is a world renowned genre of music. Originating from Seoul, South Korea, K-pop songs are primarily sung in Korean. K-pop has continued to break through international barriers. K-pop started to gain international attention through the Korean wave(Hallyu) and has continued to gain momentum through the different waves.

**Methods** This paper examined how K-pop became popular through social media during the second Korean wave. In particular, it focused on how Korean entertainment companies took advantage of social media to promote their idols. Additionally, this study examined how fans communicate with their idols through social media, and how this affected the formation of the idol fandoms.

**Conclusions** Social media was the catalyst for creating fans support towards K-pop groups. Korean entertainment companies usage of social media to promote their K-pop groups has paid off. Without social media, fandoms would not have been able to be large and impactful. YouTube was one of the first social media platforms that entertainment companies used, but now fans have a variety of platforms to interact with. It was easy to create large fan bases because of social media, and fans contributed to the output of content by creating their own. In the future, K-pop through social media will continue to gain popularity and fans give them support.

**Keywords** Hallyu(Korean Wave), K-pop, Idol, Fan, Fandom, Social Media, Youtube

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## 1. Introduction

Korean pop music, or K-pop, has been on an upwards trend and is becoming more popular as each year goes by. The Korean wave (Hallyu) is a phenomenon where Korean popular culture is introduced to other countries and gains popularity. There are three Korean waves and we are currently experiencing the third (Kim, 2015). The first Korean wave is defined by the rise in consumption of Korean content in parts of East Asia and Southeast Asia in the 1990s. Countries such as China, Japan, Thailand, and Singapore took interest in Korean entertainment (Jin and Kyong 2016). People from these countries would watch Korean dramas and be enticed by the addictive plots. The second Korean wave started in the early 2000s.

It is categorized by the increase in popularity of K-pop outside of Asia through the contributions of social media (Jin and Kyong 2016). Korean singers, or idols, such as BoA and BigBang helped start the movement. The third wave describes how both the

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entertainment industry and Korean culture have become popular worldwide (Kim, 2015). Global audiences were able to partake in the second Korean wave because of social media. Social media is what helped create the second Korean wave and continues to grow the third Korean wave. Social media was vital for introducing K-pop to global audiences.

K-pop has been able to establish such a large grasp on the world because of social media. Social media helped create the second Korean wave and distributed content such as K-pop outside of Asia. This paper aims to explore how social media influenced and contributed to the K-pop music industry's success. By exploring the second Korean wave, the creation of social media, Korean entertainment companies' utilization of social media, and idols' connections to their fans, audiences will be able to see how social media helped K-pop become popular among global audiences. Social media plays a major role in the success of K-pop around the world.

## 2. Usage of Social Media Platforms

Korean entertainment companies started utilizing social media to help expand their reach outside South Korea. To increase global popularity, Korean entertainment companies utilized YouTube to help promote their artists (Jin and Kyong 2016). By promoting K-pop on social media, Korean entertainment companies could reach more fans. Especially, YouTube helped bring K-pop to audiences in North America. YouTube was created in 2005, and allowed Korean entertainment companies to release songs and music videos with very little fees (Jin and Kyong 2016). By using YouTube, entertainment companies could increase their global fanbase without having to invest a lot of money into marketing. Fans turned to YouTube to access K-pop content because traditional forms of media such as television and radio didn't broadcast K-pop in North America in the early 2000s. Fans were able to watch music videos, variety shows, and other idol content for free on YouTube (McLaren & Dal, 2020). The readily available access to YouTube allowed K-pop fans to consume as much content as they

desired. YouTube is still a main platform for K-pop fans to receive content, but other traditional forms of media eventually started broadcasting K-pop too. Mainstream media became interested in K-pop in 2012 when South Korean idol, Psy, released “Gangnam Style” (Jin and Kyong 2016). “Gangnam Style” blew up on social media and as of 2022, it has a total of 4 billion views on YouTube (PSY, 2022). Only after Gangnam Style became popular on social media did traditional media outlets start paying attention to K-pop. The popularity of K-pop on YouTube caused traditional media to take interest in the genre and further promote it in North America.

Fans have a variety of social media platforms to choose from to interact with their favorite idol. YouTube is still very popular especially for viewing music videos, but now fans can find K-pop content on Twitter, Instagram, and Vlive (McLaren & Dal, 2020). Social media is free and readily available so fans don't have to wait for their idol to make an appearance on television. Fans can simply log onto their social media accounts to view performances (Jin 2018). Music videos on YouTube can reach millions of views within hours because of growing fanbases. Bangtan Sonyeondan, or BTS for short, is arguably the most famous K-pop group worldwide. They were able to reach 101 million views in 24 hours on their “Dynamite” music video in 2020 because of their large following (Spangler 2020). They broke the record for most views on YouTube within 24 hours. They beat the previous record-holder, BlackPink, another K-pop group, with 86.3 million views in 24 hours on their “How You Like That” music video (Spangler 2020). BTS and BlackPink have a combined total of over 140 million subscribers on their two YouTube channels and those numbers are growing (BANGTANTV, 2022) (BLACKPINK, 2022). The combination of fans' dedication and easy access to social media, allows for K-pop idols' to receive large followings on social media. Idols being present on multiple social media platforms make it easy for fans to support them in various ways and help them break records.

### 3. Role of K-pop Idols

K-pop idols are entertainers and being present on social media is one of the ways they fulfill their duties. Many Idols have a group account and their own personal social media account where they upload content on a weekly basis (McLaren & Dal, 2020). They post videos, pictures, or messages to their group social media account or to their individual account to interact with fans. They also participate in music performances, dance rehearsals, game shows, interviews, and concerts that their company will post on social media. A big part of the idol's job is to be a part of high-quality content that their fans can enjoy. Part of the reason that K-pop fans can get so immersed in the culture is because of the nonstop stream of content that they can interact with. Fans can always log onto Twitter or some other social media platforms and read about the latest update from their idol (McLaren & Dal, 2020). The amount of content being posted can be overwhelming especially if fans are dedicated to multiple idols, but that's part of the culture. K-pop idols being connected to their fans on social media helps maintain the large content consumption culture in K-pop that fans love.

Fandoms existed before social media, but social media makes it easier and faster for fans to connect and create communities (Croteau and William 2019). One way fans add to the K-pop community is by creating their own user-generated content to share with other fans. K-pop fans upload dance covers, fan cams, memes, and other types of content that they've created themselves. K-pop fans will practice for hours to be able to replicate the dance in the music video that they just watched. Then they'll dress up in outfits similar to the ones the artists are wearing in the music video. Lastly, they'll upload their dance cover to show their support. Fan cams are videos taken by fans of artists performing live at a concert. Not all fans can see artists perform live, so fan cams help other viewers get the perspective of the audience so that it feels like they are watching the artist in person. K-pop memes are usually pictures of the K-pop artists making a silly face or captioning a funny line that the artists said in a video. Creating different types of content and interacting with other fans on social media is seen as a social activity that many fans enjoy.

## 4. Fandoms Connection to Idols

Social media is a tool that fans use to sustain their connection to their idol. Fans feel connected to their favorite artist by using social media. As mentioned before, not all fans can see artists perform live so social media offers another way for them to connect. Being able to consume content on social media makes fans feel like they know their idols' personalities and interests. Fans and idols have a parasocial relationship where fans invest time and emotions into their idol (Santos, 2022). Fans can watch snippets of idols' daily life and accomplishments, which help grow their connection. When idols post on their social media accounts, fans can "like", comment, share, and watch their content. These small interactions make fans feel like they're a part of something (Kyong 2019). Idols can respond back to their fans by answering their questions and reading their comments on social media (Santos, 2022). This back and forth interaction makes fans feel like they're being heard. Idols are also constantly telling their fans that they are the reason for success (Santos, 2022). Comments and interactions like these give fans the motivation to continue to support their idol. Social media allows fans and idols to have a unique connection.

K-pop idols often have live streams where fans can chat in comments and have their questions answered directly. With the growing number of fans, not all their questions will be answered but that doesn't keep fans from expressing their support on live streams. Without social media, many fans would not be able to interact as frequently with K-pop idols.

K-pop fans don't have to worry about a language barrier when interacting with content that their idol produces. Not all Korean entertainment companies translate their music videos or other posts into other languages, so fans have taken it upon themselves to do the translations (Jin and Kyong, 2016). Multilingual fans will translate music video subtitles, posts written by the idol, and song lyrics for fans who don't understand Korean (Moon, 2020). Fans want to help each other appreciate their idol and creating translations on social media is one-way fans support each other. By creating these translations, international fans are able to deepen their connection to their idol and

fandom. Translation accounts can have up to 350,000 million followers who benefit from the generosity of the account owner (Moon, 2020). Translations by fan accounts can be made minutes after a post or video is released. By spreading translations online, fans have up to date information on how their idol is doing. These translations help spread even more K-pop content on social media and play a big part in growing the fanbase

## 5. Conclusion

Social media contributed to the success of the second Korean wave and brought a more global audience to K-pop. Early fans could only turn to social media to access K-pop content, and Korean entertainment companies simultaneously wanted to expand their fanbase. Fans now have multiple platforms where they can access content and even create their own content to add to the growing fandom. The immense amount of support that K-pop fans give to their idols is partly due to a large amount of content that the idols produce. A large amount of content keeps K-pop fans interested and allows the fanbases to grow quickly. Without social media, many fans would have very limited exposure to the genre and K-pop wouldn't be as famous globally. In the future, K-pop will continue to gain popularity as new idol groups debut and fans give them support. K-pop is breaking through Western culture and it's not going anywhere anytime soon because of social media.

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## 소셜 미디어를 통한 K-pop의 부상에 관한 연구

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### 한국어 요약

**연구 목적** 한국 대중음악은 세계적으로 유명한 음악 장르이다. 대한민국 서울에서 시작된 케이팝은 주로 한국어로 부른다. 케이팝은 계속해서 국제적인 장벽을 초월하고 있다. 케이팝은 한류를 통해 국제적인 관심을 받기 시작했지만 지금은 또 다양한 경로를 통해 계속해서 관심을 받고 있다.

**연구 방법** 본고에서는 K-pop이 제2의 한류 기간 동안 소셜 미디어를 통해 어떻게 인기를 얻게 되었는지를 살펴보았다. 특히 한국 연예기획사들이 소셜 미디어를 활용해 아이돌을 홍보하는 과정을 중점적으로 알아보았다. 또한 소셜 미디어를 통해 팬들이 아이돌과 소통하는 방법이나 과정 등을 살펴보고 이러한 것이 아이돌의 팬덤을 형성하는데 어떠한 영향을 미쳤는지를 살펴보았다.

**결론** 소셜 미디어는 케이팝 그룹에 대한 팬들의 지지를 이끌어내는 촉매제였다. 한국 연예기획사들이 K-pop 그룹을 홍보하기 위해 소셜 미디어를 사용하는 것이 성과를 거두고 있다. 소셜미디어가 없었다면 팬덤의 영향력이 이렇게 확장될 수 없었을 것이다. 유튜브는 엔터테인먼트 회사들이 처음 사용한 소셜 미디어 플랫폼 중 하나였지만, 이제 팬들은 상호작용할 수 있는 다양한 플랫폼을 갖게 되었다. 소셜 미디어 덕분에 대규모 팬층을 만들기가 쉬워졌고, 팬들은 자신만의 콘텐츠를 만들어 팬들을 홍보하기 시작했다. 앞으로도 소셜 미디어를 통한 K-pop은 계속해서 인기를 끌 것이며 팬들 역시 소셜 미디어를 통하여 자신들의 아이돌을 계속해서 응원할 것이다.

**핵심어** 한류, 케이팝, 아이돌, 팬, 팬덤, 소셜 미디어, 유튜브

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