Analyzing Social Media Strategy in Korean Music Industries

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Received: 17 July 2023; Reviewed: 02 October 2023; Accepted: 07 October 2023

Abstract

The Korean Wave (K-wave), also known as Hallyu, is the term used to describe the phenomenon of Korean pop culture, including TV dramas, movies, pop music, fashion, and online games, becoming widely popular and shared among the people of Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other Asian nations. Korean pop music, also known as K-pop, became a major component of the second K-wave after the first K-wave's drama-focused craze. Additionally, K-pop's fanbase has grown outside of Asia to the West thanks to the quick adoption of social media platforms like YouTube and Twitter. The popularity of K-pop throughout the world helps to improve the perception of "Korea" and has a positive effect on the Korean economy. According to reports, Korea has 1,000 active entertainment agencies in addition to the "big three" record labels and agencies: SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment. In this instance, we talk about the K-pop phenomenon's global appeal and how social media has contributed to the genre's recent boom. Our lessons on how to manage social media strategically, with a focus on the major agencies mentioned above, include: aligning your strategic business model with social media; maximizing different social media channels; enticing customers with on- and offline promotions; and stimulating audience with exclusive content.

Keywords: K-Pop Industry; Social Media; Entertainment Business Strategy.


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INTRODUCTION

K-pop is becoming increasingly popular in the global music entertainment industry (Oh & Lee, 2014). K-pop artists now have more fans and attention from Western media than ever before. However, competition among K-pop groups and artists has become fiercer in recent years (Saragih, 2016). Korean entertainment companies must develop effective marketing strategies for their groups and artists to differentiate themselves from competitors (Min-Soo, 2012). As a result, some Korean groups and artists have had greater success and popularity than others.

Through an online survey, the researcher will discuss how important marketing is in the K-pop industry (Ono & Kwon, 2013), how entertainment companies use different marketing tools to create a competitive advantage and suggest some methods and ideas entertainment companies can use to improve even more.

Since 1992, when Seo Taiji & Boys first took the stage and integrated English lyrics, dance, and hip-hop elements into their repertoire, Korean pop culture has steadily gained global prominence (Jin et al., 2021; Min-Soo, 2012). With vibrant colors, eclectic styles, and undeniable talent that resonates with audiences worldwide, Korean artists have pioneered an entirely new genre of their own (Longenecker & Lee, 2018). K-pop will redefine your perception of music, and once you delve into it, there’s no turning back.

The paper entitled "Korean pop takes off! Social media strategy of Korean entertainment industry" discusses the role of social media in the recent boom of K-pop (Joongho Ahn et al., 2013). The paper focuses on the major entertainment agencies in Korea, namely SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, and presents lessons on how to manage social media strategically. The lessons include aligning strategic business models with social media, maximizing various social media channels, engaging customers with on- and offline promotions, and stimulating the audience with exclusive content. The paper highlights the world-wide success of K-pop and its contribution to improving the "Korea" image and making a positive impact on the Korean economy. The paper also mentions that around 1,000 entertainment agencies are active in Korea, while there exist the "big three" record labels and entertainment agencies.

The paper titled "Comparing Western and South Korean Celebrity Twitter Strategies" aims to investigate the differences in Twitter strategies between Western and South Korean artists (Siano, 2018). The study focuses on the effective use of social media for global music distribution and how identifying the Twitter strategies of Korean idol groups can have applications beyond the music industry. The study collect data from a constructed week sample, and the content and response for each tweet will be analyzed. The paper highlights the success of South Korean idol group, Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS), in winning a Billboard Music Award for Top Social Artist in 2017, which indicates strong audience engagement and a skillful use of social media. The paper suggests that comparing how Western and South Korean artists use Twitter will bring to light new strategies for both organizations and businesses on the platform.

The paper titled "Culture and Content Industry: An Analysis on New Korean Wave based on Social Capital Perspective" discusses the impact of the New Korean Wave (Hallyu 2.0) on global fans and their adoption of Korean cultural goods from a social capital perspective (I. Kim & Lee, 2012). The study highlights the shift in media from the first generation of Korean Wave (Hallyu 1.0), which mainly refers to the exports of Korean TV dramas via broadcasting systems, to the New Korean Wave era brought by K-pop via the rapid growth of social media. The paper emphasizes that most global fans of K-pop are young and use social media to access digital content and share their opinions spontaneously. Social media providers such as YouTube and Facebook not only act as information providers to usher the fans to online music retailers but also function as links between these fans and cultural producers by turning bonding social capital into bridging social capital. Telecommunication and advertising companies participate in this market as a third party by providing funds for supporting digital circulation and distribution. The paper suggests that in this multi-sided market with interdependent agents, it is extremely important to secure a platform that leads the evolution of its business ecology. Without owning the platform, there is also a
very little chance to produce linking social capital as a means to maximize the impact of New Korean Wave.

K-Pop has proven over the years to cross borders and break down language barriers by enthralling fans from all over the world. K-Pop, with its Asian roots and subtle Western undertones, has evolved into a true hybrid novelty.

Undoubtedly, the South Korean music industry has made an indelible mark on the global stage. With its exceptional production standards and diverse musical genres, it has swiftly ascended to a position of worldwide prominence. However, the impact extends far beyond Asia; we're witnessing its resonance throughout the entire globe.

Despite the widespread acknowledgment of the global popularity of K-Pop and its profound impact on the Korean music industry, there is a gap in understanding the specific social media strategies employed by major entertainment agencies, such as SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, to effectively manage their online presence and engage a diverse global audience. This research aims to address this gap by investigating the role of social media in the success of K-Pop and identifying the strategies used by leading agencies to harness its potential, ultimately contributing to a deeper comprehension of the intersection between social media and the music entertainment industry.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

In this research paper, our primary research objectives revolved around examining the impact of social media strategies on the Korean music industry, specifically within the K-Pop genre. To effectively achieve these objectives, we adopted a research method centered on comprehensive secondary data analysis.

Here's a detailed breakdown of how this research method aligns with our research objectives:

1. **Data Selection and Sources**: To understand the relationship between social media strategies and the K-Pop industry, we carefully selected various data sources. These sources included academic studies, industry reports, government databases, surveys, and data from social media platforms.
2. **Data Collection and Extraction**: The chosen research method allowed us to collect relevant data points from these sources. We extracted information pertaining to K-Pop industry trends, social media engagement metrics, fan interactions, and the strategies employed by K-Pop entertainment agencies.
3. **Data Synthesis and Analysis**: With our dataset in hand, we conducted a thorough synthesis and analysis of the data. We looked for patterns, trends, and correlations between social media engagement and the success of K-Pop artists and agencies. By analyzing data from multiple sources, we could offer a holistic view of how social media impacted the industry.
4. **Comparative Analysis**: One of our research objectives was to compare different K-Pop entertainment agencies, specifically the "big three" record labels: SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment. Through data analysis, we were able to compare their social media strategies, audience engagement, and the outcomes of their efforts.
5. **Practical Insights and Recommendations**: To address our research objectives effectively, we used the synthesized data to draw practical insights and recommendations. We could illustrate how K-Pop agencies aligned their strategic business models with social media, maximized the use of various social media channels, engaged customers through online and offline promotions, and stimulated audience engagement through the creation of exclusive content.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**K-POP Industry**

K-pop, short for Korean Pop music, has experienced tremendous success and gained global attention in recent years. It captivates music fans worldwide with its infectious melodies, captivating choreography, and stylish fashion. Several K-pop groups and artists have achieved widespread recognition, including BTS, EXO, TWICE, BLACKPINK, PSY, and many others (Dal Yong, 2020). These artists are typically represented and trained by
entertainment companies, who actively scout talent not only in South Korea but also in other countries. After being scouted, aspiring artists undergo rigorous training as trainees within the entertainment industry for a period of 5 to 10 years. Those who successfully complete their training are then offered official contracts and make their debut under the company’s name.

The above figure depicts the reasons for K-pop at an early stage, all K-pop songs and singers are placed in a systematic entertainment company for preparation. Following that, the new K-pop songs and image of the K-pop band are promoted on social media services, along with singing and dancing styles that are emphasis elements in K-pop. K-pop eventually reaches consumers, with a knowledgeable fan base spreading the product throughout the population.

As depicted in Figure 1, the number of views of K-Pop videos on YouTube was primarily from Asia, with a staggering 1,662,650,415 views. Following closely behind, North America occupied the second position with 289,271,024 views, while Europe contributed 173,862,484 views. South America garnered 119,078,862 views, Oceania recorded 30,820,231 views, Africa had 9,630,772 views, and other regions accounted for 1,340,903 views.

The first K-wave emerged in the late 1990s when Korean dramas gained popularity in China and Japan before spreading to other Asian countries. One significant success was the 2003 television series "Jewel in the Palace," which depicted the story of the first female physician serving the king and achieved tremendous success across Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Another notable drama, "Winter Sonata," became a sensation in Japan when it aired on NHK in 2004, garnering the highest audience rating of 20% (Maliangkay, 2006). With the rise of globalization and the internet in the past two decades, the K-wave has captured worldwide attention, extending from Asia to the West.

Following the drama-oriented craze of the first Korean Wave, Korean pop music (abbreviated K-pop) became an integral part of the second Korean Wave. International fans purchased original soundtracks and naturally became interested in K-pop artists after watching Korean dramas and listening to the songs in the dramas (JoongHo Ahn et al., 2013). Furthermore, with the rapid spread of social media platforms such as YouTube and

Figure 1. The number of views of K-POP videos on YouTube
Source: Lessons from K-pop's Global Success
Twitter, K-pop has expanded its fandom outside of Asia (Yoon, 2010). To meet the growing demand of global consumers, YouTube added the K-pop genre to its music page in December 2011, alongside R&B, Rock, Pop, and Rap, among others, marking the first time that a specific country's music was introduced as a separate genre (Lee, 2011). In addition, Billboard, an international music news magazine, launched a K-Pop Hot 100 chart in August 2011. According to data obtained from YouTube, K-pop music videos on YouTube received 2.9 billion hits from Asia in 2012, followed by America (1.1 billion) and Europe (0.7 billion).

The global success of K-pop has significantly improved South Korea's image and positively impacted its economy. Traditionally, Korea's exports depended on industries such as semiconductors, cell phones, and automobiles. However, the K-wave, represented by K-pop, has emerged as a new engine of economic growth. By projecting a positive image of Korea, the popularity of idol groups and K-pop artists contributes to increasing Korea's exports and attracting foreign tourists.

Social Media

Social media has gradually evolved into one of the most effective platforms for brand and artist promotion (Piranda et al., 2022). This trend started in 2003 with the rise of Myspace, which allowed users to feature their favorite songs on their profiles. Recognizing the potential of social media, the K-Pop industry developed their own successful strategies for cultivating online fandoms and keeping them engaged with fresh content.

What sets K-Pop apart from other musicians today is their strong social media presence. While many Korean singers maintain personal accounts on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, they often lead private lives outside of their work. As a result, instead of individual public accounts, most K-Pop groups use a shared social media page for fan communication.

Fans only need to follow one page to stay up to date on all their collective endeavors. Driving all fan traffic to a single location streamlines all band updates and content, allowing them to reach a wider audience and achieve higher engagement rates. Furthermore, this strikes the ideal balance between fan interaction and artist privacy.

Korean Pop music in Indonesia

Korean Pop music, commonly known as K-Pop, has made a significant impact on the Indonesian music and entertainment scene. Indonesia is one of the many countries where K-Pop has gained a massive following and has become a cultural phenomenon. Having established K-Pop's global appeal and its role in Indonesian culture, there exist multifaceted influence and significant presence of K-Pop within Indonesia:

1) Popularity and Fanbase:

Korean Pop music, or K-Pop, has garnered an enormous following in Indonesia. Indonesian K-Pop fans, often referred to as "K-Popers," constitute a passionate and dedicated fanbase. The popularity of K-Pop in Indonesia transcends age, gender, and background, making it a unifying force among diverse segments of the population. K-Pop idols and groups have become household names, and their music is widely listened to and appreciated across the country.

2) Music Charts and Concerts:

K-Pop songs frequently dominate music charts in Indonesia. It's not uncommon to see K-Pop tracks ranking high on Indonesian music charts, reflecting their widespread appeal. Moreover, K-Pop concerts, fan meetings, and showcases are regularly held in major Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung. These events attract thousands of fans, demonstrating the immense popularity of K-Pop in Indonesia. International K-Pop acts often include Indonesia as a stop on their world tours.

3) The Korean Wave (Hallyu):

Indonesia is an active participant in the global "Korean Wave" or "Hallyu," which encompasses the spread of Korean culture worldwide. Beyond music, Hallyu encompasses Korean dramas, fashion, food, and cosmetics. K-Pop, as a significant component of Hallyu, has played a pivotal role in introducing Korean culture to Indonesian audiences. The Korean Wave has influenced Indonesian entertainment preferences, fashion trends, and beauty standards.

4) K-Pop Cover Groups and Competitions:

Indonesia has a thriving K-Pop cover group scene. These cover groups, consisting of
passionate fans, meticulously replicate K-Pop music videos and live performances. They participate in competitions, showcases, and talent events, showcasing their dedication and talent. The popularity of K-Pop cover groups has led to the emergence of cover dance competitions, where groups compete to mirror the choreography of their favorite K-Pop songs.

5) Online Presence:
K-Pop enjoys a robust online presence in Indonesia. Indonesian fans actively engage with K-Pop content on various social media platforms, including YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. YouTube, in particular, is a hub for Indonesian K-Pop fans to share dance covers, reaction videos, song covers, and fan theories. Social media has become a space for fans to connect, share their love for K-Pop, and interact with idols and fellow enthusiasts.

6) Language Learning:
One notable effect of K-Pop's popularity in Indonesia is the increasing interest in the Korean language. Many fans take up Korean language courses to better understand the lyrics of their favorite songs, follow K-Pop news, and engage with South Korean culture. Language learning centers and online platforms offering Korean language courses have witnessed growing enrollment, driven in part by the K-Pop phenomenon.

7) Local Talent in K-Pop:
Indonesia has produced some talent that has gained recognition in the South Korean K-Pop industry. For instance, Alexander Lee Eusebio, formerly a member of U-KISS, and Kevin Woo, who was also part of U-KISS and is now a solo artist, have made significant contributions to the K-Pop scene in South Korea. Their achievements are a source of pride for Indonesian K-Pop fans.

8) Cultural Exchange:
K-Pop serves as a medium for cultural exchange between South Korea and Indonesia. South Korean artists often express their appreciation for their Indonesian fans during concerts and fan meetings, fostering a sense of connection. Likewise, Indonesian fans showcase their affection for South Korean culture through fan projects, fan art, and fan letters. This cultural exchange strengthens the bond between the two nations.

9) Economic Impact:
The popularity of K-Pop in Indonesia has had a notable economic impact. This impact extends to various sectors, including merchandise sales, digital music downloads, streaming services, concert ticket sales, and the growth of the entertainment industry. K-Pop-related events and merchandise generate significant revenue and provide opportunities for local businesses.

**Powerful and consistent online presence**
Social media has evolved into one of the most profitable platforms for promoting products and artists. The K-Pop industry capitalized on this window of opportunity by developing its own innovative digital strategies for attracting and retaining fans.

The prominence of K-Pop artists on social media platforms distinguishes them from other contemporary musicians. YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are used to notify fans of upcoming performances, new albums, tour dates, and merchandise. Weverse and V LIVE are just two apps that K-Pop labels use to increase their artists' exposure to their fans.

**Building the Hype**
The K-Pop industry creates bands through auditions; most companies hold open auditions all year and select applicants to train with them (Saeji, 2020). These applicants are signed as talents who will train for a set period before making their debut in a group or as solo artists.

Aini et al. (2021) highlights the success of the K-Pop industry through talent development, offline and online promotions, and the implementation of marketing systems. Putri (2019) explores the phenomenon of K-Pop fans creating a hyperreality around their idols, influenced by simulation from friends and mass media. Oh & Lee (2014) discusses how K-Pop has transformed the perception of the popular music industry in Korea, with government support and television stations actively recruiting new K-Pop stars. Joongho Ahn et al. (2013) focuses on the role of social media in the global success of K-Pop, emphasizing the strategic use of various social media channels and engaging customers through promotions and exclusive content. In summary, these papers demonstrate that the
K-Pop industry utilizes talent development, promotions, government support, and social media strategies to build hype and create a dedicated fan base for their artists.

In the months leading up to a group’s debut, the managing company promotes them through various digital marketing channels. They share virtually every moment of their lives as performers at this point, with content such as teaser photos, rehearsal clips, and behind-the-scenes videos posted to build excitement. They would have already built a fan base and promoted their brand concept by the time they appeared on a variety show or music channel.

K-Pop Entertainment Agencies and Their Social Media Outlets

As previously stated, K-pop is the driving force behind the current K-wave. According to the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, there are approximately 1,000 entertainment agencies in Korea. There are “big three” record labels and entertainment agencies in Korea in terms of the number of K-pop artists, total sales, and global reputation, such as SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment.

These three entertainment agencies are allegedly distinguished by their recruitment philosophy and practices. According to S. Yim (2012), SM Entertainment is more likely to value its artists' physical appearances, whereas YG Entertainment values their artists' unique characteristics. Some compare SM Entertainment to an elite school where its artists receive a thorough education ranging from acting to singing and dancing, whereas YG Entertainment tries to maximize trainees' strong points rather than complementing weaknesses. JYP Entertainment prioritizes foreign language speaking abilities and places a greater emphasis on education for its artists to communicate with international fans.

The term "social media" is defined in a variety of ways. Kietzmann et al. (2011) argued that "social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content." Social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook), video sharing sites (YouTube), business networking sites (LinkedIn), collaborative websites (Wikipedia), virtual worlds (Second Life), social bookmarking sites (Reddit, Digg), microblogging services (Twitter), and so on are examples of representative social media.

Social media channels

K-pop entertainment agencies focused on a few social media channels, such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, given their business models and the current Internet environment. They opened official YouTube channels to promote new music videos and used other social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to communicate with their youth audience (Salo et al., 2013). At the same time, major K-pop labels manage individual dedicated YouTube channels for their artists to facilitate communication with the audience. In some cases, an individual K-pop artist's YouTube channel is more popular and vitalized than their entertainment agencies.

A study by S. Kim et al. (2021) highlight that high popularity and fan engagement rates are influenced by K-pop artists' video uploads and the support from V Live and entertainment companies. While JoongHo Ahn et al. (2013) said that social media has expanded its fandom outside of Asia to the West. Sung (2020) compares Korean and Japanese YouTube channels and highlights the involvement of individuals in creating content, while Oh 2013 emphasizes the significance of mass media technologies, particularly YouTube, in the global distribution of K-pop music. These findings suggest that individual K-pop artists' YouTube channels can play a crucial role in their popularity and reach, surpassing the influence of their entertainment agencies.

Engage customers

Contests have been used as a major marketing activity to engage customers and recruit potential talent in the entertainment industry. SM Entertainment holds its "Global Audition" (Yecies & Shim, 2018) program every year to find talented singers, actors/actresses, and dancers. Any applicant, regardless of age, gender, or nationality, is welcome to audition, and finalists will have the opportunity to sign a contract with SM Entertainment.
Table 1. Comparison of the 3 Biggest K-POP Agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K-Pop Entertainment Agency</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>YG</th>
<th>JYP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Established Year</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube Subscribers</td>
<td>31.4M</td>
<td>7.33M</td>
<td>26.4M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers Instagram</td>
<td>14.3M</td>
<td>2.5M</td>
<td>4.9M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Kwon & Watson, 2023; Lifestyle Asia, 2023)

Stimulate audience

Teasers are released on social media by K-pop entertainment agencies to promote new music videos or events and increase virality among their fans. While YG Entertainment’s 2NE1 released its seventh Korean single, “I Am the Best,” on YouTube, a series of teasers were exclusively leaked to pique the interest of its fans. On June 19, 2011, the first teaser for the song was released, featuring 2NE1’s leader, CL. The teaser was shared on YG-Life, along with the song’s official artwork. YG Entertainment also revealed that a 10-second snippet of the song would be released every day until the full track was released. Finally, on June 27, 2011, the song’s music video debuted on 2NE1’s official YouTube channel.

Further, Kusumawati & Widita (2020) found that K-pop group Blackpink’s photo teasers on social media were consistent with their brand and conveyed messages of beauty and strength. Jung & Shim (2014) explored the grassroots and corporate-controlled aspects of K-pop consumption and circulation on social media, while Jung (2011) focused on the impact of social media-enabled online fandom on the transcultural circulation dynamics of K-pop, particularly in Indonesia. These findings highlight the significance of social media in the promotional strategies of K-pop entertainment agencies and their efforts to increase virality among fans.

CONCLUSION

With the rapid expansion of social media, the influence of K-pop fandom has extended beyond Asia. The global success of K-pop has not only enhanced the perception of South Korea but also positively impacted the country’s economy. In this case, we explore the broader phenomenon of K-pop’s popularity and examine the role of social media in its success. Specifically, we present strategies for managing social media platforms in major K-pop entertainment agencies such as SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment.

Focusing on the business potential of social media, the K-pop entertainment industry attempts to promote music videos and communicate with a global audience through various social media channels. Along with releasing official music videos and teasers on YouTube, entertainment companies open and manage Facebook and Twitter accounts to better communicate with their audiences. Even though each social media platform (YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter) serves a distinct purpose, agencies strive to integrate the channels into their business strategy and maximize their potential.

Korean entertainment agencies’ social media strategy is as follows: align strategic business model with social media; maximize various social media channels; engage customers with on-and offline promotions; and stimulate audience with exclusive content. This case study could serve as a model for any entertainment companies looking to maximize their business potential through social media.

REFERENCES


