



From K-Pop to Y-series: How Entertainment Companies Harness Social Media and Fandom for Global Reach

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Abstract

The rapid globalization of the entertainment industry has been strongly shaped by social media and fan participation. This study examines how entertainment companies in the K-Pop and Y-series sectors employ social media platforms and fan engagement strategies to achieve global reach and sustained popularity. Using a comparative mixed-methods approach, this study integrates quantitative survey data collected from 348 respondents who consume K-Pop or Y-series content. It also includes five qualitative interviews with four active fans and a social media content creator, as well as open-ended responses, and secondary sources. These data were used to analyze patterns of fan engagement, platform effectiveness, cultural impact, and technological readiness. Linear regression analysis was applied to test hypotheses related to platform effectiveness, fan participation, engagement intensity, and perceived cultural impact.

The findings indicate that fans function not only as audiences but also as active participants who contribute to visibility through content sharing, streaming, translation, and emotional investment. Regression results show that higher levels of perceived platform effectiveness and fan participation are significantly associated with increased fan engagement intensity and stronger perceptions of cultural impact, supporting the mediating role of fan engagement. While K-Pop relies mainly on corporate-managed platforms to sustain loyalty and monetization, Y-series primarily use open social media platforms and grassroots fan circulation. Despite these differing strategies, both industries achieve comparable global outcomes through active fan participation.

The study also identifies distinct cultural pathways, with K-Pop associated with national cultural promotion and Y-series linked to LGBTQ+ visibility. Audience responses indicate cautious attitudes toward emerging technologies such as AI idols and virtual concerts, reflecting a preference for authenticity and emotional connection. Overall, the findings highlight fan engagement as a central mechanism in shaping contemporary entertainment globalization.

Keywords: *Fan Engagement, Social Media Platforms, K-Pop, Y-Series (BL), Cultural Soft Power, Global Entertainment*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the global entertainment industry has experienced significant growth, highlighting the need for research on how it continues to thrive despite various challenges. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the industry experienced production delays, venue closures, and decreased revenues. Even after the pandemic, consumer behavior shifted towards online streaming and digital consumption, resulting in a decline in reliance on traditional theaters and live venues (Adgate, 2021). These changes accelerated the convergence of digital media, online platforms, and hybrid events that combine in-person and virtual participation. As a result, the entertainment industry demonstrated resilience by adapting its strategies and developing new digital service channels (Lee, 2022).

Within this context, the K-Pop and Y-series industries serve as representative cases for examining global growth driven by digital media. K-Pop, originating from South Korea, is widely recognized for its polished performances, sophisticated choreography, and visually driven production. Since the late 1990s, K-Pop has expanded through the Hallyu wave, initially spreading across East and Southeast Asia before achieving global popularity. Today, K-Pop idol groups such as BTS, BLACKPINK, and TWICE exemplify the industry's global reach. Major entertainment companies, including SM, YG, and HYBE, have played a crucial role in this expansion by implementing corporate-driven strategies and leveraging proprietary

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platforms. These platforms, such as X, Weverse, and Bubble have facilitated international fan communication, content circulation, and monetization, positioning K-Pop as both a form of Korean cultural soft power and an economic force.

On the other hand, Y-series, a genre of Thai television dramas centered on male romance, has emerged through a different pathway. Originating from the term “Yaoi,” Y-series has gained international attention for its emotionally resonant narratives, diverse characters, and positive LGBTQ+ representation. Popular series such as *2gether*, *TharnType*, and *SOTUS* explore themes of identity, love, and social acceptance, attracting large global fan communities. Behind the series, production companies such as GMMTV, 3D Entertainment, and DMD have contributed to the genre’s expansion by offering various storytelling styles (Nuttavut, 2023). International streaming platforms, including GagaOOLala, have further enabled the global spread through multilingual subtitles and accessible distribution, transforming Y-series from a localized trend into a global phenomenon.

Additionally, the global success of both industries reflects the growing role of digital platforms and participatory fan cultures. As noted (Simon, 2022), digital distribution allows stories to transcend cultural and regional boundaries. Today, audiences increasingly engage as active participants rather than passive viewers, promoting content through hashtags, streaming campaigns, translations, and creative edits. These fan-driven activities generate visibility, cultural influence, and economic value, often reducing the need for traditional large-scale marketing efforts (Chin & Morimoto, 2013).

Despite their shared success, K-Pop and Y-series rely on different engagement models. K-Pop follows a highly structured, corporate-driven approach, while Y-series expand through grassroots participation and niche storytelling. However, both industries demonstrate that fan engagement on social media is central to global growth. Although existing research has examined these industries separately, few studies have directly compared their fan engagement strategies or analyzed how different platform ecosystems influence global visibility and cultural impact. In addition, there remains a lack of empirical research connecting platform effectiveness, fan participation, and engagement intensity with perceptions of cultural influence across these two industries. Addressing this gap is important for understanding how digital fandom and platform strategies shape contemporary entertainment globalization. Thus, this study aims to investigate how social media platforms and fan engagement strategies contribute to the global expansion of K-Pop and Y-series, and to explore the insights these two approaches offer for the future of the entertainment industry.

2. Objectives

This study aims to examine how open social media platforms and fan engagement strategies contribute to the global expansion of the K-Pop and Y-series entertainment industries. In particular, this study focuses on the roles of platform effectiveness, fan participation, fan engagement intensity, and perceived cultural impact in shaping global visibility and popularity. Therefore, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) To identify the dominant social media platforms used for fan engagement in the K-Pop and Y-series industries.
- 2) To examine the perceived effectiveness of corporate-managed platforms and open social media platforms in supporting global fan engagement.
- 3) To evaluate the relationship between fan participation, fan engagement intensity, and perceived popularity or cultural impact.
- 4) To assess how fan engagement contributes to broader perceptions of cultural influence and industry development in a global context.

3. Literature Review

Existing studies argue that the global entertainment industry has undergone structural transformation from centralized media systems to digitally networked ecosystems shaped by participatory fan cultures.



Social media platforms now function as primary infrastructures for content circulation, cross-cultural visibility, and direct interaction between producers and audiences. As Jenkins (2006) argues, media convergence has repositioned audiences as active participants who engage, reinterpret, and redistribute content, reinforcing the importance of audience-driven engagement in contemporary media ecosystems.

Additionally, this study is grounded in participatory culture theory, which emphasizes the active role of audiences as contributors and co-creators in digital media environments (Jenkins, 2006). In contemporary entertainment industries, fan communities participate in content circulation, promotion, and interpretation through social media platforms. These participatory dynamics have become central to the global expansion of entertainment industries such as K-Pop and Thai Y-series. Additionally, the concept of cultural soft power provides a framework for understanding how entertainment media contributes to national image, cultural visibility, and transnational influence (Nye, 2004). By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study examines how fan engagement and digital platform strategies shape cultural impact and global reach in the K-Pop and Y-series industries.

Within this context, K-Pop has emerged as a strategically constructed global cultural export shaped by corporate coordination, branding, and platform-based fan engagement. Choi and Maliangkay (2014) emphasize that K-Pop's international success is the result of deliberate industry strategies rather than organic diffusion. Company-managed platforms such as Weverse and Bubble facilitate fan interaction by offering controlled communication channels and monetized emotional proximity. At the same time, international fans contribute significantly to global visibility through streaming campaigns, translations, and online fan content promotions (Yoon, 2018; Sun, 2020). These practices also raise ethical concerns related to unpaid fan labor and emotional investment.

In contrast, Y-series represent a more grassroots-driven model of media internationalization. Thai BL narratives enhance LGBTQ+ cultural visibility through emotionally resonant storytelling and transnational fan circulation (Baudinette, 2021). The genre's global expansion relies heavily on open social media platforms, where fans generate edits, subtitles, and short-form content that spread beyond national borders. These fan-driven practices reflect a bottom-up model of cultural diffusion that differs markedly from K-Pop's corporate structure.

Although both industries achieve substantial growth, their engagement strategies differ greatly. K-Pop reinforces national branding and cultural soft power through institutional support, while Y-series contribute to cultural visibility and inclusivity through participatory fan networks (Baudinette, 2023). Existing studies, however, tend to examine these industries separately, with limited comparative analysis of their digital strategies, ethical implications of fan labor, or responses to emerging technologies. These gaps highlight the need for a comparative investigation into how K-Pop and Y-series leverage social media and fan engagement to achieve global expansion.

4. Materials and Methods

This study adopted a comparative mixed-methods research design to examine how the K-Pop and Y-series entertainment industries utilize digital platforms and fan engagement strategies to support global expansion. This mixed-methods approach was applied to capture quantitative patterns of engagement and deeper qualitative insights into fan behavior and cultural influence. Additionally, a comparative design was used to highlight the effectiveness of two engagement models: corporate-driven platforms commonly used in K-Pop and grassroots-driven participation observed in Y-series communities.

For quantitative analysis, the primary target population consisted of individuals who consume K-Pop or Y-series entertainment content and engage with related media on social media platforms. Survey participants were recruited using convenience sampling through social media platforms and university networks. A total of 348 valid survey responses were collected and included in the analysis. The survey captured demographic characteristics (age, gender, nationality, occupation, and spending level), social media usage frequency, fan engagement behaviors, perceptions of platform effectiveness, cultural impact awareness, and attitudes toward emerging technologies. Social media usage frequency was measured on a scale ranging



from “very frequently” to “never.” Cultural impact awareness was assessed using Likert-scale items related to cultural learning, national image (K-Pop), and representation (Y-series). Attitudes toward emerging technologies included perceptions of AI idols, virtual concerts, and related innovations. The survey also included one open-ended question regarding desired improvements in fan engagement. Question formats included multiple-choice, Likert, checkbox, and short answers items.

For qualitative analysis, five semi-structured interviews were conducted by the team during the first week of November 2025 using purposive sampling to capture diverse perspectives from fan communities. The interview participants included four K-Pop fans from different universities and one Thai-based social media beauty influencer with a strong interest in Y-series, representing both active fandom participation and public fan identity. The interviews followed a structure guide covering fan engagement practices, including grassroots participation in Y-series and corporate platform strategies in K-Pop, as well as perceptions of industry strategies, and cultural influence. Each interview lasted an average of seven and a half minutes.

In terms of variable operationalization, key variables were measured using five-point Likert-scale measures ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Fan engagement intensity was measured based on the frequency of interaction with entertainment-related content on social media, including viewing, sharing, creating online content, and participating in both online and on-site events. Perceived platform effectiveness and perceived popularity impact were measured using Likert-scale items assessing respondents’ perceptions of how effectively social media platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube, X, Weverse, and Bubble) support artist or series discovery, sharing, and access. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The fan participation index was measured based on participatory activities such as watching official videos, content sharing, participating in streaming campaigns, creating fan-generated content, and attending fan events. An index score was computed by summing these participation behaviors. Perceived cultural impact was measured through respondents’ agreement with statements related to cross-cultural understanding and cultural influence generated by entertainment content.

Based on the research objectives and existing literature on participatory culture, fan engagement, and cultural soft power, this study proposed three hypotheses to examine the relationships between social media platforms, fan participation, engagement intensity, and perceived cultural impact. These hypotheses were tested using linear regression analysis applied to the survey data.

- Hypothesis 1: Perceived effectiveness of open social media platforms is positively associated with fan engagement levels.
- Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of fan participation are positively associated with perceived increases in artist or series popularity.
- Hypothesis 3: Higher levels of fan engagement are positively associated with stronger perceptions of cultural impact.

These hypotheses position fan engagement as a central mediating mechanism linking platform strategies and participatory behaviors to global development outcomes.

To contextualize and support the primary findings, secondary data were collected from industry reports, academic literature, and publicly available platform statistics. These sources included publications from the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA), company materials from HYBE Corporation and GMMTV, academic studies on fandom and cultural soft power, and publicly available metrics such as TikTok hashtag engagement and YouTube subscriber counts. Secondary data were used to validate trends observed in the survey and interview findings rather than to serve as standalone evidence.

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize demographic characteristics and fan engagement patterns. To test the proposed hypotheses, linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between platform effectiveness, fan participation, fan engagement, and perceived cultural impact. Qualitative interview data and open-ended survey responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes related to emotional engagement, platform reliance, cultural influence, ethical concerns, and grassroots participation. Triangulation across quantitative, qualitative, and secondary



data enhanced the validity of the findings. All statistical analyses were conducted using Microsoft Excel, with a significance level set at $p < .05$. Diagnostic checks were conducted to assess the assumptions of linear regression, including inspection of residual plots and examination of potential multicollinearity among predictors. No major violations were observed.

The online survey was hosted on Google Forms and distributed through posts, direct messages, and university channels. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants were informed of the research purpose prior to taking part. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses remained anonymous and confidential. Data were used solely for academic purposes, and participants retained the right to decline or withdraw at any stage of the research process.

The figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. The framework illustrates how K-Pop and Y-series employ different engagement strategies through social media platforms, with fan engagement serving as a central mechanism. Fan engagement subsequently contributes to global outcomes such as popularity, cultural impact, and soft power. This framework emphasizes that different strategic approaches can produce similar global outcomes when fan participation plays a central role.

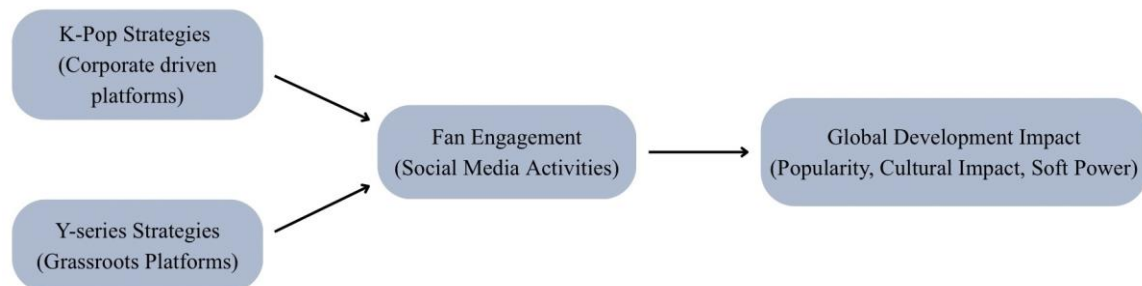


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the findings derived from quantitative survey data, qualitative interviews, open-ended responses, secondary sources, and linear regression analysis. Rather than treating each dataset independently, the results are interpreted collectively to address the study's objectives and to examine how social media platforms and fan engagement strategies contribute to the global expansion of the K-Pop and Y-series entertainment industries.

5.1 Respondent Demographics

As shown in Figure 2, most respondents fall within the 18-25 age group (69.4%), followed by those aged 26-35 (17.7%), indicating that the sample is predominantly composed of young adults. This distribution closely reflects the primary consumer base of both K-Pop and Y-series and aligns with prior research identifying younger, digitally active audiences as central to contemporary fandom cultures. In terms of gender profile, the sample reflects the inclusive nature of contemporary fan cultures, with a notable proportion of non-binary respondents, particularly within Y-series and K-Pop communities, which often attract diverse gender identities. Regarding nationalities, respondents represent a transnational sample, with the highest participation from Myanmar (131 respondents) and Thailand (126 respondents), followed by China, the Philippines, and Japan. Additional responses were recorded from countries across Southeast Asia, East Asia, Europe, and North America, including Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Finland, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Overall, this diversity demonstrates that the survey data captures perspectives from multiple cultural and national contexts, supporting the study's focus on global reach and cross-cultural engagement.

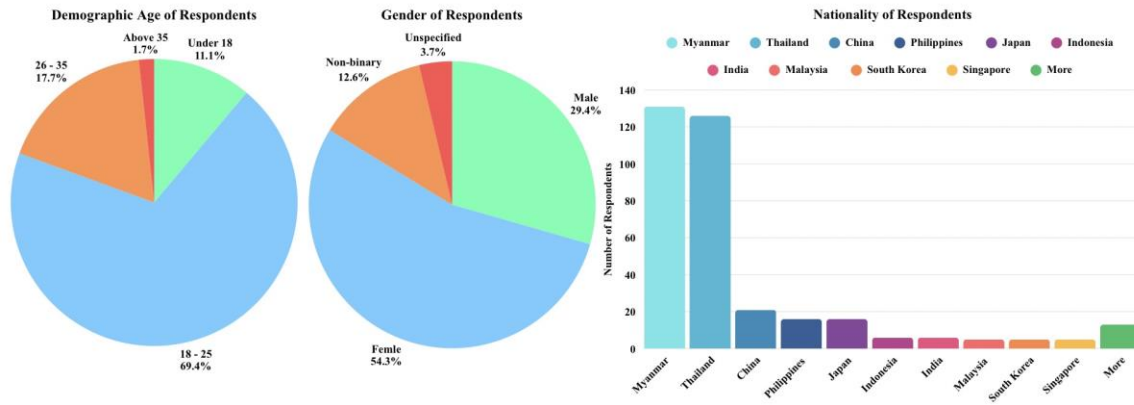


Figure 2 Combined Demographic Profiles of Survey Respondents (n=348)
(Source: Own Survey Data)

5.2 Fan Engagement Behavior and Participation Patterns

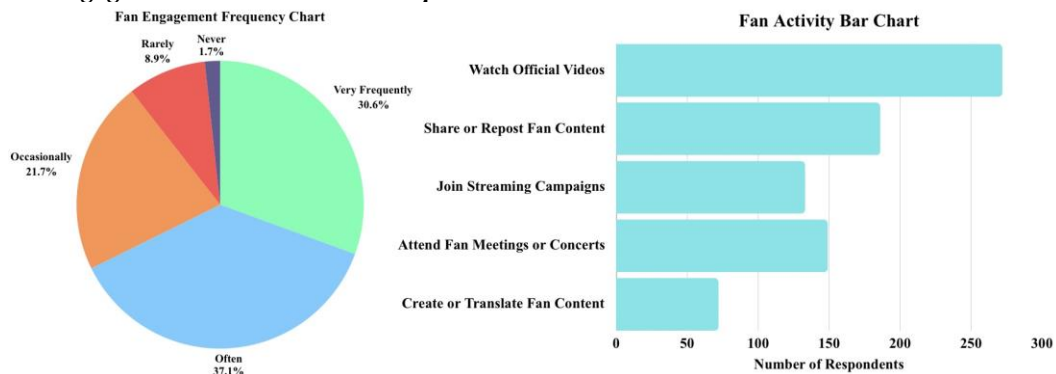


Figure 3 Fan Engagement Frequency and Participation Activities (n=348)
(Source: Own Survey Data)

As illustrated in Figure 3, the survey results indicate that fan engagement with K-Pop and Y-series content occurs at a high and sustained frequency. Most respondents reported engaging very frequently (30.6%) or often (37.1%), while fewer engaged occasionally or rarely. This distribution suggests that fandom engagement is embedded in respondents' everyday digital routines rather than occurring randomly. Beyond frequency, the reported forms of engagement reveal that fan participation is multi-layered and diverse. Watching official videos remains the most common activity (77.7%), confirming that content consumption forms the foundation of engagement. However, participation extends beyond passive viewing, as 53.1% of respondents reported sharing or reposting fan content, actively contributing to content circulation and visibility on social media. More effort-intensive activities were also observed. Approximately 38% of respondents participated in streaming or hashtag campaigns, and 42.6% attended fan meetings or concerts, either online or offline. Although a smaller proportion (20.6%) engages in content creation or translation, this group represents a highly active segment of fandom that supports accessibility and cross-cultural distribution. Perceptual responses further reinforce the importance of these activities, with a strong majority indicating agreement that fan participation increases the popularity of artists or series. This finding indicates a high level of awareness among fans regarding their influence within entertainment ecosystems.

These quantitative findings align with interview data, in which participants described fandom as an active process involving streaming, online content sharing, performances, event participation, and online promotion. Together, the results suggest a tiered structure of fan engagement, ranging from consumers to



promoters and co-creators. Supported by secondary data on large-scale fan-driven activity across social media platforms, the findings confirm that fan engagement in the K-Pop and Y-series industries is continuous, participatory, and socially networked. This directly supports Objective 3, which examines the role of fan participation and engagement in shaping cultural influence.

5.3 Entertainment Content Preferences

Table 1 Entertainment Content Preferences among Respondents (n=348)

Content Preference	Percentage (%)
Primary focus on K-Pop	26.9%
Primary focus on Y-series (BL)	22.9%
Engage with both equally	36.0%
Engage with K-Pop more than Y-series	9.10%
Engage with Y-series more than K-Pop	5.10%

(Source: Own Survey Data)

Based on Table 1, the survey results indicate a substantial overlap in entertainment consumption. While some respondents reported a primary focus on K-Pop (26.9%) and Y-series/BL content (22.9%), the largest proportion (36.0%) reported engaging with both industries equally. Additional respondents reported engaging more with one industry than the other, rather than consuming content exclusively from a single category. These findings suggest that audience engagement is flexible rather than rigidly divided. The presence of a large “both equally” group indicates that modern fandoms are interconnected rather than isolated. Audiences frequently engage with content from both industries within the same digital environments, supporting the use of a comparative research design that examines shared rather than separate audiences. Interview data reinforce this pattern, as several participants described consuming K-Pop and Y-series content simultaneously, such as following idols while watching series content or engaging in online fan discussions. This behavior reflects cross-industry engagement shaped by shared platforms and online interactions rather than strict genre boundaries. Secondary data also contextualize these findings. The extensive visibility of K-Pop on platforms such as TikTok, where hashtags like #kpop have accumulated over 564 billion views, coexists with the growing international presence of Thai Y-series on platforms such as YouTube and specialized streaming services (Baudinette, 2021).

Overall, the fandom overlap in entertainment preferences demonstrates that K-Pop and Y-series operate within a shared global fandom space, reinforcing the study’s comparative focus and highlighting the importance of examining engagement strategies within overlapping digital audiences. This supports a comparative analysis of K-Pop and Y-series audiences.

5.4 Platform Effectiveness and Fan Communication

In terms of platform strategies and the effectiveness of social media, survey results indicate that respondents generally perceive open social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and X as more effective for connecting fans with artists and content creators, as shown in Table 2. A large proportion of respondents rated these platforms as “very effective” or “somewhat effective,” reflecting confidence in their ability to support visibility, interaction, and content discovery. Company-managed platforms, including Weverse and Bubble, also received positive evaluations but were associated with a relatively higher proportion of neutral responses. These neutral perceptions toward company-managed platforms may be linked to factors such as subscription costs, limited accessibility, and unequal regional availability. While some respondents value exclusive content and closer interaction on these platforms, others—particularly students—expressed hesitation due to financial or access-related barriers. This contrast reflects two distinct engagement strategies. Company -managed platforms emphasize loyalty, exclusivity, and monetization through controlled interaction spaces, aligning with the corporate-driven model commonly observed in the K-Pop industry (HYBE Corporation, 2023). In contrast, open social media platforms demonstrate greater

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effectiveness in global reach and rapid dissemination. Secondary data support this pattern, as the hashtag #kpop has accumulated over 141 million views on Instagram, highlighting the role of algorithm-driven visibility. Similarly, the GMMTV Official YouTube channel, with approximately 19.7 million subscribers and over 18 billion total views, illustrates how Y-series content reaches international audiences through open platforms without platform-specific subscriptions. Interview data further reinforce this distinction, with participants noting that they primarily discover new artists or series through TikTok and YouTube before engaging with official platforms. Open platforms were described as easier to access and share, while company-managed platforms were viewed as offering deeper but more limited forms of engagement.

Overall, the findings indicate that company-managed platforms are effective in sustaining fan loyalty, whereas open social media platforms function as primary drivers of global exposure and fan-driven circulation. This dual-platform dynamic supports the study's conclusion that K-Pop relies more heavily on corporate-controlled engagement systems, while Y-series benefit strongly from open platforms and grassroots visibility. This finding supports Objective 1 and 2, which compares the effectiveness of corporate-managed and dominant open social media platforms.

Table 2 Perceived Effectiveness of Company-Managed and Open Social Media Platforms (n=348)

Platform Type	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neutral	Somewhat Ineffective/ Not Effective
Company-managed platforms (Weverse, Bubble)	28.0%	34.6%	28.6%	8.8%
Open Social Media platforms (TikTok, YouTube, X)	47.7%	30.03%	16.0%	6.0%

(Source: Own Survey Data)

5.5 Cultural Influence, Soft Power, and Perceptions of Technology

In terms of cultural impact, soft power, and social influence, the findings—integrating survey results, interview insights, and secondary sources,—illustrate how both industries function as forms of cultural influence through distinct but comparable pathways. Survey results indicate strong agreement among respondents that K-Pop promotes Korean culture and national identity globally. A substantial majority either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, suggesting widespread audience recognition of K-Pop's cultural influence beyond music consumption. This perception is supported by secondary sources highlighting South Korea's use of popular culture as a soft power strategy, with institutions such as the Korea Creative Content Agency actively promoting Korean cultural content internationally (KOCCA, 2020). Valieva (2018) similarly emphasizes that the Korean Wave functions as a deliberate mechanism for enhancing national image and global cultural presence. Interview data also support these findings. K-Pop fans described increased exposure to the Korean language, fashion, and social norms through sustained engagement with idols, music videos, and online fan communities. For many participants, fandom extended beyond entertainment toward broader cultural curiosity, reinforcing the role of fan engagement in cultural dissemination. Moreover, survey findings show strong agreement that Y-series contribute to LGBTQ+ representation and inclusivity in entertainment, although neutral responses were more frequent than in the case of K-Pop cultural promotion. This variation may reflect differences in cultural familiarity and social norms across respondents. Secondary literature provides important context, as Baudinette (2021) argues that Thai Y-series gain international visibility primarily through emotional storytelling and transnational fan circulation rather than institutional promotion. Interview insights also align with this perspective, with participants noting that Y-series encourage discussion and awareness of gender and sexuality, particularly among younger audiences. Fans emphasized emotional resonance and relatability as key factors driving engagement, suggesting that Y-series



exert cultural influence through grassroots participation and fan-driven dissemination rather than formal soft power strategies.

Overall, the findings indicate that K-Pop and Y-series achieve cultural impact through different mechanisms. K-Pop operates through a more structured and institutionalized soft power model, while Y-series enhance cultural visibility through inclusive narratives and participatory fan networks. Despite these differences, both industries rely heavily on fan engagement as the mechanism through which cultural meanings are translated, shared, and sustained across borders. Fans thus function as cultural intermediaries who actively contribute to the global circulation of cultural values and social influence. This finding supports objective 4 of the study.

Regarding technology-based engagement and fan readiness, survey results indicate moderate to low levels of interest in technology-driven fan engagement. While a small proportion of respondents expressed strong enthusiasm for AI idols and virtual concerts, the largest group reported neutral attitudes, followed by respondents indicating low interest. This distribution suggests that although awareness of such technologies exists, overall enthusiasm remains limited. This prevalence of neutral and low-interest responses highlights a gap between industry experimentation and audience readiness. Technological innovation alone does not appear sufficient to generate strong fan engagement, as respondents did not uniformly associate advanced digital formats with increased appeal. In addition, qualitative insights from interviews and open-ended survey responses help contextualize these findings. Participants frequently emphasized the importance of emotional authenticity and human connection, expressing concern that AI-driven engagement may feel impersonal or diminish the relational aspects traditionally associated with idols, actors, and live performances. Technology was viewed more positively when it supports existing forms of engagement, such as livestreams or online interaction, rather than replacing them entirely. Thus, the findings indicate that current fan preferences remain anchored in emotional resonance and interpersonal connection. While technology-based engagement may play a role in future industry development, successful strategies in K-Pop and Y-series appear to depend on balancing technological advancement with the core relational values that sustain fandom communities.

5.6 Regression Analysis of Engagement and Cultural Impact

Table 3 Multiple Linear Regression Results of Three Models (n=348)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Constant	2.48*** (0.22)	3.68*** (0.07)	2.83*** (0.18)
Platform Effectiveness	0.33*** (0.05)	–	–
Fan Participation Level	–	0.32*** (0.005)	–
Fan Engagement Intensity	–	–	0.30*** (0.05)
Observations (N)	348	348	348
R ²	0.106	0.110	0.113
Adjusted R ²	0.104	0.107	0.110
F value	41.15	42.76	43.95
Significance (F)	<.001	<.001	<.001

Notes: Dependent variables vary by model: Model 1 (Fan Engagement Level), Model 2 (Perceived Popularity or Cultural Impact), and Model 3 (Cultural Impact/ Soft Power Perception). B = unstandardized coefficient. SE = standard error. ***p < .001, All models estimated using linear regression ($\alpha = .05$).

To test the relationships proposed in the hypotheses, three linear regression models were estimated. Table 3 presents the results of three linear regression models testing the proposed hypotheses. All models are statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating that platform effectiveness, fan participation, and fan engagement intensity significantly predict fan engagement and perceived cultural impact. Diagnostic inspection of the residual plots shows that residuals are generally centered around zero with no clear



systematic patterns, suggesting that the assumptions of linear regression are reasonably satisfied for exploratory analysis using Likert-scale survey data. For clarity, the key variables analyzed in the regression models are defined as follows. *Platform effectiveness* refers to respondents' perceptions of how effectively social media platforms facilitate content visibility, interaction, and fan communication. *Fan participation* represents active engagement behaviors such as sharing fan content, participating in streaming campaigns, and promoting artists online. *Fan engagement intensity* shows the frequency and depth of interaction with entertainment content across digital platforms. *Perceived cultural impact* refers to respondents' perceptions of how entertainment content contributes to broader cultural awareness and influence.

Model 1 (fan engagement), shows that perceived platform effectiveness is positively associated with fan engagement ($B = 0.33$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. The model explains 10.6% of the variance in fan engagement ($R^2 = 0.106$), indicating that more effective social media platforms are associated with higher engagement levels. This result aligns with survey findings where open platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and X were rated as highly effective, as well as with interview insights highlighting ease of sharing and global visibility as key engagement drivers.

Model 2 (perceived popularity or cultural impact) demonstrates that fan participation significantly predicts perceived popularity and cultural impact ($B = 0.32$, $SE = 0.005$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. The model accounts for 11.0% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.110$), indicating that active participation through streaming, content sharing, and fan-driven promotion contributes to increased visibility. This finding is consistent with both survey responses and interview data emphasizing fans' roles as promoters and contributors, particularly within Y-series fandoms.

Model 3 (soft power perception or cultural impact), indicates that fan engagement intensity is positively associated with perceived cultural impact and soft power ($B = 0.30$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 3. This model explains 11.3% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.113$), which is the highest among the three models. These results correspond with survey findings on K-Pop's cultural influence and Y-series' LGBTQ+ visibility, as well as with interview accounts describing increased cultural awareness through sustained engagement. Therefore, the regression findings empirically support the study's central argument that fan engagement functions as a key mechanism for linking platform strategies, participatory behaviors, and cultural outcomes. These results complement the descriptive, qualitative, and secondary data analyses, reinforcing the conclusion that different engagement models can produce comparable global impacts when fans are actively involved.

Moreover, qualitative findings from interviews and open-ended survey responses provide deeper insights into the motivations and expectations underlying fan engagement in both K-Pop and Y-series. Across responses, fan engagement was consistently described as emotionally driven and relational rather than purely content-based. Participants emphasized strong emotional attachment to idols, actors, and narratives, often describing fandom as part of their personal identity and a source of belonging. This emotional dimension helps explain the high frequency of engagement observed in the survey results and clarifies why fans remain committed even when participation requires significant time, effort, or financial investment. Beyond emotional attachment, fans showed clear awareness of industry strategies, particularly the use of social media algorithms, trends, and platform-specific content to drive engagement. While participants recognized these strategies as effective, they expressed greater appreciation when engagement felt reciprocal and respectful. Ethical considerations also emerged as a recurring theme, including concerns about unpaid fan labor, artist well-being, and equitable access for international fans. Participants highlighted the importance of recognition, accessibility, and transparency, which aligns with survey findings favoring open social media platforms for visibility and inclusivity. In relation to technological innovation, qualitative responses echoed the survey's finding neutral or low interest in AI idols and virtual concerts, emphasizing that technology should support rather than replace authentic human connection. Overall, these insights reinforce the study's conclusion that sustainable fan engagement depends on balancing visibility with authenticity, corporate strategy with fan participation, and innovation with emotional and ethical considerations.



6. Conclusion

This study examined how entertainment companies in the K-Pop and Y-series industries employ social media and fan engagement strategies to achieve global reach and sustained popularity. By adopting a comparative mixed-methods approach that integrated survey data, interviews, open-ended responses, secondary sources, and regression analysis, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of how contemporary fandom operates within digitally networked entertainment ecosystems. This study also contributes to the literature by providing a comparative empirical analysis of K-Pop and Y-series entertainment industries, demonstrating how distinct engagement models, particularly corporate-managed platforms and grassroots fan networks, can generate comparable global cultural influence through participatory fan cultures.

The findings demonstrate that fan engagement functions as the central mediating mechanism linking industry strategies to global outcomes. Both survey and regression results show that platform effectiveness, fan participation, and engagement intensity are significantly associated with higher levels of fan engagement and stronger perceptions of cultural impact. These findings confirm that fans are not passive viewers but active co-creators who contribute to visibility, popularity, and cultural influence through content sharing, promotion, interpretation, and emotional investment. Moreover, these findings align with previous research on participatory culture and fan labor, which emphasizes the role of audiences as active contributors in digital media ecosystems rather than passive consumers (Jenkins, 2006; Chin & Morimoto, 2013). Similarly, studies on cultural soft power suggest that global cultural influence increasingly emerges through networked fan communities and digital platforms rather than traditional media distribution.

Although K-Pop and Y-series adopt different engagement models, both achieve comparable global impact through fan-mediated circulation. K-Pop relies more heavily on corporate-driven platforms that emphasize loyalty, exclusivity, and monetization, while Y-series expands primarily through grassroots-driven participation and open social media platforms that support accessibility and fan-led dissemination. Despite these differences, both industries depend on participatory fan cultures operating within shared digital environments.

In terms of cultural influence, K-Pop functions as a form of institutionalized soft power that promotes Korean culture and national identity, while Y-series contributes to LGBTQ+ cultural visibility through emotionally resonant narratives and transnational fan engagement. Fans also serve as cultural intermediaries in both contexts, translating and circulating meanings across cultural and geographic boundaries. The findings also indicate that while technological innovations such as AI idols and virtual concerts are increasingly explored at the industry level, fan readiness remains cautious, with audiences prioritizing authenticity, emotional connection, and ethical engagement over technological novelty.

In conclusion, this study highlights that the globalization of contemporary entertainment is driven not solely by corporate strategy or technological advancement but by fan-centered engagement practices. The results underscore the importance of balancing visibility with authenticity, corporate planning with grassroots participation, and innovation with fan values. Future research may extend this comparative framework to other entertainment industries, such as Chinese dramas, Western pop cultures, or digital influencer economies. Further studies could also investigate how emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and virtual performers, reshape fan engagement practices and cultural dissemination in evolving digital landscapes.

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