

The Success of the K-pop Industry in Utilizing Social Media to Promote Korean Culture

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Abstract: This paper explores the role of social media theories in driving the expansion of K-pop and its effective promotion of South Korean culture. The study delves into two key theories: the S.N.S. Citizenship Behavior theory and the Selectivity, Transactionality, and Conditionality Paradigm. These theories are dissected to elucidate their functionality and the benefits they bring to both users and social media platforms. To illustrate these concepts, the paper presents case studies featuring Aespa's AI concept, (G) I-DLE's girl power concept, New Jeans's Phoning application, and a hypothetical scenario involving YouTube. The findings suggest that while targeted social media strategies contribute to a broader appreciation of Korean culture, social media platforms must invest further in enhancing their promotional systems and algorithms. In conclusion, this study asserts that the synergy between K-pop and social media will continue to flourish, with the potential for further growth as social media platforms refine their support mechanisms.

Keywords: South Korea, K-pop, social media, cultural transmission

1. Introduction

South Korean popular music (known colloquially as K-pop) has recently experienced a meteoric rise in popularity [1]. Since the debut of H.O.T, the first generation of K-Pop idols, in 1992, the idol industry in Korea has been on the rise, opening the international market and gradually promoting their music to nearby countries like Japan and China, and now intruding on the Western world. For example, B.T.S. is one of the idol groups from Korea that debuted in 2013. It is one of the most successful Korean idol groups in history and has reached record-breaking achievements. B.T.S. is the first Korean idol to give a performance at the American Music Awards in 2017. They received the award for a Top Social Artist in Billboard Music Award in the same year. Moreover, B.T.S. became one of the performers at the Grammy Awards, which made B.T.S. completely open the U.S. market. Due to their strong influence among young people, UNICEF chose B.T.S. as an ambassador to give a speech at the 73rd U.N. General Assembly in New York, United States [2]. Besides B.T.S., other groups like BLACKPINK, Straykids, and Seventeen, are gaining huge popularity following the footsteps of B.T.S. Their popularity is shown in various aspects. From the perspective of album sales, the group Seventeen made a record of more than 5 million copies in 2023, creating profit for its company Pledis for more than 200 billion Korean won. From the perspective of streaming media, JungKook, a member of B.T.S., reached one hundred million view counts with his single "Seven" in only 10 days, showing the astonishing popularity of K-Pop idols. Furthermore, more and more K-Pop music

festivals are emerging in America and Europe, such as Kcon and Kpop Lux, and more and more world tours of famous artists, which often sell out at a tremendous speed.

From all the statistics presented, it is interesting to see how a country's culture flourishes worldwide, which creates wonders about how this country can successfully promote its own culture. Their culture promotion methods are highly useful and representative of other countries to promote their culture. Also, it is a great chance to understand more about the Korean culture.

K-Pop industry utilizes the benefit of social media and spreads its influence into the world. In order to discover the mechanism behind the industry, S.N.S. Citizenship Behavior theory, as well as the Selectivity, Transactionality, and Conditionality Paradigm theory, are introduced as specific theories that help with the growth of the K-Pop industry [3]. Aespa's A.I. concept, (G)-IDLE's girl power concept, New Jeans's application Phoning and the use of social media apps like X and Instagram are discussed to give a detailed case study and analysis of how these theories work to help further promote Korean culture.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. S.N.S. citizenship behavior

S.N.S. citizenship behavior, as defined, refers to the voluntary actions of S.N.S. users that go beyond the formal use of social networking services and are beneficial to the platform itself, contributing to a harmonious and productive S.N.S. environment [4]. These actions encompass:

1. Sharing information about the S.N.S. platform, including usage tips, features, and benefits.
2. Providing feedback on the S.N.S. platform's services, features, and user experience.
3. Assisting fellow S.N.S. users by answering questions, offering guidance, or sharing knowledge.
4. Promoting the S.N.S. platform through positive experiences, invitations, or recommendations.
5. Generating content that benefits other users, such as tutorials, guides, or reviews [4].

In the context of the K-pop industry, S.N.S. citizenship behavior can be defined as the extent to which global K-pop enthusiasts create and rapidly share new K-pop-related information on social media platforms [3]. These behaviors align with the actions of dedicated K-pop fans. When these fans have positive experiences on specific S.N.S. platforms featuring K-pop content, they are more likely to continue using those platforms. Conversely, dissatisfaction may lead users to suggest improvements. K-pop content on these platforms is shared, recommended, and even created by existing users to attract new users, thus fostering engagement with K-pop content and refining the platforms.

2.2. The Selectivity, Transactionality, and Conditionality Paradigm

2.2.1. The Selectivity Paradigm

According to the selectivity paradigm, people can only pay attention to a potentially finite number of media messages out of the multitude; they choose these media messages based on individual differences in needs, desires, and dispositions, and only the ones they choose have the power to affect them [5]. Selectivity Paradigm suggests that only the messages that individuals select in response to person-specific antecedents have the potential to influence them [5]. Under the K-pop context, people interested in K-pop will be recommended with more relevant information, enhancing the effect this information had on these users and making them more inclined to browse through K-pop content.

2.2.2. The Transactionality Paradigm

The transactionality paradigm is expended upon the selectivity paradigm, which argues that the media user, rather than the media, is the starting point of a process that leads to selective media use. It is suggested that the dispositions, such as the mood and attitude, of media users predict their inclination to select media, which may bring about the media effect that reciprocally influences media use and the antecedents of media use [5]. With the increasing number of young users in the K-pop industry, the need for music and entertainment skyrockets, boosting the tendency of K-pop to be selected.

2.2.3. The Conditionality Paradigm

The Conditionality Paradigm is a theoretical framework that suggests that media effects do not equally hold for all media users and can be enhanced or reduced by dispositional, developmental, and social-context factors [5]. Nowadays, social context is clustered with people with high working stress, a pressing need for relaxation and aimlessness in future life. K-pop, with its catchy tunes and exquisite ideas and production, provides an outlet for stress relief. As a result, the media effect created by K-pop is immense in this social context.

These theories closely link together to talk about how the algorithms behind social media, which are sophisticated calculations that filter and prioritize content based on users' demographic profiles and personal data [6], has further propelled the growth of K-pop by selectively promoting the content about K-pop to potential users, by the process of gaining tendency (transactionality), selecting media information (selectivity), and finally resulting in different intensity of media effect (conditionality).

3. Case study of theories

This section delves into real-world examples to demonstrate how the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier find practical application within the K-pop industry. The distinctive nature of K-pop, characterized by its dynamic “concepts”, provides fertile ground for exploring the interplay between S.N.S. citizenship behavior and the Selectivity, Transactionality, and Conditionality Paradigm.

3.1. Cases of S.N.S. Citizenship Behavior

Discussions in the K-pop community correspond with this theory, due to the speciality of “concept” in the K-pop industry, a predetermined theme of a certain boy/girl group that provides more topics and discussions for the fans. The concept can be superficially defined as the group’s style, but sometimes, it reflects certain social issues and topics presented in the songs, M.V.s, and even costumes. For instance, some girl groups debuted with the concept of “freshness”, meaning that their future songs will be more light-hearted and have a summer vibe; some boy groups will debut in the theme of the agent, implying that their future songs will be intense, and they are likely to perform in suits. In a deeper level, Aespa’s AI concept connects entertainment with AI, which has been a hot topic for a long time. Aespa is K-pop’s first group with their own AI avatars, known as the æs [7]. The concept revolves around each group member possessing their own avatars, which they use to engage in self-discovery within the intricate realm of social media. Within this realm, individuals often prioritize the opinions of others over self-reflection. This concept explicitly mirrors the prevailing conditions among today’s youth, enabling them to convey this message through an artistic medium. This thematic concept permeates their songs and music videos. For instance, their lyrics consistently explore the intersection of the virtual world and reality, while their music videos incorporate various high-tech elements, such as holographic eye goggles and AI renditions of the members appearing in mirrors. Furthermore, the company has created avatar personas for the members, integrating them into performances alongside their real-life counterparts. The group has

also produced several short videos that address how members discover their authentic selves and overcome the allure of social media, offering a compelling and pertinent message for contemporary society. The construction of the concepts stimulates S.N.S citizenship behavior of users, thus making them share their positive experiences with others about the discussion of AI to attract potential users, as well as creating more related context, such as the users' personal thoughts and experiences about the interaction of AI, social media and human, on the platforms. In a distinct vein, the girl group (G)-IDLE boldly tackles the theme of girl power by asserting that "people are born nude" and paying homage to Marilyn Monroe, a pioneering woman who shattered traditional gender roles. Their chosen themes align with ongoing societal debates, showcasing their courage and stance on sensitive issues as they expressed their motivation to fight the stereotypes and misconceptions of a showgirl [8]. This approach resonates with a broad audience, sparking meaningful discussions.

Furthermore, companies create personal platforms for communication with fans. Phoning, launched in July 25, 2022, is a mobile interaction application by Weverse Company for NewJeans, in order to facilitate communication between NewJeans members and their fans. The service was free from the time of release until November 30, 2022. However, on December 1st, 2022, it became fee-based, with the exception of certain features like member messages [9]. In this platform, S.N.S. citizenship behaviors are frequent. As a new application, it soon attracted abundant users with the celebrity effect and its diverse features such as retro feels, scrapbook designed theme, retro pixelated font, sharp icons, and dress-up games with cartoon versions. The platform is then recommended to many users, and its functions continue to update to accommodate the users. The S.N.S. citizenship behaviors here refine the application, as well as the image of the artists New Jeans, and act as an propellent of the popularity of the girl group, as well as the whole K-pop industry.

3.2. Cases of the Selectivity, Transactionality, and Conditionality Paradigm

To illustrate the role of the three paradigms in promoting K-pop further, consider a real-life scenario: Upon launching YouTube, a viral song by B.T.S. caught the attention of individuals seeking relaxation and entertainment in a high-stress society. This song served as a source of stress relief and intrigued viewers, even if they had no prior knowledge of the group. As viewers engaged with the music video, it became a selected topic of interest. Subsequently, YouTube's recommendation algorithm came into play, suggesting related content, which viewers proceeded to watch. Over time, these recommended contents began to exert a significant influence, fostering a deep connection to B.T.S. and other K-pop groups and related content.

This algorithmic process aligns with the principles of the conditionality paradigm within the context of a society characterized by high-stress levels among its youth and working population. Individuals, driven by their need for relaxation, engage with algorithm-driven content recommendations, particularly vibrant music videos, as an effective means of relaxation. Simultaneously, the transactionality paradigm operates, predicting users' preferences and offering content that aligns with their interests and needs. Lastly, the selectivity paradigm comes into play, ensuring that similar content appears with increased frequency, reinforcing users' engagement with K-pop content.

As a result of this algorithmic approach that monitors user interests and habits, the growth of K-pop has experienced a remarkable acceleration. This phenomenon is not limited to YouTube but extends to various other social media platforms, including Instagram and X, where similar processes unfold.

4. Revelation and Reflection

The theoretical frameworks discussed in this paper undoubtedly contribute significantly to the advancement of the K-pop industry. However, there remains room for improvement in enhancing the overall quality of publicity and user experience.

4.1. Suggestions for utilization of S.N.S citizenship behavior

The effectiveness of S.N.S. citizenship behavior in attracting the intended audience for K-pop content is evident. Nevertheless, there is potential for progress in the realm of information transmission.

Improving the efficiency of users providing feedback to specific S.N.S. platforms and the responsiveness of platform administrators in addressing issues through effective communication is imperative. Many S.N.S. platforms currently lack a streamlined feedback mechanism, portraying an inactive approach towards consumer engagement, ultimately leaving users with a less favorable impression. While some platforms offer suggestion portals and customer support services, there is room for enhancement in the attitudes and efficiency of staff members. Long wait times for user support and instances of indifference can lead to diminished user satisfaction and erode trust among existing consumers. Platforms should prioritize staff training in customer service to enhance the overall user experience and encourage greater S.N.S. citizenship behavior.

Moreover, the proliferation of user-generated content brings with it an increased risk of misinformation. As user numbers rise, the likelihood of false information dissemination, such as album spoilers and rumors about certain groups, also increases. Such misinformation can mislead a significant portion of the audience, requiring them to spend more time identifying and filtering out erroneous information. Furthermore, some individuals may choose to trust such rumors, leading to decreased trust in certain groups and potential fan attrition. As a result, platforms like Facebook developed a “immune system” to guard against bot infestation. Facebook has given five reputable fact-checking organizations the task of verifying the facts. Additionally, Facebook launched a service called Related Articles in some European countries, giving readers access to the findings of fact-checking the company's original publications [10].

4.2. Suggestions for the Utilization of Selectivity, Transactionality, and Conditionality Paradigm

The allure of K-pop idols, extensive TV shows, and virtual interactions can lead to excessive engagement with online content, potentially causing users to neglect real-life interactions. To safeguard users' mental and emotional well-being and promote a positive image of the K-pop industry, the implementation of an addiction prevention system is both beneficial and fitting. Such a system could establish predetermined time limits for user engagement with entertainment content, restricting platform access once these time limits are exceeded. This approach serves to protect both consumers and the reputation of the K-pop industry.

Additionally, the algorithmic systems underpinning content recommendations can be refined to better align with the paradigms and user needs discussed earlier. Firstly, recording and preserving users' past interests and preferences can prove invaluable for future reference. Utilizing users' historical search records as predictive data can enhance the accuracy of content recommendations, ensuring that users are presented with content most relevant to their interests. Secondly, monitoring the frequency of interactions with similar content can also be beneficial. By tracking users' engagement patterns, platforms can reduce the likelihood of inadvertently recommending unrelated or uninteresting content, thereby enhancing the overall user experience and alignment with the selectivity paradigm.

In summary, while the theories discussed herein provide substantial support for the growth of the K-pop industry, implementing these suggested enhancements in S.N.S citizenship behavior utilization and the utilization of the selectivity, transactionality, and conditionality paradigm can further optimize the industry's publicity efforts and user satisfaction.

5. Conclusion

The growth and development of the K-pop industry is an extremely successful example in terms of traditional culture and language promotion, as it is the referential experience for other countries with rich cultural assets, for they can learn how to promote their culture in modern society and keep pace with the trend and technology. A major reason is the coincidental utilization of the rise of social media, which is the crucial propellant for disseminating information about the K-pop industry. In the article, its utilization of specific theories, S.N.S. citizenship behavior, the Selectivity, Transactionality, and Conditionality Paradigm is discussed under the supplement of an overall framework coupled with applications of the theories on real-life K-pop case studies to show the success of South Korean in using social media to increase its popularity and attract potential consumers. Based on the given phenomenon, the utilization of the theories can be improved with refinements of the present social media services. It is certain that with the continuous improvement of the awareness of the importance of social media and more user-inclined design, K-pop will continue to flourish and expand its influence around the globe.

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