The Impact of K-pop on Chinese Fan Culture

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Abstract:

The influence of K-pop as a global cultural phenomenon extends beyond just music and fashion - it also impacts social patterns in today's society. This study seeks to delve into the unique characteristics of K-pop and how it shapes the lives of its fans. By conducting surveys through questionnaires, the author has uncovered the profound impact that K-pop has had on Chinese fans in both life and spiritual aspects. In terms of lifestyle choices, it is evident that K-pop has left an indelible mark on its followers. Fans have adopted new aesthetic preferences inspired by their favorite idols while also adapting their language style and even eating habits based on what they see from these stars. It is common for enthusiasts to emulate the appearance and behavior of their beloved idols as a means to establish their own sense of identity. Furthermore, at a deeper level - spiritually - we found that K-pop has significantly shaped the outlooks held by its followers towards life itself along with influencing their consumer behaviors as well as criteria for selecting potential partners or mates. The resilience exhibited by these idols serves not only as inspiration for remaining optimistic during personal challenges but also prompts shifts in personal aspirations leading towards self-realization.

Keywords: K-pop influence, Chinese fans, Lifestyle impact, Spiritual impact, Identity formation.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, K-pop has experienced rapid development and has evolved into a global cultural phenomenon. It boasts a substantial fan base in Asia and has successfully made inroads into the European and American markets. The expanding global influence of groups like BTS and BLACKPINK has sparked significant scholarly interest in the development of K-pop.

The influence of K-pop is immense and demonstrates a significant trend towards globalization. It encompasses not only a musical genre, but also integrates fashion, film, and television, thus becoming a distinctive cultural phenomenon. The fashion styles of K-pop artists often set trends, while their audiovisual works enjoy widespread popularity. Furthermore, K-pop has exhibited a strong impact in areas such as fan economy and social media marketing. Numerous studies have unveiled the diversity of K-pop culture and its characteristics in global dissemination. Some research indicates that K-pop rapidly spreads through the internet and social media with highly unified visual and auditory elements that possess strong symbolic features [1]. Moreover, the acceptance and influence of K-pop culture vary across different regions due to their close association with local cultural backgrounds and societal environments [2]. Additionally, some scholars have analyzed the fan culture surrounding K-pop, revealing that the fan economy and community interaction model play crucial roles in shaping its global influence [3]. In conclusion, current research primarily focuses on the uniqueness of K-pop culture, cross-cultural dissemination pathways, as well as its influencing factors within academic discourse.

Although numerous studies have explored the significant impact of K-pop, there is currently a lack of concrete data to prove the widespread and deep influence of K-pop. Most studies rely primarily on qualitative analysis and lack quantitative data support. Furthermore, research on the acceptance and interpretation of K-pop in different cultural backgrounds is still insufficient. For example, the theory of globalization provides some frameworks for studying K-pop, but its explanatory power is still insufficient. The theory of globalization primarily focuses on the flow and integration of culture, but the complexity of the K-pop phenomenon goes beyond the scope of traditional globalization theory. K-pop is not only the result of cultural output, but also reflects complex cultural interaction processes. It exhibits unique localization features in the process of globalization, and the interpretation and acceptance of K-pop by different fan groups in different countries are also different [4]. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis from multiple perspectives, including cultural

studies, sociology, and economics, needs to be conducted by combining multiple disciplinary theories and methods to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the K-pop phenomenon.

Studying its impact not only helps people understand the cultural and economic significance of this phenomenon but also reveals new patterns of cultural transmission in the context of globalization. Therefore, the importance and urgency of studying the influence of K-pop are obvious. This study will use a questionnaire survey to deeply explore the aspects in which K-pop's influence is manifested and how deep its influence is. The contribution of this study lies in revealing the transmission effects and influence of K-pop in China's cultural context through specific data analysis, complementing the shortcomings of existing data support.

2. Method

This survey was distributed randomly online to Chinese K-pop fans.

The survey consists of 21 questions, most of which are in the form of scale questions. There are 14 scale questions, 6 multiple-choice questions, and 1 ranking question. The survey mainly inquiries about the impact of K-pop on both the living and spiritual aspects of life. There are 3 basic information questions, 16 regular questions, and 2 branch questions.

The survey will be distributed and collected through K-pop fan super chats on Weibo and fan groups on WeChat and QQ.

In the end, a total of 520 responses were collected from Chinese K-pop fans. Of these, 293 (56.35%) were female and 227 (43.65%) were male. The age distribution (see Table 1) was predominantly centered between 18 and 30 years old, with the highest number falling within the 18-25 age range, totaling 221 respondents or 42.5% of the total sample.

Table 1. Age and Population Statistics Table

Age	Population	Proportions
Under 18 years	51	9.81%
18-25 years	221	42.5%
26-30 years	131	25.19%
31-40 years	68	13.08%
41-50 years	26	5%
51-60 years	20	3.85%
60 years and over	3	0.58%

The occupational distribution (see Table 2) had the largest proportion of students, totaling 200 respondents or 38.46% of the total sample.

Table 2. Occupation and Population Statistics Table

Occupation	Population	Proportion
Freelance work	63	12.12%
Students	200	38.46%
Members of political party organs	61	11.73%
Workers	86	16.54%
Enterprise practitioner	92	17.69%
Leave/Retirement	11	2.12%
keep confidential	7	1.35%

The method of analyzing the scale items involves calculating the mean and standard deviation: If the mean is less than 3.50, it indicates that the influence is significant, but not extremely significant. If the mean falls between 3.50 and 3.60, it indicates that the influence is very significant. If the mean is greater than 3.60, it indicates that the influ-

ence is extremely significant. If the standard deviation is greater than 1, it indicates that the responses are not consistent. If the standard deviation is less than 1, it indicates that the responses are relatively consistent.

3. Result & Discussion

3.1 Influence of Life Aspects

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation Statistics for Life Aspects

Questions on the Influence of Life Aspects	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Since becoming a K-pop fan, my daily language style has been influenced.	3.51	1.23
2. Since becoming a K-pop fan, I have developed a liking for Korean food, such as Budae Jjigae and Tteokbokki..	3.46	1.23
3. Since becoming a K-pop fan, my standards and range for making friends have been influenced. For example, I now prefer to befriend fellow K-pop enthusiasts.	3.37	1.16
4. Since becoming a K-pop fan, I have started changing my appearance (makeup, fashion, height, weight, etc.).	3.40	1.19
5. Since becoming a K-pop fan, following my favorite idols takes up most of my time.	3.60	1.38
6. Since becoming a K-pop fan, following idols often causes my emotions to be unstable.	3.57	1.35
7. Since becoming a K-pop fan, K-pop has had a significant impact on various aspects of my life.	3.53	1.19

Statistically, since becoming a K-pop fan, 62.30% of people reported that their daily language style had been influenced to some extent. Since becoming a K-pop fan, 66.54% of people stated that they began to enjoy Korean cuisine, such as Budae Jjigae. Since becoming a K-pop fan, 56.92% of people indicated that their standards and range for making friends have changed, making them more inclined to befriend fellow K-pop enthusiasts. Since becoming a K-pop fan, 62.50% of people believe that K-pop has changed their appearance, including aspects such as makeup and fashion. Since becoming a K-pop fan, 58.65% of people reported that following idols occupies most of their time. Since becoming a K-pop fan, 61.73% of people think that following idols has often caused their emotions to be unstable. Since becoming a K-pop fan, 57.88% of people believe that K-pop has had a significant impact on various aspects of their lives.

According to the mean statistics (see Table 3), the influence of K-pop on different aspects of life ranked from greatest to least, is as follows: Daily routine > Emotions > Language style > Dietary habits > Appearance and Aesthetics > Interpersonal relationships.

The influence of K-pop on fans' lifestyles is deeply connected to their sense of identity. Lifestyle refers to the way an individual lives in their everyday world, manifested through related activities, interests, and perspectives. In other words, lifestyle is a blend of the need for self-expression and the expectations from the group to act according to general norms [5]. This aligns well with identity theory. Identity refers to an individual's understanding and perception of who they are, and how this is expressed. It encompasses how one views their role in society, as well as their values, beliefs, interests, and behaviors. Identity is not only about personal self-concept but also involves how individuals relate to others, groups, and cultures [6]. As mentioned earlier, K-pop, as a global cultural phenomenon, affects fans' daily lives through its unique music, fashion, and social practices, ultimately influencing their sense of identity.

The theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism theory and social identity theory can further explain why and how K-pop affects Chinese fans' lifestyles and how it ultimately shapes and reinforces their sense of identity.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism theory, it emphasizes that people interact and construct their self-concept through symbols such as language, clothing, and makeup [7]. K-pop idols and their associated cultural products serve as symbols that influence fans' lifestyles, leading them to redefine and construct their identities through this symbolic interaction [1]. For example, in terms of appearance, fans may imitate the fashion and makeup styles of idols. This not only brings them visually closer to the idols but also communicates their cultural identification with K-pop and their sense of belonging to the K-pop community through these external symbols. In terms of language, many fans learn Korean better to understand the songs and variety shows of Korean idols. This language learning is not just for cultural consump-

tion but also represents a deeper identification with idol culture. The process of symbolic interaction not only alters the external expressions of fans but also affects their internal sense of identity. Through ongoing symbolic interaction, fans gradually internalize K-pop culture as part of their own identity, forming a self-concept centered on K-pop [8].

From the perspective of social identity theory, it emphasizes that individuals form their self-identity through affiliation with specific social groups [9]. For instance, K-pop fans engage in interactions on social media and fan communities by sharing and discussing idols, as well as participating in various online and offline activities. These actions further strengthen their connection to K-pop culture. Such interactions not only make them feel like part of the K-pop culture but also help them find a sense of identity and belonging within the fan community [10]. Additionally, K-pop idols also affirm the culture and values of their fan groups, officially recognizing their fans, which further enhances the fans' sense of self-identity. Under the influence of K-pop culture, fans continuously imitate both the external and internal behaviors of idols. They internalize the positive values and cultural traits conveyed by the idols, such as perseverance, dream-chasing, and teamwork. Sometimes, fans may not genuinely adhere to these values and aesthetics but engage in blind imitation to achieve a profound sense of self-identity and social identity, ultimately obtaining a unique "exclusive fan" identity [11].

3.2 Influence on the Psychological Level

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation Statistics for Psychological Impact

Questions on the Psychological Impact	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Since becoming a K-pop fan, following idols has enriched my spiritual world.	3.75	1.17
2. Since becoming a K-pop fan, K-pop has changed my attitude towards life.	3.75	1.15
3. Since becoming a K-pop fan, K-pop has influenced (or even determined) my dreams or career.	3.65	1.22
4. Since becoming a K-pop fan, my perspective on consumption has changed.	3.69	1.22
5. Since becoming a K-pop fan, K-pop has altered my worldview.	3.65	1.12
6. Since becoming a K-pop fan, my views on choosing a partner have changed.	3.60	1.20
7. I can clearly distinguish the boundaries between real life and the world of following idols.	3.71	1.21

All means are greater than 3.60, and the standard deviations are approximately equal to 1 (see Table 4), indicating that the attitudes towards the psychological impact of K-pop on Chinese fans are fairly consistent and close to strongly agree. This suggests that the influence of K-pop on fans' psychological aspects is quite significant.

Statistically, 67.50% of people believe that K-pop has enriched their spiritual world.71.34% of people think that K-pop has changed their attitude towards life, making them more optimistic. 59.23% of people believe that K-pop has influenced their dreams or career choices. 67.69% of people feel that their perspective on consumption has changed, with a greater tendency to spend money on idols. 57.50% of people think that K-pop has altered their worldview, including their views on money, morality, and gender. 61.74% of people believe that their views on marriage and relationships have changed, leading to adjustments in their criteria for choosing a partner. 64.42% of people feel that they can clearly distinguish between real life and the world of following idols.

The significant psychological impact of K-pop on fans can result in both positive and negative outcomes.

In terms of positive outcomes, K-pop can help shape a positive attitude towards life and values. Since K-pop idols often display perseverance and dedication, fans may be inspired by these traits, adopting a stronger and more optimistic attitude when facing life's challenges. This influence can play a crucial role in helping adolescents develop a correct worldview and set of values.

K-pop can enhance cultural inclusivity. The global spread of K-pop allows fans around the world to access and learn about various cultures, particularly Korean culture. This cross-cultural exposure can increase fans' cultural inclusivity and global perspective, making them more open to and understanding of other cultures [12].

K-pop can promote social interaction and a sense of belonging. By participating in fan communities and social activities, fans can connect with like-minded individuals, strengthening their social connections and sense of group belonging. This sense of belonging helps enhance their

social support system and mental health [10].

In terms of negative outcomes, K-pop may lead some fans to become overly dependent on idols, potentially resulting in mental health issues. This emotional attachment can make it difficult for them to cope with negative news about idols or stress in their real lives, leading to psychological distress. Excessive immersion in the world of K-pop, especially extreme devotion to certain idols, can trigger mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. This is particularly pronounced when idols face negative news or disband, causing fans to experience feelings of loss, helplessness, or even despair [13].

K-pop can lead fans to experience a crisis of self-identity. Due to the intense emotional investment and imitation of idols, fans may gradually lose sight of their own identity. In such cases, especially among young fans, there can be an over-reliance on the idols' external image, lifestyle, and values, to the extent that they may idealize the idols' identity and traits as their own standards. This phenomenon can blur their self-perception under the idols' aura, making it difficult to clearly distinguish between the idols' image and their own true identity, thus leading to a crisis of self-identity [14].

K-pop may cause fans to neglect their real lives. Although online fan communities offer social opportunities among fans, some individuals might become so immersed in online fan culture that they neglect social relationships in their everyday lives. To some extent, online fan communities blur the boundaries between virtual spaces and the real world. This can ultimately lead fans to lose the distinction between reality and the virtual world, resulting in feelings of isolation and alienation [15].

4. Conclusion

This research aims to explore the impact of K-pop on fans' lives, beliefs, and attitudes toward idol behaviors. Through a survey of 520 participants, the study reveals the profound effects of K-pop on the fan community. The research focuses on the influence of K-pop on the gender and age distribution of fans, changes in daily lifestyle, and shifts in beliefs and values.

The cross-gender comparison results indicate that K-pop has the greatest impact on individuals aged 31-40. On the lifestyle level, the influence is most significant in areas such as emotions, aesthetics, and dietary habits, while its impact on daily routines is relatively smaller. The psychological impact is generally substantial, with the greatest effects observed on life attitude, spiritual world, and consumption perspectives. Furthermore, the majority of respondents (64%) reported that they can clearly distinguish between real life and the world of following idols,

indicating that they maintain a certain level of rationality and balance in their fan activities.

The innovation of this research lies in its systematic quantification of the impact of K-pop on fans' lives and beliefs, filling a data gap in this field. However, it also has limitations. The questionnaire survey is relatively broad and can only collect surface-level information, failing to delve into the deeper emotional experiences and motivations of Chinese fans. The structure and design of the questionnaire may also limit respondents' ability to express their true thoughts, resulting in data constraints. Additionally, while quantitative analysis of the survey provides overall trends, it lacks a detailed understanding of individual cases, making it difficult to reveal complex emotional and behavioral patterns. Therefore, the results of this study may have certain biases and shortcomings in explaining the comprehensive impact of K-pop on Chinese fans. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating interview methods. Face-to-face or telephone interviews with Chinese K-pop fans could provide a better understanding of their personal experiences, emotional responses, and unique insights into K-pop. Interviews not only capture details not reflected in the questionnaire but also reveal the complex and multifaceted emotional connections between fans and K-pop.

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