

TikTok Challenges and Cross-Cultural Success: BLACKPINK's Global Reach Through Short-Form Video in the K-Pop Industry

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Abstract:

This study used BLACKPINK as a case example to examine how K-pop music increases its reach through short video formats. In recent years, TikTok has become a pivotal platform for content dissemination in the music industry, where viral trends and challenges can significantly boost an artist's exposure. Specifically, we analyzed the impact of TikTok challenges on content dissemination, focusing on how these challenges engage users across different regions and cultures. The findings indicate that TikTok challenges, driven primarily by easy-to-imitate choreography and catchy music clips successfully boosted global exposure. High engagement rates and huge number of user-generated contents amplified further viral spread on the internet. Overall, the TikTok platform has effectively facilitated BLACKPINK's cross-cultural promotion and global success. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital marketing in the K-Pop music industry, providing insights into how short video platforms like TikTok serve as powerful tools for artists to achieve international success.

Keywords: Dissemination; K-pop; short video; globalization.

1. Introduction

In today's digital age, the consumption and dissemination of popular culture are undergoing a revolution. K-pop, as a global phenomenon, has become an important component of cross-cultural communication, with its influence reaching young people around the world [1]. Particularly with the rise of short video platforms such as TikTok, the speed and scope of

dissemination have been unprecedentedly expanded [2]. The unique challenge event on TikTok provides a new and powerful channel for the dissemination of K-pop music.

BLACKPINK, as one of the leading groups in the K-pop world, its Challenge has gained significant exposure and popularity worldwide, showcasing not only the cross-cultural appeal of K-pop music but also the potential of short video platforms in shaping

global pop culture trends. Through these challenge activities, BLACKPINK successfully transformed fan participation into the driving force for the dissemination of music works, thereby achieving viral spread of music.

This paper aims to explore how K-pop popular music can use short video formats to increase its spread on platforms such as TikTok, using BLACKPINK Challenge as an example. The research team will analyze how BLACKPINK attracts global fans through TikTok challenge activities and how these activities promote the cross-cultural dissemination of K-pop music. Through the exploration in this article, we hope to supplement and update previous research, and enhance a comprehensive understanding of the reasons for the widespread dissemination of BLACKPINK challenge on TikTok. This effort not only has theoretical significance for understanding the global spread of K-pop but also provides valuable practical experience and strategic guidance for other K-pop groups and the entertainment industry.

2. The Role of K-pop Fandom and Short-Video Platforms in Globalizing K-pop

In recent years, K-pop has become a very common and significant cultural phenomenon in the field of global cultural dissemination. This is closely related to the efforts of strategic institutions, the active participation of fans, and the important leading role of digital platforms, especially the mutual promotion and dissemination brought about by short-video platforms like TikTok.

This paper aims to analyze existing research on the globalization of K-pop, focusing on the influence of K-pop fandom, the role of social media, and short-video content in driving cross-cultural contact. By drawing on a range of sources, including studies on fandom activities and media platform dynamics, this paper seeks to develop a theoretical framework to understand how K-pop achieves success in globalized cross-cultural exchanges.

2.1 The Globalization of K-pop Culture

K-pop's rise to global prominence can be attributed to both internal and external factors. Internally, as discussed by Jin [3], K-pop's production quality and rigorous idol training systems contribute significantly to its appeal. These internal aspects are combined with external forces like social media and digital platforms, which allow K-pop to reach diverse global audiences. K-pop's ability to fuse Western pop music elements with distinctly Korean cultural practices, as analyzed by Miller [4], has been instrumental in making it a hybrid cultural product that

resonates globally.

The cross-cultural appeal of K-pop is evident in its success across different regions, with groups like BLACKPINK and BTS achieving international fame through their music, visual aesthetics, and fan interactions. According to Freitas, K-pop agencies like YG Entertainment and SM Entertainment have played a critical role in K-pop's global dissemination by leveraging digital platforms for global promotional campaigns [5]. These campaigns have incorporated short-video challenges and fan engagement activities, particularly on platforms like TikTok, which enable rapid cultural diffusion [6].

2.2 The Role of K-pop Fandom in Cultural Contact

K-pop fandom has been a critical driver of the genre's global reach, as fandoms are not passive consumers but active participants in the cultural production and dissemination process. Jang and Song provide a case study on the Philippine K-pop Convention, which illustrates how K-pop fandoms can foster cross-cultural interactions and increase cultural contact [7]. The convention serves as a platform where Filipino fans engage with Korean culture through performances, fan merchandise, and social media interactions. This demonstrates the importance of localized fan activities in extending K-pop's reach beyond South Korea. Furthermore, Xu et al. emphasize that K-pop's global diffusion on platforms like YouTube is strongly influenced by fan-generated content [8]. Fans actively share, remix, and participate in K-pop-related content, contributing to its viral spread. This highlights the symbiotic relationship between K-pop artists and their global fanbases, where fans become cultural ambassadors who introduce and propagate K-pop within their own cultural contexts.

2.3 The Impact of Short-Video Platforms on K-pop Globalization

Short-video platforms, particularly TikTok, have revolutionized the way K-pop content is consumed and shared globally. Abidin and Lee note that TikTok's algorithm-driven format allows for the rapid spread of K-pop challenges, making it easier for users to discover and replicate content [2]. K-pop songs with catchy beats and iconic choreography, such as BLACKPINK's "DDU-DU DDU-DU," often become the focus of viral challenges, extending the reach of these songs beyond traditional media channels.

Freitas highlights how social media platforms like TikTok facilitate artist-fan engagement by enabling fans to create user-generated content (UGC) [5]. The participatory nature of these platforms encourages fans to share their interpretations of K-pop choreography and songs, creating

a feedback loop where fan content further amplifies the original material. This is especially relevant for BLACKPINK and other high-profile groups whose visual appeal and choreographed performances are tailor-made for TikTok's short-video format.

The viral mechanics of TikTok not only promote K-pop songs but also foster a deeper level of fan engagement. As fans participate in dance challenges or remix videos, they actively contribute to K-pop's global spread. This aligns with the findings of Xu et al., who emphasize the role of fan-generated content in the long-term diffusion of K-pop culture on digital platforms [8]. Through these platforms, K-pop groups can transcend cultural and linguistic barriers, reaching new audiences in diverse regions of the world.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Platformed Globalization and Cultural Contact

The concept of "platformed globalization," as discussed by Abidin and Lee, provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding how K-pop's global success is mediated through digital platforms like TikTok [2]. Globalization refers to the simultaneous globalization and localization of cultural products. K-pop, as a hybrid cultural form, is produced in South Korea but is adapted and embraced by local fans worldwide. TikTok facilitates this process by enabling localized fan content to gain global visibility through its algorithm-driven recommendations.

The "cultural contact" theory, as explored by Jang and Song, further complements this framework by examining how fan activities foster cross-cultural exchanges [7]. K-pop fandoms in countries like the Philippines not only consume K-pop but also actively participate in creating hybrid cultural practices, such as organizing local conventions or translating Korean songs into their native languages. These practices exemplify how K-pop serves as a cultural bridge, enabling greater contact and understanding between different cultures.

Additionally, "participatory culture" theory, as popularized by media scholar Henry Jenkins, is applicable here. The concept refers to the way in which digital media enables users to not only consume content but also actively engage with and co-create it. K-pop fandoms exemplify this through their active participation in online challenges, fan edits, and dance covers on platforms like TikTok. This participatory culture accelerates the global diffusion of K-pop, as fans themselves become producers and distributors of content.

2.5 Challenges and Negative Aspects of Fan Participation

While fan participation on short-video platforms is largely

positive, Maureen et al. have addressed the issue of negative reactions and hate speech within K-pop fandoms, particularly on TikTok. Some fans engage in toxic behavior, such as targeting idols with malicious comments or engaging in fan wars. These negative aspects can undermine the sense of community within fandoms and potentially harm the image of K-pop artists. However, as Maureen et al. note, positive fan engagement tends to outweigh negative interactions, and fandoms continue to play a crucial role in promoting K-pop globally.

In conclusion, the globalization of K-pop is a multifaceted process driven by the strategic use of digital platforms, the active participation of fan communities, and the viral nature of short-video content. K-pop agencies like YG Entertainment have effectively utilized platforms like TikTok to engage fans worldwide, creating viral challenges that amplify the global spread of their artists. Fan-generated content, as discussed by Xu et al., plays a crucial role in extending K-pop's reach, while platformed globalization and cultural contact theories provide a solid framework for understanding the genre's global success [8]. Despite challenges such as negative fan behavior, the overall impact of K-pop fandoms on increasing cultural contact and cross-cultural understanding remains profound, with groups like BLACKPINK continuing to develop.

3. Theoretical Framework: Interaction Mechanisms Between Short-Video Platforms and Fandom in the Globalization of K-pop

This theoretical framework is based on "Platformed Globalization", "Cultural Contact Theory", and "Participatory Culture Theory", aiming to explain the mechanisms through which K-pop successfully expands globally. By analyzing the role of K-pop fandom, short-video platforms, and the dynamics of cross-cultural contact, this framework provides an understanding of how digital platforms mediate the global spread of K-pop, with a particular focus on groups like BLACKPINK through platforms such as TikTok.

3.1 "Platformed Globalization Theory"

"Platformed Globalization" explains how digital platforms facilitate both the global dissemination of cultural products and their localization by users in different regions. As discussed by Abidin and Lee, TikTok's algorithm and user-generated content (UGC) mechanisms are critical drivers of K-pop's global diffusion [2]. K-pop content, such as BLACKPINK's iconic "DDU-DU DDU-DU" dance challenges, gains significant exposure through TikTok as fans

recreate and share the content, amplifying its global reach. This theory helps explain how K-pop, as a hybrid cultural product, achieves “glocalization”—a combination of global reach and local adaptation. Originating in South Korea, K-pop becomes embedded in local cultures through its circulation on short-video platforms like TikTok, which allow users to interpret and localize the content based on their cultural contexts. This two-way interaction between global and local dimensions underpins K-pop’s international success.

3.2 “Cultural Contact Theory”

“Cultural Contact Theory” focuses on how interactions between different cultures promote cultural exchange and understanding. Jang and Song demonstrate that K-pop fandoms act as conduits for cross-cultural interactions [7], as seen in the case of the Philippine K-pop Convention, where local fans engage deeply with Korean culture through performances, social media, and fan activities.

In the context of short-video platforms, cultural contact is facilitated by fans who share K-pop content across borders. Fans not only consume K-pop but also actively engage in creating and remixing content, fostering increased cultural interaction. Platforms like TikTok enable this cultural contact to happen at a much faster pace and wider scale than traditional media, making K-pop accessible to a global audience.

3.3 “Participatory Culture Theory”

The “Participatory Culture” theory, developed by Henry Jenkins, is crucial for understanding how K-pop fandoms contribute to the genre’s global success. This theory suggests that in the digital age, fans are not passive consumers but active creators who contribute to the cultural production process. As Xu, Park, and Park highlight, fan-generated content plays a significant role in K-pop’s spread, with fans actively participating in the creation of dance covers, remixes, and memes that extend the life cycle of K-pop songs on platforms like TikTok and YouTube [6].

Freitas emphasizes that TikTok facilitates a high degree of artist-fan engagement, allowing K-pop fans to take part in viral challenges and dance routines, which further popularize K-pop songs [5]. Through such participatory mechanisms, fans contribute to K-pop’s global reach, acting as both consumers and producers of content, thus reinforcing the global diffusion of K-pop.

3.4 Integrating Theories

By integrating “Platformed Glocalization”, “Cultural Contact Theory”, and “Participatory Culture”, this framework highlights the symbiotic relationship between short-video

platforms, fan culture, and global K-pop dissemination: First, “Platformed Glocalization” explains the structural role of digital platforms like TikTok in mediating global and local dynamics of K-pop content. Second, “Cultural Contact Theory” explores how fan interactions, both online and offline, promote cross-cultural understanding and spread Korean culture globally. Lastly, “Participatory Culture Theory” emphasizes the active role fans play in creating and circulating K-pop content, enhancing the visibility and popularity of K-pop artists worldwide. This theoretical framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how K-pop, particularly through short-video platforms, transcends cultural and geographical barriers.

4. Research Methods

In this study, we employed three research methods to investigate the research question. First, the authors distributed an anonymous survey with detailed questions related to our research question to gather data from the main audiences of the short videos. Their answers will help understand the specific mechanisms of the dissemination strategy by providing firsthand information on how users engage with these challenges and their motivations for participation.

Secondly, the authors invited four participants for interviews. Conducting one-on-one interviews significantly enhanced our research by providing qualitative insights that go beyond quantitative data analysis. Personalized interviews could explore participants’ individual experiences, motivations, and perceptions regarding their engagement with TikTok challenges. Lastly, the paper analyzed the short video data from TikTok, examining engagement metrics such as views, likes, and share to understand how these K-pop challenges contributed to the song’s viral spread and cross-cultural impact.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Survey

From 107 answers in total, the questionnaire results indicate that K-pop has a wide appeal among young people, especially those aged 18-25. Most of the respondents (63.6%) are K-pop fans, and 87.9% are exposed to K-pop culture through TikTok and Tiktok, which shows the key role of short video platform in communication. Respondents have a high level of participation in K-pop challenges, with 65.4% frequently coming across related content and 93.5% increasing their attention to artists due to challenges. BLACKPINK’s challenge videos are particularly popular, with 70.1% of users having watched

them and 65.4% participating in related challenges. The appeal of music and dance is considered the main reason for the popularity of challenge. In addition, the majority of respondents (79.4%) believe that BLACKPINK has increased its exposure through TikTok, and 73.8% believe that it has enhanced interactivity. Overall, the challenge format has significantly promoted the spread of K-pop, with 81.3% of users expecting short video platforms to continue playing an important role.

The survey results reveal the important role of short video platforms in the dissemination of K-pop culture, especially their impact on young audiences [2]. The success story of BLACKPINK demonstrates that through carefully designed challenge videos, artists can significantly increase their global visibility and engagement. The key to challenge lies in the pleasant music and simple dance, which are the main factors driving K-pop to challenge popular trends. Moreover, challenge also allows users, whether they are passersby or K-pop fans, to pay attention to artists and groups they previously did not know or were unfamiliar with. Unlike live performances, stage shows, song MVs, short video editing introductions, and so on, this challenge method is more effective and convenient in attracting attention. The catchy music, well-designed dance movements, and beautiful and handsome idols are combined together to make an appearance. Therefore, when users suddenly brush it, it will have a visual impact, and the time is usually 15 seconds, which will not make people feel tired. In addition, as the global influence of short video platforms continues to grow, it is expected that they will continue to play a key role in the future development of K-pop.

5.2 Interview

Three of the interviewees were loyal fans of BLACKPINK and one was a K-pop lover who knew about BLACKPINK. Through our interviews, we found that all four respondents agreed with the BLACKPINK challenge video because it selected the most attractive and memorable moments of the song. With easy-to-imitate dance moves, it has a high communication potential, whether fans or Internet celebrity bloggers or onlooker, they can participate in the Tiktok challenge, share the video. All mentioned the algorithm recommendation mechanism of TikTok and TikTok, which makes BLACKPINK's challenge video can be accurately pushed to potential fans and interested users, forming a viral effect.

In addition, respondents noted that for established groups such as BLACKPINK, challenge videos further expanded their fan base, while for emerging groups, it helped increase their visibility. One of the interviewees D mentioned a new angle, saying that because BLACKPINK has

a fast and widespread spread of short videos, attracting more fans and strong influence, it attracts the attention and cooperation of luxury brands overseas, and improves BLACKPINK's business value, which is another virtuous circle.

The members of this study believe that cross cultural exchanges are also an important factor in the widespread transmission of BLACKPINK. In short video platform, the fans of different countries and regions challenge video has its own characteristics, showing different cultures and aesthetics, thus enhancing the appeal and dissemination of video.

5.3 Data Analysis

BLACKPINK's official TikTok account has a commanding following of 49.3 million followers and 590.2 million likes, reflecting its global appeal. The account has a diverse range of posted content, with over 200 videos posted. Videos include music challenges, behind-the-scenes moments, and promotional content. Some music challenge videos, such as "How You Like That," have 23.2 million views, and "Pink Venom" challenges have about 13.2 million views. These challenges often go viral, with fans from diverse regions such as North America, Southeast Asia, and Europe participating in dance challenges or creative reinterpretations, indicating BLACKPINK's cross-cultural reach [9]. The account displays impressive engagement through comments, likes, and shares based on the interaction rates. The participation rate in challenge videos is incredibly high, as fans eagerly replicate dance moves and use trending hashtags such as #HowYouLikeThat challenge. The music video for "How You Like That" was released on Jun 26, 2020, at 6 p.m. KST, and it took the video 4 years, 2 months and 25 days to hit the 1.3 billion marks, which is incredible. The video further gained some significant momentum as of March 24, 2024, the video had hit 1.6 billion views on YouTube. The other challenge is the 'Flower' challenge that received an impressive 30.4 million likes, generated 292.8K comment, 1.8 million saves and 358.3K shares.

The challenges have gone viral following the engagement of celebrities and influential figures in the challenge for instance the presence of Rose in the 'Flower' Challenge. 'Pink Venom' song also gained momentum as it gained 90.4 million views in the first 24hrs after its release in August 2024, which has reached to 800 million views, 954K likes, 20.1K comments and 13.3k shares [10]. These challenges have gone viral based on the number of user-generated content using the same hashtag or audio, reflecting their global reach. Aspects of catchy choreography, visually appealing outfits, and dynamic visuals have contributed to their international reach. From the video challenges,

Southeast Asia tends to have the highest levels of participation. However, European and North American fans is also a reflection of BLACKPINK's global popularity. Audio analysis implies that the group's song clips always become trending sounds on TikTok, further increasing their influence. Moreover, from the analysis of the comments, it is evident that fans often discuss themes such as the choreography, members' performances, fashion choices, and song preferences, implying that BLACKPINK's TikTok account successfully engages its audience on different fronts, thus, a stronger connection between the groups and its global fan base.

6. Conclusion

The findings from this study demonstrate the significant role that TikTok plays in the global dissemination and cross-cultural success of K-pop, particularly through challenge videos. BLACKPINK, as our case study, their viral success on the platform is driven by the strategic selection of memorable and easy-to-replicate dance moves, coupled with the recommendation mechanisms that enhance the reach of their content to both fans and potential audiences. The challenges not only increased the group's exposure but also expanded their fan base, with respondents indicating that participation in these challenges fosters engagement and interaction across different cultures. Additionally, the widespread participation from fans, other artists, and influencers has contributed to BLACKPINK's brand collaborations and heightened their commercial value. Overall, the interplay between viral content and TikTok's algorithmic systems has allowed BLACKPINK to maintain and grow its global influence.

There are two main limitations of this study. First is the absence of professional tools for analyzing TikTok's algorithm. While we have observed the number of likes, views, and comments related to content dissemination and user engagement, we were unable to conduct an in-depth analysis of how TikTok algorithm specifically boosts certain videos and hashtag trends. The second limitation is both the survey and interviews were only conducted exclusively within China. While the findings offered valuable insights, and the data analysis was facing international users. The lack of international participants limits the generalizability of the results. Further study can focus more on cross-cultural interactions and perspectives from users in other regions.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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