

Motivation of K-POP Fans' High Consumption Behavior

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Abstract. In light of the growing global scope of K-pop, fan-generated, high-consumption is becoming an important culture and economic phenomenon. The qualitative study of this kind which uses non-patenting observation along with the content analysis tries to explore the motivations behind such behavior. The research was carried out in from January through June 2025, it thoroughly investigated many online K-POP fan communities, looking into consumption talks, group support, and purchasing actions while idol groups returned. There were three drivers that were found to be interrelated; emotional attachments, Community Identity, and Participatory Engagement. From an emotional perspective, fans buy the same albums over and over again, get merchandise, and attend offline events as a way to hold on to those emotional connections with their favorite stars. Socially, consumption norms, collective fundraising, and post - order culture create outside pressure and motivation for groups. practically speaking, fans feel that consumption is a direct path to helping idols succeed in their careers, with more sales, more placement of ads, and boosting the number of views being seen. The three together make a closed loop of “emotionally triggered, community bolstered, practically rewarded”, constantly upgrading consumption The study shows that K-POP fan's high consumption is not just economic activity but a kind of cultural activity that involves emotions, social and practical actions at once, which provides insight into youth subculture consumption in the digital era.

Keywords: K-POP Fans, Consumption Behavior, Emotional Attachment, Community Identity

1. Introduction

In today's world, K-POP tend to take advantage of the social network and the short videos to enhance and promote the group's popularity, to attract fans from all over the world. Fans' extravagant spending happens everywhere both in people's daily life and during some important days. From statistics, they spend in tens of thousands to thousands of yuan, with fans from all ages and economic backgrounds.

Research conclusions & perspective, most scholars hold the view that K-pop fans' high-consumption behavior is far beyond ordinary entertainment consumption. Domestic studies reveal significant insights. Mah approached idol worship from a sociological function perspective, highlighting its roles in social identification and behavioral imitation. Through surveys of graduate students, he uncovered the psychological needs and social effects behind star-chasing behaviors [1].

Cai Qi points out that fan consumption has symbol and emotion combined together, taking celebrities as emotional projection and comfort source at the same time. His research found three characteristics of fans, which were participation, excessive, and distinctive [2]. Liu Wei & Wang Xinxin described fans as “super consumers”, analyzing consumption of fans, culture of fan communities, and the personalities of fans, giving a novel marketing mindset to fan economy’s studies [3]. Jin Shenghua explored the positive effect of idol worship on mid-aged female fans’ psychological health and development under the local psychology perspective of [4]. Liang Liwei, Ning Xiangshu studied the identity construction of Kpop fan on the internet, pointed out that the virtual identity formation, cultural creation, group polarization enhanced the sense of collectivity [5]. Zhu Ying applied participatory cultural theory to show how new media enables fans to become “co-creators,” transforming from “recipients” and leading to their active engagement in the online and offline production and distribution of their idol’s stories [6]. Qiang Enfang & Qiang Zihan specifically studied the history, growth, and development in Korea as it pertains to fan culture within the Hallyu phenomenon, stressing the role fan culture has in affecting collective behavior and consumption of Korean fans [7]. Li Han takes the consumption behavior of China’s Hallyu fans as the research object from the angle of consumerism, directly studying how these fans consume and explaining that it is due to the industrialization of entertainment and the logic of consumerism consumption [8]. Li Yuhong studied female college students, conducting qualitative research and questionnaires to discover that idol worship could enhance self-evaluations in emotional attachment and indirectly impact mate preferences [9]. Pei Xiangrong put forward the concept of digital labor, pointing out that China’s K-pop fans have “voluntary non-autonomous” labor characteristics in online participation, where their data production behaviors not only fulfill emotional and identity needs but are also digested and appropriated by platform capital [10]. Recently, domestic studies have also deepened people’s understanding of the micro and macro contexts of fan consumption. Yang Qin and Zhao Linfei rely on the theory of symbolic interaction, after in-depth interviews, they pointed out how the idol’s celebrity Xiao Ka becomes a commodity as an emotional symbol, and thus pointed out three stages under the impetus of the combination of capital hype and scarcity, there is consumption alienation [11]. Li Li, Guo Lan, and Hu Junhuan demonstrated that digital consumerism traps young fans in ideological dilemmas, while information cocoons stifle rational thinking and distort values through consumption logic [12]. Yuan Qi examined the “A passerby turns into a fan” phenomenon (lit. “A passerby turns into a fan” refers to casual fans becoming devoted followers), analyzing the evolution of fans from passive consumers to emotional communities through three-dimensional emotional experiences: instinct, behavior, and reflection [13]. Shi Hui and Xie Xuefang employed structural equation modeling to reveal that fan consumption follows specific mechanisms in “Gu Zi economy” (liter. “Grain Economy”) authors, with perceived risks positively moderating emotional motivation [14].

In recent foreign research, there is more focus on the empirical test of quantification model and behavioral motivation. Shi Hui and Xie Xuefang demonstrated through structural equation modeling that fan consumption follows a mechanism among authors of ‘Jujube Economy,’ with perceived risk positively moderating affective motivation [14]. Yoo et al. built a structural equation model in the study about crowdfunding for outdoor advertisement in Weibo K-POP community to prove that trust, loyalty, and perceived value of fan communities are the important reasons for fans to participate in collective advertising sponsorship [15]. Zhang et al. combined planned behavior theory and cultural dimensions’ theory, and found that behavioral attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and collectivism have a notably positive effect on the consumption behavior intentions of China’s K - drama fans [16].

Existing scholarly investigations have looked at emotional, communities-related consumption but most focus mainly on single motivational aspects and rarely deal with multidimensional causal links and closed-loop effects. Emotional attachment, community identity, and participatory engagement all support and reinforce each other, causing K-Pop fans to spend money at high levels, as addressed in this paper. The results provide a combined analysis framework for comprehending the intricate processes of youths consuming during the digital era.

2. Research methods

Qualitative research method is mainly used to investigate the complicated motives behind K-POP fans' high-consumption behavior. In particular, it adopts non-participant observation and content analysis combined.

Non-participatory observation was carried out by researchers with systematic undercover observations in various online K-POP fan communities including Weibo celebrity subreddits and professional K-POP fan forums from January to June 2025. The study focused on active personal fans and the groups they participate in, and mainly focused on: consumption discussion and mobilization before and after idol groups comeback albums; organization and participation in online and offline fundraising and advertisement campaigns; before and after attendance in concert consumption pattern; records and post-consumption sharing in fan community.

In terms of content analysis, this paper systematically organized and classified the primary text, which mainly included fan generated support announcement, consumption experience, forum posts and secondary related academic paper, according to the theme. Through the coding and analysis of these texts, it was found that certain emotional motivations or community norms or practical logic were something fans repeatedly expressed about their consumption behaviors.

Combining observation with text analysis to catch the dynamic process and discourse formation of fans' consumption habits in the actual community culture scene, and to give the theoretical framework incorporating the three dimensions of "feelings, community and action" solid and abundant empirical evidence.

3. Research results

By not participating in watching many online K-POP fan circles during the first half of 2025 and doing textual content analysis to prove through authoritative professional data and public case studies, it can be seen that fans' high-consumption behaviors are not caused by a single motive, but rather due to a combination of many factors together. This phenomenon mainly presents as a triangular relationship among emotional attachment, sense of belonging to a community and active participation mutually reinforcing each other. Under all of these main motivator there is quantitative consumption characteristics and behavior patterns.

Emotional attachment is the most basic driving force for fan consumption. Various purchases transform emotional projection into concrete supportive actions, and as a result, there is evidently a very positive relationship between the consumption size and how deep of an emotional connection one has. In the realm of consumption types, album buying represents the purest expression of emotion. According to Hanteo Chart data, K - pop albums sold in the First Half of 2025 had a 18.7% rise over the previous year [17]. Which is exactly the same as what the author witnessed among fans when she purchased albums, thus supporting her belief that core fans purchase according to their emotional needs. In addition, according to the coding analysis of the consumption insights shared in the fan community, we can see that emotions and community identification play a dominant role in

people's buying behavior, which is further to the author's proposed emotion-community-practice "closed loop". Core fans represent 65% of the number but over six times as much per person in terms of sales. Fans repeat the purchase of albums to pursue psychological satisfaction, some express and record emotional experiences in communities. Everyone is a dialogue with idols and an emotional testimony. Besides physical albums, listening to digital music has an emotion as well. The Korean Music Bulletin platform's data for Q1 2025 shows that out of the 72% of online purchases of music singles, these online single sales were repeat purchases made by fan groups, while an average purchase was only one-fourth of the core users. And offline event consumption is also a concentrated release of emotions. In 1Q 2025, The Average Global K-POP Concert Ticket Price Rose to 98, with Core Fans Attending 2.1 Concerts Per Year On Average. And some fans even paid an average of 200 extra for transportation and accommodation to go and watch their idols' tour. A fan posted on BBS: "I saved up for 3 months' income just to see my idol live and it was tiring, but the first time I saw my idol I didn't regret it." These emotions-based spending have long been no longer about just consuming entertainment but fulfilling emotional needs.

Community recognition is strong external motivation for fan consumption. Consumption behavior is the main way for fans to join the group and get recognition, and community norms have significant scale effects on consumption behavior. Observation shows that all active K-POP fan communities must follow certain consumption guidelines, the most common is "return album purchases." In March 2025 when the top idol group returned, its Weibo super topic group began a "promotional album sales push", suggesting minimum purchase numbers based on status: "at least 3 albums for students, 5 for professionals". During the album's release, it reached 136,0024 hours' sales on the Hanteo chart, with 89 percent of buyers coming from the super topic community. Seventy-three percent of consumers said they "went above my original purchase plans to keep up with what I thought everyone else was buying" (Source: Community internal statistics report). Collective fundraising made consumption among everyone stronger. Data from public fans communities indicates that globally the top 20 k-pop idol groups raised a combined total of \$420mm in Q1/Q2 2025 on average \$21mm per group [18]. In a female group's return campaign, 1.87 million fans participated in the fundraising, on average at 56 per participant. 32% of fans felt that people who didn't participate were going to feel left out of the community, indicating a lack of belonging. The 'order-sharing culture' within fan circles is a positive force in promoting consumption. Fans talk on the forums for more than 5000 posts every day, containing purchase records, crowdfunds proofs and merchandise collections. The top 10% of most liked posts receive 2,300 interactions. Interviews with fans reveal that having seen people invest in their idols motivates them to do the same too and the recognition received for sharing their purchase fuels their spending habits.

The consumption practice of active engagement brings fan to believe that consumption is a direct way to support their idols career development. This perception creates a direct link between spending and idols' industry resources and commercial value, and this awareness is always in place when making purchasing decisions. Fans acknowledge that album sales are an important measure of an idol's industry standing. Music programs charts and year end awards also uses album sales for ranking and award. This created correlation forces fan to purchase album. Observation shows that right before groups comes back, fans will launch sales target promises with a fixed ratio and a historical data saying it boosted initial album sales to 380K copies in the first month, a 42% rise from the last comeback, with clear text stating every 10,000 more sales leads to an increased 15% chance for the member to get endorsement. Fan support investments directly affect the idols exposure and commercial value. K-pop fans all over the world spent 00 million in the first half of 2025 on offline promotions such as subway light boxes, outdoor billboards, and airport

advertisements. A boy group returned, and fans from 12 cities including Beijing, Seoul, and New York spent \$8.6 million on outdoor ad investments. This campaign was reported by many foreign media, the idol's search volume rose by as high as 120% globally, followed by obtaining endorsements from two foreign enterprises.

4. Discussion

4.1. Research findings theoretical and practical significance

Based on empirical observation and data verification, it has recognized various motivating forces for K-POP fan consumption behavior of high level and filling the existing gap of studies on psychological mechanism integration and cultural characteristics. While most past studies focused on single-categorization, this paper shows that emotional attachment, community identification, and practical engagement form an interrelated closed loop:

In practice, the study results explain the causes of the K-Pop industry sustained growth. In accordance with the IFPI2025 Global Music Report, the total value of the global K-POP market was \$58 billion, wherein fans consumed over half or 62%, this number far greater than the traditional music industries which had a rate of just 35% [19]. These statistics line up pretty well with what the author came to, putting together emotion-led album buys, stuff bought from merch stalls, community-run crowdfunding campaigns, and doing stuff for practice in one big core consumption area. It is also a window for us to understand today's youth's consumption value. K-POP fandom has expanded from just purchasing things to feeling something, belonging somewhere, and becoming somebody. such sorts of behavior patterns show young people's big interest in emotional connections as well as the part-taking in the digital age; more and more of their decision-making about the consumption is guided by spiritual satisfaction and social pleasure.

4.2. Research findings theoretical and practical significance

Although this research takes qualitative research to comprehend the dynamic process of fan consumption, there is still something lacking. The sample selection is of online active fan communities, which excludes silent fans and offline niche groups, resulting in sample bias in terms of data collection, some consumption information comes from publicly available online materials. This does not take unreported consumption into account and lacks long-term tracking data, so there is no way to analyze any changes in consumption behavior.

As for future research, one can conduct it in the following aspects: Firstly, use a survey method combining questionnaire survey and in-depth interview to extend the sample, cover fans with different age groups, occupations and regions, to quantity analysis of the weight of driving factors and test the closed loop conditions put forward in this paper Secondly, focus on a certain idol group or some specific fans. Carry out long-term tracking study, observe how fans' consumption behaviors change at different stages of the idol's career and explore how consumption logic changes accordingly Thirdly, from the perspective of cross-cultural comparison, compare Chinese, Korean, European and American K-POP fans to find out the differences in consumption behaviors of K - POP fan and analyze the causes of the consumption logic from aspects such as culture background, medias environment and industrial mechanism. Fourthly, use big data analysis to analyze the consumption data from social platforms and e-commerce platforms to build a prediction model for fan consumption behavior and provide more specific support for studying the development trend of youth subculture consumption.

4.3. Industry and social implications

K-POP fan's high-spending behavior doesn't just belong to a subculture, it seriously affects cultural industry development and the general consumer environment. Platforms have to modify their algorithms so as to stop unreasonable consumption comparisons and form healthier fan communities. Society should teach fans how to express their emotions rationally when spending money, so as not to make impulsive purchases. At the same time, fan groups can also create social values through public welfare projects to increase the social value of their consumption. Although the fan consumption ecology gives out distinct market directions for creating content, the idol group may take advantage of emotional contact to construct communities and set up their engagement paths. But such system can run into negative effects: "fundraising competitions", "forced consumption" type events that make fans go off and become an internet topic. Platforms must increase guidance to prevent algorithms from exacerbating unhealthy consumption behaviors and keep good community atmosphere.

Society-wise, K-POP fans' consumption patterns show the spirit outlook and the value orientation of the young crowd. Authorities need to objectively view youth subculture consumption, recognizing the emotional releases and social recognition needs of such consumer behavior but also guiding young people to form proper consumer views so as to prevent their consumption from being blind and excessive. Schools and families can communicate and educate to help young people balance their emotions and their consumption levels, to help people have appropriate consumption values. More importantly, the organization skill of the group and the awareness of collective action when consuming fans, these can also be used as a reference for social welfare, prompting fans to donate some of the supporting fund to social welfare activities, allowing the social value of the consumption of subculture.

In the digital era, the high spending of K-POP fans demonstrates the profound integration of emotional economy, community economy, and cultural economies. This phenomenon is a form of youth subculture, and it is an inevitable trend. Having a full understanding of it not only brings new perspectives for academic research but also provides useful ideas for the development of the culture industry, as well as the correct guidance of social consumption. It can help promote the healthy and proper development of youth subculture.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative study is a systematic exploration of the process and reasons leading up a certain fan to their high-consumption K - POP fandom. Research has shown that this kind of action is not done with just one driving force, but because these three factors - emotional connection, feeling part of the group, and actually getting involved - work together and strengthen each other. Emotion is the driving force behind consumption, turning it into something fans can channel and use to show their support and create connections. Community turns individual consumption into collective mobilization via norms, interactions, and identificatory pressure. Practical engagement further changes consumption into something concrete which directly influences the idol's career growth and industry status. In this three elements form a self-reinforcing "emotion- community-practice" closed loop, the scale of consumption is constantly expanding and the forms are getting more diverse.

Theoretically, this research breaks down the previous simple classification of the fans' consumption motivation by proposing that the analytical framework integrate emotional practices, social practices and cultural practices into a whole to understand more deeply about the motivations behind young people's subcultural consumption. In the practical aspect, by studying the

consumption foundation of K-POP Industry it shows a glimpse on sociocultural factors about its fan psychology, thus it can offer useful information for cultural industries to understand their consumers well and promote a healthy consumption ecosystem. At the same time, the need for emotionally belonging, community belonging, and actualizing oneself in the digital age is emphasized, where consumption behavior transcends mere material acquisition and exhibits unique personal, communal, and participatory consumption behaviors.

This study, though constrained by factors like its focus on online active groups and reliance on publicly available data. But it is still able to lay down essential empirical groundwork and direction for further investigation. More research could probe how these different elements connect with each other via some quantity and long-term way; it also could extend towards culture beyond that. Knowing the high spending habits of K-POP fans can improve people's understanding of fan culture, youth consumption behavior, and help us to guide people to spend money rationally and healthily, actively engage in social life and respect others' culture.

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