

K-pop Subculture International Impact

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## Abstract

The overall purpose of this study was to gain a more in depth understanding of the conditions in which k-pop spread internationally. We initially knew that k-pop was an extremely popular sensation in Asian countries, specifically because it originated in South Korea. Interestingly, research on the methods in which k-pop spread globally provided information on the Korean Wave. The problems we researched focused on the specific ways and influences that k-pop had on countries. Instead of only focusing on South Korea and its neighboring Asian countries, we broadened our search globally. Some major findings we encountered were discovering how k-pop transformed into a worldwide phenomenon. As aforementioned, the Korean Wave was behind this transformation. Including k-pop, the Korean Wave spread k-media in general. In addition, learning about the culture behind k-pop and the realization that it was unique but also like other cultures in some ways. Particularly, the ways that k-pop fans socialize and gather in conventions, like anime. In addition, fans interact similarly, whether based in Korea or elsewhere.

## Introduction

K-pop means Korean Pop, which is a musical genre consisting of different music styles, including hip-hop, rap, dance music and ballads. K-pop began in South Korea and the introduction of the group, Seo Taiji and Boys in 1992 kick started its popularity. This music group revitalized Korea's music background by appealing to younger generations. Around the same time, Korean dramas ignited the flames of k-pop. This is since certain actors in Korean dramas promoted their k-pop music in the dramas they starred in. According to Ravina (2008), "The Korean wave—" hallyu" in Korean—refers to a surge in the international visibility of Korean culture, beginning in East Asia in the 1990s and continuing more recently in the United States, Latin America, the Middle East, and parts of Europe" (p. 1). In addition, following Seo Taiji and Boys in the 2000's, prominent entertainment labels, JYP Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and SM Entertainment, known as "The Big Three", created k-pop music groups that targeted a younger female fan base around the world.

Those who love and listen to k-pop are referred to as "k-poppers", who make up the "k-pop community". K-poppers mainly consist of Korean females who are in their mid and late teens, although that is not only type of people who are k-poppers. Other types of k-poppers consist of Japanese and Chinese females, Middle Eastern, American, and European males and females. Most of them favor bleached hair more and have kawaii (cute) styles. They do not pay attention to masculinity in male individuals. For example, male k-pop singers wear makeup, specifically eye liner while performing. This action is common to see by the Asian population; however, it is quite unpopular in other outside countries. They prefer to use Korean language and references to express themselves in their conversations and in their lifestyles. Social media plays a noticeable role in the interaction of k-poppers and k-pop music groups. Kim (2012) explained "The CEO of DramaFever revealed that approximately 72 % of its users were non-Asians, including whites (53 %), blacks (10 %), and Hispanics (6 %)". It also plays an important part in the interaction of k-poppers around the world. Most of them aspire to be dancers and musicians because they look up to k-pop music groups as their idols, and most importantly, they are people who appreciate the music and culture of k-pop.

K-pop fans around the world can be classified into separate groups. On one side, you have the K-fans, and on the other side you have I-fans. K-fan stands for Korean fan, who are very passionate due to the fact that they have the access to see k-pop groups live and attend other fan events. On the other side of the spectrum, I-fan stands for international fan, essentially meaning any fan outside of South Korea. This grouping of fans comes across as less passionate and loyal because they do not attend events like k-fans do. I-fans mostly communicate through online sources. In addition to I-fans and K-fans, there is a separate group of fans called Saesangs. This group of fans are classified separately from Korean fans and International fans. This is mainly in part because they extend their fandom beyond the reach of ordinary. From invading personal privacy and space to physical harm, saesangs show that they do not have boundaries. Fan clubs are a major aspect for k-pop fans to be a part of. Often, fan clubs differentiate themselves from others by creating separate merchandise and making unique chants to support their favorite music groups. Tension can arise from different groups stating that their favorite k-pop group is better than others. This act is common between fan clubs for any group outside of k-pop, such as sports teams.

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K-pop can be correlated with other subcultures such as anime and hip-hop because they interact similarly. Conventions are a prominent resource for both k-pop and anime lovers to interact and share information with each-other. Along with interaction at the conventions, they also communicate similarly. Since the k-pop subculture isn't as popular as others such as skating, online resources are commonly used to connect with k-poppers around the globe. Anime followers employ the same strategy. Hip-hop supporters also discuss their favorite artists or groups, but they mostly converse personally. This is due to the fact that hip-hop followers in America are more concentrated than both k-pop and anime supporters. At the annual k-conventions and anime conventions held, the friends you connect with online can be interacted with personally for the first time. In addition, their favorite characters and groups attend and perform live, which is a once in a lifetime opportunity for most supporters.

Although k-pop has a generally positive reputation, there are some aspects that contradict these facts. Examples of this are appropriation and gender roles. In k-pop, appropriation is done by both the k-poppers and k-pop music groups. This consists of appropriation of African Americans and the k-pop music stars themselves. Also, male k-pop music groups often dress femininely and wear makeup such as eyeliner. To Korean fans, this act is considered normal, but international fans see it in a different light, often negatively. Alike other subcultures, negative aspects are present, but do not outweigh the overall positive reputation.

Another interesting aspect of k-pop is shipping. This can be defined as members of the k-pop fandom who "ship" or couple two k-pop stars together. This idea has no boundaries, meaning that any possible combination of people can be shipped, no matter their gender. Although these actions are mostly for fun, some k-pop fans take the idea to the next level by insinuating that members are gay or lesbian. As expected, this action causes some disputes in the k-pop fandoms. However, instead of lashing out or taking action, the displeased members instead ignore and avoid it.

The importance of researching the k-pop subculture, "k-poppers", is to help people gain an understanding about the uniqueness of k-poppers, and its effectiveness of joining people with different personalities, but similar interests. Although there is a large language gap separating k-pop music and some of its listeners, it doesn't hinder them from finding enjoyment in it. K-poppers are unique because they hold open minds about different music styles and cultural differences. The k-pop subculture creates a community where one can confide in another without being shamed for not conforming to the norms. Through online sources especially, since many k-pop fans are in separate continents. K-pop is an inspiration to its community, it encourages k-poppers to work hard by emulating k-pop music groups. Examples are those people who make a living talking about k-pop on the internet, people who make apps for the k-pop community, artists who improve their artistic skills by drawing k-pop music groups, logos and emblems. Also, it encourages those who want to be in the entertainment industry to practice harder.

## Literature Review

## Success in Asian Countries

The main factor that caused the k-popper subculture to be so prominent internationally is the Korean wave, also known as the “hallyu” wave. “The wave consists principally of two forms of media, television serials and pop music (K-pop), although Korean feature films and other musical forms are also part of the phenomenon. Because the Korean Wave involves the export of Korean culture, it is inherently both a national phenomenon and a transnational phenomenon” (Ravina, 2009. p. 3). The international success of k-pop was not only due to k-pop music groups’ success, but also by the contribution of k-dramas that the k-pop group members starred in as aforementioned. Although k-pop eventually became very successful internationally, its first success was in the Asian countries surrounding it such as China and Japan, when k-pop music stars promoted their music in those countries. According to one source, “the Korean wave moved forward to diverse parts of Asia, including Southeast and Central Asia, and therefore this wave reached an active penetration stage” (Ju, 2007, p. 6).

## Success in Asian Countries

The Korean Wave was a tool for Korea to represent itself in a new light, better than it was previously seen due to the Korean War, which caused poverty and political instability. Also, Korea’s economy improved heavily due to the increase in media sales relating to k-pop, which contributed to the proliferation of the Korean Wave. “Local sentiment towards Korea has not been respectable in the past, but the Korean wave has fundamentally changed the national image of Korea in a positive way. The Korean wave ultimately improved Korea’s image in foreign countries, which in turn created a ripple effect that has extended much farther than just the Korean economy or peninsula” (Lee, 2011, p. 86-87). On the contrary, some Asian countries, China, Singapore and Japan specifically, did not initially support the Korean Wave because they experienced a decrease in their media sales. In addition, these countries also view the Korean Wave as Korea’s way of representing the Asian culture in its entirety, which they did not support. “The Korean wave provoked a backlash among different Asian countries making them gradually less favorable to spread the Korean wave in their own nation and market. Main discontentment was shown in Japanese news articles presenting a hostile tone on Korea-related issues, while Chinese newspapers tended to criticize the proliferation of Korean dramas and Korean companies entering the Chinese market” (Lee, 2011, p. 90).

## International Success/Non-Asian

In addition to being popular in Korea and its surrounding Asian countries, the Korean Wave spread to other non-Asian countries. Eun-Young Jung writes about how Korean culture is popular overseas, partly because it is “transnational and hybrid” and “involve[s] combinations of local and foreign elements at multiple levels” (2009, p.78). Instead of appealing only to Koreans, their culture is appealing to many other foreign countries because it is a unique blend of foreign aspects. The introduction of the “hallyu” wave in non-Asian countries has proved to be successful. This culture includes k-pop and other related media, k-dramas and featured films. However, the growth of the Korean wave into other countries has also shown to be more stagnant.

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### International Success/Non-Asian

On the contrary to Eun-Young Jung, Ryoo writes, “South Korean popular culture is much more readily relatable and accepted to Asian audiences” (Ryoo, 2007, p. 145). He is suggesting that the spread of Korean culture to foreign countries is not as rapid due to the fact that it is much more accepted and understood by Asian countries. In addition to being more accepted to Asian audiences, Ryoo writes, “South Korean television shows and movies portray themes that Asian audiences can relate to more easily than those of Western entertainment because Korean “dramas typically deal with family issues, love and filial piety in an age of changing technology, and often reinforces traditional values of Confucianism” (Ryoo, 2007, p. 140). The specific themes in Korean media allows it to be more relatable to Asian countries rather than Western countries. Western countries are more difficult to connect with, according to Eun-Young Jung, due to the difficulties of marketing. Since Western countries have different cultural values than Korea and other Asian countries, what Western audiences find appealing is not the same as Asian audiences. Sometimes the new, fun and different Korea that is portrayed on k-dramas and k-pop videos causes international fans make rash decisions about moving to Korea in hope that they will get to see their favorite groups more often. In addition, they have a false hope that what was shown in the Korean movies might happen to them, which is an unrealistic stretch.

### I-fans/K-fans Hierarchy of Fans

Other subcultures, such as straightedge, have multiple kinds of supporters. Specifically, net-straightedgers and music-straightedgers. Similarly, there are distinctions between two types of k-poppers, the Korean fans and the international fans. The Korean fans are made up of people that live in Korea, or are Koreans, while the international fans consist of non-Asian fans, especially Americans. “The growth of the internet and its continuing penetration into our everyday lives confounds the idea that a face-to-face scene is necessary for subcultures because it allows more individuals who are disconnected from face-to-face hardcore music scenes to nevertheless interact within the subculture” (Williams, 2003, p. 109). The internet was definitely a crucial tool for the k-pop music groups to reach their international fans. There is a hierarchy that exists between the Korean fans and the international fans. Social media plays a big part in the k-pop subculture, especially for the international fans. The international fans support their favorite k-pop groups virtually by watching music videos, voting on TV shows, buying/streaming songs and buying merchandise online. The Korean fans feel as though they are better due to the fact that they attend concerts and fan signs while international fans don't. The main difference between the Korean fans and international fans is the cultural values. This difference can be viewed when k-pop female music groups perform. For example, if they are wearing exposing clothes, Korean fans tend to bully the females by calling them names, such as “slut” or “whore”, while international fans see their performance as a form of empowerment. This can be indirectly related to international fans located in the United States. Since many music artists perform baring extremely revealing clothing and dance sexually, they are idolized by many American fans. So, when k-poppers from America view videos from k-pop music groups wearing similar clothing and similar dancing, it does not phase them nearly as much as the k-fans from South Korea.

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### Professional K-poppers

As aforementioned, social media plays a big part in k-poppers' subculture. There are some fans who create their own content centered around k-pop such as skits, memes, fashion and makeup videos, reaction videos, compilations, fan sites, cover songs and dances, blogs, and English subtitles sites for non-Korean fans. "Through virtual fandom, fans share K-pop-related information, pictures, video clips, and gossip; they get to know other fans and become friends; and they create their own online community bound by the same cultural preferences—for K-pop and, more generally, Hallyu. Facebook and YouTube play a constructive role in this fandom, providing popular means of communication" (Otmazgin & Lyan, 2013, p. 76). YouTube, a video-sharing site has a very big impact on k-poppers. Also, the most popular video on YouTube is a k-pop song called Gangnam Style sang by the k-pop artist, PSY. Some k-pop fans gain money from their created k-pop related content on YouTube and they mostly have a small following of their own. These k-pop fans are the fans who attend k-pop conventions and speak on panels. They can turn it from a hobby into a living.

### Fan Clubs

Due to the numerous number of Korean artists, fan clubs have different names and colors. "Fan clubs and fan club names help fans distinguish between other fans. In the world of Korean pop, a fan club generally comes with a name and a color to represent the fan club's own form of identity, and a personal connection to their fellow fans" (Lycaceni, 2015, p.1). The color of the fandom is incorporated in their merchandise, such as stationaries, socks or light sticks. Fan clubs also create a unique chant to uniformly chant while the Korean artists are performing. The chant is normally posted online by the Korean's artists company. Fans also have fan fights because they tend to argue online about who the better artists are. The fans of the older k-pop groups who have been in the k-pop community longer are more laid back, and try to inform the younger ones about the impact they have contributed to the "hallyu" wave. The fans who just joined the community are mostly immature, thinking they are better due to their newly introduced k-pop music groups' success.

### K-Conventions

K-conventions, also known as K-con, is an annual k-pop convention that started in Los Angeles, then expanded to other parts of America and Japan. This convention is a way for international fans to meet k-pop groups and the k-pop community that they have interacted with online through mini concerts and panels. "So much fan interaction in K-pop is virtual. Fans are crazy about it, but they never get a chance to touch it," Killoren said. Without personal ways to connect, American fans could lose enthusiasm" (Brown, 2014, p. 1). At k-con, different parts of the community and k-pop internet personalities such as k-pop cosplayers, k-pop cover dancers and singers, k-pop skit makers and k-pop artists come together. In addition, k-pop websites and app managements such as Soompi and Dramafever come to promote their apps or sell merchandise. There is an abundance of excitement for preparing for k-con alone, and some people fly in or rent hotels to plan meeting up with someone they've meet online. Most of the people who attend k-con cosplay go to view their favorite, or a k-pop member. K-con is always a three-day event that starts Friday afternoon and ends Sunday night. "On Sunday night, the finale of the annual KCON exhibition (a two-day music festival and three-day convention for all things K-Pop and South Korean pop culture held in and around downtown's L.A. Live), more than a half-dozen acts showed the range of the genre. The show affirmed K-Pop's place in the U.S. as a

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fully realized, many-faceted underground pop culture arena” (Brown, 2016, p.1). This k-pop tradition can be traced almost directly to subcultures like anime. These two subcultures share this idea almost exactly, from the preparation, to the activities performed at said conventions. Social media is the main inhibitor of these conventions. The preparation is key, because international fans gather in k-pop sites and blogs to discuss their ideas and plan to meet in the convention. Additionally, these conventions provide I-fans with limited opportunities to watch their favorite k-pop artists perform live.

### Appropriation (Koreaboos)

There is an abundance of appropriation in the k-pop subculture. There is appropriation done by k-pop music groups and there is also appropriation done by k-poppers. The k-pop music groups mostly appropriate black culture, which is very displeasing to international fans, but Korean fans are not affected by it because they don’t experience the negative consequences. Koreaboos are a certain grouping of k-poppers, especially non-Asian, who appropriate Korean culture by emulating their favorite k-pop music group members by dressing like them, saying Korean phrases they use, or trying to make their features like theirs. “Koreaboos have an intense fascination with South Korea (Korea), which compels them to take a greater interest in the country, its people and its customs. But there is one thing: the majority of a koreaboos knowledge is based on Korean pop culture in the form of K-pop, K-dramas and K-variety; and while these things do give us a glimpse into the Korean Zeitgeist, one must bear in mind that while popular culture reflects the wider issues a society faces, they are not always the best source of information” (Gaya, 2012). Koreaboos are looked down upon by the majority of the k-pop subculture because they obsess and appropriate Korean culture without understanding or appreciating it. In addition, Koreaboos find that they cannot freely express their opinions because the k-pop community disagrees.

### Gender Roles

The gender roles in k-pop are quite different from other’s music subcultures. Both Korean and international k-poppers do not pay attention to the femininity in the k-pop male music groups. K-pop male music groups use makeup when performing, such as eyeliner and foundation. This is very accepted in the k-pop culture, unlike American culture, where it is seen as “gay”. “Before K-pop exploded in the U.S., Asian men struggled to be noticed by the opposite sex. Women proved it by admitting in surveys that they were least attracted to Asian men out of all other races. That’s changing as young fans discover the aesthetic of polished idols. It helps that they’re candid via social media, openly awkward or silly, and much more intimate than the emotionally sterile male stereotype. It makes fans feel not so different from them, bonding them further to the stars they adore” (Bennett, 2016, p.1). The age of technology is a recurring idea, in that it became the vessel upon which k-pop grew. From the method in which k-pop music is streamed online, fans from around the world can view their favorite male or female k-pop stars. This spurs more female attention because they can view their idols whenever and wherever they please.

### Female K-pop Music Group Inferiority

The fact is, the k-popper subculture consists of mostly young female fans. The fans have a particular individual who they find attractive, or as a role model, and this person is regarded as “Bias”. Men are given more attention and special care because the female fans are attracted to

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them. According to a study in Sweden, “When it comes to sexual orientation, although the majority is heterosexual some fans of K-pop in Sweden are also LGBTQ (non-heterosexual), and there even seems to be a slight overrepresentation of the group among the fans” (Hübinette, 2012, p. 519). Most male k-pop fans are straight which is quite unexpected because k-poppers tend to be mainly females brought in by their attraction to the k-pop male groups. K-pop female groups are quite popular, but not as popular as the boys because some of fans have a certain jealousy toward them. This is because they can’t be like them so they direct hate towards them. Although this trend is mentioned to be prominent in k-pop, it is realistically present in almost every facet of media. Ranging from rap to hip-hop, female stars are often bashed because of their appearance, while male stars are idolized for their hip looks. Also, plastic surgery is a prominent issue in Korea, and most female k-pop music groups have gone under the knife. Along with that, they maintain ridiculous diets caused by the pressure to appear prettier and slimmer. “Women have always felt the pressure to look decorative or pleasing, but within pop and rock, when the star is the focus of a mass gaze, this expectation is increased tenfold. In the face of the pop orthodoxy that a woman is there first and foremost to look attractive, female artists have consistently had to negotiate the image issue” (2003, p. 1). Furthermore, when female k-pop girls come out with a sexy concept wearing very few clothes, they are bashed and receive a lot of hate from their so-called “fans”. On the contrary, if the k-pop male music groups have the same sexy concept, they are celebrated and sales ratings increase. This is a double standard in this music-based subculture. Nowadays, due to the “hallyu” wave, they don’t receive as much hate due to the international fan and some of Korean fans’ support. Girls Generation gave perhaps the best representation of K-pop’s coy, shiny values in keeping with a chaste night that satisfied demand, but not desire. “It was an inversion on the traditional American formula; in this country, young female singers are often more sexualized than their male counterparts.” (Caramanica, 2011, p.1). Contrary to popular beliefs, k-pop is not based on innocence alone, but sex appeal because sex appeal sells. Some fans tend to sexualize underage k-pop male and female artists and this is frowned upon because it is morally wrong.

### Saesangs

“Korean pop stars have their own special brand of stalker, called "saesang (pronounced 'say-seng')." These female groups go to extremes to enter the personal lives of the idols they adore, working closely together so they can achieve success. They are often seen hovering in the background of photos of pop idols, sometimes crammed up against the windows with their faces pressed to the glass in hopes of getting a glimpse of the stars” (Colette Bennett, personal communication, Oct. 24, 2012). Saesangs are mostly young Korean female fans. Saesangs are known for doing over-the-top things such as chasing k-pop music groups’ vehicles, which sometimes cause accidents, showing up at their private homes, crashing k-pop music groups’ weddings or personal ceremonies, breaking in and stealing personal items, etc. These so-called fans have no respect for boundaries and they can and will do everything they can to get to the k-pop music members. “One of the reasons why saesang activities are more common in South Korea and less so in Western countries is due to culture. Most Western societies take issues like privacy and personal space extremely seriously, and being a saesang will most surely get you arrested in many countries. It is understandable why saesang culture has flourished in South Korea, because the laws involving stalking and privacy, and also the punishment of minors, are very minimal” (Bennett, 2012). Most saesangs take pride in being a saesang, and they do not apologize for their wrongdoings. They continue to cause mayhem despite the warnings, because

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in their hands, they think will end up with the idol.

### Shipping

This section makes up a large portion of the k-pop subculture. Shipping is when fans of a fandom ship two k-pop music members together as a couple. There are no boundaries in shipping. For example, a k-pop male music group member can be shipped with a particular female music group member, with a random popular figure, with a male music member in the same group, or any k-pop music member regardless if they have met. This pairing is called OTPs (One True Pairings). The most famous type of shipping is the male-male shipping and it is very controversial in the k-pop fandom. “Most fans who aren’t into shipping just learn to tolerate or avoid it, but some take it very personally, claiming that it is ruining the fandom for them. In extreme cases, it causes people to leave a fandom entirely or even stop watching or reading something they used to like” (Wood, 2016, p. 1). Some fans ship just for fun, but there are some fans who take it too far with actual thoughts that the k-pop music groups are lesbians or gays without even knowing the truth. They make any interaction between members’ romantic, no matter what the real intention might be, thereby causing an awkward interaction between the said members, according to a k-pop critic website, *Seoulbeats*. Also, when the member gets an actual girlfriend, they get upset, sending hate to both the member and his or her significant other. They are regarded as “delulu fans”, meaning delusional fans. Some use this shipping and create fan fiction and fan art regarding it. In addition, fans write slash, which is genre of fan fiction about the same sex members, mainly male, having sexual relationship. Also, shipping and making pornographic art and writing sexual fan fiction of k-pop underage members is considered illegal. “The very first slash couple was none other than *Star Trek*’s own Kirk/Spock, and per slash critic Constance Penley, such fanfic dates to 1976” (Lee, p. 88). This slash writing is mostly done by international fans because homosexuality is not openly accepted in South Korea.

### Stereotypes

There are different stereotypes that people have about k-pop fans mostly because they don’t know or understand k-pop. The stereotypes listed below are predominately focused on international fans. Due to the presence of saesangs, k-pop fans are generalized as young female teenagers who are delusional and obsessed with Korean men, which is not true. They are normal teenagers that go to school and work, they have friends who don’t listen to k-pop and their conversations are not always centered around k-pop. K-pop fans do care about their academics, against contrary belief. Some fans do go overboard and slack off on their academics but that is mostly based on their personal poor time management. Liking k-pop is mostly a hobby, it is not the center of their lives. People tend think that k-pop fans only like k-pop music, but they do like other music genres like pop, rap or rock. People think k-pop fans want to move to Korea and marry Korean men or women, which is false. Due to these stereotypes, k-poppers tend to be timid of admitting they enjoy k-pop.

### Negative Effects of K-pop On K-poppers

K-pop has a lot of advantages, but it has negative effects as well. The main problem is how k-pop affects one’s academics. Some k-pop fans, instead of doing assignments or preparing for exams, spend too much time listening to k-pop and checking k-pop media, causing their grades to suffer. Furthermore, this can lead to a rift between k-pop fans and his/her parents. Also, some fans tend to have conflicted relationships with their parents if they do not give them money

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to buy k-pop merchandise or tickets to a k-pop convention or concert. Some k-pop fans tend to have no social life. Although, it can help people interact; some k-poppers just stay at home, having only virtual friends without feeling the need to make physical friends. They don't do any extracurricular activities or go out with friends, deteriorating their mental and physical health. K-poppers tend to suffer health problems such as eye diseases such as eye strains caused by watching too many videos. Additionally, they tend to have asthenia which is a result of poor physical health that causes lack of energy and/or abnormal physical weakness. Other health problems they tend to have is insomnia caused by watching too much movies, and procrastination causing lack of sleep or bad sleep schedules. Some k-pop fans who have low self-esteem tend to slip into depression when they realize they are likely not going to meet or date their favorite k-pop music idols. Also, female k-poppers have more self-esteem issues by comparing themselves to k-pop female artists who tend to be skinny, pale, beautiful, tall and have clear skin. As a result of that, teenagers become too obsessed with how they look even looking at plastic surgery as it is positively looked upon in Korea. Teenagers want to be "Ulzzangs", which is a South-Korean term for good looking people. According to Wang, "Almost every K-pop star has gone through cosmetic surgeries from the minor double-eyelid operation, V-shape chin shaving, to skin and body shape fixing. Like a living billboard, K-pop culture fuels the public pursuit of perfection" (Wang, 2015, p. 41). Teenagers can begin dieting in order to become skinny so they resemble their idols, thus leading to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Some k-pop fans get quite obsessed with male idols they like, causing them to lose their sense of reality, becoming delusional. Lastly, they tend to fetishize Asians, especially Koreans wanting to get involved in Korean culture for superficial reasons and they forget or push their own culture aside. They tend have superficial views of how Korea is based on what they see on K-dramas and K-TV shows.

### Discussion and Analysis

Throughout our research on k-pop followers and background, we discovered many patterns and trends. While conducting our survey, we encountered results that proved our research and went against it. Specifically, some findings that proved our research were based on the demographics of k-poppers and how they classify themselves in the k-pop fan hierarchy. For the most part, this aspect of the survey remained true, meaning that the research has support. In reference to the certain aspects of the survey that did not prove our research, it mainly surrounded the idea of how k-poppers were introduced into the fandom. Ranging from being introduced by a friend to online sources, our results were varied. However, for most subcultures, being introduced by a friend is so common because you want to share similar interests with them. K-pop first became popular in the early 1990's, when social media and online activities were not as popular as they are now. This indicates that one of the modern main methods of communication between k-pop fans is by online sources, which supported the international trend. Additionally, this technology trend created the spread of k-pop internationally by allowing people from around the globe to connect with each other.

In our findings, we discovered our survey results correlated with our previous research. The Asian females interviewed that are between the age of 20 and 24 answered that they know what K-pop is. Although the method of introduction differed, some were introduced by k-media but most of them were introduced to it in their teenage years by their female friends who listen to K-pop. However, most of their friends have refrained from listening to it currently. In other research, we found, a prominent aspect of K-pop was the Korean Wave, which consists of all K-media. In our survey, we asked who has viewed any K-media besides K-pop. Most Asians did not view any K-drama or TV shows, which goes against our initial research, which showed that many K-pop followers were also involved with K-media in some fashion. As expected, most females that listen to K-pop are in their teen years because it was something they were exposed to it, however, after some years, they grow out of it.

Also, some young teen Asian fans who live abroad tend to be avid fans of K-pop. They were initially introduced to K-pop by their friends. Many survey results showed that females were introduced to K-pop by other friends. Naturally, people join subcultures due to what their friends are interested in. Additionally, an interesting aspect of the survey results was that our female interviewees' friends were females as well. This supports our research, in the fact that that most K-pop listeners are younger females. They also tend to watch K-dramas and regularly visit K-pop blogs online.

Per our survey, female teens tend to have only favorite male K-pop groups by watching music videos on the internet, and this backs up our literature review which stated that boy groups get more recognition than girl groups. The male groups can be more popular since they are idolized more often and looked to as "attractive" by the younger female fan base. They tend to attract more active K-poppers which tend to attend live concerts and own merchandise and CDs. While non-active K-poppers just listen to the music without being bothered to attend concerts or go the extra mile. These active vs. non-active fans are also referenced in our previous research, in terms of K-fans and I-Fans, respectively.

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Some of the older Asian women between the age of 31 and 35 listen to K-pop quite regularly and they are mostly Korean. Interestingly, they were introduced to K-pop by watching K-media, specifically K-dramas, at a very young age. As expected, they did attend K-pop concerts with their female friends. Per our previous research, a main difference of K-fans and I-fans was their ability to attend live concerts, so this correlated directly with our research. A finding that we didn't expect is that the older Korean women to be exact didn't stop listening to K-pop regardless of how older they got. This is due to the fact that mainly younger females, specifically in the teenage years, listen to k-pop.

The African-Americans who participated in the survey between the age of 14-30 mostly didn't have a clue about K-pop. Most of them seem very dumbfounded. At first, they heard the word "k-pop", they were curious but after the answering the survey, there wasn't a second thought about it. 1 in 4 of these males had a friend who knew about K-pop but that didn't have any influence on him. This backs what the literature review states, although, it is not only Korean teen females who know k-pop, it is mostly them that associate with it the most. It was also the same result for the African-American females between the age of 14-35, except for one who got introduced to K-pop by a female friend she met in her teen years. She barely listens to it now, mostly because she got more interested by watching music videos on the internet. As we mentioned earlier in our literature review, the internet is a very effective way for international fans to enjoy and listen to k-pop regardless of where they are.

The Caucasians who answered the survey were between the age of 14-19. They didn't know what k-pop is, like the African- Americans. Something recurring which was noticed is that the female Caucasian that did not listen to K-pop, has a female friend who does. Although, the female having female friends who listen to K-pop are not prompted to do the same or become curious. This is a finding that is unexpected because in the earlier days, a lot of people were influenced by friends to listen to k-pop but now, most of them just get introduced to k-pop online through blogs or music videos. This transition of methods can be blamed on the age of technology, unlike the past, when communication was more tedious.

We speculate that the number of people who know about k-pop who are in international countries are 2 in 10 people but findings proved that it is 1 in 10 people. This is an important finding that relates to the findings of other studies. According to Ryoo, "South Korean television shows and movies portray themes that Asian audiences can relate to more easily than those of Western entertainment because Korean dramas typically deal with family issues, love and filial piety in an age of changing technology, and often reinforces traditional values of Confucianism" (Ryoo, 2007, p. 140). K-pop is more popular in Asian countries than in international countries because of the similar cultures and views which makes it easier for Asians to be assimilated to k-pop. Also, k-pop was originated in South Korea, and the spread of k-pop began with the neighboring Asian countries, followed by internationally. The Korean Wave is the reason behind this, the spread of Korean culture.

An additional study that could be explored can be concentrated on the states or countries where k-poppers can be found in higher quantities than others. For example, there could be more k-poppers in Los Angeles than in Texas due to the difference in exposure to media and cultural views. More specifically, in Los Angeles, the number of people in the state that are connected to some form of social media is greater than in Texas because of the more urban population throughout the state. A study can revolve around that and the reasons why those regions are more

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filled with k-poppers than in other regions. Additionally, this spin off study could pinpoint how far k-pop has reached, not including the countries that have already been identified.

## Conclusion

From the introduction of k-pop in 1992 by Seo Taiji and Boys, it has grown into a surprisingly well known music genre and subculture. However, the k-popper subculture was mainly only based in South Korea along with the majority of any k-pop listeners. It took the Korean Wave to take k-pop to new heights. The Korean Wave was responsible for carrying k-media, including k-pop k-dramas, and TV shows throughout Asian countries and internationally. The Korean Wave played a prominent role in the k-pop subculture because it was the reason behind why so many people have had access to it. Our research on the Korean Wave and how k-pop began was one in the same. Focusing on the beginnings of k-pop was important throughout our literature review and survey questionnaire because it shaped how it is received today.

K-pop has many similarities and differences to other subcultures such as hip-hop and anime, especially with how they connect with their fans. Social media plays a prominent role in the spreading of news and information about the respective music groups. Online blogs and sources are flooded with information about the next tours, and who are the trending artists. However, they ultimately differ through the concentration of fans and loyalty. Similarly, anime followers rely on internet sources to communicate and share favorite ideas. Conversely, hip-hop fans do not rely on internet sources to communicate as heavily as k-pop and anime fans do. This conclusion can be traced to our literature review, where we explained how k-poppers are not always concentrated in certain areas. These online interactions correlate with the annual k-conventions, held in Japan and the United States. Throughout the months leading up to the conventions, k-pop fans gather online to share what they expect and plan to meet their online friends. Similar to anime, this action is very successful and leads to a worthwhile time. Anime and k-pop fans experience separation because their fans are not as concentrated as hip-hop fans in the U.S.

K-pop fans have a unique hierarchy, unlike many different music subcultures. On one side of the spectrum, there are the K-fans. This group of fans consist of the fans concentrated in South Korea, the birthplace of k-pop. K-fans pride themselves in the fact that they seem the most loyal to their k-pop music group idols, by attending live shows, purchasing merchandise, and meeting their idols. In addition, there is tension between the k-fans and I-fans, because k-fans do not see eye to eye with I-fans about their form of support. I-fans make up the group of fans that reside any place other than South Korea. Unlike k-fans, I-fans do not show their support by attending live shows because they often do not have access to them. Instead, they show their support online, which often attracts criticism by k-fans, because their comments are seen as disrespectful. This is due to many cultural differences between k-fans and I-fans, and also adds to the diversity of the k-pop subculture.

The main importance of researching k-poppers is to help people gain an understanding about the uniqueness of k-poppers. Specifically, its effectiveness of joining people with different personalities, but similar interests. K-poppers have a reputation of generally being more open minded, so it helps with the language barrier between k-pop and the international fans that listen. K-pop does not revolve around only the music. For example, k-poppers also dedicate their time learning dances from their favorite groups. This action is like other music genres, such as hip-hop. In addition, k-poppers can make their living by using their artistic skills to create k-pop

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merchandise for k-pop groups. Through mostly online sources, k-poppers gather to share common interests and ideas, which creates a friendlier environment.

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## Appendix

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Title of Research: What factors caused K-pop to be so prominent internationally?

**Consent Form**

You are invited to take part in a research survey about K-pop's international popularity. Your participation will require approximately 15 minutes' maximum. We are conducting this k-pop survey to essentially gather information about the background of k-pop listeners. By doing so, we can relate our research to this by comparing and contrasting our real-world data with data found online. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this survey. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to be in the study you can withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with anyone at Temple University. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and digital data will be stored in secure computer files after it is entered. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified. If you have questions or want a copy or summary of this study's results, you can contact the researchers at the email address above. If you have any questions about whether you have been treated in an illegal or unethical way, contact the Temple Institutional Research Board chair, Monsurat Otolorin at 210-932-4000 or tug53471@temple.edu

**Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:**

Completing this survey indicates that you are 18 years of age or older and indicates your consent to participate in the research.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

**Research Subject's Guardian's Consent to Participate in Research:**

If you are below 18 years of age, you will need parental consent.

Printed Name of Subject's Guardian

Signature of Subject's Guardian

Date

Survey Questions

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Survey Goal: We are conducting this k-pop survey to essentially gather information about the background of k-pop listeners. By doing so, we can relate our research to this by comparing and contrasting our real-world data with data found online.

Instruction: Please mark your answer with a check mark.

1. Do you know what k-pop is?
  - Yes
  - No
2. Do you listen to k-pop?
  - Yes
  - No
3. How frequently do you listen to k-pop?
  - Everyday
  - Once per week
  - Other: Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - Don't know
  - Doesn't apply
4. How old are you?
  - 14-19
  - 20-24
  - 25-30
  - 31-35
5. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
6. What is your nationality?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - Prefer not to answer
7. When were you introduced to k-pop?
  - In this year
  - In the last 5 years
  - In the last 10 years
  - No answer
  - Doesn't apply
8. How were you introduced into k-pop?
  - Through a friend
  - Through internet
  - Through k-media
  - Other: Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - No answer
  - Doesn't apply
9. Do you know anyone who listens to k-pop?
  - Yes
  - No
10. If so, what is their gender?

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- Male
  - Female
11. Are they virtual or physical?
- Virtual
  - Physical
  - No answer
12. Do you have a favorite male k-pop group/fan club?
- Yes, please specify-
- 
- No
  - Does not apply
13. Do you have a favorite female k-pop group/fan club?
- Yes, please specify-
- 
- No
  - Does not apply
14. Do you have a favorite k-pop solo artist?
- Yes, please specify-
- 
- No
  - Does not apply
15. Do you have a favorite male k-pop group bias?
- Yes, please specify-
- 
- No
  - Does not apply
16. Do you have a favorite female k-pop group bias?
- Yes, please specify-
- 
- No
  - Does not apply
17. Do you have a favorite k-pop song?
- Yes, please specify-
- 
- No
  - Does not apply
18. Do you own any k-pop CD's?
- Yes
  - No
19. Do you have any k-pop merchandise?
- Yes
  - No
20. Have you ever been to a live concert?
- Yes
  - No
21. Have you attended a meet and greet?

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- Yes
  - No
22. Aside from k-pop, do you view any K-media? (k-dramas & k-TV shows)
- Yes
  - No
23. How frequently do you view it?
- Everyday
  - Once per week
  - Other: Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - Don't know
  - Does not apply
24. Do you check any k-pop blogs or k-pop *Tumblr* blogs?
- Yes
  - No
25. And if so, how frequently do you visit these sites?
- Everyday
  - Once per week
  - Other: Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - Don't know
  - Does not apply
26. What made you interested in k-pop?
- Music videos
  - TV
  - Other: Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - No answer
  - Does not apply

What did you think about the survey?

If you have questions or concerns relating to the survey, please contact: Monsurat Otolorin at 210-932-4000 or [tug53471@temple.edu](mailto:tug53471@temple.edu).

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Thank you for completing the survey.