

Through Branding and Fan Engagement Strategies: An Analysis of How K-pop Entertainment Companies Influence Consumer Loyalty and Purchasing Behavior

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Abstract:

The present paper examines the way K-pop entertainment firms have constructed themselves into reputable brands and developed close connections with their fans. It further looks at how artist groups employ various forms of narration to help them win the sympathies of the fans and ensure the group has a long term patronage. Moreover, the strategies of fan engagement, online and offline both, associated with the fan community app, one-on-one chats, fan-meetings, concerts and fan sign events are described in the paper. The analysis associates such strategies with consumer loyalty relying on some simple psychology concepts such as emotional attachment, identity, and repeat purchase. The number of fans who expend a lot of money on events is numerous as they believe they are very close to their idols or they miss something at each successive event. Some recommendations are offered at the end of the paper on how entertainment companies can achieve long-term and stable fan loyalty through launching more low-cost yet engaging activities, as well as attracting new fans. The study is based on the recent works in K-pop marketing and marketing psychology, and online interaction. The results show that strong brand trust, emotion connection, and engaging experiences help to explain why fans continue to support K-pop groups for many years.

Keywords: K-pop fandom; Brand trust; Fan engagement; Emotional attachment; Consumer loyalty.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the South Korean pop music industry, also known as K-pop has developed into a huge global industry. It has changed from a not well-known domestic Korean music and entertainment culture into a trendsetting culture that holds a place in the global entertainment place [1,2]. K-pop groups attract fans from all over the world. Fans love K-pop not only because of the music itself, but also for the images of idols and the stories behind them which are created by the entertainment companies. Among the various entertainment companies, JYP, SM, and HYBE are relatively representative. They did a great job in creating idol groups and building strong fan communities. These companies are committed to building brands which can be trusted by fans. Fans spend money on albums, merchandise, fan meeting, and paid online platforms to get any chances that can allow them to have connection with their idols, or even just for entertainment. This purchase behavior reflects a high level of fan loyalty to the brand [3,4].

In the K-pop industry, brand trust is very important. Fans will only buy products or attend paid activities if they trust the idol group and the company. When companies treat fans fairly and provide worth services, fans' trust will increase. Besides, if idols show their genuine effort and authentic stories during activity period, the trust between idols and fans can also be enhanced. For example, groups such as BTS, Stray Kids share about the experience of making music and sharing the hard times of their growing up story with their fans. Fans will have a real sense of, therefore becoming more loyal and engaged.

Story is one of what form a brand. Narrative means the entire story of an artist group. Some focus on the making of music themselves, and mostly together with the difficulties that were faced when creating it, some focus more on the concept, for example, a girl group from SM Entertainment, Red Velvet, their concept is that the members are messengers of God, and they can get Gods guidance through a special language. Besides, narrative can also include behind-the-scenes like artists' daily lives, practice clips. These stories could capture fans' attention and create a closer bond between artist groups and fans. Psychologically, it is more likely to enhance the attachment of emotion in psychology. Fans always think their idols are "heroes", friends or family, so they will continue to support the group. Research shows this kind of psychological mechanism helps the fans build a strong identification and social connection, which helps fans to support the group better. Also, from social identity theory, fans can gain happiness, a feeling of self-respect and a sense of belonging to the group because of fans' activities and interaction with their artist group [5-7].

In addition, the innovation of digital fan community plat-

forms and paid chat apps such as Weverse and Bubble have enabled fans to have a closer experience of connecting with their idols and other fans. These tools support one-on-one communication and direct interaction with idols. And in person fan events such as concerts, fan meetings and fan signs could also be used for building bonds. Fans often identify with and have a sense of belonging with other fans, which increases the loyalty of the group. From the research digital innovation and emotions connected with social connection helps to increase the satisfaction and keep the loyalty of fans.

All in all, this paper mainly talks about how the entertainment companies build their brands of trustworthiness, and how brands of trustworthiness affect fans' loyalty. And analysis of some important strategies for fan engagement, how they can affect emotional bond, repurchase rate and long-term relationship with the brand. Finally, the paper will give some doable tips for forming more stable and loyal fan groups.

2. Brand Construction and Fan Engagement in K-pop

2.1 Mechanisms of Brand Trust in K-pop Entertainment Companies

Entertainment companies use various ways to build brands that could be trusted by fans. First, they make high quality content. From comeback album's design, concept, and music production, the editing techniques and subtitles of behind-the-scenes footage, and the song arrangements and stage design for concerts, all these need to be carefully crafted. When fans saw the excellent work, they will naturally develop trust in the group and the company.

Second, companies use multiple and reliable methods of artist's information publication. They deliver clear and consistent updates on artists through social media, videos, and news reports. Fans know what to expect and they will not see any negative news about the artists, which could also build trust.

Third, companies promote two-way communication. They use platforms like Weverse and other social media to interact with fans, including live streams, digital postings, and one-on-one chats, making fans feel heard and engaged. When fans feel valued, their trust and loyalty will increase. Research about fan engagement shows that digital innovation and interactive experience can increase fan satisfaction and loyalty, making them feel like they are part of this shared community instead of just passive consumers [5-7].

Fourth, trust comes from a transparent storytelling way. Besides artist's performances on stage, fans are more willing to see behind-the-scenes contents, as they do not see

their idols very often and therefore they care about these things. Those companies who frequently share artist's practice routines and daily practice scenes are more likely to build trust with fans. When fans see their idol's hard work and sincerity, they will respect and trust them more. Fifth, companies build trusts by protecting both idols and fans. When companies can respond to crises quickly, handle public relations effectively, and care for their artists, fans will feel stable and appreciate what the company did. This helps maintain long-term loyalty.

Finally, fans will also gather together to form fan groups. These fan groups always have some social interactions and they are discussing their idol. Also, many fans will make friends right inside those groups. Some of the more experienced fans in the group will even be able to make direct contact with companies and cooperate with the companies to organize promotional activities for their idols. If trust has been built in the community, then the fans will pass their trust on to the idol group and the company. Research on k-pop fans' loyalty shows that such social norms and group identity would help increase fans' loyalty over time [3,6].

2.2 Artist Group Branding Strategy

Artist branding is an entertainment company strategy that promotes artists and keeps fans loyal. Different artist groups use different brand strategies. Some, like Stray Kids, BTS create their own music and advocate for creative freedom. If they're not well-known, people still think of them as the actual them. Other groups might also have a very touching story, for example, the experience of working hard to train, or personal difficulties, etc. These stories can connect with fans and enhance the fans' connection. That is, sometimes companies even need to exaggerate some difficulties to gain sympathy from fans.

From a psychological standpoint, it will produce parasocial relationships through emotional narration. Parasocial relationship is a one-way emotional bond which allows the fan to create a personal bond with a public figure who is not aware of the existence of the fan. This kind of bond can enhance the loyalty of fans to the artist to help artists for economic and social benefit. Sometimes the company will share with the artists' struggle stories and documentary clips so as to create a more intimate bond of emotion. This can trigger fans' sympathy and affection, enhancing their desire to support their idols. Such as some groups that show they have trained hard, low point, or injuries, or express their own feelings, often very popular with fans. Those tales make fans able to watch their idols not only as artists but as persons with actual emotions and aspirations. This emotional connection will boost continuous fan par-

ticipation [4,7].

Social identity theory can also account for why it is that fans always end up being so close to artists. Fans are going to tend to merge the identity of the artist with their own. If fans feel as though they were a part of the group's story then they will create a group identity and this is able to improve the amount of people that feel loyal and connected to the group [3,4,8].

In other words, an artist brand is not only music and visuals. It is more important to tell the stories that will make the fans resonate, make them engaged and stay with them forever.

2.3 Platform Branding

Platform branding is when entertainment companies use their own self-developed online communication platform to create fans' perception and interaction of the brand. Weverse, Bubble, Tik Tok, V Live platform for maintaining the fan engagement. These special points are that they allow fans to interact directly and frequently with artists. Weverse is a more developed fan community. Fans can follow official information, get notifications and buy goods here, and they can also be part of the club. And in the membership, fans can get artist posts and interact with the artists that promote the fans' community. Bubble can make fans get information as if they are chatting with their idols individually, which makes the fans feel close to and noticed by the idols. Also, companies take advantage of these pages to give out special stuff, stuff like behind the scenes that just people who buy the ticket or the membership can see, and also first listens of songs. Fans will feel satisfied when they get the exclusive content and this could make their link to the brand stronger.

And fan activities, fan vote, release special events, and so on. The fans can engage with the fans created content or any promotional activities which are held by the company on the platform. And they can also vote on the posts by the company on the platform to decide which content they want to see. As per research, trust and loyalty that fans have in a group will impact the frequency a fan will partake in the spontaneous activities, this then enhances a fan's perception of their idol's worth and their financial investment [9]. And the platform could also give companies fan information, which would let companies have better targeted marketing direction and meet fans' demands better. More personalized marketing can make fans feel more special [2,9].

In short, to make fans be loyal to the platform brand is the important part that a platform branding can give fans a space with them, and it will make them feel involved, appreciated, and related.

3. Fan Engagement Strategies

3.1 Digital

With the development of the internet, K-pop companies are increasingly utilizing digital strategies to interact with fans online. They open official accounts on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, releasing music videos, trailers, and behind-the-scenes on it. Fans can leave comments and share these contents, thus help the company maintain fan activity and engagement [7,10].

Besides, paid platforms are also widely used. Platforms like Bubble and Weverse provide exclusive content or one-on-one messaging services with artists. Fans pay for these to get closer to their idols, which enhances fans participation and emotional attachment. The mature communities on these platforms can also help fans connect with each other. Fans share same identities and rules, which can enhance loyalty. Online connections often expanded to offline activities, such as fan club gathering or artist birthday celebrations at cafes.

3.2 Offline

In the K-pop economy, offline events actually take the major part of the whole branding ways, far exceeding online interaction. Offline events typically include concerts, showcases, and fan meetings. These events let fans have chance to see their idols perform live, creating deeper emotional memories [5,8].

Fan meeting is generally smaller-scale events where fans can chat with their idols, play games together, and get up close. At the same time, idols may also perform their songs in, which are only for fan meeting performance. These “special” events are more likely to build strong parasocial relationships and emotional bonds. Fans feel a personalized connection when they see their idols in person.

Showcase is an activity for introducing a new album concept and music to fans. And this kind of event usually requires fans to buy an album and then join in a lottery system. Also, showcase usually have many welfare that are not usually on regular events like reverse support (artists or company giving fan(s) gifts or food for attending showcase), autograph item(s), small fan meeting(s). These events can inspire fans' excitement and raise the fans' power of purchase.

Secondly, offline events, as fans with the same artist are highly concentrated, it is easier for them to find common topics and even make friends. This allows fans to have a sense of belonging to the group, and also strengthens the loyalty and sense of belonging of the fans to the group.

3.3 High-Cost and High-Profit Activities

Like regular offline activities and in the K-pop economy, fan meets, world tour events and so on are high-profit, high-cost events. These two types of events have become the main source of income for most entertainment companies gradually. Fans have to pay for tickets, and air tickets, and merchandise for these events. Some fans go as far as to spend a lot of money on such experiences.

Fan sign events give fans the opportunity to meet their idols face-to-face and talk to them. Such format is extremely easy to disrupt the parasocial relationship, giving people who watch the display an idol on the stage is just someone in the real world. Talking about fan sign events, there is also a group of fans which have to be introduced: “self-shipper”. This means as soon as they are in love with the idol, they imagine him/her to be their partner or lover. They try to build some kind of romantic or platonic relationship with that idol just to get a bit of joy, comfort or leave reality for a while. This group will spend a large amount of money participating in fan sign events because the format of this activity is becoming more and more addictive to them and they cannot break away from their idols. Thus, they are more prone to going to every single fan signing event. A staff member that is selling fan sign events slots, she calculated that one of her customers spends around \$90,000 USD per year on fan sign events. Besides the face-to-face chat, entertainment companies also provide one-on-one Polaroid photos, “one-day store manager”, etc., to attract fans to spend more money and establish a stronger emotional connection with the idols. And these are perfect for fans, so what is fan loyalty.

World tours are another way to generate huge profits. A year after a group's debut, entertainment companies will plan world tour for the group and many companies targeting the North American and Europe markets for their high profits. For example, Stray Kids concluded their “Dominate” world tour in October 19th, 2025. In this tour, they hold 54 shows worldwide, selling approximately 2.15 million tickets and generating about \$260 million in revenue. World tours not only bring in huge profits but also expand the group's influence and allow fan in different countries to participate in [11].

While these activities have high-cost, they generate huge profits for the entertainment companies and artists and provide emotional value for fans [2].

4. Impact on Consumer Loyalty

The loyalty of K-pop fans integrates many factors including emotional attachment, repeated purchases, group identity, and long-term connection. These psychological factors help to explain why fans can support their idols for so long. Many fans see their idols as imaginary friends

or partners, which is related to parasocial attachment in psychology. Fans always think that their idol plays an important role in their personal lives, making it impossible for them to stop supporting their idols.

4.1 Emotional Attachment

Many fans have deep emotional attachments to their idols. They watch every music video, buy every album, and attend various events actively. The formation of this emotional attachment comes from fans' understand and support to their idols. Psychological research shows that a strong emotional bond can enhance fan loyalty and happiness. Fans choose idols as a source of comfort, identity, and belonging. They may regard their idols as ideal partners or companions, even if it is one-sided. This parasocial mechanism is an important factor to increase fan loyalty. Fans often say, "I stay and continue support because of the emotional bond." It is these emotional bonds that make fans support their idols time and time again [3,4,9].

4.2 Repetitive Purchasing

K-pop fans often repurchase albums, merchandise and digital products, and gradually they start a habit of doing it. Since each comeback has different album concepts and design, also companies release lots of special editions like vinyl records, digital versions, gift versions etc. All of the design makes lots of fans. Also, some companies would create cartoon characters for their own artist group. This makes the fans want to purchase more. The fans want to own such an item to be part of the identity and fandom. Each purchase makes the fans more economically and emotionally invested in the fandom. The more fans invest in purchase, the more accountable they feel for continuing to support their idols. And the cycle of purchase styles and loyalty are also proven by the research in the field of marketing and psychology. They also state that repetitive actions strengthen long-time consumption.

4.3 Identity and Belonging

Fans often join communities with shared interests. Those groups can make the fans have a sense of identity and belonging, so they will think that they are part of a larger group. The psychology theories such as social identity theory explain that the group identity will increase loyalty. Fans feel a sense of belonging to their idol and other fans. And this shared identity makes for loyalty, as the fans wish to hold on to their group membership and status. Many of them have already found that K-pop fandoms have increased fans' happiness, self-esteem, and sense of social belonging, and this makes them more loyal to the group and identities [1,3,5].

4.4 Long-Term Connection

Some fans, after forming a strong emotional bond with their idols, will be unable to stop supporting them. For most fans, the first time they go to the fan sign event or the hi-touch event will leave them something to remember in their minds and creates a lot of emotion. Fans will feel that if they do not attend these events, then they would not be able to connect with their idols anymore, or that their idols will forget them. This long-term association keeps fans enthusiastic when they are tired of consumers.

5. Suggestions

K-pop entertainment companies rely heavily on intensive income marketing strategies. Fans often spend a lot to get close experiences like one-on-one chats, fan sign events, hi-touch, and front-row seats at concerts. While these events can bring huge profits and build fan loyalty, they can also bring a financial burden on fans, whether they are fans who participate in these events for a long-term or those who are unable to afford them. To keep fan groups stable and loyal, companies can adjust their marketing strategies slightly.

First, companies can try to providing more low-cost fan activities. These could include more frequent live streams, community challenges or social media events which allow fans to participate without purchasing expensive tickets or products. Thus, fans can feel the connection with companies and artists without inputting high costs. At the same time, these free events have the potential to attract viewers who are not fans, thus drawing potential new fans.

Second, companies should design different event experiences for fans at different spending levels. This action can let all fans feel valued. For example, free online Q&A events with artists can make more fans feel the connection to artists, while for fans who spend more on events, companies should provide them with more premium interactive event options.

Third, companies can focus on build fan communities and shared identity experiences. When fans feel like they are part of a community, their loyalty last longer. Companies hold events like art competitions, secondary creation activities, live streams, which can let more fans engaged in and it is also helpful for both companies and artist groups. Fourth, companies should pay attention to the emotional well-being of their fans. If they continuously launching high-cost events, it may lead to fan fatigue, even for fans who has a strong economic foundation. Companies should balance their business goals with fan care to ensure the long-term fan loyalty.

Last but not least, companies should learn some psychology research results to understand fans well. Also, they can integrate the psychological research into their marketing

strategies. In this way, companies can create emotional value without exploiting consumers. For example, companies can find proper and sustainable ways to enhancing parasocial experiences, thus cultivate long-term customer loyalty.

6. Conclusion

The current paper looks into how k-pop entertainment firms make trustworthy firm brands, artist brands, and platform brands. And how the fan engagement strategies that companies use impact long term loyalty from consumers. Messages are faithful to quality content and open stories will create trust. Narratives help create an emotional bond and identity of the consumer, which studies in psychology show is crucial to loyalty. Both online and offline fan engagement tactics allow fans to interact with their idols and other fans. Emotional connections of fans group/group identity, and group loyalty all get enhanced via repeated purchase behaviors and attendances.

To improve, the business needs to look into changing their plans to add more low cost, but high engagement events that build up long-term loyalty for the fans and do not ask too much of them. It is a good way so that companies are able to use psychological understanding along with some proper marketing tactics that create more enduring and stable fans' communities.

In general, powerful emotional commitments and a feeling of a sense of community as well as recurring interactions are major causes for K -pop fans to be loyal. Entertainment companies that are able to juggle between the goal of making profits and giving enjoyment to the fans will be more likely to retain its fan base.

Despite these findings, this study still has several limitations. First, the analysis is mainly based on existing resources, and the examples are selected from the K-pop industry. So this may limit the generalizability of the conclusions to other cultural or entertainment fields. Second, this paper does not include data such as fan surveys or interviews, which may not provide deeper insights into fan perceptions and behaviors. Besides, the differences among fan groups, including generation and cultural variations, are not fully discussed in this paper. In future research, these limitations could be addressed by employing empirical methods and expanding the range to other entertainment industries or global fandoms.

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