



Marketing Communication Success Through Fandom Activities in the Music Industry K-Pop Fandom Case Study

Susi Yunarti¹, Wijayanti¹, Dian Harmaningsih¹

¹Persada Indonesia University, Y.A.I, Indonesia

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Abstract

As is known, the Korean wave, which has gone global along with a widespread fandom community, has developed and actively participated, playing a key role in advancing the Korean music industry in the form of K-pop. It is a social dynamic by which one community can influence an entire industry. This article aims to explain how K-pop fandom activity is a part of the marketing mix that contributes to the success of music production. The activity of the community, initially, was just for communication and information sharing, and it evolved into a marketing communication process. We collect data from both written materials exposed through news and information media, such as Kompasiana.com and Koreaboo.com, as well as scientific writings in accredited Open Journal System and Web of Science databases, with a focus on the last five years (2020-2024). Numerous articles have examined the development and success of K-pop, fandom activities, and music album sales. Meanwhile, the data collected through interviews utilizes the results of interviews with a third-party service, QuestionAI. 2021. For data analysis, we categorize and reduce the data before conducting thematic analysis. Get resource triangulation by literature study. The research results show that fandom activity serves as a form of marketing communication. In this case, K-pop fandom is not only the target of marketing but also an active promoter of album sales. Suitable to the theory of "participatory culture" by Jenkins, complete with the theory of marketing strategy as explained by Kotler and Armstrong. Fandom has played a significant role in fostering parasocial relationships between fans and K-pop idol members. Fandom activities serve as a successful marketing communication tool to promote and increase album sales.

Keywords: *Marketing Communication; K-Pop fandom; Music industry; Album sales*

INTRODUCTION

One of the wonders of South Korea, often referred to as the ginseng country, is its ability to drive its music industry forward despite various obstacles, establishing a strong presence in the international arena. This achievement is supported by multiple parties: the government through its policies, local communities with their strong attachment to artists, and the international audience influenced by the global spread of the Korean wave. These factors have fostered a widespread fan community that actively participates in and significantly contributes to the advancement of the Korean music industry, particularly in the form of K-pop.

A notable outcome of this phenomenon is the resurgence of physical CD album sales, despite the dominance of the digital era, which has transformed mass media consumption in almost every aspect of daily life. Promoting and convincing fans to purchase physical albums requires substantial effort. Since the emergence of streaming applications, CD sales have declined significantly, as fans prefer convenient and more affordable access to the same music online.

However, according to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), the Gold and Platinum certification program, which tracks and recognizes sales and streaming achievements, recorded remarkable growth. In 2021, unit sales increased by 47 percent, and CD sales revenue rose by 21 percent. Specifically for K Pop, more than 54.5 million CDs were sold worldwide in the first 50 weeks of 2021, with total sales for the year estimated at approximately 60 million copies. Specific music genres, such as K Pop, continue to drive physical media sales. One reason artists still

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Corresponding author's email: susi.yunarti@upi-yai.ac.id

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release CDs is that fans consider them souvenirs, a way to support their favorite artists while owning a keepsake. This is especially true in Asia, where J-Pop and K-Pop acts sell millions of CDs. BTS exemplifies this phenomenon, although their level of success is difficult to replicate. Fans value tangible objects, complete with album art, and the sense of ownership they provide. Moreover, many believe their money directly supports the artist rather than large companies ([Owsinski, 2022](#)).

Beyond Asia, which remains K-pop's primary market, Europe and the Americas have also experienced rapid sales growth, signaling significant market shifts. Album product exports reached 388.9 billion won, an increase of 31.4 percent, a 7.6-fold growth from 51.3 billion won in 2017. Exports surpassed 100 billion won in 2019 and 300 billion won in 2022, demonstrating rapid expansion. This reflects K Pop's significant contribution to boosting global album sales. According to Forbes, as of March 27, 2023, local time, 19 of the top 20 albums on the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) Global Album Sales Chart were by K Pop artists. Seventeen's album FML ranked first with 6.4 million copies sold, followed by Stray Kids with 5 Star and NCT Dream with ISTJ ([Korea.net, 2024](#)).

Physical album sales continue to be a crucial indicator of creative success in K-pop, whether for groups or solo artists, alongside digital access through social media and streaming platforms. Combined CD sales, viewer counts, and subscriber numbers determine chart rankings not only in Korea but also in the United States and Europe. For instance, on August 3, 2024, the Billboard Artist 100 chart, Stray Kids and BTS's Jimin ranked at numbers 1 and 2, respectively. The only other time K-pop artists simultaneously held the top two positions was on October 17, 2020, when Blackpink and BTS occupied the first and second positions. That week, Blackpink also became the first all-female group to lead the chart. Since its launch in 2014, Billboard Artist 100 has measured artist activity across multiple metrics, including album and track sales, radio airplay, and streaming, making CD sales a significant factor in determining popularity ([Billboard, 2024](#)).

The term fandom, derived from fan and kingdom, refers to fans who form communities, grow in number, and contribute collectively to an artist's success. Their activities, such as purchasing CDs, attending concerts, buying merchandise, voting in competitions, organizing idol birthday events, and even sponsoring promotional campaigns, act as powerful tools of marketing communication that drive album sales. As [Kartikasari and Sudrajat \(2022\)](#) found, owning a physical album serves as a form of self-reward, happiness, and appreciation for idols' music. It represents cultural hegemony that has made K Pop an inseparable part of fans' daily lives.

Initially, concerns about fandom centered on consumerism, as fans often purchase large amounts of idol-related products. However, their involvement has since expanded significantly. From following idols on social media to participating in television programs and large-scale promotional activities, fandom has evolved into a collective marketing force that enhances K-pop's global reach. Research by [Putra \(2019\)](#) supports this view, showing that physical music releases continue to exist despite the global decline of physical formats. Specific markets such as India with 21.2 percent growth, Japan with 2.3 percent, and South Korea with 28.8 percent still recorded increases in physical music revenues.

K-pop's success is not only the result of government policies on promotion and investment, but also the loyalty and organized efforts of its fandom. Fans do not simply consume music; they actively participate in production and promotion. [Jenkins \(2015\)](#) describes this as participatory culture, where fans and idols share a reciprocal relationship. Idols produce music, fans respond with moral and financial support, and both sides collaborate to enhance their success.

The purpose of this article is to explain how fandom activities function as tools of marketing communication that support music production. The research questions focus on how K Pop fandom contributes to the success of physical album sales and to the promotion and marketing of music. By

analyzing fandom within the framework of participatory culture and marketing communication theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of fandom not just as groups of fans, but as powerful agents in the music industry. The novelty of this research lies in reclaiming the importance of physical album sales as a key factor in determining popularity and success in the music industry, driven by fandom activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing is an activity facilitated through communication and the development of relationships with consumers by observing the various needs and desires of individuals in society, then developing products that meet these needs, and offering and distributing them at a price that makes them accessible and available in relevant markets. Therefore, promotion and communication are needed to increase public awareness and interest in the product. This process is known as the marketing mix (Morissan, 2010). The current marketing philosophy emphasizes the importance of integrating communication and marketing to achieve sales success (Nugroho, 2015). One of the primary objectives of communication is to provide customers with specific technical information about a product, which in this context encompasses not only the music itself but also the image of idols in relation to their fans (Nurhadi, 2015).

According to the description of communication psychology, marketing communication primarily aims to persuade the target audience to change their attitudes and behavior toward an organization. Thus, marketing communication is closely related to consumer behavior. Because marketing communication theory is applied to consumer behavior, it tends to focus more on persuasion models than on the marketing approach itself. It is therefore not surprising that marketing communication theory adopts more persuasive communication theories to explain consumer behavior (Fourali, 2016). Marketing communication can be understood as a process of exchanging information carried out persuasively so that the marketing process runs efficiently and effectively (William, 1984).

Marketing communication is the process by which producers communicate their products, persuading consumers to accept and purchase them through promotional and advertising activities, as well as product introductions. In the Korean music industry, however, this process has increasingly been carried out not only by producers but also by fandoms, which engage in extensive communication, promotion, and advertising activities.

K-pop fandom begins as a consumer group but evolves into a creator community through numerous efforts to support their idols. They understand what idols need and what fans feel. Their supportive activities evolve into communication marketing activities (Wang, 2020). K Pop fandoms build their own markets and advertising systems through activities such as fan meetings, voting in music programs, promoting idol group rankings, purchasing albums to boost sales, spreading information through social media, participating in ticket competitions for concerts, sending coffee or food trucks, and sponsoring mobile advertisements such as bus posters.

Theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and the Theory of Reasoned Action provide the framework for analyzing how K-pop fandom contributes to physical album sales, promotion, and marketing. The Theory of Reasoned Action confirms that behavior is conducted individually based on interests or desires by linking beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior (Rukmiyati, 2016). This theory identifies two primary predictors of intention to behave: attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms.

A strong desire to participate in the journey of their idol's popularity motivates fans in fandom communities. They maintain relationships, remain loyal, share updates about their idols, communicate with other fans, and collaborate to promote their idols. Actively obtaining and sharing idol-related items is a form of marketing communication. In this way, behavior, attitudes, and

norms are formed positively, beginning with strong desires and shared values.

Ajzen (1991) explains that individual behavior is shaped by beliefs about possible outcomes, evaluations, expectations, motivations, and perceptions of factors that support or inhibit behavior. This creates awareness of control beliefs, which strengthen behavior. Meanwhile, Hurlock (2013) defines social behavior as a person's physical and psychological interactions with others, and vice versa, to fulfill needs in accordance with social demands. Arifin (2015) further clarifies social behavior as a person's reaction to others, shaped by feelings, attitudes, and respect for others. In addition, Ajzen (1991) also explains that attitudes influence behavior through reasoned decision making. Behavior is influenced not only by attitudes but also by objective norms, which reflect societal beliefs, and by subjective norms, which shape behavioral intentions. In the context of fandom, the desire of fans to remain connected to their idols, support them, and promote them serves as the foundation for fandom's role as a promotional engine in the Korean music industry.

Jenkins (2006; 2009) describes participatory culture as dedicated support for creating and sharing with community members. Even a small contribution is considered significant. This fosters social connections among fans. Consumer culture is no longer passive; individuals now actively participate in the production, distribution, and interpretation of goods and services. Jenkins (2006; 2009) emphasizes that participatory culture characterizes engagement and creativity in fandom practices, where the boundary between consumers and producers has blurred. In this sense, fandom activities evolve into promotional and marketing tools, working collectively to ensure the idol's continued popularity. Marketing strategy requires more than developing quality products or offering competitive prices. Kotler and Armstrong argue that marketing strategy is the logic by which business units create value and profit by developing relationships with consumers, specifically between idols and fans (Marisa, 2022). Marketing communication is therefore central to shaping brand image and increasing sales. Fandom activities can serve as a new element of marketing strategy, functioning as effective and efficient communication channels (Widiastuti, 2017).

Regardless of how well a marketing strategy is designed, without effective communication, product demand and distribution will not be optimal (Jatmiko, 2014). Effective marketing communication must be implemented to realize successful marketing strategies, particularly in persuading the public to purchase the products offered (Vivaldy, 2023). A marketing communication strategy is essentially a company's plan to allocate resources, in this case, to reach a specific consumer group, such as a K-pop fandom. Here, consumers are not merely passive purchasers but also active participants in promotion. The strategy involves disseminating informative, persuasive, and instructive messages to target consumers systematically, thereby maximizing sales. Moriarty (2009) highlights three stages of marketing strategy in promotions: determining marketing objectives, segmentation and targeting, and differentiation and positioning. In the music industry, fans serve as objectives, targets, and positioning simultaneously. Yet without communication, marketing success is unlikely. Person-to-person interactions may occur, but only when organized through fandom can the results be maximized.

RESEARCH METHOD

To obtain the required data, the researcher conducted searches and browsing as a form of digital observation of K Pop fandom activities from 2020 to 2024, ensuring that the data reflected the most recent and relevant practices. As part of data triangulation, a literature review was conducted using various sources that documented fandom activities and their contributions to the success of idol promotion. These included news and information platforms such as *kompasiana.com* and *koreaboo.com*, which often cover fandom practices through fan-driven and entertainment media, as well as academic publications indexed in the Open Journals System and

Web of Science that have been published in the last five years for more conceptual and theoretical perspectives. In addition, the researcher utilized interview data collected by a Questionnaire on the role of fandom in popularizing K-pop idol groups. A total of 251 respondents participated, although the data were not subjected to further statistical analysis.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, which involves comparing findings across academic articles, fan media, and interview data, as well as verifying consistency between fan-reported activities and observed online fandom behavior. Thematic analysis was applied to process the qualitative data collected. After categorizing and reducing the data, the results were presented in narrative form or summarized in tables. This method was used to examine the qualitative data in detail, identify patterns, and explain the extent to which a phenomenon occurs from the researcher's perspective (Fereday, 2006). Following the initial stage of data collection and transcription, the researcher identified units of meaning that emerged and categorized them into relevant themes, as demonstrated in figures, tables, and interview excerpts.

The subsequent process involved reflecting on and interpreting the data, which allowed the researcher to identify themes that could be connected as a common thread to address the research questions, thereby producing cohesive and informative conclusions. Thematic analysis is widely regarded as a foundational method for qualitative research. It is considered both a core skill and essential knowledge for conducting qualitative analysis and is one of the generic methods applicable across various qualitative approaches (Holloway, 2003).

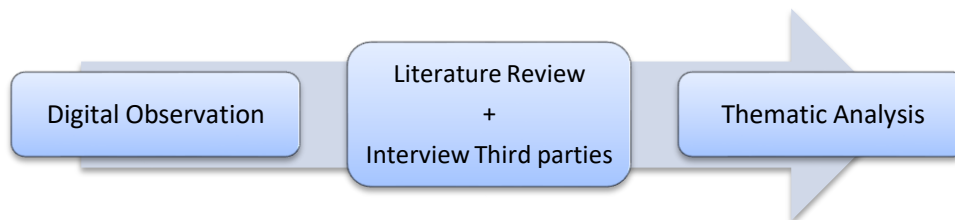


Figure 1. Procedural Steps Structure of Method Research

Digital observations were conducted to observe the development of the Korean music industry, which has successfully gone global, as indicated by its rankings on Billboard charts in both the US and the UK, the success of K-Pop album sales outside Korea, such as in Japan and China, and to supplement data on various fandom activities in real time, in line with the research's focus on real-life activities. Literature review and result interview from third parties for complete data collection and data triangulation by combining several opinions and fans' perspectives. Interview Excerpts via Question.AI, with 251 participants, were selected because the questions presented matched the desired data requirements regarding the role of fandom. Data processing was carried out through categorization and data reduction, followed by the application of thematic analysis, a method consistent with descriptive qualitative research. This method focuses on processing data in the form of text, interviews, and observations to understand meaning, concepts, characteristics, and social phenomena from various perspectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results show the role of K-Pop fandom in the progress of the Korean music industry, especially the success of reviving the production and sale of music album CDs, as one of the measuring tools of musician popularity. On the other hand, a unique form of relationship develops between fans and their idols.

K-Pop Music Industry

The emergence of K-pop is a phenomenon, a tangible representation of the development of significant popular culture in one country, Korea, which can then be accepted and adopted by other countries, influencing not only the development of musical tastes but also creating a global interconnected music market. So that K-pop is not just a music genre, but a rapidly growing entertainment industry, involving various supporting elements ranging from intensive training and high-quality music production to attractive visualizations and effective marketing. A development that is not just a trend, but a significant change in the management of the music industry that has worked diligently so that it succeeds in existing in the international world ([Hadist, 2024](#)).

The uniqueness of K-pop, as a music genre rich in variations, has made it successful in attracting attention and creating its own fans in various countries. K-pop is not only about music, but also about attractive visual appearance, dance choreography, and fashion developments. K-pop band members are chosen for their visual appearance and outstanding vocal and dancing talents, which are developed through years of intensive training. This enables them to effectively interpret the concept of songs, choreography, and fashion that are carefully designed to capture the attention of music fans ([Kompasbook, 2023](#)).

Fandoms Role

A key indicator of K-pop's popularity is the emergence and growth of official fanbases, also known as fandoms. Many K-pop groups have fandoms in every country; Indonesia is no exception, which actively organizes various activities, both in real time and in cyberspace, ranging from birthday projects for idols, holding charity events on behalf of their idol groups, sharing information on social media, and creating content, memes, and video parts, which can support and promote their idols. Developing into a relationship between fans and K-pop artists that is no longer just listening to music or liking songs, but turning into a deep emotional relationship to support and benefit each other ([Zahra, 2024](#)).

The relationship between fans and K-pop idols is based on parasocial interaction, which is interpreted as a one-sided relationship experienced by a media user with a media persona. This relationship can be formed when media users begin to involve their emotions, interests, and time in the media persona they like, in this case, the members of the K-pop group who are idols, even though neither parties know the other in the real world. Parasocial relationships in the K-pop industry build repeated interactions between fans and the idol figure. The interaction conducted in this stage, namely through media exposure, then physical attraction, task attraction, such as winning votes and participating in streaming activities, and social attraction, all contribute to building a parasocial relationship between fans and K-pop idol members. For clarity and supporting evidence, Figures 1–5 illustrate the culture of fandom advertising in Korea.



Figure 1. Fans run birthday ads for TEMPEST's Hanbin at Coex Brand Avenue

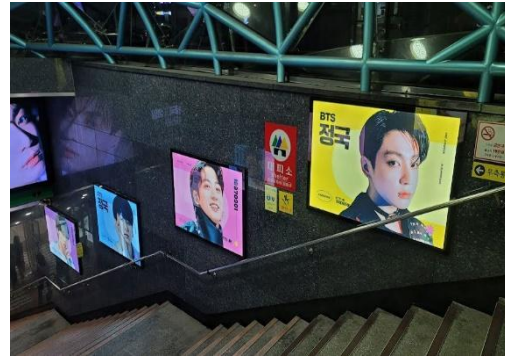


Figure 2. BTS' birthday boy's billboard Ads from fans



Figure 3. Seventeen SCOUPS Railway Airport ads



Figure 4. SHINee fans send a promo bus

Source: (Bing, 2025)



Figure 5. Send a coffee truck, a form of love for idols. Picture: Instagram gold support
Source: Detikfood, (2024)

Parasocial relationships not only develop between idols and fans, but also among fans. Fans who engage in cooperative activities to support one another and fulfill their needs, in addition to exchanging information. Meanwhile, for the sake of their idols, they actively participate in promoting them through social media and even create various extreme advertisements, such as buses featuring their idols' images, photo displays at MRT stations, and sending coffee-food trucks. (See the picture above.) One of the major projects involves placing advertisements on the Superdry Building in New York's Times Square, United States, targeting the international fan base of EXO member Suho. Billboard ads are one way for fans to show their appreciation to their idol K-pop

artists by placing advertisements in the form of billboards or Videotron in public places to introduce idols to the broader community, as can be seen in Figure 6 and 7 below.



Figure 6. Fans Suho EXO install billboard ads at Times Square, New York. Pict: Suho Union Global Pict: Suho

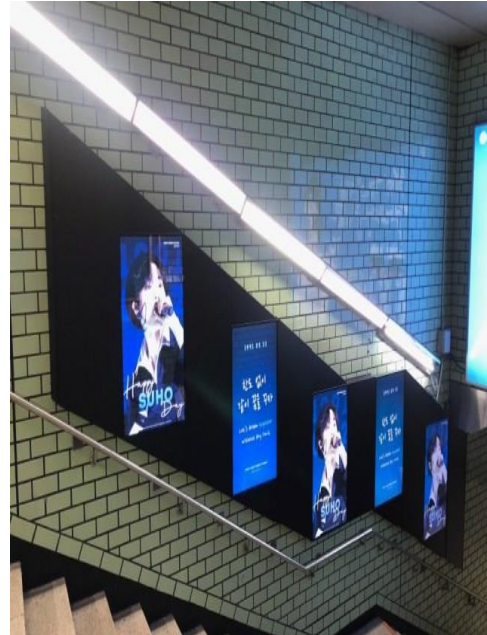


Figure 7. Fans Suho EXO install billboard ads at Jasil station, South Korea. Pict: Suho Union global

Source: Kumparan.com (2019)

K-pop is closely related to the fan community, specifically referred to as a fandom, which is short for fan kingdom—a term derived from the Korean term for celebrity fans to refer to the fan community in general (Koh, 2022). Fandom supports their favorite celebrities by implementing rules for watching celebrity music videos (streaming), choosing celebrities in public assessments for awards (voting), purchasing albums, and other activities such as active communication, information dissemination, and promotion (Khan, 2021). The results of digital interviews with a public audience of 251 participants, of which 63% were teenagers. In contrast, the remaining 37% were aged between 20 and 30 years, with most, 70%, being female. The remaining 30% were male, which is in line with various K-Pop fan data reports stating that the average K-Pop fan is female, most of whom are teenagers, with a significant proportion under 30 years old. Concluded the role of fandom in supporting their idols. Interview Excerpts via Question. AI, with 251 participants, concludes that:

1. Fandom is a crucial element in the K-pop ecosystem
2. Fandom is an active promoter and promotional agent
3. Fandom is a loyal consumer, contributing to the income and popularity of idol groups
4. Fandom also plays a role in influencing popular culture
5. Fandom is an emotional support for idols

The results of this interview can emphasize the relationship and role of fandom in supporting their idols. It appears that the public also has the same thoughts and opinions regarding the role of fandom; the public can also see the existence of a strong bond, both emotionally and rationally, between fandom and their idols. There is great power in fandom, both as a fan community and as a driving force for the progress of their idols, and it is an inseparable part of the music industry's development. Carrying out promotional and advertising functions, in addition to fostering

relationships with idols, illustrates that fandom can also serve as a marketing tool, which takes fandom advertising culture beyond reason.

Following the emergence of digital music sources, the culture of buying CDs began to decline; however, it was revived through Core fandom activities, such as fan meetups, fan calls, and fan meetings. "Core fandom" is a unit of K-pop fans who become militant, encourage album purchases, facilitate merchandise purchases, and intensively spread information and do promotions. The agency is very aware that although public awareness of certain K-pop idols is relatively high, it has a significant impact on advertising value and appearance; more effort is still needed for promotion and marketing to contribute significantly to album sales.

Results of online interviews conducted by Kumparan.com with several K-pop fans in Indonesia reveal that fans are eyeing the posters and photocards that serve as bonuses in the albums they purchase. One participant, an office worker in his 30s who idolizes the K-pop group Shinee, said that buying albums is a good way for fans to show their appreciation for the work released by K-pop idols, as the results of K-pop physical album sales serve as a source of 'fandom pride' for fans. As proof that they wholeheartedly support their idols, another participant, a female in her 20s, said, "buying albums to support their physical album sales, besides that, I also want to get a Photocard (PC)." (Kumparan, 2019)

The success of album sales is undeniably due to the number of fans of the idol, who have the potential to be consumers. The more fans, the stronger the positive correlation with album sales value. Without the need for a complex marketing strategy, through fandom activities, products can reach potential consumers and become a primary driver of sales. Fandom marketing is a powerful strategy for the Korean music industry. The May 2022 Edition of Marketeers Magazine shows that Fandom marketing is a powerful strategy for the Korean Wave, which is dominated by K-pop music, Korean Food, drama, and Korean artists. Collaboration with fandom has clear and measurable goals, as seen through the determination of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Brand value, where quality factors also determine the success of the product. K-Pop Fandom Marketing has become a connector between the government and the private sector for global promotion, and the K-Pop fan community is a strength (Ummah, 2022).

K-Pop Fandom marketing communication activity

"Core fandom" is a highly loyal unit of K-pop fans who directly contribute to a company's sales. It is important to calculate the size of the core fandom of each entertainment company in Korea because most of their music album sales are generated by the core fandom, not the public. Using data reorganized based on album sales statistics from January 2011 to September 2022, IBK Investment & Securities released the results of an analysis that estimates the strength of the "core fandom" for each agency and idol. It is known that those who are considered core fans buy an average of at least 7 to 11 of the same albums (per person) every time a new album is released. success in improving the chance of their idol being selected for an event or popularity ranking program on media both in social media and in conventional media.

Table 1. Core Fandom Largest Numbers HYBE Company

Name group/ Core Fandom	Numbers Core Fandoms in thousands
BTS/ ARMY	700
SEVENTEEN/ CARAT	320
TXT/ MOA	250
ENHYPEN/ Engene	160
New Jeans/ Bunnies	90

Name group/ Core Fandom	Numbers Core Fandoms in thousands
LE SSERAFIM/ FERNOT	85

Covering 3.5 million core fans from the four major companies in Korea, HYBE has the largest number with 1.6 million, followed by SM with 760,000, JYP with 640,000, and YG with 420,000. HYBE itself has a dedicated ARMY fandom from BTS, comprising 700,000 core fans. Following behind are SEVENTEEN's CARAT fandom (320 thousand), TXT's MOA fandom (250 thousand), Engene ENHYPEN's fandom (160 thousand), NewJeans' Bunnies fandom (ninety thousand), and LE SSERAFIM's FERNOT fandom, eighty-five thousand core fans ([Wowkoren.com](https://www.wowkoren.com), 2023).

First-week album sales are the most crucial metric in the music industry, not only as an indicator of an artist's fan base size, but also as a reflection of the income artists contribute to their labels. The expansion of K-pop's influence, driven by Hallyu, has triggered a substantial growth in the size of the K-pop fandom worldwide. In the development of K-pop music, the Chinese fandom has become a significant force due to its vast population, and the number of K-pop fans continues to grow. Even with the ban on Hallyu in the country, they continue to consume K-pop content in various ways.

Table 2. First-Week K-Pop Albums Sales 2023

Name/ Album	Released	In Million Copies	In China's Sale
Stray Kids/ 5-STAR	June 2, 2023	4,61	1,14
SEVENTEEN/ FML	April 24, 2023	4,55	2,15
ZEROBASEONE/ Youth in the shade	July 10, 2023	1,82	660.000
Aespa/ My World	May 8, 2023	1,69	1,02
EXO/ EXIST	July 10, 2023	1,56	900.000

The significance of K-pop fandom support, particularly from China, is evident in first-week album sales records. Stray Kids' 5-STAR (released June 2, 2023) achieved 4.61 million initial sales, including 1.14 million in China. Similarly, SEVENTEEN's FML (released April 24, 2023) recorded 4.55 million initial sales, with 2.15 million copies sold in China. The debut group ZEROBASEONE also demonstrated this trend, as their album YOUTH IN THE SHADE (released July 10, 2023) reached 1.82 million initial sales, of which 660,000 were from China, accounting for half of the total. Aespa's MY WORLD (released May 8, 2023) achieved 1.69 million initial sales, with China contributing the majority share at 1.02 million. Likewise, EXO's comeback album EXIST (released July 10, 2023) recorded 1.56 million initial sales, including 900,000 from China ([Koreabangnet](https://www.koreabangnet.com), 2024).

The increasing global popularity of K-pop is reflected in the significant rise of physical album sales in 2022, as illustrated by first-week sales data. Purchasing physical albums has become a primary means for fans—particularly international audiences—to demonstrate support for their idols. According to Yonhap News, global exports of K-pop albums in 2022 amounted to USD 233 million (approximately IDR 3.52 trillion), marking a 5.6 percent increase from 2021, when sales reached USD 220.85 million (IDR 3.34 trillion). Within the top ten importing countries, Japan ranked first with purchases totaling USD 85.74 million, followed by China (USD 51.33 million), the United States (USD 38.88 million), and subsequently Taiwan, the Netherlands, Thailand, Hong Kong, Germany, Indonesia, and France ([Nurrahmah](https://www.nurrahmah.com), 2023).

Table 3. Exports of K-Pop albums Worldwide 2022

Country	Sales Reaching in USD
Japan	85,74 M
China	51,33 M
USA	38,88 M

This section examines the meaning and interpretation of the data through the patterns formed in the relationship between fandom and album sales. One K-pop group, Seventeen, with the second-largest core fandom, achieved the highest album sales in 2023, reaching 4.55 million copies in the first week alone, with half of these sales coming from China. China is the second-largest importer of K-pop albums after Japan and represents a unique factor in analyzing the relevance of fandom to album sales. Although China has often resisted Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, its fandom has become a significant force due to the country's large population and the presence of Chinese idols in K-pop groups, such as Seventeen members Jun (Wen Junhui) and The 8 (Xu Minghao).

BTS, known for having the most immense core fandom, ARMY, has also recorded significant achievements in album sales. Although they did not immediately dominate, the data clearly reflect their strong market performance. Prior to their three year hiatus from 2023 to 2025 due to mandatory military service, BTS consistently achieved the highest album sales. In 2022, BTS dominated album sales in Korea, selling a total of 4.52 million copies. Their album *Proof* became the best-selling album, with around 2.96 million copies sold, while their earlier albums, such as *BE* and *Butter*, also performed strongly ([cnbcindonesia.com](https://www.cnbcindonesia.com), 2022).

The strategic framework of the K-pop industry optimizes the relationship between idols and fans, positioning idols as the primary commodity. In contrast, fans serve as an essential support system, driving the production cycle of entertainment companies. Loyalty among fans is reinforced by continuous industry promotion through various content, such as frequent comebacks, concert recordings, and behind the scenes footage on DVD. Companies also market content that reveals ordinary aspects of idols' lives. Fans purchase such material because it fosters an emotional attachment to idols who appear more human ([Espinal, 2022](#)).

The exposure of idols' personal moments and struggles fosters empathy and affection. This continuous interaction builds a reciprocal dynamic, even though idols and fans do not know each other personally. Within this system, elements such as exposure, physical attraction, task attraction through voting or streaming, and social attraction contribute to the formation of a special relationship between idols and fans. This unique bond gives rise to parasocial relationships, which foster loyalty and sustain fan engagement. Companies deliberately capitalize on these dynamics to strengthen the parasocial structure and expand their fan base ([Espinal, 2022](#)).

Interviews further indicate that fandoms are loyal consumers, actively contributing to the income and popularity of idol groups. Their role extends beyond consumption to becoming active promoters and cultural influencers within the Korean music industry. The consumer behavior of fandom members, while sometimes excessive, creates unique advantages. What begins as an expression of loyalty develops into promotional and marketing activities. Fans not only help promote idols but also generate advertising opportunities for concerts, fan sign events, and album production. Many fans purchase multiple physical albums to complete their photo card collections, inadvertently boosting album sales and the profits of the agencies. The creative design of albums, including merchandise and collectible photo cards, strengthens the bond between idols and fans, making physical design and packaging a marketing strategy in its own right.

The enthusiasm of fandoms is driven by the awareness that their idols must compete and achieve success. This motivates fans to continue their support through collective effort. Marketing strategy is not only about creating superior products but also about ensuring those products gain

recognition and sales. Therefore, this analysis not only explains how fandoms create emotional bonds with idols but also extends to how fandoms build collective strength and contribute directly to the success of idols' music. Their activities go beyond purchasing albums or streaming songs; fandoms strive to ensure that idols gain recognition, that their works are widely consumed, and that they remain competitive. The establishment of parasocial relationships fosters emotional attachment; however, it is the promotional and advertising activities of fandoms that significantly drive the progress of the music industry. The achievements of K-Pop groups are therefore not only the result of industry production, but also the outcome of organized fandom efforts that deserve recognition.

CONCLUSIONS

The success of fandom in promoting and increasing album sales was a testament to the effectiveness of fandom activity as a marketing communication tool, as evidenced by their contributions to promotional and advertising activities that supported their idols. The consumer behavior of fandom members is a unique advantage in the music industry, which initially serves their loyalty but then develops into promotional marketing activities, helping not only to promote idols but also to attract advertisements. This study has shown that physical albums can still play a key role in maintaining the popularity of musicians and increasing the income of artists in the entertainment industry. Having physical albums is a form of a real bond between fans and their idols. Through its fandom, enormous contributions are made by building parasocial relationships between fans and K-pop idol members.

Functioning as marketing communication is not the goal of fandom; however, some activities carried out as a form of participatory culture have an impact on business activities, one of which is an increase in sales of music album CDs.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

The limitations of this research lie in the inability to explain in detail how marketing strategies are applied through the design of physical albums to maintain their relevance in the entertainment industry. This requires more specific observations regarding the processes and substances involved in producing physical music albums. The demand for creative design skills in producing physical albums is expected to continue growing alongside the emergence of Society 5.0. This presents new opportunities for the entertainment industry, where musical works are no longer only about notes and sounds but also about various aspects that enhance their marketability.

This study has also not yet been able to explain how fandoms organize themselves to finance costly marketing activities. In terms of recommendations, competitive opportunities should be broadened to enable musicians to achieve rankings and gain recognition for their quality in the music industry. The government should play an active role in motivating the younger generation to be creative and competitive. This can be facilitated by organizing music festivals, television programs for music rankings, survival shows to discover new talent, and other platforms.

Further research is also needed to answer the question of why Indonesian fandoms tend to support foreign music groups. Special attention should be given to consumer behavior, particularly emotional behavior, which can act as the driving force for fandom activity and the ability of fandoms to organize themselves effectively.

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