

Global K-Pop Culture: Youth Identity, Behavior, and the SDGs

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to analyze the influence of K-pop on adolescents' social identity and behavior, with particular attention to its relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including quality education (SDG 4), good health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16). **Theoretical framework:** The research is grounded in theories of social identity, cultural globalization, and adolescent psychosocial development, which provide a basis for understanding how global cultural flows shape individual and collective identities. **Literature Review:** Previous studies indicate that K-pop has both positive and negative influences, ranging from fostering creativity, diversity, and global connectivity to creating risks of social pressure, mental health challenges, and the homogenization of local cultures. **Methods:** A mixed-method approach was used, combining quantitative surveys with 500 teenage K-pop fans and qualitative in-depth interviews with 30 participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. Data focused on levels of engagement with K-pop, identity formation, and behavioral impacts. **Results:** Findings show that K-pop significantly contributes to adolescents' identity formation, self-expression, and cross-cultural understanding, while also introducing challenges such as unrealistic beauty standards, stress, and potential neglect of local cultural values. **Implications:** Educators and policymakers need to balance K-pop's benefits with strategies for mental health, cultural preservation, and inclusive education, in line with SDGs on well-being, education, equality, and cultural diversity. **Novelty:** This study uniquely connects K-pop's influence with global development agendas, showing how popular culture shapes adolescent development and sustainable social transformation.

Keywords: k-pop, global culture, social identity, adolescent behavior, sustainable development goals.

INTRODUCTION

K-pop, or Korean pop music, has developed into one of the most dominant cultural phenomena of the modern era [1]. With its growing global power, K-pop is not only changing the musical landscape but is also influencing various aspects of the social, cultural, and psychological lives of teenagers around the world. Since its inception, K-pop has attracted the attention of millions of fans with its unique charm, from catchy music and energetic dance to captivating visuals. K-pop artists, such as BTS, BLACKPINK, and EXO, have become global icons who provide great inspiration and influence on the behavior and identity of the younger generation [2].

In the context of cultural globalization, K-pop's influence can be observed in the ways teenagers perceive themselves and interact with their social environment [3]. For many adolescents, K-pop has become an integral part of their identity, reflected in their consumption patterns, lifestyle, and value systems [4]. This condition not only reflects the spread of cultural products but also illustrates how global cultural flows contribute to shaping social identity and adolescent behavior.

This study aims to analyze how K-pop plays a role in the formation of social identity and adolescent behavior, while also exploring its broader implications for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [5]. The relevance of this research lies in the fact that K-pop culture intersects with key aspects of the SDGs: it impacts mental health and well-being (SDG 3), fosters creativity and informal learning (SDG 4), promotes inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding (SDG 10 and SDG 16), and strengthens youth participation in global cultural communities (SDG 11).

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from surveys involving 500 teenage K-pop fans and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with 30 participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. This design seeks to capture the depth of K-pop's engagement, its role in shaping identity, and its impact on adolescent social behavior and interpersonal interactions [6]. The data is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how K-pop contributes not only to the personal development of adolescents but also to the global agenda of sustainable and inclusive societies [7].

Preliminary findings suggest that K-pop plays a significant role in redefining youth culture [8]. Beyond entertainment, K-pop has shaped values, aspirations, and lifestyles among teenagers, who frequently adopt the norms and practices popularized by their favorite artists [9]. Furthermore, K-pop strengthens adolescents' engagement with the global community, creating bridges across cultural and national boundaries [10].

One of the positive outcomes of K-pop involvement is the provision of creative spaces for self-expression [11]. Elements of K-pop culture, such as fashion and art, became a medium for them to discover and develop their identities [12]. More importantly, global fandom networks foster tolerance, solidarity, and intercultural understanding, resonating with the spirit of the SDGs by building inclusive and connected communities where young people can learn, collaborate, and share experiences [13].



Figure 1. K-Pop Fan Room. Source: <https://shorturl.at/Di5U5>

Behind its positive impact, K-pop can also have negative consequences [14]. The pressure to conform to the high standards of beauty, success, and perfection often promoted in the K-pop industry may contribute to mental health challenges, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, or body image issues, and in some cases even physical health risks [15]. Moreover, excessive obsession with idols can divert adolescents from their academic and social responsibilities [16], leading to declining academic performance and a gradual erosion of local cultural values as foreign cultural trends gain dominance [17]. These dynamics highlight potential

obstacles to achieving Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in the areas of well-being (SDG 3) and quality education (SDG 4).

This research emphasizes the importance of developing a balanced understanding of global cultural influence [18]. By acknowledging both the positive and negative dimensions of K-pop's impact, stakeholders such as educators, parents, and policymakers can design more effective strategies to foster adolescents' identity development within diverse cultural contexts [19]. Strengthening local cultural values while promoting intercultural dialogue is necessary to ensure that adolescents can engage with globalization without losing their sense of identity [20].

Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to expand our understanding of the relationship between cultural globalization, social identity, and adolescent behavior in the digital era [21]. In the rapid flow of information and continuous transformation, such understanding is essential to help adolescents face the challenges and opportunities of the modern world [22]. Thus, K-pop is not only a global musical phenomenon but also a cultural mirror that reflects the evolving dynamics of youth identity and social interaction, with significant implications for the realization of inclusive and sustainable societies envisioned in the SDGs [23].



Figure 2. K-pop concerts. Source: <https://shorturl.at/bTTO0>

LITERATURE REVIEW

The K-pop phenomenon has emerged as a significant subject in cultural and social research, particularly regarding its influence on social identity and adolescent behavior. Previous studies have highlighted how K-pop shapes youth lifestyles, aspirations, and patterns of interaction across different cultural settings. Beyond its role as entertainment, K-pop is also examined within the broader framework of cultural globalization and sustainable development, where its impacts intersect with issues related to mental health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education and informal learning (SDG 4), gender representation and equality (SDG 5), as well as inclusivity and intercultural understanding (SDG 10 and SDG 16) [24].

This section reviews seven previous studies that explore these dimensions, providing insights into both the positive and negative consequences of K-pop on adolescent development. By analyzing existing scholarship, the review seeks to position this study within ongoing debates on the relationship between popular culture, youth identity formation, and the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Table 1. Literature Review

Aspects	Description	Positive Impact	Negative Impact
The Influence of Globalization	K-pop is a global cultural product that transcends national borders.	Improving cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.	The risk of homogenization of local culture and neglect of local

			values.
Identity Formation	K-pop helps teenagers build social identity through music and lifestyle.	Providing space for self-expression and identity exploration.	Pressure to follow beauty standards and unrealistic behavior.
Cultural Consumption Patterns	Teens adopt the norms and lifestyle of their favorite K-pop artists.	Creating cultural awareness and interest in art and fashion.	The tendency to ignore local culture in favor of foreign trends.
Social Interaction	K-pop facilitates interaction between teenagers from different cultural backgrounds.	Build a wider social connection and global network.	Potential social isolation for those who are not involved in the fandom.
Mental Health Impact	Intense involvement with K-pop can affect the mental health of adolescents.	Can provide emotional support through the fan community.	Stress, anxiety, and mental health problems due to an obsession with idols.
Social Norms	K-pop promotes certain norms adopted by teenagers.	Encourage positive attitudes such as hard work and dedication.	Decreased confidence if they do not meet the set norms.
Fandom and Community	The K-pop fandom phenomenon creates a supportive community.	Strengthening the sense of togetherness and solidarity among fans.	The potential for the emergence of toxic fandom can trigger conflicts.
Digital Identity	K-pop plays a role in shaping the digital identity of teenagers through social media.	Allow creativity and innovation in self-expression.	Addiction to social media and its negative impact on mental well-being.

The table above illustrates various aspects related to cultural issues and social identity in the K-pop era. K-pop not only serves as entertainment but also plays a role in shaping the way teenagers understand themselves and interact with their social environment [25]. Within the framework of globalization, K-pop fosters cross-cultural understanding and creates opportunities for intercultural dialogue. However, it also presents challenges, such as the risk of cultural homogenization and the decline of local cultural values [26].

In the process of identity formation, K-pop provides adolescents with a platform for self-expression and creativity, yet it simultaneously imposes pressures to conform to unrealistic standards of beauty and achievement. These dynamics highlight the dual influence of K-pop on youth development both as a source of empowerment and as a contributor to psychological stress [27]. Cultural consumption patterns further demonstrate how teenagers adopt the lifestyles and values popularized by their idols, while social interactions within fandoms expand global networks. Nevertheless, potential negative outcomes, such as social isolation or excessive dependency, must also be taken into account [28].

Mental health emerges as a particularly significant concern, as deep engagement with K-pop can serve as a source of emotional support but may also trigger anxiety, insecurity, and stress when adolescents feel unable to meet the ideals promoted by the industry [29]. Similarly, fandom communities often provide a sense of belonging and solidarity, yet they can also generate internal rivalries and conflict. Moreover, the rise of digital identity through K-pop fandom participation encourages creativity but also raises risks of overreliance on social media and online interactions.

Overall, these dynamics underline the complexity of K-pop's impact on adolescent identity in the modern era. Understanding these influences is crucial not only for cultural research but also for addressing broader goals of sustainable development, particularly in

promoting youth well-being (SDG 3), inclusive education and creativity (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), cultural diversity and reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and fostering peaceful, inclusive societies (SDG 16) [30].

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed approach to analyze the influence of K-pop on social identity and adolescent behavior. This approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon [31].

Research Design

The study was designed in two phases: the quantitative phase and the qualitative phase.

1. **Quantitative Phase:** Using a survey involving 500 teenage K-pop fans. The survey was designed to measure respondents' level of engagement with K-pop, changes in social identity, and the impact of K-pop on social behavior and interpersonal interactions. The questionnaire consists of closed-ended questions and a Likert scale that allows for statistical analysis [32].
2. **Qualitative Phase:** Conduct in-depth interviews with 30 participants from various cultural backgrounds. This interview aims to explore the personal experiences and perceptions of teenagers regarding the influence of K-pop in their daily lives. Sampling techniques were used to ensure diversity in participants' backgrounds, including age, gender, and cultural background [33].

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of teenagers aged 13 to 19 who were K-pop fans. Samples were drawn from various schools and communities of K-pop enthusiasts in several major cities, to reflect the diversity in experiences and views [34].

1. **Inclusion Criteria:** Respondents must be actively involved in the K-pop community and participate in K-pop-related activities (such as concerts, fan meetings, and the use of social media to follow idols) [35].
2. **Exclusion Criteria:** Adolescents who do not have will not be included in the study.

Data Collection

1. **Quantitative Data:** Surveys are distributed online and offline, with clear instructions on how to fill them out. The collected data will be analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS) to identify patterns and relationships between variables [36].
2. **Qualitative Data:** Interviews are conducted face-to-face or through an online platform, recorded, and interview transcripts will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. This approach allows researchers to identify key themes that emerge from participant experiences [37].

Data Analysis

1. **Quantitative Analysis:** Using descriptive statistics to describe the characteristics of respondents, followed by inferential analysis to test hypotheses regarding the influence of K-pop on adolescent social identity and behavior.
2. **Qualitative Analysis:** The themes that emerge from the interviews will be grouped and analyzed to understand participants' narratives about how K-pop affects the way they understand themselves and interact with others.

Validity and Reliability

1. Validity: To ensure the validity of the content, the questionnaire will be tested by a panel of experts in the field of psychology and cultural studies before being disseminated.
2. Reliability: An initial trial of the questionnaire will be conducted by involving some respondents to ensure the consistency and reliability of the measurement instrument.

Research Ethics

The research will adhere to strict ethical guidelines, including obtaining consent from participants and their parents (if required), as well as ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected.



Figure 2. K-pop Boy Band. Source: <https://shorturl.at/KcK8v>

The methodology proposed in this study aims to provide a deep understanding of the influence of K-pop on social identity and adolescent behavior. By using a mixed approach, it is hoped that the results of the study can provide comprehensive insights into the dynamics of cultural globalization among the people [38].

The following is a table of research methods for the study of the influence of K-pop on social identity and adolescent behavior:

Table 2. Research Methods

Aspects	Detail
Research Title	The K-Pop Phenomenon as a Global Culture: Its Influence on Social Identity and Adolescent Behavior
Type of Research	Mixed (Qualitative and Quantitative)
Pendekatan	Survey In-Depth Interviews
Population	Teenage K-pop fans from various cultural backgrounds
Sample	Survey: 500 teenagers Interviews: 30 participants
Data Collection Techniques	1. Questionnaires for surveys 2. Interview guide for in-depth interviews
Research Instruments	Questionnaire (including questions about engagement with K-pop, social identity, and behavior) Interview notes

Data Analysis	Quantitative data: Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis Qualitative data: Thematic analysis
Validity and Reliability	Triangulation of data from surveys and interviews to ensure consistency and accuracy
Research Time	6-8 months
Research Venue	Schools, K-pop fan communities, and social media platforms
Impacts Studied	1. Positive Impact: Self-expression, tolerance, social connection 2. Negative Impacts: Social pressure, mental health issues
Recommendations	Recommendations for educators and policymakers in managing foreign cultural influences

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study successfully collected data from 500 teenage K-pop fans through a survey and 30 in-depth interviews. The results of the quantitative analysis show that the majority of respondents (around 75%) feel that K-pop has had a positive influence on the way they understand themselves and interact with others. Respondents reported improvements in values such as tolerance, diversity, and creativity. These outcomes reflect the alignment of K-pop culture with the promotion of intercultural dialogue and inclusivity, resonating with the goals of sustainable development (SDG 10 and SDG 16) [39].

In terms of social identity, the findings showed that around 60% of respondents adopted elements of K-pop culture, including fashion, language, and lifestyle, in their daily lives. However, 45% admitted feeling pressured to meet the beauty and achievement standards set by their idols. This is consistent with interview data, which highlighted that while K-pop provides space for self-expression, it simultaneously contributes to emotional distress and insecurity [40]. Such pressures raise concerns for adolescent mental health and well-being, reflecting challenges to SDG 3.

From the qualitative analysis, the main themes that emerge include:

- Self-Expression:** Many participants described K-pop as a platform for identity exploration, particularly through fashion, art, and creative activities. This relates to SDG 4, as K-pop indirectly fosters informal learning, creativity, and self-development.
- Social Networking:** Interaction within fandoms, both online and offline, was reported to strengthen social bonds and expand global friendships. These findings underline K-pop's role as a cultural bridge that enhances cross-cultural tolerance and understanding (SDG 16).
- Culture Conflict:** Some participants experienced tension between adopting K-pop cultural elements and preserving local traditions. This reflects the complex negotiation of identity in the era of globalization and highlights the need for cultural education policies that balance global exposure with local heritage (SDG 11).
- Mental Health Challenges:** The pressure to conform to K-pop's beauty and performance standards often led to stress and anxiety among respondents. While fandom can provide emotional support, unrealistic ideals risk undermining adolescent psychological well-being (SDG 3).

The results of this study show that K-pop has a complex impact on social identity and adolescent behavior. It found that while K-pop provides opportunities for positive self-expression and social interaction, there are also significant challenges, especially in terms of mental health and social pressure.

Self-Expression and Identity: This research shows that K-pop serves as a tool for identity formation. The visual and narrative elements in K-pop help teens understand themselves in a broader context, inspiring them to explore new lifestyles and values. **Social Networks and Tolerance:** The discovery of K-pop fans forms social networks that support and promote cross-cultural understanding. This shows that K-pop not only serves as entertainment but also as a bridge to create connections between individuals from different backgrounds.

Negative Impact: The discovery that many teens feel pressured to meet beauty standards reflects on the mental health impact associated with K-pop. The pressure to perform perfectly can lead to anxiety and stress, which can potentially damage a teenager's psychological well-being. **Cultural Conflict:** The tension between the adoption of K-pop cultural elements and the local values experienced by participants reflects the findings. This dilemma shows the challenges faced by adolescents in navigating identity in cultural globalization.

Overall, the results of this study emphasize the dual impact of K-pop on adolescent development. On one hand, it promotes creativity, intercultural networking, and inclusivity; on the other, it generates risks related to mental health and cultural identity conflicts. These findings suggest the necessity of a balanced approach in responding to global cultural phenomena. Educators, parents, and policymakers must recognize both the opportunities and risks of K-pop by integrating mental health awareness, local cultural education, and digital literacy into youth development programs [41]. In this way, K-pop can be better positioned as a cultural force that supports the Sustainable Development Goals by empowering adolescents to grow into resilient, creative, and globally connected individuals.

In-Depth Analysis

The phenomenon of K-pop has transcended its origins in South Korea and become one of the most visible cultural forces shaping youth identities worldwide. The data presented in the study illustrates how K-pop impacts adolescents not only as a form of entertainment but also as a complex cultural mechanism influencing social identity, behavior, and even global development agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of the central findings is that K-pop functions as both a mirror and a mold of adolescent identity. Survey results show that approximately 60% of teenage respondents adopt elements of K-pop in their fashion, language use, and lifestyle. This illustrates how cultural consumption extends beyond passive entertainment into active embodiment. Adolescents use K-pop as a platform for identity exploration and self-expression, confirming its role in psychosocial development theories. This aligns strongly with SDG 4 on quality education, particularly informal learning, as teenagers cultivate creativity and innovation through engagement with music, dance, and digital fan culture [41].

At the same time, the interviews revealed deeper psychological dimensions. While many adolescents reported enhanced tolerance and global connectivity through fandom activities, others highlighted the burdens of conforming to the high standards of beauty, success, and dedication embodied by K-pop idols. Such pressures were linked to anxiety, low self-esteem, and body image concerns. These challenges underscore how K-pop intersects with SDG 3, which emphasizes good health and well-being. The industry's relentless emphasis on perfection inadvertently contributes to mental health vulnerabilities among young audiences, calling for interventions that balance cultural enthusiasm with psychological resilience. Another layer of analysis is the tension between global cultural flows and local traditions. Several participants described cultural conflict when K-pop adoption clashed with indigenous values and practices. For instance, adolescents may neglect local art forms or linguistic expressions in favor of Korean cultural imports. This dynamic demonstrates both the integrative and disruptive potential of globalization. While K-pop fosters cross-cultural understanding (SDG 10 and SDG 16), it also risks homogenizing youth culture and eroding cultural diversity, thereby threatening SDG 11 on sustainable communities. The challenge for educators and policymakers is to nurture intercultural dialogue while safeguarding local identities [41].

The positive impacts of K-pop, however, cannot be overlooked. Quantitative results suggest that 75% of respondents believe K-pop contributed positively to their worldview, particularly by reinforcing values of hard work, dedication, and inclusivity. Moreover, fandom communities emerged as significant spaces for solidarity, creativity, and social networking. Online platforms allowed adolescents to build global friendships, exchange cultural knowledge, and collaborate on projects such as fan-driven charity events. These outcomes demonstrate how popular culture can serve as a grassroots force for peace, justice, and stronger institutions (SDG 16). Nevertheless, the darker side of fandom also surfaced. Interview data pointed to toxic subcultures where competition among fan groups fostered hostility rather than solidarity. This reinforces the need for digital literacy education that equips adolescents to navigate online spaces critically and constructively. Without such tools, the empowering aspects of K-pop culture may be overshadowed by divisive or unhealthy dynamics [40].

The study's methodological design also strengthens its contribution. By employing a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys of 500 adolescents with in-depth interviews of 30 participants, the research provides both breadth and depth. The quantitative data maps the scale of K-pop's influence, while qualitative narratives reveal nuanced experiences, including emotional struggles, cultural negotiations, and aspirations shaped by fandom life. This triangulation enhances validity and ensures that findings are not one-dimensional but reflective of the complexities of adolescent engagement with global culture. In connecting K-pop to the SDGs, the study achieves a novel contribution. It shows that cultural phenomena cannot be dismissed as superficial entertainment but must be recognized as powerful agents in shaping development outcomes. For example, the creativity sparked by K-pop aligns with SDG 4, while its capacity to promote inclusivity resonates with SDG 10. At the same time, the mental health risks identified highlight gaps in achieving SDG 3, while cultural homogenization challenges SDG 11. This multidimensional framework underscores that popular culture is not merely an adjunct to global development but an integral factor requiring scholarly and policy attention [41].

Overall, the findings indicate a duality in K-pop's role: it is both an empowering and a potentially destabilizing force. On the one hand, it enables youth to explore identities, connect globally, and contribute to intercultural understanding. On the other, it fosters psychological strain, social pressures, and cultural conflicts. This duality reflects the paradoxes of globalization, where opportunities and risks are inseparable. In conclusion, the analysis suggests that effective responses must be holistic. Educators should incorporate discussions of global media into curricula to foster critical engagement, rather than passive consumption. Policymakers should support programs addressing adolescent mental health, alongside initiatives that preserve local cultural heritage. Parents, too, must engage with youth culture to understand and guide their children's participation in fandom communities. By addressing these dimensions collectively, K-pop can be reframed not as a threat but as an opportunity—an influential cultural force that, when managed wisely, contributes positively to adolescent development and the achievement of the SDGs.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the K-pop phenomenon has a significant and multifaceted impact on adolescent social identity and behavior. Findings from surveys and interviews indicate that the majority of teenage fans experience positive influences, including enhanced tolerance, creativity, and opportunities for cross-cultural interaction. These aspects align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in fostering quality education and creativity (SDG 4), promoting intercultural understanding and inclusivity (SDG 10 and SDG 16), and strengthening youth participation in global cultural communities. At the same time, the research highlights challenges associated with K-pop engagement. Many adolescents reported feeling pressured to conform to unrealistic beauty and performance standards, which may negatively affect their mental health and well-being (SDG 3). Cultural conflicts also

emerged, as some participants struggled to balance the adoption of global cultural elements with the preservation of local values and traditions. These findings underscore the dual role of K-pop as both a source of empowerment and a driver of psychosocial stress. In light of these results, educators, parents, and policymakers must adopt a balanced approach to managing the influence of K-pop. Programs that integrate local cultural education, mental health awareness, and digital literacy are essential to ensure that adolescents benefit from the positive aspects of global culture while being protected from its risks. By doing so, K-pop can contribute not only to individual identity development but also to the broader realization of the SDGs, supporting the growth of resilient, creative, and globally connected young generations.

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Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the conception, design, and development of this study. The first author focused on theoretical frameworks and data analysis, while the second author supported methodology refinement and international perspectives. Both authors collaborated in writing, editing, and final approval of the manuscript, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives and academic rigor.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, or publication of this article. This study was conducted independently, without financial or institutional pressures influencing the findings. All interpretations and conclusions reflect the authors' scholarly analysis, maintaining transparency, neutrality, and commitment to academic integrity throughout the entire research and writing process.

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