

Perceived Media Portrayal of K-Pop Idols and Its Potential Impacts on Audiences' Perception of Masculinity in China: A Comparative Study of Different Generations

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Abstract

The proliferation of K-pop culture has sparked controversy in China over its impact on the perception of masculinity, therefore the Chinese government has banned all K-pop content on TV and social media. This research intends to investigate the perceived media portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on TV/online TV and its impact on the perception of masculinity by two generations: Millennials and Generation Z and compare the difference between them. This study adopted the quantitative approach and surveyed with an online questionnaire due to Covid-19. As many as 425 valid results were collected from respondents of both Millennials and Generation Z groups. The data collected were utilized to test the hypotheses on SPSS. Hypothesis 1 was tested with linear regression analysis and hypothesis 2 with independent sample t-test. The findings show a significant difference between Millennials and Generation Z in the perception of masculinity under the impact of the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on TV/online TV in China. Millennials strongly agreed with the impact while Generation Z disagreed. The findings of this study could serve to improve the regulations on intercultural communication activities in China. It is recommended to proceed with ongoing comparative studies on the perception of masculinity between the current target audience and the coming younger generation to draw a better conclusion about the cultural trends in China.

Keywords: K-pop Idol, Perceived Media Portrayal, Perception of Masculinity

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การรับรู้ภาพสื่อของไอดอลเคป็อปและผลกระทบที่อาจเกิดขึ้นต่อการรับรู้ของผู้ชมเกี่ยวกับ ความเป็นชายในจีน: การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบของคนรุ่นต่างๆ

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บทคัดย่อ

การแพร่กระจายของวัฒนธรรมเคป็อปได้จุดชนวนให้เกิดความขัดแย้งในประเทศจีนเกี่ยวกับผลกระทบที่มีต่อการรับรู้ถึงความเป็นชาย ดังนั้นรัฐบาลจีนจึงสั่งห้ามเนื้อหาเคป็อปทั้งหมดในทีวีและโซเชียลมีเดีย งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายที่จะศึกษาภาพที่สื่อรับรู้เกี่ยวกับความเป็นชายของไอดอลเคป็อปในทีวี/ทีวีออนไลน์ และผลกระทบที่มีต่อการรับรู้ถึงความเป็นชายโดยสองรุ่น: Millennials และ Generation Z และเปรียบเทียบความแตกต่างระหว่างพวกเขา การศึกษานี้ใช้แนวทางเชิงปริมาณและสำรวจด้วยแบบสอบถามออนไลน์เนื่องจากโควิด-19 รวบรวมผลลัพธ์ที่ถูกต้องได้มากถึง 425 รายการจากผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามของทั้งกลุ่ม Millennials และ Generation Z ข้อมูลที่รวบรวมได้ถูกนำมาใช้เพื่อทดสอบสมมติฐานเกี่ยวกับ SPSS ทดสอบสมมติฐาน 1 ด้วยการวิเคราะห์การถดถอยเชิงเส้นและสมมติฐานที่ 2 ด้วยการทดสอบตัวอย่างอิสระ ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญระหว่างคนรุ่นมิลเลนเนียลและเจเนอเรชัน Z ในการรับรู้ถึงความเป็นชายภายใต้ผลกระทบของภาพที่ไอดอลเคป็อปรับรู้ทางทีวี/ทีวีออนไลน์ในประเทศจีน Millennials เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่งกับผลกระทบในขณะที่ Generation Z ไม่เห็นด้วย ผลการวิจัยนี้สามารถนำไปใช้ในการปรับปรุงกฎระเบียบเกี่ยวกับกิจกรรมการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมในประเทศจีน ขอแนะนำให้ดำเนินการศึกษาเปรียบเทียบอย่างต่อเนื่องเกี่ยวกับการรับรู้ถึงความเป็นชายระหว่างกลุ่มเป้าหมายปัจจุบันกับคนรุ่นใหม่ที่กำลังมาถึง เพื่อหาข้อสรุปที่ดีขึ้นเกี่ยวกับแนวโน้มทางวัฒนธรรมในประเทศจีน

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Introduction

Background of the Study

This study intends to investigate the perceived media portrayal of K-pop idols and its potential impacts on audiences' perception of masculinity in China. Over the past two decades, the Korean pop idols have swept the globe. This cultural phenomenon was first described by the Chinese media with the term "Korean Wave". Television coverage in the days before the internet should be given credit for the Korean wave's early dissemination. K-pop was broadcast on television thanks to official cultural exchange initiatives. With songs that resonated with the younger generation and covered many diverse issues aside from love, the early K-pop idols won over their followers' hearts. Additionally, K-pop idols' public image as polite and modest factors into their appeal in China during this decade.

Early K-pop is Western-influenced music sung by Koreans in a combination of English and Korean. The early transmission of the Korean wave should be attributed to television coverage in the pre-internet age. Televised K-pop was spread through official cultural exchange activities like the China-Korea Song Festival broadcasted on China Central Television (CCTV), variety shows such as Hunan Satellite TV's Happy Camp, K-pop MVs broadcast on music programs like Channel V, and song request programs on cable TV (Sun & Liew, 2019). With "their rebellious image, as portrayed through the group's outlandish fashion, irreverent rapping, and urban dance choreographies" (Doujiao, 2001), the early K-pop idols won the hearts of their fans with songs that "resonated with the younger generation" covering "many different topics apart from love" (Blue Rain, 2001). For instance, about a top-of-the-list boy band of the time-H.O.T., fans pointed out the existence of songs touching on the broader social issues and challenges faced by young people (Blue Rain, 2001). Another K-pop boy band NRG rose to stardom after their appearance on Happy Camp due to nationwide coverage of the show on satellite television. As Si Jie recalled, NRG's cassettes sold almost 200,000 copies within a month (NetEase Entertainment, 2012). Moreover, the portrayal of K-pop idols' as publicly well-mannered and humble also contributed to their popularity in China during this decade. China used to be a country where K-pop culture appeared to have an unequaled effect due to a lack of strong indigenous entertainment organizations. China's media business had generated a significant demand for K-pop material and persistent reliance on South Korean entertainment productions catering to its cultural tastes, in addition to the interdependent economic relations with South Korea.

The greatest Korean star-seeking community in the world is found in China, particularly in Generation Z. Due to China's reform and opening-up policy along with its rapid economic development, it has been made possible for the Chinese people to pick a lifestyle catering to their aesthetic orientation and according to their wishes. The arrival of the Korean wave provides Chinese people with more choices - to feel and experience different cultures, cultivate their own aesthetic taste, and change and enrich their past lifestyle (Piao, 2011). Historically influenced by Chinese Confucianism, South Korean pop culture has served as a new model incorporating Western and Confucianist values, which is conducive to China's transitioning to modernity and connecting to the outside world.

During this process, Chinese teenagers are the most profoundly and extensively affected by the Korean wave. Firstly, they are “energetic, with wide-ranging interests, rich feelings, active thoughts and full of fantasy; they are constantly seeking novelty and to be different in society” (Zheng, 2008), so they have to try to follow the leading trend led by K-pop idols. Secondly, they are also a vulnerable group in that they have been “in a state of tension, bustle, and fatigue since they were primary school students (even kindergartens). They bear multiple pressures from families, schools and society, and bear too many expectations and hopes, so there must always be a channel to eliminate the resulting pressure and troubles” (Piao, 2016). The rapid economic development of China and its reform and opening-up policies have made it feasible for the Chinese people to choose a way of life that is in line with their preferences and aesthetic orientation. Chinese people now have more options thanks to the entrance of the Korean wave, including the chance to experience and learn about other cultures, develop their own aesthetic preferences, and improve and change their current way of life. South Korea, historically influenced by Chinese Confucianism, has its pop culture acting as a new model fusing Western and Confucianist ideals, which is helpful for China's modernization and connection to the outside world. The Korean wave is having the most deep and widespread effects on Chinese teenagers at this time.

While K-pop idols were so pervasive on TV, on social media, on the front page of the press, to the point that the Chinese authorities implemented censorship against the sweeping influence of K-pop idols, for reasons they claim to be threats to the future of the nation. According to the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA), all broadcasters must “resolutely put an end to ‘sissy men’ and other abnormal aesthetics.” These actions taken by the Chinese authorities are a reflection of the official concern that Chinese pop idols influenced by the slim, androgynous look of K-pop



singers and actors, are misleading China's young boys and men to becoming 'not masculine enough'. The nationwide action also shows how rampant the phenomenon is.

Although never been explicitly admitted by the Chinese state media, the ban on K-pop has been repeatedly revealed by media reports outside the country. In a BBC Chinese report by Wang (2017), the specific measures under the restriction orders against K-pop have been summarized in five points: 1) Prohibit South Korean directors from coming to China to direct artistic productions; 2) Stop new investment in Korean cultural industry companies; 3) Stop Korean idol groups from performing to audiences of more than 10,000; 4) Prohibition of signing new cooperation projects for Korean TV dramas and variety shows; 5) Prohibition of South Korean actors appearing in TV dramas, etc.

In common sense, public disgust and media criticism should be able to put this 'abnormal' trend under control, with the criticism and opinions of literary critics and scholars playing a supervisory role as well. However, today's facts have proved that wrong. Amid the entertainment industry, whether it be the capitalist power at the back or the fans in the front, they all turned a blind eye to such criticisms and continue to let it go on its way. Now that the government intervention is in place, "Niang pao" has been given substantive connotation: it is something that violates mainstream values. Since male K-pop idols are recognized for their distinctive "beautiful boy" appearance, a number of Korean news outlets described China's restriction on effeminate men as another effort to enrage the K-pop industry. Many Chinese internet commenters have also blamed the Korean wave, also known as hallyu, for the trend of "sissy" behavior in Chinese guys, contending that K-pop boy bands were the main inspiration for the Niang pao look.

In the construct and the audiences' perception of masculinity nowadays, the media portrayal on television/online television has played an essential role which added fuel to the prevalence of K-pop idols. Idols are a kind of "constructed individuals" whose images are composed of media promotion, publicity, entertainment review, etc. They are combined and constructed together, and at the same time blended with the taste and evaluation of the public. From "masculine" to "effeminate" by observing the changes in the image of male idols, not only can we see how the cultural industry profoundly affects and changes physical cognition and aesthetics, but also discover the evolution and anxiety in the social cognition of gender image.

Therefore, it is important to perceive K-pop idols' potential influences from two different perspectives. On the surface, the K-pop wave has successfully made its way into almost every participating country of globalization which is the external cause for the situation, therefore China is

no exception, not to mention its geographical and cultural adjacency with South Korea. Meanwhile internally, the awakening of feminism has paved the way for the changes of masculinity in China, simply because young women are the largest audience group for the artistic works created and the major fan base of the pop stars produced by the entertainment industry in recent years. As a result, the shift to a softened portrayal of men happened to meet the psychological needs of female audiences. Women who used to be the object of the ‘male gaze’, have now become the subject as the major consumer group and are transforming the masculinity image with the ‘female gaze’.

When it comes to the perception of masculinity, this study is intended to focus particularly on Generation Z (born in 1997- 2012) and the Millennials (born in 1981-1996) for the reasons that the Millennials were the major consumers of K-pop idols when the “Korean wave” started to have an important impact on China’s entertainment industry, and that Generation Z is the group of people who built up the world’s biggest K-pop fandom. Meanwhile, the Millennials are the witness and active participants of the time when China’s economy was growing at a two-digit rate while embracing all cultures from the developed world, whereas Generation Z is growing up in the period when China’s economy is comparatively slowing down and promoting the revival of traditional values-a movement considered more conservative than progressive. The perception of masculinity is a reflection of the self-identity of the people in China. Therefore, a comparative analysis on the perceptive differences between two generations will serve to understand the permeating impact of mass media in the shaping of social norms and to predict future trends on gender issues.

Objectives of Study

First, to examine the main characteristics of K-pop culture with idols as icons, the way K-pop idols are portrayed by the K-pop industry and by Chinese mainstream media, and the principal channels for intercultural communication;

Second, to study the definition of masculinity, and how this concept has changed over time;

Third, to compare the differences in the perception of masculinity between Millennials and Generation Z and to explore the causes for the differences;

Scope of Study

This study will explore the features of K-pop idols from their first appearance to the official censorship in 2017, their artworks and the platforms they used to gain publicity, as well as the portrayal in Chinese mass media. Then the study will compare the perception of masculinity between



Generation Z and Millennials. Taking into consideration the significance in the comparison, the Millennials born from 1982 to 1987 and the Generation Z born from 2002 to 2007 will be selected as the population for this study. The selection for these two age groups can be explained by Lifshitz (2000) whose findings posited that people aged 14 to 19 are categorized as adolescents and people aged 20 to 39 as a younger group of adults.

Research Questions

This study aims to examine the following four research questions:

- 1) Does the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on Chinese TV/online TV have an impact on the perception of masculinity in Chinese society?
- 2) Are there differences in the perception of masculinity between the Millennials and Generation Z?

Significance of The Study

Firstly, the K-pop culture has developed into a main driver of global culture, to study its impacts is important in understanding a nation's soft power which has been recognized as an engine for sustainable economic growth. It is also a successful model for facilitating a nation's publicity and intercultural communications.

Secondly, masculinity as a concept has long been trapped in a patriarchal stereotype and earlier endeavors are mostly from the western world whose research findings were based on western traditions and values. This study will focus on east Asians, or more specifically, the countries with Confucian heritage culture. Its findings will potentially enrich the concept of masculinity.

Thirdly, the Millennials are the backbone actors of today's Chinese society and are making substantive changes in the country, whereas Generation Z is their immediate successors. An analysis of the difference in the perception of a common concept will help understand the current cultural trends and make potential predictions about where this nation is headed in the future.

Definition of Terms

K-Pop Idol: In South Korean fandom culture, a star who performs in the K-pop industry, either as a solo artist or as a member of a group, is referred to as K-Pop Idol. The highly manufactured star system that K-pop idols are produced under and made their debut under, as well as their propensity to symbolize a hybridized fusion of visuals, music, fashion, and dance, are characteristics of the genre. They typically work for a well-known entertainment company and have received considerable



instruction in singing, dancing, and a foreign language. Idols invest a lot of time and money into cultivating relationships with fans through events like concerts and meetups in addition to maintaining a carefully manicured public persona and social media presence.

Hallyu: the literal translation of the Chinese term hallyu is "Korean Wave." It is a term that refers to the phenomenal rise of Korean popular culture as a whole, which includes everything from Korean food to music, drama, and movies.

Fandom: a fandom is a group of people who have a common interest and is defined by its members' sense of empathy and togetherness. Fans typically pay close attention to even the smallest details of the subjects of their fandom and devote a significant amount of their time and energy to these pursuits. They frequently participate in specific social networks with similar practices, which distinguishes fandom members from those who have only a passing interest.

Millennial: people who were born in the year 1981-1996, aged 25-40 in 2021;

Generation Z (Gen Z): people who were born in the year 1997 to 2012;

Confucianism: also known as Ruism, is a system of thought and behavior originating in ancient China. Various described as tradition, a philosophy, a religion, a humanistic or rationalistic religion, a way of governing, or simply a way of life.

Niang Pao: a pejorative nickname for some guys in Chinese that is most often rendered as "sissy" but properly means "girly weapons / girlie cannons."

Male Gaze: the term "male gaze" refers to an attitude toward women that sexualizes and devalues them while emancipating men. While we are biologically compelled to assess each other as potential partners starting in early adolescence, the male gaze twists this natural impulse, turning the women into passive objects to possess and use as props.

Female Gaze: the gendered attention anticipated in visual and audiovisual texts addressed to female viewers.

Perceived Portrayal of masculinity by K-pop Idols on TV/online TV: it refers to the incorporation of fashion styles, behavioral styles, way of thinking and speaking presented by male K-pop idols on TV/online TV.

Perception Of Masculinity: it involves how the audiences perceive masculinity, and the factors they consider to measuring the level of masculinity.



Literature Review

This chapter is a summary of related literature and previous studies on the K-pop idols and fan culture, the representation of masculinity by K-pop idols, and the perception of masculinity in China. Furthermore, this chapter serves to explore the concepts, principles, and the related theories to develop the hypotheses and the theoretical framework.

Past Study on the Chronology of K-pop

Hallyu can be further divided into three stages when analyzed from the consumer's perspective while keeping China's features in mind: Hallyu 1.0, or the Analog Media era (1992-2004), Hallyu 2.0, or the Pre-mobile Internet era (2005-2012), and Hallyu 3.0, or the Mobile Internet era (2013-present).

Hallyu 1.0 (1997-2007)

Before the arrival of K-pop, China's entertainment content was mainly from Hong Kong and Taiwan. As a result of the normalization of the diplomatic ties between South Korea and China in the 1990s, Hallyu 1.0 arrive in the form of a 'Korean remake' of the American Hip-Hop music through traditional media such as television, radio and magazines. The positive reception of K-pop in this period "reflects the global connectivity, ethnolinguistic affinity, and cultural modernity desired and referenced by the Chinese consumers as they re-plug themselves into the world of pop." (Sun & Liew, 2019). The representative boy band of K-pop in this period are H.O.T., SECHSKIES, Shinhwa and GOD whose fans were mostly the first generation of Millennials. Labeled as "Hahanzu", these fans were mainly middle and high school students between the age 13-18 (Dazui, 2001). At its peak, H.O.T. had a Chinese fan club of over 8 million members (Tencent Entertainment, 2015).

Hallyu 2.0 (2005-2012)

Hallyu 2.0 is described as the Korean wave in the age of social media. Since late 2007, the Hallyu phenomenon has experienced a significant shift with the growth of social media, and K-Pop has become the most distinct cultural genre in the Hallyu 2.0 era (Dal, 2013). The massive usage of social media and the proliferation of smart phones have also taken central roles in the diffusion of K-Pop, because fans worldwide consume K-Pop and through social media along with other cultural content. The most successful boy bands of this era are Super Junior, TVXQ! Bigbang, 2PM, SS501, CNblue.



Hallyu 3.0 (2013-present)

The beginning of the mid-2010s marks the start of “Hallyu 3.0” which is characterized by new associations with different platforms, exerting a larger cultural and societal impact across the globe. The rise and spread of K-pop groups such as BTS and new YouTube content like Mukbang (먹방; meokbang) videos have become characteristic of Hallyu 3.0. Musical artists and international media production with foreign studios such as Netflix have also facilitated a new rise in global Korean media consumption (TNEC News Desk, 2021). The representatives of this era are BTS, EXO, GOT7, Winner, IKON, etc. Among them, the most prominent boy group is BTS who was the first K-pop group to deliver a speech at the UN, themed “speak yourself”. They were also the very boy group that triggered the harsh regulation against Hallyu in China, with their fans spreading photos of a Jeju Air airplane featuring BTS’ Jimin on its exterior circulated on Weibo as part of a BTS fan club’s campaign to celebrate the K-pop star’s 26th birthday. The campaign was later accused of “illegal fundraising” among fandom members.

K-pop Idols and Fan Culture

In contrast to western artists and their fans, K-pop idols have a different relationship with their followers. K-pop idols host fan events, stream live, and reply to fan comments on social media, forging a connection with plenty of interactions and expanding K-reach pops in terms of audiences. K-pop idols have overwhelmingly received support for their artwork garnering awards and accolades thanks to their growing fan base. In the meanwhile, the fans frequently choose the paths that idols take. The connections between idols and fans are fascinating because they are a double-edged sword that may be both good and terrible, spreading support for a specific musical genre while also causing drama and controversy.

Perceived Portrayal of Masculinity By K-Pop Idols

People today are almost surely going to see bright hair colors, lavish costumes, beautiful complexion, extensively made-up eyes, and painted lips when watching any K-pop music video. They demonstrate to people how wearing makeup increases confidence, which is seen to be the very definition of masculinity.

The reason K-pop stars put on makeup and dress up, in their opinion, is not that they can be perceived as being more or less feminine or masculine, but rather that they can display their best selves to audiences and fans.



Perception of Masculinity in China

Men, in a traditional patriarchal society, represented societal order, therefore emotional self-control is essential. Their job was to discipline, direct, and educate the people in their neighborhood. An interesting concept relating to historical masculinity ideals in China is wen-wu (文武), proposed by scholar Kam Louie. Wen (文) or 'civil', suggested a culturally refined masculinity, wu (武) or 'martial' a warlike masculinity (Li & Kuang, 2021).

As China's economy and competitiveness rose significantly in the 1980s, so did its perception of masculinity. Men were still expected to be 'responsible,' but this time it meant earning a living. Success was defined as having a decent career and providing a greater standard of living for your family: in other words, money. The ability to take chances and compete in the corporate world has become synonymous with masculinity.

However, in recent years, attitudes around masculinity have begun to shift. China, being one of K-pop's most important markets, has been profoundly influenced by its portrayal of masculinity. Nowadays, when viewing any K-pop music video, people will almost certainly be confronted with "loud hair colors, elaborate outfits, flawless skin, heavily made-up eyes and painted lips." (Morin, 2020). BTS members are an excellent example of "being unabashed in wearing bright eye shadows, pastel-colored hairstyles, and taking care of their complexions." (Yi, 2020). They show people that wearing makeup boosts one's confidence, which appears to be the essence of masculinity. The young Chinese have enthusiastically embraced the new emergent masculinity, with China's idol production based on the Korean model. This has added to the widespread concern about a "gender crisis." This new masculinity is artistically and emotionally portrayed by male idols who are typically thin, with light skin, colored hair, and full makeup, exuding femininity and attractiveness. They have no qualms about expressing personal feelings. The tendency cannot be explained by the wen-wu paradigm. Instead, the lines between traditional gender norms are blurring.

Related Theories

The Looking-glass Self Theory: it argues that human conduct is substantially determined by self-awareness, which is mostly acquired through social contact. Other people's opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of themselves are a reflection of oneself. Through this "mirror," the individual learns about and grasps himself. Fans might see themselves in idols. Individual fans in the fandom also integrate their self-imagination with the opinions of others by comparing their proposals to those of

other fans or the fan base, completing the development of self-identity. Others notice fan behavior, and self-imagination is harmonized with others' assessments, resulting in a high level of self-identity.

Social Cognitive Theory: it emphasizes learning via observing others. When K-pop idols' fashion styles or behavior patterns are magnified and repeated by media, young audiences are more prone to copy them and regard their idols act as role models. Therefore, when young audiences try to establish their concept of masculinity, they are inevitably influenced by the media portrayal of their idols. With the massive consumption of K-pop idols' media content, young audiences may form their perception of social concepts with their role models as reference, which is a tremendous benefit to young audiences who lack social experience and illuminates the path for them. The young audience watches and imitates idols' styles and actions to determine what is suitable and if they will be rewarded or penalized for it, and then self-regulate using their own cognition. If the youth audience feels they match the criteria, they will be satisfied, and their perception of the concept will be strengthened.

Hypothesis(es)

This study aims to test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on television/online television has influenced the perception of masculinity in Chinese society.

Hypothesis 2: The perception of masculinity by Millennials and Generation Z are significantly different;

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework discusses the interrelationships among the independent variable and the dependent variables.

Independent variable: the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on Chinese television /online television;

Dependent variables: the perception of masculinity by Millennials in China/ the perception of masculinity by Generation Z in China

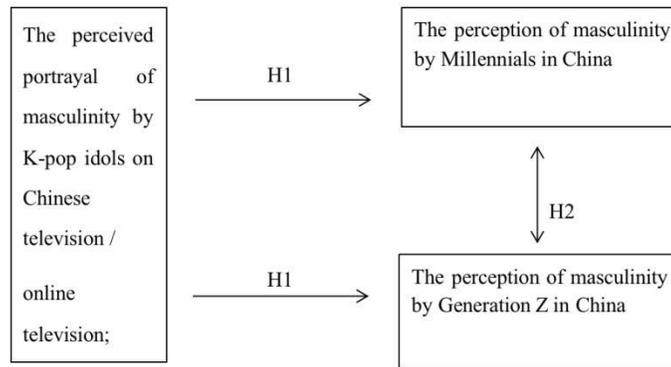


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Methodology

The procedures and research methodology used to investigate the theoretical framework and hypotheses were outlined in this part.

Research Design

The K-pop culture has a far-reaching impact in China, not merely in the development of the entertainment industry, but also in the perception of masculinity with its media portrayals in a subtle way. Up until recently, the changing image of masculinity in Chinese society has been a controversial topic. The purpose of this study was to investigate the correlation between media portrayals of K-pop idols and their audiences' perception of masculinity, especially among Generation Z and Millennials.

This study will adopt a quantitative approach whose aim is to determine the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable in a population. For data collection, a questionnaire will be used.

Population and Sample Selection

Targeted Populations: in this study, the population is the K-pop fans of the Generation Z and Millennials. These have been chosen as they have been the target audience of K-pop from Hallyu 1.0 to Hallyu 3.0. Moreover, they both have been heavy consumers of K-pop content from Hallyu 1.0 to Hallyu 3.0.



Selection of Sampling

The sample of this study are the Millennials born from 1982 to 1987 and the Generation Z born from 2002 to 2007, that is, the first half of the Millennial generation, and the second half of the generation Z. The age gap between the two sample groups was necessary to compare their perception of masculinity under the impact of the perceived portrayal of K-pop idols on Chinese TV/online TV.

In this study, the author will adopt the non-probability convenience sampling method to select sample units using convenience. The sample size for this study will be established using the Krejcie & Morgan table and formula, which can be found in the Appendix B. For a population of 1,000,000 K-pop Chinese fans, the researcher will select 384 respondents based on convenience sampling with 192 respondents from Generation Z and 192 respondents from Millennials.

Research Instrument

The researcher will utilize the quantitative research approach by constructing an online questionnaire which consists of five sections:

1) The Demographic Information: the demographic information of the participants was the focus of the first section of the questionnaire, which included age, gender, level of education, employment, financial condition, and starting age of idol worship.

2) The Perceived Portrayal Of K-Pop Idols On TV/Online TV In China: the second section of the questionnaire is about the perceived portrayal of K-pop idols on TV/online TV in China, the K-pop artifact which created awareness among fans, and the description of K-pop idols' looks and behaviors relevant to masculinity. According to the Brannon Masculinity Scale (BMS) (Brannon & Juni, 1984), there are four traditional themes in measuring masculinity: 1) the fear of appearing feminine; 2) the desire for success and the need to be looked up to; 3) to be tough, courageous, and self-reliant; and 4) to be aggressive, conquering and violent. The author provided statements according to these four themes and the respondents were provided with answers with five-point scale, arranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree to, (5) strongly agree.

The respondent's opinion on each item was measured using a five-point scale, ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Calculating the greatest score minus the lowest score and then dividing it by the number of levels yielded the requirements for the scale degree. The following is the formula:

Mean range for the scale degree = (Highest score - Lowest score) / Number of levels
Mean range for the scale degree = (5 - 1) / 5 = 4 / 5 = 0.80

As a result, the scale's mean range was 0.8. The researcher classified the mean range into five categories, as shown in Table 3, ranging from strongly agree, agree, so-so, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Table 1: Opinions toward Score Mean Interpretation of the Statement

Opinions	Score	Mean	Meaning
Strongly Agree with the statement	5	4.21 - 5.00	Strongly Agree
Agree with the statement	4	3.41 - 4.20	Agree
So-so with the statement	3	2.61 - 3.40	So-so
Disagree with the statement	2	1.81 - 2.60	Disagree
Strongly Disagree with the statement	1	1.00 - 1.80	Strongly Disagree

Statements in this section:

- (1). K-pop male idols are dressed in a masculine way on TV/online TV;
- (2). K-pop male idols are dressed in an androgynous way;
- (3). K-pop male idols' dance embodies power and strength;
- (4). K-pop male idols' dance embodies flow and sexiness;
- (5). K-pop male idols are portrayed as heroes in their music videos;
- (6). K-pop male idols are portrayed as average people in their music videos;
- (7). The biographical stories of your idol make you believe he is courageous and tough;
- (8). The biographical stories of your idol make you believe he is fragile and gentle.

3) The Perception of K-pop Idols' behaviors on TV/online TV

The third section is about the perception of K-pop idols' behaviors on TV/ Online TV. The responses were provided with five-point scale, arranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree to (5) strongly agree.

Statements in this section:

- (1). You often see aggressive and dominant behaviors of your K-pop idols on TV/online TV;
- (2). You often see peaceful and obedient behaviors of your K-pop idols on TV/online TV;
- 4) The Impact of Exposure To K-Pop Content on Fans' Behaviors



The fourth part involves the impact of exposure to K-pop on fans' behaviors. The responses were provided with five-point scale, arranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree to (5) strongly agree.

Statements in this section:

- (1). You consider yourself addicted to K-pop content;
- (2). You often imitate your idols' style and way of speaking (including body language);
- (3). You recommend the K-pop style to your family, friends, or lover;
- (4). You look for partners resembling K-pop idols in your relationship;
- 5) The Perception of Masculinity in China

The fifth section is about the perception of masculinity in China, the difference between the perception of masculinity by Millennials and Generation Z, the responses were provided with five-point scale, arranging from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree to (5) strongly agree.

Statements in this section:

- (1). You believe masculinity primarily means to be tough, courageous, ambitious, and sometimes aggressive;
- (2). You believe masculinity also means to be emotional, assuming one's sexual orientation, and not hiding a man's feminine side;
- (3). Do you agree that the standards of masculinity have changed over time?
- (4). After the ban on K-pop content in China, its impact is still present;
- (5). The perception of masculinity is different between Generation Z and Millennials
- (6). Millennials' definition of masculinity is more macho.
- (7). Generation Z's definition of masculinity is more androgynous.

Data Collection

Given the large number of K-pop fans in China, the researcher will only look at the fans from two age groups: Millennials and Generation Z. The respondents must have been a consumer of K-pop content on TV/online TV.

Using the convenience sampling approach, the researcher will spend 15 days to share the questionnaire link with the audience via Wechat when it is published on the Chinese questionnaire site "Questionnaire Star." The objective is to yield at least 384 valid results. Given the covid-19

prevention measures, the questionnaire will be completed online, and the audiences may complete the survey on Wechat and then send it back to the researcher.

Data Analysis

In this study, the hypotheses will be tested with SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Hypothesis 1 will be tested using linear regression analysis, and Hypothesis 2 will be tested using independent sample t-test.

Hypothesis 1: The perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on television/online television has influenced the perception of masculinity in Chinese society;

Independent variable: The perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols;

Dependent variable: the perception of masculinity in Chinese society;

Statistical analysis: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 2: The perception of masculinity by Millennials and Generation Z are significantly different;

Statistical analysis: Independent t-test

Findings

This part summarizes the descriptive findings and the interpretation of the data acquired from the online survey conducted in March 2022. The researcher received 425 fulfilled questionnaires from the target age groups: Millennials (1982-1987) and Gen Z (2002-2007).

Descriptive Analysis

1) Demographic Information

In this research, the sample was divided into two groups: those born between 1982-1987 (Millennials) and between 2002-2007 (Gen Z). The Millennials group accounted for 77.65%, and the Gen Z accounted for 22.35%, see table 2

Table 2: Age of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1.born between 1982-1987	330	77.65%
2.born between 2002-2007	95	22.35%
Total	425	100%



As for Millennials, they consist of 33.03% of males (n=109), and 66.97% of females (n=221); regarding their level of education, they consist of 39.09% of high school diploma or under (n=129), 41.82% of bachelor's degree (n=138), 13.64% of master's degree (n=45) and 5.45% of doctoral degree (n=18); regarding their profession, they consist of 0.6% of student (n=2), 39.70% of office workers (n=131), 22.42% of technical workers (n=74), 18.18% of job applicants (n=60), 9.39% of freelancers (n=31), 4.85% of business owners (n=16), 3.94% of unemployed (n=13), and 0.91% of other careers (n=3); regarding their level of income, they consist of 5.15% under 2,000 RMB per month (n=17), 15.15% of 2,000-3,500 RMB per month (n=50), 50.6% of 3,501-5,000 RMB per month (n=167), and 29.09% of more than 5,000 RMB per month (n=96); regarding their length of time consuming K-pop content, they consist of 27.88% of less than one year (n=92), 36.67% of 1-3 years (n=121), 21.52% of more than 3-5 years (n=71), and 3.94% of over 5 years (n=46), see table 2.

As for Gen Z, they consist of 33.68% of males (n=32), and 66.32% of females (n=63); regarding their level of education, they consist of 60% of high school diploma or under (n=57), 33.68% of bachelor's degree (n=32), 6.32% of master's degree (n=6) and none of them got a doctoral degree (n=0); regarding their profession, they consist of 93.68% of students (n=89), 3.16% of freelancers (n=3), 1.05% of office workers, technical workers, or other careers (n=1/each), and none of them were business owners, job applicants, or unemployed (n=0); regarding their level of income, they consist of 21.05% under 2,000 RMB per month (n=20), 43.16% of 2,000-3,500 RMB per month (n=41), 18.95% of 3,501-5,000 RMB per month (n=18), and 16.84% of more than 5,000 RMB per month (n=16); regarding their length of time consuming K-pop content, they consist of 27.37% of less than one year (n=26), 37.89% of 1-3 years (n=36), 17.89% of more than 3-5 years (n=17), and 16.84% of over 5 years (n=16), see table 3.

Table 3: Gender, Level of Education, Profession, Level of Income, Years of Consuming Idol Content by Millennials and Gen Z

	Variables	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	1. Female	Millennials	221	66.97%
		Gen Z	63	66.32%
	2. Male	Millennials	109	33.03%
		Gen Z	32	33.68%
		Millennials	129	39.09%

Table 3: Gender, Level of Education, Profession, Level of Income, Years of Consuming Idol Content by Millennials and Gen Z (Continue)

Variables		Group	Frequency	Percentage
Level of Education	1. High school diploma or under	Gen Z	57	60%
		Millennials	138	41.82%
	2. Bachelor's degree	Gen Z	32	33.68%
		Millennials	45	13.64%
	3. Master's degree	Gen Z	6	6.32%
		Millennials	18	5.45%
	4. Doctoral degree	Gen Z	0	0%
		Millennials	2	0.6%
Profession	1. Student	Gen Z	89	93.68%
		Millennials	131	39.70%
	2. Office Worker	Gen Z	1	1.05%
		Millennials	74	22.42%
	3. Technical Worker	Gen Z	1	1.05%
		Millennials	60	18.18%
	4. Job Applicant	Gen Z	0	0%
		Millennials	31	9.39%
	5. Freelance	Gen Z	3	3.16%
		Millennials	16	4.85%
	6. Business Owner	Gen Z	0	0%
		Millennials	13	3.94%
	7. Unemployed	Gen Z	0	0%
		Millennials	3	0.91%
	8. Others	Gen Z	1	1.05%
		Millennials	17	5.15%



Table 3: Gender, Level of Education, Profession, Level of Income, Years of Consuming Idol Content by Millennials and Gen Z (Continue)

Variables		Group	Frequency	Percentage
Level of Income	1. Under 2,000 RMB per month	Gen Z	20	21.05%
		Millennials	50	15.15%
	2. 2,000 - 3,500 RMB per month	Gen Z	41	43.16%
		Millennials	167	50.6%
	3. 3,501 - 5,000 RMB per month	Gen Z	18	18.95%
		Millennials	96	29.09%
	4. More than 5,000 RMB per month	Gen Z	16	16.84%
		Millennials	92	27.88%
How many years have you been consuming K-pop idols' content?	1. Less than one year	Gen Z	26	27.37%
		Millennials	121	36.67%
	2. 1 - 3 years	Gen Z	36	37.89%
		Millennials	71	21.52%
	3. More than 3 - 5 years	Gen Z	17	17.89%
		Millennials	46	13.94%
	4. Over 5 years;	Gen Z	16	16.84%
		Millennials	92	27.88%

2) The Perceived Portrayal of K-pop Idols on TV/online TV in China

Regarding the respondents' opinion about the perceived portrayal of K-pop idols on TV/online TV in China, they agreed that K-pop male idols are portrayed as average people in their music videos (mean=3.83), K-pop male idols' dance embodies power and strength (mean=3.75), the biographical stories of their idol make them believe he is fragile and gentle (mean=3.74), pop male idols are dressed in a masculine way on TV/online TV (mean=3.73), K-pop male idols are portrayed as heroes in their music videos (mean=3.73), K-pop male idols' dance embodies flow and sexiness (mean=3.72), the biographical stories of their idol make them believe he is courageous and tough (mean=3.72), and K-pop male idols are dressed in an androgynous way (mean=3.70).

To conclude, the samples agreed (M=3.74, SD=1.09) with the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols, see Table 4.

Table 4: The Perceived Portrayal of K-pop Idols on TV/online TV in China

The Perceived Portrayal of K-pop Idols on TV/online TV in China	Mean	SD	Meaning
Pop male idols are dressed in a masculine way on TV/online TV.	3.73	1.27	Agree
K-pop male idols are dressed in an androgynous way.	3.70	1.24	Agree
K-pop male idols' dance embodies power and strength.	3.75	1.34	Agree
K-pop male idols' dance embodies flow and sexiness.	3.72	1.29	Agree
K-pop male idols are portrayed as heroes in their music videos.	3.73	1.27	Agree
K-pop male idols are portrayed as average people in their music videos.	3.83	1.25	Agree
The biographical stories of your idol make you believe he is courageous and tough.	3.72	1.25	Agree
The biographical stories of your idol make you believe he is fragile and gentle.	3.75	1.24	Agree
Total	3.74	1.09	Agree

3) The Perception of K-pop Idols' Behaviors on TV/online TV

Regarding the respondents' opinion about the perception of K-pop idols' behaviors on TV/ online TV, the millennials strongly agreed that they often see aggressive and dominant behaviors of their K-pop idols on TV/online TV (mean=4.25), and often see peaceful and obedient behaviors of their K-pop idols on TV/online TV (mean=4.31), while Gen Z disagreed that they don't often see either aggressive and dominant behaviors or peaceful and obedient behaviors on TV/online TV (mean=1.84).

To conclude, Millennials strongly agreed (M=4.28, SD=0.76) with the perception of K-pop idols' behaviors on TV/ online TV, whereas Gen Zs disagreed (M=1.84, SD=0.76) with the perception of K-pop idols' behaviors on TV/ online TV, see Table 5.

Table 5: The Perception of K-pop idols' Behaviors on TV/ online TV

The Perception of K-pop idols' Behaviors on TV/ online TV	Group	Mean	SD	Meaning
You often see aggressive and dominant behaviors of your K-pop idols on TV	Millennials	4.25	0.745	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.84	0.854	Disagree
You often see peaceful and obedient behaviors of your K-pop idols on TV/online	Millennials	4.31	0.769	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.84	0.673	Disagree
Total		3.74	1.27	Agree

4) The Impact of Exposure To K-Pop content on Fans' Behaviors

Regarding the respondents' opinion about the impact of exposure to K-pop content on fans' behaviors, the millennials strongly agreed that they look for partners resembling K-pop idols in their relationships (mean=4.35), that they consider themselves addicted to K-pop content (mean=4.31), that they have recommended the K-pop style to their family, friends, or lovers (mean=4.30), and that they often imitate their idols' style and way of speaking (mean=4.29). However, the Gen Z disagreed that they look for partners resembling K-pop idols in their relationships (mean=1.92), that they have recommended the K-pop style to their family, friends, or lovers (mean=1.92), that they often imitate their idols' style and way of speaking (mean=1.88), or that they consider themselves addicted to K-pop content (mean=1.82).

To conclude, Millennials strongly agreed (M=4.31, SD=0.70) with the impact of exposure to K-pop content on their behaviors, while Gen Zs disagreed (M=1.89, SD=0.86) with the impact of exposure to K-pop content on their behaviors, see Table 6.

Table 6: The Impact of Exposure To K-Pop content on Fans' Behaviors

The Impact of Exposure To K-Pop content on Fans' Behaviors	Group	Mean	SD	Meaning
You consider yourself addicted to K-pop content.	Millennials	4.31	0.704	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.82	0.863	Disagree

Table 6: The Impact of Exposure To K-Pop content on Fans' Behaviors (Continue)

The Impact of Exposure To K-Pop content on Fans' Behaviors	Group	Mean	SD	Meaning
You often imitate your idols' style and way of speaking	Millennials	4.29	0.706	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.88	0.909	Disagree
You have recommended the K-pop style to your family, friends, or lover.	Millennials	4.30	0.708	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.92	0.821	Disagree
You look for partners resembling K-pop idols in your relationship.	Millennials	4.35	0.690	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.92	0.907	Disagree
Total		3.77	1.26	Agree

5) The Perception of Masculinity in China

Regarding the respondents' opinion about the perception of masculinity in China, the millennials strongly agreed that their definition of masculinity is more macho (mean=4.30), that Generation Z's definition of masculinity is more androgynous (mean=4.28), that the perception of masculinity is different between Generation Z and Millennials (mean=4.28), that the standards of masculinity have changed over time (mean=4.28), that they believe masculinity means to be emotional, assuming one's sexual orientation, and not hiding a man's feminine side (mean=4.28), that they believe masculinity primarily means to be tough, courageous, ambitious, and sometimes aggressive (mean=4.28), and that after the ban on K-pop content in China, its impact is still present (mean=4.24).

As for Gen Z, they disagreed that Millennials' definition of masculinity is more macho (mean=2.02), that after the ban on K-pop content in China, its impact is still present (mean=1.85), that they believe masculinity primarily means to be tough, courageous, ambitious, and sometimes aggressive (mean=1.84), that they believe masculinity means to be emotional, assuming one's sexual orientation, and not hiding a man's feminine side (mean=1.75), that their definition of masculinity is more androgynous (mean=1.72), that the perception of masculinity is different between Generation Z and Millennials (mean=1.72), and that the standards of masculinity have changed over time (mean=1.71).

To conclude, Millennials strongly agreed ($M=4.28$, $SD=0.77$) with the perception of masculinity in China, while Gen Zs strongly disagreed ($M=1.80$, $SD=0.74$) with the perception of masculinity in China, see Table 7.

Table 7: The Perception of Masculinity in China

The Perception of Masculinity in China	Group	Mean	SD	Meaning
You believe masculinity primarily means to be tough, courageous, ambitious, and sometimes aggressive.	Millennials	4.28	0.753	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.84	0.879	Disagree
Masculinity means to be emotional, assuming one's sexual orientation, and not hiding a man's feminine side.	Millennials	4.28	0.753	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.75	0.743	Disagree
The standards of masculinity have changed over time	Millennials	4.28	0.760	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.71	0.698	Disagree
After the ban on K-pop content in China, its impact is still present	Millennials	4.24	0.771	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.85	0.714	Disagree
The perception of masculinity is different between Generation Z and Millennials	Millennials	4.28	0.765	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.72	0.663	Disagree
Millennials' definition of masculinity is more macho.	Millennials	4.30	0.750	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	2.02	0.825	Disagree
Generation Z's definition of masculinity is more androgynous.	Millennials	4.28	0.816	Strongly Agree
	Gen Z	1.72	0.647	Disagree
Total		3.72	1.28	Agree

Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses to be tested are the followings:

Hypothesis 1: The perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on television/online television has influenced the perception of masculinity in Chinese society.

Hypothesis 2: The perception of masculinity by Millennials and by Gen Z are significantly different.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1: The perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on television/online television has influenced the perception of masculinity in Chinese society.

Independent = the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on television/online television (measured on a 5-point scale (5) Strongly Agree (4) Agree (3) So-so (2) Disagree (1) Strongly Disagree)

Dependent = the perception of masculinity in Chinese society (by Millennials and Gen Z) (measured on a 5-point scale (5) Strongly Agree (4) Agree (3) So-so (2) Disagree (1) Strongly Disagree).

To test Hypothesis 1, a linear regression analysis was performed between the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on television/online television as the independent variable and the perception of masculinity in Chinese society as the dependent variable.

The R value indicated a strong relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, and the R² indicated that the independent variables accounted for 86.7% of the variation in the dependent variable, see Table 8.

Table 8: Regression Analysis of the Impact of the Perceived Portrayal of Masculinity by K-pop Idols on the Perception of Masculinity in China

Factors (n=425)	The Perceived Portrayal of Masculinity by K-pop Idols	
	β	t
Constant		1.835(p=.067)
The Perception of Masculinity in China	.931	52.613 (p<.001)
R	.931 ^a	
F	2768.099	(p<.001 ^b)
R Square.	.867	

p < .05

The linear regression analysis revealed the correlation coefficient (r = .93) (see table 8) was significant (F (1, 423) = 2768, p < .05 (see Table 8), and 86.7% of the variation in the dependent

variable was explained by the independent variable ($r^2 = .867$, adjusted $r^2 = .867$), see table 8. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was supported.

The equation of prediction produced by this analysis described the relationship between the two variables to be:

The perception of masculinity in Chinese society = $.961 \times$ the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on television/online television + $.131$, see table 8.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2: The perception of masculinity by Millennials and by Gen Z are significantly different.

An independent sample t-test was used to test Hypothesis 2. The result revealed a significant difference between the perception of masculinity between Millennials and Gen Z ($t_{423} = 58.473$, $p < .05$) (see Table 9). That is, the Millennials reported a strong agreement regarding the impact of the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on TV/online TV on the perception of masculinity in Chinese society (mean= 4.2932) (see Table 9), while the Gen Z indicated their disagreement (mean= 1.8342) (see Table 9) regarding the impact of the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on TV/online TV on the perception of masculinity in Chinese society.

Therefore, hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 9: Sample descriptives using t-test for Equality of Means

	Millennials born between 1982-1987		Gen Z born between 2002-2007		t-test
	M	SD	M	SD	
The perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols	4.2932	.34681	1.8342	.40748	58.47

$p < .05$

Note. M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation. The perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols ranges from 1(Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).



Discussion

This part summarized the descriptive findings and discussion, hypothesis testing and discussion, the limitations of this study, and also provided recommendations for related parties. The results of this research suggest that the perceived portrayal of K-pop idols on TV/online TV has a significant impact on the perception of masculinity in Chinese society. In addition, there's a significant difference in the perception of masculinity between Millennials and Gen Z. The Millennials firmly believed that the perception of masculinity in Chinese society has been changing since the first appearance of K-pop idols on TV/online TV, and their perceived portrayals have been an important driving force of the change. However, Gen Zs think that the perception of masculinity has not changed over time and the impact of K-pop idols' media portrayal is less significant. This contrast in belief is closely related to the cultural background of the time. When Millennials were the major target audience of K-pop culture, China was aspiring to reconnect with the outside world both economically and culturally, and did not have its own popular culture. Therefore, embracing foreign cultures was the trend, and the attempt of K-pop content to influence Chinese youth was positively received.

As for Gen Zs who have grown up with the benefit of China's decade-long economic achievements to be the target audience of an evolved version of K-pop culture, they see K-pop as a dish in a cultural feast. For them, the consumption of K-pop content is more of a personal preference than a necessary need, because there is C-pop (Chinese popular culture) at their convenience and this generation appears to be more confident in cultural interactions with the outside world. In addition, the Chinese government is guiding the Gen Zs through public opinion to return to the traditional values while strengthening patriotism, which also greatly weakened the influence of K-pop culture.

When investigating the two generations (1982-1987 & 2002-2007) as the sample, the researcher found out that the age gap between them has placed them in different roles in Chinese society. Based on the survey results, 93.68% of Gen Zs in the sample are students, whereas 62.12% of Millennials in the sample are office/technical workers. Therefore, it is likely to assume that Millennials are the rule makers and Gen Zs are the rule followers in Chinese society. When Millennials are convinced of the significant impact of K-pop idol's media portrayal on the perception of masculinity in Chinese society, and they have the power to make changes, it is no longer difficult to understand the bans on K-pop content.



On the other hand, Gen Zs who have spontaneously established the biggest K-pop fandom in the world disagree with the impact of justifying the censorship, and they are obliged to accept the fact that K-pop content will no longer be available on any Chinese official platforms. They might opt to go underground for a continuous consumption of K-pop content which is undoubtedly more challenging to regulate for the rule-makers. According to a Reuters report by Jourdan (2017), K-pop fans “were already finding alternative channels” and “started following a group on a Chinese messaging service that provides links to shows on file sharing platforms like Baidu Cloud” after the censorship. Moreover, if the rules become stricter, the measures could provoke issues on personal freedom. The choice of dressing code or lifestyle is a part of personal freedom, and thus men, like women, should also be granted the right to pursue beauty. Lu Han, a former member of EXO (K-pop boy band), participating in the live broadcast of a beauty brand and was asked to comment on the topic of boys' makeup, and he said: “I think it is necessary. Makeup should not be divided by gender. Everyone can do it, as long as you like it.” (Cheng, 2021). An interview by The New York Times (May, 2021) shows that K-pop fans in China “denounced” the ban on K-pop as unwarranted and overly harsh, claiming “chasing stars” a “personal freedom”. Then a vicious circle is very likely to take place.

In the process of literature review, the researcher discovered that past studies have two things in common. Firstly, they have pre-set the changes in the perception of masculinity as feminine (Shiau & Chen, 2009). Secondly, they have been focusing on the impact on society as a whole (Louie, 2012). In this research, the author attempted to find out the insight with a questionnaire about the perception of masculinity by Millennials and Gen Z without psychologically suggesting that the current trend is feminizing. Rather, it was chosen by the sample whether the trend is changing from masculine to effeminate or simply masculine in an evolved pattern.

According to the survey results, Millennials strongly agreed that the standards of masculinity have changed over time, while the Gen Zs largely disagreed. Therefore, it can be suggested that the generation gap has led to a radical difference in the conceptualization of masculinity, that is, what is perceived as unmasculine by the Millennials could be considered masculine by the Gen Zs to a large extent. Furthermore, the severity of the negative impact of K-pop culture claimed by the rule makers could seem nonexistent according to the rule followers, and the good wills in the forms of restrictions or bans from the Millennials could be interpreted as abusive supervision of public authorities by the Gen Zs.



By researching the regulative measures taken by the Chinese authorities who are mostly Millennials, the author found out that the controversial situation is similar to an attempt at cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony refers to domination or rule maintained through ideological or cultural means. It is usually achieved through social institutions, which allows those in power to strongly influence the values, norms, ideas, expectations, worldview, and behavior of the rest of society (Cole, 2020). When examining the difference in the perception of masculinity by the sample of this research, it is obvious that Gen Zs' perceptions of masculinity are more inclusive and diversified, while Millennials are adhering to the perception which promotes an either/or way of thinking. That is, if a behavior is not conformed to the 'masculine' norm, it will be considered feminine, or effeminate; In contrast, the perception of Gen Zs has broadened the concept of masculinity and brought diversity to the universally recognized form of perception. Even if the point of departure for banning K-pop content was to provide a better cultural environment to grow for the younger generation, diversity is still indispensable in helping them develop critical thinking and aesthetics.

Limitations of the Study

This research has numerous areas for improvement, listed as follows:

The Choice for Sampling

The sample chosen from the population could be inadequately representative, and the questions in the survey could be subjective with psychological implications affecting the samples' answers; meanwhile, the sample could have answered the questions randomly which puts the credibility of the collected data under question;

The Sample Selection

The size of the sample in this research could be amplified to collect better data reflecting the reality. Meanwhile, an imbalance was found in the number of Millennial respondents (330) and Gen Z respondents (95), which could affect the reliability of this study. Moreover, the questionnaire could include more dimensions to discover deeper insights from the sample;

The Independent Variable

This research primarily focused on the perceived portrayal of K-pop idols on TV/online TV. In fact, since the beginning of Hallyu 3.0, social media has become the major platform for K-pop. Therefore, the independent variable of this study could be partial compared to reality;



The Literature Review

Confined by the level of technological development in Hallyu 1.0, most of its records are found in printed media, which was difficult to approach for literature reviewing;

The Research Method

This research adopted solely the quantitative approach with an online survey as the research tool. The qualitative approach, such as in-depth interviews and observation, could also be employed to test the survey findings and yield better results.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the process of this study, the researcher identified a number of gaps that future researchers could address. Here are a few recommendations listed below:

The Research Method

Regarding this research topic, it is recommended to conduct a content analysis on the media portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols to deepen the understanding of the communication objective and messages of K-pop culture.

The Research Topic

Since cultural communication is a reciprocal process, future research endeavors might focus on the reversed effect of the role of K-pop fans in cross-cultural communication, and how the status quo of K-pop has been implicitly shaped by its fans' directions.

This Research Duration

This research could proceed to study the next coming generation and compare their perception of masculinity with Gen Zs; the ongoing research will serve to predict the cultural trends in Chinese society.

Recommendations for Further Application for Related Parties

There is another dimension regarding the topic of this research. Historically speaking, Chinese society is rooted in a patriarchal culture. Since its economic opening-up in 1978, China has absorbed all kinds of foreign cultures and the cultural exchanges have been gradually reshaping the society. Some conservatives posited that the "feminization of young Chinese males" would endanger national security when the traditional muscular warrior-like male image was losing ground. Some even politicized the phenomenon with cold-war thinking, accusing that the US imperialist was supporting K-pop (for ROK and the US are political allies) as an instrument for peaceful evolution



against the Chinese socialism. They cited the example of J-pop in Japan (another important ally of the US) originating from Johnny & Associates, a talent agency started by American-born Japanese businessman Johnny Kitagawa. Kitagawa is claimed to have colluded with the CIA to weaken the male temperament of Japanese society (Hawkins, 2019), which had turned Japanese males from Samurais to “flower boys”, resulting in Japan’s loss of sovereignty facing the United States in the international political arena. The author recommends future researchers determine whether 'the gender of culture' could be forged by cultural infiltration and the existence of a necessary correlation between inter-cultural communication and the alleged political agenda.

Conclusion

This research is intended to determine the significance of the impact of the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on TV/online TV upon the perception of masculinity in Chinese society.

The literature review concentrated on the perceived portrayal of K-pop idols and the progressive development of its impact on Chinese society. It was found that the difference in the perception of masculinity impacted by K-pop idols’ media portrayal between different generations was not questioned by past studies.

Taking into consideration the audience of K-pop culture in China, the Millennials (born in 1982-1987) and Gen Zs (born in 2002-2007) were chosen as the sample of this research. The quantitative approach was used and the data were collected by spreading online questionnaires via the most popular social media in China: WeChat. A number of 425 valid results from the sample consisting of 330 Millennials and 95 Gen Zs were yielded to conduct the quantitative analysis and hypothesis testing with SPSS.

Based on the survey results, a linear regression analysis revealed that the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on television/online television has a significant impact on the perception of masculinity in Chinese society. Meanwhile, an independent t-test showed a significant difference in the perception of masculinity between Millennials and Gen Z. The Millennials strongly agreed with the impact of the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on TV/online TV on the perception of masculinity in Chinese society, while the Gen Z disagreed with the impact of the perceived portrayal of masculinity by K-pop idols on TV/online TV on the perception of masculinity in Chinese society.



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