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An Analysis of the Homogenization Trend of K-pop: Exploring the Reasons Behind the Perceived Monotony of K-pop

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Abstract. As the Korean K-pop industry continues to develop, an increasing number of groups have emerged in the public eye. However, despite the abundance of groups and styles presented, audiences have expressed feelings of boredom and monotony, with many audiences raising concerns about K-pop's homogenization across various aspects. Against this background, this paper examines the following research questions by comparing the Hollywood Star System and utilizing data collection and case analysis: 1. How does K-pop exhibit homogenization through musical diversity, concepts, visual aesthetics, and song content? 2. What are the key factors driving homogenization in the K-pop industry? We contend that the control of the star system, company strategies (including monopolization by major companies), fan preferences, audience aesthetic inertia, and limited autonomy of idols collectively drive convergence in music production, visual concepts, and marketing strategies. Homogenization is both an outcome of industry operations and a reflection of audience perceptions.

Keywords: K-pop, Homogenization, Star System, Self-producing Group

1. Introduction

K-pop, short for Korean pop music, refers to a genre of popular music that has become a dominant form of music in South Korea [1]. In the past, K-pop's overseas expansion was concentrated only in Asia [2].

Nowadays, however, K-pop has attracted a diverse global fan base from all around the world. In 2018, the K-pop group BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan) made history as the first Korean act to top the Billboard 200 chart with their album Love Yourself: Tear [3], marking a significant milestone in the global expansion of K-pop.

In 2022, several K-pop groups signaled a new wave of influence. Beyond global acts like BTS and Blackpink, groups such as i-dle, IVE, NewJeans and Stray Kids released widely popular songs. However, since 2023, the number of group songs achieving massive popularity has declined. As of May 2025, solo artists held all top five chart positions, with aespa's Whiplash (released in October

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2024) being the highest-ranking group song at Number 7. This contrasts with spring 2023, when groups like IVE, NewJeans dominated the charts. While newer groups such as TWS, ZEROBASEONE, Heart2Hearts have released new albums, they have yet to reach the same level of impact [4].

To analyze the causes of this phenomenon, this paper argues that it is largely due to the increasing homogenization of K-pop groups. Group concepts and styles are often more aligned with existing groups, rather than establishing a unique identity of their own. For instance, the plagiarism dispute between ILLIT and NewJeans has been extensively covered by major Korean and international media outlets [5].

At the same time, in the past two years, a growing number of English single or English version have been released by a variety of groups, and more and more title tracks have begun to adopt a Western pop sound. K-pop data aggregator WiFiTalents reports that the proportion of groups releasing English-language singles increased from 15% in 2022 to 25% in 2023 [6].

The trend toward K-pop homogenization warrants serious attention. In the 1990s, American pop bands were incredibly popular. However, according to a survey by The Guardian, 78% of respondents said they were tired of manufactured pop groups, citing a lack of uniqueness [7]. As a result, groups like the Backstreet Boys began fading from the public spotlight around 2001, and NSYNC officially announced a hiatus in 2002. Around the same time, more and more solo artists emerged, offering greater musical diversity. If we want K-pop idol groups to have long-term success, it is crucial to address the growing issue of homogenization in the industry.

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the cause behind the increasing homogenization of K-pop groups. The concept of homogenization within K-pop will be examined through various dimensions, including musical diversity, group concepts, visual aesthetics, and song structure. This study will explore the contributing factors to this phenomenon, focusing on fan preferences and aesthetic inertia, a comparison between the K-pop star system and the Hollywood Star System, utilizing the Celebrity-Industrial Complex as a theoretical framework, and an analysis of the Big Four's oligopolistic influence. Furthermore, a case study of self-producing groups will be employed to illustrate the necessity of idol autonomy. Additionally, this paper offers suggestions and forward-looking insights for both scholars and industry professionals, aiming to improve the current situation and ultimately foster greater diversity, creativity, and sustainability within K-pop groups.

2. Literature review

2.1. Hollywood Star System

The Star System, common from the 1920s to the 1960s, treated Hollywood actors as studio employees under long-term contracts. Promising young talents were signed after screen tests, and studios built public images for them, which were often unrelated to their real lives [8].

2.2. Celebrity-industrial complex

The term CIC (Celebrity-Industrial Complex) was coined by Maureen Orth in "The Importance of Being Famous" [9]. The Celebrity-Industrial Complex is a social and economic construct that involves a semiotic relationship between celebrities and business corporations.

Orth refers it to the relationship between celebrities, the media, businesses, and the entertainment industry, all of which are involved in the whole process of star-making. This study employs the CIC analytical framework to explore whether similar systems exist.

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2.3. The autonomy and de-subjectification of idols

K-pop has undergone a distinct shift in focus: while early development relied heavily on individual artists' qualities to attract fans and build loyalty, recent years have seen a trend toward greater commodification. Idol groups and their output increasingly resemble “assembly-line products,” with idols becoming mere executors of commercial strategies and role-players. From styling to song lyrics, idols have little say in creative decisions [10], with minimal personal involvement. Due to this lack of initiative within the star-making system, idols are viewed as artificial products lacking artistic autonomy [11]. Some critics label Korean pop performers as "puppets" because they rely on company-prescribed formulas, strictly following their training and instructions for performances and other activities [12].

The definition of idols' de-subjectification in this paper is: under the control of the power, idols lack rights and the chance to express their individuality, then they are gradually reduced to commodities, and forced into passive obedience.

Autonomy refers to an individual's capacity for independent thought and decision-making, emphasizing personal initiative and the right to choose. This paper argues that idols should possess autonomy, meaning they should have freedom in self-expression, creative participation, understanding sharing, and individual characteristics display.

2.4. Research gaps

There are gaps in existing research. First, few people have studied this topic. Second, a lack of analysis of audience factors, such as their behavior or psychology.

This study employs case analysis and data collection methods, selecting representative successful cases of self-producing groups and typical operational strategies of major entertainment companies as analysis objects. And we also collect quantitative indicators like the number of copyrights to explore the multidimensional causes of K-pop homogenization.

3. Definition of K-pop homogenization

In today’s society, homogenization is increasingly common. It refers to the loss of diversity and uniqueness, primarily caused by plagiarism and imitation, which weakens innovation. Historically, homogenization has been part of development, and improvement inevitably involves competition and elimination. To reduce risks, cultural enterprises often choose imitation over innovation [13].

We believe that homogenization across different fields shares a similar underlying logic. K-pop has also exhibited trends toward risk avoidance and imitation. This paper defines “K-pop homogenization” as the convergence of music diversity, group concepts, visual concepts, and song production among idol groups, which often causes audiences to experience aesthetic fatigue and monotony. Homogenization here refers specifically to “convergence” and does not equate to artistic or commercial failure. Homogenization is not a criterion for judging musical quality or artist capability because many stylistically similar groups maintain high quality and achieve success.

3.1. Musical diversity

Homogenization in K-pop refers to the decline in musical experimentation, with artists increasingly following popular trends. Before 2022, many idol groups had distinctive styles. For example, BIGBANG’s blend of hip-hop and K-pop created a unique sound, while TWICE’s energetic and

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cheerful music set new trends. However, the post-pandemic era has seen a growing convergence in style across the industry.

The growing ambition of K-pop groups to enter Western, particularly American, markets has led to the standardization of musical elements to suit global, mainly Western tastes. This reflects Adorno's theory of standardization and pseudo-individualization, which critiques the mass production of cultural products that appear unique but are essentially repetitive [14]. For example, LE SSERAFIM's Eve, Psyche & the Bluebeard's Wife (2023) and NewJeans' Super Shy (2023) both feature Jersey club beats, a style popular in Western electronic dance music [15-16]. Such repeated use of similar stylistic elements across groups contributes to a homogenized K-pop sound, where distinctiveness is often only superficial, echoing Adorno's concept of pseudo-individualization.

3.2. Concept

We argue that each K-pop group usually has a set of unique features that appear repeatedly in their music and visual content, serving as symbols of their artistic identity. These features, which may be embedded in their musical style, lyrical themes, or music video narratives, serve as a form of mediated communication through which specific concepts are conveyed to the audience. As a result, audiences often associate particular themes or aesthetics with specific groups, allowing for immediate differentiation.

For example, aespa embraces the AI-driven concept of "the rule of KWANGYA is to never look back," with songs like Black Mamba and Supernova reflecting themes of KWANGYA (the wilderness) and futuristic elements [17]. Similarly, i-dle promotes feminist messages, as seen in Tomboy and Nxde, which challenge gender discrimination. The success of groups like ITZY and i-dle has popularized the "girl-crush" concept in K-pop. However, many newer groups struggle to offer fresh takes on it. Weekly, once known for their unique "teen crush" image, shifted to a girl-crush concept with their single Play Game: AWAKE, but the change was poorly received both critically and commercially [18].

3.3. Visual concept

In K-pop, visual culture holds significant importance. Music videos (which most clearly showcase defining elements of artists, analyzable through scene styles and artist styling [19] and stage performances during live shows influence audiences. Within idol image-building, "concepts" serve as the framework determining musical direction and identity expression, aiming to create differentiated new personas that cater to fans' diverse preferences [20]. Music video settings and styling typically align with album concepts, using visual elements to narrate stories and form unique visual identities. Examples include NewJeans' Y2K aesthetics and youthful campus-style scenes in "Ditto" , XG's Hybrid look, and aespa's makeup and outfits matching their "tech-mechanical" AI concept. However, K-pop has recently faced homogenization, evident in the striking similarity of MV styles and makeup/costume designs. For instance, after wasteland-style or mechanical-style works gained popularity, numerous imitators followed suit.

The visual presentation of idols' physiques and appearances also exhibits homogenization. While more diversity among the male groups, the female groups are very homogeneous in their overall physical attributes. These female characters are all extremely thin, and many share similar "physical traits"—such as delicate oval faces, high, well-defined noses, fair complexions, and tall, slender physiques.

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3.4. Song production

Early songs placed greater emphasis on overall quality and thematic expression, and creators were more daring in innovating arrangements and production. Influenced by big data and online media dissemination, the advantages of short videos—their brevity, rapid spread, and strong interactivity [21]—have led contemporary music to prioritize crafting distinctive segments like choruses, bridges, and dance breaks. This pursuit of catchy, addictive hooks aligns with short-video dissemination strategies, as these segments are short, feature memorable musical and dance arrangements, and easily capture attention. Such songs feature simple, repetitive melodies and lyrics designed to appeal to broader audiences [10]. Leveraging platforms like TikTok and celebrity challenge collaborations for mutual promotion enables rapid viral growth. However, these works often follow similar patterns such as hook + chorus + drop and enforce a trend of "lyrics repetition" to cater to mainstream tastes (especially Western/American), leading to audience fatigue and a lack of more pure masterpieces.

4. Factors of K-pop homogenization

4.1. Fans' preferences and aesthetic inertia

As producers involved in star-making, fans possess a certain degree of dynamism and initiative. They can influence the choices and decisions of talent agencies and capital through online reviews [22]. Thus, fan preferences can be fed back to companies and artists via the internet. Simultaneously, the audience's aesthetic inertia makes it difficult for them to accept new styles, an inertia largely rooted in the prevailing aesthetic trends of the era. Once a particular aesthetic becomes mainstream, it shapes people's behaviors and psychology, forming influential norms that artists then adhere to in their creations [23]. For instance, during a period when dreamcore-style music videos gained popularity—representative works including NewJeans' "Ditto" and Hearts2Heart's "The Chase"—numerous groups subsequently adopted similar surrealistic elements, gradually solidifying this style into a new aesthetic inertia. Consequently, to avoid rejection of innovative styles by the public, fan preferences and aesthetic inertia jointly push idol groups toward mainstream alignment. The intensified competition within mainstream channels inevitably leads to content homogenization.

In aesthetic judgment, people often use "convergence" as an evaluative criterion. To break through conventional perceptions, new insights, theories, or works must gain sufficient validation before existing consensus can be adjusted and altered. At this point, new conceptualization naturally emerges and persists through inertia [24]. As inertial subjects, audiences tend to overlook novelty on a subjective level, exhibiting resistance to new things that challenge their "self-comfort." This lack of deep engagement diminishes the impact of innovative presentations, leading to situations where even innovative works may not be perceived as such—resulting in persistent feelings of dullness and boredom. Faced with this reaction, companies often abandon experimental creations to avoid risk, instead meeting mainstream expectations, thereby inhibiting style breakthroughs. Ultimately, this creates a mutually reinforcing cycle that intensifies the perception of K-pop as monotonous and boring.

Society imposes strict aesthetic standards on women, favoring "fair, youthful, and slim" appearances. Idols who deviate from these standards face controversy. While male groups showcase diverse styles—macho style, flower-boy aesthetic, androgynous style, or boyish charm —those not conforming to mainstream beauty ideals still frequently endure ridicule and criticism. This entrenched aesthetic not only contributes to the uniform appearance of idols but also drives many young girls to pursue extreme thinness at the expense of their health. Globally, the standard of

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beauty among many women is to be wafer-thin and wear lots of makeup, and paying a great deal of attention to their physical selves. Recent reports indicate that many young girls in South Korea have developed bulimia and anorexia by modeling themselves after their idols [25].

Society's singular aesthetic standards and evaluation criteria for physical appearance—such as refined facial features, tall and slender figures, and fair skin—have become widely accepted and reinforced, forming an entrenched norm that is difficult to alter. Idols who do not meet these standards are easily subjected to negative criticism. Physical appearance always impacts popularity. Considering fan preferences and mainstream aesthetics, homogenized, standardized looks become the "safe choice." Producing large numbers of idols conforming to mainstream beauty standards avoids controversy, but simultaneously diminishes the uniqueness and individuality of their appearances.

4.2. Star system

Through a cross-cultural perspective, we analyze the K-pop star system by integrating the frameworks of the Hollywood Star System and the Celebrity-Industrial Complex. We contend that the two share similar underlying logic, both representing how industrialized production models suppress and constrain artists' individuality and creativity. The interlocking forces of capital, media, fan economies, and the entertainment industry transform celebrities into "interchangeable commodities," diminishing both artistic diversity and the uniqueness of idols.

Within the Hollywood Star System, actors are bound by studio contracts. Studios build images for them that may be unrelated to their real lives—examples include Marilyn Monroe's "the blonde bombshell" and Rock Hudson's "the perfect man" [8]. Actors frequently feel "owned" by film companies, lacking autonomy. They were commodified and their images fixed, making it difficult to break free from the established framework to showcase their broader creativity. Similar constraints exist within the K-pop industry.

Within K-pop's CIC framework, capital and celebrities are bonded together. Capital dominates the development of idols by controlling the entire idol industry chain, while idols depend on capital investment and resources to maintain their exposure. Under this relationship, the space for innovation is compressed, limiting individuality and breakthroughs.

Just like the Hollywood Star System, K-pop has a systematic production system designed to develop and manufacture K-pop stars. This system aims to "develop television-friendly youth singers, emphasizing their visual appearance, and on-stage performance for promotion via broadcasting channels" [26]. K-pop companies operate like "formulaic assembly lines," focused on mass-producing idols and content.

K-pop idol production focuses on discovering and cultivating talent through intensive preparation and competition. Similar to Hollywood screen tests, K-pop entertainment companies host large-scale selection auditions. Young trainees selected undergo rigorous training programs [27]. This star-making process is overly commercialized and assembly-line. A BBC News report noted "slave contracts" that bind trainees to idol agencies with little control in their own careers [28].

K-pop idols exhibit a "de-subjectification." They are restructured into functional components within teams—such as visuals, lead vocals, and main dancers—which diminishes the display of diverse individual charms. Companies often direct idols to present their abilities in line with predetermined roles, sometimes concealing their personal traits and restricting their private lives. This model serves commercial objectives, enabling idol groups to quickly adapt to market shifts and industry demands, while transforming idols into executors of commercial strategies. The creation and packaging of personas further suppresses individuality, as idols are required to fit into

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predetermined “positions,” “personalities,” and “styles,” as seen with BIGBANG members like G-Dragon as the fearless leader, Yongbae as “the quiet one,” and Daesung as “the smiling one” [29].

Agencies control the entire process of “star-image branding,” including concept design and packaging, prioritizing commercial operations for profit over artistic development. From a corporate profit perspective, this de-subjectivized star-making model better serves commercial objectives, enabling idol groups to rapidly respond to shifts in mainstream market trends and preferences while flexibly adapting to industry demands. However, the idol trainee system’s excessive emphasis on “commercialization” disrupts the balance between “artistry and commercialism” [30]. To mitigate risks, the K-pop star system often replicates successful groups or works instead of fostering innovative productivity.

In music production, priority is given to choruses and dance challenges suitable for viral success on TikTok, catering to short-form video-dominated dissemination trends in the fast-paced era. Songwriting emphasizes “catchy melodies,” “easy-to-sing lyrics,” and powerful electronic dance beats—the formula for K-pop songs favored by Western consumers [31]. As a result, music production frequently follows rigid formulas, lacking bold innovations that break conventions. Similarly, in team development, the system prioritizes replicating successful formulas to achieve quick market returns, creating “second” successful groups (For example, “the second BLACKPINK”) rather than investing in innovative concepts. This leads to groups that lack distinctiveness and breakout appeal.

The industrialized star system of K-pop is indeed highly efficient. However, its deliberate shaping and mechanized production methods also make it feel monotonous, lacking novelty and freshness. Idols and their works are standardized, devoid of unique personal characteristics. Under the dominance of the star system, this phenomenon has led to the homogenization of the entire entertainment industry.

4.3. The business strategy of Big Four

Table 1. The business strategy of Big Four (part 1)

Company	Core Strategy	Key Artists	Training System
SM	"Culture Technology"; systemized idol creation	EXO, aespa, NCT, Red Velvet	Tiered training model, early pioneer
YG	Artist freedom, hip-hop & street culture	BLACKPINK, BIGBANG, TREASURE, BABYMONSTER	Loose, individuality-driven
JYP	“Character first” & lean content-focused model	TWICE, ITZY, Stray Kids	Character education & Holistic Development
HYBE	IP expansion & platform-centered ecosystem	BTS, NewJeans, SEVENTEEN, LE SSERAFIM	Audition + Social Media Integration

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Table 2. The business strategy of Big Four (part 2)

Company	Overseas Expansion	Fan Economy Strategy	Platform Development
SM	China, Japan, Southeast Asia	SMCU world-building to deepen fans engagement	Partnered with Kakao for distribution & platforms
YG	Japan, U.S. (BLACKPINK global reach), Southeast Asia	High visual appeal	Collaborated with Weverse
JYP	focus on Japan, North America, including Southeast Asia	the Bubble app for artist-fan communication	JYP Fan's platform & social media integration
HYBE	HYBE America, HYBE Japan; recently established HYBE Beijing	Weverse for fan community, commerce integration	Owns Weverse; exploring NFT & direct distribution

Source: Generated by the author using ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025).

The analysis is based on Table 1 and Table 2. SM Entertainment's core strategy is encapsulated in its concept of "Culture Technology", which is a systematic and industrialized framework for producing and globalizing K-pop idols. This approach covers every stage of the idol-making process, including talent scouting, training, production, and marketing, effectively transforming idols into exportable cultural products. Under this system, idol creation is highly systematized, with concepts and songs provided directly by the company, leaving limited space for individual artistic autonomy.

While other major companies offer idols limited artistic autonomy, particularly in songwriting and production for certain groups, the overall structure remains highly controlled. Apart from music creation, agencies typically manage all other aspects of an idol's career, including digital release schedules, styling and stage concepts, as well as overseas promotions and concert tours.

It is clear that although each of the Big Four, which are SM, YG, JYP, and HYBE, employs distinct strategies, they all follow highly developed, almost formulaic business models. For global expansion, these companies commonly utilize exports, licensing, and strategic alliances to boost their artists' popularity and broaden the K-pop market in Southeast Asia [32]. Additionally, they often send their affiliated artists to participate in global music festivals such as KCON (The Korean Wave Convention), primarily aiming to increase their visibility and fan base in the United States. At the same time, each company employs its own effective fan economy strategy, which strengthens its existing fan base, thereby reducing the likelihood of fans exploring other groups. Therefore, it can be seen that the Big Four creates a near oligopoly market structure.

4.4. The impact of the Big Four's oligopolistic power

Since the Big Four create a near oligopolistic market structure, this can indirectly lead to the homogenization of K-pop content.

The first major impact is market control and resource concentration. Due to their substantial capital and industry influence, the Big Four can heavily promote their artists through TV appearances, interviews, and ad campaigns, significantly boosting visibility. Additionally, when a new group is about to debut, it is common for companies to arrange interactions with already-debuted senior idols who have an existing fanbase, in order to transfer some of that popularity to the newcomers. For example, prior to BABYMONSTER's official debut, YG Entertainment produced an evaluation program and invited Lisa of BLACKPINK to participate as a mentor [33]. Her

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involvement greatly increased public interest and anticipation for the group. Smaller companies, however, often lack the financial capacity to match the promotional scale of the Big Four. Consequently, even when their groups exhibit originality and artistic experimentation, they are less likely to be noticed by the general public.

The second major impact is similar to fan economy models. The Big Four companies either cooperate with or own social media platforms that provide community-like spaces where idols and fans can interact directly. This significantly enhances fan satisfaction and strengthens fan loyalty. For example, HYBE operates Weverse, while JYP and SM utilize platforms such as Bubble to maintain ongoing communication between artists and fans. These platforms have become highly sophisticated, with interfaces that are continuously updated for convenience and aesthetic appeal, further enhancing user satisfaction among fans. While groups from smaller companies may lack the same convenience in fan interaction, this can result in lower fan engagement and a higher risk of fan attrition. Ultimately, the majority of K-pop fans still tend to support groups from the Big Four, largely due to their greater visibility, resources, and access to advanced fan platforms.

The third major impact is artistic restriction. Given that the Big Four companies exercise strong control over their idol groups, they often implement standardized branding across multiple acts, including similar group styles, visual concepts, and stage costumes. These standardized frameworks may not fully reflect the individuality of the idols, thereby imposing stylistic limitations on their artistic expression. For instance, ADOR's former CEO criticized the production of ILLIT for allegedly replicating the cultural and aesthetic elements that contributed to NewJeans' success, particularly in terms of choreography and styling, despite both groups being subsidiaries under HYBE [5]. At the same time, Yunah, one of ILLIT's members, gained significant popularity during the group's survival show R U NEXT? for her "girl crush" image. However, ILLIT's official concept centers around a dreamy, sweet aesthetic, which many fans argued does not align well with Yunah's natural presence and visual identity [34].

4.5. Case study: self-producing groups

However, in some cases, companies do not exercise full control over idol groups. There are several cases where idols' autonomy has led to significant success. We use self-producing groups as case studies to explore this phenomenon.

Table 3. Most credited idols on KOMCA (18.02.2025)

Rank	Name	Group	KOMCA ID	Credits
1	Ravi	VIXX	10003665	239
2	RM	BTS	10003681	230
3	Bang Chan	STRAY KIDS	10016933	208
4	Young K	Day6	10010197	200
5	Woozi	SEVENTEEN	10009926	188
6	Zico	Block B	10000005	183
7	G-Dragon	BIGBANG	W0726200	178
8	Changbin	STRAY KIDS	10016935	178
9	Jun Hyung	-	W1041800	176
10	Han	STRAY KIDS	10016936	171

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Source: Data originally from KOMCA, retrieved from social media.

Table 4. Top 10 group involvement (in percentage of songs with at least one member credited)

Top	Lyrics (A)	Composition (C)	Arrangement (AR)
1	Stray Kids 98%	Stray Kids 93%	Stray Kids 44%
2	P1Harmony 96%	Day6 89%	BTOB 25%
3	Seventeen 92%	BTS 84%	B1A4 24%
4	Day6 92%	CN Blue 83%	Monsta X 21%
5	B.A.P 90%	Seventeen 81%	Highlight 20%
6	Monsta X 87%	Ikon 77%	CN Blue 18%
7	BTS 87%	Xdinary Heroes 73%	B.A.P 13%
8	Treasure 86%	Winner 68%	Ateez 10%
9	Ikon 86%	Pentagon 65%	Pentagon 9%
10	CN Blue 83%	Treasure 59%	VIXX 8%

Source: Data originally from KOMCA, retrieved from social media.

Table 3 shows the top 10 most credited idols registered with the Korea Music Copyright Association as of February 18, 2025. Except for the first-place artist, who was under arrest for falsifying documents to evade military service, all others remain active in the industry. Notably, the list includes leading boy groups such as BTS, Stray Kids, Day6, SEVENTEEN, and BIGBANG, all of whom have achieved widespread popularity. As shown in Table 4, most of the songs from these groups are self-produced. This demonstrates that these highly popular groups also take significant creative control over their music.

To further explore this, we selected three representative examples for in-depth analysis: i-dle, SEVENTEEN, and Stray Kids.

i-dle is known for promoting themes of female empowerment across their discography, often combining bold, fierce tracks with more nuanced, emotional expressions. Central to this artistic direction is leader Soyeon, who serves as the main songwriter and producer for most of the group's title tracks. A behind-the-scenes video of the production of Senorita [35] showcases her creative process, including songwriting and directing other members during recording, highlighting her leadership in shaping the group's musical identity.

In 2022, the release of TOMBOY marked a major turning point, with its raw energy and rebellious message resonating globally and establishing i-dle as a top-tier K-pop group. The song's success reflected their musical versatility and ability to challenge genre norms. Soyeon's contributions earned her the Best Songwriter Award at the Melon Music Awards (2022, 2024) and Best Producer at the 2023 Asian Pop Music Awards. As a group, i-dle has received six Daesang awards (The highest honor at Korean music award ceremonies), including Artist of the Year at the 2024 MAMA, signaling their growing influence in the Korean music industry.

SEVENTEEN has seen significant success in recent years and is well known as a self-producing idol group. WOOZI, the group's main producer, plays a central role in writing and composing most of their discography, including nearly all of their title tracks. He is the principal lyricist and composer for almost all of these songs [36], often serving as the lead songwriter and main creative force. SEVENTEEN's music explores themes such as growth, dreams, identity, and perseverance,

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resonating strongly with fans. In WOOZI's Commentary Live [37], he shares insights into the creative process behind each album since their debut, highlighting the messages he aims to convey.

WOOZI was awarded "Best Producer" at the 2021 Asia Artist Awards. While S.COUPS and Vernon are also KOMCA members, all SEVENTEEN members have contributed to songwriting or composition, reflecting the group's collective involvement in music production. Their album FML topped the IFPI Global Album Chart of 2023 [38]. SEVENTEEN has received six Daesang awards, including 2023 MAMA Best Producing Album, underscoring their influence and artistry.

Stray Kids is widely recognized as a self-producing idol group. The sub-unit 3RACHA, consisting of Bang Chan, Changbin, and Han, who are all official KOMCA members, has written and produced nearly every Stray Kids song. In a recent interview, Changbin emphasized that producing their own music and performing it on stage highlights their authenticity and strengths, making self-production essential [39]. Their album 5-STAR, produced entirely by 3RACHA with Felix contributing to two tracks, became one of their most successful albums, ranking second on the IFPI Global Album Chart in 2023 [38]. Stray Kids combines hip-hop, EDM, rock, and pop to explore themes such as self-identity, growth, perseverance, and teamwork, inspiring fans to embrace themselves and overcome challenges. The group actively participates in songwriting and creative decisions, demonstrating strong artistic agency.

In 2023, 3RACHA was honored with the Asia Artist Awards' Best Creator award. As a group, Stray Kids has won six Daesang awards, including Stage of the Year at the 2023 Asia Artist Awards. Recently, they completed their world tour "dominATE", performing 54 concerts across 34 cities [40], attracting 2.2 million fans worldwide, achieving the highest attendance for a K-pop tour to date [41].

In conclusion, these examples clearly show that granting idols creative autonomy not only fosters artistic authenticity but also contributes significantly to their long-term success and sustainability in the industry.

5. Conclusion

Fan preferences significantly shape company decisions and often align with mainstream aesthetics, which reduces acceptance of novelty and experimental works. To minimize risks, companies replicate successful formulas, limit innovation, and reinforce homogenization. Meanwhile, audience feedback further intensifies this trend: aesthetic inertia and resistance to new styles weaken the impact of innovation, making songs increasingly similar and strengthening perceptions of homogeneity. Ultimately, K-pop homogenization emerges from the dual interaction of industry logic and audience perception, where risk-averse strategies and aesthetic inertia mutually reinforce each other, constraining diversity and limiting innovation.

Society's aesthetic evaluations and standards for physical appearance lack diversity. This singular aesthetic places stringent demands on idols' looks, leaving those who fail to meet expectations vulnerable to negative commentary. Agencies, in turn, hesitate to take risks by promoting idols with distinctive appearances that challenge mainstream beauty norms, resulting in increasingly standardized and indistinguishable looks.

The K-pop star system shares similarities with Hollywood's, both employing industrialized production models to exert control over celebrities' entire careers. From production to image-building and marketing, companies essentially manage the entire process. To mitigate risks, companies often replicate existing successful formulas rather than investing in innovation, leading to homogenization among K-pop idols. Contractual constraints also limit idols' autonomy: they must

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adhere to company-imposed activities, gradually becoming commodified and lacking personal distinctiveness or creative capacity.

The Big Four (SM, YG, JYP, and HYBE) operate with highly systematized business models and dominate the industry, forming an oligopolistic market. This results in three key impacts. First, their capital and influence allow them to control market resources and promotion channels. As a result, even innovative groups from smaller agencies may struggle to gain exposure, reinforcing industry homogenization.

The second impact is similar fan economy models. The Big Four enhance engagement by owning or partnering with major platforms, strengthening fan loyalty. Smaller agencies lack such access, leading to weaker interaction and higher fan attrition. As a result, most fans continue to support Big Four groups, reinforcing a homogenized fan culture. The third impact is artistic restriction. The Big Four often apply standardized branding, such as similar visuals, concepts, and styling across groups, limiting individual expression. Over time, this contributes to a homogenized artistic landscape.

The case study of self-producing groups demonstrates that allowing idols creative control enhances their artistic authenticity and plays a crucial role in ensuring their lasting success and sustainability within the K-pop industry. This autonomy encourages innovation and helps differentiate them in a competitive market.

This study also has several limitations. It primarily relies on publicly available data and does not include a primary survey. Additionally, since professional big data models were not utilized, the analysis is limited to specific artists. Homogenization is largely a subjective perception. While we observed similar reactions among many K-pop audiences, the absence of quantitative metrics makes it difficult to accurately measure its specific extent.

The implications of this study are twofold. For enterprises, it highlights the importance of fostering sustainable careers for artists. For fans, it encourages the appreciation of diverse artistic expressions. Our recommendations for future research include enhancing market data collection, conducting expert interviews, and incorporating more comprehensive theoretical models in order to obtain more authoritative data and make the analysis more quantifiable.

5.1. Suggestions

The first suggestion for entertainment companies is to grant artists greater creative autonomy. Encouraging creative idols to showcase their individual strengths and personal ideas in songs, choreography, and concepts not only helps prevent homogenization but also fosters a closer connection between idols and their fans. This authenticity allows fans to connect more deeply with the group’s work, fostering sustained interest and supporting the group’s lasting success.

The second is that the Korean entertainment industry must balance innovation and fan preferences, as creativity does not necessarily deviate from market tastes. Breaking away from convergence and herding requires bold experimentation. Entertainment companies should increase tolerance for trial-and-error costs, encouraging artists to explore unique personal styles while prioritizing artistic development within commercial frameworks. Sustained innovation can gradually shift market attitudes and forge a new aesthetic consensus.

The third is to break free from aesthetic fatigue and the negative effects of homogenized appearances, companies could foster diverse groups featuring varied body types and ethnicities. By participating in shaping a healthy and multifaceted societal aesthetic, they might encourage more people to embrace their true selves, thereby enhancing K-pop's positive influence as an artistic and cultural force for audiences.

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The fourth one is that K-pop's star-making system requires reform. Members should be granted greater creative freedom and space to express individuality, allowing them to showcase personal charms within the group framework and diversify the collective expression.

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