

A comparative analysis of musical changes in K-Pop male idol groups

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Abstract

This study analyzed the vocal part of the songs of Korean K-Pop male idol groups to find out why 3rd generation K-Pop has become the mainstream of popular music. Currently, as K-Pop is rapidly emerging as a global mainstream genre, expectations for creating artists like BTS are rising. However, the existing K-Pop is being studied focusing on its splendid appearance and performance, so there is a lack of practical musical research. In this study, we analyze the title songs of the K-pop male idols BTS and 4th generation idols, which received worldwide attention in 2020, and show the changes and characteristics of music. In this study, a research methodology using content analysis of qualitative research was selected as a method for the development of the music field. For the analysis, we selected the music data of the Billboard chart songs of BTS, the representative K-Pop idol, and the title songs of ATEEZ, Stray Kids, NCT, and SEVENTEEN, the idols that received attention abroad in 2020. In this study, in-depth analysis was carried out by measuring the playing time of the musical components of songs (singing, rap, and rapping), and it was visualized and classified for easy viewing. As a result of these studies, 'breaking away from K-Pop centered on looks and performance', 'Suggesting the musical direction of the next generation idol through analysis of BTS songs, which is a successful case of 3rd generation K-Pop', 'Effect on idol member part distribution' 'This shows that it can match the development potential of idols after the fourth generation. Through this study, to ensure continuity in the global music market, the balanced development of idol music including various genres and follow-up research through an understanding approach to the Korean idol music system will be possible.

Keywords

K-Pop, idol, hallyu, vocal analysis, Korean wave

Introduction

K-Pop refers to Korean popular music aimed at the global market, but has been specifically limited to idol music. In the past in 1997, ballads and dance genres accounted for most, whereas K-Pop of various genres is gaining popularity with the public. Along with

this diversity of genres, the recent trend of K-Pop shows the strength of idol groups that have undergone various collaboration attempts and systematic development (Yang, 2017).

Due to this, the fact that K-pop exports are limited to a small number

of music production companies is a concern in terms of the creation of a long-term music ecosystem, given the characteristics of the music industry as a creative industry (Lim, 2013).

Hallyu (“Korean wave”), which first began with TV dramas, has remained popular since 2014, with its current focus on K-pop led by idol groups.



Photo 1. Hallyu drama “Winter Sonata” and K-pop artist “Beast”.

According to the Global Hallyu Trends 2020 survey by the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE) (2020), K-pop is the most evocative of South Korea among 8,000 global consumers of Hallyu content in 17 countries, as well as the most representative content of Hallyu. Consumers are increasingly encountering K-pop on online and mobile platforms beyond mass media channels such as TV and radio, and the music is rapidly spreading throughout the world, through not only YouTube and Facebook but also

Spotify. The Hallyu Status Index in Figure 1, which shows the popularity of Hallyu, reveals that Vietnam has experienced the influence only recently; further, compared to two years ago, the index has expanded to encompass Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, Brazil, the United Arab Emirates, Australia, and Russia. Countries such as Turkey, France, and South Africa have shown a continuous increase in the index over the past three years. This proves that Hallyu is consistently extending into countries beyond Asia.

Hallyu Status Index

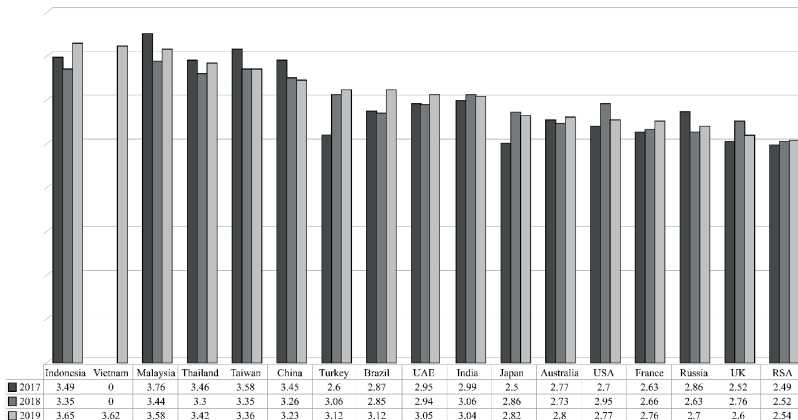


Figure 1. Hallyu Status Index (KOFICE, 2020)

As Hallyu music began to receive attention as a global cultural phenomenon in the late 1990s, South Korea's entertainment agency-idol system began in earnest, including H.O.T. by SM Entertainment, as well as Sechs Kies, Shinhwa, and god. In the second generation, Hallyu was led by idols such as TVXQ, SS501, Super Junior, and BIGBANG, trained by the "total management" system, through which entertainment agencies supervise everything from finding talent with potential to providing training to direct/indirect management. This system, based on resources and efficient investments, proved successful, and idols trained thus captivated global consumers by displaying diverse talent, singing, and dancing in the global market. They also established themselves as mainstream artists in South Korea, comprising a significant portion of South Korean music for over ten years. However, a new opportunity arose through PSY's Gangnam Style, which became a massive hit not only in the US market but also throughout the world with a new media-friendly strategy. Then, third-generation idols, such as BTS and EXO, took advantage of this opportunity and achieved success with authenticity, which led K-pop to grow into important Hallyu content for export.

Second-generation male idol groups that made K-pop known worldwide later became inactive due to some of the members' military service, discontinued activities, withdrawal or disbandment, and contract termination with their respective agencies. However, despite the slump of the second-generation idol groups, K-pop continues to lead Hallyu today, owing to the rise of third-generation idol groups. These idols

include members of diverse nationalities and have expanded the scope of content provided to consumers worldwide by going on global tours. The brilliant exploits of third-generation idols are represented by BTS, which was the first Korean group to hit No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 charts three times in 2020. While many K-pop idol groups have focused on qualitative and quantitative overseas expansion, third-generation idols have applied global marketing strategies using visual media such as images, videos, and performances in addition to the music itself. This indicates that they have found a good balance between South Korean and global standards while also satisfying the senses of sight and hearing.

Changes in K-pop idol vocals by generation

K-pop, meaning "Korean pop music", embraces pop music in South Korea in a broad sense. In a narrow sense, it refers particularly to pop, dance, electronic, hip hop, rock, and R&B in Korea since the 1990s. However, today, K-pop is mostly focused on dance music led by idols.

Since the early 2000s, when the Internet began to be widely used, "idol"—which refers to singers popular among teenagers—has become common terminology. Idols refer to young entertainers or celebrities who are popular among younger generations (National Institute of Korean Language, 2016).

Since the 1990s, K-pop has come closer to meaning "Korean popular songs sung by idols" than all other kinds of popular music in South Korea. There are different views about classifying

idols by generation, starting from first-generation idols from the mid-1990s to those actively performing today. However, idols of one generation come to a lull after a certain period of active engagement, and new idols who appear at this point can be regarded as the next generation.

First-generation idols

First-generation idols include groups that were active from the 1990s to the early 2000s, when the term “idol group” was not yet widely used. The first such group was H.O.T., which had five members, was created by SM Entertainment, and debuted in 1996. As a major first-generation idol, H.O.T. was the first idol group to sell the largest number of albums in a year. The group won the grand prize at music awards held by South Korea’s three major TV stations (i.e., the KBS Music Awards, the SBS Music Awards, and the MBC Music Awards). They also had the largest fan

club in history, until then. The group expanded into the Greater China region and marked the beginning of Hallyu.

H.O.T. was followed by a six-member group, Sechs Kies, which debuted in 1997 under Daesung Enterprise (currently DSP Media) and became the rival, competing group. Sechs Kies joined the ranks of the two leading first-generation boy bands in South Korea. In 1998, SM Entertainment created the six-member boy band Shinhwa, which was listed in the Guinness Book of World Records for not disbanding or replacing members since their debut (Kim, 2018). Shinhwa had the largest full album sales among all South Korean dance groups. Their rival was the five-member boy group god, created by Sidus HQ in 1999 and lead by JYP Park Jin-young. With a friendly, boy-next-door image rather than a mysterious one, god became popular as the first nationally loved idol group. Table 1 summarizes the major first-generation male idol groups.



Photo 2. Major first-generation K-pop male idol groups

Table 1. Major first-generation K-pop male idol groups

Group name	Agency	Debut	Member	Position
H.O.T.	SM Entertainment	September 1996	Moon Hee-Jun	Lead Vocals, Lead Rapper
			Jang Woo-Hyuk	Main Rapper
			Tony An	Lead Vocals, Lead Rapper
			Kangta	Main Vocals
			Lee Jae-Won	Lead Rapper
Sechs Kies	DSP Media	May 1997	Eun Ji-Won	Main Rapper
			Kim Jae-Duck	Sub-Vocals, Lead Rapper
			Jang Su-Won	Lead Vocals
			Lee Jai-Jin	Sub-Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Ko Ji-Yong	Sub-Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Kang Sung-Hoon	Main Vocals
Shinhwa	SM Entertainment	March 1998	Eric	Main Rapper
			Lee Min-Woo	Lead Vocals
			Kim Dong-Wan	Lead Vocals
			Shin Hye-Sung	Main Vocals
			Junjin	Lead Rapper, Sub-Vocals
			Andy	Sub-Rapper
god	Sidus HQ	January 1999	Joon Park	Lead Rapper
			Yoon Kye-Sang	Sub-Vocals
			Danny Ahn	Main Rapper
			Son Ho-Young	Lead Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Kim Tae-Woo	Main Vocals

First-generation male idol groups were comprised mainly of five or six members, and their positions as main vocalists, sub-vocalists, and rappers were more clearly distinguished than today. The bands created full albums with at least ten tracks each, and the groups, on average, were active for three months at a stretch, releasing a title track and one or two follow-up songs. This was followed by time spent preparing for the next album, showing a clear distinction between periods of activity and inactivity (Choi & Lim, 2019). Moreover, the bands mostly focused on fancy performances and choreography; thus, most of their

songs were sung not live but lip synced. Table 2 summarizes the main songs of the first-generation of K-pop male idol groups and the prominent vocal positions used in each song.

Table 2. Main songs and positions of first-generation K-pop idol groups

Group name	Song name	Release date	Singing	Rap	Chorus
H.O.T.	‘Candy’	7 September 1996	○	○	X
	‘Happiness’	5 July 1997	○	○	○
	‘We Are the Future’		○	○	○
	‘Line Up!’	25 September 1998	○	○	X
	‘Hope’		○	○	X
	‘I Yah!’	15 September 1999	○	○	○
	‘Outside Castle’	2 October 2000	○	○	X
Sechs Kies	‘Chivalry’	1 November 1997	○	○	X
	‘Reckless Love’	15 July 1998	○	○	X
	‘Couple’	30 October 1998	○	○	X
	‘Come Back’	9 September 1999	○	○	X
Shinhwa	‘Only One’	27 May 2000	○	○	○
	‘Wild Eyes’	28 June 2001	○	○	○
	‘Perfect Man’	9 March 2002	○	○	○
	‘Wedding’	27 December 2002	○	○	○
	‘Brand New’	27 August 2004	○	○	○
god	‘Lies’	3 November 2000	○	○	○
	‘Road’	15 November 2001	○	○	○
	‘Letter’	17 November 2002	○	○	X
	‘An Ordinary Day’	8 December 2004	○	○	X

The main songs above are title tracks and award-winning songs from albums of each group; the type and existence of subdivided vocal positions in each song are provided. These main songs of the first-generation idols included both singing and rapping; only half of the

songs included a chorus. The fact that rapping makes up a high proportion, along with singing, here implies that the vocals were equally divided among the members according to their positions and that rapping was considered important, along with singing, around that time.

Second-generation idols

As first-generation idol groups slowly disbanded, they were replaced by second-generation idol groups. These groups were trained under the abovementioned total management system—in which entertainment agencies supervise everything from recruitment to training, group formation, music production, and direct/indirect management after a group’s debut—which led Hallyu in music (Lee, 2016). There are different views about when the second-generation idols first appeared, but one starting point was TVXQ, the group created by SM Entertainment in 2003 (Kim, 2015). A five-member idol group, TVXQ expanded into the Japanese market in 2005 and remains popular in that country.

Later, SM Entertainment created the 13-member group Super Junior in 2005, which remains the group with the most number of members even today. Super Junior’s third album, Sorry Sorry, set a new record, ranking No. 1 for 52 consecutive weeks on Taiwan’s music charts. This shows their displaying their popularity in the global market, in addition to South Korea (Park, 2011). In 2006, however, YG Entertainment created a five-member hip hop idol group, BIGBANG, with a new style. The members were talented and wrote and produced their own songs and lyrics. BIGBANG entered Japan in 2008 and became a pioneer of Hallyu in the country. Table 3 summarizes the major second-generation male idol groups.



Photo 3. Major second-generation K-pop idol groups

Table 3. Major second-generation K-pop idol groups

Group name	Agency	Debut	Member	Position
TVXQ	SM Entertainment	December 2003	U-Know Yunho	Lead Vocals, Main Rapper
			Max Changmin	Main Vocal, Lead Rapper
			Hero Jaejoong	Main Vocals
			Micky Yoochun	Main Rapper, Sub-Vocals
			XIA Junsu	Lead Vocals
SS501	DSP Media	June 2005	Kim Hyun-Joong	Sub-Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Heo Young-Saeng	Main Vocals
			Kim Kyu-Jong	Sub-Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Park Jung-Min	Sub-Vocals
			Kim Hyung-Jun	Lead Vocals, Main Rapper
Super Junior	SM Entertainment	November 2005	Leeteuk	Sub-Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Heechul	Sub-Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Yesung	Main Vocals
			Shindong	Sub-Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Eunhyuk	Main Rapper, Sub-Vocals
			Siwon	Sub-Vocals
			Donghae	Lead Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Ryeowook	Main Vocals
			Kyuhyun	Main Vocals
			Sungmin	Lead Vocals
			Hangeng	Sub-Vocals
			Kangin	Sub-Vocals
			Kibum	Lead Rapper, Sub-Vocals
BIGBANG	YG Entertainment	August 2006	T.O.P	Lead Rapper, Sub-Vocals
			Taeyang	Main Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			G-Dragon	Main Rapper, Sub-Vocals
			Daesung	Lead Vocals
			Seungri	Sub-Vocals

Note. Main vocals/rapper: singer who sings important parts in vocal progression such as the intro, chorus, and high notes (Lee, 2020); Lead vocals/rapper: singer who seamlessly connects the flow between the main vocal

and sub-vocals to further enhance the perfection of the song (Lee, 2020); Sub-vocals/rapper: singer who assists the main vocalist in singing in a vocal group (National Institute of Korean Language, 2002)

Led by major entertainment agencies that created the first-generation idols, second-generation idols upskilled and became stars after their training period. There was also a shift in the generation of idol songwriters in South Korea, who expanded into overseas markets and reproduced the sense and style of global pop music. Since the top priority of second-generation idols was satisfying South Korean consumers, they first established themselves in the country and then expanded overseas after two or three years, on average. During this period, the groups mostly entered Japan. However, due to a lack of popularity, they had to begin at the bottom of the ladder, like any other new Japanese idols, and work their way up. At

around this time, with the digitalization of music, it became more common to release a single album or mini album (EP) to maximize profits and gain exposure, rather than release a full album. To satisfy the general public in overseas markets, the songs thus released had a hook with short, repeated riffs rather than musicality; this is a distinct feature of K-pop music. Lyrics that were easy to understand and hooks without meaning helped K-pop songs appeal to broader age groups. As second-generation idols had diverse concepts and genres, unlike their predecessors, they did not form an intense rivalry. Table 4 summarizes the main songs of the second-generation K-pop male idol groups and vocal positions in each song.

Table 4. Main songs and positions of second-generation K-pop idol groups

Group name	Song name	Release date	Singing	Rap	Chorus
TVXQ	'Hug'	11 October 2004	○	X	X
	'The Way U Are'		○	X	○
	'Believe'		○	X	○
	'Rising Sun'	12 September 2005	○	○	○
	'O-正.反.合.'	29 September 2006	○	○	○
	'MIROTIC'	25 September 2008	○	○	○
SS501	'Never Again'	23 June 2005	○	X	○
	'Snow Prince'	5 December 2005	○	X	○
	'Dejavu'	13 March 2008	○	○	○
	'U R Man'	21 November 2008	○	○	○
	'Love Like This'	20 October 2009	○	X	○
	'Love Ya'	24 May 2010	○	○	○
Super Junior	'U'	7 June 2006	○	○	○
	'Sorry, Sorry'	12 March 2009	○	X	○
	'It's You'	14 May 2009	○	X	○
	'Bonamana'	13 May 2010	○	X	○
	'Mr. Simple'	2 August 2011	○	○	○
BIG-BANG	'La La La'	22 December 2006	○	○	○
	'Lies'	16 August 2007	○	○	○
	'Last Farewell'	22 November 2007	○	○	○
	'Haru Haru'	8 August 2008	○	○	○
	'Love Song'	8 April 2011	○	○	X

The above mentioned songs were selected similar to those in Table 2, showing the type and status of the subdivided vocal positions in each song. The main songs of second-generation idols had many choruses, along with singing, but far less rapping compared to the first-generation idols. During this generation, songs with hooks (i.e., songs that used the same lyrics time and time again; National Institute of Korean Language, 2010) that were easy to sing along to because popular.

Third-generation idols

Third-generation idols who are currently

active first appeared in 2012 when there was a PSY craze, through mobile digital media. Many such idols have since used YouTube, social media, and specialized streaming platforms to make a simultaneous debut in both South Korea and overseas. This was a strategic success combining casting, training, and bold global sourcing of producing resources according to thorough planning aimed at a global niche market(Lim, 2013).

There are countless third-generation idols, but the first group to debut in both South Korea and China simultaneously

was SM Entertainment’s 12-member group EXO. This group was a huge hit not only in Asia, including China, but also in North America and Europe. Their album sold 1 million copies in the shortest period of time since the debut of K-pop artists and set the million-seller record five times in a row, earning the title “quintuple million-seller” (Kwak, 2018).

BTS, the best K-pop idol group created yet by Big Hit Entertainment in 2013, has set new records as the first, fastest, and highest-performing K-pop group worldwide, exceeding the limits of imagination in South Korean popular music every time they release a new song. Since first entering the Billboard 200 chart in June 2018, they have their album at the top of the chart four times in a row and

even reached No. 1 on Billboard’s Hot 100 in 2020. They were also the first South Korean group to perform at Citi Field in New York in 2018, after which they performed successfully in major stadiums worldwide, including Wembley Stadium in London, Stade de France in Paris, and Allianz Parque in Sao Paulo.

Third-generation idols have shown rapid growth immediately after their debut, with the know-how based on the best practices of past idol groups, as well as the development of social networking services (SNS) and digital media technology. They have been actively expanding into overseas markets. Table 5 summarizes the major third-generation male idol groups.



Photo 4. Major third-generation K-pop male idol groups photos

Table 5. Major third-generation K-pop male idol groups

Group name	Agency	Debut	Member	Position
EXO	SM Entertainmentw	March 2012	Xiumin	Sub-Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Suho	Lead Vocals
			wLay	Sub-Vocals
			Baekhyun	Main Vocals
			Chen	Main Vocals
			Chanyeol	Main Rapper, Sub-Vocals
			D.O.	Main Vocals
			Kai	Sub-Vocals, Sub-Rapper
			Sehun	Lead Rapper
			Luhan	Main Vocals
			Kris Wu	Main Rapper, Sub-Vocals
Z. Tao	Lead Rapper, Sub-Vocals			
BTS	Bright Music	June 2013	Jin	Sub-Vocals
			Suga	Lead Rapper
			J-Hope	Sub-Rapper
			RM	Main Rapper
			Jimin	Lead Vocals
			V	Sub-Vocals
			Jungkook	Main Vocals, Sub-Rapper

Third-generation idols have used social media as a means of publicity as well as a solid foundation for the increase in fandom and overseas expansion. Recently, with Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok, idols are no longer mysterious, unapproachable beings but friendly figures who communicate actively with their fans. They have also created a universe where fans can participate in storytelling, revising, and reproducing content on an enlarged scale. This storytelling has helped groups maintain fans' loyalty as well as their sustainable development. Third-generation idols are usually active in South Korea for just one or two weeks, even after releasing a new album or a single, and immediately focus on their global activities, such as concerts and

fan conventions. This has significantly increased the influence of global fans on K-pop. Unlike South Korean fans, global fans actively express their demands or expectations from entertainment agencies and idols. This culture did not exist in South Korean music in the past and has remarkably increased both the depth and scope of the music as global cultural content based on understanding and acceptance, that is, cross-cultural sensitivity (Park, 2019). Moreover, while second-generation idols mostly entered Asia, including Japan, third-generation idols have expanded worldwide, including Southeast Asia, South America, North America, and Europe. Table 6 summarizes the main songs of the third-generation K-pop male idol groups and the vocal positions of each song.

Table 6. Main songs and positions of third-generation K-pop male idol groups

Group name	Song name	Release date	Singing	Rap	Rap-Singing
EXO	'Growl'	5 August 2013	○	○	X
	'Overdose'	7 May 2014	○	○	○
	'Call Me Baby'	30 March 2015	○	○	X
	'Love Me Right'	3 June 2015	○	○	X
	'Lucky One'	9 June 2016	○	○	X
	'Monster'		○	○	○
	'Lotto'	18 August 2016.	X	X	○
	'Ko Ko Bop'	18 July 2017	○	○	○
	'Power'	5 September 2017	○	○	○
	'Tempo'	2 November 2018	○	○	X
	'Love Shot'	13 December 2018	○	○	X
	'Obsession'	27 November 2019	○	○	X
BTS	'No More Dream'	12 June 2013	○	○	X
	'N.O'	11 September 2013	○	○	X
	'Boy In Luv'	12 February 2014	○	○	X
	'Danger'	20 August 2014	○	○	X
	'I Need U'	29 April 2015	○	○	○
	'Run'	30 November 2015	○	○	○
	'Fire'	2 May 2016	○	○	X
	'Blood Sweat & Tears'	10 October 2016	○	○	○
	'Spring Day'	13 February 2017	○	○	○
	'Mic Drop'	18 September 2017	X	○	○
	'DNA'	18 September 2017	○	○	○
	'Fake Love'	18 May 2018	○	○	○
	'Idol'	24 August 2018	○	○	○
	'Make It Right'	12 April 2019	○	○	X
	'Boy With Luv'	12 April 2019	○	○	○
	'Black Swan'	21 February 2020	○	X	○
'ON'	21 February 2020	○	○	○	
'Dynamite'	21 August 2020	○	X	○	

The songs above are title tracks of each group's albums, and the type and status of subdivided vocal positions in each song are provided. Third-generation idols have created a new vocal position called rap-singing, which is rap-like singing. Rap-singing emerged as a trend in American hip hop in the 2010s, and Korean rappers began to adopt this style (Billboard Korea, 2020). EXO is characteristic of more rapping than rap-singing, while BTS does more rap-singing than rapping. Third-generation idols position their vocals freely based on their team's or members' concepts and characteristics and implement various strategies for overseas expansion.

Problem/Aim of Study

Currently, as K-Pop is rapidly emerging as a global mainstream genre, expectations for creating artists like BTS are rising.

For the continuous globalization of K-Pop, it is necessary to analyze successful artists.

However, the existing K-Pop is being studied focusing on its splendid appearance and performance, so there is a lack of practical musical research.

In response to these problems, this study analyzes the title songs of the K-pop male idols BTS and 4th generation idols, which received worldwide attention in 2020, and shows the changes and characteristics of music.

Method

Research Model

In this study, a research methodology using content analysis of qualitative research was selected as a method for

the development of the music field. The biggest advantage of such qualitative research is that it is possible to examine what meaning is conveyed through data analysis and to obtain an interpretation of culture. This interpretation is not a quantitative method, but a method of grasping both the explicit and intrinsic meanings (Choi, Jung & Jung, 2016). In general, the purpose of qualitative content analysis is "to provide knowledge and understanding of phenomena through research" (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992).

Documents

For the analysis, we selected the music data of the Billboard chart songs of BTS, the representative K-Pop idol, and the title songs of the idols ATEEZ, Stray Kids, NCT, and SEVENTEEN, which received attention overseas in 2020, and these included only male K-Pop artists. The reason is, first, that there has been specific success among male K-pop artists. Second, it would have been very difficult to effectively analyze the use of rap and songs in female-led K-pop music, as female-led K-pop hardly includes rap.

Data Analysis

This study examined the process of development and change in K-pop male idols by generation and subdivided the vocal positions of the major third-generation idol groups that lead Hallyu, as well as the changing K-pop environment, into singing, rap, and rap-singing. Accordingly, temporal data according to vocal positions were constructed and visualized and classified for easy viewing. The vocal positions include lead vocals/rapper (i.e., a singer who seamlessly connects the flow between the main vocal and sub-vocals

to further enhance the perfection of the song; Lee, 2020), main vocal/rapper (i.e., a singer who sings important parts in vocal progression such as the intro, chorus, and high notes; Lee, 2020), and sub-vocals/rapper (i.e., a singer who assists the main vocalist in singing in a vocal group; National Institute of Korean Language, 2002).

Results

The change in the proportion of vocal positions was focused on solving the following problems.

- Break away from K-Pop focusing on appearance and performance
- Suggest the musical direction of the next generation of idols through analysis of BTS songs, a successful case of 3rd generation K-Pop
- Effect on idol member part distribution

Through this study, we were able to find the characteristics of the above three items in the music of the analysis target. These contents indicated that it can match the development potential of idols after the 4th generation.

Case study 1: Analysis of the vocals in BTS's music

BTS pursued conventional hip hop music when they first debuted. As shown in Table 5, rapping took up a large part of the vocal positions of members. In their first single album No More Dream in 2013, the lyrics were more suitable and relatable to teenagers. The musical concept resembles the hip hop sound of the 1990s, symbolizing first-generation idols. However, the style differed from the previous generation's musical characteristics, which focused on songs

with hooks that adopted EDM or synth-pop sounds. In the case of the existing K-Pop, although the format, genre, composition of participating artists, etc. have changed according to the changes of the times, the topic to be conveyed has not changed significantly (Yang, 2017). Starting with the album *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Part 1* in 2015, BTS experimented with various genres of music and began to embrace global pop music style.

In 2014, BTS made an appearance on the reality show "American Hustle Life," in which they learned about real hip hop culture through the mentorship of famous rappers in the US; this marked the beginning of their American fandom. While BTS was perceived as a hip-hop idol group in South Korea, with a comical image on the TV show that negatively affected their sincerity in music, they built a friendly image in the US. They visited the country to learn about local music, which also helped them form a fandom. The track 'Dope' on the album *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Part 1* includes the lyric "Everyday hustle life," implying their experience in the US. BTS leader RM mentioned in an interview (Kim, 2021a) that this song made them first perceive responses from global fans. This album was based on hip-hop but added pop sounds. Importantly, BTS began to establish its current identity starting with this album. The members participated in writing songs and lyrics to authentically deliver their experiences and messages not just through hip hop. They made various attempts to expand the scope of their music, which led to increased singing (Figure 2). Both South Korean and overseas public came to listen more closely to the message of their worldview they showcased in each album.

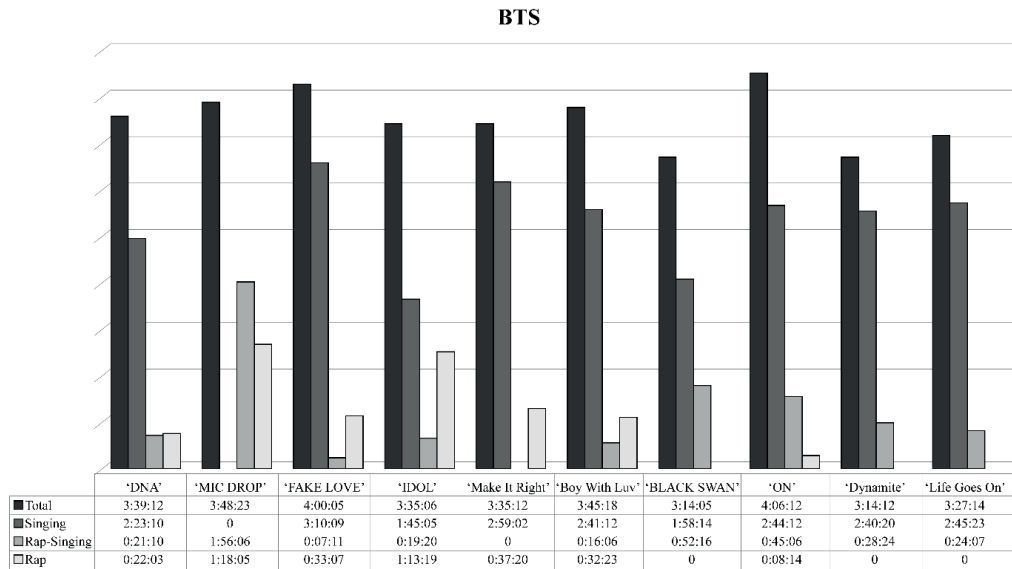


Figure 2. Changes in the vocal positions of BTS members

In 2015, *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Part 2* ranked No. 171 on the Billboard chart. This album contains many songs that emphasize vocal harmony or singing skills, and the tracks have basic hip hop beats or more sophisticated R&B and pop sounds. The music of K-pop idols has actively adopted music genres that are popular worldwide, and the distinct features of K-pop originate from combining these with Korean-style sounds. Before BTS, K-pop focused largely on performance-based dance music (i.e., the performance was the focus rather than lyrics or melodies). The public has connected with BTS's music on a more emotional level, likely because the group writes and is therefore more connected with its own lyrics. Pdogg, who discovered and produced the members before their debut, mentioned in an interview that he creates the beat first, and then BTS's members add their own lyrics and melodies. Lyrics based on real-life experiences (Min, 2018) has become the most important reason for BTS being valued today. They could shine in the spotlight in the public eye, starting with their "youth series" (i.e., "The Most

Beautiful Moment in Life" parts 1, 2, and 3) based on their efforts made in hip hop as well as the expansion of their musical base.

The album *Wings*, released in 2016, included solo tracks by all members, who began to display the individuality of their vocals, including two songs sung in collaboration by RM, Suga, and J-hope, who rapped, and Jin, Jimin, V, and Jungkook, who handled the vocals. BTS's singing at first was simpler and more rhythmical, whereas the lead single 'Blood Sweat & Tears' from *Wings* has a more sophisticated, refined melody. Starting with this, rap-singing began to stand out more in their title tracks. After rap-singing first emerged in the Korean hip hop scene in 2012, it became established in South Korea by many singers by 2017 (Billboard Korea, 2020; News Claim, 2021; Korea Entertainment Sports Newspaper, 2021). BTS, too, followed this trend in the hip hop scene, shifting from the old-school hip hop in earlier albums to the moombahton-trap beat in 'Blood Sweat & Tears'.

Ultimately, however, an earlier form of hip hop laid a significant foundation for BTS to become a global star. They were greatly influenced by producers who had learned about hip hop. Encouraging the members to find their own topics and write experience-based lyrics led to sincerity in their music, which lay the groundwork for their fame today. BTS's success is also associated with social media marketing, but it is necessary to first examine their musical development before and after their success. BTS found an inflection point between K-pop and global pop by combining their experience in hip hop with the mass appeal of pop music.

Various vocal positions in K-pop groups make their music more fun, but the harmony of those positions is also important. K-pop idols work in teams but sometimes display their talent individually or in tandem. The emergence of rap-singing, which connects rapping and singing, serves as a buffer. Therefore, the increase in singing and rap-singing compared to fast rapping has naturally helped them deliver their lyrics, attracting broader age groups and building a global fan base (Figure 2). In

general, K-pop idols have followed the trend in global pop charts by increasing the singing portions.

Case study 2: A comparative analysis of vocals by K-pop male idol groups in 2020

This section analyses the vocals of K-pop male idol groups that gained increasing global attention in 2020: ATEEZ, Stray Kids, NCT, and Seventeen. These groups won awards at the Gaonchart Music Awards 2020 and used similar marketing strategies as BTS. They appeared on TV shows in the US and were filmed while training in the US to develop a friendly image and attract American fans. They benchmarked BTS by emphasizing a similar worldview in their albums. In particular, in 2018 and 2019 Korean content entered the American market, especially with TV shows and music (Korea Creative Content Agency 2019), which helped these groups gain popularity. Third-generation idol groups are comprised of many members; ATEEZ and Stray Kids have eight members each, Seventeen has 13 members, and NCT has 23 members.



Photo 5. K-pop groups that received attention in 2020

In general, K-pop idol groups since the third generation have comprised vocals, rappers, and performers. Members receive high-quality training for each position and thus have excellent skills, which has a great impact on their musical dispositions.

The teams also include multinational members, mostly from East Asia, to make consumers in those countries feel proud and close while giving a fresh “K-pop style” image to consumers outside East Asia (Lee, 2020a). They were also turned into perfect Korean idols through the

professional training system of Korean entertainment agencies. K-pop idols are required to have not only a strong appearance but also outstanding vocal, rapping, and performing skills.

In Korea, there have been discussions about the globalization policy for Hallyu since the 2010s, and interest in K-pop has increased since that time (KOFICE, 2017). This study identified the portions of vocal positions on each team, with a focus on famous title tracks released in 2020 by male idol groups (Figure 3).

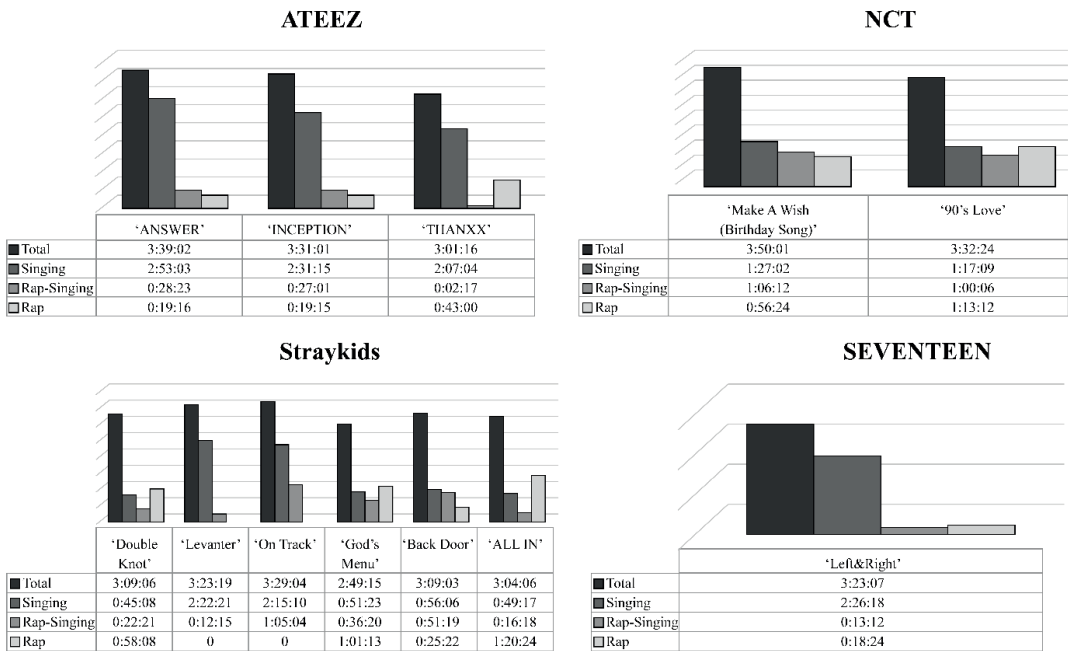


Figure 3. Changes in vocal positions of K-pop groups that received attention in 2020

K-pop quickly came to reflect trends in music and showcases a combination of multiple trends. K-pop groups succeeded in differentiating themselves by adding kalgunmu (“dancing perfectly in sync”) to their music videos (Lee, 2020b). This is focused more on performance than music, thereby possibly degenerating the nature of the music.

First, ATEEZ contains five vocalists, including the lead singer, two rappers, and one member who can both sing and rap. Songs by ATEEZ in the chart in Figure 3 mainly involve singing, which is similar in the song ‘Left & Right’ by Seventeen (bottom-right of chart). This reflects the fact that 6 members of the ATEEZ sing vocals; 9 out of the 13 members of

Seventeen also sing vocals, including sub-vocalists.

However, NCT and Stray Kids have generally shown similar positions. NCT comprises four units: NCT U (United, a team with different members depending on the song's concept), NCT 127 (a team based in Seoul with 127 representing the city's longitudinal coordinate), NCT Dream (a team comprised of members under the age of 20), and WayV (a team based in China that only has foreign members). They put together the songs of each unit to release a full NCT album. The two songs 'Make a Wish' and '90's Love' both have hip hop beats with a joyful mood, both released under the team name NCT U. Each team has different members, and many of them are talented "all-rounders" who can do well in two or more positions. There are vocalists who can rap well, rappers who can sing well, and performers who can sing well (Kim, 2021b). ATEEZ and Seventeen have their own style in terms of the proportion of members who sing and rap, and rap-sing; NCT is more focused on harmony and overall balance.

Stray Kids mostly has songs with an

even distribution of positions like NCT, but 'On Track' and 'Levanter' are songs centred on vocals. Stray Kids also has many all-rounders who can handle two or more positions like NCT, but six out of the eight members are rappers; thus, the portion of rapping is expected to be the most significant. The analysis also showed that rapping had the largest share in three of the songs.

K-pop music is characterized by a hybrid of multiple genres in a single song or album with diverse members. Therefore, to discover talented members who can perform multiple genres at once, idols today undergo strict training, as shown in Table 7, to become all-rounders. Unlike the members of BTS, who have play music and display creativity by creating storylines based on their actual experiences or directly participate in album production by writing songs, NCT's members have worked in units based on the agency's decisions regarding music and suitable members. As a result, as the appearance of BTS increased the number of global K-pop fans, South Korean idol groups found greater opportunities to become global stars.

A comparative analysis of musical changes in K-Pop male idol groups

Table 7. Positions of K-pop groups who received attention in 2020

Group name	Agency	Debut	Member	Nationality	Position
ATEEZ	KQ Entertainment	October 2018	Seong Hwa	Korean	Vocals
			Hong Joong	Korean	Main Rapper
			Yunho	Korean	Vocals
			Yeosang	Korean	Vocals
			San	Korean	Lead Vocals
			Min Gi	Korean	Main Rapper
			Woo Young	Korean	Vocals
			Jong Ho	Korean	Main Vocals
Seventeen	PLEDIS Entertainment	May 2015	S. Coups	Korean	Lead Rapper
			Jeonghan	Korean	Sub-Vocals
			Joshua	American	Sub-Vocals
			Jun	Chinese	Sub-Vocals
			Hoshi	Korean	Sub-Vocals
			Wonwoo	Korean	Sub-Rapper
			Woozi	Korean	Lead Vocals
			DK	Korean	Main Vocals
			Mingyu	Korea	Sub-Rapper
			The 8	Chinese	Sub-Vocals
			Seungkwan	Korean	Main Vocals
			Vernon	Korean American	Main Rapper
Dino	Korean	Sub-Rapper, Sub-Vocals			

Table 7. Positions of K-pop groups who received attention in 2020

NCT	SM Entertainment	April 2016	Taeil	Korean	Vocals
			Johnny	American	Vocals, Rapper
			Taeyong	Korean	Vocals, Rapper
			Yuta	Japanese	Vocals, Rapper
			Kun	Chinese	Vocals
			Doyoung	Korean	Vocals
			Ten	Thai	Vocals, Rapper
			Jaehyun	Korean	Vocals, Rapper
			Winwin	Chinese	Vocals, Rapper
			Jungwoo	Korean	Vocals
			Lucas	Chinese (Hong Kong)	Rapper
			Mark	Canadian	Vocals, Rapper
			Xiaojun	Chinese	Vocals
			Hendery	Chinese (Macau)	Rapper
			Renjun	Korean	Vocals
			Jeno	Korean	Rapper
			Haechan	Korean	Vocals
			Jaemin	Korean	Vocals, Rapper
			Yangyang	Taiwanese	Vocals, Rapper
			Shotaro	Japanese	Rapper
Sungchan	Korean	Rapper			
Chenle	Chinese	Vocals			
Jisung	Korean	Vocals, Rapper			
Stray Kids	JYP Entertainment	March 2018	Bang Chan	Australian	Vocals, Rapper
			Lee Know	Korean	Vocals, Rapper
			Changbin	Korean	Rapper, Vocals
			Hyunjin	Korean	Rapper
			Han	Korean	Rapper, Vocals
			Felix	Australian	Rapper
			Seungmin	Korean	Vocals
			I.N	Korean	Vocals

It is true that the chart entry barrier is lower than that of first- and second-generation idols. However, third-generation idols only briefly make an appearance in the charts and are not as popular overseas as they are in South Korea.

In the case study sections, this study identified the positions of K-pop idol groups according to their vocals and examined the music of BTS and four groups currently gaining attention. Most analyses on the success factors of K-pop focus on visual beauty and performance but do not sufficiently assess musical value or direction for development. According to a survey by KOFICE on global fans, the factor that makes Hallyu content so popular is “the catchy chorus and rhythm” (KOFICE, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to create music with lyrics with which the public can easily sing along and relate, thus making K-pop a steady seller instead of a brief phenomenon.

Conclusion

Performance-based music reduced remarkably due to COVID-19 in the US in 2020, whereas digital music increased, with a focus on streaming services (Korea Creative Content Agency, 2020). Therefore, video platforms such as YouTube have received more attention, serving as a key factor attracting a larger global audience on the Internet, with performances and visual beauty emphasized by K-pop idol groups. With PSY’s ‘Gangnam Style’ craze in 2012 and BTS’s global success since 2017, training and nurturing global idol groups targeting the US market have become a common goal for South Korean cultural policy and entertainment agencies.

ways to develop K-pop, which has become the centre of the Hallyu cultural phenomenon. Thus, the study examined changes in the vocals of BTS, a good example of a successful K-pop idol group, and identified their characteristics through an in-depth analysis. Accordingly, this study narrowed the scope of research to third-generation male idol groups and explored shifts in their vocal positions. Changes in positions were scrutinized with a focus on 2016, when BTS’s music style transformed. At first, BTS debuted as a hip-hop idol group, but it is now gaining popularity with pop music. They have shifted from rapping to rap-singing, following the current hip hop trend, but are now emphasizing singing with melodies and tunes that are easy to understand and sing along to, thereby delivering lyrics to global fans with more authenticity. BTS’s latest title tracks have much less rapping and more singing, thus showing a gradual change in their musical genre overall.

Third-generation idol groups that are chosen through the disciplined training system of entertainment agencies are now of higher quality than the previous generations, with more number of all-rounders and blurred lines among positions. Therefore, idol groups with many members form units for vocals, rapping, and performance to make it more interesting for the public while also ensuring musical diversity without sticking to a single genre. Some K-pop groups now become famous globally before being reintroduced to South Korea. However, they must find ways to break free from the genre of K-pop and move toward global pop music.

This study was conducted to determine

In an interview, American singer Charlie

Puth (K-Pop Gallery, 2021) claimed that pop singers must analyse BTS and see the members as role models. The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, one of the most popular talk shows in the US, introduced BTS as a global pop music icon (The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, 2021). This suggests that it is necessary to develop fundamental measures based on in-depth research on BTS's musical ideas and traditions so that K-pop does not fade away as a fleeting phenomenon.

This study explains two types of vocal positions in K-pop male idol groups that received global attention in 2020. First, singing appeared more frequently in K-pop male idol groups whose positions were clearly distributed. Second, groups—including so-called “all-rounders”—had a similar ratio of singing, rapping, and rap-singing. In South Korea, it is common to form teams by selecting the best idol members through a competition-based survival audition program or an entertainment agency's own training system. By analysing the positions in BTS songs, this study demonstrated that there has been a structural change in music so that the audience can realize the authenticity and meaning of idol groups' lyrics and not merely sing along to meaningless choruses (as in previous generations). By understanding the characteristics of third-generation K-pop idols and applying them to fourth-generation idols (instead of adopting the standardized training system), it will be possible to expand global strategies and future trends in music. Further, it is also necessary to establish a foothold for K-pop idols to grow into global artists by giving them creative freedom, having them participate in album production,

and allow them to make their own choices.

Recommendations

Through this study, it will be possible to explore the potential for development in the global music market including Korea. However, in order to ensure the continuity of K-Pop, it is necessary to develop a balanced development of idol music that includes various genres. In addition, follow-up research will be possible through an understanding approach to the Korean idol music system, which is receiving global attention.

Limitations of Study

In the case of BTS and 3rd-generation idol music data covered in this study, it was not possible to secure the diversity of results through more data collection because the album title songs based on popularity were analyzed. In addition, since qualitative research using existing analysis tools is difficult, the researcher's time data measurement method was used, which may result in minute errors.

And in the case of K-Pop idols based on the current Billboard, there is a limitation in not including female K-Pop artists because the ratio of male artists is high.

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