

Hedonic Motivation and K-Pop Fandom: A Qualitative Observation and Analysis of Social Media Use

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of Hedonic Motivation (HM) on SM engagement among K-pop fans. HM is one of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) theoretical framework. Through a qualitative analysis of content shared by fans on platforms like X (formerly known as Twitter), the research identifies key themes such as Interactive Enjoyment, Emotional Connectivity, and Community and Social Bonds. The findings suggest that fans' SM usage is significantly driven by the pleasure derived from interactive features, emotional satisfaction from recognition by their idols, and a strong sense of community. These motivations align with the UTAUT model, demonstrating how enjoyment shape behavioural intentions. The study provides practical insights for marketers and SM platforms to enhance user experience and engagement by leveraging these unique motivations, ultimately fostering deeper connections within this highly active and passionate demographic.

1. Introduction

The global rise of K-pop has transformed the music industry, propelling South Korean pop culture to unprecedented international prominence. Groups like BTS, BLACKPINK, and EXO have not only achieved remarkable commercial success but have also established a substantial presence on Social Media (SM) platforms. These platforms serve as vital channels for K-pop fans to connect with their favourite idols, share content, and participate in fan communities. SM's role in this ecosystem is not merely supportive but central, as it facilitates real-time interactions, streaming of content, and engagement in fandom activities. Given this significant integration of K-pop with SM, understanding the underlying factors that drive fans to use these platforms is crucial.

Despite the extensive research on SM usage and user motivations, there is a notable gap in literature concerning the specific drivers of SM engagement among K-pop fans, particularly from the perspective of Hedonic Motivation (HM). While general studies have explored various motivational factors influencing technology use, they often overlook the unique hedonic aspects—such as the pleasure and enjoyment derived from interacting with K-pop content—that might be particularly relevant in this context. This gap in understanding leaves a critical area unexplored, limiting insights into how pleasure and entertainment specifically influence SM behaviour among K-pop fans.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of HM on the Behavioural Intention (BI) to use SM among K-pop fans. By focusing on HM, this research aims to uncover how the enjoyment and pleasure derived from engaging with K-pop content influence fans' intent to continue using SM platforms. This objective is intended

to fill the existing gap in literature and provide a nuanced understanding of user behaviour in the K-pop fan community.

This study holds significant practical and academic importance. From a practical standpoint, understanding the role of HM in SM use can inform SM marketing strategies and fan engagement approaches for entertainment companies. By leveraging insights into what drives fans' pleasure and enjoyment, companies can create more targeted and engaging content, enhancing their reach and impact. Academically, the study contributes to the broader field of technology acceptance and user behaviour by highlighting how hedonic factors specifically influence SM engagement in the context of a global phenomenon like K-pop. This can pave the way for future research and theoretical developments in understanding user motivations across different entertainment and cultural contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 K-pop and SM

The relationship between K-pop and SM has been extensively explored in recent literature, underscoring the profound impact of digital platforms on the global spread of Korean pop music. SM serves as a primary conduit for K-pop content, allowing fans to engage with their favourite idols and groups in real-time. Studies reveal that platforms like Instagram, X, YouTube, and TikTok are central to K-pop fandom activities, including content sharing, fan interactions, and promotional efforts. For instance, research by Min (2024) highlights how K-pop agencies strategically use SM to enhance visibility and engagement, leveraging the platforms to reach international audiences and drive fan participation.

SM also plays a crucial role in the dissemination of K-pop content. By providing fans with access to exclusive content, live streams, and behind-the-scenes footage, these platforms facilitate a deeper connection between idols and their audience. According to Nam et al. (2024), the interactive nature of SM enables fans to actively participate in the K-pop experience, from voting in polls and streaming music videos to sharing personal interpretations and fan creations. This participatory culture is fundamental to the global success of K-pop, as it fosters a sense of community and belonging among fans.

2.2 Literature Gaps

Despite the increasing popularity of K-pop and the extensive use of SM by its fans, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific factors influencing K-pop fans' intentions to interact on SM. This gap is particularly evident in examining the relationship between BI to use SM and HM within the context of K-pop fandom. While Facilitating Conditions have been identified as crucial in technology adoption generally (Riady et al., 2022; Yao & Sheng, 2022; Shakeri et al., 2022), further research is needed to comprehensively understand their importance and impact on K-pop fans' SM use.

A recent study by Mohd Jenol and Ahmad Pazil (2022) highlights the role of K-pop artists' continuous production of goods and user-generated content distribution on SM platforms in enhancing their popularity and recognition. Their research investigates the motivations behind K-pop fans' creation and promotion of SM content, revealing that fans engage in a collaborative culture where they actively produce media content and take on authoritative roles within their fan communities.

The V Live app enables K-pop idol groups from various entertainment companies to interact with their fans online through live streaming. This "live broadcasting" feature allows viewers to comment or react in real-time during a broadcast (Kusuma et al. 2020). Although V Live has been operational for nearly five years, showing consistent growth in both user base and revenue, Ham and Lee (2020) note that most current research focuses on other live streaming services like Periscope, Twitch, and Afreeca TV. Consequently, there is a lack of user-level research on V Live.

To address this knowledge gap, this study focuses on user-level research on SM, particularly examining how HM influence K-pop fans' BI to use SM platforms. By applying technology acceptance theories to the specific context of fan communities, this study aims to enhance understanding of the factors driving SM use among K-pop fans.

2.3 Hedonic Motivation (HM)

HM refers to the pleasure and enjoyment derived from using a technology, as opposed to utilitarian motivations driven by practical benefits. In the context of technology acceptance, HM is crucial for understanding why users engage with certain platforms beyond their functional utility. According to Kumaran et al. (2024), HM encompasses aspects such as entertainment, fun, and emotional satisfaction, which significantly influence users' BI.

Previous studies have explored the impact of HM on technology and SM use, demonstrating its significant role in shaping user engagement. For instance, Venkatesh and Bala (2008) found that HM significantly affects users' intention to use technology, particularly in contexts where enjoyment and satisfaction are key drivers of engagement. In the realm of SM, research by Mufadhhol et al. (2024) highlights that users are motivated by the pleasure of interacting with content and others, which enhances their overall satisfaction and usage frequency. This aligns with the context of K-pop, where the enjoyment of engaging with content and participating in fan communities is a primary driver of SM usage.

2.4 Behavioural Intention (BI)

BI refers to the user's intention to engage in a specific behaviour, such as using a technology or platform. Theories such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) provide frameworks for understanding the factors that influence BI.

The TAM proposed by Davis (1989), posits that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are primary determinants of users' intention to use technology. TAM has been widely applied to various technology adoption contexts, including SM, to understand user behaviour. For example, studies have shown that ease of use and perceived benefits significantly impact users' intention to engage with SM platforms (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), introduced by Venkatesh et al. (2003), extends TAM by incorporating additional constructs such as Performance Expectancy (PE), Effort Expectancy (EE), Social Influence (SI), and Facilitating Conditions (FC). UTAUT has been used to examine SM usage, with research indicating that these constructs, along with moderators like age and experience, influence users' BI (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

In the context of K-pop fans, applying these theories helps to elucidate how HM interacts with traditional determinants of technology use. Understanding how pleasure and enjoyment influence fans' BI can provide deeper insights into their engagement with SM platforms and inform strategies for enhancing fan interaction and content delivery.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) was developed by combining eight existing models that explore how people accept and use new technologies. This comprehensive framework offers researchers valuable insights into users' attitudes and perceptions towards adopting technological innovations (Bruner, 2020). It captures the complexities of user behavior by pinpointing key factors that determine whether individuals will adopt new tools and systems.

The UTAUT identifies four key factors that significantly influence technology acceptance: PE, EE, SI, and FC. PE is the belief that using a technology will improve one's job performance. EE refers to how easy the technology is perceived to be. FC encompass the resources and support available to effectively use the technology. SI reflects the extent to which individuals perceive that important people think they should use the technology, as noted by Venkatesh et al. (2003). Together, these constructs offer a comprehensive view of the elements that can either encourage or deter the adoption of new technologies.

In 2012, UTAUT was revised and developed into UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012). This extended version extended the original framework by adding new variables, especially relevant to consumer technology. UTAUT2 included constructs like HM (the enjoyment or pleasure gained from using the technology) and Price Value (the perceived balance between cost and benefits), broadening the model's relevance across different technological domains.

Both UTAUT and UTAUT2 recognize gender, experience, and age as key moderating factors that can impact the relationship between the model's predictors and users' BI. For instance, younger users might have different expectations regarding performance or ease of use compared to older users, influencing their likelihood of adopting new technology. This nuanced perspective allows researchers and practitioners to customize their strategies for different demographic groups, making technology adoption more effective and user-friendly.

Additionally, both theories prioritize actual usage behavior as a key outcome, aiming to understand not only the intentions behind technology acceptance but also how these intentions convert into real-world use. This emphasis on behavior aligns with the objective of offering practical insights for businesses and organizations aiming to encourage the adoption of new technologies.

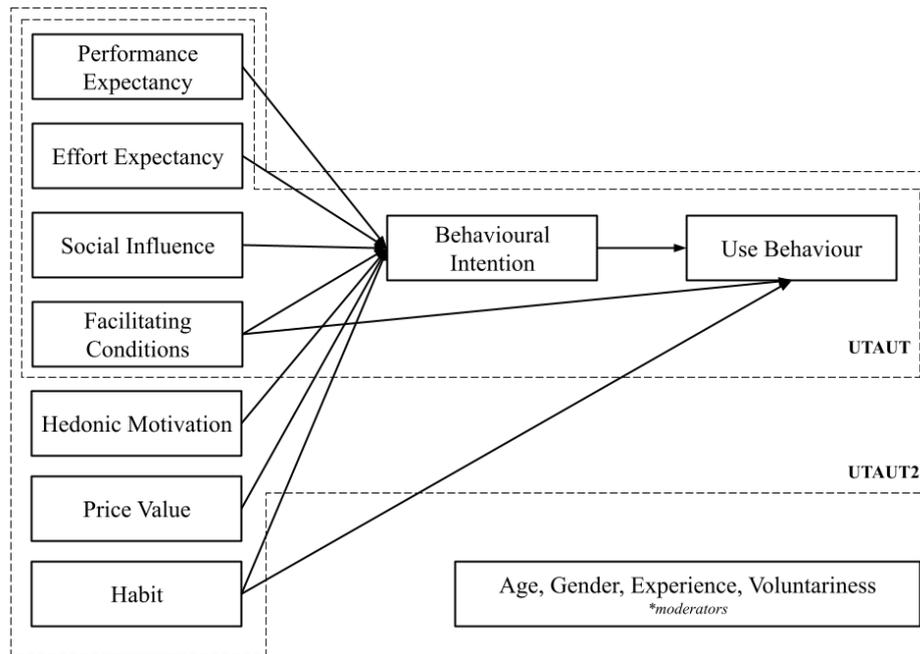


Fig. 1 UTAUT and UTAUT2 framework

The primary goal of UTAUT and UTAUT2 is to shed light on the factors that influence technology acceptance, highlighting the importance of simplicity and reliability in technology design and implementation (Shoheib & Abu-Shanab, 2022). By acknowledging the external factors that shape user behavior, decision-makers can make better-informed decisions about which technologies to adopt and how to support their use within organizations or communities (Al-Sharafi et al., 2022; 2023). This understanding is vital not only for improving user satisfaction but also for ensuring that technology investments deliver positive returns in terms of productivity and engagement. Fig. 1 illustrates the UTAUT and UTAUT2 frameworks.

UTAUT and its extended version, UTAUT2, offer a robust framework for understanding technology acceptance. By highlighting key determinants and accounting for demographic influences, these theories provide essential insights for researchers and practitioners seeking to create a more conducive environment for technology adoption.

2.6 HM in the Context of K-pop Fandom

Mohd Jenol & Ahmad Pazil (2022) discovered that K-pop fans use SM and fan events to produce and sell fan merchandise such as banners, decorative stickers, artwork, and photo cards. According to their findings, K-pop fans take part in buying and selling activities related to their favourite idols on SM platforms, primarily driven by HM. Similarly, Andira & Prasetyo (2023) discovered that e-commerce platforms that feature K-pop idols to raise awareness may influence K-pop fans' purchasing behaviour, particularly when it comes to HM. This supports the idea that SM platforms promote HM among K-pop fans, which can eventually influence their BI.

The HM factors among K-pop fans on SM are expected to be supported through the entertainment value, visual appeal, fandom creativity, fan interactions, participation in challenges, virtual concerts, fandom events, and emotional connections. The enjoyment derived from these aspects contributes to the overall positive experience of using SM within the context of the K-pop fandom. Earlier research has consistently demonstrated that HM plays an important role in influencing individuals' BI to use technology (Zhou et al., 2023; Harnadi et al., 2022; Shamsi & Abad, 2023). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H1: **HM** has a significant effect on **BI** to use SM among K-pop fans.

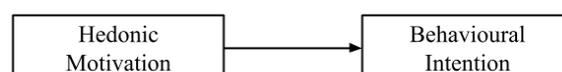


Fig. 2 Research framework

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilising observational methods to explore the impact of HM on the BI to use SM among K-pop fans. By focusing on the content and interactions observed on fans' SM accounts, the research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how pleasure and enjoyment influence their SM engagement.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study will be K-pop fans who actively engage in K-pop-related activities on SM. They will be selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who are identified as K-pop fans and frequently use SM platforms such as X. The aim is to assemble a diverse group based on factors including the duration of their SM use, the number of followers they have, and their level of interaction with the K-pop fandom. Details about the selected accounts are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Participants details

Username	User ID	Account Creation	Total followers
SUPER JUNIOR	@SJofficial	February 2018	1500000
엔즈	@babyavocado10	April 2020	1600
VHY	@hwangsejabin	April 2010	354
burbur79	@burbur79	August 2014	145
nununanaunnie	@unnie_as88	June 2012	82
r.n	@Raecha08	December 2019	31
jaja	@jajajanineteen	July 2019	24

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection will primarily involve the observation of participants' SM accounts and activities over a specified period. The researcher will systematically observe and document the content posted by participants, including text-based posts, photos, videos, comments, likes, and shares related to K-pop. Observations will be conducted non-intrusively, without direct interaction with participants, to capture their natural behaviours and interactions within the online environment.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis will utilise qualitative content analysis to identify themes, patterns, and trends in participants' K-pop-related SM activity. The researcher will examine the observed content to identify patterns in the types of posts, posting frequency, engagement metrics (such as likes and comments), and interactions with other users or fan communities. Thematic coding will be employed to categorise and code the data, facilitating the identification of recurring themes and differences among participants.

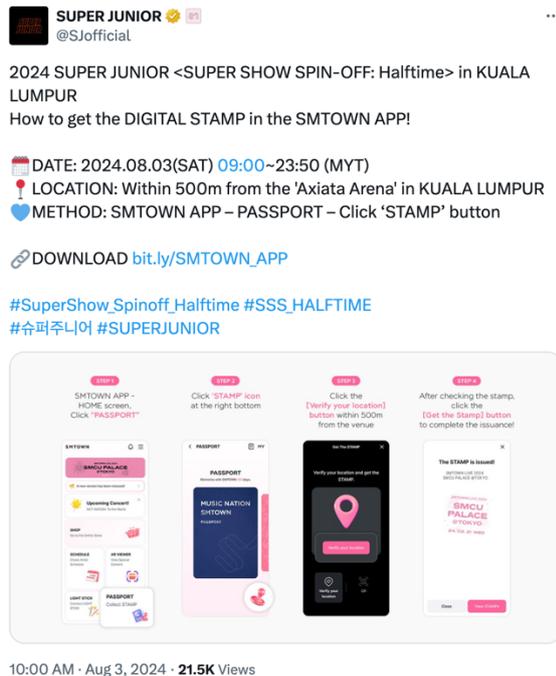
4. Results

The results of this observational study offer insights into the connection between HM and the BI to use SM among K-pop fans. The analysis of SM users' activities uncovered several key findings.

4.1 Interactive Enjoyment

Interactive Enjoyment means the fun and happiness you get from taking part in activities where you can participate and interact. It shows that when people can get involved, get quick responses, and share what they do with others, they enjoy and engage more. This idea emphasises how interactive parts can boost people's satisfaction and motivation.

In this study, Interactive Enjoyment looks at how K-pop fans find joy in interactive features on SM and fan activities. This includes things like digital events, interactive promotions, and sharing personal stories about K-pop events. These interactive features make the fan experience better by encouraging more involvement and connection with the fan community, leading to more enjoyment and satisfaction overall.



10:00 AM · Aug 3, 2024 · 21.5K Views

Fig. 3 Digital stamp for concert attendees



10:02 PM · Aug 3, 2024 · 179 Views

Fig. 4 Digital stamp claimed by fans

In Fig. 3, the official Super Junior (K-pop boy band) X account, @Sjofficial, launched a digital stamp initiative that encourages fans to collect "digital passports" at the concert. This initiative aimed to attract local fans and appeal to international fans who travel to collect these digital stamps from various concerts. The fun of collecting stamps for their "digital passports" adds an engaging element, making the concert experience more enjoyable and motivating fans to participate actively.

Fig. 4 shows @jajajanineteen, a fan who went to the concert sharing their collected digital stamp on the X platform. By posting about what they achieved, the fan celebrates their participation and shares their interactive experience with their friends. This sharing makes them enjoy the experience more by letting them show their excitement and pride, which adds to the fun from the event's interactive features.

Together, these examples show how Interactive Enjoyment, created by fun and shareable experiences, boosts fan happiness and motivation during the event and through later SM sharing.

4.2 Interactive Enjoyment

Emotional Connectivity means the strong feelings and happiness people get from meaningful interactions and connections. In SM and fandom, it includes the joy from being recognized, sharing experiences, and forming emotional bonds with others. This kind of connection is important for motivating people, as they look for platforms and activities that offer these fulfilling experiences.

Emotional Connectivity is very important for HM, especially in K-pop fandom. This idea is clearly shown through the SM activities of K-pop fans, such as the examples from users @babyavocado10 and @Raecha08 on X.

In Fig. 5, user @babyavocado10 shared their experience of attending a concert dressed in an outfit identical to their favourite artists. The artist's recognition of the fan and the fan's subsequent display of happiness through emojis illustrate how Emotional Connectivity enhances the pleasure of using SM. The joy of sharing this special moment and receiving positive feedback from other fans through replies and comments amplifies the enjoyment of engaging on SM platforms, showcasing how these interactions contribute to a more rewarding SM experience.

Fig. 6 features user @Raecha08, who posted about their self-made hand banner catching the artist's attention during a concert. The use of emojis to express excitement highlights the pleasure derived from showcasing their experience on SM. The act of sharing their creative effort and expecting to receive validation from the fan community enhances their satisfaction with the platform, demonstrating how Emotional Connectivity through SM engagement leads to increased enjoyment and usage.

Both examples underscore how Emotional Connectivity, facilitated by recognition and sharing on SM, significantly enhances the pleasure of using these platforms. The satisfaction from interacting with the fan community and receiving feedback reinforces the motivation to engage more actively with SM, illustrating how the enjoyment of these interactions drives continued SM use.



Fig. 5 Fan's outfit noticed by their favourite artists



Fig. 6 Fan's banner noticed by their favourite artists

4.3 Community and Social Bonds

Community and Social Bonds mean the feeling of belonging, mutual support, and active participation that people feel in a group. This idea highlights how important social connections and shared activities are for emotional satisfaction and happiness. In SM, these bonds are crucial because they encourage user involvement and create a supportive community, improving the overall user experience.

In this study about K-pop fandom and SM use, K-pop fans often create close communities on SM, where they share information, offer support, and join in group activities. These interactions not only increase their enjoyment and satisfaction but also strengthen their dedication to the fan community, showing how important Community and Social Bonds are for SM engagement among K-pop fans.



Fig. 7 Information sharing



Fig. 8 Discussion about the sharing information

In Fig. 7, user @unnie_as88 posted about a new advertisement banner that was put up publicly accessible. This post created excitement and anticipation among fans, acting as an informative and motivating point for others. This example shows how sharing news within the community helps build a sense of connection and shared excitement, which are important parts of Community and Social Bonds.

In Fig. 8, user @hwangsejabin asked @unnie_as88 where the banner was, saying they wanted to visit it too. User @burbur79 also joined in, saying they planned to take pictures with the banner. In reply, @unnie_as88 gave detailed information about the location, along with images. This conversation shows active community involvement, where fans help and inform each other, making the experience of being part of the fan community even better. These interactions highlight the joy that comes from mutual support and shared activities, reinforcing the importance of Community and Social Bonds in HM.

5. Findings

The findings from this study illustrate how different aspects of HM—Interactive Enjoyment, Emotional Connectivity, and Community and Social Bonds—play significant roles in enhancing K-pop fans' experiences on SM platforms.

The results demonstrate that Interactive Enjoyment is a crucial factor in K-pop fans' SM engagement. Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 highlight how the digital stamp initiative by Super Junior's official X account contributed to a more engaging and enjoyable fan experience. Fans' active participation in collecting and sharing digital stamps added a gamified element to their interaction with the concert, enhancing their overall enjoyment. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that interactive features and participatory elements in SM can significantly increase user satisfaction and engagement (Jamil et al., 2022; Lum & Chang, 2023; GGI Insights, 2024). The pleasure derived from these interactive activities encourages fans to continue using SM platforms, reinforcing their involvement and satisfaction.

Emotional Connectivity was also found to be a key driver of SM use among K-pop fans. Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 show that fans derive significant pleasure from being recognized by their idols and sharing these moments on SM. The emotional satisfaction of having their creative efforts acknowledged and celebrated by both the artists and the fan community enhances their enjoyment of the platform. This is consistent with studies that highlight the importance of emotional bonds and recognition in increasing user engagement on SM (Lin et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2023; Shuqair et al., 2024). By sharing their experiences and receiving positive feedback, fans strengthen their emotional connection to the platform, motivating continued engagement.

The study also underscores the importance of Community and Social Bonds in driving SM engagement. Fig. 7 and Fig. 8 illustrate how sharing information and engaging in discussions about fan activities foster a sense of belonging and mutual support within the K-pop fan community. The act of informing others about new events and responding to inquiries strengthens the bonds among fans and enhances their overall satisfaction with the community. This finding is supported by research on the role of social connections and shared activities in enhancing user experiences on SM (Ghaderi et al., 2023; Winstone et al., 2021). The sense of belonging and active participation in fan interactions reinforce fans' commitment to the community and their motivation to engage with SM platforms.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that emphasises the role of HM in SM engagement. Interactive Enjoyment has been shown to increase user satisfaction through participatory features and gamification (Smiderle et al., 2020). Emotional Connectivity, driven by recognition and shared experiences, has been linked to higher levels of user engagement and satisfaction (Dubovi & Tabak, 2021). Community and Social Bonds have also been identified as crucial for fostering a supportive and engaging online environment (Eden et al., 2024).

In summary, this study contributes to the understanding of how HM influences SM use among K-pop fans by highlighting the significance of Interactive Enjoyment, Emotional Connectivity, and Community and Social Bonds. These findings align with and extend previous research, offering insights into how these elements drive fan engagement and satisfaction on SM platforms.

6. Conclusion

Building on the recommendation of Roslan et al. (2024) to examine the behavior of K-pop fans, this study explored the relationship between HM and BI to use SM among K-pop fans using a qualitative observational approach. The findings offer important insights into the factors influencing fans' engagement with SM platforms and their interactions within the K-pop fan community.

By employing the UTAUT as a framework, the research demonstrates that factors such as Interactive Enjoyment, Emotional Connectivity, and Community and Social Bonds significantly influence fans' intention to use SM platforms. The qualitative analysis of SM content shows that K-pop fans derive substantial pleasure from interactive features, emotional fulfilment from being recognized by their idols, and a sense of belonging through community interactions. These findings underline that HM is a powerful driver of SM use within this fan community, enhancing both user satisfaction and engagement levels.

The study provides valuable insights for marketers, SM platforms, and fan communities by suggesting that strategies leveraging these motivational elements can effectively enhance user experience and engagement. Future research could further explore these dynamics across different fan communities or investigate additional

motivational factors that influence SM behaviour. Overall, understanding the specific motivations of K-pop fans offers broader implications for SM marketing and engagement strategies in digital fandoms.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

*The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation:** Muhammad Amirul Asyraf Roslan; **supervision, reviews and amendment:** Nurul Amelina Nasharuddin, Masrah Azrifah Azmi Murad. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.*

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