



## K POPPED - A STUDY ON THE GROWTH OF K POP MUSIC

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### Abstract

*Music is always considered as a mirror of culture. Music has the power which is not bound by language. Although there are different forms of music throughout the history, the most popular form remains Pop Music. Pop is a genre of popular music that originated in its modern form during the mid-1950s in the United States and the United Kingdom. Pop Music continuously evolves right from its beginning time which was around 1920. ("Pop Music," 2021) Though US Pop still retains the top ranks in the music industry, in the recent decade of 2000, Korean Wave has taken over the world by storm. Right from Gangnam style to BTS, a most popular boy band as on today, K Pop music changed the scenario of music industry drastically; also impacting social media to huge extent. This research paper aims to study this very growth of K Pop music globally.*

**Keywords:** *Pop Music, US Pop, K Pop, Global Growth, Social Media Popularity*



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### Introduction:

Musicology is defined as 'The branch of knowledge that deals with music as a subject of study rather than as a skill or performing art'. It is a long established lively field that has generated many enduring traditions and insights about the organization and effects of music. Music is not just the combination of notes and silence but also a social and cultural phenomenon inscribed with the flourishes of particular history, types of creativity, cultures and emotions.

Despite the impressive and work, Musicology falls short of adequately embracing the industrial, social, political, economic and cultural dimensions of music. It does not consider the business of what music can do for you. From ancient times, music has been associated with elemental cosmic and healing presence. (Pop Music, Pop Culture - Chris Rojek - Google Books, n.d.)

Music is found in every known society, past and present, and is considered to be a cultural universal. Since all people of the world, including the most isolated tribal groups, have a form of music, it may be concluded that music is likely to have been present in the ancestral population prior to the dispersal of humans around the world. Consequently, the first music may have been invented in Africa and then evolved to become a fundamental constituent of human life, using various different materials to make various instruments. ("New Harvard Study Says Music Is Universal Language," 2019)

A culture's music is influenced by all other aspects of that culture, including social and economic organization and experience, climate, access to technology and what religion is believed. The emotions and ideas that music expresses, the situations in which music is played and listened to, and the attitudes toward music players and composers all vary between regions and periods. Music history is the distinct subfield of musicology and history which studies music



(particularly [Western art music](#)) from a chronological perspective.

The different Eras of Music can be broadly categorised as Prehistoric Music, Ancient Music, Biblical Period and Early Music. Whereas Western Art Music categorization is Medieval Music, Renaissance Music, Baroque Music, Classic Music Era, Romantic Music, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Music. The 20th century saw a revolution in music listening as the radio gained popularity worldwide and new media and technologies were developed to record, capture, reproduce and distribute music. Music performances became increasingly visual with the broadcast and recording of performances. (*Continuum Encyclopaedia of Popular Music of the World, Volume 2: Performance and Production (Encyclopaedia of Popular Music of the World) John Shepherd: Continuum, n.d.*) 20th-century music brought a new freedom and wide experimentation with new musical styles and forms that challenged the accepted rules of music of earlier periods. The invention of musical amplification and electronic instruments, especially the synthesizer, in the mid-20th century revolutionized classical and popular music, and accelerated the development of new forms of music. (*Campbell, 2018*)

#### **Objective of the Study:**

The main objectives of the study are,

- (1) To learn about the journey from Pop to K Pop
- (2) To study the growth K Pop

#### **Methodology:**

The study is based on secondary data collected from different Journals, Research Papers, Articles and Books published related to the topic. The study was conducted on free-lance and theoretical review. So, the need for implying statistical tools was compromised.

#### **Review of Literature:**

Rojek Chris (2011) – Researcher studies Pop Music and Pop Culture through agency approaches and structuralist approaches. He explains the field of pop music study in detail by indicating that today networking, de differentiation and deterritorialization have modified the character of production, exchange and consumption of pop music. According to him, Pop music clearly reflects what is common among composers, performers and audiences. He concludes that technology, social media plays an essential role in the pop music popularity.

Shin Hyunjoon, Lee Seung-Ah (2017) – This book is divided in different parts explaining history, genres, artists, and issues. It also covers the major figures, styles and social contexts of pop music in Korea. History of Korea, how Korean music evolved, genres of music are described thoroughly. In artist part, he focused on four figures from distinct periods noted for artistic creativity and cultural influence. It concludes with the essays written by leading scholars of Korean music.

Choi, Maliangkay (2015), This book described K Pop as South Korea's greatest export. It examines the phenomenon and discuss the reasons of its success through the questions like why fandom matters to international rise of K Pop, Korean history of uniform pop music acts, Girls generation from local to global, Question of place and identity and also K Pop and the male beauty ideals. It mainly answers the question how far Asian culture can be global in truly meaningful way.

Kim Jin-Young and Lee, Jong Oh (2014) – In this paper on Korean Pop Culture, author states how K Pop causes a great sensation in the Pop music world. Korea emerged as a new centre for the production of transnational pop culture.

He explains that Korean wave achievement through the mention of Korean dramas, games, shows, movies and popular



actors in the decade of 2000. He also touched some aspects of popularity of Anti-Hallyu. He concludes that hallyu is considered as a product using Korean culture as a medium, it is the window through which other Asian countries look at Korea. In this context, hallyu should shift its paradigm from the darling of culture industry to an overall phenomenon encompassing politics, economics and social matters.

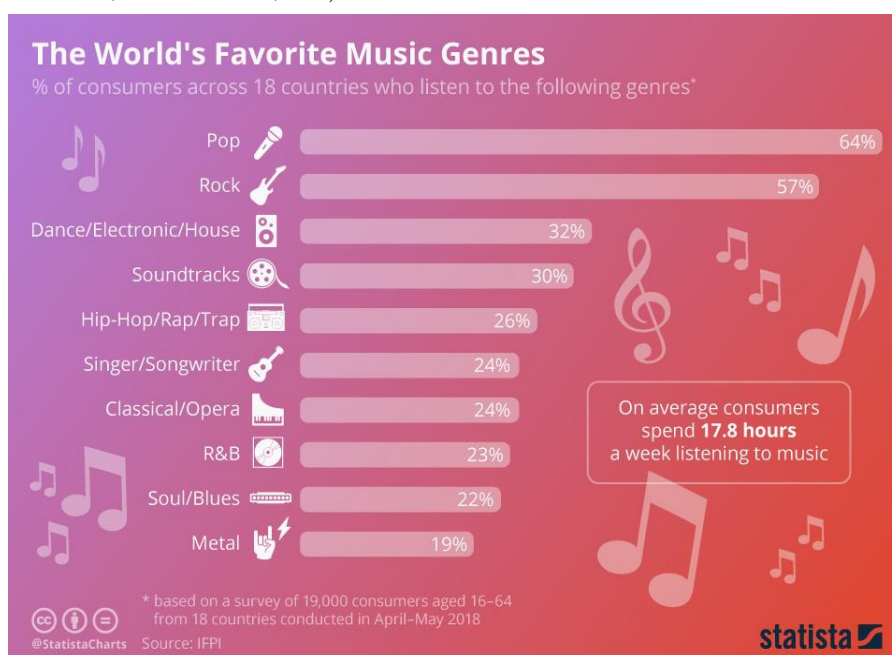
Parc Jimmyn, Messerlin P. and Moon Hwy-Chang (2017) – Authors explains Today's mantra in many political and business circles is that stringent copyrights are needed for fostering cultural creativity and that piracy is the greatest obstacle toward creativity. They seek to explain this apparent paradox through three steps. First, most of the existing world culture has been created without copyrights, and economic analysis, Second, the competitiveness of the current K-pop scene and Third a fascinating relationship between the competitiveness gaining process and piracy suggesting that piracy actually helped the development and competitiveness of K-pop. It concludes saying that the success of K-pop has benefited from two positive forces: globalization through new technologies and well-balanced copyright. Both have ensured an ever-widening range of goods and services that can meet the demands of consumers.

### Scope of the Study:

This study aims to understand the Pop Music history and latest trend in Pop and Rock music in the form K Pop. and also, its rapid global growth. He also studies modes of production such as artists, managers, audiences, media and technology.

### Pop Music

Pop is a genre of popular music that originated in its modern form during the mid-1950s in the United States and the United Kingdom. The terms *popular music* and *pop music* are often used interchangeably, although the former describes all music that is popular and includes many disparate styles. During the 1950s and 1960s, pop encompassed rock and roll and the youth-oriented styles it influenced. Rock and pop remained roughly synonymous until the late 1960s, after which pop became associated with music that was more commercial, ephemeral, and accessible. (S. Frith, W. Straw, and J. Street, eds)





The above image is self-explanatory in terms of world's favourite music genres. Although much of the music that appears on record charts is seen as pop music, the genre is distinguished from chart music. Identifying factors usually include repeated choruses and hooks, short to medium-length songs written in a basic format (often the verse-chorus structure), and rhythms or tempos that can be easily danced to. Much pop music also borrows elements from other styles such as rock, urban, dance, Latin, and country. ("Pop Music," 2021)

David Hatch and Stephen Millward (1987) define pop music as "a body of music which is distinguishable from popular, jazz, and folk music". Although pop music is seen as just the singles charts, it is not the sum of all chart music. The music charts contain songs from a variety of sources, including classical, jazz, rock, and novelty songs.

Pop music continuously evolves along with the term's definition. According to music writer Bill Lamb, popular music is defined as "the music since industrialization in the 1800s that is most in line with the tastes and interests of the urban middle class." (*Lamb Bill, 2018*). Pop music has been dominated by the American and (from the mid-1960s) British music industries, whose influence has made pop music something of an international monoculture, but most regions and countries have their own form of pop music, sometimes producing local versions of wider trends, and lending them local characteristics. (*J. Kun, 2005*) Some Non-Western countries, such as Japan, have developed a thriving pop music industry, most of which is devoted to Western-style pop. Japan has for several years produced a greater quantity of music than everywhere except the US. One of the pop music styles that developed alongside other music styles is Latin pop, which rose in popularity in the US during the 1950s with early rock and roll success Ritchie Valens. Later, as Los Lobos garnered major Chicano rock popularity during the 1970s and 1980s, musician Selena saw large-scale pop music presence as the 1980s and 1990s progressed, along with crossover appeal with fans of Tejano music pioneers Lydia Mendoza and Little Joe. (*Lucero, Mario J, 2020*) With later Hispanic and Latino Americans seeing success within pop music charts, 1990s pop successes stayed popular in both their original genres and in broader pop music. (*Aldama, A.J.; Sandoval, C.; García, P.J. (2012)* Latin pop hit singles, such as "Macarena" by Los del Río and "Despacito" by Luis Fonsi, have seen record-breaking success on worldwide pop music charts. (*Villafañe, Veronica, 2017*) and then comes the Korean Wave, K POP. ("Pop Music," 2021)

### **K Pop – A Korean Music Wave**

K-Pop – contemporary Korean dance music – is currently becoming one of the noticeable popular music genres in the world. K-Pop is definitely Korean pop music, but it is also a kind of transnational hybrid music that refers to other global popular music in various ways. Previously, South Korean pop music was called *Gayo* While "K-pop" is a general term for popular music in South Korea. The history of the development of K-Pop shows how local cultural industries survived in the flow of globalization by building regional international success and then expanding around the world.

### **History of K Pop**

It was firstly globalized in East Asian region, and recently it is being globalized in the rest of the world including US and the West. It all started with a music video of the single *Gangnam Style*, produced and performed by famous Korean rapper and producer PSY (Jae-Sang Park), has been viewed over 300 million times worldwide since it was posted on YouTube. This song was his first single released internationally, though his Korean debut album released in 2001 and *Gangnam Style* is the first single cut from his sixth studio album. It was ranked No.1 on the UK Singles Chart in September of 2011 and ranked the second place of Billboard Hot 100 Chart (the main single chart of the Billboard) for seven consecutive weeks. *Gangnam Style* became the first Korean song to reach No. 1 in the UK and top 5 in the US,



two of the dominant powers of global popular music industry. Notably, its lyrics are Korean, not English, Spanish, or other European languages yet Americans sing along to this Korean song with its funny 'invisible horse dance', even without knowing what its lyrics mean.

Although the success of *Gangnam Style* is unique, there has been slight but significant hint of this K-Pop wave since the late 2000s in the US and some Western European countries. Billboard newly introduced a weekly K-pop chart in July of 2011 after several K-Pop musicians such as BoA, Girl's Generation, Wonder Girls, and Big Bang appeared on the Billboard 200 (albums) and Billboard Hot 100 (singles) charts. Before PSY swept a number of television variety and talk shows in the late 2012, Girl's Generation, one of the most popular K-Pop girl bands in its domestic market, had appeared as guests on *The David Letterman Show* in January of 2012.

Even before other media outlets jumped on the trend after the *Gangnam Style* phenomenon, many K-Pop musicians have had joint concerts in global cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Paris, London, Barcelona, Berlin, Mexico City, São Paulo, and Sidney since the late 2000s, with almost all the seats occupied.

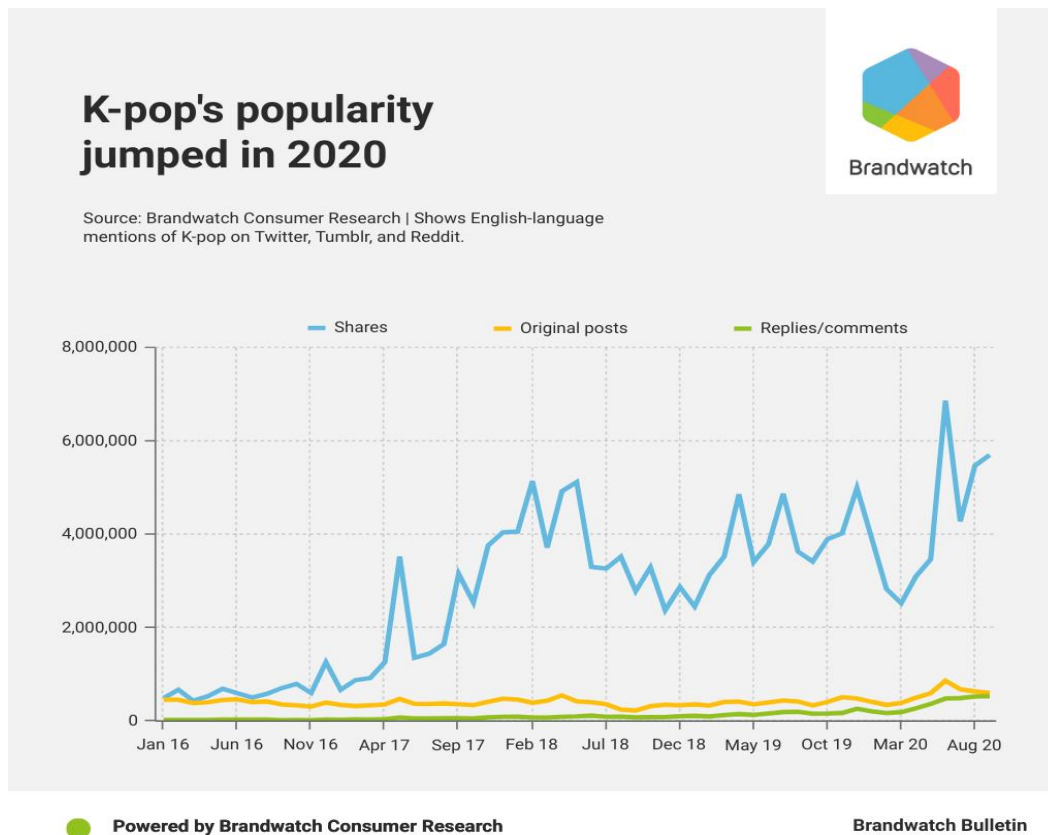
### **K Pop Today – Growth and Success**

In 2018, K-pop experienced significant growth and became a 'power player', marking a 17.9% increase in revenue growth. As of 2019, K-pop is ranked at number six among the top ten music markets worldwide according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry's "Global Music Report 2019", with BTS and Black pink cited as artists leading the market growth.

Since the mid-2000s, a huge portion of the East Asian music market has been dominated by K-pop. In 2008, South Korea's cultural exports (including television dramas and computer games) rose to US\$2 billion, maintaining an annual growth rate of over 10%. That year, Japan accounted for almost 68% of all K-pop export revenues, ahead of China (11.2%) and the United States (2.1%). The sale of concert tickets proved to be a lucrative business; TVXQ's Timoshenko Live Tour in Japan sold over 850,000 tickets at an average cost of US\$109 each, generating a total of US\$92.6 million in revenues.

Elsewhere in the world, the genre has rapidly grown in success, especially after Psy's "Gangnam Style" music video was the first YouTube video to reach one billion views, achieving widespread coverage in mainstream media. As of December 2020, the video has 3.9 billion views. BTS won Top Social Artist at the 2017 Billboard Music Awards in 2017, making them the first K-pop group to win a BBMA. Their performance of the song "DNA" at the American Music Awards, the first AMA performance by a K-pop group, also led to the song peaking at number 67 on the Billboard Hot 100. The following year, BTS became the first K-pop group to reach number 1 on the Billboard 200 with *Love Yourself: Tear*. *Map of the Soul: Persona* later became the best-selling album ever in South Korea, with more than 3.2 million sales in less than a month. On the night of December 31, 2019, BTS ushered in the upcoming year 2020 with a performance at the New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square, in front of one million spectators and a television audience of over one billion people.

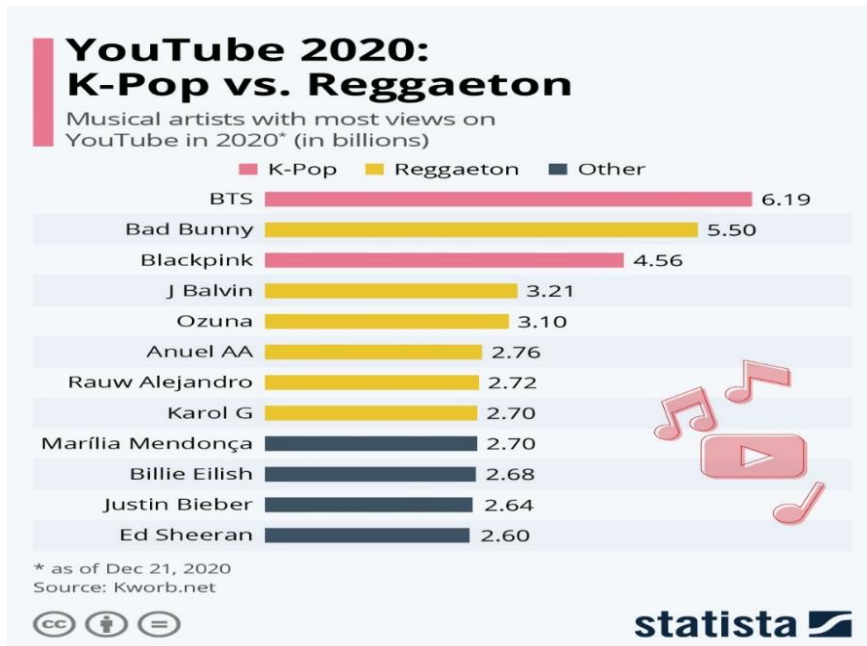
The following image shows the jump of K Pop popularity in the year 2020.



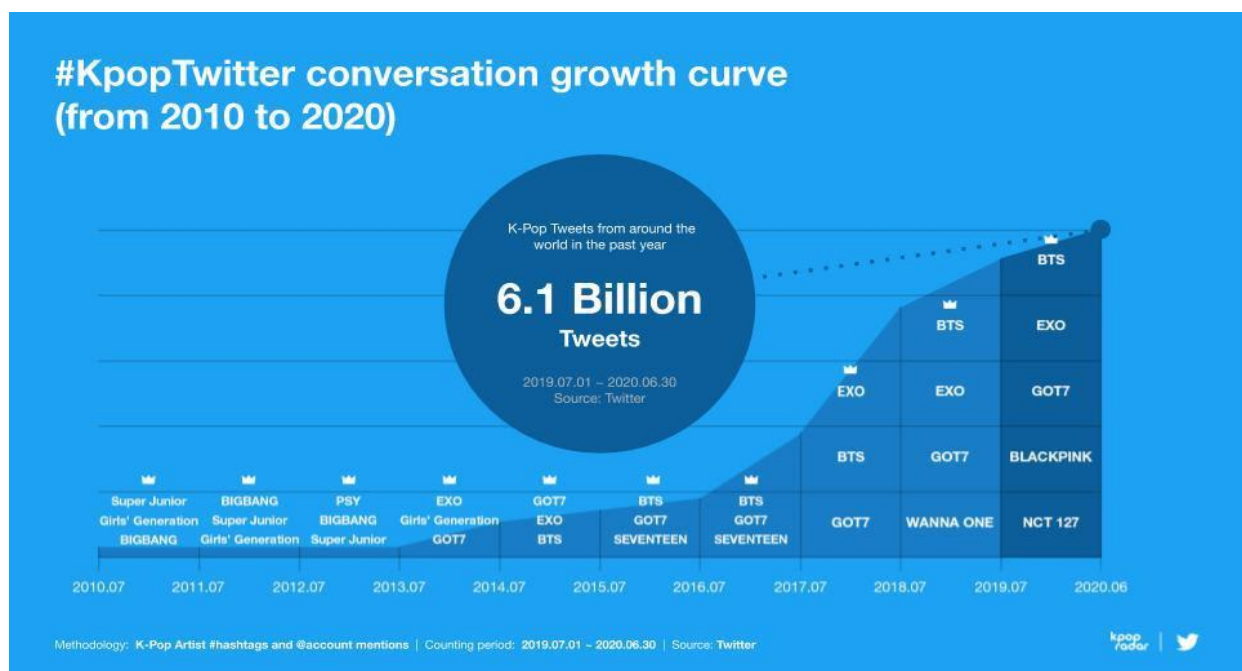
### K Pop and Social Media

Social media sites such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook allow K-pop artists to reach a global audience and to communicate readily with their fans. As global online music market revenue increased 19% from 2009 to 2014 with social media, music consumers around the world are more likely to be exposed to K-pop. K-pop idol groups benefit from video-based social media such as YouTube since visual components such as dance and fashion are essential factors in their performance. The number of searches of "K-pop" on YouTube increased by a factor of 33 from 2004 to 2014. Through social media advertisement, Korean entertainment companies narrowed the cultural gap so K-pop could enter the global market and gain recognition among overseas consumers. The export of K-pop dramatically increased from US\$13.9 million to US\$204 million between 2007 and 2011.<sup>[198]</sup> Social media also changes the consumption patterns of K-pop music. Before the digital era, people would purchase and consume music products on an individual basis. Consumers now actively participate in sharing music products and advertising their favourite artists, which is advantageous for K-pop.

Since K-pop started to spread its industry outside South Korea, K-pop artists have set notable records on YouTube. Of the 2.28 billion worldwide K-pop YouTube views in 2011, 240 million came from the United States, more than double the figure from 2010 (94 million). In December 2011, K-pop became the first country-specific genre of music to gain a homepage on YouTube. From the following image, it is clear that BTS gained the 1<sup>st</sup> Position in Most Viewed Musical Artists with almost 6.19 million views as compared to US Pop artists.



Twitter has also been a significant social media platform for K-pop stars to get connections and promotions. Bang Si Hyuk, the producer of BTS, partially attributed the fast growth of their fanbase to social media such as Twitter. On November 13, 2017, BTS became the first South Korean act to reach 10 million followers on Twitter. In 2017, BTS was the most tweeted-about artist both in the United States and globally. Other K-pop groups, such as Seventeen and Monsta X, also appeared in the global top ten. Exo, a South Korean boyband, was the most followed celebrity to have entered Twitter in 2017. At the 2017, 2018, and 2019 Billboard Music Awards, BTS won the award for Top Social Media Artist based on Twitter voting by their fans. Growth of K Pop Twitter can be seen from the following chart.





Many Korean entertainment companies use social media platforms, especially Facebook, to promote and communicate about their global auditions. K-pop groups use Facebook pages to promote their music and other content to large numbers of fans. K-pop fans use Facebook to express their devotion, communicate with other members of the K-pop community, and consume K-pop content.

**Conclusions:**

K-Pop is a recent trend that has just become a noticeable cultural phenomenon in Europe and the Americas for only about a couple of years or so. However, K-Pop has already been established as one of the 'coolest' popular musical forms in most East Asian countries. It has led to the rapid popularization of Korean popular cultural products in East Asia – the new and broad cultural phenomenon called the *Hallyu* (韓流) or Korean Wave. K-Pop had already conquered the regional East Asian music industry, and now it is going global far and wide.

However, this staggering success in such a short period of time raise a particularly interesting question for further research that whether K-pop is sustainable in the long run. The available answers differ a lot—between those who predict its continuous success and those who argue that a fall will come soon. Answer only time will tell. Till then as BTS famous song of 2020 says “Life Goes On”.

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