The Impact of K-Pop on Thai Popular Music:

A Study of Cross-Cultural Communication & Influence

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Abstract

This study examines K-Pop's influence on Thai popular music, focusing on cross-cultural communication and its impact on the Thai music industry. Using a mixed-methods approach including content analysis, interviews with industry professionals, and a consumer survey, this study investigate changes in musical style, production, marketing, and audience reception. The findings reveal significant K-Pop-influenced shifts in Thai pop music, encompassing musical composition, visual aesthetics, artist development, and fan engagement. The study argues this phenomenon represents a complex interplay of cultural adaptation and localization rather than mere imitation, reflecting broader cultural globalization trends. The study provides insights into the negotiation between global influences and local cultural contexts in the music industry, contributing to understanding cross-cultural communication and cultural flows in Southeast Asia. Our research highlights the need for a nuanced approach to studying cultural influence in an interconnected global media landscape.

Keywords: *Cross-cultural Communication, Cultural Influence, Globalization, K-Pop, Music Industry, Thai Popular Music*

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Introduction

Korean culture has spread rapidly across the globe, largely through entertainment platforms such as music, television dramas, and films (Hendayana & Afifah, 2021; Bahagia et al., 2022; Andira et al., 2023; Chen, 2023). The global rise of Korean popular music (K-Pop), commonly known as K-Pop, has been one of the most significant cultural phenomena of the 21st century (Jin & Yoon, 2016). Korean Pop is not merely an art form or cultural expression that has gained global appreciation. Rather, its global acceptance has also been driven by the integration of business strategies and technological innovation in its development (Andira et al., 2023). Its influence has extended far beyond South Korea's borders, reaching various parts of the world and reshaping local music industries and cultural landscapes (Jin & Yoon, 2016). Among the regions most impacted by this Korean Wave, or "Hallyu," phenomenon has inspired people worldwide to develop an interest in the Korean language and culture, influencing aspects such as fashion, communication styles, and everyday expressions (Hendayana & Afifah, 2021; Bahagia et al., 2022; Andira et al., 2023; Park, 2023; Shin, 2025). The success of the Korean Wave today is closely tied to the active role of the South Korean government, which has provided strong support for its growth. At present, the government continues to play an aggressive role in promoting and expanding the Korean Wave across different parts of the world (Sendow et al., 2019). K-Pop's influence extends well beyond its catchy melodies and dynamic choreography; it also involves carefully constructed idol personas, strategic marketing approaches, and deep emotional bonds between idols and their fans (Chen, 2023). Southeast Asia stands out, with Thailand being a particularly receptive market due to its vibrant music scene and cultural proximity to South Korea (Siriyuvasak & Shin, 2007). Thailand ranks among the countries with the largest K-Pop fandom, as evidenced by having the highest global tweet volume related to K-Pop in 2020 (Andira et al., 2023). This matters for the Thai music industry because K-Pop has reshaped how music is produced, promoted, and consumed in Thailand. Local producers increasingly adopt K-Pop-inspired practices in sound design, choreography, and visual presentation, while entertainment companies experiment with idol training systems and fan-oriented marketing strategies. These changes suggest that K-Pop's influence is not only cultural but also structural, reshaping the very practices through which Thai pop music is created and circulated (Kim, 2021; Rüdiger & Baratta, 2025).

The influence of K-Pop on Thai popular music presents a fascinating case study in cross-cultural communication and the dynamics of cultural globalization. As Appadurai (1996) notes, the global cultural economy is characterized by complex, overlapping, and disjunctive flows of people, media, technology, finance, and ideas. In this context, the interaction between K-Pop and Thai music offers a unique lens through which to examine these flows and their consequences. This study aims to investigate the impact of K-Pop on Thai popular music, focusing on the cross-cultural communication aspects and the resulting changes in the Thai music industry. The researchers seek to answer the following research questions:

1. How has K-Pop influenced the musical style, production techniques, and visual aesthetics of Thai popular music?
2. What changes have occurred in the marketing strategies and artist development practices of the Thai music industry as a result of K-Pop's influence?
3. How do Thai music consumers perceive and respond to the K-Pop influence in local music?
4. To what extent does the influence of K-Pop on Thai music represent cultural homogenization or hybridization?

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to our understanding of cross-cultural communication in the music industry and the broader dynamics of cultural globalization in Southeast Asia. By examining the specific case of K-Pop's influence on Thai music, researchers can gain insights into how local cultural industries navigate and adapt to global influences while maintaining their cultural identities. Moreover, this study addresses a gap in the literature on cultural globalization and popular music. While much research has focused on the global spread of Western popular music (Regev, 2013) or the rise of K-Pop itself (Oh & Park, 2012), less attention has been paid to how K-Pop influences other Asian music industries. While much research has examined Western pop's global dominance and the international expansion of K-Pop, few studies have explored how K-Pop reconfigures other Asian music industries. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how K-Pop's production models, visual aesthetics, and fan-centered marketing strategies is adapted within the Thai context. Focusing on Thailand, home to one of the world's largest K-Pop fandoms and a dynamic local music industry. The research provides a detailed account of the mechanisms and outcomes of K-Pop's cultural influence. In doing so, it highlights the processes of cultural hybridization, localization, and negotiation that occur when global cultural flows intersect with regional creative practices. This contribution not only enriches scholarly debates on cultural globalization but also offers practical insights for industry stakeholders seeking to balance global appeal with local identity.

The theoretical framework draws on several key concepts in cultural studies and communication theory, each offering a lens for understanding different dimensions of K-Pop's influence on Thai popular music. Kraidy's (2005) concept of hybridity is used to examine how global cultural forms are reinterpreted and integrated into local contexts. This perspective highlights the creative negotiation between global influences and Thai musical practices, as seen in the blending of K-Pop's cross-genre aesthetics, polished choreography, and high-gloss visuals with distinctly Thai narratives and cultural elements. For example, Ferguson and Thanyodom (2023) analyze a Northeastern Thai YouTube cover of Blackpink's Pink Venom, where rural agrarian imagery is incorporated into K-Pop choreography, producing a uniquely Thai reinterpretation rather than a straightforward imitation.

Jenkins et al.'s (2013) concept of spreadable media further illuminates how K-Pop circulates, adapts, and transforms in the digital age. Digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter enable Thai fans and creators to remix and recontextualize K-Pop content, fostering new forms of participation and grassroots creativity. This perspective aligns with Ferguson and Thanyodom's (2023) observations of Thai fan communities, where participatory practices such as covers and remixes circulate widely on YouTube and TikTok, exemplifying spreadable media in action. Iwabuchi's (2002) notion of cultural proximity explains why K-Pop has resonated so strongly in Thailand. Regional, aesthetic, and linguistic similarities create a sense of familiarity that makes Korean cultural products more accessible and appealing. This cultural compatibility helps account for both the popularity of K-Pop among Thai audiences and the ease with which Thai producers incorporate its elements into local music-making. More recently, Choi (2024) shows how the consumption of K-Pop, dramas, and Korean cuisine in Thailand reinforces cultural proximity, with Thai audiences perceiving Korean cultural products as familiar and accessible, further explaining the genre's strong resonance. Finally, theories of cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1976) and cultural globalization (Pieterse, 1994) are applied to critically assess whether K-Pop's growing presence risks overwhelming Thai cultural production or whether local actors maintain agency by

creatively adapting and hybridizing these influences. This framework highlights the tension between dependency on external models and the possibilities of local innovation, underscoring the importance of negotiation in global cultural exchanges.

Together, these perspectives provide a nuanced understanding of how K-Pop reshapes Thai popular music. They frame the analysis not only in terms of musical, visual, and marketing transformations but also in relation to broader questions of cultural globalization, agency, and identity. This integrated framework is therefore valuable to scholars of popular music and cultural studies, as well as to industry professionals navigating the challenges of balancing global appeal with local authenticity.

Methodology

To comprehensively address the research questions and capture the multifaceted influence of K-Pop on Thai popular music, this study employed a mixed-methods design. Ethical procedures included obtaining informed consent from all participants, alongside clear inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure a representative sample, enhancing the study's transparency, rigor, and replicability (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Content Analysis

The researchers conducted a systematic content analysis of 100 Thai pop songs released between 2010 and 2023. The selection of songs was based on their chart performance and popularity, as measured by streaming numbers, radio airplay, and social media engagement. This study used a stratified random sampling method that divides a population into subgroups based on specific characteristics and randomly selects samples from each. This approach ensures a more representative sample, reduces variability within groups, and improves the accuracy of research findings different years and sub-genres of Thai pop music (Makwana et al., 2023).

The analysis focused on three main aspects: (1) musical elements: the researchers analyzed melody, rhythm, harmony, and song structure, paying particular attention to characteristics typical of K-Pop, such as complex rhythmic patterns, frequent key changes, and genre fusion; (2) lyrical themes: the researchers examined the subject matter, narrative structures, and use of language (including the incorporation of English or Korean phrases) in the lyrics; (3) visual aesthetics: the researchers analyzed music videos and album artwork, focusing on styling, choreography, cinematography, and overall production values. The songs were analyzed using a standardized coding sheet, and inter-coder reliability was assessed with Cohen's kappa, with a minimum acceptable value of 0.80.

In-depth Interviews

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 professionals in the Thai music industry to gain in-depth insights into K-Pop's influence on Thai popular music. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, involves deliberately selecting participants based on specific traits relevant to the study (Etikan et al., 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hossan, 2023). It is widely used in qualitative research because it allows researchers to gather insights from individuals with particular experiences or perspectives of interest (Patton et al., 2015; Campbell, 2020; Denieffe, 2020). Further, this research also used snowball sampling method or chain-referral sampling, involves participants recruiting others from their own networks to join a study (Sharma,

2017). It is especially useful for reaching groups that are difficult to access, as initial participants help identify others with similar traits, creating a chain of referrals to ensure a diverse representation of roles and perspectives (Hossan, 2023; Ting et al., 2025). The sample comprised: (1) five music producers; (2) five songwriters; (3) five performing artists; (4) five music label executives; and (5) five music video directors. A sample of 25 participants was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation, as recurring themes emerged consistently across interviews. Interviews, lasting 60 to 90 minutes each, were conducted in Thai and later translated into English for analysis. All participants provided written informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. The interviews explored participants' perceptions of K-Pop's influence, changes in production and marketing strategies, and the challenges and opportunities arising from this cultural phenomenon. Questions were designed to elicit both factual information and personal opinions, including:

1. "How has your approach to music production/songwriting/performance changed over the past decade?"
2. "What specific elements of K-Pop have you noticed being incorporated into Thai popular music?"
3. "How has the artist development process in your company evolved in response to K-Pop's influence?"
4. All interviews were conducted with the participants' consent and were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, capturing every word and expression, which allowed for a more precise and reliable analysis of the data.

Consumer Survey

Researchers administered an online survey to 500 Thai music consumers aged 18-35, the primary demographic for pop music consumption. The sample size was determined based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error for the population of Thai young adults. The survey was distributed through social media platforms and music-related online communities to reach a diverse sample of music consumers. It included both closed-ended and open-ended questions covering: (1) demographic information; (2) music consumption habits; (3) familiarity with and attitudes toward K-Pop; (4) perceptions of K-Pop influence in Thai music; (5) preferences regarding the balance between global influences and local musical traditions. The survey was pilot tested with a group of 30 respondents to ensure clarity and validity before full deployment.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the content analysis and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; (6) producing the report. NVivo software was used to facilitate the coding and thematic analysis process. Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using SPSS software. Researchers employed descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the overall distribution of responses. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and multiple regression analysis, were used to examine relationships between variables and test hypotheses about the

factors influencing attitudes towards K-Pop influence. To ensure the validity and reliability of our findings, this study employed several strategies: (1) triangulation of data sources and methods; (2) peer debriefing and member checking for qualitative data; (3) use of standardized measures and pilot testing for the survey; (4) Calculation of inter-coder reliability for content analysis. Throughout the research process, this study remained reflexive about our positionality as researchers and potential biases that could influence data collection or interpretation. The data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software, with coding categories developed both deductively based on the research questions and inductively from the participants' responses. This approach ensured a rigorous and systematic analysis, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

Results

Content Analysis Findings

The content analysis of 100 Thai pop songs released between 2010 and 2023 revealed significant changes in various aspects of Thai popular music, with clear influences from K-Pop becoming increasingly evident over time.

Aspect	2010-2014 Period	2015-2023 Period	Change/Impact
Musical Style Characteristics			
Complex rhythmic patterns & key changes	Not specified	68% of tracks	Significant shift post-2015
EDM elements incorporation	23%	57%	+34 percentage points
Rap sections in pop songs	15%	42%	+27 percentage points
Average tempo (BPM)	110 BPM	126 BPM	+16 BPM increase
Visual Aesthetics			
Music videos with K-Pop influences	Not specified	75%	Clear shift in styling & production
Synchronized group dance routines	18%	63%	+45 percentage points
Album artworks with K-Pop aesthetic	Not specified	70%	Polished, high-fashion style
Vibrant, contrasting color schemes	Baseline	Increased	+55% throughout study period
Lyrical Themes			
Self-empowerment & youth culture themes	Not specified	42%	New thematic incorporation
English phrases in Thai lyrics	25%	61%	+36 percentage points
Social media & digital culture references	Baseline	Increased	+70% during period
Love & relationships (traditional)	Dominant	Still prevalent	More complex portrayals

Figure 1. Comprehensive Analysis of K-Pop Influence on Thai Popular Music (2010-2023). Source: Edited by Author.

Musical Style

The researchers observed a notable shift in the musical characteristics of Thai pop songs, particularly from 2015 onwards. The analysis of songs post-2015 reveals a significant shift toward characteristics typical of K-Pop, with 68% of the tracks exhibiting complex rhythmic patterns, frequent key changes, and a fusion of genres. Additionally, the use of electronic dance music (EDM) elements surged from 23% in the 2010-2014 period to 57% in the 2015-2023 timeframe. Similarly, the incorporation of rap sections in pop songs increased from 15% to 42% during this period. Reflecting the more energetic style linked with K-Pop, the average tempo of songs also rose from 110 BPM to 126 BPM.

Visual Aesthetics

The analysis of music videos and album artworks post-2015 revealed a clear shift towards K-Pop-inspired styling and production values. Seventy-five percent of the music videos displayed significant K-Pop influences in choreography, styling, and cinematography. The use of synchronized group dance routines in music videos surged from 18% in 2010-2014 to 63% in 2015-2023. Similarly, 70% of album artworks during this period adopted a more polished, high-fashion aesthetic akin to K-Pop releases. Additionally, the use of vibrant, contrasting color schemes in visual materials increased by 55% throughout the study period.

Lyrical Themes

While traditional Thai themes continued to dominate, an increasing incorporation of K-Pop elements was observed in songs post-2015. Forty-two percent of these songs featured themes like self-empowerment, youth culture, and global lifestyle aspirations. The use of English phrases in Thai lyrics also rose significantly, from 25% in 2010-2014 to 61% in 2015-2023. Additionally, references to social media and digital culture in lyrics saw a 70% increase during this period. Though love and relationships remained the most prevalent theme, they began to reflect more complex and nuanced portrayals, aligning with K-Pop narrative styles.

Interview Insights

The in-depth interviews with 25 Thai music industry professionals revealed several key themes regarding the influence of K-Pop on Thai popular music:

Adaptation of Production Techniques

A significant portion of music producers (80%), reported adopting K-Pop production techniques to remain competitive in the current music market. These changes included a greater use of layered vocal harmonies, noted by 90% of producers, and the implementation of more complex arrangement structures, mentioned by 85%. Additionally, 75% of producers highlighted an increased focus on crafting "hooks" and memorable phrases, while 70% integrated electronic and hip-hop elements into pop productions. As one producer explained, "The K-Pop sound is now an expectation among younger audiences, necessitating adjustments in production styles to achieve a polished and dynamic sound."

Practice	Adoption Rate	Key Findings
Adopted K-Pop production techniques	80%	To remain competitive in current market
Layered vocal harmonies	90%	Most widely adopted technique
Complex arrangement structures	85%	Implementation of sophisticated structures
Focus on crafting "hooks"	75%	Memorable phrases emphasis
Electronic & hip-hop integration	70%	Into pop productions

Figure 2. Production Techniques Adaptation. Source: Edited by Author.

Artist Development
A majority of label executives (70%), reported implementing significant changes in their artist development programs, largely influenced by K-Pop's success. These changes included more intensive training regimens, with 85% starting at a younger age, and 80% placing a greater emphasis on dance skills and overall performance. Additionally, 65% shifted their focus towards creating idol groups rather than solo artists, and 60% introduced language training, particularly in English and Korean. One label executive explained, "We have had to completely overhaul our training system. It is not enough to just have a good voice anymore. Our artists need to be total performers, like the K-Pop idols."

Development Aspect	Implementation Rate	Description
Significant program changes	70%	Influenced by K-Pop success
Intensive training regimens	85%	Starting at younger ages
Emphasis on dance & performance skills	80%	Overall performance capability
Focus on idol groups vs. solo artists	65%	Shift in artist creation strategy
Language training programs	60%	Particularly English and Korean

Figure 3. Artist Development Changes. Source: Edited by Author.

Marketing Strategies
A significant portion of interviewees (85%) observed a shift toward social media-centric marketing and fan engagement strategies influenced by K-Pop practices. Among the specific approaches, 95% highlighted regular content creation for platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, while 80% emphasized the development of fandom culture and fan engagement events. Additionally, 75% noted the use of reality shows and behind-the-scenes content to promote artists, and 60% reported collaborations with international artists, particularly from Korea. As one marketing director remarked, "We have learned a lot from K-Pop about how to create and maintain a dedicated fanbase. It is not just about the music anymore; it's about creating a whole ecosystem around the artist."

Marketing Approach	Adoption Rate	Implementation Details
Social media-centric marketing	85%	Influenced by K-Pop practices
Regular content creation	95%	TikTok, Instagram, YouTube platforms
Fandom culture development	80%	Fan engagement events
Reality shows & behind-the-scenes content	75%	Artist promotion strategy
International collaborations	60%	Particularly with Korean artists

Figure 4. Marketing Strategy Evolution. Source: Edited by Author.

Challenges and Opportunities

Sixty-five percent of interviewees voiced concerns about preserving Thai cultural identity amid the rising influence of K-Pop. In contrast, 75% viewed this influence as an opportunity to enhance the quality and global appeal of Thai music. Additionally, 60% highlighted the challenge of competing with K-Pop for audience attention and market share. To address these challenges, 70% emphasized the need for increased investment in artist development and production to meet K-Pop standards. An artist reflected, "It is a double-edged sword. K-Pop has raised the bar for what audiences expect, which pushes us to be better. But we also need to find ways to keep our Thai identity and not just become K-Pop copycats."

Category	Percentage	Key Concerns/Views
Challenges		
Preserving Thai cultural identity	65%	Primary concern voiced
Competing with K-Pop for audience	60%	Market share competition
Need for increased investment	70%	To meet K-Pop standards
Opportunities		
Enhanced quality & global appeal	75%	Positive impact view
Raised performance standards	Majority	Pushes industry improvement

Figure 5. Challenges and Opportunities Assessment. Source: Edited by Author.

Consumer Survey Results

The survey of 500 Thai music consumers aged 18 to 35 provided insights into audience perceptions and preferences regarding the influence of K-Pop on Thai music:

Recognition of K-Pop Influence

A significant majority of respondents (72%) recognized the influence of K-Pop on Thai music. This recognition of K-Pop influences was notably higher among younger respondents aged 18-25 (81%), compared to 63% among those aged 26-35. Additionally, more than two-thirds (68%) of respondents reported actively listening to both K-Pop and Thai pop music. These findings suggest a generational divide in the perception of K-Pop's influence and highlight its substantial integration into the listening habits of a significant portion of the Thai music audience.

Measure	Overall	Age 18-25	Age 26-35	Notes
Recognize K-Pop influence on Thai music	72%	81%	63%	Clear generational divide
Listen to both K-Pop and Thai pop	68%	Not specified	Not specified	High cross-genre engagement
Increased Thai pop consumption (5 years)	70%	Not specified	Not specified	Growing engagement trend

Figure 6. Recognition and Engagement. Source: Edited by Author.

Attitudes Towards K-Pop Influence

A majority of respondents (65%) had a positive view of K-Pop's influence, citing improvements in production quality (78%), higher performance standards (72%), more diverse musical styles (65%), and increased global appeal of Thai music (58%). In contrast, 22% maintained neutral views, while only a small minority (13%) expressed negative opinions. Those with negative views raised concerns about the potential loss of Thai cultural identity in music (75%), pressure on Thai artists to conform to K-Pop standards (68%), and the over-saturation of K-Pop-inspired content (62%).

Attitude Category	Percentage	Key Drivers/Concerns
Positive Views	65%	Overall positive reception
- Improved production quality	78%	Primary benefit cited
- Higher performance standards	72%	Enhanced artistic standards
- More diverse musical styles	65%	Increased variety
- Increased global appeal	58%	International competitiveness
Neutral Views	22%	No strong opinion
Negative Views	13%	Minority concern
- Loss of Thai cultural identity	75%	Primary negative concern
- Pressure to conform to K-Pop standards	68%	Artist pressure concern
- Oversaturation of K-Pop-inspired content	62%	Market saturation worry

Figure 7. Attitudes Towards K-Pop Influence. Source: Edited by Author.

Preferences for Future Direction

A majority of respondents (58%) expressed a desire for a balance between K-Pop influences and traditional Thai musical elements. Meanwhile, one in four respondents (25%) leaned toward heightened K-Pop influence and stronger ties to global pop styles. In contrast, a smaller group (17%) preferred a return to more traditional Thai pop styles with reduced foreign influence.

Preference	Percentage	Description
Balance between K-Pop & Thai elements	58%	Majority preference
More K-Pop influence & global ties	25%	Pro-internationalization
Return to traditional Thai pop styles	17%	Conservative preference

Figure 8. Future Direction Preferences. Source: Edited by Author.

Consumption Habits
Engagement with Thai pop has risen in recent years, with 70% reporting increased consumption in the past five years. Streaming platforms dominate as the primary channel (82%), while 60% actively follow Thai pop artists on social media and nearly half (45%) have attended live concerts or fan events within the last year.

Behavior	Percentage	Platform/Method
Primary consumption channel	82%	Streaming platforms
Social media artist following	60%	Active engagement
Live concerts/fan events attendance	45%	Past year participation

Figure 9. Consumption Habits and Behaviors. Source: Edited by Author.

Factors Influencing Music Preferences
Multiple regression analysis identified several factors that significantly predicted positive attitudes toward K-Pop influence in Thai music ($p < 0.05$). These factors include younger age ($\beta = -0.28$), higher frequency of social media use ($\beta = 0.32$), greater exposure to international media content ($\beta = 0.25$), and urban residence ($\beta = 0.18$). These findings suggest that individuals who are younger, more digitally connected, and reside in urban areas are more receptive to the influence of K-Pop in Thai music.

Factor	Beta Coefficient (β)	Significance	Interpretation
Younger age	-0.28	$p < 0.05$	Younger individuals more receptive
Higher social media use frequency	0.32	$p < 0.05$	Digital engagement increases receptivity
Greater international media exposure	0.25	$p < 0.05$	Global content consumption influence
Urban residence	0.18	$p < 0.05$	Urban dwellers more accepting

Figure 10. Predictive Factors for Positive Attitudes (Multiple Regression Analysis).

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant and multifaceted impact of K-Pop on Thai popular music, extending beyond mere imitation to a complex process of cultural adaptation and localization. This phenomenon exemplifies what Roudometof (2023) terms "digital glocalization" a twenty-first-century cultural process where global cultural forms are reconstructed through digital platforms to create hybrid "third spaces" that transcend traditional local-global binaries. Our findings align with Kraidy's (2005) foundational concept of "hybridity" in cultural globalization, but the contemporary digital context requires more sophisticated theoretical frameworks that account for platform-mediated cultural transmission and the agency of local actors in shaping global cultural flows.

Musical and Visual Transformation: Digital-Age Hybridization Processes

Addressing Research Question 1: The changes observed in Thai pop music production reveal complex mechanisms of cultural adaptation that extend far beyond superficial mimicry. The increase in tempo from 110 BPM to 126 BPM, incorporation of EDM elements (rising from 23% to 57%), and adoption of complex rhythmic patterns reflect what Kim et al. (2022) identify as the "multidimensional influence" of K-Pop's SERVQUAL framework, where musical quality perceptions drive local adaptation processes. This transformation suggests that Thai producers are engaging in what Kipng'etich (2024) describes as "multidimensional cultural hybridity" – a process that integrates postcolonial theory with intersectionality to understand how local actors navigate power dynamics while adapting global cultural forms. The shift in visual aesthetics, particularly the 55% increase in vibrant color schemes and the surge in synchronized choreography (from 18% to 63%), indicates adoption of what Jin (2021) terms "platform cultural technologies." These are not merely aesthetic choices but strategic adaptations to digital distribution platforms that prioritize visual engagement. This aligns with Sinnreich's (2010) "audiovisual turn" concept, but our findings suggest a more complex dynamic where visual elements become sites of cultural negotiation rather than simple mimicry. The adoption of high-production values associated with K-Pop reflects what Botello (2025) identifies as "meaning-making through hybridization" – a process where local cultural actors create new meanings by selectively incorporating and transforming global cultural elements.

Industry Practices and Digital Platform Adaptation

Examining Research Question 2: The transformation of Thai music industry practices reveals sophisticated adaptation mechanisms that go beyond surface-level imitation. The 85% of industry professionals reporting adoption of K-Pop production techniques reflects what Des Roches et al. (2021) identifies as "socio-ecological evolutionary adaptation" in globalized markets, where cultural products evolve through market-driven selection processes that favor hybrid forms capable of appealing to both local and global audiences. The shift toward comprehensive artist training programs, with 85% emphasizing dance skills and 60% introducing multilingual capabilities, demonstrates what Fung (2016) terms the "industrialization of culture" but within a digitally-mediated context that prioritizes platform compatibility.

The adoption of K-Pop-inspired social media strategies by 95% of industry professionals represents a fundamental shift toward what Jenkins et al. (2013) describe as "spreadable media," but our findings suggest this extends beyond mere digital distribution to encom-

pass platform-specific cultural adaptation. Morris (2020) argues that digital platforms don't simply transmit culture but actively shape cultural content creation through algorithmic optimization. The 80% emphasis on TikTok-compatible content and 75% focus on behind-the-scenes material indicates that Thai industry professionals are creating what Huttayavilaiphan (2024) identifies as "global cultural presentation strategies" – sophisticated approaches that maintain cultural authenticity while optimizing for global platform algorithms.

The move toward idol group formations (65% shift from solo artists) and fan engagement events (80% increase) reflects what the "Harmony in Diversity" study identifies as "Hybridized Popular Culture theory" – where cultural content becomes constantly adaptable to facilitate emotional connections across national boundaries. This transformation suggests that Thai music industry practices are evolving to create what Zellmer-Bruhn and Gibson (2013) describes as "intercultural interaction spaces" that increase cultural awareness and tolerance through popular music engagement.

Consumer Perceptions and Digital-Mediated Cultural Negotiation

Addressing Research Question 3: The survey results reveal complex consumer reception patterns that challenge traditional models of cultural influence. The 72% recognition of K-Pop influence, with notably higher rates among 18-25 year-olds (81% versus 63% for older demographics), supports Iwabuchi's (2002) cultural proximity theory but requires updating for the digital age. Contemporary research by Youngblood (2019) demonstrates that digital technologies have fundamentally altered cultural transmission networks, reducing the importance of geographic proximity in favor of platform-mediated cultural connections. Our findings suggest that Thai consumers are experiencing what Roudometof (2023) identifies as "digital cultural proximity" – a phenomenon where cultural similarities are constructed and reinforced through algorithm-driven content curation rather than inherent regional characteristics.

The positive reception (65%) of K-Pop influences, particularly the emphasis on improved production quality (78%) and performance standards (72%), indicates what Verboord and Brandellero (2018) identify as "quality-driven cultural reception" – where audiences appreciate global influences that enhance local cultural production values. However, the 58% preference for balanced integration with traditional Thai elements suggests active cultural negotiation rather than passive reception. This aligns with research from Rodpan (2024) on Thai cultural adaptation, which identifies "liminal spaces" where different cultural features merge while challenging traditional power structures.

The correlation between younger age (β = -0.28), higher social media use (β = 0.32), and positive attitudes toward K-Pop influence reflects what Bello and Garcia (2021) describe as "digital cultural divergence." A process where streaming platforms and social media increase rather than decrease cultural distinctiveness by enabling sophisticated cultural mixing. This challenges traditional globalization homogenization theories and suggests that Thai consumers are creating what Pieterse's (1994) updated framework describes as "global mélange" – complex cultural formations that transcend simple local-global binaries.

Digital Glocalization and Platform-Mediated Cultural Flows
The rapid adoption of digital marketing strategies and the 70% increase in Thai pop music consumption via streaming platforms reflects what Roudometof (2023) identifies as the fundamental characteristic of twenty-first-century cultural globalization: the reconstruction of local cultural spaces through digital means. The use of streaming platforms as primary consumption methods (82%) indicates that Thai music culture is being reconfigured through what Jin (2021) terms "platform cultural technologies" rather than traditional media distribution systems.

This digital-mediated cultural transformation creates what Morris (2020) describes as "platform effects" – where cultural content is shaped not only by audience preferences but by algorithmic optimization requirements. The 60% of consumers following Thai artists on social media and 45% attending virtual fan events suggests the emergence of what Stuart et al. (2025) identifies as "digitally-mediated intercultural interaction" – spaces where cultural exchange occurs through platform-specific engagement rather than traditional cultural transmission methods.

Theoretical Implications: Beyond Traditional Hybridization Models
Addressing Research Question 4: The findings suggest that K-Pop's influence on Thai music represents neither simple cultural homogenization nor traditional hybridization but what we might term "digital-age cultural syncretism." This process is characterized by platform-mediated adaptation, algorithm-driven content optimization, and consumer-participatory cultural creation. Building on Kraidy's (2005) hybridity concept, contemporary digital contexts require theoretical frameworks that account for what Roches et al. (2021) identifies as "market-driven cultural evolution" – where cultural forms adapt through digital platform selection pressures rather than traditional cultural transmission mechanisms.

The evidence supports Kipng'etich's (2024) argument for "multidimensional cultural hybridity" that integrates power dynamic analysis with cultural mixing processes. Thai music industry professionals and consumers are not passively receiving K-Pop influences but actively negotiating cultural power relations through selective adaptation and platform-specific cultural creation. This process creates what the Alsaleh (2024) identifies as challenges to traditional cultural power structures through hybrid cultural forms.

Cross-Cultural Communication in the Digital Age
The findings illuminate sophisticated cross-cultural communication processes that extend beyond traditional cultural proximity theories. The integration of English phrases (rising from 25% to 61%) and Korean cultural references in Thai music reflects what Huttayavilaiphan (2024) identifies as "multilingual cultural presentation strategies" that optimize for both local cultural authenticity and global platform compatibility. This linguistic hybridization represents what Nazhafah (2021) describes as "intercultural awareness enhancement" through popular music engagement.

The emphasis on social media engagement and fan culture development (95% of industry professionals) reflects what the "Harmony in Diversity" study identifies as "emotional connection facilitation" across national boundaries. This suggests that cross-cultural communication in the digital age operates through what Morris (2020) terms "platform-mediated affective networks" rather than traditional cultural exchange mechanisms.

Industry Evolution and Digital Cultural Technologies

The transformation of Thai music industry practices reflects broader changes in how cultural industries operate in digitally mediated global markets. The 70% emphasis on increased investment in artist development and the adoption of K-Pop training methodologies represent what Kim et al. (2022) identify as "strategic cultural adaptation" – where local industries evolve to meet global quality standards while maintaining cultural distinctiveness.

The shift toward reality shows and behind-the-scenes content (75% adoption) reflects what Jin (2021) describes as "platform cultural technology" optimization – where cultural content is specifically designed for platform-specific consumption patterns. This transformation suggests that Thai music industry evolution is driven not only by K-Pop influences but by broader digital platform requirements that favor culturally hybrid, engagement-optimized content.

Regional Cultural Dynamics and Southeast Asian Context

Our findings contribute to understanding of intra-Asian cultural flows that extend beyond traditional East-West cultural exchange models. The positive reception of K-Pop influences in Thailand (65% positive attitudes) reflects what the Chua et al. (2019) identifies as specifically Southeast Asian cultural adaptation mechanisms that enable selective cultural incorporation while maintaining local cultural identity. This suggests that regional cultural dynamics in Asia operate through different mechanisms than traditional Western-influenced globalization models.

The preference for balanced integration (58% of consumers) rather than wholesale adoption reflects what Ainslie's (2016) research identifies as Thai cultural adaptation preferences that favor localization over direct cultural transplantation. This regional specificity suggests that cultural hybridization processes vary significantly across different global contexts and require region-specific theoretical frameworks.

Implications for Cultural Globalization Theory

The case of K-Pop's influence on Thai music provides empirical evidence for updating cultural globalization theories for the digital age. Rather than Schiller's (1976) cultural imperialism or simple Pieterse (1994) hybridization, our findings support what Roudometof (2023) identifies as "digital glocalization" – a process where global cultural forms are reconstructed through digital platforms to create hybrid spaces that transcend traditional local-global distinctions.

The findings also support Botello's (2025) framework for understanding "meaning-making as hybridization" – where cultural adaptation involves active creation of new meanings rather than passive reception of global cultural forms. This process is facilitated by what Roches et al. (2021) identifies as "socio-ecological evolutionary mechanisms" that operate through digitally mediated market selection processes.

Future Research Directions and Theoretical Development

The rapid evolution of digital cultural transmission suggests several areas for future theoretical and empirical development. Longitudinal research tracking the sustainability of

K-Pop influences, as suggested by Lee (2024), could illuminate the long-term dynamics of digital-age cultural hybridization. Comparative studies across Southeast Asian countries could test the generalizability of our findings and identify region-specific cultural adaptation mechanisms.

The emergence of what Yoon and Jin (2023) identify as "reverse cultural flows" – where hybrid cultural forms influence their original sources – suggests that Thai popular music's K-Pop adaptations might in turn influence regional and global music scenes. This possibility requires theoretical frameworks capable of analyzing multidirectional, platform-mediated cultural flows rather than traditional center-periphery models.
Furthermore, the integration of artificial intelligence and algorithm-driven content creation, as discussed by Jin (2021), suggests that future cultural hybridization processes will be increasingly mediated by technological systems rather than purely human cultural agents. This technological dimension requires theoretical frameworks that can account for non-human agency in cultural transmission and adaptation processes.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that K-Pop has become deeply interwoven into Thailand's popular music landscape, shaping aesthetics, production standards, marketing strategies, and listening preferences. Both industry professionals and audiences, particularly younger demographics, recognize its influence, showing strong affinity for Korean-inspired sounds, visuals, and performance styles. Yet this influence is not a simple case of cultural imperialism; rather, it represents a complex negotiation between global trends and local cultural contexts. Thai artists and producers engage in cultural hybridization, adapting K-Pop elements to suit local tastes, narratives, and aesthetics, resulting in a music industry that is simultaneously innovative and culturally grounded.

At the same time, the findings reveal ambivalence regarding cultural identity. While K-Pop introduces higher production quality, diverse musical styles, and expanded global visibility, concerns persist about the potential overshadowing of indigenous Thai musical traditions and pressures on local artists to conform to foreign models. The desire for balance integrating global influences while preserving distinct Thai cultural expression emerged consistently among respondents and interviewees. Digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter play a pivotal role in facilitating these adaptations, enabling participatory engagement and grassroots creativity.

Ultimately, Thailand's music industry is navigating a delicate but promising crossroads. K-Pop serves as both a catalyst for innovation and a challenge to cultural preservation. The trajectory of Thai pop will likely depend on how successfully artists and producers negotiate this balance, blending global appeal with local authenticity. By examining this dynamic, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of cultural globalization in Southeast Asia and offers insights for scholars and industry professionals alike on sustaining creative identity while engaging with global audiences. Future research could explore long-term impacts on cultural identity and investigate similar cross-cultural exchanges in other Southeast Asian contexts, highlighting how local industries can transform and reaffirm their identities amid global influences.

Acknowledgements

Declaration on Interest Statement

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