

Money Talks, Experience Runs: The Korean White Hook and the Multinational Community

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Abstract :At a time when physical albums have been rapidly being replaced by digital formats offered by streaming platforms, one market continues to register high numbers in annual album sales by domestic artists: the South Korean market. Although much of it is due to the local market, most of the acquisitions are made from abroad. Research conducted for a year and a half on the experiences suffered by the Kpop fandom Monbebe Puebla, collected qualitative data that points to the importance of a transmedia narrative construction to generate an integration link from the fan's perspective with the musical artist, as well as the added value of the CD's in physical formats as to constitute a collectible element that supposes an unquestionable purchase desire. This also represents a meaningful Through phenomenology and the use of data collection tools such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, an approach is made towards understanding the establishment of engagement by using marketing strategies as well as the influential reach by mediatic products is being slightly addressed.

Keywords : Engagement, Experience, Fandom, Kpop, Imagined Community, Transmedia, Phenomenology.

I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of globalization works as an exporter of culture in a world where the idea of the *Global Village* proposed by McLuhan is increasingly palpable. Music is a quintessential example when it comes to a media with universal characteristics; and when we talk about the pop genre, South Korean popular music or *Kpop* seems to be gaining more relevance in recent years. However, since the 1990s, it has been undertaking efforts that have earned him greater recognition over time.

The expansion of *Kpop* can be understood as part of the so-called *Hallyu Wave*. A phenomenon that began in the 90's with the export of South Korean *boygroup music* to the neighboring nations of the country, which also comprised a complete subculture involving not only music, but also fashion, makeup, *dramas*, language, food, technology, etc.

To refer to products from South Korea that fall within this *Hallyu* phenomenon, the letter *K* is commonly placed at the beginning of the corresponding category in English (such as in *Kbeauty*, *Kfood*, etc.). In the case of Korean popular music, the name *Kpop* was adopted in order to refer to artists of the pop genre from the South Korean region. But compared to their foreign competition, Korean entertainment companies responsible for talent training, management and representation have adopted the Japanese model of entertainment with the formation of groups with young members who perform in entertainment. Thus, *boygroups* and *girlgroups* made up of *idols* were born.

In Latin America, the expansion of *Kpop* was carried out due to such an important factor as dance, which is present in the musical genre and occupy a fundamental trait both in the genre, but in the cultures of Latin American countries (Min, 2017)

However, the introduction of the *Hallyu Wave* came hand in hand with television, with the drama “Star In My Heart” broadcasted in 1998. At this point, attention to the context of the plot threw interest into the different elements that made it up, music being one of them, assuming a gain of followers for this musical style that would gain ground over the years.

The increase in the popularity of *Kpop* in Mexico can be seen reflected in how the official *fandoms* went from being 4 in the Latin American country, made up of just 2,000 members in 2004, to more than 70, surpassing 30,000 fans in 2011 alone (Choi et al., 2014, page 37) ^[2].

With this new interest arising within the Mexican market, one of the main ideas inherent in human nature is reaffirmed; when a person encounters a consumer good, be it tangible or intangible, they experience sensations of liking or disliking that can be ephemeral or lasting as long as they are in contact with it. However, there are occasions in which, although the stimuli that originates them are no longer present, the produced sensations persist in the subject and constant thought about it is encouraged. This is called *engagement* (Calder and Malthouse, 2008).

From an advertising perspective, what stands out most about this oriental phenomenon is the ability to generate *engagement* in its consumers. An issue that becomes evident when looking at its recorded music market in physical format which, despite the current proliferation of different music streaming platforms, has managed to adapt and coexist with technological advances by offering its market a unique value proposition.

One of the main points of interest in the study is understanding the skill used in marketing strategies to build a solid *fanbase* of a selected musical group, which translates, in essence, into a brand towards which the fans feel so identified to the point of buying a media product that, in many cases, exceeds the price of their counterparts from other countries. This consumption that presumes a contribution to the economy of another nation is, of course, left in the background since the main action perceived by the buyer falls on the acquisition of a good motivated by personal taste.

However, this behavior that is limited, as individual tastes, is motivated by the satisfaction of different intrinsic needs that, if understood, can be a source of information for projects of the line of business that seek to achieve a similar response in terms of the generation of a loyal community.

In the same way, the study of *Kpop* and the *engagement* generated by it cannot be understood without the presence of a *fandom*; an imagined community of fans who share a liking for the same genre of music and, in this case, a musical lineup. Addressing the issue of building an imagined community that manages to build itself through similar preferences and codes of behavior mutually accepted by the members to belong to the group of their choice. When it comes to *Kpop fandoms* it is interesting that a media product born in a specific country is taken as a basis and that it has been able to be accepted by members of this community in several other States, even despite cultural and linguistic barriers. And through this logic, the concept of white power is born.

The consumption of foreign cultural products contributes to the concept introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990 in his work “Bound to Lead”, which refers to the ability of an actor to influence people's decisions and ideology using cultural means and diplomatic complements. Therefore, the presence of these factors within a musical genre that used to be niche but has shown significant growth, demand studies and analysis to find its causes and scope.

II. HOW DOES CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT WORK

Approaching the subject from a theoretical point of view, in the 2008 book “Kellogg On Advertisement and Media”, the authors Malthouse and Calder ^[3] mention the importance of placing a distinction between *liking* and *engagement* since, although both lead to strong reactions of approach or repulsion directed towards a particular product or service, *liking* is only triggered by hedonic experiences while *engagement* also involves motivational experiences. Fig 1

Hedonic experiences focus entirely on the satisfaction of immediate pleasure. On the other hand, motivational experiences can seek to be satisfied in a period of time greater than the adjoining term. However, these two types of experiences can be both complementary and mutually exclusive; The authors establish and identify two possible types of consumer engagement. Positive engagement and negative engagement.

The first type of engagement involves the satisfaction of intrinsic and extrinsic needs of the person who consumes a product or service. Which, therefore, results in a constant and repeated consumption of it. On the

contrary, negative engagement is defined as one that, although it manages to position itself effectively in the mind of the customer and get a space in their share of mind, does not ensure a further consumption.

However, although both types of engagement imply persistence in the mind of the market, the one that brands aspire to achieve is of the positive type since it reflects the interest, purchase and constant consumption of their product or service that translates into monetary gains and positioning for the company or organization.

Once, in both situations, the concept of engagement is differentiated from those of fancying or liking, two types of key motivations come into play to encourage consumption: the intrinsic and extrinsic ones. In this sense, the intrinsic motivations refer to those that are satisfied from within the subject, seeking self-realization, personal development. While the extrinsic ones come from outside and are encouraged through reward or approval.

Finally, before thinking about building engagement, two factors must be considered: how the product or service interacts with the media and the way in which it is generated in the advertised brand. Once the conceptual understanding has been covered, the next ingredient that must be taken into account for the construction of consumer engagement lies in the importance of offering and providing unique experiences that are also of value to consumers by representing a novel source as well as satisfaction to motivate their constant demand. This is when we start talking about experiential marketing.

III. MORE THAN MUSIC, IT'S A CONCEPT

By transferring the advertising concepts within the field of *Kpop*, the factors that provide, in the first place, the hedonic experiences can be clearly identified for the genre has been characterized by the quality of the visual stimuli used in its products. Whether it's billboards, network advertising, music videos, photo shoots, or concept covers for music albums, design and attention to detail have established themselves as the standard expected by the public.

It is through the understanding of the power that the visual image holds and the capacity of influence that is achieved with it, that the South Korean physical recorded music industry has managed to stand out compared to its counterparts in other countries since that has remained alive in a reality where the consumption of music in said presentation has been in decline in the face of streaming competition.

Although international majors are established in the Asian country such as Warner Music, EMI Music and Sony Music, as well as independent record companies, South Korea has created an environment conducive to entertainment, fusing the sound stimuli of music with the visual ones by exploiting the image of their *idols*, which in themselves represent an aspirational symbol both in aesthetics and behavior to their fans.

It is by following this logic that large corporations such as SM Entertainment, JYP Entertainment and YG Entertainment have been consolidated in the country as companies that, in addition to record labels, act as holistic entertainment companies. As its name suggests, this company model involves efforts that go beyond music in order to cover the broad spectrum of market entertainment demands. From music, dance, recorded and live visual productions to television shows, these companies invest in the professional preparation of their artists to stand out in one or more activities, which define their status in the formed *Kpop group*. Through vocalization, rap, dance, and even language classes, the *idol* begins to be trained to serve as a role model.

Of course, the preparation process includes human and economic efforts to ensure quality, but perhaps the greatest success is the customization of the products that are designed, from the beginning, to target a certain delimited market segment whose final expression is manifested on the music album. On her thesis ^[5] Oliver mentions the South Korean word *Mugukjeok* (which literally means 'no nation') as a guiding concept in the design of *Kpop*. This factor leaves the field open to the genre's individual adoption by each person appropriating the product and the beginning of construction of parasocial relationships with the musical proposal.

It is through Oliver's work that *Kpop* albums begin to be explored, being a first approach to the different stimuli of the genre following the creation of a concept proposed by Philip Kotler in 1970 ^[4] as fundamental to propitiate the probability of consumption of a product, but that constitutes the conceptualization in the environment of the product. TABLE 1

Thus, by combining the atmospheric aspects of Kotler present in *Kpop*, a Causal Chain is established that connects these elements, triggering the probability of consumption and provoking the idea of consumerism through the establishment of collecting and idealization. Fig. 2

IV. Fandoms And The Construction Of The Imagined Community

Once explained the functionality and profitability of *Kpop* through its discs in physical formats, the behavior experienced by those who have the human factor and the most important factor to feed the industry is left to analyze; those who consume based on the need to add to their collection.

For this, it must be taken into account that the media success of any product offered obviously lies in the existence of a willing and eager demand to consume it. A large part of *Kpop's* success abroad lies in its inclusion of a variety of globally popular styles such as pop, hip-hop, rap, rock, R&B, and electronic music. Likewise, the effort to achieve optimal visual quality at the cinema level in music videos, the complex but aesthetic choreographies and/or the ease of remembering them, as well as, of course, the preparation of the *idols* -the artists- from their early teenager years to unwind in the entertainment industry (Vargas & Park: 2015: p.4)

[6]. The same authors attribute a large part of the content's dissemination to the internet and social networks since, before that, *Kpop*, as part of the Hallyu movement, depended on the televising of its content on each nation's local television stations.

Due to the evident transformation of current consumer behavior, where the entertainment demand is no longer local as there are platforms and options that offer a wide range of content from around the world, adaptability and the coexistence with the new tendencies introduced to the market must be considered as the standard to remain in vogue. This is something that the *Kpop* industry has been able to combine since, as annual reports point out [7], , the demand for a product that would be considered obsolete in other parts of the world [8] continues to be relevant to the genre.

But even with the success that has meant the inclusion of an added value to seek sales in the recording industry, the commercial logic to which *Kpop* is tied must be followed due to its product quality that, inevitably, exposes it to a constant battle to stay relevant and profitable.

Therefore, in addition to seeking to generate constant consumption where sporadic and occasional purchases are not enough to stay in the market, being a media product, it has the quality of being replicable in transmediality, which ideally aims to generate engagement through the creation of communities. In the genre's case, as it is in any other musical movement, fans are given a special label to refer to those who like it. And as often happens even in western pop, fans of a certain artist are gifted and referred to through names that particularly allude to them. These types of labels ultimately end up creating membership groups with which they feel identified.

As Oliver points out (2020) [5], *Kpop* albums follow what was mentioned in the 1999 article "Covering Music: A brief history and analysis of album cover design" by Steve Jones and Martin Sorger. Jones writes "It should be a goal of future research into the role of graphic design in music packaging to discover what elements of art theory, visual communication, art history, marketing, semiotics, and media studies can add to our understanding" and Oliver argues that *Kpop* has been designed to reach a global mass of audience, causing the words 'genre' and 'industry' to be synonymous in a field where they were not interchangeable.

In the same way, this identifying space paved the way for the existence of another phenomenon within the structure of the South Korean popular music industry; *fandoms* become a community, the concept established by Benedict Anderson [9] of an imagined community that shares signs in common and that establishes rules and norms of conduct to identify each other despite the physical borders that traditionally delimited individuals as belonging to different nations.

Then, what is it that makes them decide to belong to one fandom or another? Under the understanding of the previous concept applied to *Kpop* with its ease of replication aimed at consumerist masses, the operation and incubation process of the idea of annexation to the *fandom* can be explained concisely through Sir Elmo Lewis's AIDA model as attention, interest, desire and action are identified in the process of belonging to a certain group as long as the individual identifies in a greater or lesser extent with some segmentation and concept. Fig. 3

V. Methodological Design

Kpop is a musical genre that has far from remained in its country of origin, and therefore the communities expand throughout the width of the globe. In particular, the presence and manifestation of the engagement generated in the Monbebe Puebla fandom, in Mexico, where the culture and language are completely different but has been analyzed.

Using a mixed approach, tools such as in-depth interviews and focus groups were combined with individuals belonging to the Monbebe Puebla fandom and teachers in the area of local entertainment and Asian studies to compare experiences, explain and complement, from a social and personal perspective, the differentiating and functional aspects of the *Kpop* proposal, especially referring to the group Monsta X, in Mexico. Likewise, it is intended to approach an understanding and reflectional lecture of local entertainment and the points of improvement since it has been detected that, despite the previous existence of media products of transmedial quality of Mexican origin [10] and the main difference of coming from another country, the success of the South Korean industry in the Latin American nation is evident. Factors such as musical preference towards different genres [11] that combine *Kpop* are seen as foundations that favor the ease of penetration into Mexican taste, while some other aspects such as the decline in the popularity of national pop artists can be considered to analyze the main failures of the national music industry, same that can be said has failed in the face of the existence of foreign artists who are more consumed. This section does not compare the scenic and musical quality, but it is attributed to the lack of effective advertising and promotion strategies.

Nonetheless, Mexico ranks sixth in countries that play *Kpop* the most. For this reason, this genre's mass strategy is taken as a reference, for it has managed to be replicated in different nations without the strict need to share the same linguistic and cultural signs to identify. The behavior is studied on people who live first-hand the experience of belonging to the *fandom*, the qualitative identifying and value characteristics that contribute to the creation of a captive market.

Likewise, analyzes carried out around the presence of the globalized and popularized phenomenon in a country whose territory has a proliferation of this type of imagined communities are collected from a more professional and theoretical perspective.

It is worth mentioning that the applied methodological paradigm obeys the phenomenological study of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, understanding that the personal experiences of individuals and their interpretation are based on their own approach to the phenomenon and their particular process of perceiving their individual reality.

Finally, the selection of the Monbebe Puebla fandom is adjusted to the characteristics of the territoriality of the research and is due to the validity of the group and fandom in the city. In this sense, for the selection of the focus group participants, the following demographic factors were taken into account:

- Indistinct sex
- Age (between 15-30 years).
- Age in the *fandom* of more than 1 year.
- With residence in the City of Puebla Capital.
- Constant consumption of the group's audiovisual products (being followed on social networks and liking their products).
- Having invested monetary resources in the acquisition of more than one official product of the group.

VI. RESULTS

The Monbebe *fandom*, belonging to a community of the *Kpop* genre, shares common meanings and words adapted from the Korean and English languages to communicate between members belonging to the same group.

The interaction between the group, Monsta X, and the *fandom*, Monbebe, is of utmost importance for the permanence of its members as an active and dynamic part. Likewise, the follow-up of the trajectory and the universe proposed by the *idols* is crucial for the understanding

of the proposed narrative and the establishment of an *engagement* that generates the created need to keep in constant consumption of marketing content.

However, the members of the fandom are aware of these strategies. However, it is not seen as an expense, but as an investment. This is fueled by the idea of getting closer to their *idols* through material acquisitions, which sell the idea of exclusivity and closeness.

In turn, this is also possible since the environment has created a culture of collecting among the wider *Kpop* community. Therefore, the fact of having material goods does not imply a monetary value, but a sentimental one. For Monbebe, consumption is a way of interacting, not an obligation but a duty to maintain validity and respond to the members of the group and the members of the community to which they belong. In this sense, we speak of *experiential marketing* that comes into action at the moment of satisfying the unexpressed needs within individuals.

On the other hand, the adaptation of these experiential elements through the sense of sight is unthinkable without the presence of a narrative that serves as a connector between the group's history and its interaction with fans.

As soon as the approach and perception of the fandom is compared, which has approaches much more governed by the emotions and experiences of marketing efforts, the answers obtained through interviews throw up and demand a critical analysis of the behavior of pop culture and its shaping.

Professor Bárbara Pérez ^[10] labels *Kpop* as a cultural movement that, by going beyond music, permeates behavior and the adoption of attitudes that, before the arrival of the internet and the proliferation of globalization, would be very unlikely to occur. find in an ecosystem so different from the Korean one.

While she maintains that the models of bands and musical groups aimed at the youth sector are not new, she also places an important emphasis on the role of the Internet in expanding the marketing range. In Mexico, only in the 80's and 90's were there groups with similar concepts (such as Parchis, Timbiriche, etc.) and that now are a precedent for understanding the acceptance of the Mexican public before a form of foreign entertainment.

Regarding the commercial success of physical formats, she mentions that the main difference and success lies in a marketing strategy such as design and conceptualization. Factors that, as they have in the past. They will be a distinctive part of a generation.

On the other hand, Professor Alfonso Espinoza Jaimes ^[12], gives *Kpop* the benefit of personalization, and interprets the construction of a parasocial relationship between fans and the artist, where, unlike other cultures, he humanizes and approaches "private" life. " to individuals who are not part of the entertainment sphere.

In the same way, it emphasizes the idea of imagined communities, who establish criteria, norms and an invisible hierarchy that is governed by the material possessions belonging to the group. These possessions symbolize fandom and a stronger connection between artists and fans.

Likewise, the concept of soft power is also thrown on the table. This power is partially manifested in *Kpop*, where it is through this conduit that the Korean nation can inject its cultural influence through the use and export of its entertainment products. This reflection forces us to think about the ease of acceptance of foreign cultural products in preference to national ones, and their permeability in the formation of their own identity.

VII. FIGURES AND TABLES

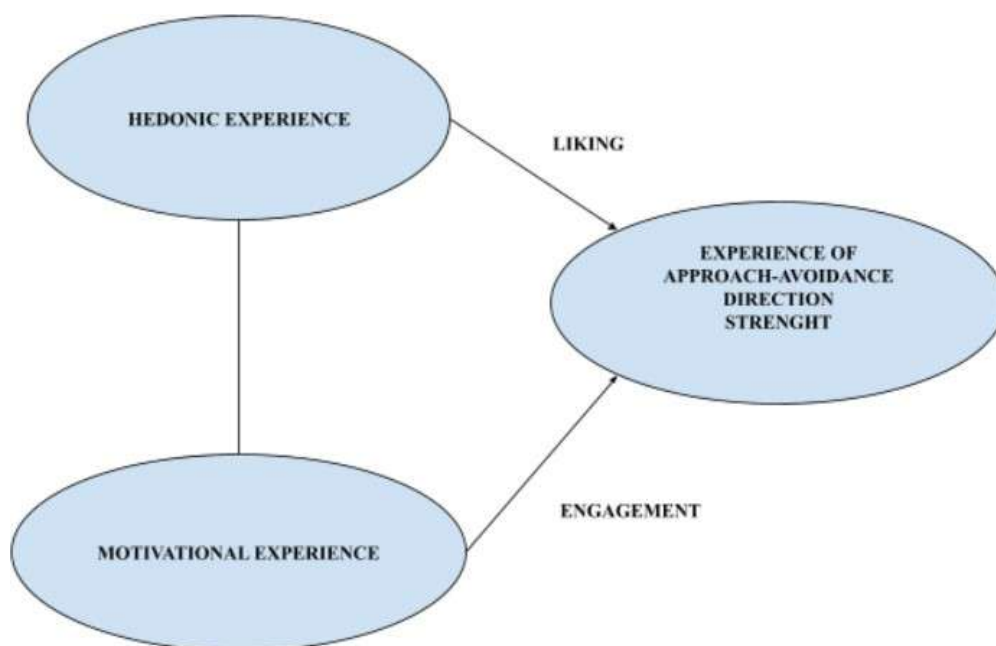


Figure 1. Higgins Adaptation On Engagement Model [3]

SENSORY LEVEL	DIMENSION
Visual	Color: the diversity of colors chosen to be part of the album. Brightness: the level of brightness in the visual aspects of <i>Kpop</i> conceptualizes a much darker, innocent, bubbly style, etcetera. Size: <i>Kpop</i> albums are various and different in sizes, according to aesthetics and concepts of each group. Figures: in <i>Kpop</i> albums figures are much represented by merch and photoshoots ruled by concept.
Aural	Volume: music and melody play a major role helping the consumer dive into the concept. Tone: the vocal tone of members'/singers' voice and the various pitches give life to the songs.
Olfactory	Odor: when buying an album, entertainment companies might also have a particular odor to their label.
Tactile	Softness: textures such as hard covers,
	acrylic templates and other materials help build the outside and tangible concept.

Table 1. Kotler's Atmospherics applied to Kpop Albums

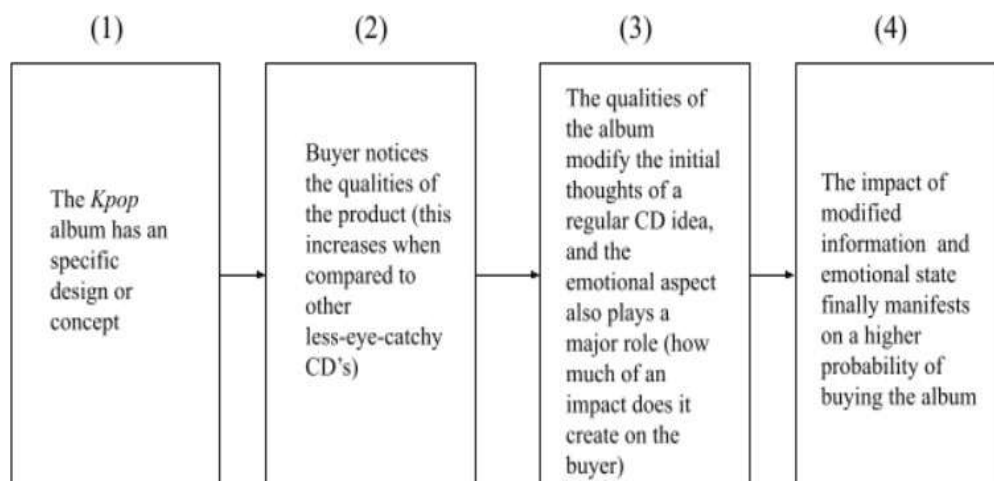


Figure 2. Kotler's *The Causal Chain Connecting Atmosphere and Purchase Probability in Kpop*

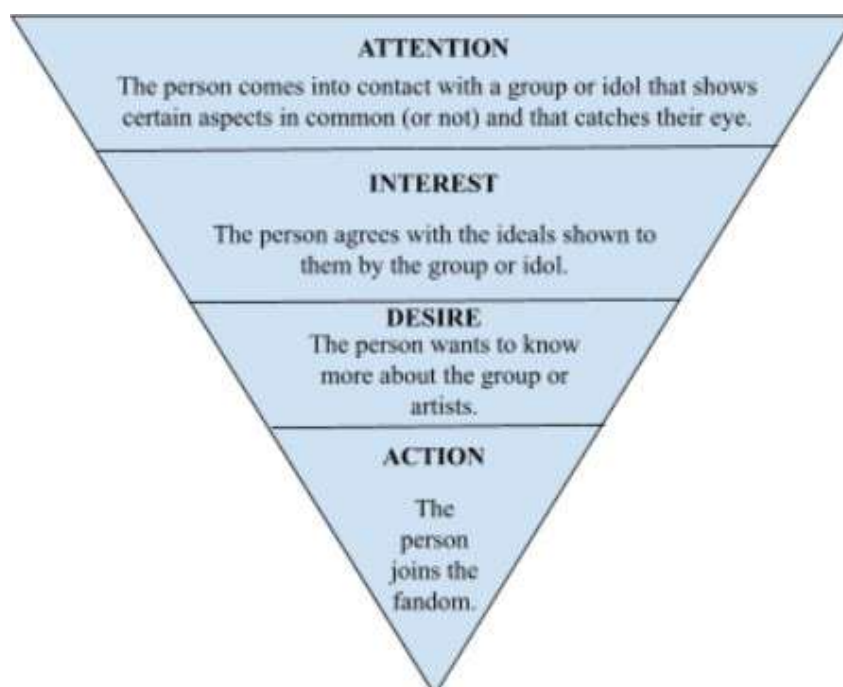


Figure 3. *Model AIDA applied to Kpop*

VIII. CONCLUSION

With the results obtained both by conducting the focus groups and interviews with experts working within different areas of the music and academic industry, it can be concluded that *Kpop* is a musical movement that has gained popularity in recent years and which, furthermore, has been able to interact and include a fundamental element such as new technologies that, in other cases, have been a threat and a weakness, especially for the music industry recorded in physical format.

It is important to emphasize that *experiential marketing* is present in the conceptualization of *Kpop albums* in the form of *merchandising*, which constitutes an element of collecting that in turn is fed by communication efforts on different digital platforms. This type of marketing strategy supposes a transmedia narrative since the fans are consuming through the different media, therefore an *engagement* that drives the continuation of their consumption is also satisfactorily generated. Why is this engagement generated?

Therefore, since the presence of products is not only found in social networks and other communication channels used by the entertainment company (record label), but has effectively translated into a

form of word-of-mouth marketing that satisfies intrinsic needs of the human being such as *acceptance* and the need to *belong* (belonging to social groups of which one is an intentional participant [1]), as can be seen in the case of the Monbebe Puebla *fandom* , whose members have even expressed having spent important sums of money in articles related to the group, and yet they consider this expense as an important part for their permanence and validity in their recognition as fans. The role of the norms of the imagined community comes into discussion again, which seems to define its hierarchical status around the acquisitions and possessions obtained by the individual members.

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