

Exploring the Style of Korean Girl Group NewJeans in the Context of Contemporary Consumerism

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Abstract. Instead of focusing on the girl crush style commonly adopted by fourth-generation girl groups, i.e. the rebellion against the "male gaze" and the conceptualization of criticism, the new group NewJeans focused on the emotional growth of women themselves in their teenage years, highlighting the different perceptions of women. It focuses on the emotional growth of women during their adolescence and highlights the attention to the different perceptions of women as individuals. At the same time, the visual image of New Jeans is shaped by the optimistic Y2K aesthetic.

1 Introduction

NewJeans is a girl group launched by HYBE's label ADOR on July 22, 2022, consisting of five members MINJI, HANNI, DANIELLE, HAERIN, and HYEIN. The girl group set a record for entering the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart within six months of their debut, the fastest Korean artist ever to enter the chart, and also set records at every level of the Korean idol industry's evaluation system. For example, NewJeans' debut album "NewJeans" set a record for first-day sales of a Korean girl group's debut album, and the single "attention" was the first song to reach #1 on the first day of the major audio real-time charts in five years. And NewJeans' debut album is another million-selling debut album after 26 years, setting a record for Korean girl group debut album sales on the first day of release.

On the audio side, they are the only artist group to hold the top three positions on the monthly chart for two consecutive months since the launch of Melon's online music service, making them the group with the longest streak of weekly chart toppers since the site's inception. NewJeans has also gained high popularity in China, being the artist group with the most new Weibo followers in China in 2022. As a new group, this rapid gain of huge influence is noteworthy.

2 Main argumentation structure

2.1 Korea's Support for Cultural Industries

The phenomenon of NewJeans explosion is a product of the rapid development of Korean culture industry. The Korean culture industry has now become an important part of the Korean economic system.

NewJeans has been able to create a strong influence

rapidly without the Korean government's high priority and strong support for the development of the cultural industry.

In 1998, President Kim Dae-jung established the strategy of "Culture as a Nation" and set the cultural industry as the pillar industry of the country. The Basic Law for the Promotion of Cultural Industries was introduced in 1999, and a series of special laws have been introduced around this law. When Park Geun-hye became president, the Regional Culture Promotion Act was also introduced to develop cultural industries with local characteristics. Successive Korean governments have strongly supported the cultural industry. Under this condition, many entertainment agencies have established and created a large number of idol groups, which have harvested a large number of consumers in Korea and have become a very important part of the national economic system[1-4].

2.2 The rise of girl crush style

It is generally believed that five generations of girl groups have developed in Korea since 2007. The first generation of girl groups are mostly girl style, such as SES, Baby Vox, etc; the second generation of girl groups are more diversified, mainly favoring retro style, cute style, like Wonder Girls' retro style, 2NE1's girl crush style, etc; Due to the fierce competition in the girl group market, many girl groups started to open the market with a sexy style from a male perspective, the third generation of girl groups favor the sexy style from male perspective, for example, SISTAR, AOA, etc; the fourth generation of girl groups emerged in the period of the first perspective of women, such as the fourth generation of girl groups BLACKPINK as a girl crush style girl groups to promote the female spirit, harvesting the favor of many female consumers, which led to the prevalence of this style among girl groups. Girl crush style is more diverse, but

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the core of promoting female spirit is the same.

This change is due to the significant rise in the proportion of female consumers, the large number of financially independent Korean working women who can afford to pay for the entertainment industry, and the shift of capital to cater to the aesthetic appeal of female consumers. At the same time, the local market in Korea is limited in size, and it is easier to open up the European and American markets by adopting a narrative from the female subject's perspective. The capital, after smelling the business opportunity, started to adjust the style positioning of groups, integrate the feminist proposition into the idol industry, launch many girl crush style girl groups with anti-male narrative, and put a large number of idol groups that meet female aesthetics into the market through packaging by shaping the image of independent female personality.

In terms of capital operation and market performance, Korean girl groups have indeed been effective in driving consumption, steadily recovering investment costs, and consistently increasing economic benefits. All of these factors have contributed to the transformation of the girl group market, which was initially dominated by the male consumer perspective, into a market dominated by female consumers today.

In addition, the rise of girl crush style has a great relationship with the Korean feminist movement. The feminist movement in Europe and America emerged as early as the 19th century, which provided sustenance for the prevalence of girl crush style in the European and American markets. Under the promotion of the Korean Federation of Women's Groups, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1989 was passed and women's groups were given more employment opportunities under a democratic government, but of course, in recent years the feminist movement in Korea is still prevalent and more women will start to support actions for feminist issues.

Some women support girl groups as an expression of their attitude towards women's rights, and use it as an outlet for spirituality and emotional catharsis. But at the same time, the girl crush style can be seen as a product of feminism being exploited by consumerism, so the female perspective largely determines the style positioning of girl groups[5].

The girl crush style of Korean girl groups presents a critical attitude from the female perspective, in addition to the independent spirit and the criticism of the "male gaze". This style has been adopted on a large scale by girl groups in recent years, but it also makes consumers change from active choice to passive acceptance, which causes this style to be more like a framework pre-defined by girl groups for female consumers, and also makes some consumers fall into a situation of aesthetic fatigue.

2.3 The difference between other girl groups and the "Be Yourself" preached by New Jeans

New Jeans, as a fifth-generation girl group, does not focus on the rebellion against the "male gaze" and the conceptualization of criticism, but focuses on the

emotional growth of women themselves during their teenage years, highlighting the attention to the different individual perceptions of women themselves. Bringing consumers into the concept and looking at themselves as teenagers or as they are now.

Therefore, in this market context, the concept style brought to the public by New Jeans is differentiated from the current girl groups, and the first point is to focus the core of the concept on "readability". Each consumer will have different feelings about personal growth, but the essence is the changes brought about by adolescence, so consumers can generate more sense of participation and immersion. The concept of growth itself does not require a threshold of understanding, so it is easy to resonate with consumers. The five members of New Jeans are teenagers themselves, so they can interpret the concept by just being themselves in front of the camera, and with Generation Z consumers as the main consumer force nowadays, they are either in or have experienced the teenage stage, so they can better appreciate the concept of growth.

Take the mv of New Jeans' debut single "Attention" as an example, the mv chose to focus on the lifestyle of girls of the z-generation, presenting their lifestyle: such as not leaving their cell phones, being keen on social media, shopping with friends, putting on makeup, attending lively school dances, etc., just like a replica of the daily life of the z-generation. New Jeans' single "Ditto", released at the end of 2022, takes consumers back to their high school days, as shown in the video: high school girls running happily in the hallway, laughing and joking in the classroom, riding bikes with classmates on the way out of school, confused about relationships and longing for friends. In the "Ditto" video, New Jeans presents a portrait of modern high school girls, which not only resonates with Generation Z consumers but also reminds consumers who have experienced the teenage years of the five girls of New Jeans.

This youthful growth concept invisibly brings idols and fans closer to each other. Therefore, New Jeans focuses on the concept of a way to know oneself and understand the value of individuals. Physiological changes and rapid psychological development make adolescents begin to strengthen their sense of self, they begin to observe, examine and study themselves from a new perspective, and many thoughts about "I" emerge, and a series of confusion and distress will arise. New Jeans portrays five Generation Z girls who are on a journey to find and discover themselves, allowing consumers to see their 'other selves'. The special thing about New Jeans is that it drops the excessive packaging and returns to the essence of showing growth and youth, which hits the heart of female consumers to a greater extent.

2.4 New Jeans' Y2K style

In addition to the concept, NewJeans also has a very representative fashion style. Whether it's a music video or a stage look, NewJeans presents a very representative Y2K style (like figure 1). Initially popular around 2000,

the generation born between 1984 and 1995 is coming of age, and today's Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2009, is in the midst of the second Y2K wave. These two generations are also the largest consumers in society today.

The Y2K style came back into the public eye in recent years due to the economic shutdown and social panic during the epidemic, and this time with more Generation Z overtones. People reminisce about the uneventful life and colorful entertainment before the epidemic began, but also imagine a future when the epidemic has fully dissipated. If the previous generation of Y2K was motivated by the fear of the millennium bug problem, this generation of Y2K is more carefully designed and manufactured. Vivid, highly saturated colors and futuristic technology are key elements of the Y2K style, reflecting the vitality and creativity within people[6]. Overturning the dull and dreary past with positive optimism, the aesthetic elements of the new century and the future world are highlighted with colorful colors, reflecting the psychology of people who wish to usher in change.



Figure 1. Visual Design of the Inside Page of "New Jeans" Album

The optimistic spirit of the Y2K style fits the core of the New Jeans concept. From the perspective of the culture industry, New Jeans makes good use of the current hot aesthetic style by combining the visual image of the group with the Y2K style to form a unique girl group merchandise. Under the impact of the rapidly developing Internet and digital wave, the individual solitude of Generation Z in the face of the flood of the times, the pressure and tension in the face of school and interpersonal relationships, and the nostalgia and transient trust in the carefree past, it is easy to see from these expressions that Generation Z and the Y2K

aesthetic have always been important factors in shaping the visual image of New Jeans (like Figure 2-3)[7].



Figure 2. NewJeans 1st EP 'New Jeans' Bluebook logo design



Figure 3. App Visual Design for New Jeans

Xiaohongshu and Tiktok are popular social media platforms among China's Generation Z. This became a position for them to showcase their Y2K style. Posts about New Jeans' Y2K style introductions, styling and outfitting guides appear in them, with hits ranging from tens to hundreds of thousands. Even with the drive of

consumerism, this generation of Y2K has individualized values, and we can see the feminist trend and Generation Z advocating independence and freedom.

Vivid, highly saturated colors and a sense of future technology are key elements of the Y2K style, reflecting the vitality and creativity of the early twenty-first century, when people overthrew the dull and dreary past with positive optimism, boldly displaying colors and highlighting the aesthetic elements of the new century and the future world with colorful colors, reflecting people's desire to accept new things and usher in change. The vibrant and optimistic spirit of the Y2K style also fits the core of the New Jeans concept. From the perspective of the cultural industry, New Jeans makes good use of the current hot aesthetic style and combines the external visual image and internal concept of the group with the Y2K style to form a unique girl group product. Under the impact of the rapidly developing Internet and digital wave, the loneliness of the times, the pressure and tension of school and relationships, and the nostalgia and transient trust of the past, it is easy to see from these expressions that Generation Z and Y2K aesthetics have always been important factors in shaping the visual image of New Jeans.

At the same time, NewJeans was included in the annual list of top 10 artists of 2022 released by China QQ Music. Their song "Ditto" occupied the first place in QQ Music's major charts as soon as it was released, and NewJeans' songs were among the top songs in many cities in China on Apple Music platform, and they were also the artist group with the most new followers on Weibo in 2022, which shows that NewJeans also gained a large number of Chinese consumers' love, and their Chinese fan base is mostly Generation Z.

3 Conclusion

The explosion of New Jeans shows that the agency has continued the group concept of female narrative and developed a different line of youthful growth from the girl crush style, incorporating the design style that is popular among the Generation Z consumers into the group concept and controlling the tone of the current market. From the perspective of the cultural industry, New Jeans' product attributes have brought considerable economic and cultural value to the company and even to the Korean idol industry, while from the perspective of the gender society, New Jeans has provided its female fans with an emotional support that resonates with them.

Through a comparative analysis of NewJeans and previous girl groups, we can find that the development of Korean girl groups is a process of constantly thinking outside the box, and a process of constantly catering to the market and leading it. The explosion of NewJeans also reflects the fact that Generation Z is now becoming a major target group and consumer trendsetter in the entertainment and fashion industries. By observing and analyzing the cultural industry system of Korean girl groups, it can provide a reference for the construction of Chinese pop culture, both to be wary of falling into the trap of consumerism and to learn from the experience of

the operation of excellent idol groups. At the same time, NewJeans' message of "Let's be real and undefined" conveys the spirit of innovation and independence that we hope everyone will not be bound by complicated labels, and provides positive guidance for young people of Generation Z to develop the right values and behavioral standards.

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