

Reevaluating Price Value: Exploring Emotional and Social Motivations in K-pop Fans' Social Media Use

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of Price Value (PV) within the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework, focusing on social media (SM) usage among K-pop fans. K-pop fandom is characterized by its intense engagement with SM platforms for content consumption, idol interaction, and community participation. However, little is known about how perceived costs—such as time, data usage, or paid features—affect fan behavior, particularly with PV as conceptualized in UTAUT2. This study addresses a critical gap by examining whether PV influences K-pop fans' BI to use SM platforms, which are primarily free or low-cost. Using qualitative methods, the research employs focus group discussions (FGDs) to explore how K-pop fans perceive and evaluate the costs associated with SM. 15 participants were involved in this study to contribute their insights. Findings suggest that emotional and social rewards, such as interactions with idols and fan communities, far outweigh concerns about direct or indirect costs. PV is found to be less significant, as fans' engagement is driven more by emotional and social benefits than by monetary considerations. This research contributes to the UTAUT2 model by highlighting the limited role of PV in contexts where emotional and social rewards dominate. The findings also provide practical implications for platform developers and marketers, suggesting that enhancing emotional and social engagement strategies may be more effective than focusing on cost-related factors.

1. Introduction

The music industry has been transformed by the global phenomenon of Korean pop (K-pop), resulting in a vibrant, digitally connected fanbase that engages extensively through social media (SM) (Kim et al., 2022). Cultural trends and digital interactions are influenced worldwide by the impact of K-pop beyond musical entertainment (Anand & Baek, 2024). SM platforms such as X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are utilized by K-pop fans, who are known for their enthusiastic and dedicated support, not only to follow their favorite idols but also to participate in fan-driven activities, share content, and organise events (Maros & Basek, 2022). These platforms have become crucial for fan engagement, music promotion, and community-building within the K-pop fandom.

Understanding the motivations behind using SM by K-pop fans is essential for theoretical and practical reasons. While SM usage is influenced by various factors, the concept of Price Value (PV)—a key component of the UTAUT2 (Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2) model—is specifically focused on in this study. PV is defined as the perceived trade-off between the benefits of using a technology and the costs incurred

(Venkatesh et al., 2012). In the context of SM, both direct financial costs, such as subscription fees or in-app purchases (Al-Adwan & Sammour, 2020; Tyrväinen, & Karjaluo, 2024), and indirect costs, such as time investment, data usage, and opportunity costs are encompassed (Li & Fang, 2022).

Despite the low direct financial costs associated with most SM platforms, the significance of how PV affects users' Behavioural Intention (BI) remains. Most SM platforms utilised by K-pop fans are free, which might suggest that PV has little relevance in this context. However, this assumption warrants examination, particularly as new SM platforms and paid fan services continue to emerge. For instance, premium features and exclusive contents are offered by platforms like Weverse and Bubble that could influence the perceived value for fans (Yang, 2022). Therefore, exploring whether and how PV impacts K-pop fans' intentions to use SM is considered crucial, given that these platforms, while mostly free, can involve costs related to premium content or increased data usage.

Existing literature on technology acceptance often focuses on PV in contexts where financial costs are more apparent, such as e-commerce or subscription-based services (Abed & Alkadi, 2024; Gertze & Petersen, 2024; Ly & Tran, 2024; Belvedere et al., 2024). However, a research gap exists regarding its impact in environments where the primary costs are not directly monetary but related to time and engagement. This gap is particularly relevant to K-pop fans, whose SM activities are characterised by high levels of engagement and interaction but minimal direct expenditure.

The central research question for this study is: "Does PV significantly affect the BI to use SM among K-pop fans?" This study aims to assess whether K-pop fans' intention to use SM platforms is influenced by PV. Because many SM services are free or low-cost, the focus is on understanding the impact of perceived indirect costs, such as time, data usage, and optional paid features, on fans' BI. By addressing this research question, a deeper understanding of how PV operates in contexts where users experience primarily non-monetary costs and benefits is sought, with insights that could inform both academic theory and practical strategies for engaging K-pop fans in the digital age.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Structure Concept of PV in Technology Acceptance

In technology acceptance models, PV is defined as the user's cognitive trade-off between the perceived benefits of using a technology and the monetary costs associated with it, particularly the UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012). How users evaluate whether the advantages of adopting a technology outweigh its financial costs is reflected by this concept (Jackson & Allen, 2024). The cost, such as in e-commerce or subscription-based services, where users must decide whether the benefits justify the expenditure, is crucial in the context of PV, specifically in direct monetary terms. In these scenarios, PV significantly influences users' decisions, as seen in studies on online shopping and premium digital services (Martins & Rodrigues, 2024; Lehmann-Zschunke, 2024). For example, research has shown that consumers' purchase decisions are often swayed by whether the perceived value of a product or service exceeds its price (Bambauer-Sachse & Young, 2024; Tavitiyaman et al., 2022). Conversely, in the contexts of where the primary costs are not directly monetary—such as with many free or ad-supported digital platforms—PV may have an impact on user behaviour differently. For example, Zenny (2020) explores how ad-supported services impact user engagement and decision-making, with the cost of advertisements being perceived as a form of "attention tax" that may affect user retention differently from direct subscription fees. Studies also demonstrate that when PV is low, users may perceive greater value in freemium models or ad-supported content, even as they weigh the non-monetary costs such as privacy concerns or exposure to intrusive ads (Riedel et al., 2024). The absence of direct financial costs reduces the salience of PV, potentially making other factors like social influence or usability more influential in technology adoption.

2.2 Structure Relevance of PV for SM Use

PV remains relevant due to the presence of indirect costs that users might consider, despite the low direct financial costs of most SM platforms. Studies have indicated that evaluations made by users are not only focused on the direct costs, but the indirect costs associated with digital services as well. For instance, users may consider the time required to engage with the platform, data consumption, and potential distractions or opportunity costs, even when a service is free. Research on free digital services suggests that users weigh these indirect costs when deciding whether to continue using a service.

For example, time spent on SM versus other activities, or the data costs incurred through heavy use might be assessed by users (Heese & Pacelli, 2024). In some cases, optional paid features or premium content are offered by SM platforms, which can further complicate the cost-benefit evaluation for users (Zhang et al., 2022). Additional research points out how the experience of users on SM is affected by the time and energy invested, potentially leading to SM fatigue caused by perceived pressure and overuse (Frick et al., 2021). The use of data, particularly in SM analytics and business decision-making, must be considered by users as it increases the

overall indirect costs, as heavy data consumption is required for engaging with these platforms (Yang et al., 2022). Moreover, indirect opportunity costs are revealed using SM sales professionals, with time spent engaging with these platforms directly affecting other potential sales activities (Guenzi & Nijssen, 2020).

2.3 Relevance of PV for SM Use PV in K-pop Fan Communities

The concept of PV takes on unique dimensions when focusing on K-pop fandoms. There are various indirect costs and optional paid features that can influence fans' decisions. K-pop fans often invest significant time and attention to follow their favorite idols, participate in fan activities, and engage in fan-driven initiatives. Additionally, platforms that offer exclusive content or features for a fee introduces a direct financial cost for those interested (Permatasari, 2022). The decision and behavior of users can be impacted by perceived costs such as time, attention, and the availability of paid content in fan communities and similar digital engagement contexts (Jin, 2025). For K-pop fans, the base usage of SM platforms may be free, but the value derived from premium content and exclusive interactions can be affected by their overall engagement and satisfaction (Park et al., 2023). This real-time video-call fan interactions and exclusive content that enhance fan loyalty and engagement are included (Kim et al., 2023). In this context, both the direct financial implications of optional paid features and the indirect costs associated with time and attention investment are examined to understand PV.

3. Method

The primary objective of the qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) is to explore the perceptions and experiences of K-pop fans regarding the value they derive from SM and the role of PV in their engagement with these platforms. The FGDs aim to provide deeper insights into how K-pop fans perceive the costs associated with SM usage and how these perceptions influence their engagement behavior.

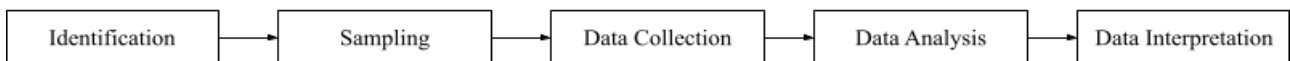


Fig. 1 Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to delve into the perceptions and experiences of K-pop fans regarding their engagement with SM and the role of PV in this engagement. The objectives are introduced at the beginning of the paper to set a clear framework for the study, guiding the research process and ensuring that the findings will be relevant to understanding the complex interplay between SM, perceived value, and fan engagement in the K-pop context.

3.1 Sampling

The study will organize 3 focus groups, each consisting of 4 to 6 participants. This size strikes a balance between fostering an intimate, dynamic environment for discussion while still capturing a range of perspectives. Small groups allow participants to express their thoughts and experiences more freely without feeling overshadowed, which can happen in larger groups. The focus on having 4 to 6 participants per group ensures that everyone has ample opportunity to contribute, fostering richer interactions and deeper insights. Research on small group size in focus groups confirms that moderation becomes more effective, facilitating more in-depth contributions from all participants (Radermecker, 2023). Additionally, smaller groups enable the moderator to manage the conversation more effectively, ensuring that all voices are heard, and the discussion remains focused on key topics.

With 3 groups, the study can capture a variety of viewpoints across multiple sessions, increasing the reliability of the data and ensuring that the findings represent a broad spectrum of experiences. This arrangement also allows for thematic saturation, as common themes across different groups are more likely to emerge, enhancing the depth and quality of the qualitative data collected (Helenius, 2024; Rotterdam, 2023). To select these participants, a purposive sampling method will be employed, focusing on individuals who can offer in-depth perspectives on the research questions based on their high engagement and deep involvement in the K-pop fandom (Yang & Fouzbi, 2021). Details about the selected accounts are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Respondents' Demography

#	Age	Gender	Frequency of SM Use	Years in Fandom	Preferred SM Platforms	Membership in Fan Clubs or Paid Platforms
R1	23	F	Very frequently	6 years	X, Instagram	Yes (Weverse, V Live)
R2	18	F	Somewhat frequently	2 years	TikTok, Instagram	No

#	Age	Gender	Frequency of SM Use	Years in Fandom	Preferred SM Platforms	Membership in Fan Clubs or Paid Platforms
R3	27	M	Very frequently	9 years	X, Instagram, TikTok	Yes (Weverse)
R4	21	F	Somewhat frequently	5 years	X, Instagram	Yes (V Live)
R5	19	F	Occasionally	3 years	X, TikTok	No
R6	22	M	Somewhat frequently	4 years	X, Instagram	Yes (Weverse)
R7	25	F	Occasionally	7 years	X, Instagram	No
R8	30	M	Somewhat infrequently	10 years	X, Facebook	Yes (Fan Club Membership)
R9	24	F	Very frequently	6 years	X, Instagram, TikTok	Yes (Weverse)
R10	20	F	Very frequently	4 years	X, TikTok	No
R11	28	M	Somewhat frequently	8 years	X, Instagram	Yes (Weverse, V Live)
R12	26	F	Occasionally	9 years	X, Instagram	No
R13	19	F	Very frequently	3 years	TikTok, X	Yes (Weverse)
R14	22	M	Somewhat frequently	5 years	X, Instagram	No
R15	21	F	Very frequently	4 years	X, Instagram	Yes (V Live)

3.2 Data Collection Tools

Data collection for the focus groups will utilize a semi-structured interview guide comprising open-ended questions designed to elicit comprehensive and detailed responses. The guide will feature key questions such as:

[1] *“How do you perceive the value of SM in engaging with K-pop content?”*—This question is aimed at uncovering participants’ views on the benefits they derive from their SM interactions with K-pop content.

[2] *“To what extent do you consider the costs (such as time, data usage, or optional payments) when using SM platforms?”*—This question will explore how participants balance these costs against their overall engagement and enjoyment.

[3] *“What motivates you to pay for additional features or exclusive content on SM platforms?”*—This question is intended to identify the factors driving participants to invest in paid features or content, and how these motivations relate to their perceived value of the SM platform.

By addressing these questions, the semi-structured interviews will provide in-depth insights into how K-pop fans perceive and manage the costs associated with their SM engagement.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data collected from the FGDs will be analysed using thematic analysis, a method that allows for a systematic exploration of patterns and themes within qualitative data. The process will begin with transcription and familiarisation, where the recorded discussions will be transcribed verbatim, enabling the researchers to thoroughly understand the content. In qualitative research, thematic analysis, frequently utilised, is characterised by structured steps such as familiarisation, coding, and the identification of broader themes (Jenol & Pazil, 2020). Next, coding will be conducted to identify recurring themes, specifically those related to PV, emotional and social rewards, and engagement behaviours will be identified. The core experiences and perceptions of the participants will be encapsulated by broader themes as the codes are organised (Callau, 2024).

To enhance the depth of the analysis, the identified themes will be compared with findings from previous studies that may have employed a quantitative approach, offering a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing SM usage among K-pop fans. Thematic analysis thus provides rich insights into motivations and perceptions, uncovering the nuanced interactions between perceived value, costs, and engagement behaviours (Kuk, 2021). This method will offer a deeper understanding of the unique role PV plays in shaping SM engagement for K-pop fans.

4. Results

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

4.1 Emotional and Social Rewards Over Price Considerations

The primary driver of engagement for K-pop fans is believed to be Emotional Value. The significant incentive to participate in SM interactions is created by the deep emotional connection fans have with their idols. Research

shows that strong emotional attachments are often developed by K-pop fans, which can result in substantial engagement in digital spaces and fan-driven activities (Ismail & Khan, 2023). This sense of joy and fulfilment that far outweighs any perceived financial or time costs is often provided by this connection. In K-pop's global fan communities, emotional satisfaction is found to be a more influential factor than economic incentives, particularly where fans prioritise emotional rewards over financial considerations (Saeji, 2024). As respondents noted:

- R1 : *"The fun I get from being a fan and seeing new stuff (or content) from my idols is something you can't put a price on. It is more of an emotional thing, and I'm totally cool with that"*
- R2 : *"The happiness I feel when my fav(ourite) idol posts or talks to us is priceless. I'm more than happy to spend hours on SM just to stay in the loop"*
- R5 : *"It's not just about watching videos; it is about feeling connected (to them). Their updates really brighten my day, and that's worth all the time I spend online"*

The emotional gratification derived from idol interactions is perceived as more valuable than the cost of engagement, as underscored by these quotes.

The perceived value of SM platforms for K-pop fans is enhanced by the crucial role played by Social Bonds. The profound feeling of belonging and emotional fulfilment fosters a strong sense of community and support experienced by fans through their interactions with other fans (Kim et al., 2023; Romero, 2023). As respondents expressed,

- R7 : *"Being part of a fan community makes me feel like I belong. The friendships and support (I get) from other fans means a lot to me"*
- R10 : *"Our fan group feels like a second family. We all share our love for the idols and have each other's back, which makes being online totally worth it"*
- R12 : *"The friendships and connections I've made through fan stuff are priceless. The sense of community and support makes every minute (on SM) worth it"*

These sentiments illustrate how concerns about any associated costs often outweighed the value of social connections and community support.

Cost Justification is seen as a key factor in how SM usage is rationalised by the fans. The high level of emotional satisfaction and social engagement derived from their online activities is frequently justified by the fans, both direct and indirect costs, such as subscription fees or time spent (Mohammad & Saifurrahman, 2023; Shin & Whitaker, 2023). Respondents highlighted:

- R1 : *"Yeah, I sometimes spend more on data or subscriptions, but it doesn't bother me. (Because) the experience and connection I get (from engaging) with other fans make it totally worth it"*
- R5 : *"I know being a fan comes with costs, but the happiness and the sense of community are way more important. It is a good trade-off"*
- R8 : *"Even if I have to pay for a fan club (membership) or spend a lot of time online, it's worth it because the emotional satisfaction and sense of community are priceless"*

The perceived benefits of engagement often outweighed any direct or indirect costs, reinforcing the idea that investment is justified by emotional and social rewards.

The high premium placed on the benefits of SM interactions by K-pop fans is illustrated by the emphasis on emotional value, social bonds, and cost justification (Kang et al., 2022; Mohammad & Saifurrahman, 2023; Aguilar et al., 2023). The deep emotional fulfilment and strong community connections often overshadow any concerns about the costs of engagement in free digital environments, demonstrating a robust and nuanced understanding of perceived value (Kim et al., 2023; Lopina et al., 2022; James, 2024).

4.2 Indirect Costs vs. Direct Financial Costs in SM Usage

Understanding both direct and indirect costs in analyzing K-pop fans' engagement with SM platforms is deemed essential for grasping their overall cost perception. The costs are primarily reflected through usage statistics, subscription plans, in-app purchases, engagement with paid content, and time invested in fan activities (Park et al., 2023; Rieple et al., 2023; Ryu, 2024). By examining these dimensions, how the costs and benefits of their SM interactions are weighed by the fans and what factors ultimately drive their continued engagement can be explored.

The overall experience of K-pop fans on SM platforms is perceived by how indirect costs such as time and data usage play a crucial role (Lopina et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2023; Callau, 2024). Insights into hidden costs of fan engagement is provided by usage statistics and time investments (Park et al., 2023; Romero, 2023; Cho et al., 2023). For example:

- R2 : *"I know I use up a lot of data with all the videos, but it is worth it to feel connected and be part of every live event"*
- R5 : *"I spend (a lot of time) on SM, but it makes me so happy and gives me a real sense of belonging, so I don't even see it as a cost"*
- R10 : *"I'm on X for hours every day just keeping up with (updates from) my favourite idols. It consumed a lot of time, but I don't mind at all because I love every second of it"*

These quotes highlight that while indirect costs are represented by time and data usage, they are often viewed by fans as worthwhile investments for the emotional and social rewards they receive in return.

Another important aspect of K-pop fans' engagement with SM platforms is represented by Direct Financial Costs associated with subscriptions and in-app purchases (Park et al., 2023; Jinyoung, 2023; Ryu, 2024). Subscription plans or exclusive content purchases reveal how fans directly spend money to access enhanced features or content. Respondents explained:

- R1 : *"I don't mind paying for V Live (membership) because I get (access to) exclusive content I can't find anywhere else. It feels like a special connection with the idols"*
- R3 : *"The monthly subscription for premium content is totally worth it for the access I get. It's like buying happiness"*
- R8 : *"I've spent money on fan clubs (memberships) and in-app stuff (or purchases), but for me, it was all about supporting my idols and feeling closer to them"*

These perspectives suggest that direct financial costs are often incurred by fans because the value of the exclusive content and special features is perceived to be significantly high.

The evaluation of their overall SM experience by K-pop fans is balanced by these factors when both indirect and direct costs are compared. The time and data costs are often compared with the financial expenditures by fans to determine which is more significant to them. Studies have shown that K-pop fans, particularly those who are heavily involved in digital activities, consider not only the financial costs associated with premium content but also the time and data spent on engaging with SM platforms (Jeon et al., 2023; Radermecker, 2023). These comparisons help fans decide which elements of their fan engagement are worth the investment, leading to strategic decisions about which platforms and activities to prioritise based on cost-benefit analyses (Oon, 2021). For instance:

- R9 : *"I spend a lot of time on SM, and I'd rather give my time than money. But if the exclusive content worth it, I'll pay"*
- R4 : *"Subscriptions don't bother me as much as losing time just scrolling, but it's still worth it for the community vibe"*
- R15 : *"I sometimes think about the time I spend vs. the money for subscriptions, but both feel pretty fair for what I get in return"*

These insights suggest that both time and money are perceived as costs by fans, but the willingness to pay—whether through time or financial means—is often justified by the emotional satisfaction and social engagement they receive.

A nuanced approach to evaluating SM engagement costs is demonstrated by K-pop fans. While both indirect costs (time and data usage) and direct financial costs (subscriptions and in-app purchases) are recognised by them, often the expenditures are justified by the emotional and social benefits they derive. Studies reveal that fans consider not only the monetary aspects but also the emotional fulfilment they gain from interacting with idols and fellow fans on SM platforms (Permatasari, 2022). The rewards of exclusive content, community participation, and connection with idols are prioritised by fans over any associated costs, reflecting a complex cost-benefit analysis that emphasises the value of engagement and emotional fulfilment over the tangible costs incurred (Kim et al., 2023).

4.3 Perceived Value and Its Influence on K-pop Fan Engagement

The perceived value of SM content and platform features is explored in this theme, directly influencing the engagement levels of K-pop fans. K-pop fans are highly valued due to their attraction to exclusive content, interactions with idols, and participation in the community, which is perceived as highly valuable by them. Their willingness to invest both time and money into engaging with these platforms is significantly driven by the perception of value. Research highlights that K-pop fans' behaviour is motivated by their desire for emotional and social connection with their idols, which often outweighs the associated financial costs (Ismail & Khan, 2023; Chen, 2023). Examining various types of content and features reveals how this perceived benefits shape fan behaviour (Ranieses, 2024).

Exclusive Content and Premium Features play a primary role in the engagement of K-pop fans. Many fans are willing to pay for premium access to exclusive content, such as behind-the-scenes videos, live-stream events, or special fan messages, as a unique connection with their idols (Peralta, 2024). Fans shared:

- R4 : *"I subscribed to V Live because the exclusive live streams make me feel like I'm in a private chat with my favourite idols. Totally worth the fee"*
- R11 : *"I don't mind paying for Weverse membership because the exclusive pics and messages make me feel closer to the idols. It was like getting a (special) gift from them"*
- R6 : *"I pay for premium content because it makes me feel more involved. It is not just about watching; it's like being part of their world"*

These statements illustrate that high value in exclusive content by fans, which is justified by their financial investment and overall engagement with the platform.

High-Engagement Posts and Content further demonstrate how fan interaction on SM is driven by perceived value. Fans perceived posts that generate significant engagement, such as those with a high number of likes, comments, and shares, as particularly valuable. These posts are often celebrated by idols, or unique content is shared that resonates with the community. Research indicates that high-engagement posts create opportunities for fans to interact, enhancing their emotional connection with idols and reinforcing social bonds within the fandom (Chansanam et al., 2022; Ismail & Khan, 2023). Fans commented:

- R3 : *"When a post blows up, it feels like (I'm) being a part of something big. Getting noticed in the community means a lot"*
- R12 : *"I love seeing tons of shares and comments on fan pages. It shows (that) we're all in this together, supporting our idols"*
- R14 : *"When there's a post about a new video or a win for my favourite group, I always like and comment. It feels like I'm helping them succeed"*

These quotes highlight how fans perceive a sense of belonging and purpose through high-engagement content, which motivates them to participate actively.

Fan engagement is also crucially shaped by fan-generated content and reactions. Fans' own content, such as fan art, tribute videos, or creative posts, reflecting their emotional connection to the idols and their active role in

the fan community, is often created. Research shows that fan-generated content, including reaction videos and creative tributes, plays a significant role in deepening fan engagement and reinforcing emotional connections within fandoms (Chung & Koo, 2023; Jin et al., 2021). Fans explained:

- R4 : *"Making fan art or tribute videos feels like my way of giving back to the idols and the community. It is how I show my love and support"*
- R7 : *"I love checking out fan-made stuff (such as content) because it shows how passionate and creative our community is. It makes me proud to be a part of it"*
- R13 : *"When people react positively to my fan posts, it pushes me to keep sharing (and contributing). It's more than just consuming content; it is super rewarding"*

These insights demonstrate that the perceived value of contributing creatively and engaging with fan-generated content is enhanced by fans' connection to the community and driven by higher engagement.

The perceived value that motivates K-pop fans to engage deeply with SM platforms is also reflected by Community-Driven Events and Initiatives. A sense of purpose and community spirit is fostered by events such as fan-organised online meetups, charity drives, or fan voting campaigns. Research indicates that these community-driven practices create a participatory culture where fans collaborate on various initiatives, reinforcing their emotional connection and engagement with the fandom (Saraswati, 2020; Rooks, 2022). Fans expressed:

- R3 : *"I love joining online (fan) meetups and events organised by fans. It brings us (all) together and lets us celebrate our idols in fun ways"*
- R6 : *"Taking part in fan voting or charity events makes me feel like I'm actually making a difference. It's more than just supporting my idols; it is about being part of something bigger"*
- R14 : *"These fan-driven activities are why I stay active online (such as SM). They give us a reason to come together and bond over our love (for the idols)"*

These comments highlight how fans derive value from participating in community-driven activities, which strengthens their loyalty and engagement.

Positive User Feedback on Platform Features further reinforces the importance of perceived value in driving fan behaviour. Feedback on features like interactive tools, personalised content, or user-friendly interfaces shows that fans appreciate these elements and find them valuable. Research suggests that the accessibility and personalization of digital platforms significantly enhance fan experiences, making them more engaging and emotionally fulfilling (Hnatushenko & Vovk, 2024). Fans mentioned:

- R1 : *"I'm really into the new interactive tools (on the SM platform); they make it super easy to connect with other fans and join in on conversations"*
- R7 : *"I love how the platform recommends contents that's just what I want to see"*
- R11 : *"The app is so easy to use; and finding the content I'm looking for is so fast, and that is why I keep coming back"*

The value of platform features that enhance user experience is indicated by these statements, ultimately leading to continued engagement and use by fans.

The engagement levels of K-pop fans are significantly influenced by the perceived value of content and platform features. Fans are motivated to participate actively and invest time or money, whether through exclusive content, high-engagement posts, fan-generated activities, community-driven events, or positive feedback on platform features (Chen, 2023; Ismail & Khan, 2023). The investment in these elements is justified by the value found in them, sustaining the ongoing involvement of the fan community.

4.4 Impact of Fan Loyalty on Cost Perception

This theme delves into the significant impact of K-pop fans' loyalty on their perception of both direct and indirect costs associated with SM usage. The strong emotional connection and commitment that loyal fans have

towards their idols often leads them to overlook the costs associated with engaging on these platforms. Their devotion alters their cost perception, making them more willing to invest in content and features that enhance their connection to their idols.

Exclusive Fan Content is a key area where fan loyalty affects cost perception. Loyal fans are often willing to invest in exclusive content, such as premium videos, exclusive merchandise, or early access to new releases, because their loyalty enhances the perceived value of this content. Respondents shared:

- R6 : *"I don't mind paying extra for exclusive videos or early access to new songs. It is more about feeling (of being) closer to the idols (than just the content)"*
- R11 : *"Even if it costs money, I think it is totally worth it for the emotional satisfaction and the chance to get something special (and exclusive)"*
- R13 : *"The price is worth it because it makes me feel like I'm part of something special, (something that) not every fan gets to experience"*

These quotes illustrate that loyal fans view the cost of exclusive content as a justified investment, driven by the emotional connection they feel with their idols.

Fan Club Memberships and Paid Features further demonstrate how loyalty can lower sensitivity to direct financial costs. On platforms like Weverse, fans often pay for memberships or additional features that offer special live streams, chats with idols, or exclusive content. Respondents noted:

- R8 : *"Being a member lets me feel like I'm in the inner circle. For me, that's worth the money"*
- R9 : *"I don't really think about the cost. What matters (to me) is getting the opportunity to connect with my idols on a deeper level"*
- R15 : *"I signed up for a paid membership because it means I get special interactions with my favourite idols. The cost is nothing compared to the joy I get from those moments"*

These insights highlight that loyal fans are willing to pay for enhanced interactions and exclusive content, perceiving the financial costs as minimal compared to the perceived benefits.

High Engagement Posts also reflect the role of loyalty in diminishing cost perception, particularly concerning indirect costs like time and data usage. Highly engaged posts on fan pages or groups celebrating idols' achievements often attract significant participation from fans. Fans commented:

- R2 : *"I don't mind the data costs. It's just part of being a loyal (and dedicated) fan and staying connected with everyone"*
- R10 : *"I spend a lot of time commenting and sharing posts. It takes up hours, but it feels like I'm really supporting my idols, so it's (totally) worth it"*
- R12 : *"I get a real sense of satisfaction every time I engage with a post, no matter how long it takes"*

These responses suggest that loyal fans perceive the indirect costs of engagement as less significant when weighed against the emotional rewards they receive.

Fan-Made Content such as fan art, videos, or tribute posts also demonstrates how loyalty affects cost perception. The creation and sharing of fan-made content require both time and effort, yet many fans see this as a valuable investment in their fandom. Fans stated:

- R13 : *"I really enjoy making fan art because it is a fun way to show how much I love the group. The time and effort don't feel like a hassle (and cost); it is just something I like doing"*
- R14 : *"Creating content can be a lot of work, but it feels awesome when the community appreciates it"*
- R15 : *"I never worry about the data or the time it takes to upload my tribute videos. It is all about*

sharing the love and excitement with everyone else"

These comments illustrate that the sense of community and personal investment fostered by fan loyalty helps fans overlook the indirect costs of content creation.

Positive Feedback on Paid Content is another indicator of how loyalty influences fans' perception of costs. Many fans leave positive reviews or feedback on paid content or exclusive features, highlighting their satisfaction with these offerings. Fans expressed:

- R9 : *"I bought the paid content because it feels like the best way to support my (favourite) idols. The satisfaction I get from contributing to their success worth way more than the cost"*
- R11 : *"I have never regretted spending money on exclusive content. The joy and the connection I get from it are totally worth it"*
- R13 : *"Whenever I pay for new features, I feel like I'm not just watching but actually doing my part to support my idols"*

These quotes reflect that loyal fans often view the costs associated with paid content as justified by the value they perceive, driven by their desire to support their idols.

Fan loyalty often shifts the balance of perceived value away from costs, focusing instead on the benefits of exclusive access and enhanced interactions. Loyal fans are willing to tolerate higher costs, both direct (such as subscription fees) and indirect (like time and data), because they derive significant personal value and satisfaction from their engagement. This high level of engagement, in turn, correlates with a diminished sensitivity to costs, as the perceived emotional and social rewards are seen to outweigh financial considerations. By incorporating these, the evidence will clearly demonstrate how fan loyalty impacts cost perception, providing concrete examples of how dedicated fans justify and manage their SM expenditures.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that PV does not significantly impact K-pop fans' use of SM. This result diverges from some prior studies in technology acceptance where PV has been found to play a more prominent role, particularly in contexts involving direct monetary exchanges, such as e-commerce or subscription-based services. Several factors could explain this difference, primarily centred on the unique context of K-pop fandoms and their SM usage patterns.

First, the absence of significant PV influence could be attributed to the nature of SM platforms used by K-pop fans, which are predominantly free. Unlike other digital services that require regular payments or subscriptions, most popular SM platforms—such as X, Instagram, and TikTok—do not impose direct monetary costs on their users. As such, the cost factor becomes less relevant in decision-making processes around SM use among K-pop fans. Existing literature on technology acceptance suggests that users are less sensitive to price considerations when there are minimal direct costs involved. Studies indicate that as long as direct costs remain low or non-existent, users tend to focus on other factors like usability, convenience, and perceived value when deciding to engage with a technology (Nastjuk et al., 2020; Kasilingam, 2020). For instance, in studies of free digital platforms, PV is often overshadowed by other factors like perceived ease of use or social influence. Users tend to prioritise ease of use and social interactions over financial considerations when engaging with free services, as these factors significantly shape their overall user experience and engagement (Hamari et al., 2020; Fatima et al., 2021). Therefore, it is plausible that K-pop fans are not deterred by cost-related concerns, as their primary platforms do not require upfront payments or ongoing fees.

Additionally, the study suggests that K-pop fans derive substantial emotional and social value from their SM use, which likely overshadows any concerns related to indirect costs, such as time or data consumption. K-pop fandoms are characterised by a strong sense of community, identity, and emotional attachment to idols. These fans use SM extensively to interact with their idols, access exclusive content, and participate in fan activities, which provides them with significant emotional satisfaction and social bonding opportunities. Previous studies highlight that the deep emotional bonds K-pop fans form with their idols play a crucial role in fostering a sense of community and belonging within the fandom (Chen, 2023). This sense of shared identity and emotional connection drives fan participation and loyalty, further solidifying the unique nature of K-pop fandoms (Ismail & Khan, 2023). This aligns with existing literature that emphasises the high levels of engagement and community support within fan-driven networks.

Furthermore, alternative explanations suggest that K-pop fans perceive the SM platforms themselves as tools for free expression, creativity, and connection rather than as services that come with associated costs. The perceived benefits, such as access to community-driven content, real-time updates, and direct interaction with idols, may hold greater value for fans than any consideration of potential costs. Studies demonstrate that K-pop fans place high value on these unique interactions and real-time experiences, which enhance their sense of community and attachment to their idols, often outweighing concerns about time or financial investment (Rooks, 2022; Esquivias, 2023). The high emotional rewards and social connections facilitated by these platforms can effectively neutralise the perception of costs.

Additionally, the emergence of fan-driven economies on these platforms, where fans voluntarily create and share content without any expectation of financial gain, may further dilute the perceived impact of PV. As suggested by other studies, in communities where social and emotional rewards are predominant, the traditional cost-benefit analysis may not fully apply. Research demonstrates that in K-pop fan communities, emotional connections and social rewards often outweigh financial costs, driving fan behaviour through intrinsic value rather than economic considerations (Boman, 2021; Tukachinsky Forster, 2023). This phenomenon could explain why K-pop fans, who are often motivated by love and dedication to their idols, may view the indirect costs as negligible. In this context, the perceived value derived from social engagement, creative expression, and emotional fulfilment far outweighs any concerns about financial or time investments.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that PV may not be a significant determinant in K-pop fans' decisions to use SM because the emotional and social benefits of participation far outweigh the minimal direct or indirect costs. This interpretation underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of technology acceptance in contexts where emotional and social drivers play a central role. Future research should further explore these alternative explanations and examine other factors that might influence the BI of highly engaged and emotionally invested user groups, such as K-pop fans.

5.2 Interpretation of Findings Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings of this study offer important theoretical implications for the field of technology acceptance, particularly in contexts where users perceive substantial non-monetary benefits. The limited role of PV among K-pop fans using SM suggests that current technology acceptance models, such as the UTAUT2, may need refinement when applied to scenarios where emotional and social rewards dominate user engagement. Traditional models like UTAUT2 often emphasise factors like performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and PV, if these elements equally influence users' intentions and behaviours. However, in cases like K-pop fandoms, where social and emotional connections play a central role, the relative importance of PV diminishes, and non-monetary benefits take precedence.

The study's findings imply that existing models could benefit from a more nuanced understanding of user motivations in contexts characterised by strong community bonds, emotional attachment, and intrinsic rewards. When users perceive substantial emotional satisfaction and social engagement from using a technology or platform, these factors can overshadow considerations of cost, whether direct or indirect. Studies have shown that emotional components and social engagement can dominate users' evaluations, leading them to prioritise the perceived benefits over financial costs (Ofori et al., 2023; Jang et al., 2024). As such, future models of technology acceptance could integrate constructs that more explicitly account for emotional value, social identity, and community belonging. These modifications could provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding user behaviour in digital environments where non-monetary benefits are primary drivers of engagement.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the relationship between PV and BI might be context-dependent and not universally applicable across all types of digital platforms. Studies have shown that the impact of PV on BI varies depending on the type of platform and the perceived utility or social value it offers (Obry, 2023; Xie et al., 2024). In scenarios where the primary value is derived from emotional and social factors, researchers might consider re-evaluating the weight and significance of PV in predicting user behaviour. This calls for further empirical research to explore how emotional and social rewards interact with other determinants of technology use, potentially leading to the development of more context-specific acceptance models.

For platform developers, K-pop management companies, and marketers, these findings provide valuable insights into how to effectively engage and retain users in contexts where emotional and social benefits are paramount. Rather than focusing on strategies that emphasise minimising costs or promoting financial affordability, efforts should be directed toward enhancing the emotional and social value that users derive from the platform. Research indicates that enhancing customer satisfaction through emotional engagement and social interactions is more effective in maintaining user loyalty and engagement, especially in digital platforms (Rane et al., 2023; Hampton et al., 2022). For instance, developers could create features that facilitate deeper interactions between fans and idols, such as personalised messages, exclusive behind-the-scenes content, or interactive live streams that enhance the sense of connection and community.

K-pop management companies and marketers can also benefit from understanding that their target audience—loyal K-pop fans—are driven more by emotional connections and social engagement than by price considerations. Studies show that K-pop fans form deep emotional attachments to idols, which significantly influence their engagement and loyalty, often overshadowing price considerations (Chen, 2023; Aguilar et al., 2024). Marketing strategies should focus on promoting the unique emotional experiences and social interactions available through the platform. Research suggests that enhancing emotional engagement and offering opportunities for social interaction are key to building fan loyalty and increasing engagement among K-pop fans (de Jesus, 2020; Rane et al., 2023). For example, highlighting opportunities for fans to participate in special events, fan meet-ups, or collaborative fan projects may be more effective than emphasising affordability or discounts.

Moreover, platform developers and content creators can leverage the high engagement levels associated with fan-driven and community-generated content. Encouraging and facilitating user-generated content, such as fan art, tribute videos, or community-led campaigns, could further enhance the emotional and social value perceived by fans, fostering deeper engagement and loyalty. Research has shown that fan-driven content and community initiatives play a crucial role in increasing emotional attachment and engagement within digital fan cultures (Filimowicz & Tzankova, 2020; Gratch & Gratch, 2021).

These practical implications suggest that the most successful strategies for engaging K-pop fans will focus on creating rich, emotionally fulfilling experiences rather than merely addressing cost concerns. By prioritising user engagement through enhanced emotional value and community-building features, platforms and marketers can cultivate a more loyal and active user base that is less sensitive to cost factors. This approach can lead to sustained engagement and potentially greater revenue through indirect monetization strategies, such as exclusive content and paid features that align with fans' emotional and social motivations.

6. Conclusion

Building on the recommendation of Roslan et al. (2024) to examine the behaviour of K-pop fans, this study explored the relationship between PV and BI to use SM among K-pop fans.

This study examined the role of PV in influencing the BI to use SM among K-pop fans, revealing that PV does not significantly impact their engagement. Instead, the findings suggest that K-pop fans are primarily motivated by substantial non-monetary benefits, such as emotional satisfaction, social connections, and a sense of community belonging, which diminish the importance of direct and indirect costs associated with SM usage.

These results contribute to the understanding of technology acceptance in contexts where users derive high emotional and social value from their interactions, challenging the traditional emphasis on PV as a key determinant. The findings imply that existing technology acceptance models, such as UTAUT2, may need refinement to more accurately reflect user behaviour in environments where intrinsic rewards outweigh cost considerations. Future research should consider integrating constructs that account for emotional and social motivations to better capture the dynamics of user engagement in these contexts.

While this study provides valuable insights, it does have certain limitations. The research focused exclusively on K-pop fans, which aligns with the primary goal of the study but may limit the generalizability of the findings to other types of fan communities or SM user groups. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the research restricts the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationship between PV and SM usage.

To address these limitations, future research should examine whether similar patterns hold true for different fan communities or user groups across various SM platforms. Longitudinal studies could offer a deeper understanding of how perceptions of PV and other motivators evolve over time. Additionally, using a mixed-methods approach, such as combining quantitative analysis with qualitative methods like interviews or content analysis, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how fans perceive and manage costs in their digital engagements.

From a practical perspective, this study suggests that platform developers, K-pop management companies, and marketers should focus on strategies that enhance emotional and social value rather than emphasising cost-related factors. By offering unique experiences, fostering deeper interactions with idols, and promoting community engagement, they are likely to drive greater engagement among K-pop fans. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, understanding the factors that influence user behaviour, such as emotional connection and community belonging, will be crucial for developing effective engagement strategies.

In conclusion, while PV appears to play a limited role in determining SM use among K-pop fans, the study underscores the significant impact of emotional and social rewards on user behaviour. By acknowledging these motivations, stakeholders can better cater to the preferences of K-pop fans, fostering sustained engagement and long-term loyalty. Future research should continue to explore how these factors interact in digital environments to refine our understanding of user behaviour and develop more targeted strategies for engagement.

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Conflict of Interest

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

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