

CONTESTED FRAMES, CURATED TRUTHS: HOW HYBE, ADOR, AND NEWJEANS
FANS CO-CONSTRUCTED A K-POP CRISIS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received 15.08.2025 Accepted 15.10.2025 Published 15.11.2025 Keywords: <i>K-pop,</i> <i>media framing,</i> <i>artist agency,</i> <i>fan activism,</i> <i>platform capitalism</i>	<i>This paper examines the media framing of the public dispute involving K-pop group NewJeans, their label ADOR, and parent company HYBE. Drawing on media discourse analysis, the study traces how the conflict unfolded across traditional news platforms and participatory digital spaces, highlighting the role of para-journalistic fan accounts, curated timelines, and platform-specific affordances. The paper foregrounds how narrative authority is contested and co-constructed through emotional publics, algorithmic visibility, and competing claims to legitimacy. Rather than adjudicating truth, the analysis explores how different actors—corporate, artistic, and fan-driven—produce, circulate, and challenge meanings in real time. This case illustrates the shifting dynamics of media power in the K-pop industry and broader digital culture, raising questions about authenticity, governance, and affective labor in contemporary celebrity ecosystems. Ultimately, the NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE conflict offers insight into the changing nature of visibility, credibility, and control in platform-mediated controversies.</i>
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1: Context and Significance

The public conflict involving NewJeans, one of the most commercially significant K-pop groups in recent years, has drawn global media attention and intense engagement from fans, commentators, and institutions. At the centre is Min Hee-jin, creative director and former CEO of HYBE subsidiary ADOR, whose relationship with the group became entangled in a corporate power struggle that played out across multiple media platforms (Chin, 2025). What makes this case distinctively contemporary is the convergence of institutional, corporate, and fan-driven narratives via news, court filings, social media, and livestreams.

Platforms like TikTok, X, YouTube, and Weverse didn't just distribute information—they shaped the narrative structure. Studies by Oh and Park (2012) and Ahn et al. (2013) show how K-pop entities use digital platforms for engagement and crisis response. In contrast, traditional media often echoed online narratives (Al-Quran, 2022), while entertainment news increasingly blends journalism with promotional content, raising concerns about influence and independence (Jin, 2015).

As audiences gain sophistication in decoding and co-producing narratives, understanding cross-platform storytelling becomes critical. While tweets or headlines offer glimpses, academic work helps reveal larger patterns. Bay (2020) notes that corporations now absorb affirmational fan labour into publicity strategies, shifting what it means to be a media fan: "By bringing 'desirable' and 'affirmational' media fans into the mainstream, corporations are reorganizing them as publics ... and this shift could contribute to a change in what it means to be a media fan" (p. 321). This study synthesizes academic literature and media discourse to explore how the NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE conflict has been represented across media platforms and scholarly discussions. It addresses three research questions:

RQ1: How do legacy, social, and entertainment media frame K-pop controversies?

RQ2: What concepts and methods do scholars use to study these conflicts?

RQ3: How is artist agency theorised in relation to media representation and institutional power?

By foregrounding scholarship over primary reporting, this project interprets the HYBE–ADOR situation as a case of 'platformed conflict' where legal claims, fan reactions, and corporate messaging circulate through algorithmic systems that fragment rather than unify narratives (Poell et al., 2021). The case also highlights persistent tensions in K-pop—from autonomy to accountability—often glossed over in public debate. With institutional, corporate, and fan voices all competing for visibility, any single version of "truth" remains contingent on affective and algorithmic amplification.

2: Review of the Literature

Academic interest in South Korea's entertainment industry has expanded around labour conditions, fan practices, and digital platforms. Although direct scholarship on NewJeans remains limited, this review synthesises work relevant to the research questions and is organised into three themes: platform framing (how legacy and social media structure narratives), digitally networked publics (fan, family, and audience interventions), and artist agency & labour (how autonomy is negotiated within institutional and platform ecologies).

2.1 Media Framing and Agenda-Setting

Media framing theory examines how news media emphasize specific aspects of events, shaping how issues are publicly understood and discussed. Entman (1993) identifies four primary functions of framing: problem definition, causal diagnosis, moral evaluation, and solution recommendation. Within entertainment disputes, such frames significantly influence how audiences perceive credibility, accountability, and legitimacy. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) highlight that the framing of conflicts can determine public support or condemnation, directly affecting reputations and public sentiment.

In the context of K-pop, media framing plays a significant role due to the industry's careful management of public image and frequent reliance on media cooperation. Oh and Park (2012) note that Korean entertainment companies often work closely with legacy media outlets to ensure favorable narratives, especially during controversies. Jin (2016) similarly critiques South Korean entertainment journalism, suggesting it often blends promotional content and reporting, complicating issues of media independence.

However, digital platforms complicate traditional framing. Al-Quran (2022) observes that influencers and online communities frequently challenge corporate-driven narratives by introducing competing frames. This shift can affect how conflicts, such as the NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE case, unfold publicly—particularly given the active role of fans and families on social media. Recognizing this dynamic is essential to this study, as it seeks to analyze how competing media frames shaped public understanding and stakeholder credibility within a platform-driven controversy.

2.2 Platform Capitalism and Cultural Labour

The K-pop industry has long been structured around hierarchical contracts and tightly controlled artist branding. Scholars such as Negus (1992) and Marshall (2013) describe how labels manage not only production but also persona, echoing Epstein and Turnbull's (2014) findings about K-pop's idol system. These arrangements commodify performers while limiting their creative agency.

However, with the rise of digital platforms, artists are increasingly entangled in broader economies of visibility and affect. Within the K-pop industry, idols exemplify the pressures of platform capitalism, where continuous engagement is demanded without adequate labour protections or formal recognition—conditions that reflect both exploitative employment structures (An, 2025) and a consumer-driven system that commodifies identity and performance, particularly along gendered lines (Kuczaj, 2025). Bay (2020) explores how fan labour, particularly online, is incorporated into promotional cycles, creating feedback loops between consumption and branding. This participatory logic complicates the power balance, as artists and fans both contribute to and resist the commodification process.

In the NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE conflict, these tensions manifest in how each party navigates the platform ecosystem—artists mostly remain publicly silent, parents post statements, and fans speculate or defend in real-time. This environment produces layered narratives that blur legal, emotional, and symbolic forms of power.

2.4 Fan Activism and Networked Publics

Fans are no longer passive consumers. Jenkins (2006) identifies them as “textual poachers” who reinterpret content, while Baym (2018) sees fans as emotionally invested publics who sometimes intervene in disputes. In K-pop, fandoms play dual roles as consumers and protective agents. Lee (2019) observes how fans engage in coordinated action—such as hashtag campaigns, boycotts, and digital counter-messaging—to defend or critique artists and companies.

These networked publics act as both amplifiers and arbiters of legitimacy. In the NewJeans case, fan responses have been intense, fractured, and often speculative. The @jeanz_pr account, widely believed to be run by the parents, functioned as a proxy for fan engagement, leveraging emotional appeals to garner sympathy and shift perceptions. This aligns with

Crow's (2019) analysis of emotional discourse in Korean online communities, where sentiment often drives momentum more than fact.

2.5 Contextualising the NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE Dispute

The dispute involving K-pop group NewJeans, their management company ADOR, and its parent corporation HYBE highlights broader tensions surrounding corporate governance, artist autonomy, and media dynamics within the entertainment industry. The controversy publicly emerged after HYBE alleged that Min Hee-jin, the creative director and CEO of ADOR, had attempted to gain unilateral control over the subsidiary. Min contested these allegations, asserting instead that her removal from leadership was a response to internal criticisms she raised regarding corporate practices and governance. Following her departure, Min publicly criticized HYBE's leadership approach and organizational culture (JoongAng Daily, 2025).

In the wake of these events, NewJeans' representatives argued that the substantial changes within ADOR had compromised the trust and conditions underlying their original agreements. Citing emotional distress and the shifting managerial context, they asserted that their contracts had become fundamentally altered (Dalugdug, 2025). ADOR and HYBE countered by referencing their significant investments and contributions to the group's development, maintaining that external interference, notably Min's involvement, had negatively influenced the artists' perceptions. The active engagement of family members, particularly through social media accounts such as @jeanz_pr, further shaped the public narrative by portraying the group as young artists navigating a challenging corporate environment (Ha, 2025).

Initial court rulings clarified the contractual obligations at stake, yet public perceptions stayed sharply divided across news outlets and fan networks, each pushing its own account of legitimacy and responsibility. Rather than signaling any readiness to resume business as usual, NewJeans anchored its position in calls for artistic autonomy and a rejection of the managerial practices that sparked the conflict. The episode therefore captures the core issues traced in this study: how media frame artist–agency disputes, how both digital and legacy platforms shape narrative authority, and how mobilized fan publics steer the wider conversation around entertainment-industry controversies.

3: Methodology

This study follows a qualitative, literature-based design. Using the NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE dispute as a living reference point, it synthesises existing scholarship on media platform framing, fan mobilisation, and artist agency in entertainment-industry conflicts. No primary media artefacts or social-media datasets are coded; instead, the analysis maps arguments and theoretical models already circulating in communication, cultural-studies, and music-industry research.

3.1 Research Design

An integrative literature review guides the study, mapping sources to the three themes introduced in Chapter 2 and addressing the research questions. Rather than assembling a fixed corpus, the review constructs a narrative synthesis from peer-reviewed sources and selected media reports, emphasising recurring perspectives, theoretical tensions, and methodological trends around platform power, fan mobilisation, and cultural labour.

3.2 Selection Criteria

Academic sources were primarily drawn from media, communication, cultural, and fan studies via Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Search terms included combinations such as “K-pop,” “artist conflict,” “media framing,” “entertainment industry,” “fan activism,” “platform capitalism,” and key actors like “NewJeans,” “HYBE,” and “ADOR.”

Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and edited volumes published in English, especially from 2018 onward to reflect platform-dominated environments and intensified fan–industry interactions. Sources directly referencing NewJeans, Min Hee-jin, or HYBE were included where available, though academic coverage remains limited. Select grey literature (e.g., institutional reports, academic blogs) was also included where it offered relevant insights not yet represented in journals.

3.3 Analytical Approach

The literature was thematically synthesised around three strands: Platform framing in artist-industry conflicts; Digitally networked publics (fans, family members, observers); and Artist agency in platform-centred creative economies. This structure enabled comparison across academic works regarding media influence, legitimacy of fan interventions, and the constraints on artist autonomy—even in participatory contexts. While illustrative media texts (e.g., press releases, social media, news articles) are occasionally referenced, they are not the basis of formal content analysis or coding. Instead, they support understanding of how public narratives intersect with academic interpretations and broader discussions of power, labour, and representation. This literature-driven approach also entails limits: it excludes non-English fan discourse (e.g., KakaoStory) and lacks real-time data capture. A future shadow methodology could employ tools like Brandwatch or Netlytic to map hashtag virality, while anonymized interviews with industry PR staff might illuminate backstage crisis strategies.

3.4 Framing the Case

The NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE conflict is treated as both a case study and an illustrative anchor, because it pairs K-pop’s tightly managed idol system with an unusually public, intra-corporate rift. Parallels to Taylor Swift’s re-recording drive or Prince’s quest for master ownership show familiar tensions over control and representation, yet key differences make NewJeans uniquely instructive: the clash plays out on decentralized, real-time platforms; family-run and fan accounts inject emotion into corporate messaging; and a subsidiary CEO openly challenges the conglomerate that owns her label. These factors expose backstage business practices rarely visible in K-pop, offering a fresh test case for examining media framing, platform power, and evolving artist agency.

4: Media Narratives, Publics, and Artist Agency

Conflicts between artists and agencies are increasingly shaped by media visibility, platform dynamics, and strategic silence. While legal rulings define outcomes, public discourse shapes perception. Following the three themes established in Chapter 2, the chapter examines: media/platform framing, digitally networked publics, and artist agency within platform and institutional contexts.

4.1 Media Platform Framing in Disputes

Academic literature identifies a divide between legacy and digital media. South Korean legacy outlets—*Chosun Ilbo*, *JoongAng Ilbo*, *Hankyoreh*—often prioritise procedural narratives and managerial voices, reinforcing institutional legitimacy (Tworek & Buschow, 2016; Langer & Gruber, 2021). This framing reduces complex disputes to matters of contract enforcement and reputational management.

By contrast, digital platforms enable competing narratives to thrive. In the NewJeans case, family-created accounts such as @jeanz_pr bypassed official PR to portray the group as vulnerable, contributing to an emotional counter-narrative. TikTok's algorithmic curation systems amplify affect-driven content, where edits like #ADORprotectsNewJeans often outpaced corporate hashtags like #HYBETRansparency—a dynamic consistent with Bajhor (2022) and Ruckenstein's (2023) findings on algorithmic amplification of emotional narratives. Similarly, fan-led campaigns have been shown to generate up to three times more engagement than official statements (Jung & Shin, 2022).

However, visibility does not necessarily translate into institutional influence. Legal rulings and managerial decisions remain insulated from online sentiment (Bennett & Feldman, 2014). At the same time, platform-specific affordances—such as quote tweets, reposts, and remix cultures—encourage polarised discourse (Gillespie, 2018). Algorithms shape diverging truths rather than fostering unified debate (Bucher, 2018).

4.2 Digitally Networked Publics

Fan communities and even family members played an unusually direct role in this dispute, steering public interpretation far beyond the reach of legacy news outlets. This dynamic fits Abidin's (2021) notion of refracted publics, where visibility and affective resonance stand in for formal authority on networked platforms. NewJeans' parents and fans leveraged X, Instagram, and TikTok to circulate emotionally charged narratives, while ADOR and HYBE relied on corporate statements and legal filings. These user-driven campaigns thrived in algorithmic systems that reward sentiment over verification (Rodilloso, 2024), yet—consistent with prior findings—high engagement influenced framing more than legal outcomes (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

4.3 Artist Agency and Strategic Silence

In K-pop, artist agency is often tightly managed and distributed across layers of representation. During the conflict, NewJeans maintained public appearances but made no direct statements—an act that may reflect legal caution, institutional advice, or strategic branding (Adler & Kohn, 2023).

Scholars such as Preece and Kerrigan (2015) argue that artistic identity is co-constructed with managers, media, and publics. This aligns with Venter and Rothenberg (2023), who highlights the layered nature of control in K-pop. In this dispute, family members acted as proxies, reflecting a distributed model of communication rather than simple silence or resistance. Agency here is situational—artists navigate between performance, risk mitigation, and media portrayal. Absence can be just as calculated as presence.

4.4 Key Patterns

Three patterns emerge. First, media narratives simplify complex dynamics. Second, networked publics influence perception but lack formal authority. Third, artist agency is

fluid—not total freedom or voicelessness, but something negotiated. Together these dynamics yield contested frames and curated truths: HYBE’s corporate-legal framing, ADOR’s brand-protective messaging, and fan-led affective narratives each set competing terms for visibility and credibility. Platform algorithms privilege affect and recency, so emotive frames often travel faster than corrections or court outcomes. As a result, multiple “truths” can coexist for long stretches, sustained by selective amplification and segmented audiences.

5: Discussion and Implications

The conflict involving NewJeans, ADOR, and HYBE shows how real-time digital communication is reshaping entertainment-industry power dynamics. Disputes that once stayed behind boardroom doors now unfold across multiple platforms, their visibility amplified by fans, family members, and informal commentators. Even so, decisive steps toward resolution can still occur out of public view, illustrating that ultimate control over the narrative is never fully surrendered. Taken together, these developments signal broader changes in narrative control, media framing, and public conversation.

5.1 Reconsidering Artist–Agency Conflicts in the Platform Age

Disputes between artists and agencies now extend beyond legal contracts and official statements. In the NewJeans case, visibility arose not only from institutional communications but also from parallel narratives amplified by fan mobilisation and emotional framing on digital platforms. These narratives bypass traditional gatekeepers, addressing audiences directly and reshaping perceptions of legitimacy, authenticity, and artistic identity. Control is increasingly distributed across multiple stakeholders and publics, turning artist–agency conflicts into complex negotiations over representation and power within a fragmented media environment. Because platform governance is shaped as much by user-cultivated cultural norms as by technical rules, authority remains perpetually contested (Kyprianou & Navis, 2024).

5.2 Media Framing and the Limits of Objectivity

Coverage of the NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE dispute revealed how flexible and uneven media framing can be. Some outlets leaned on official statements; others emphasized fan reactions or critiques of corporate power. Corporate-affiliated media often echoed institutional narratives, while independent or international sources provided alternative views. This aligns with existing critiques of entertainment journalism, where coverage is shaped by access, ownership, and commercial pressures. Objectivity becomes a negotiated stance, influenced by institutional constraints and audience expectations.

South Korean media often frame K-pop acts like NewJeans as national symbols, while Western media may stress novelty or conflict (Moon, 2024; Kim & Kwon, 2022). Yet fan narratives from digital spaces rarely break into mainstream news unless amplified by virality or influencers. Framing theory helps explain why certain narratives gain traction. In this case, meaning was negotiated across competing systems—each shaping public understanding in distinct, and sometimes conflicting, ways.

5.3 Social Media and the Decentralisation of Messaging

Social media have transformed how entertainment disputes unfold, disrupting traditional gatekeepers and enabling direct, decentralised communication (Al-Quran, 2022). In the

NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE case, platforms like Instagram played a key role in shaping perception—particularly through accounts like @jeanz_pr, which offered an emotional counternarrative to official statements. While such messaging did not come from the artists themselves, it reflected a strategic effort to frame the group as vulnerable yet principled. The platform was not just a distribution tool but a space for persuasion and visibility.

However, decentralisation doesn't equal neutrality. Messaging remains curated and targeted, influenced by platform architecture and strategic interests (van Dijck et al., 2018). Audience responses are fragmented—some align with the messaging, others challenge it. Social and legacy media often interact, especially during high-attention moments (Murthy & Longwell, 2013). Together, they create a hybrid environment where narrative control is shared, negotiated, and constantly reshaped. Such messaging often rides creator 'algorithmic lore' about timing, format, and affect, which can privilege emotionally charged frames (Bishop, 2020).

5.4 Triangulating Truth in a Contested Media Space

No single narrative captures the full complexity of the ADOR–HYBE–NewJeans dispute. Truth, then, is pieced together from three channels: corporate messaging, legacy news, and platform-based commentary. Each stakeholder operates with distinct aims—corporations manage investor relations and brand image, parents foreground artists' well-being, and news outlets balance institutional ties, audience demands, and commercial imperatives (Shim, 2008). Legacy outlets—often aligned with chaebol (family-controlled conglomerate) interests—tend to frame events as managerial or procedural matters, while digital spaces filter stories through algorithms and fan allegiances, giving emotionally charged narratives rapid lift (Lee & Jin, 2021; Jenkins et al., 2013; Jhaver et al., 2023). Headlines stressing contractual stability meet posts about fairness and mental health, and algorithmic visibility can outweigh verification, producing parallel versions of "what happened" (Jin, 2024). In hybrid media systems, legitimacy accrues through repetition, affect, and audience engagement rather than a single authoritative source; comparing—rather than collapsing—competing accounts clarifies how platform design, stakeholder motives, and shared emotions steer public understanding (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Cosentino, 2020). A productive analysis compares—rather than collapses—these competing accounts, asking how platform design, stakeholder motives, and shared emotions steer public understanding.

5.5 Implications for Media Studies and Industry Practice

The NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE dispute shows how platform-native voices—fans, parents, and other stakeholders—steer public conversation, reducing the agenda-setting power of legacy gatekeepers (Valenzuela et al., 2017; Jin, 2024). Controversies now unfold in hybrid spaces where control is shared, questioned, and rapidly re-framed.

For industry actors, traditional crisis playbooks struggle against real-time, affect-driven commentary (Abidin, 2018; Lee & Jin, 2021). Ignoring parallel narratives risks reputational harm and fandom fractures. Yet the same environment rewards transparent, dialogic engagement. Agencies that address fan concerns directly can rebuild trust, while scholars gain a living laboratory for studying how authority circulates through affect, algorithm, and platform design. Future research should integrate media theory, platform studies, and cultural analysis to capture these evolving power logics.

5.6 Final Remarks

The NewJeans–ADOR–HYBE controversy offers a telling case study in the transformation of media ecologies and public discourse. It illustrates how legacy control structures—centralised communication strategies, institutional PR, and mainstream journalism—are increasingly challenged by actors who bypass traditional gatekeeping to speak directly, emotionally, and tactically to networked audiences. However, this expanded access to platforms does not guarantee transparency, clarity, or resolution.

Instead, a fragmented media landscape emerges, where narratives form in real time through selective amplification, competing truth claims, and the emotional labour of invested publics. Authority is no longer asserted solely through institutional weight but co-produced through visibility, resonance, and affective investment (Papacharissi, 2015).

For researchers, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The goal is not to adjudicate competing narratives but to trace how they gain traction—how discursive authority is distributed, how contradictions are negotiated, and how publics are mobilised across platforms. This means treating media controversies not merely as PR crises or fandom disruptions, but as sites of cultural meaning-making where identities, power relations, and communicative norms are actively reconfigured. Ultimately, the NewJeans case highlights the need for frameworks attuned to platformed conflict and algorithmic amplification, capable of capturing the instability and multiplicity of mediated meaning. It invites critical engagement with platform design, media labour, and emotional publics—not as peripheral elements of entertainment culture, but as central to understanding how legitimacy circulates today.

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