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Mechanisms and Strategies for the Global Diffusion of J-pop Through Anime Collaboration and Digital Platforms: Sony Music Entertainment Japan

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of global streaming services reshaping the pop music market, Japanese popular music (J-pop) has expanded overseas through animation collaborations and digital platforms. In this context, Sony Music Entertainment Japan (SMEJ) stands as a representative case of vertical integration across animation, music and global distribution. Employing the resource-based view (RBV) and dynamic capabilities theory (DCT) as a framework, this paper uses a qualitative case study to examine SMEJ's mechanisms and limitations, and proposes optimisation strategies. The study reveals that J-pop achieves global diffusion through anime-driven attention, cross-platform synergy, multilingual adaptations and hybrid live-offline spillover effects. However, constrained by reliance on anime, project-specific ties, data and copyright issues, and popularity mismatches, the industry requires breakthroughs in music independence and localisation, advance planning, cross-platform data management and improved offline performance production capacity. The study indicates that J-pop's globalisation relies on the dynamic capacity to continuously reorganise resources while retaining cultural authenticity to achieve global circulation, which has transferable value for the overseas expansion of non-English-language popular music.

Keywords: J-pop, Anime-Music Collaboration, Digital Platforms, Global Diffusion, Non-English-Language Music Export

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

In the current digital information era, streaming has become a vital driver for revenue and development within the global recorded music market. Aligning with this trend, as the world's second-largest recorded music market, Japan in recent years has also been shifting from its traditional physical record sales to streaming distribution: in 2023, Japanese music accounted for 2.1% market share among the top 10,000 streaming songs worldwide, a considerable increase from 1.3% in 2022 [1]. Japanese pop tracks such as 'Idol', the opening theme for Oshi no Ko; 'Bling-Bang-Bang-Born', the opening theme for the second season of Mashle: Magic and Muscles; and

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"Homura", the film theme for Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba - The Movie: Mugen Train, have climbed to the top of global streaming charts, receiving extremely high play counts. Sony Music Entertainment Japan (SMEJ) has created a network of animation production, anime streaming platforms and worldwide music distribution to promote the export of Japanese pop music (J-pop) systematically [2]. Therefore, investigating how animation intellectual property collaborations and digital platform distribution assist J-pop in breaking into the domestic market and attracting foreign fans carries both economic and cultural benefits for Japanese cultural exchange and global music multilingualisation.

1.2. Literature review

Scholarly research has provided many-faceted views of anime IP, J-pop and digital platforms. Finan applies the concept of a 'media mix' to explore Love Live! in a transmedia way, and believes that anime songs connect animation with J-pop [3]. Mori applies cross-media extension logic in the context of industrial economics. He proposes that animation also develop areas such as music, merchandise and live-action shows to increase its economic value [4]. Green also provides information on Sony's digital streaming distribution of Japanese anime music and identifies a cyclical chain of animation production, record release, streaming distribution, and global marketing that illustrates the organisational process of contemporary Japanese anime-related pop music [5]. Haraguchi uses multiple regression analysis to examine the data of 2024 autumn Japanese anime opening and ending tracks on YouTube Music and Spotify, and finds that music streaming figures are related to several factors, such as the popularity of the animation and recognition by artists [6]. Therefore, the above studies have covered many aspects, such as IP transmedia expansion, streaming distribution and corporate operations, etc., providing a theoretical and practical basis for the globalisation of J-pop.

Most research has focused on the operational model and overseas results of J-pop, exploring cross-media cooperation and digital distribution; however, few studies have systematically examined SMEJ as a case study to investigate how amine collaborations and digital platforms jointly promote the global dissemination of J-pop. In addition, although previous research has explored the interaction among animation and anime music, as well as the spread and dissemination functions of digital platforms, it has not sufficiently examined the proactive integration model of entertainment companies, such as record labels' participation in anime projects, or the synergistic distribution of animation and music platforms [5, 6]. Furthermore, the conflict between the Japanese-centred way and global discoverability has also not been studied.

1.3. Research framework

Based on the Resources-Based View (RBV) and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT), this paper conducts a qualitative case study of SMEJ. Based on RBV, the research identifies the strategic resources and core competencies of SMEJ [7]. DCT is used to study how SMEJ senses and responds to changes in the global market by adjusting resources and structure [8]. First, the paper introduces the background and main businesses of SMEJ, and its current global expansion strategies for J-pop. Then, it explores the global distribution of J-pop by SMEs and offers some improvements. Finally, it presents the reference value of SMEJ's model for introducing non-English-language pop music to the overseas market.

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2. Case profile: SMEJ's vertically integrated ecosystem

2.1. Corporate structure and business scope

SMEJ, as a fully owned subsidiary of Sony Group, has three main business divisions: artist and music, visual and character, and entertainment solutions. Beyond traditional music production and publishing, alongside artist management, SMEJ is also progressing in other fields such as animation creation, IP licensing, and live shows, committed to diversifying its content and fostering synergistic advancement [3]. Its subsidiaries include Sony Music Labels and Aniplex, and its roster features YOASOBI, LiSA and Aimer [7].

2.2. The anime-to-streaming diffusion chain

Building on this business model, anime collaborations and streaming releases have become vital channels for SMEJ's J-pop industry [2]. Firstly, the anime subsidiary engages in the investment and production of animations, providing the music with cooperative access and an IP content platform. Subsequently, the music division and the artists collaborate to record anime songs, such as opening and closing themes. Afterwards, the anime series enters the global market via streaming platforms such as Crunchyroll, Netflix, and Bilibili, with the songs further released on digital music platforms such as Spotify and NetEase Cloud Music. According to Sony's 2025 corporate report, from 2020 to 2024, Sony's streaming revenue achieved a compound annual growth rate of 15.1%, reflecting a shift in its strategic focus [2, 8]. Through this anime-streaming model, SMEJ has acquired a number of globally popular animated music tracks, such as YOASOBI's 'Idol', LiSA's 'Homura' and Aimer's 'Deep down'. For instance, YOASOBI's 'Idol' reached first place on the Billboard Global Excl. U.S. Chart in June 2023, showcasing the potential for animation songs' overseas popularity [9].

Overall, SMEJ has completed its transformation from a 'domestic Japanese record label' to a 'global distributor of anime music'. Table 1 shows how these segments form a mature global value chain for J-pop promotion.

Table 1. Business chain supporting the global diffusion of J-pop within SMEJ

Stage	Representative Companies/Platforms
Anime/IP Development	Aniplex
Anime-Music Collaboration	Sony Music Labels
Global Anime Distribution	Crunchyroll, Netflix, Bilibili
Digital Music Release	Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube Music
International Promotion	Sony Music Solutions, Zepp Hall Network

3. Analysis of the mechanisms and limitations of SMEJ's J-pop global diffusion

3.1. Positive mechanisms of global diffusion

3.1.1. Anime-music collaboration as attention prepayment

SMEJ's strategy of combining animation and music can be used to provide initial exposure for anime IPs and build a foundation of audience interest. Audience attention in the environment of digital media is scarce and commercially valuable [10]. Therefore, to attract the attention of the public abroad in a competitive environment, J-pop needs to continuously improve. Under the SMEJ

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model, the record label's participation in the script stage of an anime series can integrate music with characters and other elements in the story to create a close connection between pictures and sound. Based on this, the audience can spontaneously associate the story with the music and be motivated to search for songs or listen repeatedly. SMEJ has developed a system of resource heterogeneity, such as animation IPs and music labels, to use animation for product development in conjunction with J-pop and thus achieve 'asset orchestration' [7, 8]. Therefore, animation IPs serve as an attention subsidy to reduce the entry cost for J-pop in linguistically and culturally distant areas.

3.1.2. Dual-platform coordination and lifecycle extension

By using dual-streaming platforms for animation and music, SMEJ extends the life of songs beyond the broadcast of animations and promotes continuous distribution in the overseas music market. Animation streaming services such as Crunchyroll and Netflix simultaneously broadcast anime series and their accompanying tracks around the world, and music-streaming platforms have also added these tracks to their music databases digitally [5, 11]. After the release of an anime, its soundtrack will also be available on Spotify and Apple Music; many listeners, both fans and non-fans, have started creating playlists with the music [12]. Bullet comments, discussion posts and fan-created content on animation streaming platforms can also be used to link users to music services for cross-platform traffic sharing. Therefore, SMEJ applies the 'seizing' theory of DCT to strategically coordinate various distribution platforms, and can convert the traffic generated by anime series into long-term assets that can be reused repeatedly.

3.1.3. Multilingual adaptation and threshold reduction

SMEJ's multilingual releases help spread the culture of J-pop abroad by reducing language barriers. According to research by Schneider, English-language versions of non-English songs can serve as a gateway for native English speakers and attract a wider overseas audience [13]. For example, the group SMEJ's hit song "Idol" was first released in Japan on April 12, 2023, and then an English version was released on May 26 to increase its overseas exposure [9]. In this sense, the English versions are not merely replacements for the Japanese originals but also add another way to expose English-speaking audiences to the original Japanese works, and thus may become a potential route for the backflow of the original work. Based on this, the strategy of SMEJ shows a clear "reconfiguring" of DCT: multilingual adaptation of Japanese music resources in the context of internationalisation, thereby fostering connections among J-pop culture and various national cultures.

3.1.4. Live performances and cross-channel spillover

Artists' overseas live performances can further extend the distribution channels of J-pop and turn increased overseas exposure into new music discoveries online. Montoro-Pons and others have found that concerts and digital platforms are related; therefore, they can promote the distribution of music via streaming services [14]. The above results show that the strategy of cross-channel promotion (online and offline) is effective. Currently, SMEJ's artist development initiatives focus on offline economic activities, such as music festivals and large-scale concerts, to enhance the experience value of tracks [2]. Animation-driven exposure increases the demand for live performances; these concerts then drive people to enjoy independent streaming at home. From the perspective of 'seizing' in DCT, SMEJ's overseas concert business deepens the path of attention

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conversion towards streaming music consumption, establishing an industrial closed loop of 'anime series- streaming- live performances- streaming' [8]. Online-offline synergy has expanded the scope of J-pop to include non-anime fans around the world.

3.2. Structural limitations of the global diffusion model

3.2.1. Anime-context dependence and constraints on independent audience development

Although anime collaborations and multilingual releases have shown adaptive advantages, they are still constrained by the context of animation and Japanese-language orientation, thus limiting the autonomy of J-pop. Within an animation IP system, related tracks and animation content, including the main story and character development, are closely linked to make the animation experience an important part of the appeal of the music [3]. Although this way can deepen the existing fans' understanding of the songs, when these songs are released independently on streaming platforms without animated visuals, the lack of strong emotions may cause other listeners who are not fans of anime to lose interest in listening. Cross-linguistic adaptation is also subject to problems of linguistic and cultural misalignment, such as semantic differences and lost cultural connotations. Therefore, SMEJ's resources for anime and music collaborations lack the necessary advantages to attract and retain international fans [7]. Therefore, J-pop has had difficulty building an independent appeal abroad due to animation and the Japanese language.

3.2.2. Anime project dependence and passive music planning

Cross-industry synergy creates a dependency risk: music projects are overly dependent on the market for anime. As an extension of the animation business model, anime songs need to be popular in animation to attract viewers for consumption [4, 6]. SMEJ's record label does not have the right to select anime series; therefore, song releases and promotion are subject to the decisions and production standards of animation subsidiaries [2]. Therefore, if the animation project is unsuccessful, the dissemination and awareness of these songs will also be diminished, and highly commercially viable songs may be missed out on. In addition, animation studios focus on IP development, and record labels need artists and songs with long-lasting popularity. Due to different business focuses, the distribution and release plans of resources are not aligned, leading to a very passive song life cycle [8]. SMEJ's Distribution Model internalises anime project risk and reduces music project autonomy.

3.2.3. Data fragmentation and territorial copyright frictions

Fragmentation of streaming data and territorial copyright friction hinder global market analysis and resource allocation for SMEJ. On the one hand, there are differences in animation and music streaming services that pose a problem of measuring cross-platform consumer behaviour for SMEJ [15]. For instance, the activities of users watching anime series on Crunchyroll and listening to theme tracks on Spotify involve separate account systems and databases, so it is difficult to track the conversion rate from anime viewing to music streaming. On the other hand, the world's spread of digital music is also subject to different copyright laws in various countries, making it difficult to collect performance and income data for J-pop in overseas areas [12]. This contradiction undermines the efficiency of royalty distribution and renders platform data insufficiently transparent. Therefore,

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due to data silos and non-transparent royalty distribution, market selection and commercial valuation have been suboptimal.

3.2.4. Live capacity constraints and missed popularity peaks

The increase in traffic during the broadcast period of the anime may conflict with the timing of preparations for the artist's live performances, and thus the efficiency of capitalisation on this short-term popularity could be enhanced. Distribution of anime tracks through anime broadcasts and streaming platforms can quickly attract a large number of viewers and generate online discussions and promotions [5, 6]. SMEJ's artist business is still focused on the Japanese domestic market; at the same time, various factors such as visas, venues and stage preparations, and funding arrangements may pose problems for the timely organisation of overseas live performances [2]. In this sense, delayed live shows will be less popular with the public and less commercially viable due to changes in people's leisure activities [10]. The resulting opportunity cost reduces fan acquisition and disrupts the global release schedule of J-pop [8]. Therefore, the problem of limited capacity by which SMEJ can continuously drive momentum in both online and offline channels should be addressed through strategic adjustments.

4. Optimisation strategies

4.1. Decoupling music assets from anime while deepening localisation

SMEJ should strengthen the narrative unity of anime singles after they are released independently of the original anime and improve localisation of lyrics for non-Japanese editions. At the production stage, the record label should negotiate a 'dual-fit' brief with the animation subsidiary: the music needs to support the story of the anime and also be a stand-alone asset [5, 8]. For non-Japanese-speaking areas, a multi-level adaptation system will be established based on the original Japanese edition; at the same time, localised versions in various languages, such as English, Chinese, Spanish, etc., will be developed in collaboration with local creators [13]. Under this adjustment method, anime tracks maintain the pre-paid attention advantage of the anime IP and increase the value of independent consumption. In addition, using culturally adapted multilingual editions, SMEJ can help address the communication problems arising from cultural differences. Therefore, the strategy can help build a large-scale and stable overseas audience for J-pop distribution by SMEJ.

4.2. Co-planning at the project inception stage and hedging anime-dependent risk

SMEJ's record label can be involved in the early stages of the project and enhance the independence of music projects by establishing risk-mitigation mechanisms. Firstly, SMEJ can build an animation-music joint planning structure to have the record label make decisions about music projects at the beginning of the animation project, such as selecting songs, setting release times and promotional funds, thus reducing the constraints on animation project schedules [8]. In addition, for risk hedging, SMEJ can build a library of music IP and reduce the dependence on a single animation through multi-window distribution of music videos and artists' albums [2]. In addition, the incorporation of synergistic profit-sharing and risk-sharing clauses at the contractual level can motivate animation subsidiaries and record labels to coordinate resources and adjust plans internally and share the risk of the project's outcome. A symmetrical contract would enable faster adaptation of music planning to changes in the anime market.

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4.3. Building a cross-platform data infrastructure and harmonising royalty governance

SMEJ can integrate cross-platform user data and promote standardised coordination of copyright and royalty information to optimise the marketing plan for J-pop. The group can cooperate with streaming platforms to build a cross-platform data centre that collects and analyses audience data at various times, such as anime viewing, music discovery, music playback, and repeated listening [8, 15]. Funnel analysis will then determine the demand areas and audience groups to adjust concert routes and budgets accordingly. SMEJ can also foster a cooperative model for regional copyright licensing and specify related norms, such as the area of regional licensing, royalty-sharing periods, and information-dissemination mechanisms [12]. Thus, the licensing responsibilities of the regions and platforms will be clear and the efficiency of J-pop publication will improve. In short, the above measures will reduce the problem of the data-royalty gap.

4.4. Building rapid-response live capacity to capture peak online momentum

SMEJ can build a fast-response mechanism to connect online popularity with live performances, and increase overseas capacity by collaborating with third-party resources. First, based on the popularity-performance correlation model, using streaming traffic data from all over the world, one can plan concert schedules and arrange resources in advance [8]. Given that SMEJ has short-term constraints on overseas operation, a combined model of self-owned resources and third-party cooperation should be adopted to collaborate with local music festivals, anime conventions, and famous artists for offline production [2]. Based on this, SMEJ can also conduct live-streaming promotions online, such as behind-the-scenes footage and artist Q&A sessions, to draw the attention of viewers back to the streaming platform and thus create a cycle of traffic between online and offline channels [14]. Thus, the model can convert short-lived online peaks into demand signals and prolonged interest.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Core findings

This paper uses SMEJ as a case, employing RBV and DCT to reveal the mechanisms and strategies behind animation IP collaborations and digital platforms in driving J-pop's global diffusion. The primary resource advantage of SMEJ is vertical integration of animation, music and worldwide distribution for anime and music streaming platforms, multilingual support, and cross-channel traffic circulation from live performances. However, this model has four deficiencies: lack of autonomy for tracks, music projects, cross-platform data and copyright management, and delayed application of offline performances. Therefore, the four measures proposed by this paper are: strengthening the independence and decentralisation of music; optimising music planning and risk management; integrating cross-platform data and harmonising copyright regulations; and enhancing the responsiveness and production capacity of offline performances. Based on the above research, the spread of J-pop around the world is driven by its continuous rearrangement of resources to achieve global dissemination while maintaining cultural originality, rather than simply adapting the anime-and-music model.

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5.2. Theoretical and practical implications

From a practical perspective, this paper offers a feasible strategic system for the J-pop industry and the globalisation of non-English-language popular music in practice. The above framework will provide SMEJ with a foundation for optimising animation-music projects and overseas distribution plans, and offer transferable value for the international expansion of music in Korean and Chinese. In terms of social values, this study provides a reference for exploring how cultural works in the digital age can overcome linguistic and geographical barriers to promote multilingualism and cultural diversity in music consumption.

5.3. Limitations and future study

This paper utilises secondary sources and a qualitative case study, lacking support from primary data. Accordingly, it does not conduct quantitative analyses to examine audience perceptions, cross-linguistic receptiveness, and synergistic effects. In addition, the single-case design further limits external validity. In the future, collect primary data by means of questionnaires and in-depth interviews with overseas users to investigate whether multilingual adaptation influences their willingness to listen and pay.

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