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Global Production, Circulation, and Consumption of Gangnam Style

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This essay examines the cultural production, circulation, and consumption of the Korean music video *Gangnam Style* in the broader context of globalization. We conduct a chronological analysis of its distribution, production, and reproduction on YouTube, focusing on the interactions between traditional and new players in reinforcing and creating new meanings. We argue that the phenomenal success of *Gangnam Style* is due to the dynamic interplay of traditional and new media outlets, the active participation of global audiences, the video's spreadable hooks, a laissez-faire copyright policy, and the musician PSY's marketing strategies.

Keywords: K-pop, Gangnam Style, YouTube, audience participation, globalization, global culture

Introduction

Gangnam Style (GS) was one of the most notable phenomena in the world of popular culture in 2012. Released first on YouTube on July 15, 2012, the song, created by the Korean musician Jaesang Park, commonly called PSY, reached number two on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in less than two months. It broke the 800-million-views record of Justin Bieber's *Baby* on December 21, 2012 (Gruger, 2012) and remained at the number one spot of the world's most watched video on YouTube as of August 2014.

PSY's online popularity also increased his off-line attraction. He was invited to perform in several countries. The impact of the GS phenomenon has extended beyond PSY's singular music video. According to a YouTube Trends report (YouTube Trends Team, 2013), the view counts of Korean music videos increased threefold from 2012 to 2013. GS blurs the line between production and consumption. Many user-generated videos have been produced, circulated, and reproduced. The global audiences' reception,

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translation, and adaptation play an important role in popularizing the video. In a way, the phenomenon symbolizes the growing disjuncture and irregularities in global flows in terms of capital, people, media, technology, and ideology (Appadurai, 1990). In addition, GS allows us to understand the circulation pattern of popular music content on YouTube and the complex relationships among audiences, celebrities, and mainstream media in "the universal digital platform" (Oh & Park, 2012, p. 391).

In this article, we aim to understand how and why GS became popular through a chronological analysis of its global production, reproduction, circulation, and consumption. This study especially focuses on the global users' active role in producing and reproducing new meanings and the dynamic relationships between traditional and new media.

We argue that the phenomenal success of GS derives from a combination of several factors: its ingenious use of the existing K-pop fan base, the buy-in of major media outlets and celebrities, the active participation of global audiences, the unique features of the video, and PSY and his company's laissez-faire copyright policy that allows users to benefit from their participation. The dynamic relationships among all these factors were instrumental in the video's success. New media cannot function independently; rather, they must work together with traditional media outlets to popularize content.

The Audience in Transnational Media Flows

Scholars have noted the multidirectional and uneven flows of transnational culture by paying attention to the distinctive characteristics of different nations, the agency of global audiences, and the new technological environment (Appadurai, 1996; Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992; Iwabuchi, 2002; Kraidy, 2002; Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996; Straubhaar, 1991). Presenting the five dimensional interruptions in global cultural flows—ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes—Appadurai (1996) asserts that the concept of a global cultural economy no longer entails homogenization or Americanization, but rather "globalization is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even localizing process" (p. 17). Globalization represents the dynamic processes where local cultures interact with global cultures by producing hybrid cultural forms (Bhabha, 1990; Kraidy, 2002; Papastergiadis, 2005; Tomlinson, 1999). Hybridity symbolizes the dialectic relationship between cultural structure and agency. The global cultural condition is now characterized by "the dual forces of globalization and localization, cohesion and dispersion, and disjuncture and mixture, that capture transnational and transcultural dialectics" (Kraidy, 2002, p. 327).

Audience, as an agent of globalization, should be analyzed as the first and most important factor that shapes the complex and multilateral patterns of global media use. Morley (2006) suggests that an active local audience can interpret, negotiate, resist, or subvert the polysemic meanings of transnational media content, thus compelling media producers to adopt a glocalizing strategy. Ang (1994) argues that a homogeneous culture at a global level has never existed, because transnational content is often reproduced by local audiences. Therefore, the inflow of global media content to a local culture is a dynamic process that interacts with local values, preferences, and meaning systems.

Digital technologies and social media have changed the global cultural landscape, which has produced new audience practices. Web 2.0 technology allows users to communicate and collaborate with one another on a global scale. In particular, online media function as social spaces for fan communities and identity building (Bacon-Smith, 2000; Baym, 2000). In virtual communities such as social network services, wikis, and video sharing sites, users can reuse, rework, and redistribute globally circulated media content (Burgess, 2008). Such a converging media environment has blurred the boundary between the producer and consumer, leading to the dynamic interactions between production and consumption (Bruns, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Livingstone, 2004). Thus, media content is often "freely" circulated and distributed as a potential commodity for unanticipated markets. New media incorporate both "gift economy" (Barbrook, 1998) and "long tail economy" (Anderson, 2004).

Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) propose the model of "spreadable media" to explain the mechanism of media circulation. Spreadable media are portable, reusable, multiple, open-ended, attractive, collective, ambiguous, temporary, and localized content that rely on active audience participation. Transnational fans, diasporic communities, and pop cosmopolitans play important roles in circulating global content (Jenkins, 2004; Jenkins et al., 2013), enabling non-Western goods to enter the West.

YouTube is especially influential in spreading global popular content. Generally speaking, there are two types of YouTube channels: individual based and corporate based. The former is created by individual users, and the latter includes major network broadcasters, movie studios, and record labels. According to Burgess and Green (2009), these two categories symbolize YouTube's double functions as a "top-down" platform for content distribution and a "bottom-up" platform for creativity (p. 6).

The Globalization of K-pop

The transnational fever for Korean popular music (or K-pop) has developed hand in hand with the Korean Wave,² led by the extreme popularity of Korean TV drama series in East Asian countries in the late 1990s (Jeon et al., 2012; KOCIS, 2011; Shim, 2006). K-pop's success in Asia is associated with the political and economic changes in South Korea then (Kim, 2002). First, Korea's improved diplomatic relations with neighboring countries allowed Korean media to enter the regional market. Second, Korean media companies have experienced a severe loss of profits in the domestic market because of illegal music downloading since the early 2000. These factors forced the Korean music industry to expand globally for survival (Jeon et al., 2012).

Although K-pop may refer to any genre of South Korean popular music, it is generally limited to songs produced by K-pop idol bands, such as Girl's Generation, Super Junior, Wonder Girls, Big Bang, and 2NE1, and their management agencies, such as SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP

² In 1999, *Beijing Youth Daily* first coined the now popular term Korean Wave or Hallyu (韓流), which literally means "flows from Korea."

Entertainment. Modern K-pop started with the appearance of the boy band Seo Taiji & Boys³ in the early 1990s. This band created a new type of music by experimenting with musical instrument digital interface sound and incorporating Western music elements such as hip hop, rock, and metal. Since then, the inclusion of foreign music elements has become a common practice in K-pop songs. K-pop now is a hybrid music genre that mixes hip-hop, rap, electronic, and rhythm and blues (Hong, 2013; Shim, 2006). K-pop has been industrialized by music management companies by offering intensive training programs to idols and conducting research on the tastes of domestic and foreign fans (Shim, 2006).

A K-pop idol band for the global market often uses three strategies: the inclusion of a large number of idols with varying talents, the physical attractiveness of group members, and the creation of coordinated dance and singing as a group (Oh, 2013). Given that a producer's main concern is profit, producing singers that are globally attractive is a highly profitable strategy. Not surprisingly, Korean idol bands often consist of good-looking, well-trained members with different talents, who in particular appeal to Asian and Western female fans.

From the very beginning, K-pop songs have been produced in collaboration with transnational composers, songwriters, and choreographers. Music companies often seek to expand their market by producing hybrid music content and young stars with universal attraction (Jeon et al., 2012). Hong (2013) asserts that "K-pop is circulated as a stylish hybrid culture that mixes youth culture, appropriates Black music and emulates the White body, which combines 'political correctness' and multiculturalism in a safe way" (p. 339).

Since the late 2000s, Korean popular content has expanded its base beyond Asia to Europe, Latin America, and North America by taking advantage of social media and mobile devices (Hong, 2013; KOCIS, 2011). Specifically, YouTube and other social network sites such as Twitter and Facebook have greatly influenced the dissemination of K-pop in the world. SM Entertainment and YG Entertainment, two of the largest K-pop management agencies, partnered with YouTube and opened accounts in 2009.

According to Jeong and Song (2012), K-pop music videos on YouTube, based on the singers' affiliated with SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment, were viewed 2.3 million times in 235 countries around the world in 2011. As shown in Figure 1, K-pop has the largest share in Asia, with Japan being the largest market, followed by Thailand, Taiwan, Vietnam, Korea, and other countries

³ Seo Taiji & Boys is highly valued as a revolutionary pop music band in South Korea, which expanded the scope of Korean pop music genre and its market. The male band is composed of the underground bassist-singer-songwriter Taiji Seo and two rapper-dancers Hyunsuk Yang and Juno Lee. With their socially critical messages and unconventional practice of music production free from the control of broadcasters, the band challenged and innovated the broadcasting network-controlled music market (Shim, 2006). Hyunsuk Yang, a member of the band, later established a record label called YG Entertainment, which became one of the most influential K-pop companies. Although Seo Taiji & Boys influenced K-pop's musical content and form, Suman Lee, founder of SM Entertainment, developed K-pop as an industrial commodity. By producing well-trained idol bands that appealed to international teenage girls, Lee industrialized the star-making system of K-pop.

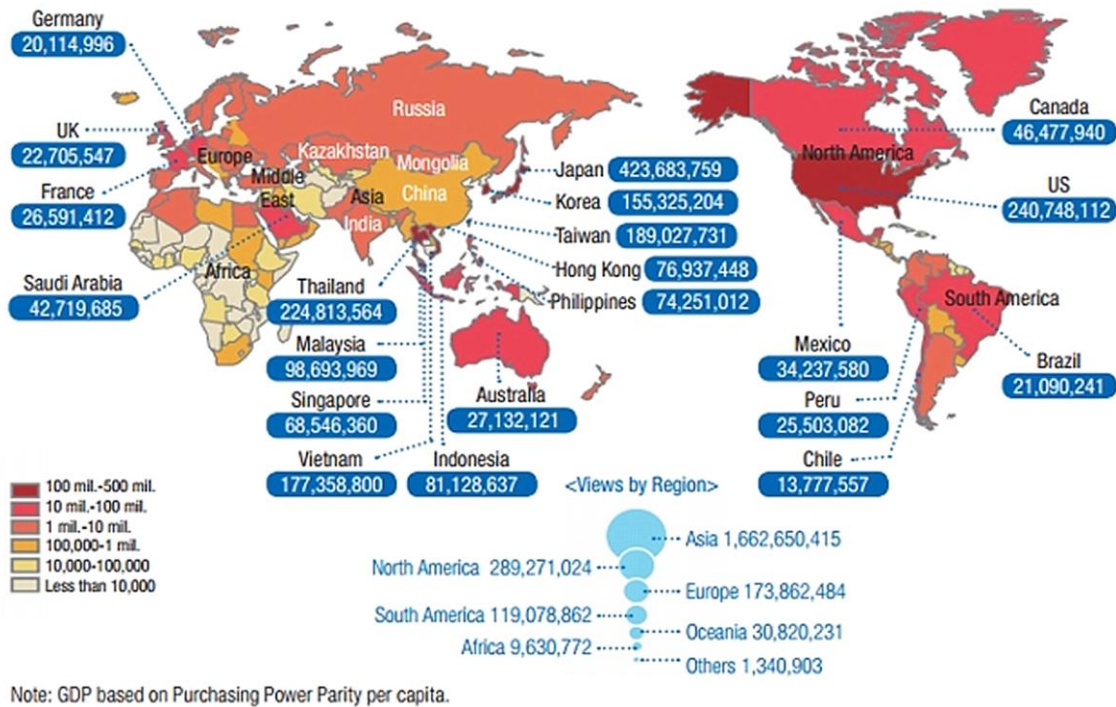


Figure 1. View Counts of K-pop Videos on YouTube, January 1 to December 5, 2011.

Reprinted from "Lessons from the Global Success of K-pop," by M. Seo, 2012, *SERI Quarterly*, 5(3), p. 62.

Outside Asia, the United States is a leading market. K-pop also enjoys significant popularity in Canada, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, France, Peru, the United Kingdom, Germany, Brazil, and Chile.

In response to this global fandom of K-pop, YouTube created an independent music category of the K-pop genre in December 2011. It was the first time when YouTube introduced a particular country's music as a music genre similar to rock, folk, and jazz (Jeon et al., 2012, p. 61). YouTube is pivotal in producing secondary user and future fans of K-pop while maintaining the music's popularity in South Korea and Japan (Oh & Park, 2012).

PSY is not a typical K-pop singer. He started his singing career in 2001. His first single, "Bird," gave the Korean pop market a refreshing jolt with blunt lyrics, bizarre dance, and ridiculous performance. His first album, "PSY from the Psycho World," features humor and a socially critical message, which shocked Korean music fans. He then became an icon of the "bizarre." Although PSY's music style and beat are similar to K-pop, his song, lyrics, appearance, and dance style are at odds with traditional K-pop produced by the industrial model.

In this essay, PSY is put under the umbrella of K-pop for three reasons. First, he signed a contract with the K-pop management agency YG Entertainment in 2010 to utilize the company's global fan base to promote his music. According to Korean blogger "dshower" (2010), PSY needed YG's experience, knowledge, and reliable management in the global market. Second, PSY's music is categorized on YouTube as K-pop. Third, the success of GS expanded the global fan base and the scope of K-pop and endorsed PSY's wise choice of partnership with YG. According to a YouTube Trends report (YouTube Trends Team, 2013), while more than half of the viewers of top K-pop channels were from the Asia-Pacific region in 2011, the viewership trend has reversed since GS became popular. Now, most viewers are located outside the Asia-Pacific region, and over 90% of the viewers are outside Korea. The U.S. viewership of videos of other top K-pop artists doubled after the success of GS.

Method

In this article, we examine the diffusion patterns of GS on YouTube by performing a keyword research on Google Trends for the first 100 days after the video's release, from July 15 to October 22.⁴ The first 100 days is significant, because GS reached its number two spot on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and was viewed more than 500 million times on YouTube. This period also provides sufficient information for us to understand how the video was disseminated.

The Google Trends graph was divided into four stages based on the velocity and characteristics of the dissemination. Each of the four stages is interpreted in correspondence with major events, PSY and his company's promotional efforts, and audience participation that occurred in the same period.

We also briefly analyzed how users responded to the video during this period of time. The first author performed keyword searches using the phrase "Gangnam Style" multiple times in late October 2012. More than 200,000 videos were generated, and only the videos with more than 1 million hits were analyzed.⁵ As of October 22, 2012, a 149 video clips had been collected that had more than 1 million views. Among these videos, PSY's official account published 15 clips, including the original GS music video, a video about its production process, a few teaser ads, PSY's concert videos, and TV show clips featuring PSY and others. Twelve original videos were uploaded by mainstream media or by the hosts of

⁴ Google Trends offers graphs based on its own analysis. The analysis indicates the probability of a random user finding a particular search term from a certain location at a certain time. The horizontal axis represents the date, and the vertical axis represents how many searches have been conducted, which is relative to the total number of searches conducted on Google over time. The data represent a scale from 0 to 100. To arrive at those values, Google Trends first normalizes the data, divides each point by the highest value, and then multiplies by 100.

⁵ YouTube is not a neutral platform. Rather, different viewers obtain different information depending on a user's language, search preference, location, and past activity. YouTube also faces the problem of artificial inflation of viewership (Huffington Post, 2012). Our search was conducted in English and the United States. At the time, several countries such as China, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey officially banned YouTube and results of these countries are not included in the analysis.

the programs, such as *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *On Air with Ryan Seacrest*, and *The Beat of New York*, to their official YouTube accounts. The remaining 122 clips were user-generated content. These videos were posted by users from 23 countries. North America and Asia had the most uploads: 42.6% ($N = 52$) of the videos were posted by users in the United States and Canada, 36% ($N = 44$) were posted by users in Asia, 9% ($N = 11$) were posted by users in Europe, 4.1% ($N = 5$) were posted by users in South America, 4.1% ($N = 5$) were posted by Australians, and 0.8% ($N = 1$) was posted by an Israeli. And 3.3 ($N = 4$) were posted by users whose origin was unknown. U.S. users had the most uploads ($N = 47$), followed by users from South Korea ($N = 15$), Thailand ($N = 6$), the Philippines ($N = 6$), the United Kingdom ($N = 5$), Australia ($N = 5$), Canada ($N = 5$), and Taiwan ($N = 5$). Interestingly, there was no video posted by users from the African continent. Generally speaking, there is a positive association between a country's purchasing power and the use of YouTube and K-pop, as shown in Figure 1. Obviously, technologically advanced countries still occupy central positions in producing user-generated content.

Analysis and Results

The dissemination of GS on YouTube in the first 100 days is divided into four stages based on velocity and characteristics. As shown in Figure 2, the first noticeable sign appeared at the end of July. The graph showed a steady upward curve from late August, and then a sharp increase in early September. From late September to October, the graph fluctuated but maintained a general upward trend. The turning points are related to the buy-in of celebrities and traditional media and audience participation. Generally speaking, the interactions between traditional and new media and the participation of influential celebrities and professional media producers as well as of fans played a central role in disseminating and popularizing the GS video.

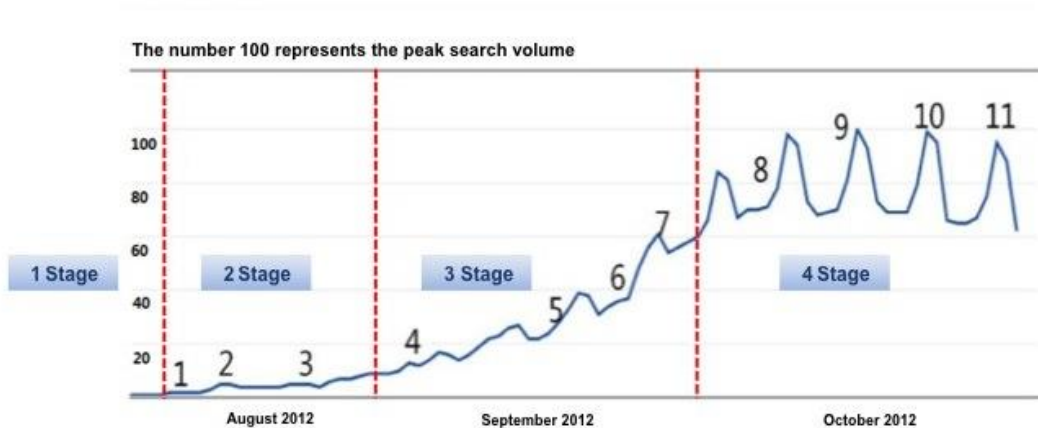


Figure 2. The Web Search Trend of GS, October 22, 2012.

We list in Table 1 the influential events that corresponded with the dissemination stages. From July 28 to July 31, several celebrities with millions of followers on their social network accounts shared the music video. Print media started to cover GS in early August, followed by coverage of broadcasters in late August. On September 14, PSY appeared on NBC's *Today Show* (numeral 6 in Figure 2 and Table 1). This event was broadcast live and subsequently posted on YouTube. On October 4, PSY held a free concert at the Seoul City Hall Square, and the concert was broadcast live on YouTube (numeral 9 in Figure 2 and Table 1).

Table 1. Major Events in Disseminating GS in the First 100 Days.

1	July 28 to July 31	The music video was shared on the social news website Reddit on July 28. Robbie Williams (July 28), T-pain (July 29), and Scooter Broun (July 31) shared the music video on their Twitter accounts.
2	August 2 to August 3	Featured in CNN International (August 2) and <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (August 3)
3	August 14	Number one on YouTube monthly chart
4	August 23	PSY's first appearance in U.S. TV show <i>Video Hits One's Big Morning Buzz Live</i>
5	September 4	MBC (Korea) hookup—PSY concert
6	September 14	Featured on NBC's <i>Today Show</i>
7	September 17	Nominated for Best Video, 2012 MTV Europe Music Award
8	September 27	Number two on Billboard Hot 100 chart
9	October 4	PSY concert at Seoul City Hall Square (YouTube live)
10	October 15	Australia TV show appearance
11	October 20	PSY's second whirlwind tour in the United States

Note: The numerals listed in the first column in Table 1 correspond with those in Figure 2.

The Four Stages of GS

As stated, we divided the dissemination of GS into four stages. The first stage is from the release date of the first teaser video to the time when a minimum detectable signal appeared in late July. The second stage starts from the end of July to late August, before PSY's first appearance on a U.S. television show. The third stage is from PSY's debut on a U.S. TV show to the date when GS reached number two on the Billboard Hot 100 chart. In the fourth stage, after September 27, GS had already become a global phenomenon. Our analysis pays particular attention to how GS was promoted, what content YouTubers produced, and how influencers and mainstream media reacted in each stage.

***The First Stage (July 11 to July 27):
Promotional Effort Combined With Core Fan-Initiated Diffusion***

The first stage represents the initial diffusion phase. This period is characterized by YG's promotional effort as well as the participation of core K-pop fans—active, loyal users who regularly consume and disseminate K-pop content—and of the Korean diasporic population. YG published three promotional ads (one teaser video and two endorsement videos featuring Korean celebrities) before the official release of the video on July 15. Core K-pop fans first commented on the video and created their own translation videos, reaction videos, and cover dance videos. At this point, users were limited to fans and participants of major K-pop websites and online communities. On July 25, PSY's company released a video featuring the production process, which further fueled the ongoing discussion. Also, PSY regularly checked the fans' responses (AP-Entertainment, 2012).

The teaser video, released on July 11, attracted a huge amount of interest. According to Muzalive (2012), a Korean social music platform conducting big data analysis, Twitter references to "Gangnam Style" numbered 3,000 per day after the release of the teaser ad. The number of references increased to about 7,000 on the day when the music video was officially released. A user named "We Love Dara" with 30,000 Twitter followers, who is a fan of K-pop girl idol group 2NE1, tweeted the original video immediately after its official release. However, the number of Twitter references to "Gangnam Style" gradually decreased until the end of July. During this period, the highly ranked videos were mostly those uploaded by PSY's official account, suggesting that content produced by mainstream media tends to be the most viewed (Burgess & Green, 2009).

Immediately after the official release of GS, YouTube users created several types of GS-related video clips such as reaction videos, translation videos, and cover videos. Global K-pop fans and the Korean diaspora played a key role in producing these videos.⁶ Translation helped disseminate GS. Starting from a Chinese translation video on July 17, the lyrics were subsequently translated into Romanized Korean, Vietnamese, English, Spanish, and Portuguese. These translations generally corresponded with the dates when GS was widely disseminated in each country.⁷ The uploaders mostly run K-pop channels on YouTube or K-pop fan sites. For example, the user "dearkorea," a Korean American in Minnesota, posted several articles to introduce GS on her blog, apart from uploading a translation video on YouTube.⁸ Her articles accounted for the meaning of "Gangnam." On August 23, 2012, Max Fisher, an editor at *The Atlantic*, cited dearkorea in introducing background knowledge of GS, which enabled English speakers to know about the satire (Fisher, 2012).

⁶ The first reaction video was published on July 17, 2012, by "Tronzzdmc05," run by eight Singaporean girls who are regular listeners of K-pop. It was followed by the reaction videos of the account "namastedwaejikm," operated by U.S. K-pop fan sisters Katie and Mindy Anderson, and of the account "KSpazzing," which is maintained by a couple in the United Kingdom.

⁷ Google Trends offers a regional search function, enabling users to compare the published dates of the translation videos and the time when *Gangnam Style* became popular in each uploader's country.

⁸ Retrieved from <http://mydearkorea.blogspot.com/2012/08/korean-music-psy-gangnam-style-and.html>.

Fan subbing, which means the fan's translation or subtitling of foreign media content into a local language, is significant in disseminating global content. In most countries, fan subbing is illegal because it infringes copyright. However, from the fans' point of view, subbing is an important mechanism by which they donate their talents and time for self-expression or self-fulfillment to the transnational audience community (Hong, 2013). Fan subbers are often intercultural elites who demonstrate profound understandings of the contextual meanings of content and languages. Their voluntary activities are essential in spreading global content. Korean producers often treat subbing as a cultural mediation and convenient instrument to make inroads to the global market.

The Second Stage (July to August 22): Influencer-Accelerated Diffusion

In the second stage, cultural influencers such as celebrities, professional media producers, brokers, and traditional media outlets were important players in producing and reproducing the contents. GS benefited from the impact of the influencers, and the influencers also benefited from the popularity of the video. To some extent, GS symbolizes the bandwagon effect and the force of conformity, whereby the rate of its use increased as more people adopted this phenomenon. At the same time, many YouTubers continued the appropriation of the video in more creative ways.

Celebrities, brokers, YouTube influencers, and professionals were essential in promoting the interest in GS. Although they initially only mentioned or commented on GS, they subsequently used the video or produced GS-related contents. The mention of the video by several celebrities and the social news website Reddit on July 28 marked a turning point. T-pain, a U.S. rapper whose song was rated number one on the Billboard 100 Hot chart, tweeted GS on July 29. On July 31, Scooter Braun, a well-known U.S. talent manager who promoted pop idol Justin Bieber, linked GS to his Twitter account. He expressed an interest in signing a contract with PSY, which drew international attention. Consequently, the number of Twitter references to "Gangnam Style" soared to 12,586 on the same day (Muzalive, 2012).

Media stars began to use GS in mid-August. For example, Canadian singer Nelly Furtado sang the song in her live concert, which was posted on YouTube on August 19, and a singer of the Korean boy idol group Big Bang produced a cover dance video and posted it on YouTube on August 21. These videos gained much attention as soon as they were released.

YouTube-based professional entertainers and filmmakers started to produce their own GS-related videos. "TheFineBros," a popular YouTube group specializing in reaction videos, published a teens' reaction video on August 19. YouTube channels of U.S. comedians "JustKiddingFilms" and "DavidSoComedy" uploaded parody videos respectively on August 19 and 20. "MysteryGuitarMan" published a cover video that mixes his own guitar and keyboard playing and PSY's voice from *Gangnam Style*. Users published parodies using names such as *Korean Style*, *Hongdae Style* (Hongdae, Korea), *Oppa-ya Daegu Style* (Daegu, Korea), *Oppa Chicago Style* (Chicago, United States), *Orang Shaba Style* (Shaba, Malaysia), *Village Style* (Thailand), *Jewish Style* (Israel), and so on. These video clips were among the most viewed, and they feature local scenery, cultural symbols, and regional images.

The most popular genre in this period is computer-based fan video such as mash-ups and animation/machinema. For example, a Canadian user, "lalatu," produced a mash-up video of the edited scenes of a North Korean military parade along with the melody of GS. "Coconeru," producer of the Pony Music Video, created an animation that features two ponies performing the riding-horse dance. "BuzzFeed" published a mash-up video with mixed melody from Nicki Minaj's *Starship* and lyrics from GS. These experienced users are skilled at quickly producing fan videos through editing, mixing, and using graphic designs.

Another notable genre is flash mob. Starting on August 17 from Sungnam, a city in South Korea, flash-mob videos were subsequently filmed in locales from Pasadena, California, to Sydney, Australia. These flash mobs were first led by domestic and Korean immigrants and were followed by people in major cities and colleges across the globe. Furthermore, as GS was developing into a major cultural phenomenon, traditional media also began to cover it. Indeed, CNN International and *The Wall Street Journal* reported on GS in early August.

In summary, professionals and fan video makers in the second stage played a significant role in producing user-generated videos and in dispersing GS. Amateur users also participated in flash-mob performances. As a result, GS was first ranked at the top of YouTube's most viewed videos monthly chart on August 14, topping superstars like Justin Bieber and Nicki Minaj.

***The Third Stage (August 23 to September 27):
Combination of Mass Media–Pushed Diffusion and New Media Dissemination***

During this stage, mass media endorsed and magnified the GS phenomenon. YouTube celebrities and ordinary users continued their effort to be engaged. The engagement allowed them to gain online currency and economic benefits. GS's explosive popularity on social media drew the attention of the U.S. mainstream media. Beginning with the cable channel Video Hits One's morning show *Big Morning Buzz Live*, PSY consecutively appeared on NBC's *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, ABC's *Nightline*, *Good Morning America*, and other programs. These events were driving forces behind GS. PSY's appearances on these shows were also posted on YouTube. The intensive exposure on television and radio drew global attention.

This stage is characterized by the massive production of parodies. Those who produced the most-viewed videos are called YouTube celebrities or YouTube personalities. These are YouTube-based entertainers who own multimillion-hit videos, such as "Barely Political" (United States), "Galo Frito" (Brazil), and "Bie the Ska I" (Thailand). Although these people exist outside mainstream media, they are as popular as any celebrity within the YouTube community. Some run several YouTube channels and provide content once or twice per week. They have millions of subscribers, enabling them to have a greater influence than ordinary users.

YouTube celebrities and professional filmmakers are skilled in integrating an original video with other popular characters and stories. They upload sophisticated and refined video clips. For example, user "JervyHou," a freelance photographer, wedding videographer, and music engineer, uploaded a parody

called *Gunman Style—Western Parody*. The video tells a story of an Asian man who longs to be a gunslinger in the American West by juxtaposing popular cultural icons such as a western gunman and a ninja, modified lyrics of GS, and Western-style rhythm and sound effects. In an interview video on his YouTube page, Jervy Hou stated that he aimed to use the video to attain professional benefits and social recognition (JervyHou, 2012). “Barely Political,” one of the most famous comedian teams on YouTube with more than 3.9 million subscribers and several comedy channels as of August 2014, produced a parody called *Kim Jong Style* that criticizes North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his father, Kim Jong Il, by using black humor and filk music.⁹

In addition, semiprofessionals such as public relations teams at educational institutions produced parodies. For example, “GoDucksdotcom,” the University of Oregon’s official YouTube channel, published a promotional parody by featuring the Oregon Duck mascot and the cheer squad. It is the first parody produced by an educational institution that features group dance and a university icon. The users replicated, reused, and re-created GS’s textual hooks such as dance, music, costume, expression, and even setting. Other educational institutions such as the U.S. Naval Academy and West Point followed suit and produced their own parodies modeled after the University of Oregon’s.

In a way, active YouTube users and celebrities use GS to gain or maintain popularity and in turn popularize the video. In an interview (Go, 2012), Hanwoo Park argued that successful K-pop content is disseminated through sources, authorities, and hubs, and among them hubs are the most important; active YouTube users are now hubs for information dissemination.

New YouTube members who had never published any clips began to upload GS-related videos. For example, user “bkyi1004” published footage that features a wedding ceremony in South Korea in GS style. “M Soto” produced a flash-mob video at Cornell University performing the horse-riding dance. And a Taiwanese user, “男彥黃,” uploaded a boy’s cover dance performance in GS style. These relatively unrefined videos often gained more than 1 million clicks within a month of their releases. PSY’s official YouTube account started to upload his previous music and live concert videos. GS was nominated as a best video at the MTV Europe Music Awards on September 17 and reached number two on the Billboard Hot 100 chart on September 27. By that time, GS had been recognized as a global cultural phenomenon.

The Fourth Stage (September 28 to Present): Globally Prevailed Diffusion

GS’s momentum has continued. Traditional promotional strategies have been combined with the decentered global diffusion online, which has gradually turned the music video into a remarkable cultural phenomenon. PSY’s official YouTube account has continued to upload his past music and live concert videos. The view count of GS on YouTube has increased exponentially. On September 28, the video hit 3

⁹ Filking is a fan culture dealing with music. According to Jenkins (2012), filking is best understood as “a vehicle for building or commenting upon pre-existing media texts, a way of pulling to the surface marginalized characters or subplots” (p. 252). The makers of this type of parody add and change the meaning of the original song to fit their own interpretation. The filked lyrics are similar to textual poaching.

million views. Discussions were focused on whether the video could maintain its momentum and break the record of Justin Bieber's *Baby*, the most viewed music video at the time.

On October 4, PSY held a free concert at the Seoul City Hall Square. The concert was broadcast live through YouTube and Ustream. During the two-hour live performance, the number of views from 145 countries reached 1.6 million. PSY held a Christmas concert in 2012 in Washington, DC, and President Obama attended the event. PSY's performances in Seoul and Washington, DC, were among the most searched based on Google Trends. PSY continued to tour Australia, the United States, and Europe to maintain global interest. The trajectory of GS's popularity challenges the traditional view of globalization as flowing from the West to the rest, but it simultaneously confirms the West's hegemonic position in defining global cultural interests.

A wide range of video types have been uploaded, including parody, cover video, fan video, translation, reaction, reloaded original video, flash mob, found footage, and tutoring. Generally speaking, parody is the dominant genre for user-generated videos, followed by cover videos, fan videos, and translation videos.¹⁰

Many of the most-viewed productions are of high quality. GS parody fever even penetrated into the domains of science and politics. Users created parodies called *Mitt Romney Style*, *Obama Style*, and *NASA Johnson Style*. These videos recorded high numbers of hits as soon as they were released on YouTube largely because GS already had a huge fan base.

The Global Reception of *Gangnam Style*

As Burgess (2008) points out, successful videos should have textual attractions to stimulate users' participation, which then become cultural repertoires. GS has several textual hooks for users to replicate in their own videos: an easy-to-follow song with an addictive electronic riff and repeated lyrics, a unique and funny dance, ridiculous characters and comic setups, and a satirical message.

An interesting aspect of the GS phenomenon is the "misheard" parody. Many English speakers misheard "Oppan Gangnam Style" as "Open condom style" (Wagner, 2012). In Japan, the phrase was mistranslated as "Oppaiga Gundam Style," which means "breast is Gundam Style" (Kim, 2012). Critics assert that GS has a linguistic playfulness that allows it to leap across language barriers. Many translation videos have been produced in different languages, and the misheard lyrics have inspired many videos.¹¹

As stated, GS is different from typical K-pop music video. PSY's generally viewed unattractive, face and plump body make him an atypical K-pop singer. Many scholars consider K-pop a music style

¹⁰ Of the 122 user-generated videos with more than 1 million views in our study, 41% are parodies, 17.2% are cover videos, 17.2% are fan videos, and 7.4% are translation videos.

¹¹ For example, user "mumu ngui" published a misheard parody that mixes English and Chinese lyrics. "Chad Wild Clay," which introduces itself as a band of parody, comedy, and pop songs, uploaded a video featuring the band singing the misheard song over a microphone.

performed by “manufactured” idol bands with catchy melodies, synchronized and well-coordinated group dance, and good-looking members—all of which aim to attract teenage girls (Hong, 2013; Shim, 2006; Shin, 2009). Despite the differences, online K-pop networks became the foundation for the dissemination of GS.

GS is characterized by its bizarreness, humor, and parody. In one scene, PSY sings in a black classic suit, and later it is revealed that he is sitting on a toilet. In his interview on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* (NBC) on September 10, 2012, PSY described his performance as “dress classy, dance cheesy.” Born as a Gangnameese, PSY occupies a privileged position to critique the pretentious culture of Gangnam, the richest area in South Korea. However, in his performance he acts as an underdog so as to reveal the production of the myth of Gangnam.

Shifman (2011) describes six common features of viral videos on YouTube: ordinary people, flawed masculinity, humor, simplicity, repetitiveness, and whimsical content. Particularly, she explains that the portrayals of flawed masculinity reflect the threatened contemporary male image, thereby invoking further creative dialogues. PSY’s pretentious bravado as a character of flawed masculinity is entertaining. For example, Karanovic (2012) argues that PSY’s appearance reminded U.S. audiences of Mr. Chow, a funny Asian man in the 2009 hit comedy *The Hangover*. Crystal Anderson (2012) claims that PSY corresponded with the racial stereotype of “comedic Asian male” as buffoonish, desexualized, and emasculated, which has been produced by Hollywood and U.S. television shows.

In the video *Gangnam Style Sensation* (YouTube KCCLA, 2012), Christopher Hanscom, a professor of Asian languages and cultures at UCLA, argues that the GS video’s most important element is its satires on the materialistic lifestyle of the Gangnam district and PSY’s self-mockery as a Gangnameese. Generally recognized as representing “B-class culture,” GS symbolizes lowbrow taste and the “thug” spirit (Bae, 2012).¹² Director of the Korean Art Critics’ Association Seokyong Jang argued, “B-class culture is not about the quality of the art itself” but rather seeks to rebel against the “mainstream” (Bae, 2012). B-class culture is believed to prosper in South Korea because of increasing individualism, which allows the youth freedom for personal expression and choice without experiencing much social pressure. According to Hyungseok Lee (2013), in Korean society dominated by the top 1%, B-class culture represents how people of the 99% desire social changes.

Many artists who produce B-class culture with low budgets still seek to become financially successful. PSY was successful precisely because he catered to such sentiments. Since his debut in 2001, B-class sentiment is a major feature of PSY’s music. PSY’s ridiculous but critical message challenges the submissive image of K-pop and positions him not as a manufactured singer but an artist.¹³ Hong (2013)

¹² The term *B-class culture* derived from post-World War II German film producers. Compared to the Hollywood production system, these film producers self-mockingly called themselves B-class because of their low budgets and lower production quality. Now the term describes low-budget art that features satire, retro, criticism, or alternative views.

¹³ For example, PSY rapped anti-American lyrics against the War in Iraq after a Korean hostage was killed in 2004, which won him acclaim from some U.S. fans (Imam, 2012).

asserts that PSY's difference from other K-pop bands may expand the influence of K-pop beyond young female fandom.

The GS phenomenon also can be understood through Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) notion of the carnivalesque, which subverts social hierarchies through joyful performance and humor. By mingling the real and ideal, emperors become beggars and fools become wise; thus, carnival blurs the social hierarchy and undermines the dominant ideology. The collective laughter creates a common bond and a sense of community among the ordinary. Given that most YouTubers belong to B-class culture, PSY's video provides an easy channel for social critique and escapism at a time of global economic recession.

PSY and his management agency took advantage of YouTube as a promotional and distributional platform. Song (2012) points out that PSY and YG Entertainment were skilled in managing customer interactions and the brand. In particular, their decision not to enforce the copyright was an effective strategy to disseminate the video. Such a practice was uncommon in the Korean pop music industry then, because producers and distributors generally attempted to restrict users' appropriation of copyrighted content. PSY and his company's strategy inspired users to generate their own products and benefit financially and symbolically.¹⁴ According to a YouTube Trends report, in the first two weeks after its release, almost 1,000 videos with "Gangnam" (in English) in the title were posted on YouTube (YouTube Trends Team, 2012). The video spread to 220 countries in only two months and climbed to the top of the music charts in 30 countries (Cho, 2012).

PSY and his company benefited financially from their copyright policy. Given the enormous surge of YouTube content, videos that are not viewed or spread are buried.¹⁵ In an environment of content abundance, gaining popularity is more important than controlling access, because the creators and copyright owners can also make money in other places. Generally speaking, for music streaming and download revenues, the composer or writer obtains 9%, the performers share 5%, 46% belongs to the download site, and YG has 40%. In this case, PSY shares the composing revenue, performing revenue, and the revenue with YG (Park, 2012). For iTunes video revenues, 70% belongs to YG and other copyright holders, and 30% belongs to iTunes. PSY also obtained revenue from his appearance fees on TV, in advertisements, and at other occasions. PSY reportedly earned \$400,000 to \$500,000 per ad. PSY earned \$8 million from YouTube (Stern, 2013).

The strategic choice of a *laissez-faire* copyright policy is in sharp contrast to the tight control over copyrighted materials in the United States (Jenkins et al., 2013). Although YouTubers may enjoy the right

¹⁴ Korean users may earn one cent of U.S. currency per click on YouTube (S. H. Lee, 2013). In some cases, they start to make money from 100,000 views (Yun, 2009). In the United States, in June 2012, the average rate of "pre-roll" video ads on YouTube was \$9.35 per 1,000 views, and it dropped to \$6.33 in March 2013 (Hamilton, 2013).

¹⁵ For example, after YouTube launched a new revenue-sharing program in April 2012 that automates the ad-pairing process, the new content posted on YouTube surged from 48 hours per minute to 72 hours per minute (Hamilton, 2013).

to fair use, they cannot use copyrighted materials created by U.S. media for profit. The example suggests, as Jenkins and his colleagues argue, that the spreadable media brings about a new cultural logic and that fans' participation in the media circulation enhances the product value. Although some of the examples given by Jenkins and his colleagues can be viewed as the effort of media companies to exploit the "free labor" of the fan communities, GS's co-creation model allows fans to share profits.

Discussion and Conclusion

This essay examines the global circulation and consumption of the *Gangnam Style* video. The buy-in of celebrities and traditional media played a huge role in creating the global phenomenon. Content produced by mainstream media were regularly uploaded on social networking sites, websites, and blogs, thus amplifying their impact and the impact of GS.

Remarkably, a wide range of users functioned as bridges between the original music video and the mainstream media. They include celebrities, YouTube influencers, mainstream media's official YouTube channels, professional filmmakers, fans, the diaspora, and active participants. GS became popular due to a combination of several factors: (a) the active role of K-pop fans, (b) the subsequent participation of global audiences that created a bandwagon effect, (c) PSY's marketing strategy to enforce a noninfringement copyright policy, (d) the textual hooks of the video, and (e) PSY and his company's regular promotional efforts. It is the dynamics of all these factors that produced the success of GS.

The case study suggests that the online sphere is still a hierarchical world and that some people are more powerful than others. The complex layers of interactions between K-pop fans, celebrities, mainstream media, and ordinary users magnify the influence of networked audiences. These global networks speed up the circulation, consumption, production, and reproduction of GS through the dynamic interactions among the uneven and unequal agents and agencies, in which new cultural, social, and economic values are created and traded.

As is shown in this study, traditional and new media outlets work together in making GS successful. Therefore, we argue that new media cannot be studied independently. Rather, they have to be analyzed by looking at the holistic media environment and media ecology to understand how meanings are produced and reproduced.

Past globalization theories often privilege information flows from the West to the rest. However, new communication technologies enable semiperiphery and periphery countries to enter the global market more easily. These countries can become the origin of creativity and innovation, which challenges the dominant position of Western producers and simultaneously feeds content to Western media.

Last, we are witnessing new cultural and economic logics in media productions. Although media producers, especially in the West, often view tight copyright control as essential for economic success, the new media environment drastically devalues content that cannot spread, which suggests that producers should rethink Western-style copyright policies and controls in international trade negotiations.

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