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Global Audience Participation in the Production and Consumption of Gangnam Style

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GLOBAL AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION
IN THE PRDUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF GANGNAM STYLE

by

SOOKEUNG JUNG

Under the Direction of Professor Hongmei Li

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the cultural consumption of the Korean music video *Gangnam Style* in the broader context of the increasing popularity of Korean popular content, often called the Korean Wave, and of complex conditions of transnational consumption. Specifically, it investigates why the music video *Gangnam Style* gained popularity not only in East Asia but also over the world, how it is circulated, and what conditions contribute to its success. It focuses on the role of the networked audiences and the interactions between the networked audiences and mainstream media through a chronological analysis on the distribution and reproduction process of *Gangnam Style* on YouTube. Through the case study of *Gangman Style*, this thesis attempts to rethink the established globalization theories and to suggest new perspective of cultural circulation in the globalized and digitalized media environment.

INDEX WORDS: K-pop, Gangnam Style, YouTube, Audience, Participation, Global circulation

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SOOKEUNG JUNG

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2014

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by

SOOKEUNG JUNG

Committee Chair: Hongmei Li

Committee: Hongmei Li

Leonard R. Teel

Sharon Shahaf

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to
my love Kihun, Beom and Dan,
and my first step to academia.

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1 INTRODUCTION

On December 17, 2012, YouTube published ‘Rewind YouTube Style 2012.’ The video includes ten YouTube stars who found their way into the limelight during the same year. The music video *Gangnam Style* was placed at the top of the list. As the mash-up video indicates, *Gangnam Style* was one of the most notable phenomena in the world of popular culture in 2012 in that a Korean song by an unknown singer has gained tremendous popularity throughout the world in a few months.

Gangnam Style symbolizes the global consumption of Korean popular culture. Created by the unknown Korean musician PSY,¹ the mash-up video, featuring PSY’s funny dance moves and catchy music beats, went viral through YouTube and Social Network Service (SNS) services after it was released online on July 15, 2012. The song reached number two on the billboard Hot 100 chart in less than two months. The music video broke the 800-million-views record of Justin Bieber’s *Baby* and became the first YouTube video that reached a billion views according to a report on December 21, 2012 (Gruger, 2012, December 21). PSY’s online popularity also went offline. He was invited to perform in various countries. On New Year’s Eve 2012, PSY and rapper MC Hammer performed in New York City in front of more than a million spectators on site (Bora, 2013, January 2). The original music video remains the number one spot of the world’s most watched videos in YouTube as of March 2014.

¹ PSY is a South Korean singer, songwriter, rapper, dancer and record producer. His real name is Park Jae-sang and was born December 31, 1977. PSY debuted with his full-length album *PSY from the Psycho World* in January 2001. His first single *Bird* gave the Korean pop market of those days a refreshing jolt with blunt lyrics, bizarre dance and ridiculous appearance. At that time, he brought the term of “엽기 (yup-gi, 獵奇, bizarre)” into vogue.

More importantly, the impact of the *Gangnam Style* phenomenon has extended beyond PSY's singular music video. According to a YouTube Trend report (2013, July 15), the views of Korean music videos in a year after the release of *Gangnam Style*, have recorded a threefold increase over the previous year. This means *Gangnam Style* has changed the landscape of Korean pop music industry and pulled the growth of K-pop in the online music market. Therefore, the successful case of *Gangnam Style* can be a key clue to understand the current global circulation of K-pop.

1.1 Theoretical Background of the Study

The rapid growth of Korean popular culture, called *Korean Wave* or *Hallyu*, has attracted attention from many cultural researchers. Korean popular culture has become one of the most important subjects in East Asian cultural studies over the past ten years. Few studies on Korean popular culture were produced until around 2000, but even the little that existed did not pay attention to the global production and consumption of Korean popular content. This is because Korean popular content abruptly appeared in the global market. From the late 1990s, Korean popular content including Korean dramas, films, and music started to become popular in China. Now Korean popular content have gone beyond the borders of East Asia and reached all over the world (Hong, 2013; Jeon et al., 2012; Son, 2011). Specifically, Korean popular music, called K-pop, has extended the fan base to part of the Middle East, Africa, South and North America, and Europe.

Since Korean culture has not been dominant in modern Asian history, Korean Wave's abrupt and unexpected success has surprised many observers. Most importantly, Korean popular content with a local language and cultural code has mainly focused on the domestic market. Nonetheless, Korean Wave has gained tremendous popularity around the world and has formed

global fandom beyond East Asian markets and the Korean diasporic network (Hong, 2013). The dominant globalization discourses, which focus on North American and Euro-centered cultural domination and transnational cultural flow mediated by mass media, cannot explain the current Korean Wave phenomenon. In this way, as the Korean popular content has shown noticeable paths in the global market, a considerable amount of research on the cultural phenomenon has been generated for a decade.

The earlier studies on *Korean Wave* can be divided into three categories. First, the policy research examining the economic potential of *Korean Wave* have been abundant (Chung 2001; Ha, 2006; Ha & Yang 2002; Kim Y.D. 2005; Kim & Kang 2000; Park 2001; Yoon 2006). In a meta-analysis of 250 Korean research papers on Korean Wave from various academic fields, Seunghye Son (2009) finds the strong emphasis on policy suggestions rather than on accumulating fundamental information about the audiences and markets of the importing societies. This research applies the logic of cultural industry. Based on the analysis of dissemination of Korean media content in East and Southeast Asia, the researchers suggest various export strategies for the growth of Korea's cultural industry. These export-centered studies which stem from the perspectives of cultural nationalism tend to overlook the existing cultural inequality on global mediascape which resulted from dominant power of transnational media corporation and overestimates the potential of the content which is supported by Korean government.

The second research trend examines diverse textual attractions of Korean media culture to Asian regional audiences (Hanaki et al., 2007; Heo, 2002; Iwabuchi, 2008a; Yang, 2003; Yoo & Lee, 2001). Focusing on how Korean popular culture is consumed and accepted in the social and cultural context of each country, these studies attempt to discover the characteristics of Korean media content as well as of Asian audiences. According to Ryu et al.(2003), the prevalence

of the *Korean Wave* resulted for several reasons: high quality of the content including outstanding actors and actresses, compelling stories, production skills, and price competitiveness; cultural demands of importing countries, which are accompanied by their political, economic, social, and cultural growth; non-violent and non-sexual content of Korean popular culture; and Korean culture is less threatening to East Asian countries than that of Japan or the U.S. In the same vein, many studies have been conducted using the notion of “cultural proximity” to understand how Korean popular culture is consumed and accepted in the social and cultural context of each country (Hanaki et al., 2007; Heo, 2002; Iwabuchi, 2008; Yang, 2003; Yoo & Lee, 2001). Jin Heo (2002) and Sekyeong Yoo and Kyeongsook Lee (2001) argue that the cultural proximity of Korean popular content, especially Confucianism and modern Asian urban lifestyle, works as a crucial element to attract Asian audiences. However, this perspective is confronted with a criticism that consumption of Korean media content in Asia should be examined with multisided angles because Asian audiences have various social and cultural identities and historical experiences (Hanaki et al., 2007; Ling & Tong 2008; Mori 2008; Yang F. K., 2007). In addition, the concept of ‘cultural proximity’ can no longer account for the simultaneous dissemination and consumption of Korean popular content over the world beyond Asian areas in a digitalized media environment.

The third line of approach considers *Korean Wave* as a case of globalization of local popular culture (Cho, 2005; Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Kim, H. M., 2005; Lee, D.Y., 2004; Lee, K. H., 2008; Lee & Won, 2005; Shim, 2006; Shin, 2003). From a critical perspective, these researchers claim that *Korean Wave* phenomenon should be considered not only in the aspect of cultural characteristics and textual attractions, but also in relation to political relations and economic integration, because culture is constituted in dialectical and complementary relations with

politics and economy (Ching, 2000). These researches view *Korean Wave* as outcomes of global/regional tactics of transnational/local media firms and Korean government, thus theorizing the discourse based on ideological realm: cultural nationalism, neoliberal commercialism, post-colonialism etc. In this sense, the success of *Korean Wave* can be considered as the outcome of complex interactions between the industrial integration carried by neoliberal capitalism, national restrictions and the emotional sensitivity based on historical ties (Lee, D. Y., 2004; Onishi, 2006; Chua, 2004). Specifically, Jongwon Lee & Yongjin Won (2005) and Dubo Shim (2006) recognize Korean popular music as a hybrid culture produced by the mixture of western cultural style, unique star system of Korean media industry, and regional fandom culture. Paying attention to synchronic modernization and globalization in the Asian area, they suggest integration of Asian regional culture by mediation of Korean popular culture (Lee & Won, 2005). This notion has a significant implication in that it shows a possibility that local/regional culture integrates against global cultural dominance. However, since the concept of hybridization can also be a commodification strategy of transnational media content toward local/regional market (Mosco, 1996; Van der Veer, 1997), hybrid features of Korean media content alone cannot demonstrate formation of a regional bloc in the global media market.

Although various research on the Korean Wave have been conducted in textual, theoretical, and industrial perspectives, most studies focused on a certain country, particularly East Asian countries like China and Japan and consumption preference and patterns of the audience. This limited access cannot grasp the current brisk circulation of the Korean popular content over the world beyond the Asian market. More recently, the convergence media culture has increased the velocity and scope of the Korean Wave circulation. In order to understand the cultural impact

and its implication of this new trend of cultural flow, detailed observation and practical approach on the networked audience and transnational cultural circulation are required.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to understand how and why Korean popular culture, specifically K-pop, is circulated and consumed across the world. To comprehend the transnational circulation of the K-pop in the context of convergence media culture, this research takes note of the case study of the Korean music video, *Gangnam Style*. What is especially intriguing in *Gangnam Style* phenomenon is that not only is the music video endlessly circulated online, but numerous user-generated videos centered on this video have also been circulated, produced and reproduced, thus amplifying the impact of the *Gangnam Style* music video as a cultural product and process. This music video not only problematizes the idea of viewing cultural globalization as merely flowing from the West to the rest, but also blurs the line between production and consumption. The global audiences' reception, translation and adaptation played an important role in popularizing and disseminating this phenomenon. In a way, this music single symbolizes the growing disjuncture and interruptions between capital, humanity, media, technology, and ideology (Appadurai, 1990) and the increasingly complex connectivity and networks of interconnections on a global scale (Tomlinson, 1991).

Compared with the previous research on the Korean popular culture, this case study provides insights into the way that fans of transnational cultural content are engaged in a system of global media flow, which are determined by cultural, economic, and political forces. Some studies on Korean popular content have already focused on local audiences and active fans, this study pays attention to the new trends of Korean pop music, specifically the dynamic interactions

between global networked audience and the music video, and between new media and mainstream media in the interactive and converging media environment.

In order to catch detailed production and consumption activities of global audiences, and at the same time, understand their roles in the context of cultural globalization, new research design encompassing quantitative and qualitative analysis on the circulation and consumption of *Gangnam Style* are needed. The research method is basically a chronological analysis of *Gangnam Style* videos' global production, consumption, dissemination, and re-production. The circulation of the music video in different cultures and global users' active role in producing and re-producing new meanings in the process are explored. This closer observation on the circulation and consumption of K-pop, which has the strongest and rapidest dissemination power among Korean popular culture, helps to account for the reality of converging media environment and growing potential of global networked audience, thus elucidating the complexity of cultural globalization to some extent. Therefore, this innovative approach to the study of global consumption of local media content can break new ground in cultural globalization research.

The research questions focus on how the music video was disseminated and consumed over the world, what roles users played in the diffusion process, and what conditions enabled the success of *Gangnam Style*. With the audience-centered approach on the Korean popular culture, this study contributes to delineate the position and dynamic transformation of a global audience consuming Korean popular culture. In addition, this case study offers an opportunity to rethink the established globalization theories and to suggest new perspectives of cultural production and consumption as a cultural shift in the context of globalization and digitalization.

1.3 Outline of the Study

This study consists of six chapters. Chapter one is an introduction which gives an overview of the study. The theoretical background of the study reviews the existing research on Korean popular culture. Next, the purpose and value of the study are discussed. In addition, the research objectives and outline of the study are listed.

Chapter two provides a brief introduction of the Korean Wave, particularly K-pop and its chronology focusing on specific genres, importing countries, and marketing strategies. This chapter illustrates characteristics of K-pop and its cultural distinctions based on a review of the previous research and media articles. In addition, the textual distinctions of the music video, *Gangnam Style* are described.

Chapter three is a literature review scoping on relevant theoretical arguments. This chapter sets up the analytic frame for examining the Korean Wave and active circulation of Korean media content in the world. The theoretical concepts include cultural imperialism, flow and contra-flow, center-periphery, cultural hybridity, cultural proximity, cultural discount, and globalization. In addition, by using Paul du Guy and colleagues' concept of circuit of culture, this chapter addresses the interactions between production and consumption. Furthermore, discourse of cultural shifts which resulted from Web 2.0 technology focusing on Henry Jenkins's notion of spreadable media and fan studies is discussed.

Chapter four provides explanation and justification for the research methodology of this study. As a primary method, the chronological analysis on dissemination of *Gangnam Style* videos on YouTube is examined by using the functions of *Google Trend*. In addition, the user-generated videos are divided by genre, location, and the release date. Along with the empirical

analysis on the global consumption process of *Gangnam Style*, the time-periodic characteristics of interaction between the original music video and the user-generated videos are classified.

Chapter five contains an analysis on the dissemination and reproduction process of *Gangnam Style* videos. This chapter investigates textual characteristics and number of *Gangnam style* videos by diffusion period and genre, thus drawing cultural implications in the dissemination process of the videos. Additionally, the interactions between new media and mainstream media are examined.

Chapter six includes the theoretical and empirical findings concerning the global production and consumption of *Gangnam Style*. Applying the model “spreadable media” and “circuit of culture,” this chapter analyzes interaction between the networked global audience and the videos, and its outcomes. In addition, implications of the cultural phenomenon and the limitations of the case study are discussed. This chapter strongly supports the notion that current K-pop is transforming as a cultural commodity attracting participation of the global audience and utilizing convergence media actively, thus evolving as a successful model of cultural globalization in the digital environment.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of key theories and literatures to be used and discussed in the thesis. In terms of the study of current popular culture, it is important to understand the process of globalization. Globalization theories have focused on the ways in which political and industrial powers move media content around the globe, the uneven distribution nature of this movement, and popular texts and audience practices. Thus, this case study is situated

in the study of globalization of media, fan and audience studies, and cultural studies on transnational production and consumption.

The literature review of this work explores previous scholarship in five areas. First, general discussion about the transnational media flow is explored. Second, transnational consumption of local audience is studied. Third, emerging trends of the networked audience in converging media environment are reviewed. Forth, cultural studies on global production and consumption of media commodities are discussed. Finally, exploration of the existing work on the Korean Wave is provided.

2.1 Transnational Media Flow

Today, globalization has become a major frame of reference in international communication research and global cultural studies. Historically, globalization scholars have been concerned with the homogenization, synchronization, and westernization of global media system dominated by the transnational media industry of the United States. However, this cultural diffusion model has been criticized by the scholars saying that transnational cultural circulation is more complex and complicated. While media industries from the United States have had an undeniable impact on the world, the dominant power of the American media industries must take many factors into account. In order to better understand current transnational circulation of popular culture, this study outlines the scholarship to present about globalization and cultural flows.

Early studies on international communication identified transcultural media flows as dominance of western or American media over underdeveloped and less powerful countries. These studies paid attention to the one-sided, and a dominant-subordinate relationship between developed and developing countries. In particular, cultural imperialists consider culture and communication as an ideological structure. These scholars argue that global commercial media

industry, particularly U.S. hegemony have given rise to Americanization as well as homogenization of local culture (Hamelink, 1983; Schiller, 1991; Tomlinson, 1991; Tunstall, 1977). Herbert Schiller (1991) deliberates how imperialism was done and how much it has changed from the past. According to Schiller, cultural imperialism is the shift from the “Hard Power,” which means physical force such as military power, to the “Soft Power,” such as culture, an ability to get what you want by negotiating and cooperating rather than commanding. Thus, imperialism has just taken a different form – “cultural imperialism,” and the world is heading towards homogeneity through transnational media domination. Cees J. Hamelink (1983) also takes note of the power of transnational corporations as the primary agents of cultural synchronization. He indicates that American popular culture replaces local culture with U.S. media culture by global investment and marketing strategy. Considering the local culture’s assimilation into the U.S. commercial culture, John Tomlinson (1991) asserts cultural diffusion directs from the center to the periphery.

Although the transnational media circulation has the potential to preoccupy the global cultural market and to weaken local culture, the ‘one-way dominant flow’ thesis has faced robust criticism. As the many co-existent cultural phenomena based on intra-regional media flow apart from U.S. centric hegemony and interdependence in global economic relations have emerged, many scholars refute that cultural imperialism places too much emphasis on the ideological interpretation of cultural dominant and overlooks distinctness of various nations and autonomy of worldwide audiences and the change of media environment based on technological development. (Appadurai, 1996; Iwabuchi, 2002; Sinclair et al., 1996; Straubhaar, 1991; Thussu, 1992).

While there is no denying that the relationships between the West and the rest remains highly unequal, the development of new media technology and the economics in the dominated

countries have led to “asymmetrical interdependence” between unequal nations (Straubhaar, 1991). That is, U.S. media hegemony still exerts its influence in many developing countries, but local media systems autonomously work to some degree in cultural production and distribution. The industrial and technological advancement of the national and local media market have made transnational media circulation patterns more complex and multidirectional.

Paying attention to the change of transnational media circulation, Oliver Boyd-Barret and Daya Thussu (1992) suggest the advent of local resistance in the global media and “contra-flows” of information, which contrasts dominant flow of the U.S. global industry. They argue that ‘glocalization’ strategy of global media, which involves geo-cultural media and linguistic groups in order to maintain their cultural domination in local and regional markets, can help local cultural media to form reverse flows against the global media industry hegemony. David Morely (2006) points out that cultural imperialism does not account for glocalization, as a counterstrategy of global media producers to the minor flow from local mediascapes, such as cultural protectionism and local audience’s active role, thus failing to address the complexity of transnational media flow in a multilayered global sphere. Therefore, the inflow of U.S. content to local culture is a dynamic interaction with local values, preferences, and meaning systems.

With regard to the complexity of cultural flow, some scholars interpret the nature of cultural globalization as a dynamic force of cultural exchange, that is, hybridity (Tomlinson, 1999; Kraidy, 2002; Papastergiadis, 2005). Conceptualization of hybridity as a characteristic of globalization arose with postcolonial theories. Homi Bhabha (1990) regards a nation and national identity as a transitional social reality to reflect the ambivalence of the human psyche –“us” and “other,” rather than as a sign of the modernity. For Bhabha, the nation is a narrative strategy for the standardization of identity, an apparatus of power, and a form of institutionalized political

rationality, thus producing counter-narratives with the hybridization strategy in order to resist imperial domination. Focusing on the dialectic relationship between cultural structure and agency, Kraidy confirms that hybridity is a global existential cultural condition “to characterize the dual forces of globalization and localization, cohesion and dispersion, and disjuncture and mixture, that capture transnational and transcultural dialectics” (2002, p. 327). The concept of hybridity, however, encounters criticism for the conceptual ambiguity and structural vulnerability for anti-progressive appropriation. The critics refute that hybridity overlooks or justifies the commercial and capital nature of the global expansion process (Van der Veer, 1997), and overstates cultural dimensions, especially the unequal and asymmetrical relationships among countries, cultures, regions and audiences, thus leading to a neglect of the dynamic impact of structure (Golding, 1997).

As transnational cultural circulation no longer flows unilaterally, the dichotomous view of the cultural production and distribution are challenged (Appadurai, 1996; Iwabuchi, 2008a; Tomlinson, 1999; Thussu, 1997). Based on the “five dimensional disjuncture or interruptions in global cultural flow – ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples,” Ajun Appadurai asserts that the global cultural economy cannot any longer be interpreted by binary perspectives, nor does it necessarily imply homogenization of Americanization. “Globalization is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even localizing process” (1996, p 17). John Sinclair, Liz Jacka, and Stuart Cunningham (1996) also criticizes that the real world cannot be divided through binary concepts such as “center-periphery,” “dominance-subordination,” or “the West-the rest” intranational cultural flows. They take note of the clout of some metropolitan cities outside dominant nations, like the U.S., in cultural production and distribution. It is true that each “geo-linguistic region” such as Latin America, the Middle East, Greater China and the English

speaking world, Canada and Australia have one or two powerful metropolitan centers of audiovisual productions, and these peripheries have their own internal dynamics as well as global ties. Since each geolinguistic region is itself dominated by the regional cultural center rather than the U.S. global media center, the binary view of the world cannot properly explain semi-peripheral societies like Australia and Canada, and the cultural production capacity of peripheral countries.

In relation to a regional pattern of media flow, media industry strategy driven by the nation-state has triggered reformation of local/regional cultural circulation (Curtin, 2007; Keane, 2007; Lee & Won, 2005; Mosco, 1996; Thussu, 2007). In fact, Asian countries were generally reluctant to open their national and local cultural market to foreign cultural capital due to their past colonial experience (Hoskins & Mirus; 1988; Waterman & Rogers, 1994). However, this conservative attitude toward foreign culture quickly changed by widespread globalization and hyper-urban modernization. Riding on the neoliberal reform in the late 1990s, Asian media systems were rapidly commercialized, privatized, and industrialized. Asian countries realized more industrial opportunities for cultural markets, and at the same time, needs for protection of their own media industry (Iwabuchi, 2005). With the support of the state, Asian media systems have begun to reshape industrial structure and local and regional markets. According to Michael Keane (2007), the creative industrial clusters, as a part of cultural industry strategy, play a crucial role in globalizing regional cultures in East Asia. Since these clusters tend to provide cultural products and services for the global market rather than the domestic market, they become hubs that direct and organize transnational flows of media content, thus glocalizing the local/regional cultures. In the same logic, Michael Curtin (2007) pays attention to the emerging centers of transnational cultural production. As an approach to the complex patterns of cultural flow, Curtin suggests the notion of “media capital,” where resources, reputation and talent are concentrated

and complex forces and flows interact. Through empirical analysis on the East Asian megacities such as Hong Kong, Taipei, Singapore, Beijing and Shanghai, Curtain reconstructs the complex and intersecting networks shaping the role and status of these media capitals in the regional cultural market at various levels of development.

2.2 Transnational Consumption of Audience

Another explanation to the transnational cultural flow is focusing on the reception of audiences. The study of audience has been mainly concerned with why audiences preferred some transnational media content and what textual attractions of the content drew the attention of audiences. Based on the broad survey on the television networks in East Asian countries, David Waterman and Everett M. Rogers (1994) discover that the regional consumers tend to prefer their domestic media content to foreign content. Regarding this local consumption tendency, Colin Hokins and Rolf Mirus (1988) propose the notion of “cultural discount.” They illustrate cultural discount by showing that a media product tends to be less valued by foreign audiences who lack the cultural background, language and knowledge about the product. Examining the role and influence of television on cultural identities, Chris Barker (1997) supports the “cultural discount” theory. Barker claims that since global television is a proliferating source for the social construction of cultural identity, to which language is central, transnational television content is unevenly distributed and differently received. Particularly, language is a very essential issue in global cultural reception. Even though the imported programs are dubbed or subtitled, it is obvious that local audiences cannot fully appreciate the content. Hence, foreign programs are likely to be traded in reduced prices. Comparing to U.S. media content with cultural hegemony and prevalence of English language, non-western content cannot avoid a relatively high reduction of price in the global media market. However, as regional media industries have grown and possessed

competitive power, the cross-regional media flow has increased (Iwabuchi, 2002, 2004; Morley, 2006; Straubharr, 1996; Thussu, 1998).

In terms of the growth of region-centered media flow, Straubharr (1991, 1996) presents the theory of “cultural proximity,” which defines that transnational media content from an adjacent region is easily consumed by audiences rather than from less geoculturally related regions. Sinclair and his colleagues (1996) insist that television viewers prefer their local content despite the increasing multi-channel and global content. As an evidence of cultural proximity, Kalyani Chadha and Anandam Kavoori (2000) assert that local audience’s preference, along with the national gatekeeping policy and competitiveness of local media content, is one of the major elements to undermine the dominance of the Western media content in developing Asian countries. For Asian audiences, however, cultural proximity cannot be applied successfully, because the Asian area is geographically too broad and ethnographically too diverse (Hanaki et al., 2007; Lin & Tong 2008; Mori 2008). Even though East Asian countries have shared the same racial identity, it is hard to say that they have an emotional bond with each other. Presenting the survey on Taiwanese and Japanese audience, Iwabuchi (2002) emphasizes that rather historical experience and social connection with neighbor countries influence the preference of local audiences to the regional content.

The research on cultural consumption more boldly interprets the autonomy of local audience. As Morley indicates previously, local audience can play an active role in decoding transcultural messages, thus compelling transnational media producers to adopt glocalization strategy (2006). Ien Ang (1994), a feminist audience researcher, asserts that a homogeneous culture at a global level has never existed. This is because the transnational content within local cultural context is likely to be reestablished and reproduced (Iwabuch, 2005). Borrowing from Pierre

Bourdieu's notion that popular pleasure is characterized by an immediate emotional or sensual involvement in the object of pleasure, Ien Ang notes that "what matters is the possibility of identifying oneself with (a popular cultural text) in some way or other, to integrate it into everyday life. In other words, popular pleasure is first and foremost a pleasure of recognition" (1985, p.20).

2.3 The Networked Audience and New Trend of Cultural Flow

The cultural implication of audience has sharply expanded since the emergence of media convergence. As Web 2.0 technology allows users to communicate and collaborate with each other in virtual communities such as social network services, wikis, and video sharing sites, the boundary between producers and consumers has blurred, and the dynamic interaction between them has triggered sweeping changes in cultural circulation (Bruns, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Livingstone, 2004).

Although the advancement of new media technology has increased the speed and scope of media content circulation, audience studies take note of the users' participation and their motivation rather than technology (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkin, Ford, & Green, 2013). That is because the values of the shared content on converging media are created not by the technology, but by the users' activities which "reuse, rework, and redistribute" media content (Burgess, 2008). In this convergence media culture, media content is freely circulated, and at the same time, it is distributed as a potential commodity for unanticipated markets. This dual economic force – i.e., "gift economy" (Barbrook, 1998) and "long tail economy" (Anderson, 2005) depends on users' activities (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

In particular, fan studies focusing on fans' devotion to production and consumption of popular cultural texts show that fans are not abnormal but part of an enduring cultural phenomenon that have the potential of an active audience (Jenkins, 1992). More recently, fans' activities

with the new media technology demonstrate the functions of online media as a social space for fans community and identity-building (Baym, 2000; Bacon-Smith, 2000). Nancy Baym (2000) characterizes the fan community of soap operas as a social world where audiences who never meet face-to-face can build their online world through their participation. In the same vein, Camille Bacon-Smith (2000) proposes that online fan communities create spaces for interaction between creators and audience and the roles of producers and consumers are frequently interchanged in the community. Furthermore, she emphasizes fandom is not determined by simply geographical variation but by cultural choice which results from the active engagement of audience.

Based on the long term observation on online fan activities and grass-root participatory culture, Jenkins et al. suggests the model of “spreadable media,” which accounts for the mechanism of current convergent media circulation in accordance with active audience’s participation (2013). They uncover that spreadable media are potable, reusable, multiple, open-ended, attractive, collective, ambiguous, temporary localized content including fantasies, humor, parody, mysteries, controversies etc. Because of the nature of spreadable media, the increasing diversity of transnational media is an inevitable consequence. The main agencies of the spreadable media include transnational fans, diasporic communities, and pop cosmopolitans, who understand, connect, and desire cultural difference as well as are networked with new media (Jenkins, 2004; Jenkins et al., 2013). In addition, Jenkins adds that since the “networked computing is multidirectional and lowers transaction costs, it will insure that more non-Western goods make it into the West” (2004, p. 117).

Admittedly, there still exists a chance that the users’ participation can be exploited by the global media corporations. However, Jenkins et al. refute that even though audiences’ activi-

ties advantage global capital, their activities can benefit from the increased access to niche content and from the collaboration with producers to create and spread their own media content. In terms of the limitation of participation capacity caused by educational, economic, and geographic inequality, they dispute that the educated and affluent population exists in even underdeveloped countries, and the population may actively interact with each other as global networked audiences. Therefore, even though transnational spreadable media flow is still uneven and imbalanced, they can provide the networked audiences an opportunity to challenge global cultural dominance (Jenkins et al., 2013).

2.4 The Circuit of Culture: Interconnection of Cultural Meaning and Values

While the domains of producers and consumers have been blurred and interchanged, the media structure and industrial system cannot be ignored because audience activities are entangled within the global system of power. In order to understand the mechanism of current transnational cultural production and consumption, researchers should try to identify the complicated relationship between audiences, producers, media products, and any relevant contextual matter, with more comprehensive perspectives – neither simply a close-up view on the cultural texts, nor a wide view of global industries. This is because, on one hand, media contents are not simply the products of monolithic industries for making profit, nor the results of hegemonic organizations. On the other hand, popular cultural contents are not free from the industrial production system and media structure. That is, the cultural products and even audiences who are consuming the products have to be understood in the global political, economic, social, and cultural basement.

From this perspective, cultural studies on media production and consumption have focused on how cultural values and meaning are created, maintained, and transformed through various sites, moments, and practice. Considering the media as the biggest tool of circulation of the

shared social meaning, Stuart Hall (1981) presents the circuit of cultural model as a way of understanding the process of 'representational system.' In the four-stage heuristic model involving moments of production, circulation, use, and reproduction, Hall asserts that each stage exerts constraints on its associated meanings and practices, at the same time, it is constrained by other stages. Hence, the meanings in a cultural artifact are negotiated by the users. Refuting that Hall's model overlooks the interpretive nature of consumption as their lived experience in favor of social structure, Richard Johnson (1986) modifies this model focusing on the creative agency of consumers and their everyday life articulating social interactions between production and consumption and a linkage between the public and private domains of consumption. Reflecting this critique, Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus (1997) develop the revised model including totally interconnected spheres of representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation (See Figure 2.1). In this model, du Gay et al. claim that although the elements in each part of the circuit are considered as a specific object in cultural studies, they overlap and intertwine with complex and contingent ways in the real world and the meaning-making consistently processes through the interactions in the circuit of cultural production, consumption, and representation in everyday lives.

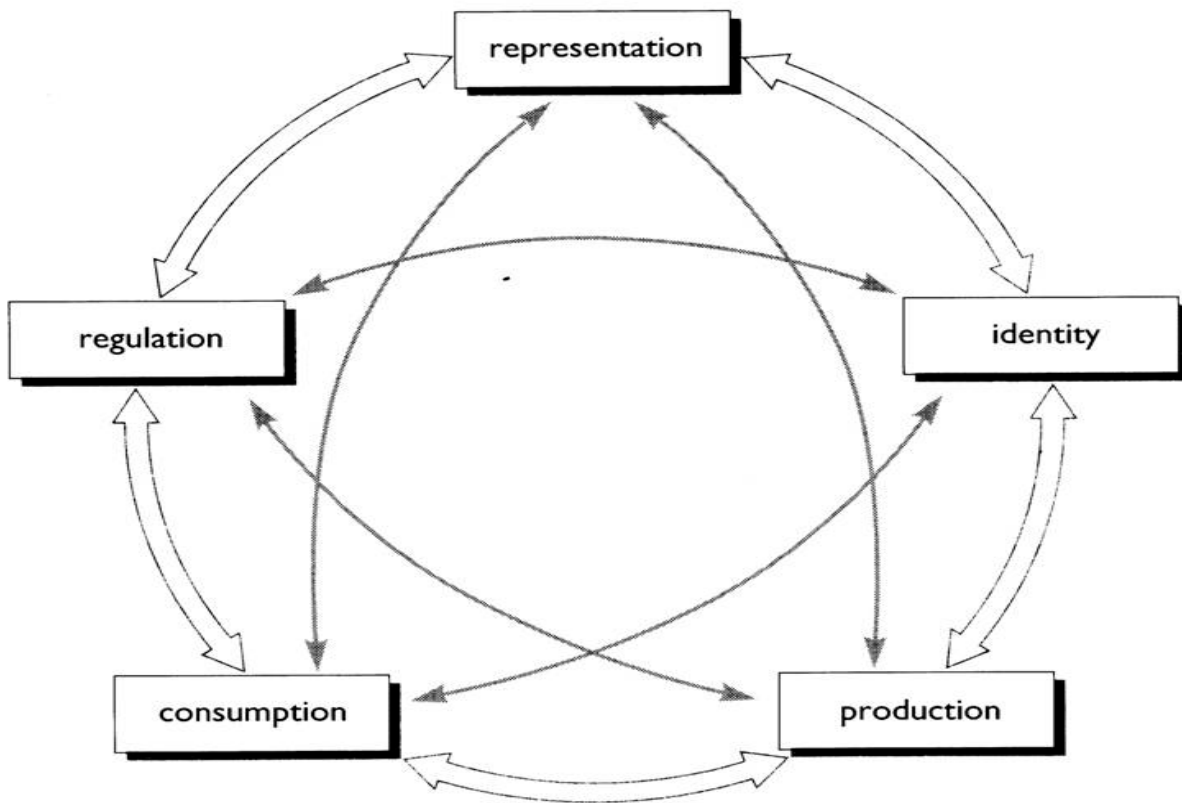


Figure 2.1 The circuit of culture

Reprinted from du Gay, P (1997). *Production of culture/ cultures of production*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

As new media like the Internet become a primary communication tool of everyday life, the model of circuit of culture has been adapted and applied in recent media studies. Nick Dyer-Witherford (1999) applies the model to the social sphere in which new media technology forms the site of struggle between capital and labor. He asserts that the Internet can play not only as a means of control and commercialization but also as means of democratic and resistant organization, because of the ambivalence of high technology. Matthew Soar (2000) utilizes the model to identify the dynamic roles of the cultural subjects as ‘cultural intermediaries’ in the moment of commercial cultural production. Based on the analysis of user-centered design, Guy Julier (2007) offers the updated model to articulate the everyday business and professional practices in the

context of social participation and associated identities of designers and consumers. In these ways, the status of the cultural circuit has been constantly changing in accordance with the contemporary social and cultural contexts including interactive, hyper-textual, and multi-functional media environment.

In sum, the transnational media flow is heading in two ways, the top-down flow of global dominant media capitals and the bottom-up flow of local and regional media market. The studies of global dominant flow in the international cultural market emphasize a unilateral stream from the central to peripheral region from the perspective of political economy. On the other hand, more recent studies of multilateral cultural flow focuses on the autonomous and plural movement of local or regional media market and audience. These media circulation patterns reflect ever-changing and complex global communication environment. Particularly, the rapid growth of national and regional media systems in Asia brings attention to the international media production and consumption. The dynamic interactions of local, regional, and global agencies within the Asian media market have formed a remarkable path in global media circulation. The Korean Wave has been in the middle of the cultural flow. In order to understand the transnational cultural production and consumption of Korean popular content, it is necessary to look closer at the reality of the converging media culture and its agents' dynamic interactions in the circuit of culture.

This study aims to examine the new transnational media flow in the convergence media culture through the analysis of *Gangnam Style's* transnational circulation. Through the dissemination and consumption process of *Gangnam Style*, how global users played an important role in making the Korean popular content successful is focused on. The study addresses the following questions:

- 1) How was *Gangnam Style* promoted, consumed, and disseminated over the world?
- 2) What roles did users play in the dissemination process of *Gangnam Style*?
- 3) How were the interrelationships between the original music video and its user-generated videos, and between new media and mainstream media in the dissemination process demonstrated?
- 4) What conditions enabled the popularity and success of *Gangnam Style*?

3 A DYNAMIC CULTURAL PHENOMENON, THE K-POP

The transnational fever for the Korean popular music, or its abbreviation K-pop, started along with the tremendous popularity of the Korean Wave led by Korean TV drama series in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong in the late 1990s (Shim, 2006; KOCIS, 2011; Jeon et al., 2012). Since the Korean drama series *What is Love*, which was aired on Channel 1 of CCTV and *A Wish Upon a Star*, which was broadcast by Phoenix TV in 1998, became a mega-hit in China, Korean popular songs began to be introduced to the Chinese cultural market. Starting from the success of *Forever*, the theme song of the TV drama *A Wish Upon a Star*, Chinese audience have become familiar with K-pop through Chinese radio programs, regional music television channels, and satellite channel such as Channel V and Star TV (Shim, 2006; Jang, 2012).

3.1 The History of the K-pop

Specifically, Korean dance music has formed its huge fan base among Chinese teens and twenties. H.O.T. and N.R.G., famous Korean boy bands in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, surprised music critics by selling tens of thousands of copies over a short period and attracting a big crowd. Following the boy bands, a number of Korean singers and idol groups have entered the Chinese music market. Referring to this unexpected popularity of the Korean popular culture,

Chinese journalists coined the new term *Korean Wave* or *Hallyu* (韓流), which literary means “flow of Korea.” Since Beijing Youth Daily first used the term *Korean Wave* or *Hallyu* in 1999, the terminology entered into general use through the repeated quotation of Chinese news media.

In the Japanese music market, K-pop has won success in the same way. The popularity of K-pop in Japan began with the big hit of the Korean drama *Winter Sonata* in 2003 (KOCCA, 2011, No. 10). Taking the opportunity of the Korean TV drama boom in Japan, the boys’ idol groups ‘TVXQ’ and ‘Big Bang’ etc. made a soft landing on the Japanese music market. Capitalizing on the inroads to Chinese and Japanese market, these young Korean stars have also gained tremendous popularity in Southeast Asia including Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore etc.

The reason why the Korean popular music was successful in Asian market is related to the political and economic change in Korean society in the 1990s (Kim, 2001). First, the improvement of diplomatic relations between Korea and neighboring countries such as China and Japan gave an opportunity for Korean popular content to enter the regional market. Korean government normalized the diplomatic relation with China in 1992 and gradationally lifted censorship or bans on the importation of Japanese popular culture since the beginning of the cultural exchange policy between Korea and Japan in 1998. As a result, Korean pop music has been far more diverse and creative, and then, easily exported to the Japanese market.

However, the most decisive motive of the K-pop’s overseas market expansion lay in the limitation of the domestic music industry itself. Compared to American or Japanese music market which occupies the majority of global music market, Korean music market was so small that the music companies could hardly thrive in the domestic business. What was worse, illegal music downloading from the early 2000s was a severe loss for the Korean domestic recording industry.

In this situation, Korean music entertainment agencies were compelled to open up overseas markets. That is, the globalization strategy of K-pop was the only option for survival of the Korean music industry (Jeon et al., 2012).

3.2 Cultural Distinctions and Global Competitiveness of K-pop

While K-pop may include any genre of South Korean popular music in a large scope, it is generally limited to songs produced by K-pop idols like ‘Girl’s Generation,’ ‘Super Junior,’ ‘Wonder Girls,’ ‘Big Bang,’ ‘2NE1’ etc. and their management agencies such as SM, YG, and JYP entertainment. In other words, K-pop is the products of Korean music entertainment agencies, which aimed at the world market.

The differentiation strategy of K-pop for the global market is roughly threefold: numbers of the group members; physical attractiveness; and dance-singing coordination (Oh, 2013). First, from the perspective of producers, the most important point is profitability. They want their singers to become global stars and eventually to generate high cash returns on initial investments. However, since it generally takes five to ten years for the singers to be stars, producers seek to utilize the idol group in various ways. To achieve this, producers compose the group with various talented members who share roles and responsibility. For example, one boy group may consist of one or two main vocalists who lead songs, sub vocals who take charge of visual attraction and dance, rappers with witty words and performance, a leader who commands the team etc. Due to this role division strategy, K-pop idol groups need many members.

Second, K-pop idol members show off much more sophisticated looks and bodies in comparison with other Asian idol bands like J-pop groups. They are thin, tall, and have feminine looks regardless of gender. With this physical attractiveness, K-pop music videos and concerts are visually appealing to Asian and Western female fans. The strong physical attractiveness of

K-pop singers resulted from their TV-dependent marketing. Since 1991, Korean broadcasting industry began to reform toward a free-market system. As the broadcasting industry depended on advertising revenues, Korean TV producers under pressure of the rating of their programs tried to seek the programs capturing the public fancy (Kim, 2001). As a result, entertainment TV programs started to grow and pop music was one of the most attractive sources to fill the programs. Music videos, clips from concerts, interviews with pop singers, as well as live music performance were constantly shown on television. K-pop singers appeared in a lot of different TV shows such as talk shows, comedy shows and even drama series. For the singers, television was an essential tool to succeed in marketing themselves. The looks and performance of the K-pop idol bands have been improved through TV performances over the last decades.

The third feature of the globalization strategy of K-pop is dance-singing coordination in large groups. K-pop idol group members demonstrate well-organized and synchronized dance moves along with their songs. This is an outgrowth of the star-marketing system of Korean entertainment companies. Like venture capital firms, they develop idol stars as a commodity for overseas market. The management companies select potential idols through internal auditions and train them, like Sparta, for a long time often ranging from five to ten years. During the training period, trainees master the technique of singing, dancing, theatrical acting, and speaking foreign languages. The well-trained and good-looking idol groups draw the attention of young teenagers around the world. Their personality, image, and fashion have a strong impact on forming fashion trends of young viewers.

In terms of musical distinctions, K-pop is a hybrid music genre as a mixture of hip-hop, rap, electronic, rhythm and blues (R&B) etc. (Shim, 2006; Hong, 2013). This is because the music companies seek universal attractions convincing transnational audiences for making profits

(Jeon et al., 2012). Modern K-pop started from the appearance of ‘Seo Taiji & Boys’ in the early 1990s, which created a new type of music through various experiments with different midi sounds. Since then, the integration of foreign music elements has become common practice in the production of K-pop songs (Shim, 2006). In recent years, world-famous music producers and writers have taken part in producing K-pop songs, thereby enhancing hybridization of music form and genre (KOCIS, 2011).

In addition to the musical elements, K-pop idols represent themselves as a hybrid cultural identity (Hong, 2013). The fact that K-pop singers with Western-style looks and body type sing African-American music such as hip-hop, rap, and R&B clearly demonstrates the characteristic of K-pop. Seokkyeong Hong asserts that “K-pop is circulated as a stylish hybrid culture including a sound youth culture, nonblack Black music, nonwhite White face, and ‘politically correct’ and safe multi-culture” (Hong, 2013, p.339).

3.3 K-pop Leads Neo-Korean Wave

In the late 2000s, Korean popular content started to expand its base by taking advantage of new media technology. That is a linkage with social media and mobile devices. Owing to the IT innovation, Korean popular culture expanded the scope of fans beyond Asia to Europe, Latin America (KOCIS, 2011; Hong, 2013). Specifically, video sharing sites such as YouTube, YouKu, Tudou, Sohu, Dramafever etc. have greatly influenced the spreading the Korean Wave to the world. Most Korean dramas, entertainment TV programs, films, and animations have been almost instantly uploaded on the sites after the release in the domestic market. Compared to the past, the propagation speed of the Korean Wave and its impact have quickened and deepened more at an increasing rate, and the social strata of Korean pop culture consumers have become more diverse. This new transformation is called “Neo-Korean Wave” (KOCIS, 2011, p.39).

The primary axis of the Neo-Korean Wave is K-pop. Based on the remarkable growth of online music streaming and downloading service industry caused by the advance of mobile Internet devices and smart phones, the export of K-pop has increased not only in East Asia and Southeast Asia but also in Europe and North and South America. In the case of a K-pop concert in Paris, 2011, the tickets were all sold out within fifteen minutes after the beginning of the sale of advance tickets. Some fans who couldn't purchase the ticket performed a flash mob to request additional concerts at Louvre Museum in Paris and Trafalgar Square in London. This event clearly revealed the global influence of K-pop (Son, 2011; Jeon et al., 2012; Hong 2013).

Particularly, YouTube linked with other SNS sites Twitter and Facebook have led the K-pop's overseas market expansion. SM Entertainment, one of the largest K-pop management agencies, entered into the partnership program of YouTube and opened their accounts under name of 'sment' or 'SMTOWN' since 2009. Through their official YouTube accounts, SM Entertainment uploaded the music videos of their idol groups including 'Girls' Generation,' 'Super Junior,' 'Shinee,' 'f(x)' etc. Before the advent of PSY's *Gangnam Style*, each music video of 'Girls' Generation' recorded tens of millions hits on YouTube. 'Big Bang' and "2NE1" affiliated with YG Entertainment have also utilized YouTube as a key tool of marketing themselves.

According to a report of *Joongang Ilbo* (2012, January 2), K-pop music videos on YouTube, based on the singers affiliated with SM, YG, and JYP Entertainment, had been viewed 2.3 million times in 235 countries around the world during the year of 2011. Figure 3.1 clearly shows the global dissemination and consumption of K-pop. In response to this global fandom of K-pop, YouTube created a K-pop genre as an independent music genre. It was the first case in which a particular country's music was introduced exclusively as a music genre like rock, folk, and jazz etc. on YouTube (Jeon et al., 2012: 61).

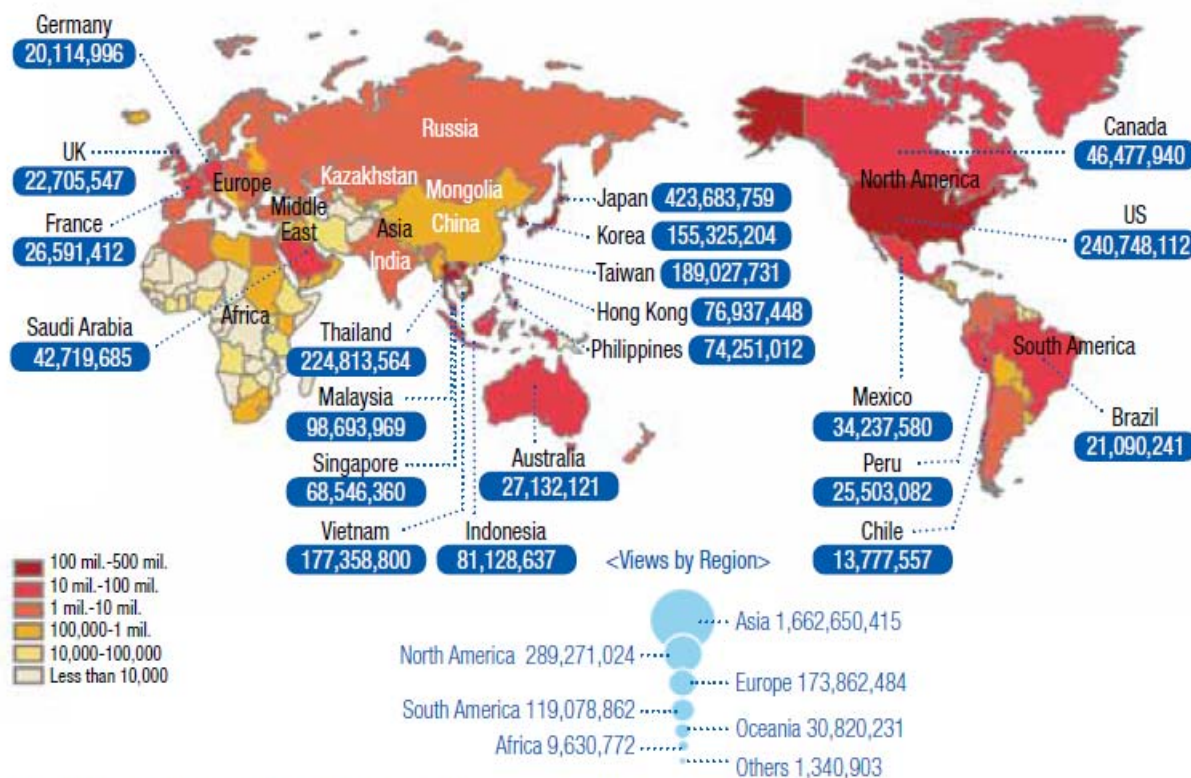


Figure 3.1 Number of views of K-pop videos on YouTube during 2011

Reprinted from Seo, M. (2012, July) Lessons from K-pop's Global Success. *SERI Quarterly*. Samsung Research Institute.

According to 2012 Statistics of Content Industry in Korea (KOCCA, 2012), the total sales of mobile music services in 2011 increased 121% compared with the previous year, rising from US\$83,262,000 in 2010 to US\$196,113,000 in 2011. The sales of music content production for the Internet and mobile service in the same year also recorded an increase of 58.2% compared with the previous year. The bullish market of the online music service industry has accelerated the sale growth of K-pop in global music market (See Figure 3.2).

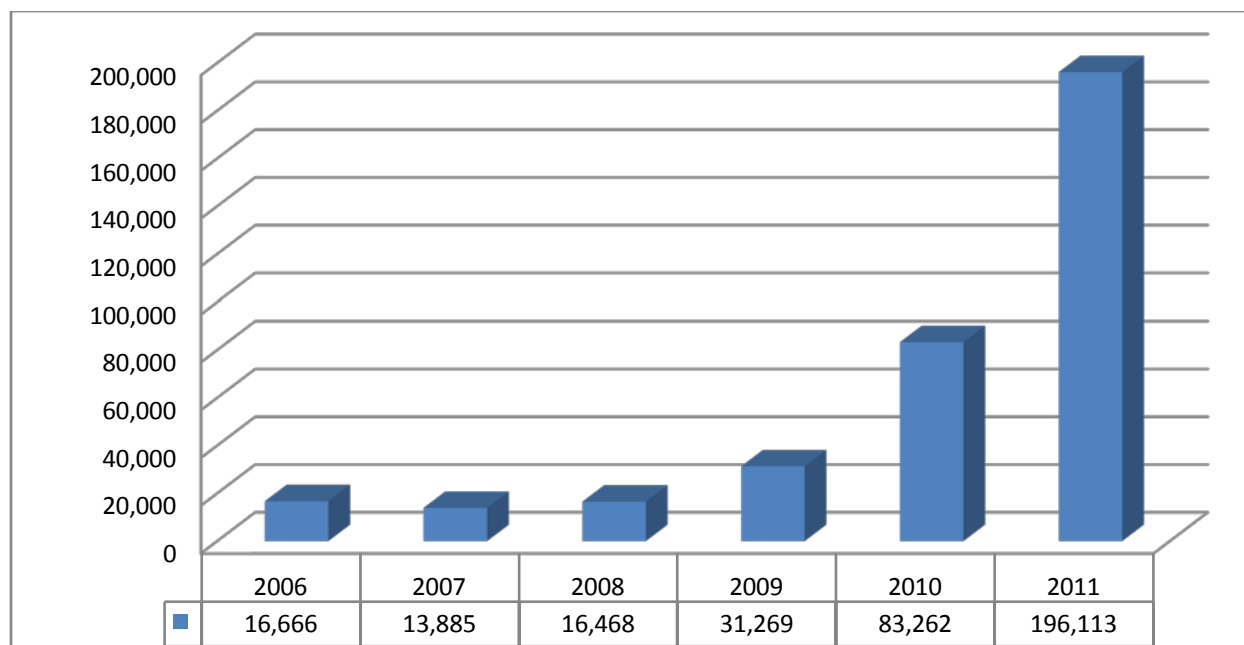


Figure 3.2 The amount of K-pop export, 2006-2011 (Unit: \$1,000)

Note: Author's reconstruction from the *2012 White paper of Korean music industry*, Korean Creative Content Agency.

Evidently, the huge success of *Gangnam Style* accelerated the rapid growth trend of K-pop in the global music market. A YouTube Trend report, which was published on July 15, 2013 in celebration of the first anniversary of the release of *Gangnam Style*, presented interesting data regarding K-pop consumption on YouTube. According to the report, while official music videos of K-pop singers such as 'Girls' Generation' and 'Big Bang' were viewed over 2.2 billion times in the year before *Gangnam Style*, the number jumped up to more than 7 billion views in the year following.

More interesting point is that the viewership on top K-pop channels from outside the Asia-Pacific region was recorded as less than half of that from the Asia-Pacific region in 2011, whereas, after two years, the viewership from outside the Asia-Pacific region were in the majority. Also, 91% of viewing was outside South Korea in 2012. Moreover, In the U.S. where many people were not familiar with K-pop before the release of *Gangnam Style*, the watching of top K-

pop singers doubled the year after the mega hit of *Gangnam Style* (YouTube Trend, 2013, July 15).

3.4 The Global Reception of *Gangnam Style*

The Korean music video *Gangnam Style* is a pop culture icon to show the cultural distinctions and values of the globalization and digitalization era. In order to understand the characteristics of diffusion mechanism of *Gangnam Style* and its cultural implication, this study uncovers its textually distinct features in advance.

Like other K-pop music videos, *Gangnam Style* was also introduced to the market through YouTube for the first time. As soon as it was published on YouTube, it caught the eyes and ears of people all around the world. Burgess argues that successful videos have textual attractions to stimulate users' choice for repetition and then these hooks become cultural repertoires (2008). *Gangnam Style* music video also provides several textual hooks for users to replicate in their own videos.

The attraction of the *Gangnam Style* music video lies in its musical and visual elements. In terms of music, *Gangnam Style* is far from elegance or high-class. PSY has been singing hip hop songs like *Gangnam Style* with crude lyrics and antic gestures since his debut twelve years ago. While his song may sound cheesy and kitsch, unlike well-developed K-pop idols, his works are praised as sophisticated pieces that are full of satire and humor. Most music critics believe that the fascination of *Gangnam Style* is a highly addictive electronic riff and a repeated lyric, "Oppan Gangnam Style." Woojin Cha, who is a Korean music critic, says "its musical style is electronic pop, so it sounds familiar to audiences. On the other hand, its lyrics and music video are strange, unique and funny. This is an attractive point" (Yim, 2012, August 26).

As many music critics point out about the characteristics of K-pop, *Gangnam Style* is also an easy-to-follow song. Although its lyrics in Korean couldn't be understood by most people of other countries, the song has transcended language barriers and has quickly been spread to the world. Rather, as the lyrics were seasoned with codes of sexuality, they were translated into totally different meanings. Large numbers of male English speakers misheard "Oppan Gangnam Style" as "Open condom style" (Wagner, 2012, August 24) and in Japan, it was mistranslated as "Oppaiga Gundam Style (おっぱいガンダムスタイル: Breast is Gundam Style)" (Kim, 2012, August 9). Critics assert that *Gangnam Style* has a linguistic playfulness that allows it to leap across language barriers. They present a few similar examples: *Tunak Tunak Tune*, which is an Indian Pop love song by Daler Mehndi released in 1998; *Macarena*, a Spanish dance song by Los Del Rio in 1994; and *Scatman (Ski-Ba-Bop-Ba-Dop-Bop)*, an American pop song by Scatman John in 1995. A Korean music critic, Kyeongjoon Lee says "The reason that non-Korean people are enthusiastic about *Gangnam Style* despite being completely out of their depth in its Korean lyrics is that the supranational and repeated lyrics have a lot of fun." (Yim, 2012, August 26). That is, the Korean lyrics "Oppan Gangnam Style" work as an entertaining element for the fun-seeking audiences who are unfamiliar with Korean language.

In the respect of visual performance, the most notable thing in the music video is the riding horse dance. Wearing a dressy suit, performing the riding horse dance has become the brand of the song - "Dress Classy, Dance Cheesy."² In fact, the riding horse dance was not a figment of a certain artist's imagination. It was created by a group of choreographers. In order to develop the novel dance, PSY held a dance contest of professional choreographers through SNS offering

² When PSY appeared *The Ellen DeGeneres Show (NBC)* in September 10, 2012, he said this slogan in order to teach Britney Spears the point of the dance. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZmkU5Pg1sw>

prizes, and from this process, he gathered creative ideas and completed the choreography of the dance (Song, 2012, September 10). In terms of preproduction, he applied the principle of collective intelligence to his new work.

One notable thing is that the dance invites people to participate while viewing this video. Unlike most K-pop singers' refined dances, the riding horse dance is unique and funny. It is literally a dance to mimic riding horse movements. Due to these amusements of the dance moves, people are willing to follow it for pleasure. Despite the fact that the riding horse dance is not easy to follow correctly, which requires a certain level of sense of rhythm and gesture, the familiarity of the movement enabled anyone to dance together with *Gangnam Style* lyrics. This choreographic universality of the dance allows everyone to participate in the dance.

Another interesting point of the riding horse dance is that the dance triggers people to join in a collective play. A countless number of group cover dance videos and flash-mob videos of *Gangnam Style* demonstrate that people perform the dance in group. Actually, this collective performance appears as the ending scene in the original *Gangnam Style* music video. By performing collective dancing, people express their sense of unity and kinship as well as their identity. The users' collective dance videos stimulate other groups to emulate them and make their own videos. Through this process, *Gangnam Style* evolves into a kind of collective amusement.

In addition to the aspects of music and dance, funny characters and comic setups are also significant factors to entertain audiences. For example, in the beginning scene, a kid does a ridiculous dance with a serious look, and at its mid-point, as an elevator door opens, PSY and another man suddenly perform a dirty dance with peculiar poses. Also, with only simple camera work such as zoom-out, the music video makes people laugh aloud. One of the most impressive scenes to the audiences is that PSY sings in a black classic suit and then it turns out that he is sitting on

a toilet. These simple but dramatic reversal scenes were replicated in a considerable number of *Gangnam Style* parodies.

Chief of all, PSY himself is the most remarkable character as well as a comic factor. Unlike other K-pop musicians, he has an ugly face and a plump body shape. Despite his ugly appearance, PSY acts superior wearing a dressy suit, pretending to be a Gangnamese. As Limor Shifman (2011) suggests, this flawed male character is one of the representative elements of memetic videos. By analyzing concomitant natures of memetic videos on YouTube, Shifman uncovers six common features: ordinary people, flawed masculinity, humor, simplicity, repetitiveness and whimsical content. Among these features, she explains that the flawed masculinity reflects contemporary intimidated male image, thereby invoking further creative dialogue. PSY's act of bravado as a character of flawed masculinity performs a function of the laughing point in the music video.

Moreover, the fact that PSY looks like a character of a popular comedy film is an element to make audiences laugh. When he was first introduced to American audiences, people noted that his appearance is similar to Mr. Chow from the movie *The Hangover*, which was a great hit comedy film in 2009. The actor, Ken Jeong, who played the role of Mr. Chow, was fixed as a funny Asian guy in the public. In the music video, many Americans instantly recalled the character of Mr. Chow from PSY (Trifnov, 2012, August 22). In an essay on her blog *High Yellow*, Crystal Anderson claims that PSY in *Gangnam Style* coincides with the racial stereotypes which Hollywood and American television media have long epitomized as “comedic Asian male”: buffoonish, desexualized, and emasculated.

However, the most distinctive element of all is a satire on society via the protagonist's self-contempt. According to Linda Hutcheon, satire is, unlike parody, “both moral and social in

its focus and ameliorative in its intention (1984: 16). While parody basically aims at the precursor text, body of texts or style, satire targets at the real world. In the video “Gangnam Style Sensation,” Christopher Hanscom analyzes the music video as follows:

Most of the satire is located in the lyrics. He’s talking about Gangnam. We don’t know what Gangnam is. We don’t really understand the satire of the video. But, the video mocks itself. He’s a musical performer, but he walked in bowing in the garbage window his face, and he’s appearing in a toilet and in an elevator and so on. In a way, this is already making fun of himself, making fun of the genre. And I think this is something that the audience in the states can pick upon and enjoy, and you can pick upon even if you can’t understand the lyrics. And it also makes it impossible to make fun of PSY himself. He’s already making fun of himself, so how can you mock him?

As Hanscom indicates, *Gangnam style* includes a satire on the materialistic lifestyle of the Gangnam district, which is the wealthiest area in Korea, and on the people who are dreaming to be residents of the area. In the social condition of contemporary capitalism in which where one lives determines one’s social class and status, Gangnam is the iconic place for ordinary Korean people who long for the luxurious life and wealth status. But, most scenes of the music video are far from being Gangnamish images. Also, PSY as the main character in the music video appears to be a non-Gangnameese. Instead, by showing unexpected humor and kitsch expression against a background of the everyday landscape of Seoul, PSY intentionally makes fun of the vain desire.³

³ In the interview with CNN, PSY answered the question that what Gangnam is and why he is singing about it. By saying that “People who are actually from Gangnam never proclaim that they are—it’s only the posers and wannabes that put on these airs and say that they are “Gangnam Style”—so this song is actually poking fun at those kinds of people who are trying so hard to be something that they’re not.” Cha, F. (2012, August 17). Interview: PSY on ‘GangnamStyle,’ posers and that hysterical little boy. *CNN*. Re-

In relation to this attraction of the opposite, Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, in his work *Rabelais and His World*, likened the carnivalesque to the type of activity in the carnivals of popular culture. Carnavalesque refers to a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of the dominant style or atmosphere through humor and chaos. In the carnival, joyful performances with humor and grotesque subvert social hierarchies of real life as well as all ready-made truths. The dominant orders are overturned by suppressed voices and energies. Through the experience which mingles the real and ideal: emperors become beggars and fools becomes wise, carnival blurs the hierarchical position and dominant ideology. Bakhtin emphasized the activity of laughter in carnival. Because laughter was not individual but collective and universal, it rendered religious dogmatism, mysticism and pity invalid (Storey, 1998).

As a carnival form, *Gangnam Style* subverts and incapacitates status and values by provoking collective laughter. In the music video, diverse people of all ages and all social groups appeared: children in a playground, old men playing the Korean chess game, middle-aged women who are dancing in a sightseeing bus etc. Although these ordinary people are more likely to live as a slave of social desire and commodity fetishism in the real world, those who appeared in the music video engage in making fun of materialistic lifestyle along with PSY. In particular, at the final scene of the music video, the diverse characters who were symbolized as people from all walks of life decompress their hard life in reality with the collective riding horse dance.

Besides these internal elements, there is an external factor that had a decisive effect on spreading the video. In order to disseminate the music video, PSY's management agency gave up their copyrights. The agency allowed users to freely use the music video, instead of claiming the copyrights. In fact, this decision was based on a very measured marketing strategy. The company

is YG entertainment, which is the second largest entertainment management agency in Korea. It also has a record label, which specializes in R&B and hip hop music. YG entertainment has already known the importance of SNS sites including YouTube as a marketing tool. After joining YouTube partnership program in October 2009, they have provided their singers' music videos to YouTube. The music videos of K-pop idol groups such as Big Bang or 2NE1 in the YG entertainment has been viewed tens of millions of times on YouTube. Through online and mobile devices, these music videos have rapidly been disseminated all over the world.

For PSY, who was a leading performer in Korea but unknown in the global music market, the noninterference policy for YouTube users' infringement of the copyright could be the best choice to enter into the world. According to a YouTube Trends report (2012, August 7), in the first two weeks since it was released, almost 1000 videos with "Gangnam" (in English) in the title were posted on YouTube. Along with the global users' active participation, the music video has been exposed to 220 countries over the world only for two months and has swept to the top of the music chart in 30 countries (Cho, 2012, September 11). The case of *Gangnam Style* clearly offers considerable implications to understand the relationship of media content and audiences in this new media ecology.

The strategic choice of releasing his copyright is in sharp contrast with the tight control of copyright in the media industry in the United States. The example suggests, as Jenkins and his colleagues argue, that the spreadable media brings about a new cultural logic of media convergence and that fans' participation in the media circulations can actually enhance the product value rather than diminish it. While some of the examples given by Jenkins and his colleagues can be criticized as the effort of media companies to exploit the "free labor" of the fan communities,

what is amazing in *Gangnam Style* is that it creates a model allowing fans to share profits from the circulation, remix and co-production.

4 RESEARCH METHODS

As mentioned in the introduction, this study applies a case study of *Gangnam Style* in analyzing the transnational dissemination process of K-pop. Even though *Gangnam Style* has a lot of successful elements that made it spreadable, it would not be so quickly disseminated all over the world without the support of media and their audiences. Thus, this study focuses on the role of audience and the interactions between the audience, music content, and media. To this end, this study first examines the overall distribution trend of *Gangnam Style*. Based on the analysis of a chronological dissemination pattern, this study investigates the time-periodic characteristics of interaction between the original music video and the user-generated videos and the implication of the spreading process of the cultural phenomenon.

Through performing a keyword research on Google Trends, a web tool to search what people are interested in around the world, this study comprehends the overall distribution trend of *Gangnam Style*, because the searching trend of *Gangnam Style* on the Web provides a vital clue to understand the propagation time, velocity, and pathway. This study limits the research period on the searching trend of *Gangnam Style* within the first 100 days since the release of the music video. During this period, *Gangnam Style* retained its number two spot on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and the music video was viewed over 500 million times on YouTube. Thus, there was enough time to trace the dissemination process.

In addition, following the related articles in newspapers, magazines and blogs, the detailed process of its dissemination is analyzed. This is because several celebrities who have mil-

lions of followers on their SNS accounts shared the music video and mainstream media coverage on the *Gangnam Style* phenomenon also had a strong impact on transmitting the music video over the world. Furthermore, PSY's major musical performances and events based on the posting on PSY's official homepage are examined.

Next, this study gathers sample user-generated videos which were produced in the same period on YouTube. Since the original music video was first released on this video sharing site and has been spread through other websites, blogs and SNS sites linked with YouTube, the chronological analysis on the sample videos offers an opportunity to look at how the audiences react, reuse, and reproduce the original music video. The sample videos on YouTube are selected by the number of view counts and then classified by genre, quality of the video, and the degree of engagement determining either reproduction or coproduction of the users. Additionally, the release date, location, intimacy degree with K-pop of the users are examined through the users' SNS sites, blogs or homepages linked with their YouTube channels in order to grasp the likelihood of their preliminary perception about K-pop and PSY and the relationship between their location and distribution process of *Gangnam Style*.

By comparing the graph of web searching trends of *Gangnam Style* and the remarkable activities and events of PSY, mainstream media and celebrities, this study divides the dissemination process into several stages. This study then analyzes the characteristics of the user-generated videos in each stage and the type of YouTube users' activity and their cultural co-production and re-production, which is followed by the implications of interactions between the cultural texts and the audience and between new media and mainstream media.

5 DISSEMINATION PROCESS OF GANGNAM STYLE

This chapter examines the relationships between the graph showing web searching trends of “Gangnam Style” on Google, *Gangnam Style* videos on YouTube, and PSY’s activities. Particularly, the *Gangnam style* videos on YouTube are analyzed in more detail by uploader, genre, and the release date. On the basis of the analysis, the chronological dissemination trends of *Gangnam Style* are classified into stages. And then, the time-periodic characteristics of the diffusion of *Gangnam Style* are discussed.

5.1 Dissemination Trend of *Gangnam Style* in the First 100 days

Entering the keyword “Gangnam Style” in the search bar on Google Trends,⁴ a graph demonstrating web searching trends of *Gangnam Style* from all over the world was gained (See Figure 5.1). The region of investigation was set as “worldwide” and the duration as from July 15 to October 22 – i.e., until 100 days from the release date of the original music video.

According to Muzalive (2012, August 9), which is a Korean social music platform offering social big data analysis regarding music consumption, the time when the title of the song “Gangnam Style” was mentioned for the first time on Twitter is July 11, 2011. This is consistent with the date when the first teaser ad of *Gangnam Style* was released on YouTube. Before the release of the video, PSY’s official account on YouTube uploaded two teaser ads and a supportive comment video of Korean pop stars on July 11, 12 and 13. Thus, the first exposure of the title “Gangnam Style” started on July 11, 2012. However, as the graph of web searching trends

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

of “Gangnam style” demonstrates, the first noticeable sign on the graph appears at the end of July. The graph shows a steady upward curve from late August, and increases sharply from early September. By late September, it maintains an upward trend while repeating ups and downs.

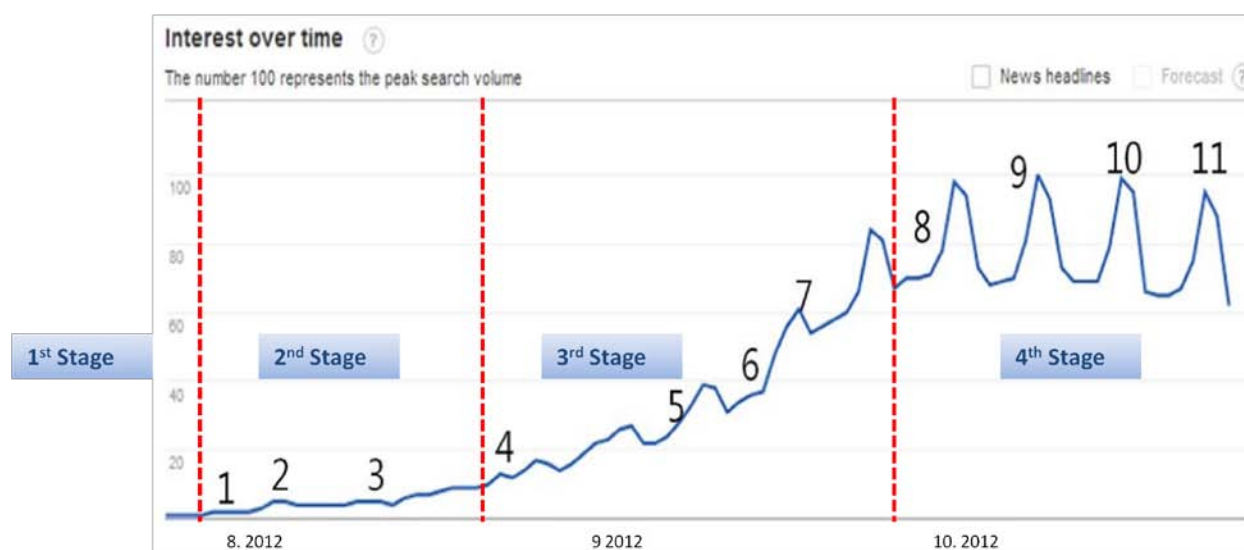


Figure 5.1 Web search trend of Gangnam Style

Note: Google Trend on October 22, 2012. The numbers on the figure 5.1 correspond with the numbers on Table 5.1

Table 5.1 The major events in disseminating *Gangnam Style* in the first 100 days

1	7/28, 7/31, 8/1	The music video was shared on the social news website Reddit, on July 28. Robbie Williams (7/28), Scooter Broun (7/31), T-pain (8/1) shared the MV on their Twitter accounts.
2	8/2, 8/3	Featured in CNN International (8/2) and <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (8/3)
3	8/13	Number one on YouTube monthly chart
4	8/23	PSY's first appearance in a US TV-shows
5	9/4	MBC(Korea) hookup - PSY concert
6	9/13	NBC(US) morning show appearance
7	9/17	Nominated in Best Video, 2012 MTV Europe Music Award
8	9/27	No.2 on Billboard hot 100 chart
9	10/4	PSY concert at Seoul Cityhall Square (YouTube live)
10	10/15	Australia TV show appearance
11	10/20	PSY's second whirlwind tour in the U.S

The turning points of this graph are related to the media exposure of *Gangnam Style*, including mass media as well as online media. At the early period, new media such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube influenced on its dissemination. As No 1, 2 and 3 on the table 5.1 shows, several celebrities who have millions of followers on their SNS accounts shared the music video. These activities had a strong impact on transmitting *Gangnam Style* over the world. From the last part of August, mass media starts to play a crucial role in disseminating the video. On September 13, PSY appeared at NBC morning live shows (No. 6 on Figure 5.1 and Table 5.1). This event was broadcast live on NBC channel, and at the same time, the video clip was posted on YouTube. On October 4, PSY held his free concert at Seoul city hall square, the concert was also broadcasted live cross the world through YouTube network (No. 9 on Figure 5.1. and Table 5.1). Therefore, what media played a role in distributing the music video can be a criterion to analyze the characteristics of the dissemination.

5.2 Classification of the Sampled *Gangnam Style* Videos on YouTube

Next, focusing on the relationship between the original music video and audiences' reactions, this study gathered sample user-generated videos which were produced in the same period on YouTube. A keyword search of "Gangnam Style" was conducted on YouTube, which generated more than 200,000 video clips. Since unrelated video clips were often listed, or some YouTube accounts were deactivated, it was impossible to count the exact number of the user-generated video clips for analysis. Hence, the author narrowed down the samples by the number of view counts. Only the videos with more than one million hits were considered. As of October 22, 2012, which was the 100th-day after the official release date of *Gangnam Style*, 149 video clips were collected.

Among the 149 videos, PSY's official account uploaded the greatest number of clips. PSY's representative published fifteen video clips including the original *Gangnam Style* music video, a making-film and teaser ads of the original music video, PSY's concert videos, TV show clips featuring PSY, other of PSY's music videos etc. (See table 5.2). Interestingly, PSY's official account provided the video clips at regular intervals. By providing new contents continuously along with his appearance on mainstream media, PSY's representative has kept the viewers' interests at a certain level.

Table 5.2 The list of video clips uploaded by PSY's official YouTube account

Upload Date	Video	Genre
10/20/10	<i>Right now (PSY Vol.5)</i>	MV
2/6/11	<i>It's art (PSY Vol.5)</i>	MV
7/11/12	Teaser # 1 for <i>Gangnam Style</i>	Teaser
7/12/12	Teaser # 2 for <i>Gangnam Style</i>	Teaser
7/13/12	Supporting comment for <i>Gangnam Style</i>	Teaser
7/13/12	Official MV of <i>Gangnam Style</i>	MV
7/25/12	Making-film of the official MV	Making film
7/30/12	<i>Korea (PSY single)</i>	MV
8/5/12	SBS Inkikayo- Weekly TV music chart live show	TV show
8/14/12	<i>Oppa is my style</i>	MV
8/19/12	SBS Inkikayo- Weekly TV music chart live show	TV show
8/26/12	SBS Inkikayo- Weekly TV music chart live show	TV show
8/29/12	Summer Stand Live	Concert
9/25/12	Gangnam Style stage at Kyonggi University	Campus Festival
9/28/12	Jill Stuart New York - Dress Classy	MV

Except for PSY's official videos, there are twelve original videos uploaded on the YouTube official accounts by mainstream media or the hosts of the programs including *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *On Air with Ryan Seacrest*, *The Beat of New York* etc.(See Table 5.3). Al-

though the Korea.net run by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is not a mainstream media, its official YouTube account was included into this category since the account was used as a pathway to show PSY's Seoul City Hall concert for global fans.

Table 5.3 The list of the video clips uploaded by mainstream media and the hosts

Date	Title	The channel of mainstream media	Genre	Nation
8/3	PSY's Gangnam Style spotlighted on CNN International	CNN international	TV News	Hong Kong
8/22	Jason Dundas/ Dancing with PSY - Gangnam Style!	Jason Dundas/ Big Buzz morning show	TV show	US
8/26	GANGNAM (SUPER KAMPUNG) STYLE	FLY FM Deejays/ 95.8 in the Klang Valley	Parody	Malaysia
8/28	How to Gangnam Style Dance Tutorial with PSY and Michelle Park	Michell W. Park/ NY1 reporter	TV show	US
8/29	PSY - Gangnam Style (강남스타일) Cover By EFM Style	EFM Radio Deejays/ 94 EFM	Parody	Thailand
9/10	Surprise Britney	The Ellen Degeneres Show	TV show	US
9/10	PSY Talks Gangnam Style with Seacrest - PART 1	On Air with Ryan Seacrest	Radio Show	US
9/10	PSY Talks Gangnam Style with Seacrest - PART 2	On Air with Ryan Seacrest	Radio Show	US
9/14	PSY and Gangnam Style Take Over New York City	The Beat of New York/ 103.5 KTU	Radio Show/ Parody	US
9/19	Gangnam Style Mom and Son!	The Ellen Degeneres Show	TV show	US
9/19	PSY Brings Down the Ellen House!	The Ellen Degeneres Show	TV show	US
10/4	Seoul Concert for Fans Seoul City Hall Korea	Korea.net/Ministry of Culture and Tourism	Concert	Korea

Since these videos mainly contained the scenes which PSY appeared on the broadcasting programs, the release dates generally corresponded with PSY's music sales promotion activities. However, two video clips were produced independent of the broadcasting programs. To illustrate, "Super Kampung Style" produced by radio DJs in Malaysia and "Gangnam Style cover by EFM

Style” by radio DJs in Thailand were created as a form of parody. These two parody clips were not related to PSY’s promotion activities.

Next, the user-generated videos include 122 clips among all selected videos. In terms of genre, they were identified and grouped into nine categories: (1) parody; (2) cover; (3) fan-video (mash-up and animation); (4) translation; (5) reaction; (6) reloaded original video; (7) flash mob; (8) found footage; and (9) tutoring. Look at Table 5.4 below to see a detailed proportion of each category.

According to Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian researcher known for her influential theories of postmodernism, parody is defined as “a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity” (1985, p.16). While other researchers restrict the function of parody as purely polemical and critical to the text, Hutcheon expands it “from respectful admiration to biting ridicule (1985, p.16).”Based on Hutcheon’s definition of parody, this analysis included the video clips which parodied the original music video for pastiche, ironical, critical and satirical purpose. The cover videos include user’s dance or music performance that simply imitated the original music video. The animation music clips and mash-up videos consisting of mixing scenes and sounds of the original music video of *Gangnam Style* and a certain film, animation, or three-dimensional computer graphics were classified into the category of fan-video. Translation videos include the videos were translated into English, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Chinese subtitles to simply deliver the meanings of the lyrics. Reaction videos mean the clips filmed audience’s responses while watching the original music video. Reloaded original video refers to the original clips of mainstream media reloaded not by the media but by general users. The videos which took a picture of a group of people who performed together the riding horse dance to the *Gangnam Style* music in public for the purpose of publishing on the internet were involved in

a flash mob. Also, found footage refers to the videos which caught the moment of an accidental event in everyday life. For instance, when a person saw a few people performing the riding horse dance on the street by chance, the footage was filmed by the person using a camera-equipped mobile phone. Finally, videos in which dancers teach the riding horse dance in front of camera were sorted into tutoring.

A great majority of the videos were parodies of the original *Gangnam Style* music video. These parodies occupy roughly 40% of all selected videos. Second, the number of cover videos and fan-videos were 21 for each one, which followed by nine translation videos and six reaction videos. Next, five reloaded original clips and five flash mop videos were produced, and followed by four found footages and one tutoring video.

Table 5.4 Categories of the user-generated videos

Category	Number of Videos	Percentage
Parody	50	41.0%
Cover	21	17.2%
Fan video (mash-up and animation)	21	17.2%
Translation	9	7.4%
Reaction	6	4.9%
Reloaded original clip	5	4.1%
Flash mob	5	4.1%
Found footage	4	3.3%
Tutoring	1	0.8%
Total	122	100.0%

Additionally, the author examined the release date, location (country) or familiarity with K-pop of the uploaders through their SNS sites, blogs or homepages linked with their YouTube channels in order to grasp the likelihood of their preliminary perception about K-pop or PSY and the relationship between their location and distribution process of *Gangnam Style*.

5.3 The Time-Periodic Characteristics of Dissemination of *Gangnam Style*

In consideration of the data on the propagation pathways of *Gangnam Style*, this study divides four stages by chronological pattern. The first stage is from the release date of the first teaser video to the time before the minimum detectable signal appeared on the graph of Google Trend. Approximately, the date can be the end of July 2012, which is the time when a few celebrities such as Robbie Williams, Scooter Broun, and T-pain referred to the music video on their Twitter pages and a social news and entertainment website based in San Francisco, Reddit, introduced *Gangnam Style*. The second stage is from the end of July to the day before PSY appeared on a US television show for the first time. The third stage is from the date of PSY's debut on an American TV show stage to the date when *GangnamStyle* reached number two on the Billboard Hot 100 Chart. Finally, the fourth stage deals with the characteristics of its dissemination and the user-generated videos after September 27. With respect to this indicator, the author analyzes how *Gangnam Style* was promoted and what content YouTube users produced during each stage.

5.3.1 *The first stage (July 11~July 29)*

According to the article published by Muzalive (2012, August 9), the number of Twitter references to "Gangnam Style" had increasingly grown to about 7,000 until the date of the official music video release since the release date of the first teaser video, July 11. At that time, the

epicenter of its diffusion was a fan of K-pop idol girl group 2ne1,⁵ whose Twitter followers were approximately 30,000. The fan, whose Twitter ID is ‘We Love Dara,’ tweeted the original music video as soon as the official music video of *Gangnam Style* was published on YouTube. However, the number of Twitter references to “Gangnam Style” has gradually decreased without any turning point until the end of July.

During this period, the highest ranked videos are mostly those which PSY’s official account published. Not only did the official *Gangnam Style* music video but also other video clips including teaser ads and a making-film of *Gangnam Style*, PSY’s other music videos, and PSY’s performance in Korean TV live shows videos receive far higher view counts than any other user-generated video. One interesting thing is that two music videos of PSY’s previous album, i.e., *It’s a art*, and *Right now* which were published more than one year before the release of *Gangnam Style*, have started to be highly viewed along with the mega hit of the *Gangnam Style* music video. This result demonstrates the fact that traditional sources produced by mainstream media tend to be recorded as “Most Viewed” and “Most Favorite” videos on YouTube, as Burgess and Green present in their book *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (2008).

As soon as the original music video was released, YouTube’s active users instantly started to create several types of video clips. The first uploaded video type is a ‘reaction video,’ which refers to a new online genre where people film the audiences’ reaction while they watch a certain video. Among the selected videos, the first uploaded reaction video was published by ‘Tronzzdmco5’ on July 17, 2012. The YouTube channel is run by eight Singaporean girls who mainly listen to K-pop. They filmed two teen girls and one boy’s reaction and interviews. The next day, K-pop fans Katie and Mindy Anderson, who are sisters who live in Utah, released their

⁵ 2ne1 is a four-member South Korean girl group formed by YG Entertainment in 2009, to which PSY is affiliated. The band consists of CL, Minzy, Dara, and Bom. The twitter user, ‘We Love Dara’ seems to be a fan of Dara, one of the group members.

reaction video under the name of ‘namastedwaejikm’ on YouTube. They introduce themselves as “a bunch of fan girls who make fun of our obsession and react to the many awesome K-pop MVs out there!” on their YouTube channel.⁶ On July 21, ‘Kspazzing,’ who are a couple who live in the United Kingdom, also uploaded K-pop fans’ reactions. These reaction-specialists have one thing in common with K-pop fans.

Another remarkable genre published in the first period is a ‘translation video.’ Since K-pop is sung in Korean, translation videos which interpret its Korean lyrics into each country’s language are simultaneously produced whenever a new K-pop song is released. The translators are not the songs’ producers themselves but K-pop fans. Like reaction-video makers, these YouTube translators also specially focus on production of translation videos. User ‘boicesonekpop3’ uploaded a Chinese translation video on July 17, 2012. ‘Han Yong Mi,’ a Korean user, created a translation video clip with Korean and Romanized lyrics on July 20. Her YouTube activities concentrate on K-pop translation. A Vietnamese translator ‘Vietsub Dream Center’ published the video which added Vietnamese subtitles to the original music video on July 29. Among the selected videos, the number of translation videos is nine. Except for above-mentioned videos, the rest involved English, Spanish, and Portuguese translation videos. The production dates of these translation videos generally coincided with the time when *Gangnam Style* was widely introduced to each country.⁷ The uploaders of the translation clips are mostly running K-pop channels on YouTube or K-pop fan sites. One of the translators, ‘dearkorea’ posted several articles to intro-

⁶ In an interview with a blog of Korea Creative Content Agency, Katie and Mindy said that they were first interested in a K-pop idol group ‘Big Bang,’ which also belongs to YG Entertainment. They stated that they collected the information about K-pop at the website of Allkpop.com and official websites of K-pop groups and singers. Besides, they could gain information related to K-pop on YouTube, Google and Wikipedia. Available on <http://koreancontent.kr/m/post/view/id/911>

⁷ Google Trend offers a regional search function. By using this tool, the researcher was able to compare the published date of the translation videos and the time when *Gangnam Style* started to be widely exposed to each uploader’s country.

duce *Gangnam Style* on her own blog, apart from uploading a translation on YouTube.⁸ Her articles which accounted for the meaning of “Gangnam” and its background knowledge were introduced through the article of Max Fisher, an editor at *The Atlantic* (2012, August 23). This event gave momentum to the fact that English speakers were aware of the satire of *Gangnam Style*.

In terms of the translation video, Seokkyeong Hong (2013) asserts that despite an illegal activity infringing copyrights and intellectual property of a cultural content, fan subbing can be considered as a very important donation of talent for self-expression or self-fulfillment as well as for the transnational audience community. Since fan subbing requires profound understanding for the contextual meanings of a content as well as language, fan subbers are intercultural elites who are familiar with languages and culture of two countries and are dedicated to their own pleasure and transnational audience community. Without these fan subbers’ voluntary activities, Korean popular content including *Gangnam Style* would not have spread widely and fast. For Korean copyrighters who want to make inroad to global market, fan subbing is not a piracy or illegal behavior, but a cultural mediation to promote Korean Wave to the world.

Next, the cover videos of *Gangnam Style* also started to be generated on YouTube in this period. ‘APUKMUSE’ uploaded a video which shot a group performance of Korean dancers on July 21. Junsung Ahn, a Korean-American violinist, published a video of him playing *Gangnam Style* on his violin with his dance on July 25. And the earliest parody of *Gangnam Style* was pro-

⁸ User “dearkorea” is a Korean American in Minnesota, USA. She introduces herself saying “My name is Jea Kim. I’m a Jill of all trades, master of none, hopefully better than a master of one. Onsemiro means ‘forever’ in Native Korean, and I’m blogging on everything I know about where I’m from.” Retrieved from <http://mydearkorea.blogspot.com/2012/08/korean-music-psys-gangnam-style-and.html>

duced by ‘eat your kimchi,’ a popular video guide channel in Korea, on July 23.⁹ It was followed by a parody video of ‘kpop chonny,’ an Australian user. He introduced himself as a K-pop fan on his YouTube account.

In sum, the users who created their own *Gangnam style* videos in the early stage are mostly K-pop fans or Korean users who were familiar with K-pop or PSY’s songs. These videos show that K-pop has grown into a popular subculture among teenagers and young adults all over the world based on social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. It may be said that these K-pop fans played a role in propagating *Gangnam Style* in the earliest phase of dissemination.

5.3.2 *The second stage (July 30 ~August 21)*

The turning point which pushed the slow downward curve of *Gangnam Style* upward was the mention of “Gangnam Style” by celebrities and Reddit’s (a popular social news and entertainment site) sharing the music video. In particular, Scooter Broun, who is well-known as an American talent manager who promotes one of the world’s most prominent pop idols, Justin Bieber, linked the *Gangnam Style* music video on his Twitter account on July 31. His mention, which implied a possibility of a contract with PSY, drew international attention to *Gangnam Style*. Immediately following his reference, T-pain, an American rapper who has recorded number one song on the Billboard Chart, also tweeted *Gangnam Style* on August 1. Based on the popularity of these celebrities’ tweets, the number of Twitter reference to “Gangnam Style” of the day soared to 12,586. August 1st was the starting point of the ascending current. As *Gangnam Style* spread quickly through social media, news media began to take note of the music video.

⁹ This channel offers information about Korean food, language and music. Since launched by a Canadian married couple Simon and Martina Stawski in 2008, it became one of the most popular YouTube channels in South Korea. Available on www.eatyourkimchi.com

CNN international and *The Wall street Journal* reported about the *Gangnam Style* fever on August 2 and August 3.

One remarkable phenomenon on YouTube in this second stage is professional users' activities. Above all, cover dance videos of professional singers who are currently gaining international popularity, such as Nelly Furtado¹⁰ and Big Bang¹¹, attracted the eyes of users as soon as they released the video. Since they had a huge number of fans and YouTube subscribers, their videos may have played a significant part in the dissemination of *Gangnam Style*.

Some YouTube-based professional entertainers and film makers also started to produce their own *Gangnam Style* videos. 'The Fine Bros,' which is a popular YouTube group specializing in production of reaction videos, published a teens' reaction video of *Gangnam Style* on August 19. 'David So comedy' and 'Just Kidding Films' which are YouTube channels of local comedians in the U.S., uploaded their parody videos. 'Mystery Guitar Man' published his cover video in which he mixed his own guitar and keyboard playing and PSY's voice from the *Gangnam Style* music video. A few Korean filmmakers generated parodies as names of their regions by borrowing the title of "Gangnam Style." These video clips had been highly viewed due to a lot of subscribers and high degree of quality.

However, the most intensively produced genre in this period is the fan-video based on computer technologies, such as mash-up and animation/ machinema. A Canadian user, 'lalatu,' produced a mash-up video of edited scenes of a North Korean military parade along with melody

¹⁰ Nelly Furtado is a Canadian singer and actress. With her debut album, she won 2002 Grammy Award for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance. She has sold more than 20 million albums over the world.

¹¹ Big Bang is one of the most popular male groups of South Korea. The group is well known for unique music and fashion style. Their music video "fantastic baby" was one of the most viewed videos in K-pop until *Gangnam Style* was released. In this cover dance video, Seungri, one of the group members, danced with the *Gangnam Style* song

of *Gangnam Style*. ‘Coconeru,’ who had created the Pony Music Video¹², showed an animation video in which two ponies perform the riding-horse dance with “Gangnam Style.” ‘Buzz Feed’ published a mash-up video with mixed melody from Nicki Minaj’s¹³ *Starship* and lyrics from *Gangnam Style*. These users have in common lots of experience producing their own fan videos that demonstrate editing, mixing and graphic skills. Due to their experience, they seemed to be able to instantly create *Gangnam Style* videos.

Another notable genre of this period is flash mob. Starting with the flash mob of Sungnam, a city in South Korea on August 17, flash mob videos were successively filmed in locales from Pasadena, in California, the U.S. to Sydney, in Australia. These flash mobs were first led by domestic and overseas Koreans, and henceforward followed by people in principle cities and colleges of the world.

One interesting example is the ‘Misheard’ parody. As previously stated, the interpretation of non-Korean speakers was completely different from the original Korean lyrics. Many non-Korean users found amusement in its misheard lyrics. Although there are many translation videos in diverse languages, some users used its misheard lyrics as a main source of their videos. User ‘mumu galleries’ published a misheard parody with mixed English and Chinese lyrics. User ‘chad wild clay,’ which introduces itself as a band of parody comedy pop songs, uploaded a scene of them singing the misheard song over a microphone.

In summary, the most remarkable characteristic of the user-generated videos in the second stage is a video production by professionals and fan-video makers. By re-creating *Gang-*

¹² Pony Music Video(PMV), a fan-video genre, is similar to Animation Music Video(AMV). These videos use footage from cartoon “My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic.” Since the cartoon has tremendous popularity and most episodes are available on YouTube free of charge, many users have created these videos.

¹³ Nicki Minaj is an American rapper and television personality. Her debut album ‘Pink Friday’ gained global popularity, and she became the first female solo singer to have seven singles on the Billboard Hot 100 Chart at the same time.

nam Style with their own talent and ability and creating such an entertaining performance, they contributed to the dispersion of *Gangnam Style*. On the other hand, amateur users also participated in flash mob performances. Thanks to the reactions of professional and amateur users, PSY's *Gangnam Style* first ranked at the top of YouTube's 'Most Viewed Videos' monthly chart on August 13, beating out superstars like Justin Bieber and Nicki Minaj.

5.3.3 *The third stage (August 22 ~ September 26)*

Gangnam Style's explosive popularity on social media drew the attention of the American mainstream media. Starting from a VH1's morning show 'Big Morning Buzz Live,' PSY consecutively appeared on NBC's *Ellen Degeneres Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, ABC's *Nightline*, *Good Morning America* and so on. These events were driving forces in diffusing rapidly *Gangnam Style*. At the same time, PSY's appearances on these shows were posted on YouTube by the programs' official YouTube channels or users. The intensive exposure on television and radio media drew global attention, as the graph extracted from Google Trend indicates.

When it comes to YouTube user's activity, one noticeable phenomenon in this stage is the massive production of parodies. Compared to other fan videos including translation, reaction, cover, and mash-up videos, parody videos appeared a bit lately. It can be assumed that making a parody video of *Gangnam Style* requires more time and effort. From professional filmmakers to ordinary students, those who had different backgrounds created diverse types of parodies. In particular, the makers who produced the most highly-viewed parodies are so-called "YouTube celebrities," or "YouTube personalities."¹⁴ It refers to YouTube-based entertainers who have multi-million hits videos, such as 'barely political (US),' 'program a galo frito (Brazil),' and 'bomber

¹⁴ According to Wikipedia, YouTube personalities are those who are popular users or groups on YouTube because of their videos. Some users have sponsors who pay for the users' products for online ads. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube_celebrities

ball (Thailand)' etc. Although these people exist outside of mainstream media, they are as popular as any celebrity within the YouTube community. Some run several channels on YouTube and provide regularly featured content once or twice a week. It is as if a famous entertainer runs his/her own program channels in mainstream media. These YouTube celebrities have a great number of subscribers. Thus, their influences on YouTube are much greater than any other user.

The feature of the YouTube celebrities and professional filmmakers is good at handling the materials of the original video and integrating them with other popular characters and stories such as Gandalf in *The Lord of the Ring* and Orange in *Annoying Orange*. User 'Jervy Hou' is one example. His parody 'Gunman Style – Western Parody' tells a story of an Asian male who longs to be a gunslinger in the American West. The protagonist of the parody challenges against powerful villains in order to save a girl captured in hostage. In this parody, a lot of popular cultural icons such as a western gunman and a ninja are mixed in. 'Jervy Hou' also changed the lyrics and arranged the original music of *Gangnam Style* with western style rhythm and effect sounds. Despite totally different plot and imageries, the video displays a very polished parody which has unmistakable riding horse dance scenes and the basic melody line of *Gangnam Style*. In his interview video on his YouTube page (Jervy Hou, 2012, May 15), Jervy Hou mentioned that he has worked on YouTube as a producer, musician, writer, and filmmaker. Professionally, he has made money as a freelance photographer, wedding videographer, and music engineer. He stated that his goal behind making videos is to attain professional benefits and social recognition. Another YouTube celebrity 'Barely Political' is well known for one of the most famous comedian teams on YouTube. The channel has more than 3.5 million subscribers and runs several comedy channels on YouTube as of April 2014.¹⁵ Its parody 'Kim Jong Style' criticizes North

¹⁵ Owing to their matchless capacity of making comedy video, 'Barely Political' was bought by YouTube in 2011. Besides them, some YouTube celebrities engaged in YouTube not as individuals but as partners.

Korea's leader, Kim Jong-eun and his father Kim Jong-il by using black humor and a filk song.¹⁶

This parody rarely uses the motifs of the original *Gangnam Style* music video. By replacing horses in stable with North Koreans in a jail, the video keenly satirizes the dictatorship of North Korea. Like 'Jervy Hou' and 'Barely Political,' the user-generated videos by YouTube celebrities and media professionals uploaded sophisticated and refined video clips.

In addition to YouTube celebrities, semi-professional users like school PR agents took part in producing parodies. 'Go Ducks dot com,' an official YouTube channel of the University of Oregon, published a promotional parody video by featuring the Oregon Duck mascot and the cheer squad. As it was followed by other colleges' parodies including the US Naval Academy and West Point, this parody video became a new model of school videos. As *Gangnam Style* stimulated the users to replicate, reuse and re-create its textual hooks such as dance, song, costume, expression and even setting, the Oregon Duck's parody provided other users the format of group dance, use of symbolic icon and of location as well as motivation of parody production.

In fact, even YouTube celebrities or active uploaders who have millions of subscribers find it hard to make their videos 'go viral' whenever they upload. Thus, using an opportunity like the *Gangnam Style* phenomenon is very helpful to gain or maintain their popularity. Inversely, YouTube celebrities or semi-professional users' involvement can influence the dissemination of *Gangnam Style* due to their subscribers. These viewers can transmit to other Internet sites or SNS. A Korean researcher of webometrics, Park Han-woo says, "Web content is generally transmitted through three steps, 'source – authority – hub,' among them, the role of hub is very important to transmit. The hub which mainly existed on Twitter heretofore appears on YouTube now" (Go,

¹⁶ Filking is a musical culture which appears in fandom. According to Jenkins, 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" (2012, p.252). The parody users add and change the meaning of the original song to their own interpretation through the filk songs. The filked lyrics carefully juxtaposed with parody images and another dimension to the practice of textual poaching.

2012, September 5). According to Park, the active users play a crucial role as the hubs on YouTube.

As *Gangnam Style* became a bona fide phenomenon through online and offline media, new YouTube members who had never published any clips began to upload their own videos. User 'bkyi1004' published a footage which filmed a wedding ceremony performance in South Korea; 'M soto,' a flash mob video of Cornell University; and a Taiwanese user '男彦黃,' one boy's cover dance performance. Despite relatively unrefined videos in comparison with other professional works, these videos easily gained more than one million clicks within one month of their releases. This shows the fact that spreadable media stimulate general users to take an active part in production beyond just viewers.

Owing to this dynamic collaboration between the original content and YouTube active users, *Gangnam Style* was nominated in the 'Best Video' category at the MTV Europe Music Awards on September 17 and reached number two on the Billboard Hot 100 Chart on September 27. This news publicly demonstrated that *Gangnam Style* had become a worldwide cultural phenomenon.

5.3.4 The fourth stage (September 28~)

After being ranked second on Billboard's main chart, the view count of *Gangnam Style* on YouTube increased exponentially. Since the *Gangnam Style* music video hit three million views on YouTube on September 28, public interests focused on if *Gangnam Style* could break the highest viewed music video record of Justin Bieber's 'Baby' and how long this cultural phenomenon would last.

At that time, PSY held his free concert at Seoul City Hall Square.¹⁷ The concert was broadcast live across the world through YouTube and Ustream. During the 2-hour live concert, the number of views reached 1.6 million from 145 countries. According to Google Trend, this event peaked atop the web search trend about *Gangnam Style* along with PSY's Christmas concert with President Obama in Washington, the U.S. Since PSY continued to tour Australia, the U.S. and Europe by the end of the year, public interest in PSY and *Gangnam Style* maintained a certain level without a huge decline.

In this stage, popular user-generated videos of *Gangnam Style* show the tendency of higher-quality and more refined production through repeating replication and re-creation of *Gangnam Style*. The cover dance video of 'CPDRC' inmates, a rehabilitation center in the Philippines, represents group dance at the highest level. The parodies continued to evolve. 'Mitt Romney Style,' 'Obama Style' and 'NASA Johnson Style' show that the *Gangnam Style* parody craze swept the domain of even science and politics. These videos recorded high numbers of hits as soon as they were published on YouTube. Since *Gangnam Style* already had huge fan bases in this period, new parodies with high quality easily gained popularity.

6 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION: TRANSNATIONAL AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION IN GLOBALIZATION OF K-POP

This study examines numerous aspects of the *Gangnam Style* phenomenon, in relation to the transnational dissemination process of the original music video and its user-generated videos. Particularly, the characteristics of the diffusion process of *Gangnam Style* help us to understand the complex conditions of K-pop's global circulation. Based on the analysis of the user-

¹⁷ PSY's Seoul city hall concert was held on October 4. The number of audiences attending the concert was estimated about 80,000. All the audiences sang along the hit song with the riding horse dance.

generated videos of *Gangnam Style*, this chapter provides in-depth discussions about transnational production and consumption of *Gangnam Style* videos in the global circulation process and cultural implications of the networked audience's co-production and re-production. In addition, this section identifies the significances and limitations of the case study of *Gangnam Style*, and finally the future research is suggested.

6.1 Collaboration of Fans, Celebrities, and Mainstream Media

In terms of the propagation path of *Gangnam Style*, starting from the distribution of YouTube, it was simultaneously moved to other SNS such as Twitter and Facebook, and then, gradually dispersed into mainstream media like television and radio. Global fans who were familiar with K-pop first popularized *Gangnam Style*. These fans not only spread the original music video on their SNS sites but also reproduced diverse fan videos such as reaction, translation, cover videos etc. However, the first trigger that aroused the interest of the public was popular celebrities tweeting, who have tremendous numbers of followers. Then as mass media, which detected a notable movement on new media introduced extensively the music video and the singer, the public interest for *Gangnam Style* was amplified.

What is remarkable is those who formed the bridge between the original music video and the mainstream media. Popular celebrities greatly contributed to the dissemination of the music video by producing their own videos as well as by transmitting the original music videos. Some existing professional entertainers attracted the eyes of users with their *Gangnam Style* cover dance videos. The mainstream media's official YouTube accounts also worked as an influential user of the space of SNS. Above all, PSY's representative got full mileage out of their power as an "influencer." PSY's official YouTube account provided his original videos at intervals. By

offering new contents and appearing on mass media continuously, PSY's representative could keep the viewers' interests at a certain level.

The activities of powerful mediators in the case of *Gangnam Style* demonstrate that some people's activities are much more powerful than other general users. In terms of the role of an influencer, Katz-Lazarsfeld's two-step flow hypothesis suggested that the media's messages are channeled to the audiences through opinion readerships, i.e., personal influence (1955). Depending on the ideas of the two-step flow, Everett Rogers (2010) asserted that diffusion of an innovation is influenced through certain channels, time, and the social system. Specifically, Rogers emphasized that opinion leaders who typically have greater exposure to the mass media, higher socioeconomic status, more cosmopolitan and great contact with change agents have the most influence in the innovation decision process. That is, the diffusion of innovation relies heavily on the influence of opinion leaders.

However, the two-step flow theory is only partially correct in the dissemination process of *Gangnam Style*. Rather, the music video was circulated in multilateral directions. Even though celebrities played a crucial role in mediating the original music video with the public, their influence is temporal and exists in the complex dynamics between audiences and mainstream media. From more detailed view, the first transmitter of *Gangnam Style* to the celebrities is K-pop fans. Without these fans' devoted activities, *Gangnam Style* might not be delivered to the popular celebrities. Also, the followers of the celebrities also contributed to the diffusion of *Gangnam Style*, with re-tweeting the celebrities' comments, by extension, YouTube users' ceaseless activities such as sharing, commenting, evaluating, creating etc. held up and accelerated the dissemination velocity and range of *Gangnam Style*. Mainstream media also introduced PSY and the music video and provided related video clips. Whenever PSY appeared in the mainstream media or up-

loaded new content on YouTube, the original footages of the mass media and PSY were instantly re-uploaded by the users. As these footages were transmitted by other SNS, websites and blogs, they received explosive numbers of views in a very short time. This indicates that all agents were not mutually exclusive but complementary and cooperative in the dissemination process of *Gangnam Style*.

What is specifically noteworthy is that the role of mediators or influencers was not largely unseen in the case of *Gentleman*,¹⁸ which is PSY's song after *Gangnam Style*. Although *Gangnam Style* reached to 100 million views in more than 50 days since its first release, *Gentleman* took just four days to gain the same viewership (Seo, 2013, April 17). The fact that *Gentleman* immediately spread over the world as soon as it was released means that the music video, unlike *Gangnam Style*, directly and simultaneously communicated with all agents. This shows that in the converging media environment, agents are closely connected with one another and the diffusion pathway of cultural content varies depending on the interactions of content, agent, and time.

6.2 *Gangnam Style* on YouTube, Conjunction of New Media and Old Media

The active interactions and collaborations between the original music video and the users, and between new media and traditional media are attributed to YouTube. As a distribution hub for videos, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2009) divide the functions of YouTube into two categories: “a ‘top-down’ platform for the distribution of pop culture and a ‘bottom-up’ platform for vernacular creativity” (2009, p.6). That is, YouTube is used as a distribution platform for the products of commercial media as well as a platform for user-generated content. To put it simply, when a music video is released, it is a commodity, and then if the video is transmitted by users

¹⁸ *Gentleman* was published on April 12, 2013. After 10 days from the release, the music video hit 200 million views on YouTube. At the end of 2013, *Gentleman* was awarded as “the most-viewed” video of the year and surpassed 600 million views on YouTube.

on YouTube or SNS without any expense, it is a gift, and through this dissemination, if the video becomes popular and creates added value, it is a commodity again. Thus, a gift economy and a commodity economy go together on YouTube, and users participate in YouTube activities for sharing pleasure as well as economical and social benefits.

Particularly, the partnership program of YouTube, which share profits from the uploaded videos with the owners triggers more active participation of users. Since YouTube has implemented the program, competent users so-called “YouTube celebrities” have emerged. In reality, the fact that the *Gangnam Style* videos that gained high view counts were produced by professionals and semiprofessionals reflects this YouTube ecology. Also, those who produce diverse fan videos with their talent, language skills, and technological skills actively participate in YouTube production work. However, the main beneficiaries of YouTube are the music producers themselves. For at least K-pop producers and distributors, YouTube channels are the most effective tools to promote, disseminate and make a profit on their music videos. Since the more users participate in, the more profits are generated, K-pop producers and distributors seek a way to cause the users to actively participate. Non-infringement policy of copyrights is an outcome of their YouTube-focused marketing strategies.¹⁹

To better understand YouTube ecology as a converging platform of new media and traditional media, it is necessary to look at the systemic structure of YouTube. Although all users have the potential to be active participants, it is also true that there exists a hierarchy on YouTube. Donella Meadow (2008), in her book *Thinking in System*, asserts three characteristics of websites which make the system function well: hierarchy, self-organization, and resilience. She

¹⁹ According to the guideline of YouTube Partner Reward program as of April, 2014, rewards fall to the channels with more than 100,000 subscribers. Channel qualification is determined several times a year. If a channel gets over 1,000,000 subscribers, it is re-qualified with Golden button plaque. A channel only needs to pass a threshold once to qualify for a reward and each channel is eligible to receive a reward once for each milestone. Available on <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2667769?hl=en>.

insists that the hierarchical system can work as a form of self-organization which can be more complex and change through diverse activities, and resilience allows systems to recover, thus claiming that each possesses characteristics that correlate with the nature of websites. According to Meadow's three factors, Varun Mangal (2011) discovers that YouTube has the very presence of resilience as well as hierarchy. That is, users including individuals as well as mass media on YouTube play in a hierarchical structure such as ranking, whereas their interaction and correlations— i.e., “user-to-user” interaction —flatten the hierarchy (2011, p.140). Also, spreadable media like *Gangnam Style*, which trigger participation and activities of audience catalyze dynamic connectivity. Therefore, YouTube, as du Guy et al. argue, is a dynamic sphere where the cultural circuit of ‘production-consumption-identity-representation-regulation’ overlaps and intertwines with each other through dynamic interactions and participation of multilayered users. *Gangnam Style* on YouTube was a catalyst to stimulate and accelerate the cultural circulation.

6.3 From Translation to Parody, Cultural Hybridity and Spreadability of *Gangnam Style*

Throughout the dissemination process of *Gangnam Style*, multilayered users reacted, reused, and reproduced *Gangnam Style* videos. Starting from K-pop fans' translation, reaction, and cover videos, mash-up videos by fan-video makers were followed by parodies by YouTube-based entertainers and filmmakers. These videos gained high view counts due to the strength of their high quality and many subscribers. These high-quality fan-videos and parodies were introduced by mainstream media and other websites. Also, the videos affected the participation of general users and newcomers. In this way, the user-generated videos of *Gangnam Style* were produced to cover almost every YouTube genre.

These user-generated videos co-produced and re-produced *Gangnam Style* in diverse ways from imitation to creation. Like the original video, its user-generated videos also showed remarkably high hybridity. Particularly, *Gangnam Style* parodies are not simple copies of the original music video. Although they replicated the textual attracters of *Gangnam Style* such as music, dance, characters and comic expression, the parody makers created new cultural texts by substituting their cultural, geographical, and ethnical features. For example, ‘Dead pool vs. Gangnam Style’ uploaded by user ‘critiques4geeks’ and ‘Slender man vs. Gangnam Style’ by user ‘Champ Chong’ represented the users’ cultural preference with the scenes which popular characters of *Slender Man*²⁰ and *Dead pool*²¹ perform the riding horse dance. ‘Oppa Chicago Style’ (Chicago, US), ‘Oppa-ya Daegu Style’ (Daegu, Korea), ‘Orang Shaba Style’ (Shaba, Malaysia), ‘กำนันสไตล์ (เสือร้องไห้) Village Style’ (Thailand), ‘Jewish Style’ (Israel) etc. showed local scenery, ethnic symbols and regional images in the videos.

The most frequently parodied audiovisual hook of *Gangnam Style* in the user-generated videos is definitely the riding horse dance. The dance was used as a representative code to show that the parodies came from *Gangnam Style*. Also, the selected parodies ensured cultural continuity by using comical scenes of the original music video, such as ‘elevator scene,’ ‘parking-lot dance battle scene,’ ‘garbage wind scene’ etc. Some parodies followed the cultural convention of *Gangnam Style* through self-deprecating their protagonists as a flawed masculine character.

²⁰ *Slender Man* is a fictional character which originated as an Internet meme. The character is described as very tall and thin with unnaturally long arms, often ending in tentacles. It has a pale featureless head and appears to be wearing a dark suit. It has the ability to teleport. The success of the *Slender Man* legend has been ascribed to the connective nature of the Internet. It exemplifies the similarities between traditional folklore and the open source ethos of the Internet. Unlike those of traditional monsters such as vampires and werewolves, the *Slender Man*’s mythos can be tracked and signposted, giving a powerful insight into how myth and folklore form.

²¹ *Deadpool* is a fictional character, a mercenary and anti-hero appearing in comic books. The character is famous for his talkative nature and his tendency to “break the fourth wall,” which is used as humorous effect.

However, the parodies differentiated themselves from the original video with other cultural codes as well as diverse audiovisual editing skills and expression styles. Filking and using misheard lyrics is one of the most notable manners to differentiate from the original video. These musical variations show audiences' creative readings of the original content.

By using other popular symbols, cultural images and various expressional skills, the user-video makers drew a line between their parodies and the original music video. Jenkins, in his article "How to Watch a Fan-Vid" on his blog, points out that: "they (fan-video makers) are trying to entertain hypotheticals, address what if questions, and propose alternative realities. Part of the pleasure of fan made media is seeing the same situations through multiple points of view, reading the same characters in radically different ways. The same artist might offer multiple constructions of the characters and their relationships across different works — simply to keep alive this play with different readings" (2006b). That is, how audiences can identify themselves with what they see is most important in their construction of pleasure from media consumption. In this regard, the hybrid cultural appropriation of users, including the mash-up videos and 'misheard' and filked parodies can be said to be a creative product to subvert the meaning of the original text for the purpose of users' pleasure.

As Linda Hutcheon(1985) emphasizes, parody cannot work without the audience's recognition. Parody producers should construct a second meaning through implying about the original materials and supplement the background context with sharing knowledge (Hutcheon, 1985). If a parody has no sharing knowledge about the background context, the parody gets naturalized and eliminated. Therefore, parody requires a certain level of literary and social knowledge. It means that people who do creative work are inclined to relatively freely interpret the text and to demonstrate vigorous imagination. The outgrowths generated through these users' activities are

neither by-products of *Gangnam Style* nor that of the cultural characters or formats which the users deployed. As Hutcheon points out that “local particularities become transplanted to new grounds, and something new and hybrid results” (2006, p.150), the parody has inherent hybridity (and multiplicity) in the process of translation and adaptation.

According to Papastergiadis (2005), hybridity has three related states. On the first level, hybridity manifests the visible difference in identity as a result of the incorporation of foreign elements. On the next level, hybridity naturalizes and neutralizes cultural difference within the body of host culture. In this level, the degree of cultural mixture or hybridization has varied over time. Finally, the third level of hybridity represents the new critical practices and cultural forms which serve as a counterpoint to either closed forms of tradition or universal forms of abstraction which essentialist theories confine. However, in the case of *Gangnam Style*, the multiple levels of hybridity simultaneously occurred in the process of audience’s consumption and reproduction. The synchronistic hybridization of *Gangnam Style* implies high mobility of contemporary popular culture. Lee Su-an (2013) explains that the reason why K-pop has rapidly spread and interacted with global audience is that converging media accelerate cultural hybridity. In other words, the music videos on social media such as YouTube satisfies the audiovisual appetites of networked global audiences and accelerates cultural hybridization through the audience participation, thus attracting global hybridity of sense and sensibility. Therefore, cultural hybridity needs to be considered from various angles including the interactions of cultural products and audience as well as the dynamic characteristics of current convergence culture.

6.4 Limitation and Future Research

This thesis has discussed global circulation process of *Gangnam Style* in converging media environment. While the existing studies of Korean Wave usually concentrate on reception of

local audiences, they fail to explain K-pop's global consumption beyond the East Asian region. Specifically, *Gangnam Style*'s rapid and wide circulation over the world challenges the global dominant flow and American-Euro-centric music market. In order to discuss the dynamic circulation of the music video, this thesis explored cultural globalization theories, cultural production and consumption models, and audience-centered discourses. Focusing on the interrelationships between the networked audience and transnational media content, this case study empirically and practically examined the diffusion process of *Gangnam Style* and its cultural implications. Through the case study of *Gangnam Style*, this thesis provides more detailed and comprehensive analysis of globalization of K-pop and a rich and holistic account of complex and dynamic global cultural circulation.

Since *Gangnam Style* is the frontrunner of K-pop to open the dominant global music market, the limitation of this thesis basically lies in the uniqueness of the case. Although the case study of *Gangnam Style* have potential importance in investigating complex global media flow, the results of the analysis cannot be generalized in globalization of non-hegemonic content because it recorded unprecedented and epoch-making success in world music history as well as Korean pop song history. Further limitations involve research range and duration. Since countless *Gangnam Style videos* were circulated on YouTube, this research collected the user-generated videos viewed more than one million times. Because high-viewed YouTube videos are generally likely to be produced by experienced and skilled users, there is possibility of biased data collection and lack of representativeness. In addition, YouTube accounts which are nicknamed and identified depending on the users' own free will cannot fully guarantee the authenticity of the information on the pages, but also supply accurate information about the users. Except design of the case study, the lack of previous study is one of the limitations this research encountered.

Since there has been little academic research and argument about K-pop and its globalization, this thesis partly relies on news articles and industrial reports regarding K-pop.

The globalization of K-pop is an ongoing process. Thus, this thesis is a beginning, not an end of study about the cultural trend. Further research will be more concentrated on ethnography to capture the identities of the networked users, motivations of their cultural participation, and their media usage and cultural consumption in everyday life. Although this thesis discusses the role of networked audience in the dissemination process of *Gangnam Style*, the ethnographic research and observation on K-pop audience in future research will investigate how the uneven and multilayered audiences connect and communicate with one another in consuming process of K-pop, and how K-pop fans and YouTube users contribute to globalization of K-pop and ultimately, diversification of global culture. Additionally, future research projects on K-pop should take into consideration textual attractions in the digital era. It can include how the audience with different cultural background and identity feel and share the cultural sentiment of K-pop and how K-pop audiences in and outside East Asian countries form cultural communities. The future research will help unearth whether K-pop can sustain its global popularity as a unique music form with its own independent domains.

I hope that this thesis empirically and theoretically understands the relationships among audience, converging media, popular music industry, and globalization of Korean Wave. When he got an invitation to the Oxford Union Society, PSY stated:

People saw it and what they thought was, I think, “we can do it, we can do PSY’s dance” just like you doing the riding horse dance these days. So what I thought was “I can provide them (an opportunity of) participation instead of exhibition.”²²

²² Oxford Union. (2012, November 16). PSY | Full Address | Oxford Union. *YouTube.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2f99cTgT5mg&feature=g-high>

His remark shows that he had already known how cultural products circulate in the convergence culture – not through exhibition but participation. That is a keyword that accounts for an essential force circulating popular content globally.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: The transcript of *Gangnam Style*

Time	Picture	Lyrics (Sound)
0'00"	A plane flies by with an attached 'Gangnam style' tag. (Zoom Out) A fanning girl mirrored in Psy's sun glasses (Z.O.) Psy's face with sun glasses Psy is leaning back in a beach chair at what looks like a sandy beach. (Z.O.) It turns out to be a playground.	(Music starts) Oppa is Gangnam style! Gangnam style!
18"	With a row of horses in a stable, Psy walks in and performs the riding-horse dance. In the playground, a boy skillfully dances with funny expression, behind the boy, Psy squirts out a cup of coffee. (Cross cutting the stable scene and the playground scene) Psy dances with a skyscraper for background	A girl who is warm and humane during the day. A classy girl who knows how to enjoy the freedom of a cup of coffee. A girl whose heart gets hotter when night comes. A girl with that kind of twist.
33"	Psy and two girls weather through waste, trash and artificial snow in the wind as if they are on a catwalk.	I'm a guy. A guy who is as warm as you during the day. A guy who one-shots his coffee before it even cools down. A guy whose heart bursts when night comes. That kind of guy.
48"	Resting his head on a man's shoulder, Psy sits in a sauna and gazes at a gangster with envy and awe. Psy sings in front of two old men playing Korean chess (at riverside of Han-river)	Beautiful, Loveable, Yes you! Hey! yes you, hey!
55"	Psy dances with a girl in an indoor tennis court while a few people are playing tennis. Psy gazes at the dancing gangster in the sauna. Psy sings in front of two old men. Psy sings in a tour bus with seniors. (Cross cutting the chess scene and bus scene) Explosion at riverside, two old men are thrown out. Psy walks forward and exclaims.	Beautiful, Loveable, Yes you, hey! yes you, hey! Now let's go until the end. Oppa is Gangnam style!
1'11"	Psy and back dancers play the riding-horse dance in an indoor horse training field. Two woman walk backward and Psy chases them while playing the riding-horse dance. Psy dances in an indoor tennis court, a girl comes in. Psy and the girl ride a merry-go-round. Psy dances with the merry-go-round in the back-ground.	Gangnam style! Op, Op, Op, Op, Op, Oppa is Gangnam style! Gangnam style! Op, Op, Op, Op, Op!

1'25"	<p>Psy dances in an indoor horse training field with riding horsemen for background. Women do yoga by the riverside of Han-river, and Psy appears dancing. Psy sings in a tour bus with seniors</p> <p>Psy dances on the boat Wiggling hips of yoga women, Psy yells.</p>	<p>Oppa is Gangnam style! Eh- Sexy Lady, Op, Op, Op, Op, Op, Oppa is Gangnam style! Eh- Sexy Lady Op, Op, Op, Op! Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!</p>
1'40"	<p>Psy and a few girls dance in an indoor parking lot. A man with yellow suit walks beside Psy, And he shows off his presence with hopping dance.</p>	<p>A girl who looks quiet but plays when she plays. A girl who puts her hair down when the right time comes. A girl who covers herself but is sexier than a girl who bares it all. A sensible girl like that.</p>
1'55"	<p>An elevator door opens, and a man does a dirty dance. Below the man Psy sings on his stomach. The yellow man of the parking lot drives away in his red luxurious sport car.</p>	<p>I'm a guy. A guy who seems calm but plays when he plays. A guy who goes completely crazy when the right time comes. A guy who has bulging ideas rather than muscles That kind of guy.</p>
2'10"	<p>Psy catches a girl in the subway. (Slow motion) The girl performs a sexy dance. Psy walks closer to her Both of them go near each other (Cross cutting) They are conjoined.</p>	<p>Beautiful, loveable! Yes you, hey, yes you, hey! Beautiful, loveable! Yes you, hey, yes you, hey Now let's go until the end.</p>
2'32"	<p>Psy exclaims to the girl. Psy, the girl, and back up dancers play the riding-horse dance on a platform of the subway Psy with swimming goggles pulls out of water and exclaims. (Z.O) It turns out to be a hot bath. Psy goes with dancing on a crossroad. Psy and girls perform the riding-horse dance on the subway platform. Psy plunders into the bath.</p>	<p>Oppa is Gangnam style, Gangnam style Op, Op, Op, Op, Op, Oppa is Gangnam style! Gangnam style! Op, Op, Op, Op, Op! Oppa is Gangnam style!</p>
2'48"	<p>Psy and girls perform the riding-horse dance on the subway platform, and Psy crawls under the girl's legs. Psy and girls dance in an indoor horse training field with riding horsemen for background. Psy plunders in the bath.</p>	<p>Eh- Sexy Lady, Op, Op, Op, Op, Op, Oppa is Gangnam style! Eh- Sexy Lady Op, Op, Op, Op! Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!</p>
3'03"	<p>Psy dances and leers at the girl Psy sings in a black suit. (Z.O) It turns out that he sits on the toilet</p>	<p>On top of the running man is the flying man, baby baby, I'm a man who knows a thing or two. On top of the running man is the flying man, baby baby, I'm a man who knows a</p>

		<p>thing or two. You know what I'm saying? Oppa is Gangnam style!</p>
3'18"	<p>Psy dances in a tour bus Psy dances with people from all walks of life under bright and neon light.</p> <p>(Fade Out)</p>	<p>Eh- Sexy Lady, Op, Op, Op, Op, Op, Oppa is Gangnam style! Eh- Sexy Lady Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oh, Oppa is Gangnam style! (Music ends up)</p>
3'44" (4'13")	<p>Replaying of the parking lot scene and the explosion scene (Yellow man and Psy have a dance battle. And after the explosion, Psy comes forward and exclaims)</p>	<p>“OppanGangnam Style!”</p>