

K-pop

on the Global Platform: European Audience Reception and Contexts



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(K-pop의 세계무대: 유럽청중의 수용과
사회적 환경을 중심으로)

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K-pop on the Global Platform: European Audience Reception and Contexts

(General Introduction)

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1. Introduction

Amongst various contemporary Korean popular cultures disseminated across the globe, K-pop is increasingly gaining its importance as an Asian pop targeting the global market. Highly syncretic in terms of its styles and readily available online free of charge, K-pop's easy accessibility makes it almost ubiquitous to many global fans. At the same time, the specificities of regional music scenes and the characteristics of local fan cultures give shape to the ways in which K-pop is received and consumed locally. This research address some of the particularities of different K-pop scenes across Europe in parallel with the regional specificities of Korean Wave reception.

The report provides the outcome of the collaborative research project on K-pop Fandom in Europe undertaken by Dr. Haekyung Um (University of Liverpool, UK), Dr. Sang-Yeon Sung (Vienna University, Austria) and Dr. Michael Fuhr (University of Hanover, Germany) from March to December 2013. The research was undertaken in collaboration with the Institute for Popular Music at the University of Liverpool, the Korean Cultural Centre UK in London and the Korean Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE) in Seoul, which also provided the funding for the project. This comparative ethnographic research intends to bring together popular music scholarship, cultural diplomacy practice and culture industries research. It should be noted that the support and assistant of Dr. SungHyun Park, the head of the KOFICE Research Division and other staff members, Ms. Jieun Lee and Eunkyung Lee, were instrumental to the completion of the project.

The General Introduction consists of five sections as follows:

1. 'K-pop At Large' introduces the musical genre and style.
2. 'Triangulated Relationships: K-pop, Korean Wave and Cultural Policy' reviews some of the significant social and cultural contexts for the global dissemination of K-pop as they relate to the development of contemporary Korean popular culture, cultural policy and the creative industries.
3. 'Overview of Key Concepts' discusses some of the key theoretical concepts, including

scenes, fandom, cosmopolitanism, convergence culture, participatory culture, global youth culture and identity, all of which are inextricably linked to each other and give shape to the emerging patterns of K-pop reception and consumption in Europe and across the globe.

4. 'Research Aims and Objectives' outlines what this project set out to accomplish.
5. Finally, 'Research Methods and Activities' describes the significance of ethnographic the research methods employed and individual engagements and research activities undertaken by the investigators in this collaborative project.

2. K-pop At Large

K-pop is a mainstream popular music genre from South Korea which combines a number of different styles including pop, rock, electro, R&B, dance, hip hop, etc. It is performed by young pop idols, groomed by the major entertainment agencies such as SM, JYP and YG all of which employ 360-degree contracts.¹⁾ Targeting overseas audiences, K-pop is also sung in Japanese, Chinese and English. K-pop idol membership is increasingly transnational and includes, American Korean, Chinese [Fei of Miss A], American Taiwanese [Amber of f(x)], Thai [Nikhun of 2PM]. More specifically, SM's boy band EXO consists of two subunits: EXO-M that performs predominantly in Chinese and EXO-K in Korean.

While it is specifically local in terms of its domestic Korean production, its fan-base is Asian regional, including Japan in particular which is the second largest music market in the world. Various social media, and their associated participatory culture, contribute to its wide dissemination online. Given the small size of the Korean domestic market, K-pop is a musical product made for international export. At the same time, it is specifically local Korean in terms of its production methods and strategies which

1) There are over 100 entertainment management agencies in Korea but only 8 companies are listed on the stock market. Entertainment agencies (e.g. SM, YG, JYP, etc.): plan, produce and manage all aspects of their musical and entertainment activities. An 'Apprentice' system of training includes singing, dancing, rapping, stage manners, acting and foreign languages (mostly Japanese; English and Chinese) for approximately 2 years before debuting. Assigned personas and specialisations include, for example, projecting a tough guy image or being a cute member of a group, singing or leading dancing or rapping.



are largely based on the idol system managed by the major entertainment agencies (Kim 2012; Park 2013a, 2013b; Russell 2008; Yi Ch'angu et al. 2012), which, in turn, were originally developed in Japan (see Stevens 2008: 68–100 for Japanese music business practice). In the last few years K-pop has expanded across the globe, reaching out to fans in the Americas, Europe and the Middle East (see Kim and Kim 2011 and Korean Culture Information Service 2011 for the global dissemination of K-pop). K-pop's most recent expansion owes a great deal to digital technology and various social media and their associated participatory culture, with Psy's 'Gangnam Style' setting the world record as the most watched video including its numerous parodies.

3. Triangulated Relationships: K-pop, Korean Wave and Cultural Policy

K-pop is closely associated with the significant development of Korean popular culture known as the Korean Wave (Hallyu), which began in the late 1990s with the popularity of Korean TV dramas across East Asia. As a cultural export Korean Wave, which now includes film, music, food, fashion, etc., has become a source of national pride. It is also seen as a cultural commodity with significant economic and political value (also see Lee 2008 for the cultural politics of Korean Wave).²⁾ Since 2009 the Korean Wave has been strategically promoted by the Korean Ministry of Culture as its 'nation branding' project.³⁾ This development began with the government initiatives in 2008 to promote Korea's national image globally with the establishment of the Presidential Council on Nation Branding⁴⁾ with the specific aim of utilizing international status and

2) Since the government of Kim Dae Jung in the late 1990s, South Korea has been providing support and subsidies for the Korean domestic cultural industries to improve its international competitiveness. (Yim 2002: 46–47). Otmazgin (2011) also notes that in recent years governments of East Asia have recognised the economic potential and political value of pop culture products.

3) It should be noted that a variety of campaigns to promote Korea's image were developed since the early 2000s. For example, 'Dynamic Korea' was initiated in connection with the 2002 World Cup co-hosted by Korea and Japan. The 2007 campaign of 'Korea Sparkling' has now been replaced by 'Korea, Be Inspired' which was launched in 2010. These campaigns have been managed by the Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO). For example, see the English page of 'Korea, Be Inspired': <http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/index.kto> (accessed 30 December 2013).

4) The council was inaugurated on 22 January 2009 following President Lee Myung Bak's speech on the 15 August 2008, which stressed 3 core values for Korea's future: a law abiding spirit, green growth and the importance of a nation branding.

national self-esteem as a foundation to create a reliable and dignified Korea.⁵⁾

In connection with Korea's effort for nation branding, the Korean Wave is also seen as a tool for cultural diplomacy to enhance Korea's 'soft power'. According to Nye, 'soft power' is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments (Nye 2004).⁶⁾ It is also notable that the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs published their *Cultural Diplomacy Manual* in 2011, in order to develop effective strategies and cohesive programmes led by the Ministry and in collaboration with various governments, affiliated institutions and overseas diplomatic services. The dissemination of the Korean Wave (see page 24 of the Manual) is one of the key tasks for diplomatic projects to attain 'soft power' (also see Jang and Paik 2012; Nye and Kim 2013)⁷⁾.

In this context, marketing K-pop, as part of the Korean Wave, on the global stage is not just the business of the music industry but also the public sector through Korean diplomatic and overseas cultural services, including: Korean Embassies, Korean Cultural Centres (KCC), Korean Culture and Information Services (KOCIS) and the Korean Creative Contents Agency (KOCCA). With South Korean government support, popular culture is promoted as a national symbol. At the same time, the promotion of the Korean Wave varies from place to place with specific emphases as shown in the programmes offered by different Korean Culture Centres in Europe, for example: contemporary/popular music for the UK and traditional art and music for Germany.

5) The vision and strategies of the council can be found at: <http://www.koreabrand.net/gokr/en/cms/selectKbrdCmsPageTbl.do?cd=0120&m1=1&m2=5>, accessed 23 June 2013. The council's main initiatives include: (1) acting as a pan-governmental controlling agency; (2) supporting effective nation branding projects; and (3) reinforcing and expanding public cooperation and participation. For more details, see: <http://www.koreabrand.net/gokr/en/cms/selectKbrdCmsPageTbl.do?cd=0119&m1=1&m2=4> (accessed 23 June 2013).

6) Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power' was first proposed to analyse America's foreign policy but is now widely applied elsewhere. Chua Beng Huat offers various case studies and in-depth discussions on East Asian pop culture and soft power (2012).

7) Nye and Kim's co-authored article discusses the potentials and limitations of the Korean Wave as cultural resources to achieve soft power (2013: 31-42).



4. Overview of Some Key Concepts

Scenes

The term ‘scene’, according to Cohen, is broadly defined and includes, for example, ‘a group of people who have something in common, such as a shared musical activity or taste’ and is most often applied to ‘groups of people and organisations, situations, and events involved with the production and consumption of particular music genres and style’. This term is also used to describe ‘situations in which distinctions between informal and formal music activity, and between the activities and roles of music audiences, producers and performers, are blurred’ (Cohen 1999: 239). While it is additionally used to refer to music activity within specific geographical areas, scenes are not isolated from outside worlds, non-local influences and also global impacts. Therefore, the term ‘scene’ highlights the dynamic, shifting and globally interconnected nature of music activity in comparison with more bounded terms like ‘community’, ‘subculture’ (ibid.). This theoretical concept of ‘scene’, is useful when identifying the local specificities of particular K-pop scenes, on the one hand, while, at the same time, understanding the dynamic connections and influences that global K-pop music scenes share.

Fandom

Fandom is the collective term for the phenomenon of fans and their behaviour (Schuker 2003: 116–117). In many respects, the concept of fandom is closely linked to the above-described ‘scene’ in the sense that fandom is often locally situated and yet it operates globally. Fiske suggests that fans create a fan culture with its own system of production and distribution, which he terms a ‘shadow cultural economy’. According to Fiske, it lies outside the cultural industries yet shares feature with them (Fiske 1992). Interestingly Duffet (2013a) argues that other than the Cavicchi’s work, the analysis of fans is a relatively new area of research in popular music studies.⁸⁾ In

8) Daniel Cavicchi’s ethnographic research on Bruce Springsteen fans (1998) is considered to be one of the most significant studies on the topic. Other major book-length publications on fandom include: Lisa Lewis’s edited volume (1992), Matthew Hill’s monograph (2002), Cornel Sandvoss’s monograph (2005), Gray, Harrington and Sandvoss’ co-edited volume (2007) and Mark Duffet’s recent book (2013b).

fact, fans are very often stereotyped, as being passive, or even 'regressive' as suggested by Adorno with respect to mass consumption of popular music (1991: 44–45). More recent research on media consumers, such as fan studies by Jenkins, shows that fans in fact are active communal, intelligent and politicised, etc. (more will be discussed below about Jenkins and his theories). The fandom studies on popular music and culture tend to focus on the Anglo–American genres, with exceptions being the studies of Japanese media consumers (e.g. Kelly 2004, Stevens 2010). However, understanding of K–pop fandom as part of global music practice and its analysis from broader theoretical perspectives that deals with a specific genre K–pop (accepting the fact K–pop is broadly defined) in multiple locations in Western Europe will benefit from the expanding body of literature in the field of fandom studies.

Cosmopolitanism

The concept of cosmopolitanism embraces a wide range of perspectives, values, processes and dispositions all of which are variably associated with multicultural, global and transnational flows and influences (Hannerz 1990, Vertovec and Cohen 2002). They include, according to Vertovec and Cohen: a vision of global democracy of world citizenship; the possibilities for shaping new transnational frameworks for making links between social movements; non–communitarian, post–identity politics of overlapping interests and heterogeneous or hybrid publics in order to challenge conventional notion of belonging, identity and citizenship; certain socio–cultural processes or individual behaviours, values or dispositions manifesting a capacity to engage cultural multiplicity (2002: 1). It is also suggested that cosmopolitanism is often regarded as 'a matter of consumption, an acquired taste for cultural artefacts from around the world (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 7). Such that Calhoun (2002) proposes the concept of 'consumerist cosmopolitanism' which is manifested in the globalisation of tastes, e.g. food, artworks, music, literature and fashion, etc. Similarly Urry's concept of 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' (1995) is found amongst global tourists who consume foreign places, or the audience of 'world music'. In the era of media convergence Jenkins posits that the top–down push of 'corporate convergence' and the bottom–up pull of 'grassroots convergence' intersect to produce 'global



convergence’ or multidirectional flow of cultural goods around the world (2004: 116–117). And this global convergence gives rise to what he terms ‘pop cosmopolitanism’, which refers to the ways that transcultural flows of popular culture inspire new forms of global consciousness and cultural competence (Jenkins 2004: 117).

All of these theories of cosmopolitanism can be drawn together to describe and analyse global K–pop consumption. Cosmopolitanism offers useful perspectives, for example, how do we understand it as socio–cultural condition, worldview, attitudes, competence, identity, etc. If we accept that global youth culture of the 21st century (see Nilan and Feixa 2006) is characterised by its vibrant multiplicity and hybridity bringing global and local cultures together, K–pop offers a very useful vantage point to further explore the border crossing, participation, appropriation, adaptation, production of meaning, etc.

Convergence Culture and Participatory Culture

Convergence, according to Jenkins, is ‘the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted.’(2006: 2) Jenkins also suggests that ‘participatory culture’ relates to a new media spectatorship and in an emerging new media environment ‘what might traditionally be understood as media producers and consumers are transformed into participants who are expected to interact with each other according to a new set of rules which none of us fully understands’ (Jenkins 2006: 3). These concepts of convergence culture and participatory culture are highly relevant to and contribute to the evolution of K–pop scenes and fandom across the globe.

5. Research Aims and Objectives

The Key research questions set out for the project include:

- 1) Who are the K-pop audience in Europe?**
- 2) Why do European audiences consume K-pop and how do they choose it?**
- 3) What are the methods of K-pop consumption for K-pop audiences in Europe?**
- 4) What kind of K-pop do European audiences prefer?**
- 5) Which aspects of K-pop appeal to the European audiences of K-pop most and what are the reasons?**
- 6) What does K-pop mean to the K-pop audiences in Europe and how their K-pop music consumption is perceived by their wider society? This question relates to K-pop audiences' social position (ality) and identity, media reception, local music industry perception, etc.**
- 7) What are the relationships between the European music and media industries and K-pop consumption in Europe?**
- 8) What kind of 'translocal' relationships and connections the K-pop audience groups in Europe maintain with each other?**

By way of exploring these research questions, this project can provide an in-depth analysis of K-pop audience reception, identification and values that are specific to Europe. The ethnographic case studies of K-pop reception in Europe offer a projection of K-pop in the European music scene and its marketability both in short and long term prospects. Additionally, the project aims to address to what extent our understanding of K-pop consumption behaviour and taste can and will contribute to the future strategies for K-pop music production and the promotion of K-pop on the global platform.



6. Research Methods

This study of K-pop fandom in Europe primarily employed ethnographic research methods. Although there are differences amongst disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, ethnomusicology, popular music studies and so on, ethnographic approaches are seen as ‘grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting on the basis of, though not exclusively by, participant observation (Atkinson et al, 2001: 4). More specifically for the studies of music scenes and fandom, ethnographic methods are extremely useful and essential in the sense that this research approach allows us to explore the dynamics of groups of people and organisations, situations and events involved with the production and consumption of music.

Taking comparative perspectives, this research also describes and analyses both the common features and the specificities of various regional, social and cultural characteristics of the K-pop audiences in Europe. In addition to the ethnographic research, a quantitative study of the perception of K-pop amongst the UK’s general public was undertaken using the Google survey methodology (currently available in the US, Canada and the UK only).

While focusing on specific ‘key case studies’ (see Individual Reports), each of the individual projects variably employed multiple research methods, including:

- 1) Participant observation of various K-pop events (e.g. live concerts, workshops, parties, competitions, auditions, etc.).**
- 2) Face-to-face interviews with K-pop fans, bloggers, promoters and organisers of various K-pop events.**
- 3) Online ethnography of K-pop social media including, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.**
- 4) Small-scale pilot questionnaires using the online K-pop fan clubs as a platform to develop surveys of K-pop fandom across Europe.**
- 5) Interviews with European/local music and media industry stakeholders.**
- 6) Specifically for the UK K-pop scenes, ‘Google Surveys’ were used to explore the general perception**

and reception of K-pop in the UK.

7. Summary

This project explores the nature of K-pop fandom in Europe and the emerging patterns of Asian popular culture consumption in Europe. It aims to develop a comparative ethnography of K-pop fandom in Europe focusing on specific case studies from the UK, Austria and Germany. The three individual projects are based on the research data collected using ethnographic methods. Each report offers the chosen case studies and discusses specific issues, while addressing some of the key themes described above. Details of individual approaches and engagement with the research topic are described in the respective research methods section. For example, Haekyung Um attended several programmes of the K-pop Academy of the Korean Culture Centre in London which allowed her to see both changes and continuity with respect to the demographic profiles and group dynamics of participants. Sang-Yeon Sung's involvement as a K-pop competition judge in Vienna offered her a valuable opportunity to observe and interview both the competitors and other judge members. Her position gives an insider's vantage point while she would have clearly been seen by Austrian K-pop fans and amateur performers as a K-pop expert. Michael Fuhr also taught a course on Korean popular music in the University of Köln which he was able to use as a platform for in-depth discussion with the students some of whom were avid K-pop fans.



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1. Introduction: Background and Formation of K-pop Scene in the UK

Like everywhere across the globe ‘Gangnam Style’ was a great hit in Britain making it to the top of the UK’s single chart for several weeks in 2012. The Gangnam Style phenomenon makes us to think about the ways in which popular culture is consumed in the age of digital technology and convergence culture. This music video is mostly sung in Korean except for a couple of catch refrains, including ‘Gangnam Style’ and ‘Hey, Sexy Lady’. It was created initially for the *domestic* South Korean audiences, but once it went viral it gained *global* popularity in a very short space of time owing to social media sparked by the initial interests of US celebrities and their ‘cool hunting strategy’. Numerous parodies appeared in connection with the popularity of this entertaining music video in which Psy, on his imaginary horse, hops around the Gangnam district of Seoul. They feature a wide range of themes, personalities and locations: for example in the UK they included ‘Eaton Style’ created by Eaton students (over 3,136,000 views since 17 Oct 2012) and ‘London Style’ featuring London as its focal location (6,304,480 hits since 16 Sept 2013). With this proliferation of consumer-driven video productions, several parody charts were compiled by British media, including the top 6 by the broadsheet *The Guardian*¹⁾ and the top 10 by the tabloid paper *The Sun*.²⁾ Several radio programmes about Psy and ‘Gangnam Style’ were made, for example, BBC Radio 4’s programme ‘Profile’ broadcasted on the 6th of October 2012.

Since its global success, Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’ became synonymous to K-pop to many UK audiences (I will discuss this general K-pop perception in the UK later the ‘Google Surveys’ section below). But the K-pop fan base in Britain began to emerge in the late 2000s. This early K-pop UK fandom can be considered a ‘virtual scene’, although it was locally based and not necessarily widely separated geographically (see Bennett and Peterson 2004). These fans were members of online discussion groups, forums and chat rooms of Asian popular musics who communicated with

1) ‘Gangnam Style parodies: six more of the best’ by Ally Forward, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2012 at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2012/oct/19/gangnam-style-video-parodies-psy> (accessed 27 December 2013).

2) ‘Top 10 Gangnam Style parodies show our funny Psydie’, by Bella Battle, *The Sun*, 24 October 2013 at: <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/features/4605351/Top-10-Gangnam-Style-parodies.html> (accessed 27 December 2013).

each other sharing and exchanging their musical interests and knowledge of K-pop. The primary mode of consumption for these K-pop fans was music videos on the internet with little access to live performance events. They were 'hidden fans' invisible to the general public but dedicated to the music genre of their choice – K-pop.

This virtual trend in K-pop fandom focusing on mediated performances changed in the early 2010s when several K-pop acts began their concert tours in Europe. The first major UK live concert by K-pop idols, the five-piece boy band SHINee from SM Entertainment, stirred up much excitement and 'craze' for K-pop fans as reported by the UK media such as the London based newspaper *London Evening Standard*³⁾ and national newspaper *The Independent*.⁴⁾

Live performances are important to artists themselves, fans, promoters and music journalists as a focal point of interaction, shared experience and participation, etc. The idea of 'liveness' is often closely tied to the genre identity and authenticity credential for some popular musics such as rock (see Auslander 1999 for the notion of liveness and the discourse of authenticity in rock). However, as a highly mediated pop genre, the most common place to find K-pop performance is the virtual realm of the internet, such as YouTube. But at the same time, live performance events of K-pop creates an excitement and sense of 'local scene' for the locally based fans. For example, K-pop fans in London and Paris have organised flash mobs to demonstrate their solidarity and also to show their strong desire for K-pop concert events in their town.

Live performance events also contribute to the making of 'translocal scenes' (see Bennett and Peterson 2004) when K-pop fans travel to neighbouring countries to experience the liveness of K-pop performance. In addition various K-pop audition and competition programmes for singing and dancing organised by various Korean entertainment agencies and local institutions further encourage a dynamic movement of fans and amateur artists who travel translocally and globally to participate and

3) 'London is going K-pop crazy' by Victoria Stewart, *London Evening Standard*, 3 October 2011 at: <http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-is-going-kpop-crazy-6449569.html>; (accessed 27 December 2013).

4) 'K-pop Craze: The K Factor' by Holly Williams, *The Independent*, 26 November 2011 at: <http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-is-going-kpop-crazy-6449569.html>. 2013).



perform in the events.

2. Time, Place and Research Methods

This research is concerned with the development of K-pop in the United Kingdom during 2013, focusing on various events, activities of individual and institutional actors and evolving patterns for the consumption of this pop genre abroad. The earlier development in 2011 and 2012 has provided continuity for the current context. The research was conducted primarily in London where the majority of K-pop related events and activities took place.

This project employs ethnographic methods, which include participant observation, interviews and recordings, to investigate the dynamics of K-pop fandom and music scene as they relate to the UK contexts. The focus of the research relates to two key case studies: the K-pop Academy at the Korean Cultural Centre (KCC), UK and the London K-pop Cover Dance Workshop (LoKo). In addition, a pilot study using Google Surveys online research was conducted to explore the general reception of K-pop in the United Kingdom. Using the same questions as the Google Surveys, a small-scale focus group discussion with K-pop fans was also undertaken to compare and contrast the general perception with fans' intimate knowledge.

3. K-pop UK: Demography and Geography

UK K-pop fandom is characterised by its multicultural and multi-ethnic composition reflecting the demographic and cultural diversity of contemporary UK society. The 'ethnoscape' (Appadurai 1990) of K-pop fandom in the UK consists of East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, Afro-Caribbean, White and mixed nationalities. Notably non-UK born and short-term residents, such as overseas students and contracted employees, make a visible representation in this K-pop demography.

The majority of fans are teenagers and early twenties with a small number of older fans in their late twenties and thirties. The older fans often take leading roles in UK K-pop scenes by organising K-pop events and fan activities. Some of them have been K-pop fans for more than five years or longer and consider themselves to be the first generation fans, for example, the bloggers of 'Korean Class Massive' and the founders of the London K-pop Cover Dance Workshop.

With regard to gender of K-pop fans in the UK, it is predominantly female. For example, there was a markedly contrasting gender ratio in the K-pop Academy participants at the Korean Cultural Centre in London where the 1st and 3rd programmes of the K-pop Academy had one male member and the 2nd programme had none. This female biased gender ratio appears to be common to K-pop fandom demography globally, which, in turn, gives shape to the K-pop reception of UK fans and their self-representation. It should be noted, however, proportionally a larger number of male fans attend K-pop dance activities and audition programmes, clearly indicating their active engagement in K-pop participation. This may have to do with their high aspiration to become a performer and their desire to identify themselves with K-pop male idols (also see below 'Case Study 2. London K-pop Cover Dance Workshop' for further discussion on this issue).

The UK K-pop scene is centred on greater London where the majority of K-pop events and venues are to be found and they include the KCC's K-pop Academy, Loko's K-pop dance workshops, K-pop concerts, K-pop auditions and K-pop karaoke and parties and so on. Since many K-pop fans have been and still are consumers of Japanese pop culture such as J-pop, anime and manga, there are convergences of fan practice and their aesthetic tastes, such as 'cosplay' (costume play) which is common amongst anime and manga fans. For example, at the 2012 Big Bang concert in Wembley Arena, I met a British fan who dressed up as a 'monster' character from Big Bang's music video 'Monster' (see Figure 3.1 below, Photo of a fan with the 'I Am Not a Monster' T-shirt at the 2012 Big Bang Concert, London). This intersecting path of discovering K-pop through Japanese popular culture was not uncommon: in fact several K-pop fans, especially the first generation fans, told me



that they initially found some of the major K-pop artists including BoA from the J-pop lists and networks. At the same time, there is a noticeable effort amongst K-pop fans in the UK to distinguish themselves from fans of J-pop or other Asian popular music by ‘taking a more assertive and proactive approach’ to their fandom and working harder to promote K-pop, when compared to the fans of other popular music genres.⁵⁾



<Figure 3.1.> Photo of a British fan with the ‘I Am Not a Monster’ T-shirt, the 2012 Big Bang Concert, London
(Photo taken by Haekyung Um)

4. K-pop Events and Activities

Concerts

The most awaited K-pop events are live concerts by K-pop acts. Since the mini concert by SHNee and a full-programme concert by Cube artists in 2011, the numbers of K-pop concerts have steadily increased, with 2 in 2011, 3 in 2012 and 4 in 2013 as follow:

⁵⁾ Deena, a fan from London, told me in an interview that this competitive element of K-pop fandom in the UK makes them more visible but at the same time it can give a negative impression of K-pop to the general public.

- SHINee (SM): 3 November 2011 at the 2011 London Korean Film Opening Gala Concert, Odeon, London
- United CUBE: 5 December 2011, O2 Brixton Academy, London; artists included Trouble Maker (Cube Entertainment sub-unit comprising Hyuna of 4Minute and Jay Stomp of Beast), G.NA, 4Minute and Beast.
- MBC Culture Festival UK: June 2012, IndigO2, London; artists included EXO-K (SM), 4Minute (Cube) and Norazo (Winning InSight).
- CN Blue (FNC Entertainment): 22 September 2012, IndigO2, London.
- Big Bang Alive Galaxy Tour (YG): 14 & 15 December 2012, Wembley Arena, London.
- Teen Top (TOP Media): 8 February 2013, The Forum, London.
- Jay Park (AOMG): 21 September 2013, Hammersmith Apollo, London.
- Super Junior Super Show 5 (SM): 9 November 2013, Wembley Arena, London.
- Infinite One Great Step (Woollim): 27 November 2013, Hammersmith Apollo, London.

Additionally, several Korean indie rock events were held in 2013. Apollo 18, Gate Flowers, Galaxy Express and Goonam completed the 'Korea Rocks' tour in the UK, which was sponsored by Hyundai Credit Card. During the 'K-Music Festival 2013' in June 2013, several underground rock artists, including Uuhboo Project, Yi Sung Yol, Kiha and the Faces, gave their UK debut performance.

These K-pop concerts, held in the UK in the past 3 years, have showcased K-pop idol stars from major entertainment agencies such as SM, YG, Cube and Woollim, attracting fans from across Europe. The live events also provided an opportunity for the fans to share and display their passion and knowledge which I would consider to be the 'cultural capital' of K-pop fandom. For example, along with multinational British local audiences, K-pop fans from across Western Europe, from France, Spain, Germany and Sweden came to the Big Bang concert at the Wembley Arena in December 2012. Fans arrived early and while they were waiting for the doors to open, they talked with each other in the queue. From time to time they started to chant some of the Big Bang's hit numbers such as 'Fantastic Baby'. Their friendly casual chat, with other fan members in the queue, displayed a thinly disguised competitive demonstration



of their knowledge of K-pop in general and particular K-pop idols. Some of them also display various items of merchandise and memorabilia from other K-pop events they attended. For example, Malaysian teenage girls were wearing flashing YG hairbands and handheld lights which they purchased at the Big Bang concert in Singapore in September 2012 and a German young male fan told me that his T-shirt came from the 2012 Big Bang concert in Tokyo (see Figure 3.2, Big Bang fans wearing the YG hair bands and Figure 3.3, a German fan wearing the 2013 Big Bang World Tour T-shirt, both at Wembley Arena, London).



<Figure 4.1.> Big Bang fans at the queue wearing the YG hair bands, Wembley Arena, London, December 2012
(Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 4.2.> A German fan wearing the 2012 Big Bang World Tour T-shirt from Tokyo, Wembley Arena, London, December 2012 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)

Auditions and Contests

K-pop auditions and contests offer opportunities for global fans to participate in K-pop, not just as consumers but also as performers and producers. These events also give shape to positive and energetic images of global K-pop fans as promoters of this pop genre. With these emerging multiple positions, K-pop fans may be considered as what Toffler termed ‘prosumers’ (Toffler 1980) whose role as consumers and producers are merged.⁶⁾

Korean entertainment agencies regularly hold auditions both domestically and internationally in search of new talents. The appeal to global K-pop fans is that auditions with SM, YG or JYP give them a sense of belonging to the K-pop world and an aspiration to take part in this music business. Therefore, when YG had an audition in London on 16 June 2012 as part of their ‘2012 YG Global Audition’,⁷⁾ over 350 submitted

6) As early as 1972 McLuhan and Nevitt predicted that the consumer will be producer with the introduction of electric technology (McLuhan and Nevitt 1972).

7) The YG auditions were held in 8 cities in five different countries, including the UK (London), Germany (Berlin), US (New York, Seattle and LA), Canada (Toronto) and Japan (Tokyo and Osaka).



their applications for the one-day event held in the Korean Cultural Centre, London (see Figure 4.3 below, YG audition participants at the Korean Cultural Centre UK, London, 16 June 2012). The representatives from YG recorded all performances to be reviewed by the head office in Seoul. The YG audition in Berlin held on 23 June 2012 was equally successful in attracting a huge number of local applicants from Germany and neighbouring European countries including Poland, France and Italy.⁸⁾

The 2013 JYP UK audition, on 8 June 2013, was also held in the Korean Cultural Centre in London. In addition to singing and dancing, this audition had acting and modelling categories. On the same day, a K-pop cover dance competition was held to select the finalist to represent the UK at the 2013 K-pop Cover Dance Festival to be held in October in Kyōngju (Gyeongju), Korea. Team LoKo won the UK division with their performance of the K-pop boy band VIXX's 'Rock Ur Body'.

The Korean Cultural Centre in London has been organising K-pop contests annually since 2011. The winners of the contest participate in the KBS K-Pop World Festival in Ch'angwŏn (Changwon) as the UK representative. The 2012 winner of the KCCCK-pop contest, Tita Lau, in fact, is a professional singer who recently signed to Nine Record in June 2013. The K-pop cover dance group 9034K, with 5 female members, won the 2013 competition. Interestingly they were dubbed the 'British 4Minute'.



<Figure 4.3.> YG Audition participants at the Korean Cultural Centre UK, London, 16 June 2012 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)

8) Fieldwork in London (13 June) and Berlin (23 June).

Parties, Festivals and Exhibitions

Parties featuring K-pop and other Asian dance musics are held in various clubs and private venues in London. These events have been primarily organised by the London based entertainment organisation Kpop Team. Since 2011 The Korean Cultural Centre in London held several K-pop parties for all ages, with DJs from the Kpop Team. K-pop events were presented during the London Mayor's Thames Festival in both 2011 and 2012 (see Figure 4.4, K-pop Party at the KCC, May 2013 and Figure 4.5, the K-pop booth at the 2011 London Mayor's Thames Festival).

The 2013 Korea Brand Entertainment Expo (KBEE) held in Old Billingsgate Market on 4–6 November 2013 featured K-pop hologram concerts of YG's 2NE1 and Psy. The booth for CJ Entertainment and Music, in particular, had many visitors where a number of K-pop fans sang and danced along with K-pop tracks played by a DJ. Many K-pop fans came for the autograph session with 2NE1, who were the K-pop Ambassadors for the Expo. This was held on 6 November in collaboration with CJ Food who owned the Korean fast food chain Bibigo, illustrating a corporate convergence between YG and the CJ Group (see Figure 4.6, K-pop at the CJ Entertainment and Music booth and Figure 4.7, 2NE1 autography session at Bibigo, both at the 2013 KBEE, London).



<Figure 4.4.> K-pop party for all ages at the KCC, 18 May 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 4.5.> K-pop booth at the 2011 London Mayor's Thames Festival, 10-11 September 2011
(Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 4.6.> K-pop at the CJ Entertainment and Music booth, Korea Brand and Entertainment Expo 2013,
Old Billingsgate, London, 6 November 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 4.7.> 2NE1 autograph session at Bibigo, Korea Brand and Entertainment Expo 2013, Old Billingsgate, London, 6 November 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)

5. K-pop Organisations and Institutions

As much as music scenes are defined by ‘groups of people and organisations, situations, and events involved with the production and consumption of particular music genres and style’ (Cohen 1999: 239), the K-pop scene in the UK is subject to various individuals and institutions who share musical activities and tastes. The distinction between the activities and roles of audiences, performers, producers and promoters of K-pop become blurred or converged: for example, fans who become bloggers (e.g. Korean Class Massive⁹⁾ and UnitedKpop¹⁰⁾ since 2011) and dance teachers

9) Korean Class Massive, a London based blog, was launched in 2011 by three Korean language students, Ema Ho, Annabel Harrison and Sarah Yates who met each other at the Sejong Institute of the Korean Culture Centre, London. This blog covers a wide range of topics, which the bloggers consider to be ‘all things about Korea’. They include: various aspects of Korean culture both traditional and contemporary, travel information, K-pop, other genres of Korean music, film, TV, food, etc. The events diaries provide up-to-date information about upcoming Korean cultural events in London while the photo gallery posts numerous still shots from these events especially K-pop concerts. In September 2012 two of the Korean Class Massive bloggers, Ema and Annabel, were invited to Korea by the Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS) to attend the Global Korea Blog festival. Their website and other social media links include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube channel and Instagram. Website: <http://koreanclassmassive.com/>; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Korean-Class-Massive-Blog/270093189704982?fref=ts>; Twitter: @KCMassive; Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/KoreanClassMassive?feature=mhee>; Instagram: <http://instagram.com/kcmassive#>.

10) UnitedKpop is a blog created by an art student Freya Bigg in Dundee, Scotland. Website: <http://unitedkpop.com/>; Face book: <https://www.facebook.com/UnitedKpop/>; Twitter: https://twitter.com/united_kpop.



(e.g. Team LoKo since 2011, also see Case Study 2 below). The business interests of local music promoters, such as Kpop Team, also contribute to the making of the K-pop scene in a wider context of the club culture in London (see Figure 5.1, Kpop Team DJs at the Kpop Night, KCC UK, London, 8 December 2012).

One of the distinguishing features of the K-pop scene in the United Kingdom in the past few years is the active engagement of the public sector and government bodies, including the Korean Cultural Centre (KCC), Korean Creative Contents Agency (KOCCA) and Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS) as well as the Korean Foundation of Cultural Exchange (KOFICE). Their roles are multifaceted including education, sponsorship, coordination, and publicity of K-pop in the UK as part of the Korean Wave and more recently under the larger umbrella of K-culture.¹¹⁾ The promotion of K-pop in the UK and on the global stage is also closely linked to Korean state policy and cultural diplomacy to enhance soft power through culture (also see Case 1, the K-pop Academy at the Korean Cultural Centre, UK below for more details).

K-pop event sponsorship from Korean conglomerates, such as Samsung (Samsung Galaxy for the 2012 Big Bang Alive concert at Wembley Arena) and CJ Group (CJ Food for YG's Psy and 2NE1 at the 2013 KBEE, London) in collaboration with the Korean music business (CJ Music and Entertainment and YG at the 2013 KBEE) establish cases of what Jenkins termed 'cooperate convergence' (Jenkins 2004), which in turn intersect with the 'grassroots convergence' of K-pop fandom in the UK to produce 'global convergence' of K-pop production and consumption. Additionally, we can also see a convergence of the 'brand nationalism' (Iwabuchi 2010) and 'commercial nationalism' (Volcic and Andrejevic 2011) in this particular union of commercial interests of various industries and national interests of the state which seeks to enhance the image of the country and its 'soft power' through pop.

11) For example, the course titles for the 5th K-pop Academy are organised in accordance with 'K themes' such as: 'K-Language', 'K-Cuisine', 'K-Fashion', 'K-History', 'K-Art', 'K-Literature', 'K-Traditional Music', 'K-Dance', etc.



<Figure 5.1> Kpop Team DJs at the Kpop Night, KCC UK, London, 8 December 2012 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)

6. Case Study 1 -

K-pop Academy, Korean Culture Centre (KCC) UK: Convergence of Pop Cosmopolitanism and Cultural Diplomacy¹²⁾

The K-pop Academy is a 12 weeks course which teaches a wide range of topics about Korea to K-pop fans in the UK. This course is offered by the Korean Cultural Centre (KCC) in London, free of charge and open to anyone over 15 years old who is interested in Korean culture. Each programme accepts 30 applications. The KCC selects the students by reviewing their personal statements, which they submit with their application. Since the first academy, which ran from February to May in 2012, four programmes have been completed producing 120 graduates in total. The 5th K-pop Academy is due to run from February to May 2014. The aims of the K-pop Academy, according to the KCC are:

12) Photos in this section were taken by the author. I obtained permission to use the images from individual K-pop Academy participants by posting messages on various Facebook pages run by former K-pop Academy participants. They are closed groups and include: the 1st K-pop Academy, 2nd K-pop Academy and Bubble Tea Party.



'By focusing on the cultural aspects of Korea as a socio-cultural force, the course encourages K-pop fans to learn more about the culture of Korea. The course considers the K-pop phenomenon as an important catalyst for K-pop fans to further flourish around the world to promote Korea's fascinating and diverse culture.' (K-pop Academy Course Outlines, Spring Term, Feb 2012).

The learning outcomes of the K-pop Academy course includes:

1. Having an understanding of the history of Korea and impact on the development of K-pop as a mainstay of contemporary culture.
2. Understand the basics of Korea's culture.
3. Be familiar with some of the cultural aspects of Korea.

(K-pop Academy Course Outlines, Spring Term, February 2012)

The topics taught in the K-pop Academy include: Korean history, literature, arts, traditional music, traditional costume, K-pop dance and cuisine. The course is coordinated by KCC and taught by guest lecturers who are academics and specialists in their own field (see Figure 6.1, the 3rd K-pop Academy Programme below). For example, Korean literature, focusing on the traditional *sijo* poem, is taught by a lecturer from SOAS and the session on the Korean War is given by a British veteran who fought in Korea.¹³⁾ Lectures are normally given on the premises of KCC in the Strand near Trafalgar Square, London. A guided tour of the Korean exhibitions at the British Museum and a cooking lesson in a local Korean restaurant are included. The programme also featured a visit to the Korean Ambassador's residence in the 1st to the 3rd K-pop Academy programmes.

Each session is documented and edited into a short video diary which they post on the KCC website including interviews with participants.¹⁴⁾ Each week the students hand in their assignments which are, in turn, graded by the KCC staff members. The best essays/assignment are announced at the beginning of the following lecture and the winners are awarded prizes, which are K-pop CDs and other related merchandise.

13) Brigadier Brian Parrit, CBE, served as a young Gunner officer during the Korean War. His book, *Chinese Horde and Human waves: Personal Perspectives of the Korean War*, was published by Pen & Sword 2012.

14) See K-pop Academy videos from the Korean Cultural Centre's YouTube Channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/thekccuk/> featured.

At the end of the course in week 12, a graduation ceremony is held with the students making a presentation of their Academy experience. The best student of the whole course is awarded with a free airplane ticket to Seoul from one of the course sponsors, Asiana Airlines (see Figure 6.2, K-pop dance class; Figure 6.3, Korean costume hanbok class; Figure 6.4, Samulnori class; Figure 6.5, British Museum visit; and Figure 6.6, Karaoke session; all from the 3rd Korean K-pop Academy, KCC UK, 2013).

K-pop Academy participants are multicultural and multi-ethnic (see Figure 6.7, Graduation photos of K-pop Academy) and predominantly young females aged 15 to 19. The K-pop Academy course offers them an opportunity to share their musical interests and hobbies which they initially developed through online communities and social network. Clearly their K-pop fandom plays a huge part in their personal and social identity. Through the weekly sessions these young K-pop fans feel that they are not alone in the imagined community of K-pop fandom. It should be noted that some of the participants are non-UK born and or short-term residents. For example, of the 30 participants of the 3rd K-pop Academy, Andrea from Peru, Maria from Spain, Danny from Barbados and Sue from Malaysia were overseas students while Marie from Romania was working on short-term contract. This demography of K-pop Academy participants reflects the cultural diversity and cosmopolitan nature of K-pop fandom in the UK, particularly London.

About 10 per cent of the participants do not keep up with the course. But the majority of the participants expressed, in their final presentation, how much the K-pop Academy helped them to understand broader aspects of Korean culture both traditional and contemporary, affirming the success of the KCC programme. Several graduates went on to take up the Korean language courses offered in the Korean Culture Centre UK and in Korea. The fact that several academy graduates are planning or have applied for Korean studies programmes for their undergraduate degree, the KCC's K-pop Academy clearly makes a real contribution to the promotion of Korean Studies in the United Kingdom.

When I asked the K-pop Academy participants about the appeal of K-pop, many of



them responded that the production value and physical attractiveness of the performers are very important to them.¹⁵⁾ Andrea from Peru and Maria from Spain said that they like the fact that K-pop is very different to the mainstream Anglo American pop. They also stressed that K-pop is ‘descent and proper’, as it does not contain sexually explicit and violent contents and images. This view is also shared by K-pop Academy participants’ parents and guardians who came to the graduation ceremonies: K-pop’s decency and the associated cultural values make this pop music both attractive and acceptable to them. From time to time, the topic of ‘Asian values’ or ‘shared cultural values’ came up when I spoke to East Asian or South Asian fans or parents. Andrea also pointed out that the weekly classes on a wide range of culture and art topics give the teenagers an opportunity to learn something new which opens up and broadens their minds. It is also interesting to note the work ethics, politeness and modesty of the K-pop idols also appeals to many young K-pop fans. For example, an amateur dancer who teaches K-pop cover dance to the K-pop Academy students said that she admires and respects K-pop artists because they are talented and hard working but they are still friendly and approachable. She also loves the way K-pop idols struggle to speak English making an effort to communicate with their international audiences.

All of these positions and perspectives as consumers/users of Asian/Korean popular culture can be interpreted as a type of ‘pop cosmopolitanism’, as Jenkins suggests (2004). Pop cosmopolitanism, according to Jenkins, embraces cultural difference, seeking to escape the pull of their local communities in order to enter a broader sphere of cultural experiences. It also opens up consumers to offers of alternative cultural perspectives and possibilities of feeling solidarity with the global K-pop fandom.

From the Korean Cultural Centre’s point of view, the K-pop Academy is its ‘flagship cultural programme’ which effectively promotes Korean culture by way of using K-pop as a catalyst. While enhancing the image of Korea, this programme has been producing a number of graduates who hopefully take on the role of ‘cultural ambassador’ for K-pop and contemporary Korean culture. This programme offers an interesting case study in which the South Korea’s cultural diplomacy through popular

¹⁵⁾ In this section, the names of the respondents have been changed.

music meets with a ‘pop cosmopolitanism’ of the K-pop fans in the UK. With the 5th K-pop Academy currently running, it would be worthwhile to try and examine its overall impact on cultural diplomacy, soft power and the Korean cultural industries (see Nye 2004).

The 3 rd K-Pop Academy Programmes		
Date	Title	Contents
23 Feb	Korea & Me	- Introduction of K-Pop Academy and new students - Quiz competition about K-Pop and Korean Culture
2 Mar	Korean History and People	- Special Lecture on the History of Korea and K-Dramas - Study characters in K-Dramas related to Korean history
9 Mar	The Korean War and Peace	- Talk by the Korean war veteran about his real experience at the War - Watch a K-film related to the Korean War
16 Mar	Dancing with K-Pop Star	- Dance workshop with K-Pop stars at a dance studio - K-Pop Academy Dance Contest
23 Mar	Korean Art and Painters	-Lecture on traditional Korean art and history -Drawing workshop with traditional materials
Easter Holiday		
6 Apr	Special visit to Ambassador's Residence	- To mark 'Korean Cuisine Day', special luncheon with His Excellency Ambassador of the Republic of Korea at His Residence
13 Apr	Korean Literature	- Lecture on the history of Korean literatures - Workshop with Korean Studies students at University of London on major novels of Korea
20 Apr	Hanbok, K-Fashion	- Lecture about Korean traditional cloth, Hanbok - Participate in K-Pop Academy Hanbok fashion show
27 Apr	Jewel In The Palace & Korean Cuisine	- Cooking court cuisine of Korea with a chef and team competition at one of Korean restaurant in London
4 May	Samulnori, Traditional Korean Music	- Lecture on traditional Korean music and instruments - 'Samulnori' workshop to learn how to play traditional instruments
11 May	Happy K-Pop Concert	To mark 'Children's Day', visit to Children's hospital and perform Samulnori and K-Pop dance with K-Pop Star
18 May	The Graduation	- Graduation ceremony and exhibition - Korean cuisine luncheon with family & friends - Special performance by K-Pop star

<Figure 6.1.> The 3rd K-pop Academy Programme, Feb- May 2013 (used with permission from the KCC UK)



<Figure 6.2.> K-pop dance class, the 3rd Korean K-pop Academy, KCC UK, 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 6.3.> Korean costume hanbok class, the 3rd Korean K-pop Academy, KCC UK, 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 6.4.> Samulnori class, the 3rd Korean K-pop Academy, KCC UK, 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 6.5.> British Museum visit, the 3rd Korean K-pop Academy, KCC UK, 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 6.6.> K-pop karaoke session, the 3rd Korean K-pop Academy, KCC UK, 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)





<Figure 6.7.> 1st to the 3rd K-pop Academy Graduation Photos (Photographs taken by Haekyung Um)



7. Case Study 2 -

London K-pop Cover Dance Workshop (LoKo): Sociability of Participation and Prosumer Reproduction¹⁶⁾

The London K-pop Cover Dance Workshop (LoKo) is a one-day event which is usually held on the last Sunday of the month in a dance studio in North London. It was founded by two British K-pop fans and amateur dancers: Tammy Mejia (leader and founder) and Caroline Stacey (lead promoter and co-founder). Tammy was born into a Filipino family and she travels back 'home' frequently to visit her relatives.

The two founders started the workshop series to help other amateur dancers who wanted to learn K-pop dance routines. Having begun with only 8 students on the 5th of September 2011, LoKo now has about 30 students in each session. The workshops are open to all age groups and beginners are also welcome to join (see Figure 7.1, the LoKo students dancing). LoKo events are coordinated and managed through Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/LondonKPopDanceWorkshop>) and Twitter (www.twitter.com/londonkpopdance). A nominal fee of £10 per person covers the rental of a dance studio, various K-pop merchandise, which they give out as prizes to dance workshop participants and other incidentals. All workshop sessions (so far 27 of them) and other events are recorded and posted by Tammy and Caroline on their YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/user/LondonKPopDanceWorks>).

The LoKo team is organised into a two-tier structure: the 'teachers' (currently 4 of them) who instruct and demonstrate K-pop cover dance routines to the workshop participants and the 'dancers' (12 of them in total) who give public performances or teach private workshops. Caroline took part in the music video of 'Psy - London Style'¹⁷⁾ while the LoKo dancers gave a performance in Paris in 2013 and participated in various regional and international K-pop dance competitions. For example, the LoKo Team were the UK finalist for the 2013 World K-pop Cover Dance Competition

¹⁶⁾ Photos in this section were taken by the author. I obtained permission to use the images from individual LoKo organisers and participants by posting messages on the LoKo Facebook page which is open to public view.

¹⁷⁾ YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMmyeXeXeK0> (6,395,150 views by 20 Feb 2013).

held in Ch'angwŏn, Korea in October 2013 (see Figure 7.2, the LoKo dancers with the two founders in the front row, Tammy far left and Caroline far right). Tammy and Caroline, have also taught the K-pop Academy dance class at KCC in 2012 (week 6 of the 2nd programme) and 2013 (week 7 of the 3rd programme, also see Figure 6.2).

For each K-pop cover dance workshop session, several K-pop tunes (usually 4 songs) are selected beforehand. Sometimes, a particular or seasonal theme is chosen, e.g. 'Christmas special' or 'K-pop chill'. The chorus/refrain segments of a song are taught by one of the four teachers, Tammy, Caroline, Isabelle and Deanna. In addition to the regular workshops, several master classes have been organised and anniversary events held, e.g. 'Hallyu Stage-K-pop Showcase' on 14 December 2013 with sponsorship from KOFICE. At the end of each workshop session, the participants' performances are reviewed and evaluated. Each teacher selects their best performing student who receives a prize of K-pop merchandise, such as CDs, DVDs, posters, photos and socks, some of which are donated by the sponsors (see Figure 7.3, LoKo students looking at their prize items of K-pop posters and Figure 7. 4. the best two students from the 2nd of September workshop with their prize sponsored by KOFICE).

The LoKo dance workshop organisers and participants are multicultural and multi-ethnic (see Figure 7.5, Group photo of the LoKo participants after the workshop on 2 September 2013). And the majority of the students are in their late teens and early 20s, quite similar to the K-pop Academy at KCC. At least 10% but probably more of the participants appeared to be non-UK born, short term residents who are studying or working in London. There is also some membership overlap between the K-pop Academy and LoKo, illustrating the converging network of the K-pop scene in London. However, compared to the K-pop Academy at KCC, a larger number of young males are represented in LoKo and they all appear to share their keen interests in urban dance styles in addition to K-pop dance (see Figure 7.6, some of the male participants dancing at the LoKo workshop, 1 September 2013). Participants with African and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds and Southeast Asians including Filipino, Malaysian and Vietnamese make a visible representation while a relatively small number of South Asians take part in the LoKo workshops. Interestingly some participants consider themselves more as amateur or semi-professional dancers than



K-pop fans, for example, a British born Chinese and one of the LoKo dancers.

After the workshop some of the participants go out together to one of the inexpensive Korean eateries in the Tottenham Court Avenue area for snacks and light supper. This is sometimes followed by a visit to a bubble tea café for a Taiwanese style soft drink mixed with tea. The social dimension of LoKo is clearly important to the young participants. It was interesting to note that after a whole day at the K-pop dance workshop, some young participants continue to practice the dance routines they learnt earlier wherever they can find a space to dance, be it public or private. For example, several LoKo students found a suitable hair salon in the basement of a Korean café. As they thought this hair salon with its many mirrors would be perfect for their dance practice, they obtained permission from the British Somali manager of the salon who, as a K-pop fan herself, was happy to see them dancing (see Figure 7.7, the LoKo students practicing K-pop dance routines in a hair salon in London).

Clearly what brings people together here is K-pop dance and the pleasure and sociability of K-pop dancing. In other words, K-pop cover dance is one of the key components of K-pop fandom and its participatory culture. K-pop fan's passion for dancing can also be 'uncontainable' and 'unstoppable' as illustrated in the episode above. The celebration of musical participation, as suggested by Christopher Small's concept of 'musicking' (Small 1998) or Thomas Turino's discussion of 'participatory performance' (Turino 2008), are all very relevant to K-pop fan practice.

Tammy and Caroline, the two founders, told me that they never imagined their K-pop dance workshop would grow this big. They are extremely committed to the LoKo but at the same time, they are taking a cautious approach regarding the formalisation of their workshop. Tammy, for example, feels that as the majority of Loko members are young and while K-pop may play an important part in these young people's individual and social identity formation, this could also be 'transient' (see Tarrant, North and Hargreaves 2001). The LoKo will continue to attract young K-pop fans and dancers who enjoy dancing, or 'musicking' to use Small's concept, and the sociability of K-pop.



<Figure 7.1.> The LoKo students dancing, 2 September 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 7. 2.> The LoKo dancers with the two founders in the front row, Tammy far left and Caroline far right
(Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 7.3.> LoKo students looking at their prize items of K-pop posters (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 7.4.> The two best students from the 2nd of September workshop with their prizes sponsored by KOFICE (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 7.5.> Group photo of the LoKo participants after the workshop on 2 September 2013
(Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 7.6.> Some of the male participants dancing, 1 September 2013 (Photo taken by Haekyung Um)



<Figure 7.7.> The LoKo students practicing K-pop dance routine in a hair salon in London
(Photo taken by Haekyung Um).

8. Google Surveys: Reception of K-pop

Between the 16th of August and the 10th of September 2013 I ran four pilot internet surveys using the Google Consumer Survey network service. Targeting UK's general population the surveys were designed to explore how K-pop is received in the United Kingdom. Two of the surveys had a single question each to a representative sample of the UK as a whole, asking the respondent's choice of music and their impression of Korea respectively. These results provide a general context for the UK audience's music preference and how Korea is perceived in the UK to provide points of comparison with those who have had exposure to K-Pop. To do this two longer surveys use a screening question to target the UK K-pop audience and ask a range of questions pertaining to K-pop consumption, aesthetics, personal preference, ethnicity and citizenship, etc. (See the questions below).

The 4 Google Surveys and the Questions Asked

All of the four pilot surveys are largely based on the extensive online surveys of the overseas reception of Hallyu, which were undertaken by the Korean Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE) in February and November 2012. Significantly, wherever appropriate the Google Surveys were able to use open-ended questions to solicit a wider range of informant responses. These were very revealing as they were not limited to the 'shopping lists' of responses used in the KOFICE surveys. So, to begin with I will review the results of these questions for the UK as a whole.

UK general survey of impressions on Korea: field date 2 September 2013.

Question *When thinking about Korea what is the first thing that comes to your mind? (1,006 responses analysed)*

Result See Figure 8.1 below: The top answer was 'conflict' and 'war' at 11.5% followed by 'Samsung' at 6.7% then various items related to North Korea and the war. Cultural items such as Kimchi and food combine at 3.6% and 'Gangnam Style' and Psy came together at 2.3% in addition to many other issues and items of interest. So the dominant view of Korea is a divided country in conflict followed by a high technology manufacturing nation in which Psy has popularised the view of Korea as having a place in the world of popular culture.

UK general survey of music preferences: field date 3 September 2013.

Question *Which kind of music do you like most? (1,000 responses analysed)*

Result See Figure 8.2 below: The most favoured music genre was 'Rock' at 14% followed by 'Pop' at 12.8% then 'Classical' at 9.4% and Jazz at 4.4%. 'Indie' then came in at 4.2%. Significantly K-Pop did not get identified as a genre in this question.



All the remaining questions were preceded by the screening question: field date 16 August and again on 3 September 2013.

Question *Do you ever listen to K-Pop (Korean popular music)? 'Yes' or 'No'? (27,271 responses and 15,544 analysed respectively)*

Result For the UK as a whole 8% said 'yes' to this question when first run and then 8.6% when run a second time. In addition to these results being consistent within the margins of error 8% is quite high considering the open-ended question did not produce a result at all. Perhaps those who listen to pop music are simply classifying K-Pop as just another form of pop.

Subsequently the first question asked of K-pop listeners, that is to say those who answered 'yes' to the screening question was:

Question *How much do you know about Korea? (For all of these questions the response rate was 200)*

Result See Figure 8.3 below: 'I Know a little about Korea' at 54.7% followed by 'I have an accurate knowledge of Korea' at 23.5%, then 'I only know the name of Korea' at 14% and finally 'I have never heard of Korea' at 7.8%. So 78.2% of K-pop listeners believe they have some knowledge of Korea.

This question was followed by two open-ended questions:

Question *When thinking about Korea what is the first thing that comes to your mind?*

Result See Figure 8.4 below: Psy clearly came out on top at 10% followed by Kimchi at 7% then Samsung at 5.5% and 'Gangnam Style' at 4.5%. War came in at 4%. Clearly for this section of the UK public K-pop and Korean culture are more important than the war and conflict, which came first for the general public (compare with Figure 8.1). However they were both agreed that Samsung was almost equally

significant at 6.7% for the general public.

Question *How do you get access to K-pop?*

Result See Figure 8.5 below: 'YouTube' provided the most used form of access at 34.8% followed by the 'Internet' at 22.9% and then 'Radio' at only 3.5%. Clearly at 57.7% most K-pop listeners use on-line sources for their entertainment. The purchase of CDs and tickets to live concerts did not make it into the responses to this question.

Question *On average how many minutes do you listen to K-pop per day?*

Result See Figure 8.6 below: On average the listening time was approximately 15 minutes which amounts to at least 3 songs per day. However a small percentage, 4.8% said they listened for as much as or more than 4 hours per day.

Question *What do you think makes K-pop appealing?*

Result See Figure 8.7 below: Being 'Catchy', 'Fun' or 'Funny' came in top at 7.5% followed by Psy at 5%. The appeal of the 'Music', was 2.5%, 'Sound' 2%, 'Beats' 1.5%, 'Dance' 1.5% and 'Lyrics' 1.5%. However its difference to other forms of pop was also equally significant at 2% and 'Originality' only 1%. The percentages themselves do not mean much here but the rank order does with the genre having its greatest appeal because it is good fun with various musical qualities second and its uniqueness third.

Question *What, if anything, do you least like about K-pop?*

Result See Figure 8.8 below: 'Nothing' and 'No' are the first and second responses to this question at 10.5% and 3.5% respectively. However, for 3% of K-pop listeners Psy is not a positive influence followed by the genre being too 'Cheesy' at 3% and 'Noisy' at 2.5%.

Question *Which K-pop star, if any, would you like to meet most of all?*



Result See Figure 8.9 below: Not surprisingly given his global exposure ‘Psy’ comes out on top at 34% followed by ‘Girls Generation’ at 5% then ‘Rain’ at 2.5% and ‘SHINee’ at 1.5% suggesting that most K-pop listeners do not know or pay much attention to the names of the stars they hear and watch through various media.

Question *Were you born and live in the UK, or were you born elsewhere and are resident in the UK?*

Result See Table 8.1 and Figure 8.10 below: Although 70.5% of K-pop listeners said they were ‘Born In the UK’ significantly 28.5% said they were ‘Not Born in the UK’ which is very much more than 13% from the 2011 UK census.¹⁸⁾ Non-UK born short term resident (STRs) is also very high at 13%, compared to the national average for STRs at 0.035% (and London at 0.084%).¹⁹⁾ Clearly K-pop appeals very much to the growing cosmopolitan elements of UK society as illustrated in Table 1 below.

<Table 8.1> Country of Birth and K-pop Listeners

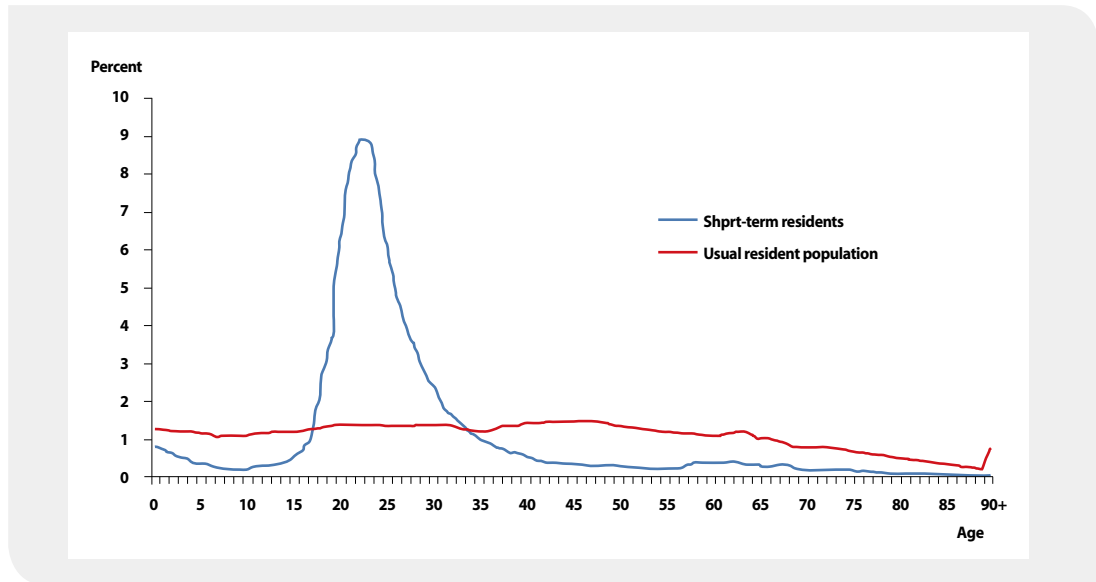
Country of birth	K-pop Listeners	2011 UK Census	Ratio
Born and live in the UK	70.5%	87.0%	0.81%
Not born in UK and permanent UK resident	15.5%	13.0%	1.19%
Not born in UK and short term UK resident	13.0%	0.035% (national) / 0.084% (London)	371.43% (national) / 154.76 % (London)

According to the 2011 UK census, the overall short-term resident population was relatively young: nearly 70% of short-term residents were aged 15 to 29; and within that age range the majority were aged 20 to 24, indicating that many may be in the UK for study purposes. This age distribution also corresponds with a very high ratio of K-pop listeners who are non-UK born and short-term UK residents as noted in the Table 1 above. All of which may suggest that together with this global movement of a young population this ‘ethnoscape’ (Appadurai 1996) gives shape to the mobility

18) See page 8, ‘Detailed Characteristics for England and Wales, *Statistical Bulletin*, March 2011 published by the Office for National Statistics, 16 May 2013.

19) See page 3, ‘Non-UK Born Short Term Residents in England and Wales, 2011’ published by the Office for National Statistics, 26 March 2013.

of global youth culture (Nilan and Feixa 2002) – and K-pop and its global fandom contribute to this dynamic.



<Graph 8.1.> Age Distribution of non-UK born short-term residents compared to the usual resident population in England and Wales 2011²⁰⁾

Question *In addition to K-pop which other kind of music do you like most?*

Result See Figure 8.11 below: ‘Pop’ came in first at 11% confirming popular music, K-pop or otherwise, is their preferred listening followed by ‘Rock’ which was first for the UK as a whole (Figure 8.2) then ‘Classical’ third for both K-pop and all other UK listeners.

Question *What do you think would make K-pop more appealing to a wider audience?*

Result See Figure 8.12 below: The most popular suggestion was ‘English’ at 8%

²⁰⁾ ‘Non-UK Born Short-Term Residents in England and Wales, 2011’ published by the Office for National Statistics, p. 3. 26 March 2013.



then better promotion and marketing in general at 2% along with more ‘Psy’ also at 2% and then better music and songs both at 1,5%.

Question *In addition to Korean popular music what other kinds of Korean popular culture (Korean Wave) are you interested in?*

Result See Figure 8.13 below: Significantly 26,5% said ‘None’ but 10% said ‘Food’, 5% ‘Film’, 3% ‘Drama’ and ‘Korean Wave’ in general also at 3% and so on and so on through a list of different items from ‘Anime’ to ‘Rock’ and ‘Fashion’.

Question *Which of the following best represents you? While, South Asian, East Asian, Black, Other (please specify)*

Result See Table 8.2 and Figure 8.14 below: 63.75 said they were ‘White’, 12.4% ‘South Asian’, 11.4% ‘East Asian’ and 10% ‘Black’. This compares with the 2011 UK census at: ‘White’ 91.27%, ‘South Asian’ 3.6%, ‘East Asian’ 0.8% and ‘Black’ 1.8%. Clearly ethnic minorities enjoy and listen to K–pop in a proportionally much higher percentage than their representation in the UK population as a whole as follows²¹:

<Table 8.2> Ethnicity and K-pop Listeners

Ethnicity	K-pop Listeners	2011 UK Census	Ratio
White	63.7%	91.27%	0.70%
South Asian	12.4%	3.6%	3.44%
East Asian	11.4%	0.8%	14.25%
Black	10.0%	1.8%	5.56%

Focus Group Discussion of Google Pilot Surveys

I organised an informal focus group session with a small number K–pop fans to discuss the preliminary results of the Google Surveys. The session was held in London on 9 November 2013. The group comprised of 3 females (1 Malaysian Chinese overseas

21) See ‘Ethnicity and National Identity in England and Wales, 2011’, published by the Office for National Statistics, 11 December 2012.

student, 1 South Asian and 1 British Somali) and 1 white British male. Our discussion focused on several questions including: the perception of Korea, their musical preference, the appeal of K-pop, what they least like about K-pop, how to make K-pop more appealing to a wider audience.²²⁾

When asked about their perception of Korea, the focus group members had a similar view as the K-pop listeners of the Google Surveys that is closely related to contemporary pop culture and technology. All focus group members except for one have visited Korea and they all have good understanding of the country. They are also aware of the common perception of Korea being ‘conflict’ and ‘war’, for example, according to Deena:

When I tried to discuss South Korean culture with my family. My Mom and my brother especially, they immediately think of North Korea and a bad association with it. In a sense because they are neighbours they think they are same. My mother worried about it, I explained it to her and she understood it. (Focus group discussion, 9 November 2013)

The Google Surveys result on K-pop listeners’ preference confirms that pop is their first choice. However, the focus group members stressed that their own musical preferences do not coincide with the survey result and their music preferences are also far more diverse to include musics from across the globe. This is what Deena said: ‘I like Korean hip-hop. I also listen to my own cultural music. I am Indian, so I am into Indian music – Bollywood, Bhangra. I also listen to American music and English music, too.’ She also went on to emphasise that her understanding of the Korean language helps to appreciate the lyrics more, she has also ‘moved on’ from the idol centred dance music to other Korea popular music genres that are more artistically rewarding and meaningful to her.

Regarding the appeal of K-pop, the focus group agreed with the Google Survey’s results, i.e. ‘catchy and fun’. They also pointed out the significance of music video in K-pop: it is both ‘watch’ and ‘listen’, therefore it has to be both visual and aural

22) I obtained permission from the focus group members to quote their comments. However, pseudonyms are used in this section.



aspects that contribute to K-pop's appeal.

Their own responses included: Wendy said that the songs appeal most even when she do not understand the lyrics, while Jason talked about good looks of K-pop artists which in his case had a female gender bias. Maya told me about her first impression of K-pop: 'The first time when I watched K-pop on YouTube, I could not understand it – why do they have wear so much make up, and so on? Some people might think they are gay. But I am fine with it now.'

When asked about what they least like about K-pop, the focus group members gave specific answers with comments including: Deena – 'the fact that it is so manufactured' and Wendy – 'Music industry does not have any original concept – same, same, same, nothing new. So it is overly commercialised.' Interestingly, the topic of K-pop fandom came up negatively: 'fan wars' and 'immature fan behaviours'. Finally, the expensiveness of the concert tickets was pointed out. The lack of K-pop concerts in the UK was also an issue. Jason said: 'The fact that they don't always come to London. Some groups have never been to England – I don't like that.' With respect to the Google Surveys' result that Psy was seen as a negative influence, the focus group concurred and responded: 'Psy is a parody of K-pop. A lot of K-pop fans do not think Psy is K-pop.' 'Psy is retro. He is an entertainer.'

The question of how to make K-pop more appealing to a wider audience led a long and vigorous discussion. When I told them the Google Survey result was 'English' or 'the English language. Jason considers the language and K-pop could use some English. For Deena it was to do with the way English is used in K-pop. In contrast, Wendy and Maya were against the English language K-pop in principle. For Wendy it is partly to do with the genre identity and authenticity and partly to do with more choices for Korean popular music: 'Because it wouldn't be original from Korea, genre-wise, [if K-pop is in English]. No one would like to listen to pop pop pop music. ... I think they should bring more K-rock and hip-hop rather than pop music, pop music, pop music. So I don't think the language is the issue here. Maya concurs with Wendy on both points: 'They spend too much money on K-pop but nothing on underground scenes. There are a lot of talented people who are not just part of it.

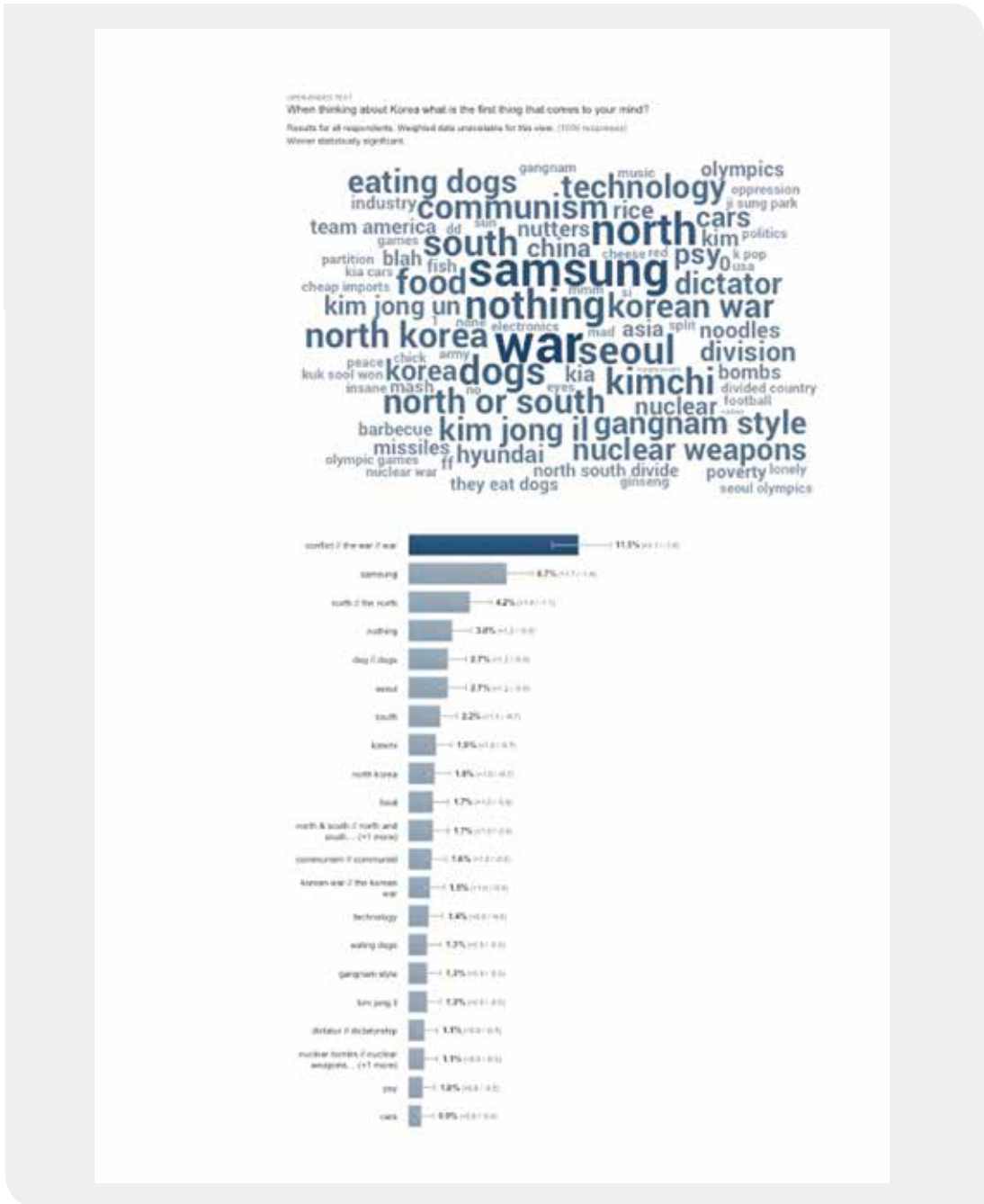
They can potentially reach the audiences which K-pop doesn't. ... I don't think K-pop needs to be in English. A lot of songs done in English so far are not so great. They could collaborate with English artists. But singing in English is not necessary in order to get a wider appeal.'

The discussion ended with their views and practice as K-pop fan – interestingly their music listening practice has been narrowed down.

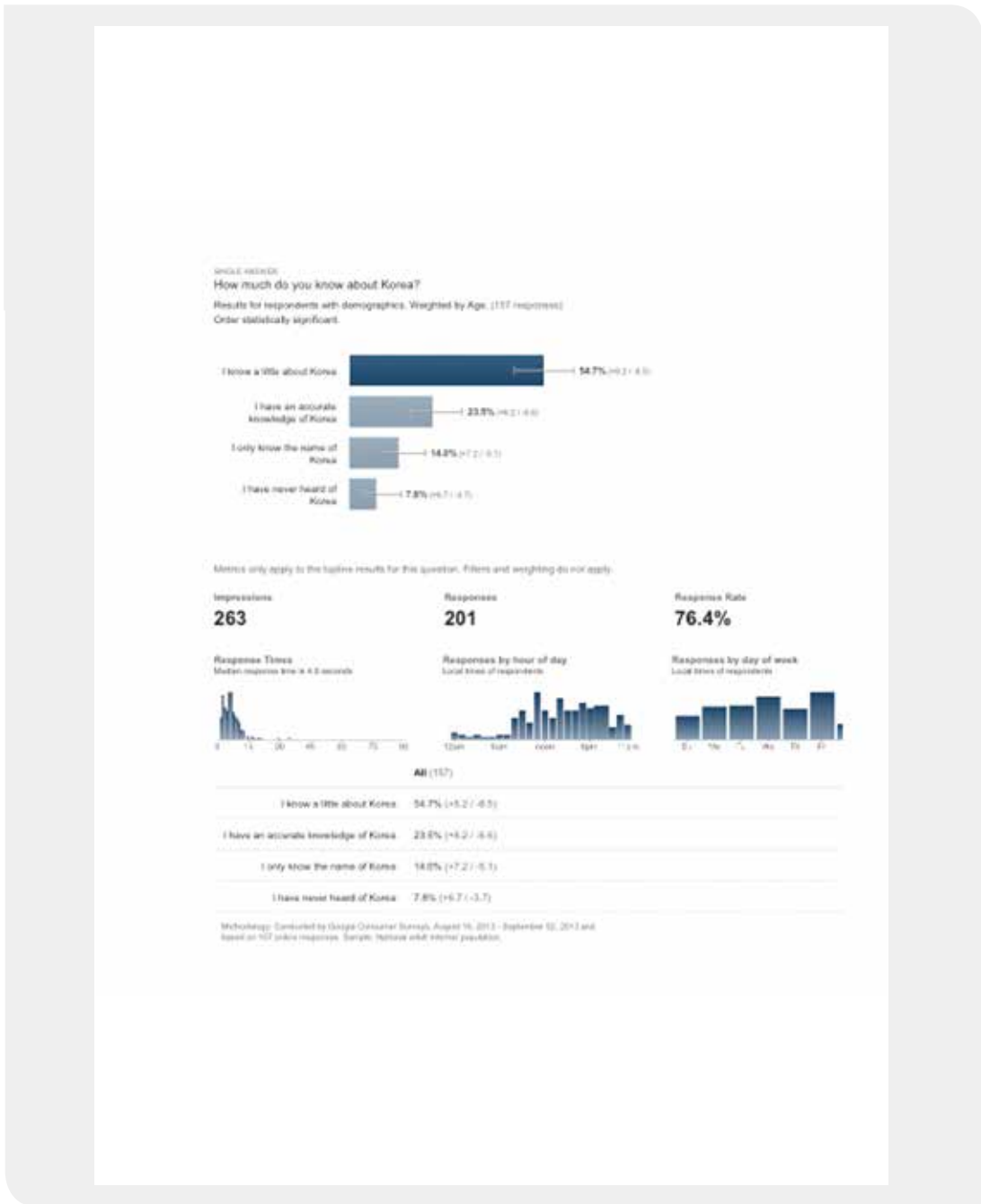
Deena: Before I listened to K-pop, I used to listen to British pop music But not anymore.

Jason: I don't listen to British pop. K-pop artists are better looking, more talented than most of English artists. They also show how to dress decent and well. In Western pop they try to draw your attention from taking their cloth off. Very much sexualised.

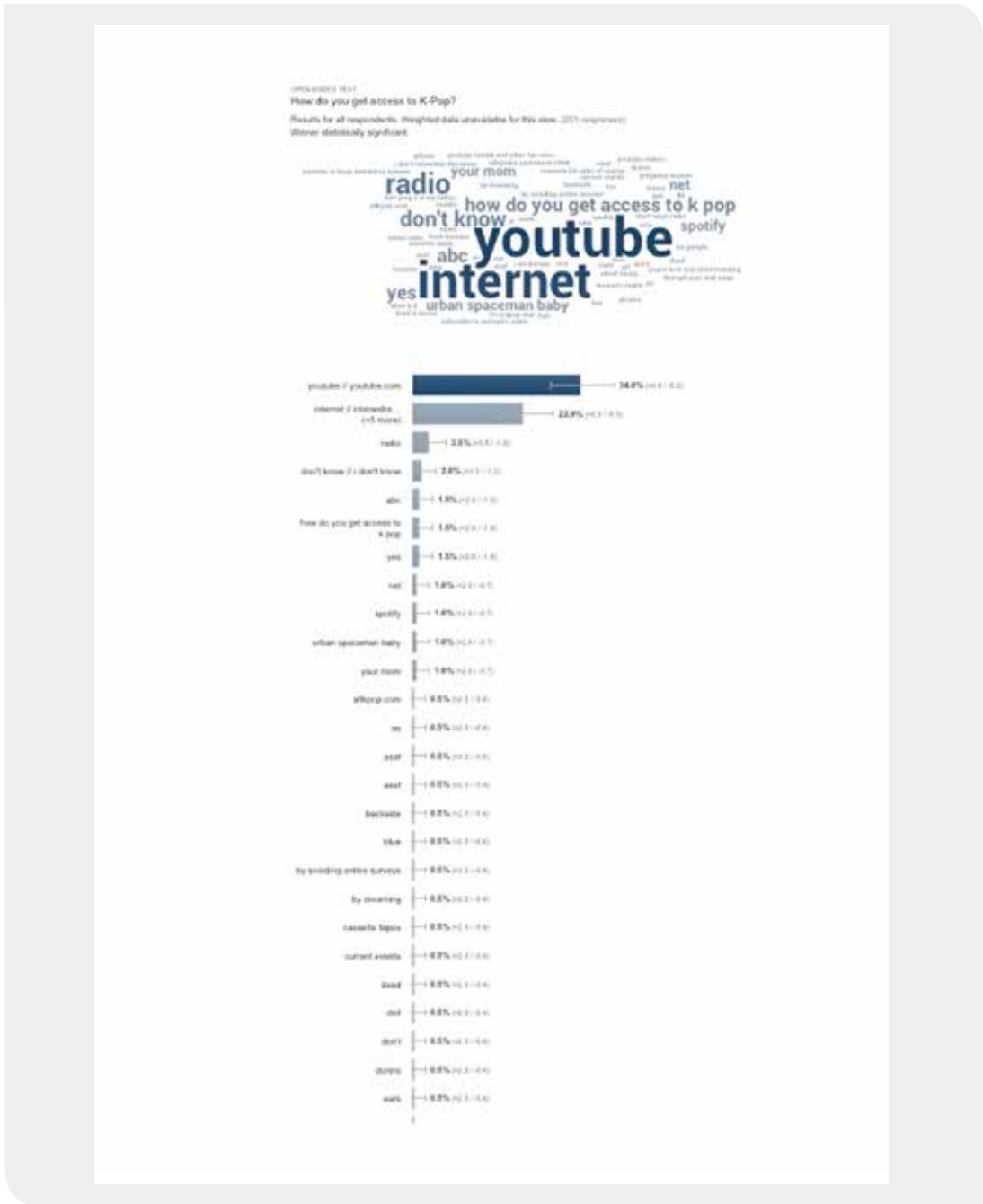
Maya: It is changing in K-pop though. The skirts are getting shorter and shorter. Sexualisation in K-pop is happening, too. (Focus group discussion, 9 November 2013)



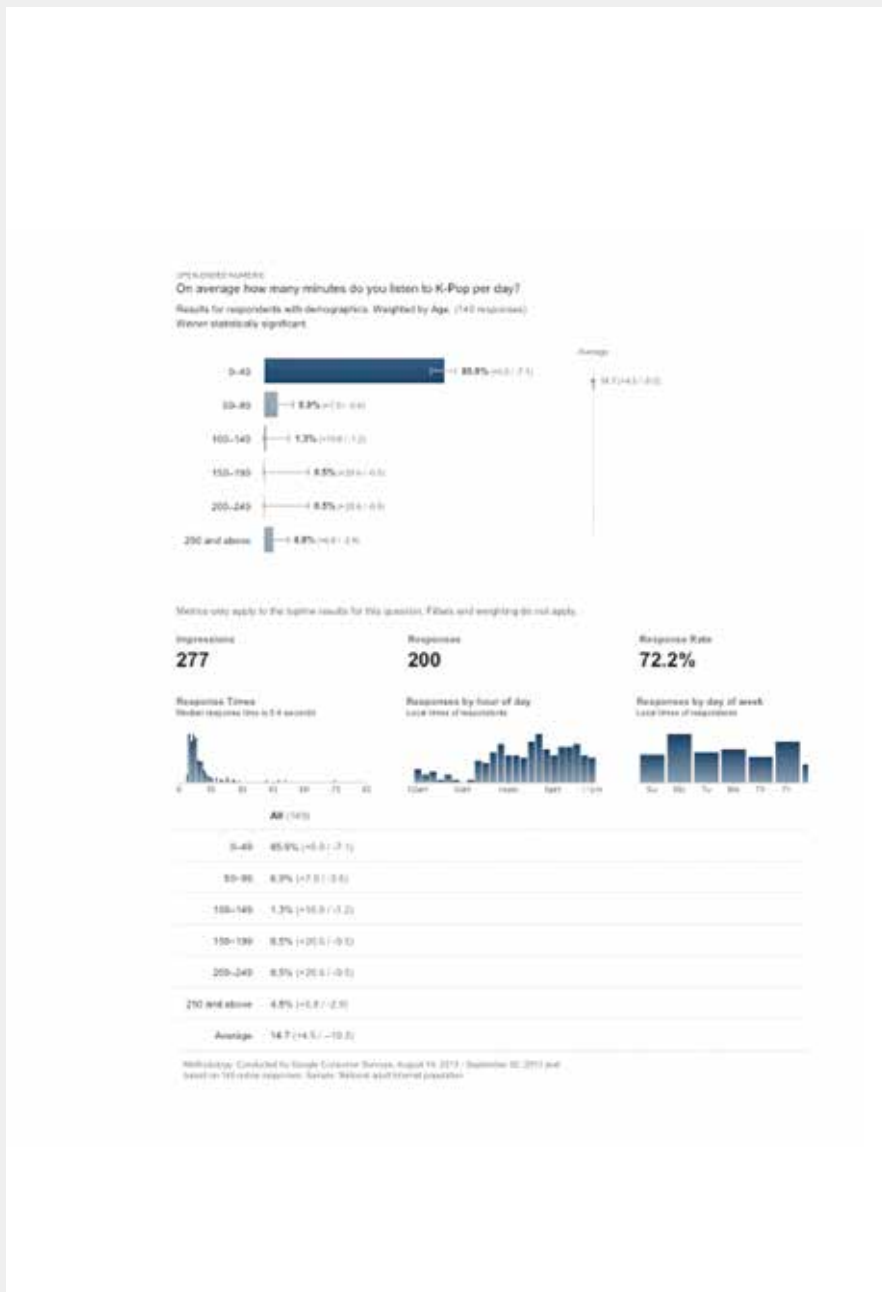
<Figure 8.1.> All UK – When thinking about Korea what is the first thing that comes to your mind?



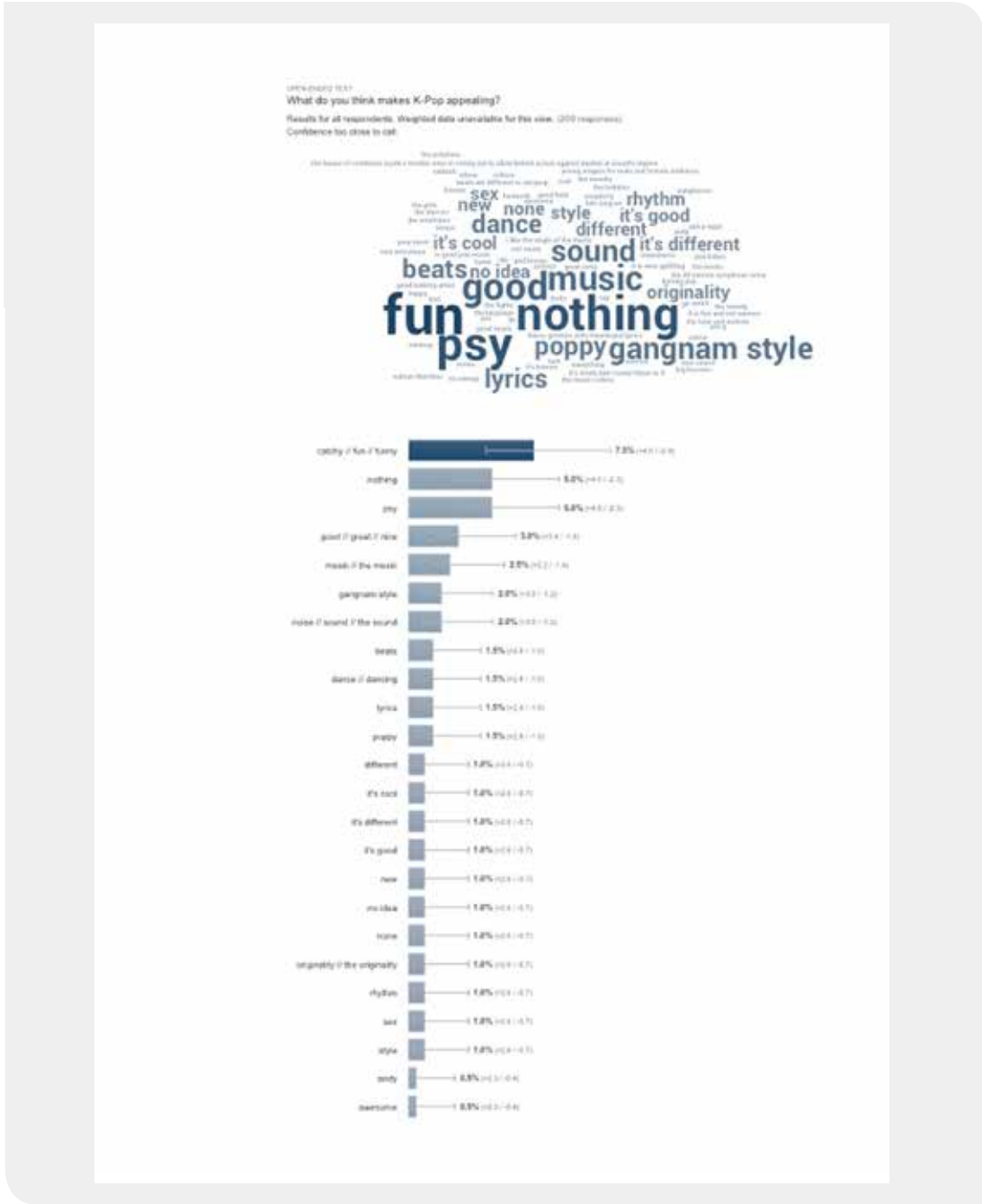
<Figure 8.3.> K-pop Listeners – How much do you know about Korea?



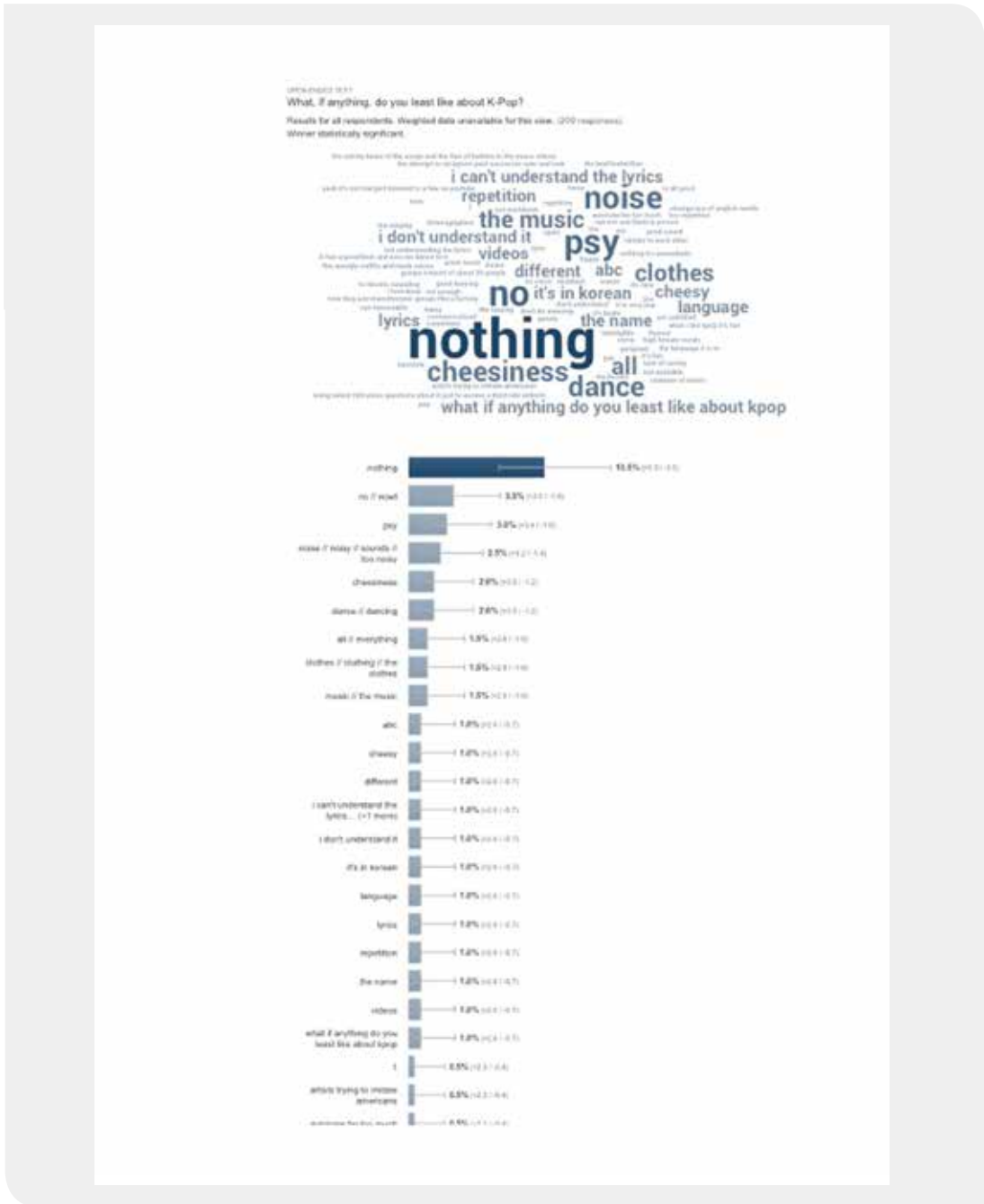
<Figure 8.5.> K-pop Listeners – *How do you get access to K-Pop?*



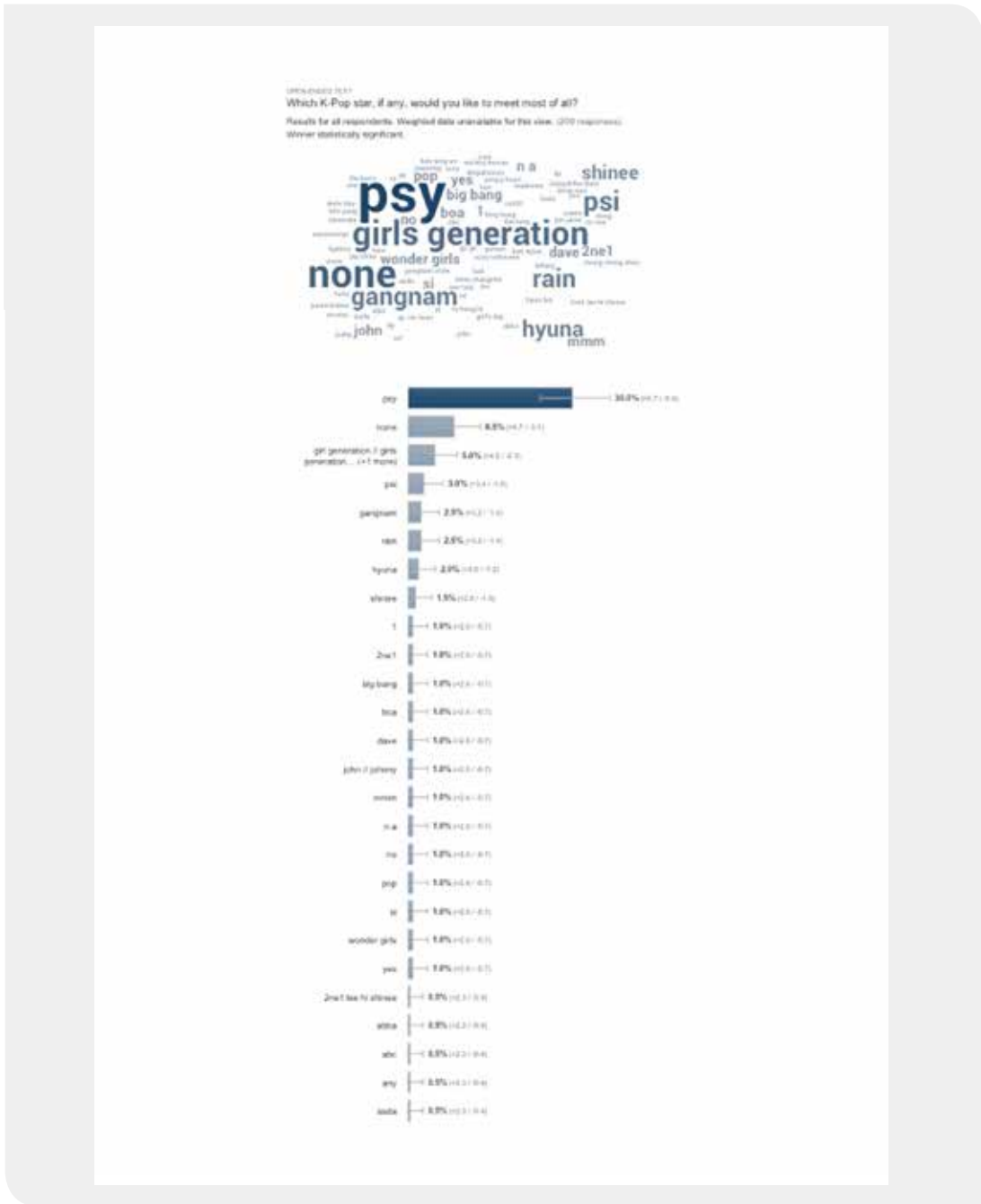
<Figure 8.6.> K-pop Listeners – On average how many minutes do you listen to K-pop per day?



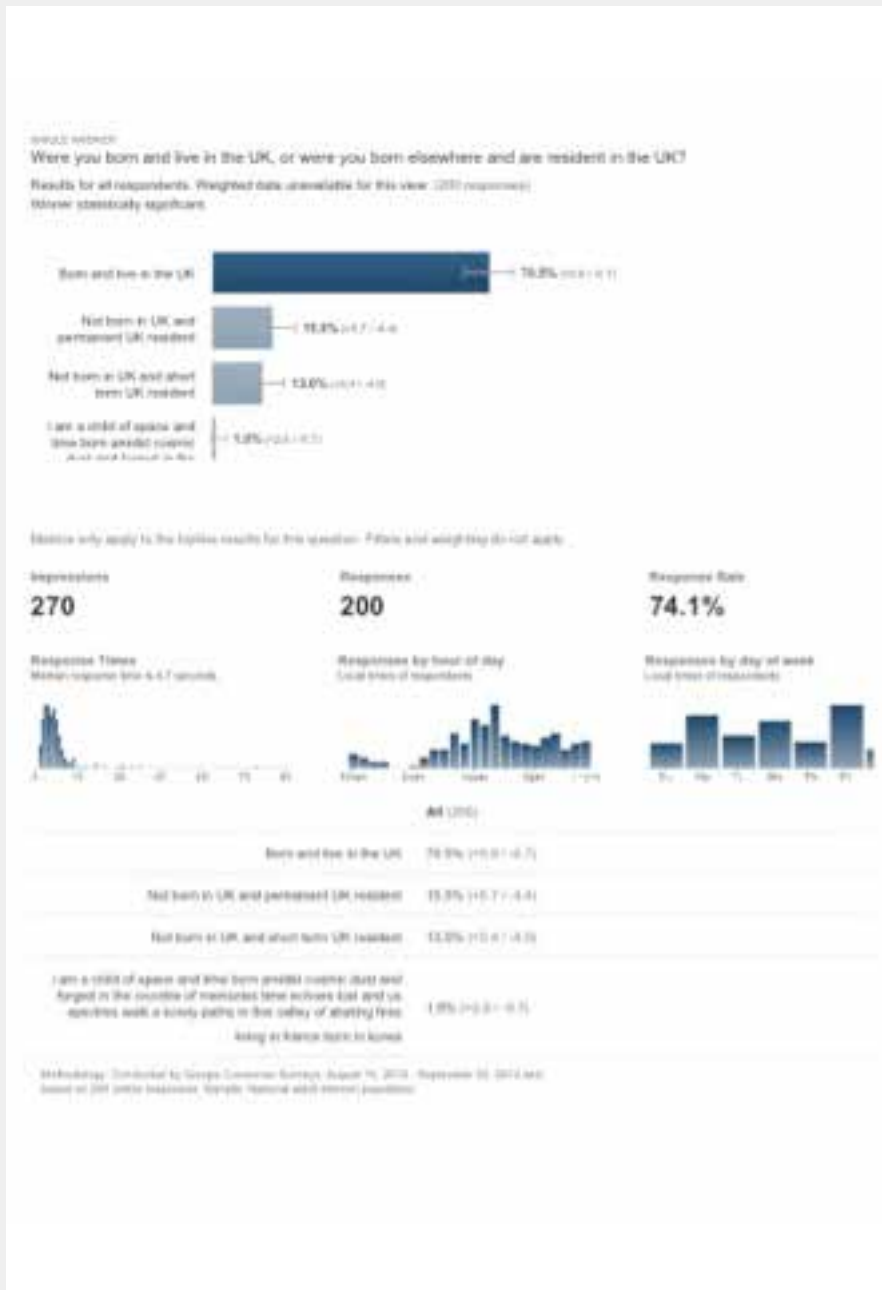
<Figure 8.7.> K-pop Listeners – What do you think makes K-pop appealing?



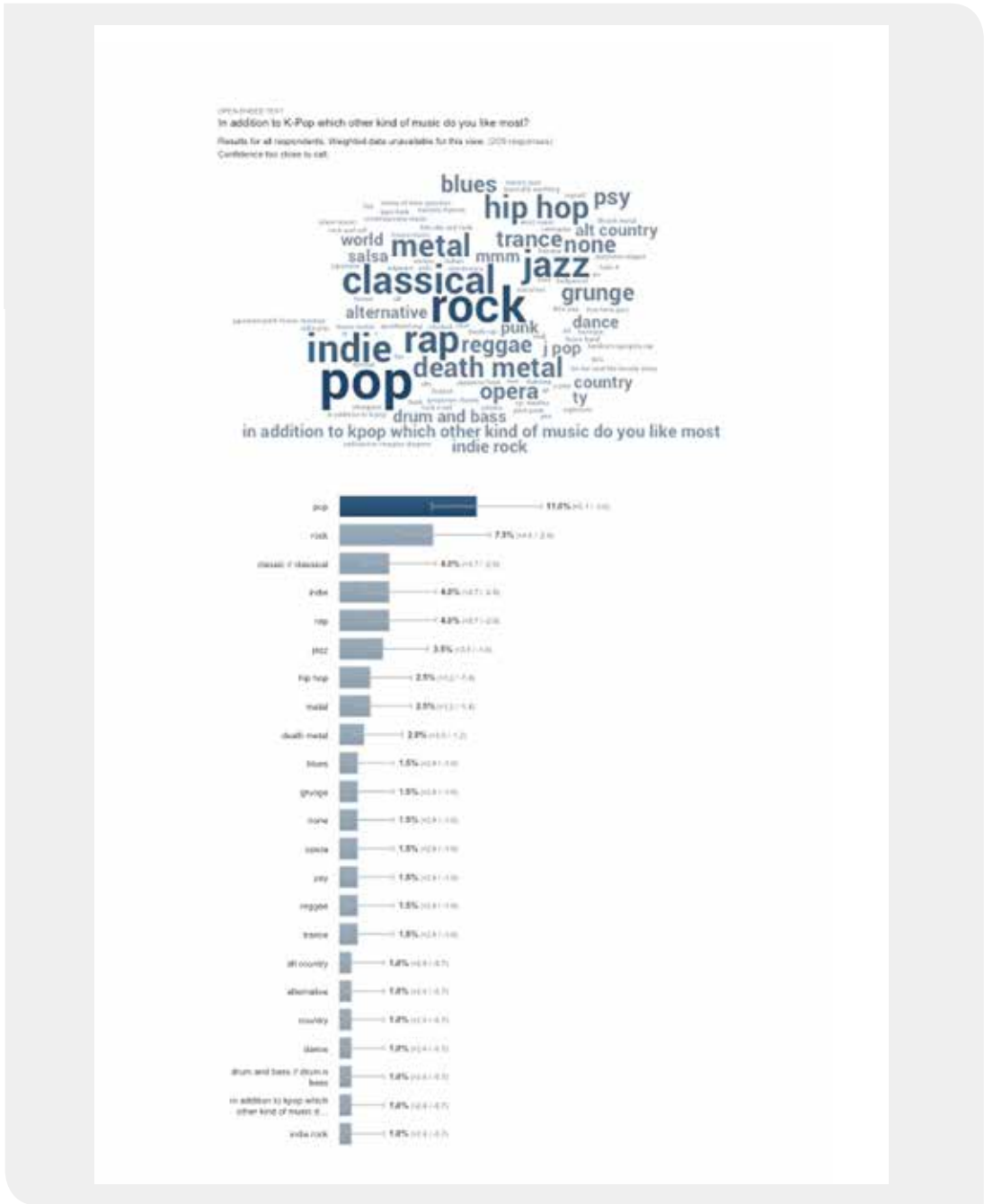
<Figure 8.8.> K-pop Listeners – *What, if anything, do you least like about K-pop?*



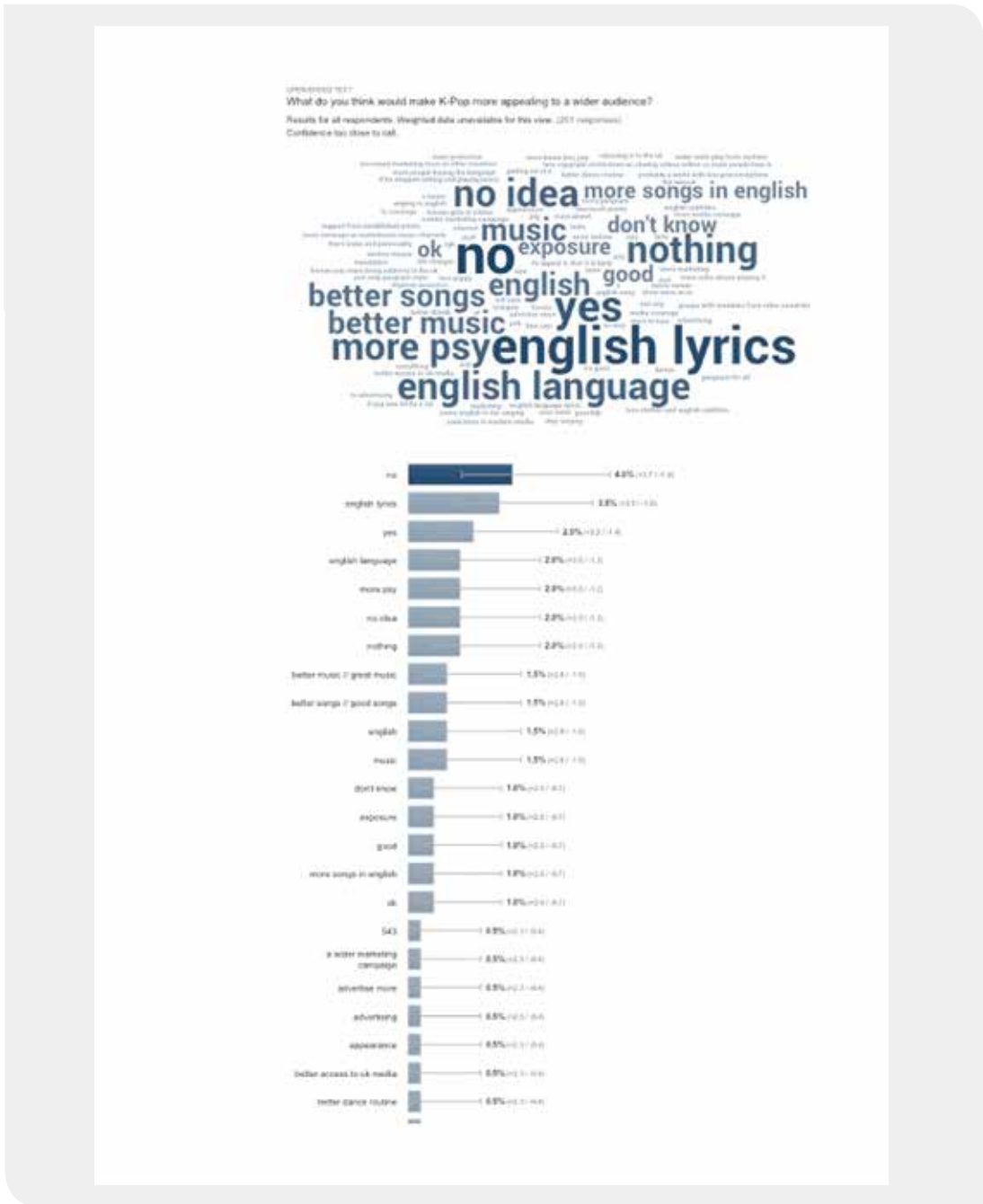
<Figure 8.9.> K-pop Listeners – Which K-pop star, if any, would you like to meet most of all?



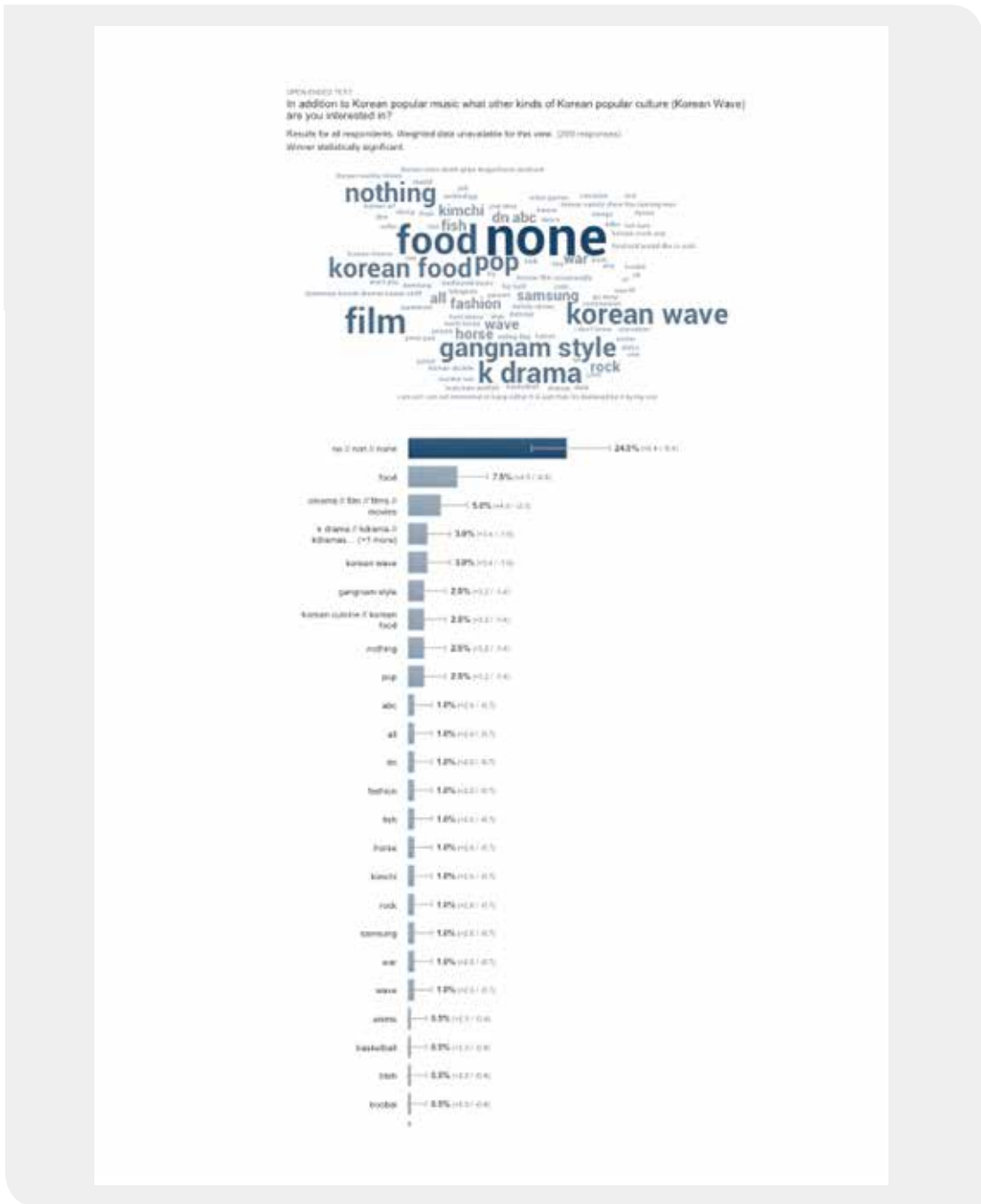
<Figure 8.10.> K-pop Listeners – Were you born and live in the UK, or were you born elsewhere and are resident in the UK?



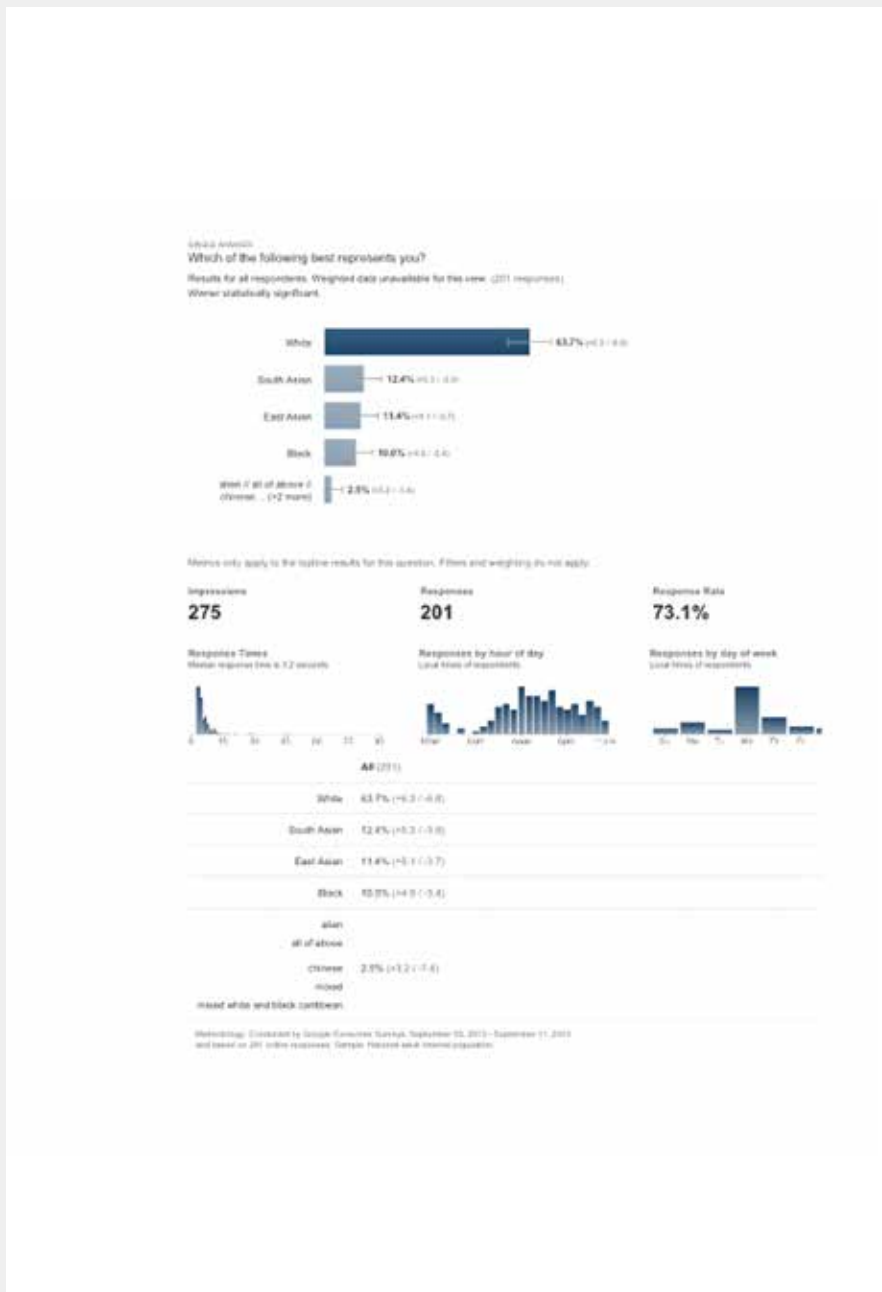
<Figure 8.11.> K-pop Listeners – In addition to K-pop which other kind of music do you like most?



<Figure 8.12.> K-pop Listeners – What do you think would make K-pop more appealing to a wider audience?



<Figure 8.13.> K-pop Listeners – In addition to Korean popular music what other kinds of Korean popular culture (Korean Wave) are you interested in?



<Figure 8.14.> K-pop Listeners – Which of the following best represents you? While, South Asian, East Asian, Black, Other (please specify)



9. Concluding Remarks

Much of the development of K-pop fandom and scenes around the world have been shaped by digital technology and social media, including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, while globalisation and dynamic cultural flow provided the contexts for the global K-pop fan culture.

It could be suggested that the UK K-pop scene began as a virtual scene before it developed local characteristics and specificities. The mobility of fans, promoters and organisers across the geographical and cultural borders contribute to the creation of the translocal scenes, which in the European context are vital and beneficial to the development of local K-pop scenes and the K-pop industry as a whole. All of these dynamics could be understood in terms of Arjun Appadurai's five concepts that give shape to global cultural flow and they include: 'ethnoscape', 'technoscape', 'mediascape', 'financescape' and 'ideoscape' (Appadurai 1990). These concepts applied together help us to better understand the interconnected and fluid nature of Asian popular music culture – which is reconfigured and mobilised by its creative producers and consumers.

By way of a preliminary conclusion to this report, the key research questions are briefly addressed focussing on the UK experience below. Further analysis of the research data collected will produce more comprehensive and in-depth discussion.

1) Who are the K-pop audience in Europe?

K-pop audiences in the United Kingdom are multicultural and multiethnic. The demography of K-pop fans in the UK reflects the dynamic ethnoscape of contemporary British society. The self-identification of individual fans are also important as this connects to the next question which deals with the motivation and practice of music consumption.

2) Why do European audiences consume K-pop and how do they choose it?

The motivations of UK K-pop fans are varied and they are also influenced by an individual's cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds. Nevertheless, globalisation and 'pop cosmopolitanism' (Jenkins 2004) are contributing factors. Pleasure of participation is also important. In this sense, K-pop fans are both consumers and producers (prosumer) of the music genre of their choice.

3) What are the methods of K-pop consumption for K-pop audiences in Europe?

The digital technology and new media are the main methods of K-pop consumption for the K-pop audiences across the globe. However, live K-pop events such as concerts are equally important for the fans to experience 'liveness' (Auslander 1999).

4) What kind of K-pop do European audiences prefer?

In the UK, K-pop acts from the major entertainment agencies are popular, especially those acts who had concerts in Britain, including Big Bang, SHINee, CN Blue, EXO and 4Minute Super Junior, Infinite and Super Junior. A small but increasing number of fans, who are looking further, enjoy Korean hip-hop and Korean rock.

5) Which aspects of K-pop appeal to the European audiences of K-pop most and what are the reasons?

According to the Google Surveys conducted in the summer of 2013, 'catchy' and 'fun' are the main appeals for the UK audience. The focus group discussants also concur with the survey result.

6) What does K-pop mean to the K-pop audiences in Europe and how their K-pop music consumption is perceived by their wider society? This question relates to K-pop audiences' social position(ality) and identity, media reception, local music industry perception, etc.

A small number of K-pop aficionado began to listen to K-pop in the late 1990s. The global hit of Psy in 2012 made the British general audience aware of this otherwise unknown pop genre from Korea. Prior to Psy, a few UK media reported on K-pop fans in Britain, which was seen as a 'craze'. The British national media perception of



Wembley Arena concerts by Big Bang²³⁾ and Super Junior²⁴⁾ is more favorable but K-pop still remains peripheral. More research on societal perception and the media and music industries are required.

7) What are the relationships between the European music and media industries and K-pop consumption in Europe?

The local British music industry has not involved itself very much with K-pop except for several K-pop live concerts held since 2011. See above.

8) What kind of 'translocal' relationships and connections do the K-pop audience groups in Europe maintain with each other?

I have met a number of K-pop fans from the European continent and Asia at various live concerts events but have not established any contact with any K-pop fan groups from other European countries. Further research on the European translocal relationships are needed to explore this issue

23) 'Big Bang – review' by Caroline Sullivan, *The Guardian*, 16 December 2012: <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/dec/16/big-bang-review> (accessed 18 February 2014).

24) 'SouthKorea's One Direction: Super Junior's Wembley Gig shows K-pop is on the rise', by Jamie Merril, *The Independent*, 8 November 2013: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/south-koreas-one-direction-super-juniors-wembley-gig-shows-kpop-is-on-the-rise-8929680.html> (accessed 18 February 2014).

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11. Research Outputs and Activities

Conference paper presentations

April 2013: 'YouTube Ethnomusicology in 'Gangnam Style': Researching K-pop music and its consumption in the age of digital technologies', at the 2013 Conference of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, Queen's University Belfast, UK.

June 2013: 'K-pop Diplomacy and Pop Cosmopolitanism: The Place of Asian Pop on the Global Stage', at the 17th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Universidad de Oviedo, Gijón, Spain.

July 2013: 'K-pop Scenes and Fandom in the UK: Location, Mobility and Identity', at the International Association for Music Analysis Annual Conference, Liverpool, UK.

October 2013: 'K-pop Reception in the UK: Bringing Quantitative and Ethnographic Studies Together', at the World Association for Hallyu Studies International Congress, Seoul, Korea.

November 2013: 'K-Pop Fandom in the UK: Cosmopolitans, Locals and Translocals', at the 2013 Society for Ethnomusicology Annual Conference, Indianapolis, USA.

Conference panel organisation

July 2013: A panel on 'K-pop on the Global Platform: European Reception and Contexts' at the International Association for Music Analysis Annual Conference, Liverpool, UK. Panelists: Haekyung Um, Sang-Yeonn Sung and Michael Fuhr. Discussants: Keith Howard, Tobias Hübinette.

October 2013: A panel on 'Making Sense of Local K-Pop Fandom and the Global Reception of Korean Wave', at the World Association for Hallyu Studies International Congress, Seoul. Panelists: Haekyung Um, Sang-Yeon Sung and Michael Fuhr.



Planned Conference Presentations

May 2014: 'Imagining Korea and the World through K-Pop: A Study of UK Fandom', at the Second Middle East World Association for Hallyu Studies Conference, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel.

March 2014: 'Transnational Southeast Asian Fandom in the Making of the Global K-pop Scene in London', at the one-day conference entitled 'South Korea <-> Southeast Asia, Seoul, Korea.

Planned publications

In preparation: 'K-pop Music Videos and the Making of Online Stardom: Global Dissemination of East Asian Pop', *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*.

In preparation: 'K-pop Cosmopolitanism and Pop Cultural Diplomacy: UK Case Studies', *Popular Music*.

K-pop Reception and Participatory Fan Culture in Austria

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1. Introduction

Korean popular music, known as K-pop, has become one of the most powerful cultural products in East Asian cultural traffic, becoming popular even in Europe and the United States in the past few years, bringing new ways of understanding the globalisation of popular music as a multidirectional flow. Through social media, boosted by South Korean pop singer Psy's 'Gangnam Style' in 2012, K-pop's popularity has been growing around the world. As the result of collaboration among the United Kingdom (University of Liverpool), Germany (University of Heidelberg) and Austria (University of Vienna), this research explores similarities and differences in K-pop's reception and fan culture in several localities in Europe. Contacts made at many presentations at conferences and workshops with collaborative researchers during the research period suggest that each European nation has a distinctive local K-pop scene. For example, the general age and gender (teenage female) are similar, but the ethnic construction varies by immigration law and history. Also, public awareness of the Korean community and its national image varies from locality to locality. As a case study of K-pop reception and its fan culture, this part of the research report provides the case of Austria by elaborating material collected from interviews, an online survey and participant-observation.

K-pop and its participatory culture (Jenkins 2006) spread fast among fans in Europe, boosted by social media (Marinescu & Balica 2013) and Korean pop singer Psy's video 'Gangnam Style.' K-pop fans in Austria had already been increasing in number for several years (Sung 2012; 2013), but the sudden popularity of 'Gangnam Style,' accompanied by a rise of South Korea's national image and awareness of K-pop, sharply increased their participatory fan culture. After the video had topped the Austrian chart in October 2012, K-pop events sharply increased in number and were readily organised by longtime K-pop fans and local promoters with different drives and aims. Most of these fans had been fans of K-pop for a long time, many of them for more than ten years. Smaller K-pop events among East Asians, like K-pop clubbing and K-pop karaoke, had already occurred in private occasions, but large-scale public K-pop events are new, promoted by local and institutional sponsors,

such as the Korean embassy, the Korean Culture House, the Korean Austrian Association, and private businessmen. Longtime K-pop fans are no longer satisfied being consumers but are acting as providers of the next generation of K-pop fans. They are motivated to organise and lead these events to provide more connection among K-Pop fans, and sponsors consider it worthy to promote such events to support Korea's national image and benefit their own products.

As a case study carried out after 'Gangnam Style' was released, this research could be a new approach to the study of K-pop. By focusing on K-pop's participatory fan culture in Austria between February and November 2013, it contributes to an understanding of the reception of K-pop on a global scale. Based on qualitative interviews with fans, organisers, and sponsors of such events, survey and participant-observation of three major K-pop events held in Vienna (Austria's Next K-Pop Star, between February and May 2013; K-Pop Dance Festival Vienna, in June 2013; and K-pop Quiz, in November 2013), it discusses the K-pop scene in Austria. The main questions it raises are: Who are the K-pop fans in Austria? Why do they like K-pop? Who are the organisers of local K-pop in Austrian events and what are their aims and drives? Who participates and why? What are the differences or changes in K-pop fandom and its participatory fan culture before and after 'Gangnam Style'?

As an ethnographic case study of K-pop reception and the associated participatory culture in Austria, this research contributes toward understanding how the local situation of Korean institutions, local fans and private sponsor's interactions with participatory fan culture construct the local specificity of the K-pop scene in Europe and argues the importance of understanding K-pop participatory culture from local perspectives.



2. Research Methods

Much quantitative research on popular music has been done (Roe 1998; Roe and von Feilitzen 1992), but it lacks insight into people's experience and perspectives, largely because the listeners' own accounts are absent (William 2001:223). In general, there is a need for in-depth qualitative empirical research in popular music studies, research that takes into account listeners' own experiences and perspectives (Williams 2001:223). Without a doubt, K-pop has become the most successful and visible musical player in East Asia since the late 1990s, leading scholars to speak of 'trans-Asia cultural traffic' (Iwabuchi et al. 2004) and 'East Asian pop culture' (Chua 2004). K-pop's transnational growth, however, has not been limited within the regional context but has spread globally, leading to complicated and multidirectional cultural flows. K-pop has gained scholarly attention, and many have approached its content and popularity from multiple perspectives. The tendency of previous studies, however, has been to focus on East Asia and Southeast Asia (Jung & Shim 2013; Khiun 2013), and the non-Asian regions have not yet been fully explored.

Ethnographic study of K-pop reception in Austria has been done in two different periods, first in 2010–2011¹⁾ and later, between February and November 2013. These studies—done before and after the popularity of 'Gangnam Style'—prove that there has been drastic change in the K-pop scene in Austria. Earlier research proves most K-pop fans in Austria were East Asians.²⁾ Social media played a significant role in enabling them to construct their own regional identity apart from that of the dominant culture (Sung 2012, 2013), but later research proves that more local and East European fans—from Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and so forth—increased in number and are no longer only consumers and listeners of K-pop but people who try to lead the Austrian K-pop scene from a spectator culture to a participatory culture (Jenkins 2006).

1) This research on *hallyu* reception in Austria was funded by the Academy of Korean Studies, Korea.

2) Austrian and other European K-pop fans had existed for a long time, but their presence sharply increased only recently because of their active participation on K-pop events and increased use of social media.

The earlier case study indicates an emerging cultural taste in Austria among East Asian immigrants for cultural products that routinely reinforce links with their home countries and with the region of East Asia. For these East Asians in Austria, engagement with the Korean Wave, particularly with K-pop and Korean television drama, in everyday life may be a significant marker of self-identity. The participants in this study have different tastes and preferences by genre and nation, but all of them agreed that they preferred to watch or listen to Korean popular culture, which keeps them in closer touch with their hometowns. Instead of admiring Western popular culture or a host society of Europe, they are finding new opportunities to construct an alternate consciousness and structure of feeling by sharing a popular culture similar to their own. Korean popular culture has clearly become a cultural icon of contemporary East Asia, and this popularity has led overseas East Asians to consume it through the Internet and to share their emerging cultural taste (and opinions about it) through social media, even in a foreign land like Europe. By sharing similar contents that contain their values and sentiments, they struggle to create their own community, distinct from the dominant culture or group of their host society.

Although Austria is a small country with a small number of K-pop fans, case studies of K-pop in Austria carry high value because its geographic location (surrounded by 8 different countries), the multicultural environment (a growing number of immigrants), the transformation of Asian images (a strengthening of Asian images through K-pop), efforts of Koreans to promote K-pop to local fans and an active fan base make its fan culture more dynamic and specific. Its geographic location makes it a hub for K-pop fan culture in Europe, as does its online and offline participatory culture. Not much ethnographic study of K-pop reception and its fan culture in general, and very little in Europe, has been done; however, some scholars have attempted to explore K-pop's popularity in local contexts (Chan and Kim 2011; Marinescu and Balica 2013; Sung 2012, 2013). Research on the reception of K-pop in Paris has been explored (Cha and Kim 2011) because the SM Town World Tour, produced by South Korea's largest entertainment company, SM, in June 2011, turned out to be quite successful in attracting local attention.



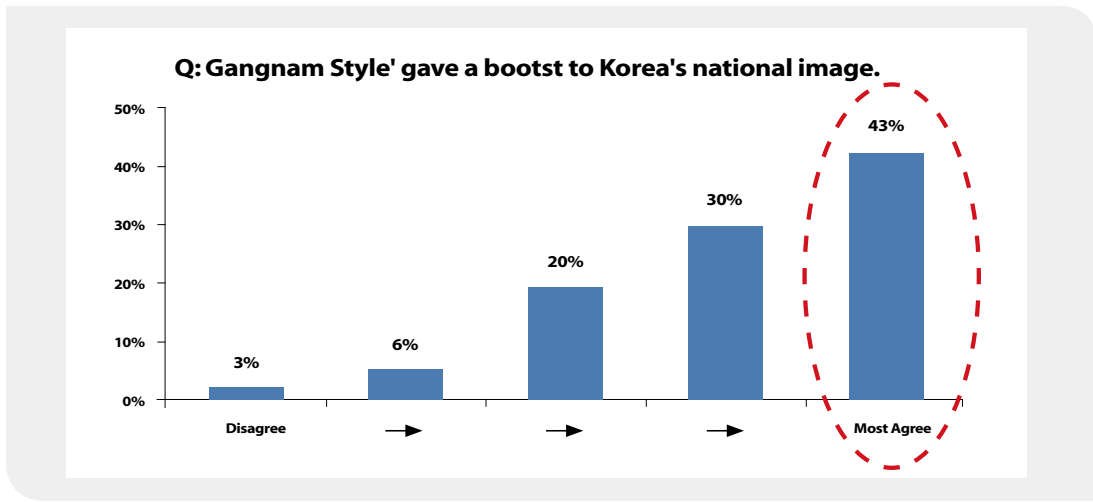
K-pop fans in Austria are not as numerous as those in Paris or the United Kingdom, for example, but this study emphasizes the importance of a case study of K-pop in Austria. Though it is a small country, with roughly 8.47 million people, it is surrounded by eight different countries: the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. This geographic situation makes Vienna an international center, easy for K-pop fans in neighbouring countries to reach. For example, the K-pop dance festival that was held in Vienna in June 2013 proves that European fans share the same interest through social media, which led them to participate in K-pop events held in a neighbouring country. Participants from Poland, Hungary, Germany, France and the Czech Republic participated in this event, showing that fans are willing to travel internationally to places where events are held. According to the participants, Vienna is easy to reach by airplane or by train, and its location makes their participation easy. Furthermore, immigration into Austria has become more diverse in recent years, especially from these neighbouring countries. According to the 2001 census, 9.1 percent of Austria's inhabitants were foreign-born residents, with 62.8 percent of them coming from the successor states of the former Yugoslavia and from Turkey (Migration Information Source n.d.). Many K-pop fans not only travel to participate in K-pop events but have strong connections with each other.

About 2,500 Koreans, 3,000 Taiwanese, 2,500 Japanese and 15,673 Chinese immigrants live in Austria. (The size of the Chinese community can be estimated at about 30,000 when the official data consider illegal migrants and refugees.) East Asian immigrants in Austria are usually students, migrant workers and corporate expatriates. Some of them tend to become immigrants after their study or contract is over. They have been a fairly unproblematic minority. They rarely cause big social conflicts with the host society (as other groups have) and Austrians are not well informed about East Asian society and its culture, partly due to its limited access through mass media and a lack of cultural understanding. Before 'Gangnam Style,' South Korea did not enjoy a clear image among Austrians and was considered a nation not uniquely different from China or Japan. Because local interest in Vienna lies mostly in Austria and neighbouring countries, little news about the rest of the world is disseminated. To improve this state of affairs, Korean national institutions have constantly been promoting South

Korea and its culture in European societies, including in Austria. For example, the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts and other institutions visit Europe occasionally to promote Korean traditional music and dance (Sung 2013).

Performances by musicians visiting Austria to introduce Korean traditional music have occurred from time to time. A so-called Korean Night, held in Vienna in 2005, provided an opportunity to introduce Korean traditional culture to the Austrian mass media. It was a special concert. Barbara Wolschek, chief editor at the foreign policy department of the public broadcaster ORF, after attending the concert, said, “Now we can look beyond the EU and let our eyes turn to Asia.” She emphasised the usefulness of promoting the national image. Despite constant effort from the South Korean government to upgrade the national image, South Korea until recently has been known mainly for its political issues with North Korea; therefore, it has always seemed serious and dangerous. Although the South Korean government has made an effort to upgrade South Korea’s national image as dynamic and trendy, it has not attracted much attention in Austrian society. To the surprise of many, the popularity of ‘Gangnam Style’ interested Austrians in learning about South Korea and this has led them to become interested in the reasons for K-pop’s success and made them aware of the global success of the South Korean economy. K-pop fans in interviews say that their fascination toward K-pop is partly due to their fascination for South Korea’s economic growth and its national branding. Interviews show that South Korea’s image as perceived by younger Austrians is quite positive and this has led them to react positively toward K-pop. After the K-pop boom and ‘Gangnam Style,’ the image of South Korea changed from a serious and dangerous place to a cosmopolitan country where people know how to enjoy their lives.

During the research period, the students in the class I teach undertook a survey among 200 Austrians between 18 and 25 years of age about how their image toward South Korea changed after ‘Gangnam Style’. The following graph shows that 43 percent of respondents agreed that ‘Gangnam Style’ boosted South Korea’s national image and 20 percent agreed that they realised friends and families had become interested in South Korea after ‘Gangnam Style.’



K-pop's popularity in Austria is not immense, compared to that of the UK or France, but it is growing. According to Park Jong Bum³⁾, president of the Korean Austrian Community:

German and Austrian people are very conservative, and they have very strong pride on [sic] their own things. They are very slow but very exact. Compared to Paris and UK, German people are very slowly reacting to hallyu or K-pop. But as you know, there was a K-pop audition, and it was pretty successful, and there was a K-pop dance festival in the Weltmuseum. Even in Austria, it is evident that K-pop even attracted them. If K-pop can be popular among Austrians, it is likely popular all over Europe. (Interview with author, 10 June 2013)

As pointed out by Park, K-pop's popularity has spread in Europe. Its popularity in Austria, however, has gone unstudied, probably because of the small number of fans and the slow growth of their numbers. The study of K-pop in Austria carries high value because the country's geographic location and multicultural environment, the transformation of Asian images, efforts of Koreans to promote K-pop to local fans and an active fan base make its fan culture more dynamic and specific, compared to other parts of the Europe.

³⁾ I obtained permission from the interviewee to use his real name. All the names which will be used throughout the paper are their real names and received their permissions.

3. Fans as Consumers - Who are K-pop fans and why do they like it?

This section summarises the qualitative interviews done with K-pop fans living in Austria and the survey done through the website Kpop europe.com. The survey elicited more than 500 feedbacks within a week from K-pop fans in Austria, Germany, Poland, Hungary and France. The survey questions are as follows.

- 1. What country do you live in?**
- 2. What is your age?**
- 3. What is your gender?**
- 4. What ethnicity/nationality are you?**
- 5. What is your occupation?**
- 6. When and how did you get to know K-pop?**
- 7. Why do you like K-pop?**
- 8. Who is your favorite K-Pop artist and why do you like them?**
- 9. Where do you usually get all the K-pop information?**
- 10. Are you actively participating at any K-pop events? If yes, why?**
- 11. Do you think there are more K-pop related events after the popularity of Psy's 'Gangnam Style'?**
- 12. What do you think K-pop's future will be?**
- 13. Has K-pop changed your lifestyle somehow? If yes, please describe.**

The answers show that most of K-pop fans are female between 15 and 19 in age. More than 50 percent of participants said they are between 15 and 19 years old, and 30 percent said they are between 20 and 25. All but 6 out of 516 respondents were female. It is surprising to see this result because quite a few men have been observed participating in K-pop events such as K-pop auditions and dance events.

The respondents to the survey had first contact with K-pop through social media and since then have consumed K-pop regularly through social media and the Internet. They usually use site such as Soompi, Tumblr, Allkpop, fangroups on Facebook, Twitter, Eatyourkimchi.com and Kpop europe.com. More than half said they like music from SM entertainment and around 30 percent said they like the music from



YG and JYP entertainment.

To the question “Why do you like K–pop?” fans answered thus (the texts are completely unedited and stand exactly as they were submitted):

I love how the k–pop bands and singers communicate with their fans and it’s just the whole music and really the bond between the fans and the band. They are always thankful for everything. Furthermore, I love Korean culture. I think it’s so interesting and thanks to that the Koreans have a different attitude when they are winning something. And they are really hardworkers!

K–pop is an inspiring music art for me. After a day of full stress, I can relax by hearing K–pop Songs. Beside the music, the entertainment and film/drama industry play a big role for me too. It’s like the second world, where i can create my fantasies, which might not be able to in the real world.

Because K–pop is the reflection of another world. It also transmit Korean views of life. There are many love songs and dynamic songs which can rhythm our life. When I listen to K–pop I feel really distress.

It helped me through some rough times in the beginning of the year and it is also different from the American styled pop music. The music is amazing, the dances are incredible and the concepts are just so different.

It’s bright, colourful, entertaining and different to the other genres I listen to. It doesn’t take itself too seriously, and I like that.

It’s not like American music, with lots of naked women in MVs. Korean is a beautiful language so it sounds good in songs and I absolutely love dances in Korean music.

I love k–pop because these stars are incredible music that moves into a different world. The artists are very talented and have respect for colleagues from other labels. K–pop woke me energy reserves and opened his eyes to the wonderful world of Asia. Korean artists are amazing. They have beautiful voices, great dancing, they are very funny and handsome. K–pop will always be in my heart.

That's actually a difficult question... Mainly because of the effort and hard work the idols picture, because of the way they taught me not to give up and be stronger. As I know how much they have to go through, I find in myself strength not to whine about small life problems and to chase my dreams no matter how hard the way might be. Besides, they are really talented and I love to hear my idols' voices and amazing dance performances just as I love their personalities shown in various variety shows. There's really a lot more to talk about so I'll just end with that.

K-pop is fun – simple as that. You can always find a song that suits your mood and Korean language sounds really nice. I love the whole “waiting for the comeback” thing, the excitement and happiness. I also like idols' attitude, how humble and thankful they are. It's not only about music here, it's about people who deliver it too~

K-pop artists are different than west artist. They don't hide their real character. We can see their true feeling when they are on the scene. They are polite for all fans. And you are with them for better or worse. This is why I like k-pop.

K-pop artists (and their companies) know how to do entertainment. They train hard to show viewers performance in best quality. Melodies are seductive and easy to remember, MV's are interesting and during watching them I want to dance choreographies with artists. K-pop stars have many skills. They sing, dance, and play the instruments. Some of them are actors or models. Of course the always look good. So it is obvious that girls 'fall in love' in those boys, and fan-boys adore female artists. This world is colourful. Every comeback brings something new and shows artists another face. To be honest at the beginning I was sceptical about this genre. I'm originally a rock and metal music fan. This was hard time for me. I couldn't understand WHY do I enjoy this music and the whole K-pop world? Now I know. It's just magical.

In summary, respondents to the survey value Korean idol stars' politeness and good relationship with fans, and many compare K-pop with American pop. This proves that K-pop acts as an alternative pop genre for those who don't like mainstream pop. It also proves that K-pop fans have positive feeling and images of South Korea and its popular culture.

The question “Has K-pop changed your life style somehow?” elicited the following answers:



Yes, Now I am learning more about Asian culture, music. I started learning Korean, and I am talking about K-pop almost all the time.

Yes, it changed my life a lot. Now I am a person who can show my feelings and I'm not afraid about this. I don't give up with my dreams because everything's possible with my good mood!

Well, apart from the fact that I use Internet even more since I became a K-pop fan.. And not being able to listen other songs than K-pop.

I think this thing all idols represent, this "working hard" got to me and I try to put more effort in what I do, remembering of them.

Yes, very much. Now I'm more open-minded and more confident. Before my history with K-pop I was very very shy. Now I'm crazy person with many great friends.

Definitely, I'm not no-life of course, but K-pop absolutely changed my life. Before I got to know K-pop I was listening to Japanese and Chinese music only and it wasn't something like Oh my god, it's something I can't live without! No. But after listened some Korean music, watched MVs and learned who is who, I've started to feel better. I had something only for me. Something which describe my personality.

Yes, Of course, K-pop changed my lifestyle. It does not bother me that guys have make-up and dress colourfully. With K-Pop I'm happy and more open to new friendships. K-pop showed me that everyone is different, that each is the best. es, I became happier and brighter person.

Yes, since listen K-pop I'm more happy person and have less worries.

Yes, I didn't have friend and I didn't go out from home often, when I started listen to K-pop I knew lots of people who are like me addicted to it and we are now best friends and we meet often.

As can be seen here, K-pop changed some European teenagers' identity: after having contact with K-pop and its fans, their shyness changed and they gained confidence in themselves. Some fans even claim that K-pop has made their life much happier and brighter. It seems that K-pop has become a gateway to an alternative social

community for some who have social difficulties.

Qualitative interviews elicited more interesting results than the Internet survey because, in conversation, fans could expose more personal feelings about South Korea and K-pop. Since Austrians have not had many chances to have experience K-pop culture directly, the image they get from music videos or movies through social media is quite distinct, and they are surprised to see how advanced and developed a country South Korea is. Many Austrian K-pop fans talk about their fascination with South Korea's image through music videos and how amazed they have been to have seen a different world there. For example, Jay, a K-pop fan in Austria, says:

I love Korea. I have never been to South Korea, but I really want to save money and travel there. I like their tradition, how they are and the language. I am also very curious and want to know how Korea [sic] managed so well. With the war and all that, they [sic] still doing very well. The landscape is also very nice from the drama. It looks really nice there and gives better image to me. Before, when we talk [sic] about Korea, they always talk about the [sic] North Korea and all that, but through music everybody can believe South Korea is in the form. Not all the time about the political things, but people really lives [sic] there, and they are happy. (Interview with author, 25 June 2013, Vienna)

This interview reveals a certain fascination with Korea, involving music videos and other visual images in South Korean television dramas. Since most European K-pop fans have not been to Korea, their fantasy may grow and create some kind of constructed image within their imagination. Many interviewed K-pop fans said they like South Korea or Asia because it is exotic—or they just like South Korea for no reason.



4. Participatory Culture - What kinds of events are organised; purpose and participants

This section is based on participant-observation of two major K-pop events, held from February to June 2013 in Vienna and on interviews conducted with the event organisers, sponsors, and participating fans. These events were sponsored by the South Korean embassy, Korean business companies (including Hyundai and Samsung), and local companies run by Koreans (including the Youngsan Group, World Culture Network [WCN], and Akakiko), as well as Korean associations in Austria, including the Korean Austrian Community and the Korean Culture House. Qualitative interviews were held with the organisers of these events, Christian Schleining, Anja Hillebrand, and Bai Sujin, the president of the Korean Austrian Community (which often sponsors such events), and fans who participated in these events, such as the ones who took part in these events as masters of ceremony or judges. Through these two events, I explore participatory fan culture in Austria and interactions among public and private institutions, sponsors, fans and local organisers and how they set up different local atmospheres in each locality in the European K-pop scene.

Austria's Next K-pop Star

'Austria's Next K-pop Star' is a K-pop audition that was organised mainly by Austrian K-pop fan Anja Hillebrand and Bai Sujin, a voice professor at Prayner Music Conservatory in Vienna. Bai and Hillebrand had already organised various K-pop events, such as "K-pop Nolja" (literally, 'Let's Play K-pop') in the Korean culture house before he organised this audition. Approached by Hillebrand, who had participated in the Nolja event, Bai decided to get sponsors and organise a K-pop audition. Hillebrand's knowledge of K-pop as a longtime fan and her connection with other K-pop fans throughout the Austrian fan community and Bai's professional singing career were a perfect match for them to get financial sponsors such as Park Jong Bum, the CEO of Youngsan Group in Austria, for such an event. In an interview, Bai said her reason for organising the audition was to find talented individuals and introduce them to South Korea (she thinks potential exists to find a hidden star from

Austria). In this audition, Bai acted not only as an organiser of “Austria’s Next K-pop Star” but also as a main judge and voice trainer. After the first round of the competition, when the participants had been reduced to sixteen contestants, she trained each one for their live performances. Because of her ceaseless efforts, the participants improved greatly through this period. Bai said:

I really had fun teaching them, and I found out what they really want. They really want to be a good singer. Some of them really have deep musical talent, so they can really be serious about being a K-pop idol. They are very serious about K-pop. As you know, many were K-pop fans already for many years. (Interview with author, 11 June 2013)

Unlike other judges, who give more credit to good singers and dancers, Bai was pretty sure about what kind of singer she was looking for: “There are many great singers who have a powerful voice, but there are many good singers like that in Korea. That’s not what we’re looking for. We want something unique that Korea might be interested in. It has to be something different” (Interview with author, 11 June 2013).

Aside from Bai’s role in this audition, a prominent role was played by Hillebrand, a student in the Korean Studies Program in the University of Vienna, who is well known in the local fan community for her knowledge of K-pop. As a knowledgeable K-pop fan, she acted as a judge and leader of the program.

I was a K-pop fan for long time already. My friend, Jasmine [another organiser who operates background music for the singers] and I were both interested in Asia since kindergarten. We loved China in the beginning and then Japan, and from 2000 to 2004, we started to love Korea. I love all East Asian countries, but I love Korea the most. I feel warm whenever I think about Korea. It is a very special feeling. (Interview with author, 10 May 2013)

Hillebrand added that she would also love to find a talented star to sell to South Korea: “I like it so much that I want this to be my profession. It would be what I love to do. It is like you make money from your hobby” (interview with author, 10 May 2013). She fully devoted herself to this audition program. While Bai was training in



vocal technique, Hillebrand selected K-pop pieces for the participants to make sure they tried many different genres to find one that would best fit their voices.

The first K-pop audition in the “Austria’s Next K-pop Star” series was held on 16 February 2013 at the Korean culture house. Fifty-one contestants competed. After selecting sixteen of these contestants to proceed to the next level, the judges organised six live shows, open to the public. The live shows were held every second week on Saturday nights starting on 20 March. The size of the audience varied from time to time, but usually between 100 and 200 people attended. Each live show was enthusiastic and exciting, with the participants showing off their talents as well as their potential popularity as stars. During each live show, two or three participants were eliminated. The judges got emotional forcing them to leave the show; Hillebrand sometimes even cried. At the end of the series, a K-pop star was selected.

As the guest judge of this competition, I found it fascinating and informative to be part of this event while also observing as a researcher. The main judges were Anja Hillebrand, Bai Sujin and Franz Brunner; Choi Kyoungju (an ORF radio producer), Nobert Mosch (a Taekwondo representative), Christian Spatzik (an Austrian actor), and I joined as auxiliary judges. There were many discussions about who would be suitable for being Austria’s first K-pop star, during which I learned a lot about the factors that went into the selection process. Bai gave more credit to the singers whose voice colour and technique were unique and could not easily be found in Koreans singers; Bai argued that few Korean singers really sing well, but there is no uniqueness to their singing technique and voice colour. Some judges tried to give extra credit to contestants whose age and dancing skill were most like those of previously established K-pop idols. The final winner, Youngkwang (Lukas), was accepted by most of the judges as being the most suitable because he had all the traits that the judges thought a K-pop star should have: he was young (13 at that time) and had multiple language skills (French, Korean, English, German), good dancing skill, and of course a distinctive singing style. He was born to a Korean mother and a European father. Because he was born in France, he still attends French school. He gained girl fandom while performing during the live performances and proved his potential to be a K-pop star.

Another important person to be mentioned is sponsor Park Jong Bum of the Youngsan Group. Park revealed that his intention to sponsor this K-pop audition was to promote South Korea and its art to Austria and to Europe: “As long as it is something that might contribute to promoting Korea as well as give a bridge to the cultural exchange, and to let the second-generation Koreans to know their own culture, it is necessary to sponsor such an event and I will do my best to do so” (interview with author, 10 June 2013). He added that as immigrant, he always feels he owes much to Austria, and therefore he wishes to return something he can to Austrian society. For him, sponsoring K-pop events can satisfy both intentions. He is happy that Austrian fans love K-pop and wants to create an event for them to participate in; he considers this a good way to promote Korean music and culture.

In the future, Hillebrand, Bai, and Park plan to continue this K-pop audition yearly and search for talented Austrian K-pop stars, which they would like to promote in South Korean music industry. They benefited from the event, and as long as they are likely to profit their interest from repetition of this event, they plan to produce such auditions on a regular basis. After its success, Hillebrand and Bai organised an official community under the name of Mindeullae (<https://www.facebook.com/Mindeullae>). Its purpose is to organise K-pop events more regularly in Austria to provide participatory fan culture on regular basis. Since Mindeullae was organised in July 2013, smaller-sized K-pop events, such as a K-pop quiz and K-pop karaoke, were held at the Korean culture house and provided a chance for K-pop fans to get together.

K-pop Dance Festival Vienna

K-pop Dance Festival Vienna, one of the most distinctive and largest K-pop events ever held in Austria, was held on 1 June 2013. It was organised by Christian Schleining, a 33-year-old Austrian man who has been a K-pop fan since 2008. After deciding with the Korean embassy that the Weltmuseum would be a great place to hold such a big K-pop dance festival, he searched for sponsors willing to support this event. After partnering with WCN (World Culture Networks), he received many sponsors,



including Samsung, Akakiko, Hyundai and so forth. If Austria's Next K-pop Star was a more local event, K-pop Dance Festival Vienn was a more regional event, with more participants from neighbouring countries.

Schleining was introduced to K-pop by a Japanese friend while he was studying in Mainland China. He says, "It was obvious that I learned about K-pop through Japanese friend. At that time, Asia was much influenced by Korean wave already. My Japanese friend was K-pop fan already ten years ago when she introduced K-pop to me" (interview with author, June 21, 2013). Even after he returned to Austria from China, he continued to enjoy K-pop and started to see the potential of growing K-pop in the European market. About running two major K-pop websites, Ai-likeEntertainment (www.ai-like.net) and Kpopeurope (We bring K-pop to Europe!, www.kpopeurope.eu), he says:

I did all this business because I see the potential of the K-pop market in this region. There are huge differences from a different region like Paris and Germany in terms of the size, but the problem is that they are already huge. It's about time to develop this region. Austrians are very slow and conservative. So I think if something becomes a trend or popular at all, then it is already popular all over the world. The problem is that Austria is too small to do any kind of concerts, for it is too small in the size of the market, but if you see all the surrounding countries, such as Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic, there are some potential futures in this region. (Interview with author, 21 June 2013)

As stated by Schleining, this event was more exciting because participants came from countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and France. The group Oh My Girls (also called O.M.G.) and some other groups that participated in this event posted their intention of participating, and most of them said they not only do this as a hobby, but because they really would like to help bring K-pop into Europe. As mentioned, the K-pop community and activities have been active longer in East Europe than in Austria. For example, O.M.G., a girl group from the Czech Republic, won the K-pop Contest in the Czech Republic in 2012 and was the grand prize winner of the K-pop World Festival 2012, held in Changwon, South Korea. This festival, initiated in 2012 and scheduled to be held yearly in Changwon, was planned by eleven different South Korean culture and information service institutions to spread and

expand the global base of hallyu, the wave of Korean popular culture that swept East Asia at the turn of the twenty-first century. O.M.G., as the winner of the second prize of the K-pop Dance Festival Vienna, already has experienced performing in major K-pop events held in Europe and South Korea, while for many Austrian groups participating in these kinds of events was a fairly new experience.

Although Schleining initiated the K-pop Dance Festival Vienna and was its main organizer, this event would not have been possible without the cooperation of WCN Entertainment and the Weltmuseum and sponsorship from others. Major support came again from Park. WCN is a management service for cultural, social and business-related events and is an affiliate of the Youngsan Group. According to Christian:

WCN, Weltmuseum, and me—we all brought something in to this project, but no profit in terms of money. WCN wanted to make the profile bigger, and the museum wanted to attract people, and I wanted to bring bigger project, so it turned out to be a positive event, in which we all gained something. But I worked five months for this project. All the people who participated would do it again but under different circumstances. (Interview with author, 21 June 2013)

After heated competition among seventeen dance groups, the winner was KPOP ALL STAR from France, consisting of four members from different ethnic backgrounds. The group's leader is the only member of Korean origin (actually, he was the only Korean participant among all the performers in this event). KPOP ALL STAR not only received big applause from the audience but were popular among the other participants for being good supporters offstage. The group is actually a combination of two groups: a girl group, called New G Crew, which won the BIGBANG FANTASTIC BABY CONTEST 2012 (<http://www.kpopeurope.eu/en-european-teams-for-the-2013-k-pop-cover-dance-festival-1-kpop-all-star/>), and two boys from DS Dancers, which brings dancers from South Korea to Paris to hold K-pop dance workshops. Except for KPOP ALL STAR, all the participants in the K-pop Dance Festival Vienna were from Austria and nearby countries, including Germany. Among the seventeen groups that participated were a.kysss, Black Illusion, G.A.M.E. (Girls and Music Entertainment), HOME MADE ASIA, KPOP ALL STAR, Little Viet, Mr. &



Mrs. Hyungjin, Oh My Girls, One2Step, Red Riding Hood, Rule Entertainment (Rule Ent.), Secret Identity, The Freaks, Unequal, Z.A.M.S., and MiXtery, from Germany, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. The names of the groups, except possibly Z.A.M.S., are in or based on the English language. From this, it is obvious that they hope to extend their performance career in the region, or even on a global scale.

According to Schleining, around 250 entrance tickets were sold for the event; however, if the organisers and participants are all counted, about 400 people attended. Seventeen dance groups from five different places in Europe participated. During this dance festival, it was fascinating to see how people from different nations could easily connect with K-pop, because of its hybrid form, and with each other. Although “K-pop” stands for the popular music of South Korea, its fans have formed local communities of their own in Austria and elsewhere. As a result, it was quite successful.

K-pop Quiz

K-pop Quiz was one of the largest local events which was held in 17th of November at Korean Culture House organised by Mindeullae, official community organised by Bai Sujin and Anja Hillebrand. This event was organised by Mindeullae under the sponsor from the Korean embassy. The quiz was organised by three different categories: 1) song and picture quiz. A section of a song is played or part of an image / picture shown and provided to a question. 2) Lyrics quiz. A song line is shown in Korean and the question will be asked according to that sample. In this section Koreans were not allowed to join. 3) Facts Quiz. Very general questions were asked without picture or sound. Koreans were not allowed to join in this section as well. 51 K-pop fans participated and around 25 people were the audience. According to the Korean embassy, the fans had so much knowledge about K-pop that very detailed questions were easily answered. The gifts for the winners were K-Pop Merchandise package (CD's, Poster, etc.), small gift package (Ramen, Make-Up Samples, ChocoPie etc..) and Samsung Galaxy Handy. This event was actually the first official event organised by Mindeullae and they plan to have regular K-pop event as such yearly. Mindeullae will plan to have the 2nd Austria's future K-pop star as well as smaller events such as K-pop karaoke and K-pop quiz in the near future.

5. Social Media

The explosion of user-created media content on the web has created a new media universe. As more and more people are using social media such as Facebook and Twitter, their favourite pop music and the television drama that they watched the previous night can spread instantly in online spaces. This powerful use of social media has created a new kind of cultural flow and connected people in Europe with popular cultural products that they prefer.

Through social media, people tend to have more communications with friends with whom they have common interests—which update them with cultural trends and enable them to keep up with popular music and television dramas. Most of the cultural products they desire are provided free on YouTube or other internet websites. This specific function of social media has greatly influenced K-pop's spread in Europe as well as globally. If the earlier channel of dissemination of K-pop were cable channels such as MTV, the recent K-pop fans can search for the newest released album directly on YouTube. When they see something that interests them, they post it in their Facebook page to share it with their friends. This kind of function has driven K-pop to reach global audiences rapidly. From the survey among K-pop fans in Europe also proves that most of the K-pop fans had their first contact with K-pop through Facebook or YouTube and they continuously get the latest news from the social media such as Facebook and twitter. Internet online culture provides the easiest and most convenient way to obtain products and news; without it, K-pop fans in Austria would be unable to consume all the cultural products they want with the same speed as in South Korea.



6. Cultural Intermediaries: Consumers to provider

An important conclusion from this research is the role of cultural intermediaries who have been long-time K-pop fans and have transformed themselves from being consumers to being providers for the next generation, and together with the Korean private sector (for example, Korean businessmen and Korean professional singers), they are acting as cultural intermediaries between Korean institutions and the K-pop fan community. Their role highlights the reason for a sharp increase of participatory fan culture in Austria, because they are more visible than before. The role of Anja Hillebrand and Christian Schleining on K-pop scene in Austria is immense⁴⁾. Without their constant efforts to produce K-pop events, K-pop events would fade away very soon; however, due to their interest in spreading K-pop and communicating with K-pop fans, they have helped create a special K-pop scene in Vienna.

7. Institutions: Korean embassy, Korean culture house, Korean Association in Austria, Private Business

In the local Austrian K-pop scene, Korean institutions play an interesting part. The South Korean embassy has a direct relationship with Hillebrand and Schleining. Through constant communication with them and participating in events by offering ideas and sometimes sponsorship, it plays a major role in the local K-pop scene; however, according to Hillebrand, it would like to see many European participants in K-pop events, so these events cannot be promoted solely to Asian fans. This could be one reason that East Asian K-pop fans are not very active any longer. Also, the Korean culture house in Vienna constantly supports these events by providing space for free, and Youngsan and Park Jong Bum are a unique case, playing a big part on the local K-pop scene. The close relationship between K-pop fans and South Korean

⁴⁾ This chapter does not explicitly explain the role Anja and Christian played as cultural intermediaries because their role and intention to organise such an event are explored in the earlier chapter of K-pop events.

institutions and their efforts to hold K-pop events has led to the result that major K-pop events in which people from neighbouring countries can participate together are being held in Austria. Through the survey, many Polish respondents complained that no such events are held in Poland, although Polish K-pop fans outnumber Austrian K-pop fans.

8. Conclusion

This case study K-pop reception and participatory fan culture contributes to an understanding of how local institutions, fans and private sponsors' interactions construct an exclusive local popular-music scene, and it argues the prominence of seeing popular-music participatory culture from local perspectives. After the popularity of 'Gangnam Style,' K-pop fans and their fan culture have been much more active and have increased in numbers, with more voluntary work from fans and increasing financial support from the private and public sectors. The increased national image and public awareness of South Korea has led many in the private and public sectors to become involved in K-pop events; by sponsoring these events, they try to benefit their companies' name value as well as to support K-pop's image in Austria. The fact that, with a few active fans and Korean sponsors, K-pop events are held regularly in Vienna creates growing connections among the fans to communicate and strengthen their ties with each other and with Korean community.

Hallyu has gained much attention from many scholars in various fields of study (Chua 2006; Jung 2011; Shim 2008; Shin 2009; Sung 2008, 2013). This sudden cultural flow unexpectedly spread fast, and unlike many scholars have assumed, it has been continuing and has become stable in every locality. Many scholars have been interested in understanding it under the guise of globalisation (Chua 2004; Iwabuchi 2002). This phenomenon challenges the idea of a West-dominated globalisational process, which emphasised the study of the influence of Western pop on non-Western pop music. For example, the study of Asian pop is usually dedicated to the influence of Western pop in Asian settings. The rise of K-pop brings a new type of cultural flow,



one that interacts within Asia under the terms intra-Asian cultural flow and trans-Asia cultural traffic (Iwabuchi et al. 2004) or East Asian pop culture (Iwabuchi et al. 2004). According to Shin, South Korean pop culture, or more precisely the group of Korean cultural industries as its agencies, is just a new player in this complex and multidirectional traffic (Shin 2009: 507), and the growing consumption of K-pop among Europeans brings another perspective on globalisation—that the direction of influence is changing from West to East to East to West.

The circulation of K-pop in the early stage was primarily limited to Asian countries and overseas Asians (Sung 2008, 2013). Although South Korean mass media emphasised the global influence of *hallyu*, most of the audience consisted of East Asians or East Asian immigrants in Western countries. Now that K-pop fandom has increased in Austria, Asian K-pop fans there are comparatively few, and more second-generation East Asians born in Austria or Austrians fans increased. If the East Asian K-pop fans were strongly connected to their home culture and attached to trends in their home culture through social media (Sung 2012, 2013), the Austrian K-pop fans are closely linked to each other through community and local events, and they even travel to participate in local events in neighbouring cultures. K-pop has become one of the most powerful cultural products in East Asian cultural traffic now reaching the West. Controversies about it and its global state have developed: if studies emphasised the growing power of South Korea in East Asian contexts, its new popularity should be looked at as the burgeoning power of East Asian pop in Western contexts. The K-pop boom proves that popular music does not move only from West to East, and the trend should not be considered unidirectional. Especially, since European fans tend to travel to K-pop events, the study of K-pop reception and fandom in Europe involves the new idea of the mobility of popular music and its fandom; it brings new attention to this East Asian cultural traffic.

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10. Research Outputs and Activities

Publication

Sung, S. Y 2014, 'K-pop Reception and Participatory Fan Culture in Austria', Cross-Currents; East Asian Culture and History Review E Journal, Berkeley Press.

Workshops and Conferences

2013 November, Presentation at SEM 2013 (Society for Ethnomusicology), Indianapolis, Indiana USA. Topic: Transnational Circulations of K-pop: Fandom and Social Media in Europe and Asia

2013 October, Presentation at World Association of Hallyu Studies, Korea University. Topic of Panel: Hallyu Musicology, Topic of Presentation: K-Pop Fandom and Participatory Culture in Austria after 'Gangnam Style'

2013 July, Presentation at Popular Music Analysis conference in Liverpool, Topic of Panel: K-pop on the European Platform: Changing Reception and Contexts.' Topic of Presentation: K-Pop Fandom and Participatory Culture in Austria

Appendix I: Photos of Events

1. Photos of K-pop Quiz⁵⁾



5) All the pictures are taken by Cham Yi Park, who was the main photographers at K-pop events. I have received permission to use his photos.







2. K-Pop Dance Festival in Vienna







3. Photos of Austria's K-pop Star







Appendix II: K-pop Survey in Europe

-pop survey in Europe

file:///E:/My Documents/Loisejoyful grace/K-pop survey in Europe.htm

K-pop survey in Europe

Thank you for taking some time and reading this article about a K-pop survey in Europe! We were asked by a researcher at the University of Vienna to share some questions about K-pop. The questions are about "Getting to know the European audience – reception and contexts." As a part of this study, the researcher wants to understand who the K-pop fans are and why you like K-pop. Please read and answer the following questions and leave your email if you want to participate in the drawing of some gifts! Be assured that all personal information you provide will be kept in the strictest confidentiality, and the data will be analyzed and written up as academic research only.

Additional information:

Four of the participants will be drawn and receive a small gift!

Each question can be answered shortly with one sentence.

The survey will end on December 17th 2013!

*** Required**

What country do you live in? *

- * Austria
- * Belgium
- * Bulgaria

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K-pop survey in Europe

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- Czech Republic
- France
- Germany
- Hungary
- Italy
- Poland
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom
- Other:

This is a required question

What is your age? *

- Under 14
- 15-19
- 20-24
- 25-29
- 30+

This is a required question

What is your gender? *

- Male
- Female

This is a required question

What ethnicity/nationality are you?

This is a required question

What is your occupation?

This is a required question

When and how did you got to know K-pop?

This is a required question

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Why do you like K-pop?

This is a required question

Who is your favorite K-Pop artist and why do you like them?

This is a required question

Where do you usually get all the K-pop information?

This is a required question

Are you actively participating at any K-pop events? If yes, why?

This is a required question

Do you think there are more K-pop related events after the popularity of Psy's Gangnam Style?

This is a required question

What do you think K-pop's future will be?

This is a required question

Has K-pop changed your life style somehow? If yes, please

K-pop survey in Europe

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describe.

This is a required question

Among YG, SM and JYP, which entertainment company is your favorite and why? Which artists do you particularly like?

This is a required question

Please leave your email. There will be a drawing in which participants will be given a small gift.

This is a required question

Do you want to participate in the drawing of gifts? If yes, in which present are you interested?

- Gift #1
- Gift #2
- Gift #3
- Gift #4

This is a required question

Gift #1

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Gift #2

K-pop survey in Europe

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Gift #3

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K-pop Consumption and Fandom in Germany

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1. Introduction

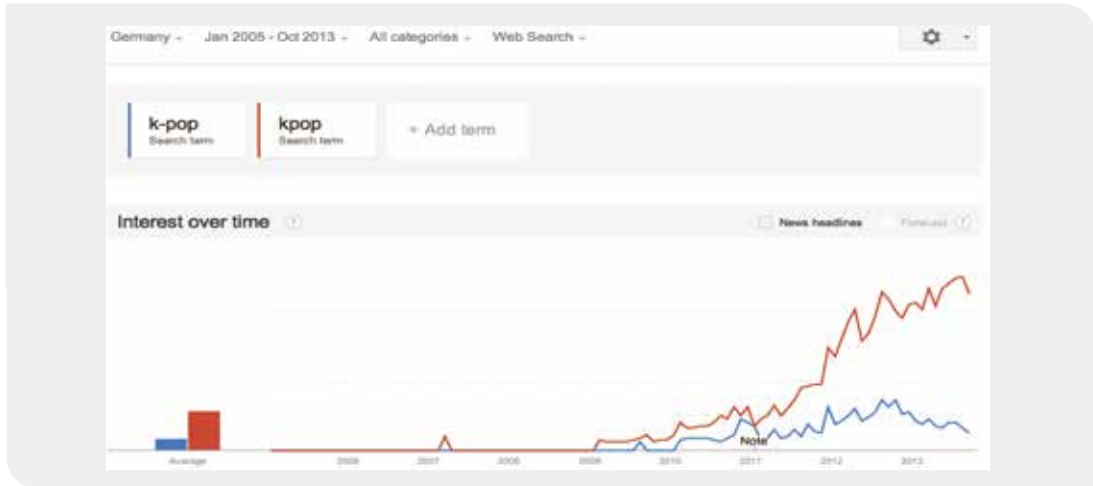
It is not an exaggeration to say that South Korea is not part of German public consciousness. South Korea may best be known for its cars, smartphones, and flat screens, for World Cup soccer, and the country's political division and tensions with the North (whose 'anachronistic' regime seems to provoke even greater interest). Popular music (K-pop) may newly be added to this list, since PSY's music video 'Gangnam Style' became a sensational hit worldwide in 2012. Due to PSY's enormous success and to German mainstream media reporting on him (for example about his winning of the MTV European Music Awards in Frankfurt), K-pop began to popularise among the German public. Remarkably, K-pop fan clubs in Germany had been mushrooming even a few years earlier, and that without any K-pop idol ever having done concerts, official album sales or active promotion in Europe. If South Korea was long at the receiving end of popular music flows spreading from the West and from Japan, K-pop signals a new stage on which these flows have become reversed and decentralised. What are the effects of these greater shifts on local pop music consumption in Germany? Who are the relevant players, fans and consumers of K-pop? What are their positions, practices, individual and social motivations, and functions? Why and how do they appropriate K-pop into their everyday lives? This study looks into aspects of German audience reception and participatory fan culture of K-pop.

Before presenting the details, I shall provide some general information about the specificities of the German context, which is in a more or lesser degree influential to the situation of local K-pop consumption.

Google Trends

A quick look at Google Trends reveals a steadily rising interest on the search terms 'K-pop' and 'Kpop' among users in Germany. As Figure 1 shows, the number of clicks has been increasing exponentially since 2009. The 'Gangnam Style' hit in 2012 has

certainly contributed to K-pop's popularity, though it seems to remain a quite isolated one-hit-wonder phenomenon because K-pop fans usually like to distinguish themselves from Gangnam Style and PSY in preference of other K-pop idol boy and girl groups.



<Figure 1.> Rising interest in the search term 'K-pop.' Google Trends screenshot © Google Inc., used with permission. (Accessed Oct 15, 2013)

Technology: YouTube access denied

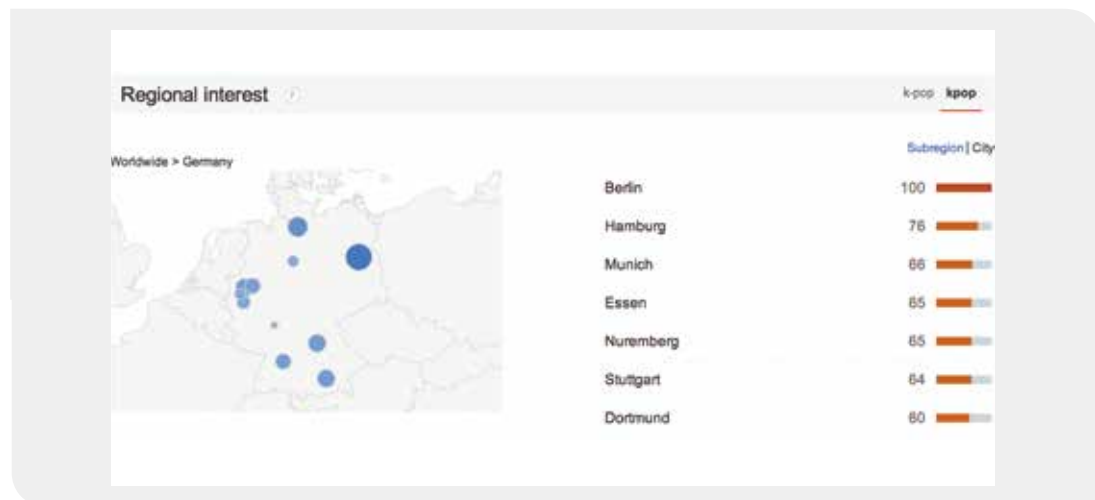


<Figure 2.> The 'Gangnam Style' music video is blocked on YouTube. YouTube screenshot © Google Inc., used with permission. (Accessed Oct 15, 2013)

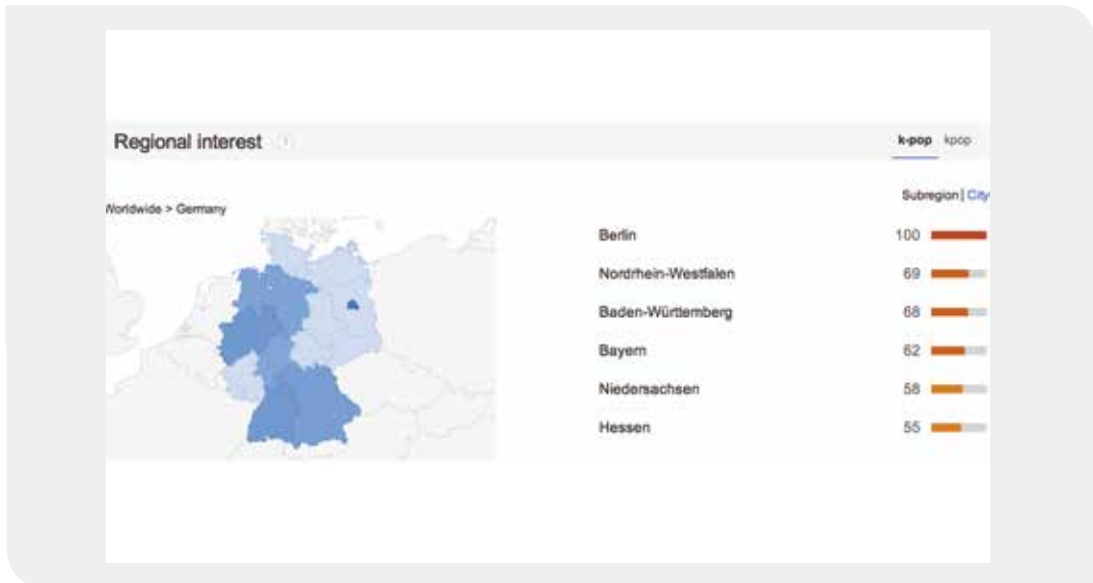


One of the specificities of the German context is that official music video clips (including K-pop videos) are banned on the video platform YouTube, as ‘Gangnam Style’ for example (Figure 2). This is due to unresolved conflicts over royalty payments between YouTube and the German copyright association GEMA (GEMA 2013). The old contract expired in 2009 and a new one is in the state of re-negotiation. As long as the two parties cannot find any agreement, YouTube decided to block the content of rights-holders represented by the GEMA (and sometimes even that of non-GEMA members). This limited accessibility, however, seems to have only little impact on the German reception of K-pop. Fans and consumers have quickly found ways to circumvent this technical boundary and to access the videos either by using unblocking-software tools or by visiting alternative video platforms, such as Metacafe.com and Vimeo.com. ‘Gangnam Style’ became a huge hit in Germany, too, maybe not so much on video platforms (as in other countries) but still because of high mainstream media coverage, heavy rotation on radio shows, and frequent performances in night clubs and bars. Thus, it can be said, that YouTube’s banning of video clips is not a severe obstacle to K-pop fans, whereas it can also be said that it certainly hinders K-pop in directly penetrating German mainstream culture and expanding on a bigger scale. Therefore, K-pop in Germany must be regarded as a niché culture.

Geography and Federalism



<Figure 3.> Google Trends Regional Interest Rate by Cities. Google Trends screenshot © Google Inc., used with permission. (Accessed Oct 15, 2013)



<Figure 4.> Google Trends Regional Interest Rate by Subregion. Google Trends screenshot © Google Inc., used with permission. (Accessed Oct 15, 2013)

A glimpse at the geographical dispersion of Google users reveals that the majority of people interested in K-pop is located in major cities, such as Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Essen, and Frankfurt (Figure 3), and in areas of high population density respectively, such as Berlin, Nordrhine–Westphalia (Ruhr Area), and the Rhine–Main area (around Frankfurt) (Figure 4), which are areas with high Korean and Asian immigrant population density along with strong social and economic networks.

Generally speaking, K-pop is a DIY culture with many individual fans and small fan communities in very different places of the country, who usually heavily engage in online activities (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr) and less frequently in organising offline meetings. Fan groups are mostly loosely organised, widely dispersed and decentralised, relatively isolated, and often engaged in very mixed Korea-related activities that go beyond mere K-pop music consumption (i.e., cooking Korean food, watching K-drama, playing games). Fan communities seem to be reflecting the geographical size and the federal structure of Germany. There are for example no nation-wide fan clubs and fan meetings due to the country's large size. The financial and time budgets of young fans would usually not allow them to travel long distances



to fan meetings or events which are taking place in cities far-away from their home towns. For example, K-pop fans from the Southwestern part of Germany would not regularly travel to fan meetings in Berlin. Instead of a nation-wide fan club, we can find fan group profiles on Facebook named after the federal state they are located in: 'K-pop in NRW' [NRW stands for 'Nordrhine-Westphalia,' MF], 'K-pop in Lower Saxon,' 'K-pop in Bavaria').

K-pop fandom is largely based on what media scholar Henry Jenkins called 'grassroots intermediaries' (Jenkins, 2006, p.162). We can see them slowly emerging, whereas mainstream media coverage of K-pop (with the exception of PSY's 'Gangnam Style' hit) remains nearly inexistent.

2. Times, Places and Research Methods

This study is part of the wider collaborative research project on the audience reception and fan culture of K-pop in Europe. Due to the study's prime focus on K-pop fandom and reception in Germany and given the fact that K-pop fandom in Germany appears geographically decentralised, I decided to undertake a multi-sited fieldwork in different cities in order to grasp the multi-local dimension and to overview the dynamics of the growing K-pop fandom. I used ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews during a sixth-months fieldwork period, which lasted from April to October 2013. Field work was divided into two parts. I spent the first three months to start a rough mapping of the K-pop scene in Germany. I tried to identify and to meet relevant players and attended important events related to K-pop giving particular attention to the North-Western region and to Berlin. In the final three months, I decided to limit my attention to the participatory dimension of the K-pop dance and thus met with several players who are involved in dance-related activities, such as amateur dance group members, dance instructors, event organisers, and DJs. I conducted focus group interviews with five K-pop cover dance groups from Hamburg, Bremen, Cologne, Mönchengladbach, and Neuss. I was given the opportunity to meet them at their rehearsal studies and to observe training

practices, dynamics and discussions among the group members. I met some of them twice and could do follow-up interviews to review my data, to observe developments, and to contextualise my findings. Interviews with my informants usually ranged between one and two hours. In addition to fieldwork, I taught a twelve-week seminar on K-pop in the summer term 2013 at the University of Cologne. The seminar not only helped me to teach K-pop and Korea-related issues to students and to discuss and develop arguments, but also gave me the opportunity to use my students as valuable informants about their own attitudes, listening behaviours, aesthetic perceptions, and world view that have partly changed in response to Korean pop music and the issues we discussed in the course. Finally, I gathered materials and retrieved data related to K-pop in Germany from websites and SNS, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr.

3. K-pop Players in Germany

Producers / Providers / Public Institutions

1) The Korean Cultural Center in Berlin (KCCB)

The Korean Center Centre, located in Berlin, is the cultural department of the South Korean embassy in Germany. As a sub-organisation of the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, the centre is a public institution that aims at introducing and promoting Korean culture to the German public. In the past, the centre's programme exclusively focussed on Korean Cultural Heritage and Arts. For example, the center offers regular courses on Korean language, calligraphy, traditional instruments *danso*, *daegeum*, *gayageum*, and Korean meditation. Next to in-house concerts, lectures, exhibitions, conferences, and film screenings, the centre holds a library with Korea-related books and it publishes the magazine 'Culture Korea.'

Due to the growing international popularity of Korean popular culture and to the increasing demands from German youngsters, who are interested in Korean pop



culture, the KCCB began to include the sectors: 'K-Sports,' 'K-Food,' and 'K-Pop' (in the following: 'K-Culture') These categories appear much in line with the Korean government's marketing campaign that has been seeking to promote various cultural forms within the wider scope of nation branding strategies. This is most visible in the use of the national signifier 'K' (Sung, 2010; Lie, 2012; Fuhr, 2013).

In terms of manpower, the KCCB employs nine regular staff workers who are working in three divisions: culture, public relations, and administration. Mr. Cho Yongmin from the administration team is the only person in charge of the new sections, allocating 10% of his total working hours to 'K-Sports,' 'K-Food,' and 'K-Pop.' Given this small time budget and lacking financial budgets together with the fact that K-Culture is not assigned to the cultural division, but instead to the administration division, clearly signals K-pop's marginal position in the KCCB's overall programme scheme. This is also reflected in the separated use of media channels for targeting different audience groups. Whereas the KCCB homepage hardly contains any promotion of K-Culture-related events, one can find it exclusively on the centre's Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube pages, of which all are intended to target youth audience groups. The reason why the KCCB only takes comparably little effort in promoting K-pop in Germany (e.g., compared to the KCC in the UK) seems to lie in the smaller K-pop fan community that exists in Germany, but likewise in the center's different though unwritten agenda that implies general concerns towards the public funding of a private sector. Sharing these concerns, Mr. Cho (pers.comm, 27.04.2013) pointed out that subsidising a highly commercialised and high-profile industry such as K-pop may be difficult to legitimise towards the Korean tax payers. According to Mr. Cho, the KCCB neither provides financial support, nor expertise on K-pop, but it gives support of infrastructure, information and promotion, facilities, and technical equipment to K-pop fan and interest groups on special occasions.

For example, the KCCB supported the Berlin-based K-pop fan group So-loved (see page 150) by hosting the 'First German K-pop Night' on August 11, 2011 and the annual 'So-loved Awards' since December 2011. On June 23, 2012, the KCCB provided their facilities to YG Entertainment for the YG Global Audition in Berlin. The KCCB is taking part in the pre-selection and audition process of the German representative

in the annual K-pop World Festival, of which the final round is taking place in Changwon, South Korea. The last German final audition took place on August 24 in 2012. In 2013, the KCCB decided to skip the German audition to the K-pop World Festival because it was overloaded with organising many other events in honour of the 130 years of German-Korean diplomatic relations and 50 years of the Korean-German labour recruitment agreement, both of which were commemorated in the same year. From May 31 to June 2, 2013, the KCCB collaborated with So-loved/ 'K-Magazin' at the European youth cultural fair YOU 2013.

Website:

Korea Cultural Center Berlin (<http://www.kulturkorea.org/de/>)

Fans / Consumers



<Figure 5.> K-pop fans in Düsseldorf after performing a flash mob (May 28, 2011) (Photo taken by Michael Fuhr)

The number of K-pop fans in Germany is difficult to evaluate for various reasons. Not only are official data lacking, but also is it not easy to define and quantify fandom or to distinguish fans from private listeners or mere supporters. Based on observations by the Korean Cultural Center and the editorial team of the K-Colors magazine in Berlin (Cho, 2013, K-Colors, 2013), an estimated number of c.5000 K-pop fans, thereof 2000 active fans, may be existent. Similar numbers can be

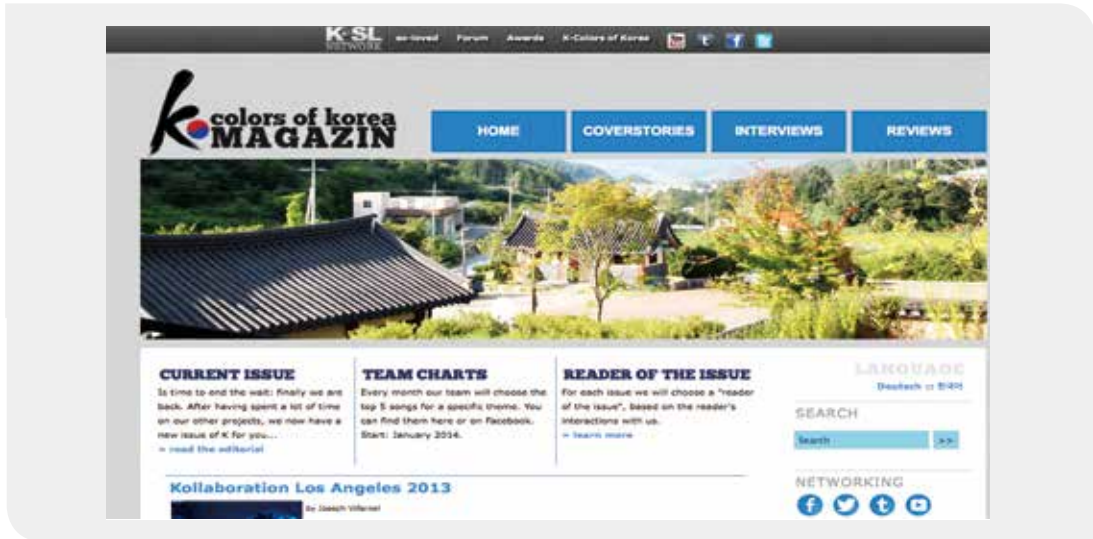


found on the biggest German K-pop fan pages on Facebook, for example: 'K-pop Meetings in Germany' (6,574 Likes), 'Super Junior E.L.F. in Germany' (5,724 Likes), 'SM Town in Germany' (3,491 Likes), and Remarkable—K-pop in Germany (2,482 Likes) (as of 25 Nov 2013). According to the Korea Cultural Center in Berlin, 80 to 90% of K-pop fans in Germany are female. Most fans are teens and twenty-somethings, who are high-school students and graduates, university students, job seekers, job starters, trainees, or workers (mostly in the service, cultural, and welfare sectors). In terms of ethnicity, it can be suggested that there are two groups of nearly the same size. Whereas the first group consists of white educated middle-class Germans, the second group is made up of fans with a migratory background. These are mostly people with an Asian, African and Turkish migratory background. Here it is notable that the Turkish migrant community is the biggest ethnic minority in Germany. Another striking aspect is that there are not many fans of Korean migratory background, but mostly of Chinese-speaking countries (Taiwan, Hong Kong; PRC), Japan, Vietnam, and Thailand. In Berlin, for example, Vietnamese migrants are the biggest group of Asian migrant communities with a total of number of 12,814, which almost 20% of all Asian migrants, as of December 31, 2009 (Statistik Berlin Brandenburg 2010).

The Facebook fan page 'K-pop Statistics Germany,' launched in January 2012 (2139 Likes, as of Nov 26, 2013) conducted a general survey about German K-pop fans on Feb 16, 2013 (see Appendix I). The results are comparable to the observations given above, as it is notable that the underage group accounts for more than 50% and female respondents for more than 90% of the total of 1041 respondents. The survey also asked about the favourite K-pop artists and groups and revealed that the top three male singers were G-Dragon, K.Will, Kim Jaejoong, the top female singers were Ailee, BoA, and Hyuna, the top male groups were Big Bang, B.A.P., and Super Junior, and the top female groups were 2NE1, Girls Generation, and SISTAR.

1) Fanzines

① K-Colors of Korea (So-Loved)



<Figure 6.> 'K-Colors of Korea' Magazine Website (Source: www.k-magazin.com, used with permission)

'K-Colors of Korea' has been the first German speaking online magazine about Korean culture and pop culture. Launched in May 2010, the magazine provides information on K-pop and various other aspects of Korean culture and lifestyle to its readers. It contains cover stories, interviews and reviews on Korea-related topics with issues published every two months. Since February 2011, the magazine appears in German and English. Additional information and articles are provided on related social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube. At its second anniversary in 2012, the magazine was published as a print version in German and English languages.

'K-Colors of Korea' is realised through the voluntary work of a Berlin-based editorial team around Esther Klung, a 32-year-old freelance journalist and Korea fan, who started to write about Korean culture for a different online magazine in 2007. Sometime later in 2008, when she discovered K-pop songs on YouTube and got affected by them, she began to steer her professional and private interest in Korea



towards the making of the magazine. Her four fellow members of the K-Colors editorial team are Andrea Maag, Isabella Filla, Franziska Meyer, and Saskia Gerner. The five female editors aged 18 to 32 got to know each other from earlier K-pop fan forums around the time when they were passionate fans of boy group Super Junior. Esther and Andrea launched a fan forum for German Super Junior fans in 2008, which began to popularise and to produce several additional forums to subsequently include fans of K-pop groups MBLAQ, CNBlue, and Big Bang.

'So-Loved' has become the overarching online fan-site for these sub-forums and served as an important basis to the later K-Colors members for sustaining their interest and activities in Korea-related issues and also for lifting their K-pop fan activities up to more professional heights. The K-Colors magazine remains a non-profit business, though it seeks to distinguish itself from other K-pop fan-sites by deliberately adhering to journalistic standards and avoiding copyright infringements. The magazine's mission statement, published in a free K-pop Special Issue brochure, reads as follows:

K-Colors defines itself as a magazine meaning that next to the entertaining factor and the content of information the magazine feels obligated to keep the journalistic aspect which clearly differentiates K-Colors of Korea from blogs and other sites on the internet. What connects all participants is the interest in South Korea and the joy to connect others with the country in a creative way. It is only through this bond that K-Colors of Korea is able to offer a magazine that is not profit-oriented but invites readers to unfold in a creative way as well as creating an idealistic project together that emphasizes on personal development. The team also likes to challenge itself with projects of their own or projects on behalf of others starting from organisation to execution. The projects of the last years include: A Korean cooking class, the 1st K-pop Night 2011, the European K-pop Awards and fan-management for OMUNDO Media GmbH for BEAST. (K-Colors of Korea, 2013, p.37)

In the past, the editorial team held close cooperation with governmental institutions, such as the Korean Cultural Centre in Berlin and with KOFICE (Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange) in Seoul to conduct more large-scale fan activities and projects. In August 2011, for example, the group organised the First German K-pop Night at the Korean Cultural Center in Berlin. The event was sold out with

two hundred K-pop fans, who turned up and enjoyed the dance party, karaoke singing, K-pop cover dance performances, and prize games. More events are listed on the magazines website (see Figure 7). One event – the YOU 2013 – will be discussed in more detail later (see chapter 4, ‘Events and Activities’).

In 2014 the team of K-Colors of Korea and So-Loved decided to go a step further and will launch their KSL Network as a non-profit network for promotion, event planning and public relations.

Date	Event	Partners	Function of K
May 2011	"Rain & Vogler", Semper Oper		Press coverage, K-Pop Fan short documentary filming about German K- Pop
August 2011	1st German K-Pop Night	Korean Cultural Center	Organization, moderation
November 2011	K-Pop Contest	Korean Cultural Center	moderation
November 2011	JYJ Concert		press coverage
December 2011	1st European K-Pop Awards - So-Loved Awards	KBS, Korean Cultural Center, German Embassy in Seoul	organization, scheduling, moderation
February 2012	B2ST Concert		fan-management for Omundo Media GmbH, press coverage
June 2012	YG Audition		Press coverage
August 2012	K-Pop Contest		Jury, preselection
October 2012	Korean Cooking Class "Kochu Karu"	Kochu Karu	Initiative, Public Relation, press coverage
December 2012	so-loved Awards 2012	Korean Cultural Center, KOFICE	Organization, scheduling, moderation

<Figure 7.> K-Colors magazine event activities (Source: www.k-magazin.com, used with permission)

Websites:

K-Colors of Korea (<http://k-magazin.com>)

So-Loved (<http://so-loved.net/pages/so-loved/news.php>)

So-Loved Awards (<http://awards.so-loved.net>)



② 'K-pop Magazin'



<Figure 8.> K-pop Magazin Website (Source: www.kpopmagazin.de, used with permission)

The K-pop Magazin is the biggest K-pop news site for German speaking fans. In contrast to K-Colors, which provides exclusively written articles by its authors, the K-pop Magazin is almost completely based on user generated content (UGC), taken from English news blogs, such as allkpop.com and soompi.com, and translated into German. Exceptions are exclusive reports on K-pop concerts, exclusive interviews with K-pop stars, and fan quiz games, which are written and published by the editors themselves. The magazine had a few forerunners before it was launched in its current form in January 2012. Until today, more than 450,000 visitors have viewed the page, according to the website.

Sori¹⁾, a twenty-year-old Vietnamese female K-pop fan, is one of the magazine's founding members. She lives in Berlin, where she is currently a B.A. student in Korean studies in her fourth semester. In an interview, she told me that her choice of Korean studies stemmed from her interest in K-pop. Sori discovered K-pop on the Internet around 2008, after she was an already long-term enthusiast of Japanese anime and manga. Music-wise, she listened to a few anime soundtracks, but

1) The name has been changed.

otherwise was not much interested in Japanese pop music (neither did she listen to Vietnamese music). While she found J-rock 'too hard' and J-pop 'too cute,' K-pop songs seemed to offer her the right balance and the more attractive alternative. In particular, she was captivated by boy group Big Bang and their early songs, including 'Lies' (2007) and 'Haru Haru' (2008). She noted on Big Bang:

I like the fact that they were five very different personalities making music together, and I prefer YG Entertainment over the other companies, the way how they treat their artists and that they give them much creative freedom. (Sori, 27.04.2013, Berlin)

Sori quickly turned into a K-pop fan and began to search for others who might be interested in the same music and she found them on German J-pop fan sites. From K-pop discussion groups on those sites emerged the desire of creating an independent K-pop fan blog. One of the first one was the German Hallyu Project, initially set up on 'Schüler VZ', a social network site for school students, and later shifted to Facebook. One of the group's key activities was to organise a flashmob event in 2010, which took place in different German cities at the same time. Sori became the administrator of the Facebook page, but she soon started her own private blog on K-pop and furthermore co-established a K-pop radio show on the internet radio programme Newcomer Radio Deutschland, to which she was one of the moderators in the beginning. She had to quit most of her fan activities due to the high school examination phase, but soon after resumed the attempt to create a K-pop news site in German language. Together with two other K-pop fans, Lisa from Bremen (see 6.4) and Jasmin from Leipzig, she started the K-pop Magazin. The magazine is fan-driven and non-profit and has turned into an important source about K-pop for German speaking fans, especially for teenagers, whose poor English skills prevent them from reading international K-pop sites.

Websites:

K-pop Magazin (www.kpopmagazin.de)

German Hallyu Project (www.facebook.com/groups/117619028268364/)



2) Cover Dance Groups

Many German fans told me that they appreciate K-pop as a well-designed entertainment package, which consists of all round-entertaining idol stars and a bundle of attractive components: look, music, video, fashion, dance, etc. The dance aspects in K-pop—the group cover dances in particular—bear a highly participatory function and are thus pivotal in many individual and collective fan activities. The K-pop group dances rely on choreographies that can be easily learned by non-professional dancers and that include signature dance moves and constantly rotating front dancers. With the increased online distribution of K-pop videos, shot in high cinematic quality and featuring a new generation of idol groups, my informants told me that they felt easily attracted and that they engage themselves in various (partly self-organised) K-pop dance-related events and activities, such as in local K-pop flash mobs, dance groups, dance lessons and workshops, contests, and dance club events. Among the cover dance groups, the following five groups were generous in providing me with valuable insights into their fan and dance activities. It is notable that these dance groups are fan-driven and even if they are at times paid for public performances their activities remain non-professional.

① One For Nine (149) (Hamburg)



<Figure 9.> One For Nine (149) from Hamburg (Photo taken by 149 coordinator Isy, used with permission)

One For Nine (149) is a seven-member K-pop cover dance group from Hamburg. The group was launched in June 2012 after its members met each other at a K-pop flash mob in Hamburg. One For Nine consists of two male and five female dancers: Milka, Khai, Dici, Johanna, Lesa, Alex, and Can. The members are aged 18 to 22. Except of Dici, who is the oldest member and leader of the group and who has been studying digital film making, all members just graduated from high school and were planning the next steps of their professional development. The group operates as an amateur show group that has been frequently booked for showcasing Korean music and dance at Korean cultural festivals and multicultural festivals, such as those organised by the German-Korean society in Hamburg. The group performed twelve shows since its inception in summer 2012, as can be read from the following list:

- 23.09.2012 (Debut) Korean Cultural Festival
- 20.10.2012 Five Year Charity Gala Kang Center Taekwon-Do (in Kiel)
- 13.01.2013 100 Year Anniversary of the Ethnological Museum Hamburg
- 23.02.2013 Seollal Korean New Year's Party
- 01.06.2013 Showcase at the Youth Cultural Fair (in Berlin)
- 02.06.2013 Korea Days in Hamburg
- 10.08.2013 Korea Sports Festival in the City Park Hamburg
- 16.08.2013 Intercultural Summer Party
- 28.09.2013 Korean Harvest Festival /Chuseok
- 05.10.2013 Korean Harvest Festival /Chuseok (in Hannover)
- 13.10.2013 (Comeback Stage) Korean Cultural Festival
- 30.11.2013 So-Loved Awards Party (in Berlin)

Almost all One For Nine members were interested in other East Asian pop culture, such as Japanese music, anime and manga, before they began to listen to K-pop. Why is K-pop attractive to them? Seventeen-year-old Alex and twenty-two-year-old Dici gave the following answer:

Alex: K-pop is colourful, K-pop is flashy, K-pop is different.

Dici: In K-pop, there are band members with choreographies, which for example are not that strong than in American Pop. Now, that is becoming a trend with Usher and Justin Bieber, for example, who



also have choreographies. We don't find them bad, but in K-pop the choreographies are interesting and when you watch the shows and movies, you see that people are mostly likeable and we discover them to be normal. The language is actually not that important, but the combination, that they dance and sing and that they have an incredible precision, which is why it is quite attractive to dancers like us. (One For Nine, 1.6.2013, Berlin)

The members already had an affinity to dancing before they listened to K-pop. Therefore, the dance pop character of many K-pop songs is particularly important to the group. Alex explained how they came to dancing K-pop:

Alex: All of us love dancing and in the past each of us used to sit at home alone in front of the computer and learned the dances from the video clips. But when we met at one of those K-pop meetings in Hamburg, some people said: 'hey, look at this, I've learned this dance!' Then we did that dance and we realised that others also learned the same dance. So, we started to learn dances together, and that's how it actually began. Well, the dance was there from the beginning. But, there are also K-pop fans who do not dance. (One For Nine, 1.6.2013, Berlin)

A good example of their dance style can be found on YouTube (<http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=IQO8bwhedH8&noredirect=1>). On Oct 1, 2013, the group posted a video clip with their dance cover of the song 'Wow' (와우) by BTOB (비투비) for the purpose of self-promotion. The high quality and elaborated camera work of the clip marks a clear distinction to the DIY aesthetics of other fan videos that can be found on the Internet. Here, a friend of the group, who is an independent film maker and member of a film production team, shot the video.

② UC (Unique and Crazy) (Bremen)



<Figure 10.> UC (Unique and Crazy) from Bremen (Photo taken by Michael Fuhr)

UC (Unique and Crazy) is a five-member dance group from Bremen. In June 2013, the group won the K-pop dance group cover contest in Bremen with the title 'Action' by K-pop boy group Nu'est. All members live in Bremen and have a personal background in dancing. They met each other at the Driton dance school in Bremen and launched the K-pop cover dance group in 2011. Notably, the cast is very diverse in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity: Nancy is a 32 year-old white German female office worker in a pharmacy computing centre, 20-year-old Kadisha, a high-school student, and 22-year-old Justine, a university student in Korean studies, are two female members of African-American and German parentage. Dennis, a German male nurse trainee, is twenty-one years old and the only male dancer in the group. Pin is twenty and a female dance instructor from Thailand. She is offering dance courses at the Driton dance school and teaches the others in the group. It is remarkable that Pin performed with the group during the dance contest, even though she was pregnant in her seventh months. In an interview she told me that she did not want to retreat from the contest and to abandon her friends despite the high exhaustion she felt from practicing and performing the choreographies. It might be said that the group's sense of solidarity and high enthusiasm prevailed her concerns over personal



suffering or potential health risks. Altogether, the group serves as an outstanding example of the dancers' personal enthusiasm and engagement as well as of K-pop's potential of transgressing social boundaries.

③ K-Dancer (Cologne)



<Figure 11.> K-Dancer from Cologne (Photo taken by Michael Fuhr)

K-Dancer is a cover dance group from Cologne. Launched in October 2011, the group consists of the following seven members: Eileen, 22, is a German-Chinese who works as a wholesale merchant of sanitary products. Julia, 23, was trained as a digital media designer but seeks to pursue a teaching career in English and Japanese language. Medben, 26, is an employed staff at the International airport Cologne/Bonn. Panda, 16, is a school student with one of her parents emigrated from Indonesia. Gesa, 20, is a German student of Asian Studies in Bonn. Kathrin, 21, accomplished her training as a physician assistant after she had graduated from high school.

Initially, Maya and a friend of her started to watch K-pop videos in 2002. While randomly zapping through TV channels, they came across KBS World and its music shows, from which their interest in K-pop began to increase over the years. What started with watching video clips of H.O.T. and Shinhwa turned into the forming of

a cover dance group ten years later. Maya's friend, who is a German–Korean, left the group to pursue an apprenticeship as a stylist with YG Entertainment in Korea. The current group members got to know each other via Facebook and started to look for an appropriate rehearsal studio, before they could start regular training in early 2012. They regularly meet once a week in a community center in Cologne, where they have rented a small studio with a mirror wall for the period of two hours each Sunday. Apart from regular rehearsals, the group additionally meets up on special occasions, for example when they prepare for upcoming shows. These shows are usually part of big anime and manga conventions that take place annually in different cities, such as in Düsseldorf (Dokomi), Solingen (Yukon), Cologne (Games Com), and Frankfurt (CosDay). K–Dancer, like UC, also participated in the K–pop cover dance contest in Bremen and ranked the second place with the song 'On and On' by boy group Vixx. On 19 October 2013, they even won the first place at a K–pop dance cover contest that took place during the Korean Film Festival in Frankfurt. The performance was a dance cover of the song 'Wolf' by boy group EXO and featured members of the group Æ:motion (see below).

④ Stardream Entertainment M-Gladbach (Mönchengladbach)



<Figure 12.> Stardream Entertainment from Mönchengladbach (Photo taken by Michael Fuhr)



Stardream Entertainment (SDE) is the collaborative name for two cover dance groups, which are specified as 'SDE-K' from Cologne and 'SDE-M' from Mönchengladbach, a mid-size town close to the border of the Netherlands with a one-hour train ride to Cologne. Whereas SDE-K is identical with K-Dancer (see above), SDE-M comprises a separate cast with its own training programme and rehearsals. SDE-M consists of about twelve or more members. Melanie, 20, is the group leader and organises training schedules and selects songs. Born to a Thai mother and a German father, she is a freshman in East Asian studies at the university in Bochum. Vanessa, 19, is also a Thai-German and a university freshman in Korean studies in Tübingen. Jasmin, 19, is a high school student from Mönchengladbach who learned about K-pop from a friend. Julia, 18, is a high-school graduate from Neuss, whose first encounter with K-pop was by listening to Shinee's 'Lucifer,' and Girls Generation's 'Gee' via Twitter. Celina, 17, is a school student from Neuss, who discovered K-pop through watching Japanese commercials on YouTube. Stella, 22, a school student from Karst was a fan of anime and manga before she found a clip of EXO's song 'Mama' on YouTube. Sunny, 23, is a student of philosophy and history from Dortmund. Born to Turkish parents, she was born and raised in Germany and she became curious about K-pop with a media report on Gangnam Style. Emanuel, 16, is a school student from Hilden with parents emigrated from Congo. Like his sister Sarah, who is also a group member, he was interested in Japanese pop before he turned to K-pop.

The group has rented a studio room at one of the local dance schools in Mönchengladbach, where the members meet once or twice a week in the evening hours to practice new choreographies.

⑤ ЯE:motion (Neuss)



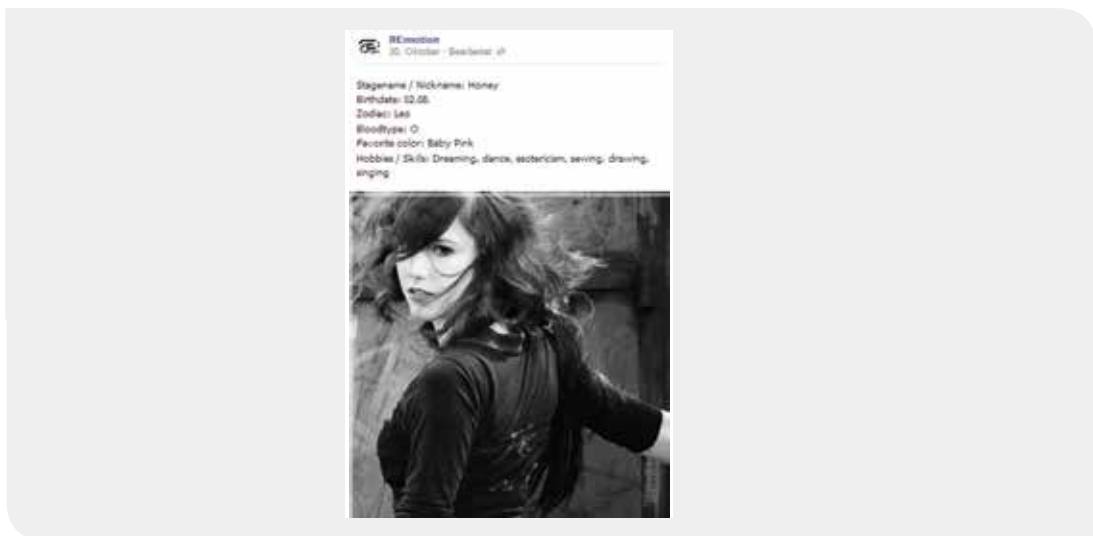
<Figure 13.> ЯE:motion from Neuss (Photo taken by Michael Fuhr)

ЯE:motion is a seven-member group from Neuss, launched in January 2012. Even though only one member is actually living in Neuss, the group rehearsals take place in the local youth community center in Neuss, where the dancers may use a small studio free of charge. Thus, they meet twice a week for about two hours. It is remarkable that two members of the group live that far away that they have to take a two-hour train ride to join the rehearsals. The group²⁾ consists of: Marion, 21, a hair-design apprentice from Gelsenkirchen. Duc, 21, a retail-design student at the university in Düsseldorf and a son of Vietnamese parents. Mii, 20, a high school graduate from around Neuss with plans to work in the cultural event management. Jana, 26, a design draftswoman and editor from Duisburg. Honey, 20, a fashion design student in Düsseldorf. Domi, 24, a trade merchant with parents from Portugal. And Kathrin, 24, a medical assistant working in an orthopaedic practice nearby Neuss. The group emerged from a circle of friends who already knew each other from Japanese pop and rock concerts, parties, and conventions that took place in bigger cities of Northrhine-Westphalia.

2) In this section, pseudonyms have been used for some respondents.



On its Facebook site, the group posted their dance cover version of the song ‘Man Man Ha Ni’ (Am I that easy?) by boy group U-KISS. In addition, one can find the group member profiles with photos and details of each member. It is interesting that, next to name, birthday, favourite colour and others, the category ‘bloodtype’ also appears in the list (see Figure 14). Discourses about blood type are more significant in East Asian societies and thus also more to East Asian pop fans than to Western pop fans. This is clearly an adaptation of East Asian fan practice, whose underlying racial connotations appear particularly awkward in the face of Germany’s Nazi history.



<Figure 14.> Member profile including bloodtype (Photo used with permission from RE:motion)

Websites:

One For Nine (149) (www.facebook.com/Onefor9)

Stardream Entertainment (www.stardream-entertainment.de/index.html)

UC (Unique and Crazy) (www.facebook.com/pages/Unique-Crazy-UC/288954507811018?fref=ts)

RE:motion (www.facebook.com/REmotionDANCE?fref=ts)

3) Dance Instructors



<Figure 15.> K-pop Dance Workshop at the Driton Dance School in Bremen. (Photo taken by Michael Fuhr)

The Driton Dance School, located in Bremen, is the first private dance school in Germany that offers regular K-pop dance courses to its clients. It was launched in October 2010 by Driton, who is a professional male dancer, dance instructor, and former triple European champion in the category street dance. As a Kosovo-Albanian, he immigrated to Germany in the wake of the Kosovo War in the end of the 1990s. He is married to Simone, a second generation Korean German, who is a dancer and dance instructor herself. The group dances and the signature dance moves seem to be pivotal to many fans since they bear high potential for fan participation. The Driton Dance School, which may be called a ‘small-scale entrepreneur,’ tries to capitalise on this participatory function of the K-pop dance. On June 15, 2013, Driton organised the first K-pop dance group cover contest, which saw more than 130 dancers and visitors. At the dance school two or three instructors are teaching K-pop. These dance instructors are key persons in promoting the K-pop dances among dance-affine youngsters.



Lisa, one of instructors at the dance school recalls her first contact with K-pop as follows:

Once, I think it was in 2006, I was bored so I watched YouTube. There, I found one music video that I watched. That was a bit strange because of the different language they used. That was Dongbangshinki's 'Rising Sun.' After three weeks, I came across the same video again and then I found it amazing somehow. Then I started to learn more about those guys and then it grew more and more. (Lisa, 15.06.2013, Bremen)

Simone, the Korean-German instructor, heard about K-pop the first time from her German dance students, as she explained:

When I visited Korea, I bought me beauty cosmetics and utensils—you know you can get a lot of them in Korea—and I got a plastic bag with a picture of 2ne1 on it. So back at home, I had it with me when I went into the dance school and all were like 'Aaah, that bag!!' and I thought: 'What's that?' The dance students knew exactly who they were and only then I realised that it has something to do with dancing. First, I thought they were just advertising characters to promote make-up or so. That was funny. (Simone, 15.06.2013, Bremen)

How do the dance instructors evaluate the quality of K-pop groups? Are there any top dancer among them?

Driton: Junsu from Ex-TVXQ, for example..

Simone: You always have good and weak dancers in one group, but the choreographies are made in a way that the weak ones don't have to dance that much, while good one can show off their talents,

Lisa: Replay by Shinee is really good.

Driton: Yes, that was great, but also the Supreme Team..

Simone: ..but with the Supreme Team, you mean the dancers, the background dancers!

Lisa: For me, it's Super Junior. Because they are an incredibly big group, and they manage to perform on huge stages and to realise the choreographies in a way that you do not see that they have also bad dancers. They make really good choreographies and the positions are unbelievable. I saw them live once, that was amazing, how they can coordinate themselves with 13 people on one stage, and then also do the singing. Respect! (15.06.2013, Bremen)

Due to Lisa's fascination for K-pop and the growing demand from dance students, the Driton dance school began to offer a course for dancing K-pop formation in November 2011. In the beginning, 22 students joined the class, but after a while they dropped out because they had to prepare for high school examination and thus less time to focus on dancing. In January 2012, the dance school started regular K-pop courses. They became a fixed part of the dance school programme and drew a constant number of about twenty students each week.

Website:

Driton Dance School (www.dritondance.de)

4) DJs

Since recently, we find K-pop making a presence in club culture in bigger German cities. This is a quite new and a very small phenomenon. With K-pop Dance parties or Asian Dance Night parties organised on a non-regular base, K-pop DJs present either original K-pop songs or electro and house style remixes of K-pop songs. The audiences are still small but growing and consist of regular dance club visitors, who are Asian pop affine, and of K-pop fans who enjoy dancing and meeting other fans but otherwise would not attend the club. The VISUAL CULTURE DJ Team (see chapter 6), for example, performed a new club event, called 'K-pop deluxe' in Bottrop (see Figure 16).



<Figure 16.> K-pop Club Night Flyer (Source: VISUAL CULTURE)



Website:

VISUAL CULTURE (www.visualcultureparty.blogspot.de)

K-pop Deluxe Party (www.facebook.com/events/489177677803053/?ref=22)

Distributors

Although distributors were not part of this study, it seems to be important to briefly mention that there are two new tendencies relevant to the transmission of K-pop products. First, one can find new players on the Internet who are specialised in selling K-pop fan goods. Daebak, for example, is an online shop located in Frankfurt, which started to sell all things K-pop in January 2012. Second, the already established retailers and wholesalers of Japanese and Asian pop goods in Germany began to gradually shift their range of products towards including K-pop goods. These were, for example: NeoTokyo, a shop in Munich and Berlin specialised on J-pop and J-rock, lyradia.com, an online shop for Asian music including C-pop, J-pop, K-pop and music for meditation based in Lemgo, a city in North-Rhine-Westphalia, and Matrix Anime, a wholesaler for Japanese pop goods from Wuppertal, a small city nearby Düsseldorf.

Websites:

Daebak (www.daebak.de/shop/)

Lyradia.com (www.lyradia.com)

Matrix Anime (www.facebook.com/pages/Matrix-K-pop-und-Anime-Einzelhandel/215081718619029)

Neo Tokyo (www.neotokyo.de)

4. Events and activities

K-pop flash mobs

Since 2011, there were a number K-pop flash mobs organised by local fan groups in different German cities, much in the wake of the bigger K-pop flash mobs held in Paris and London in spring/summer 2011, which European fans attended to call for additional shows of SM Entertainment acts in the case of Paris and to bring YG Entertainment acts to London. Usually, K-pop and hallyu fan groups and individuals used various SNS to announce flash mob events and finally a small group of teenagers gathered on public places to perform the dance hits of the time, such as Super Junior's 'Sorry Sorry,' Shinee's 'Lucifer', 2PM's 'Again and Again,' and Girls Generation's 'Gee.' Although the flash mobs were a short-lived trend that soon lost its appeal, they were quite important because K-pop fans had the rare opportunity to meet offline and to get to know each other in person. These events seemed to have stirred and bundled their interest in K-pop songs on the one hand and in dancing on the other hand. Some of the participants joined forces and started cover dance groups, others sought to develop their personal dancing skills or to extend their knowledge about Korea.

YOU 2013 (Berlin)

From May 31 to June 2, 2013, the Korea Cultural Center in Berlin presented a stand at the European youth cultural fair YOU 2013 in Berlin. The stand was tripartite with each section representing one of the three K-Culture related themes: K-pop, K-Food, and K-Sports. The K-Sports section demonstrated Taekwondo performances of young members of the local Taekwondo club and the K-Food section gave out small Korean snacks and drinks to the visitors, such as *gimbap*, *ramyon*, *kimchi*, and rice drinks. Regarding the K-pop section, the KCCB asked the five-member editorial team of the online fan magazine 'K-Colors Magazin' to design and organise the stand. The K-Color team was free in their decisions and set up a K-pop karaoke



corner, where people could sing along to their favourite K-pop songs. Romanised lyrics of the songs were displayed on flat screens, so that the singers could easily follow and reproduce the song lines(see Figure 17). Apart from karaoke DJing, the team conducted K-pop quiz games with the visitors and organised a cover dance performance on the neighbouring Asia Stage. The Asia Stage featured different activities throughout the fair, among which the Korea stand presented Taekwondo performances, karaoke singing, K-pop cover dancing and calligraphy painting. The cover dance group was One For Nine from Hamburg (see chapter 3), who came to perform a twenty-minute medley of different K-pop dances. It is notable that the medley consisted next to recent K-pop dances of a song by 90s pop duo Deuce. By including this comparably old song, the group wanted to show that the songs of older K-pop bands were also worthwhile listening to. Since the Asia Stage and the Korea stand were located in the Asia hall, which was mainly devoted to Japanese pop culture, many J-pop and anime and manga fans were in the audience. In sum, the K-pop stand was successful because it drew masses of teenagers who performed Karaoke singing of K-pop songs.



<Figure 17.> K-pop Karaoke at the YOU 2013 (Photo taken by Michael Fuhr)

The most interesting aspect here is that the KCCB cooperated with a K-pop fan group/editorial team and let them organise and conduct the music section of the booth. It was not the first time that the K-Colors team worked together with the KCCB. In holding close cooperation with governmental institutions, such as the KCCB, but also with KOFICE (Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange), the K-Colors members are able to mobilise fan activities. They provide expertise on K-pop, creativity, and manpower to the KCCB and in turn they receive support to conduct more large-scale fan activities and projects, such as the K-pop stand, but also K-pop parties and games. In the case of the So-loved Awards, which is an online event where K-pop fans can vote their favourite idols, the K-Colors team also received funding from KOFICE for organising the fan party and promotion. From the Korean perspective, this can be regarded as state-sponsoring of an international fan group.

One effect of this process is that the K-Colors members gained credibility among other fans and that they became a mediator between public agents, Korean entertainment companies, and German fans. They gained first-hand information and accessibility to concerts, press conferences, etc., and they got the chance to meet K-pop idols in person and conduct interviews with them. It is obvious that they transformed from mere fans to cultural mediators and promoters of Korean culture.

While they were accumulating cultural capital and while growing older—they are in the mid-late-twenties—they were also sometimes facing discontent and envy from the younger generation of K-Pop fans, who are teenagers.

Website:

YOU—Youth Cultural Fair Berlin (www.you.de)



K-pop Cover Dance Contest (Bremen)

On June 15, 2013, the Driton dance school organised the first K-pop dance group cover contest in Germany, which saw more than 130 attendants, including dancers and visitors. Eleven dance groups with 67 dancers in total participated in the contest. The first three winners were awarded winner medals, certificates, and K-pop merchandising products sponsored by K-pop distributors and promoters, such as the online shops Daebak, NeoTokyo, Lyradia.com, and the Korea Culture Center Centre and the Korea Tourism Organisation. The community centre Bremen-Oslebshausen provided the facility where the contest took place.

According to the line-up (see Figure 18), most of the dance groups came from the northern parts of Germany and from bigger cities, such as Hamburg, Bremen, Bremerhaven, and Hannover. The repertoire list consists of song titles from then-actual K-pop boy and girl groups. The earliest song chosen was the 2008 song 'Mirotic' by TVXQ.

	Name of Dance Group	Dancers	Place	Band	Title
1	Milan	5	Hamburg	Brave Girls	Nowadays You
2	Choko Confectionerys	4	Bremen	SISTAR	So Cool
3	Procyon	9	Bremen	Girls' Generation	I Got A Boy
4	Alpha Six	4	Hamburg	Miss A	Goodbye Baby
5	Neon Nareul Weonhae	5	Hamburg	DBSK	MIROTIC
6	Rush	5	Mönchengladbach	Evol	We're A Bit Different
7	Kisses	3	Bremerhaven (OL)	Orange Caramel	Lipstick
8	Choom-C	8	Hannover	Jo Kwon	Animal
9	Passion	4	Bremerhaven	GLAM	I Like That
10	Bonny Dolls	6	Hamburg	Girls Day	Oh My God
11	UC (Unique & Crazy)	5	Bremen	Nu'est	Action
12	Diamonds	3	Hamburg	Miss A	Goodbye Baby
13	K-Dancer (Stardream)	6	Köln	Vixx	On & On

<Figure 18.> Line-up Dance Groups

The group UC (Unique and Crazy) from Bremen won the first prize, K-Dancer from Cologne the second prize, and Rush from Mönchengladbach the third prize.

When I called Driton the first time to ask him whether I may attend the contest to conduct interviews with some of the participants, I did not know that I would end up as one member of the judging panel at the contest. Soon after our first talk, he asked me to be one of the judges arguing that my background as a doctoral student who studied K-pop would be more than sufficient to have the authority about deciding over K-pop dance steps. A couple of weeks later, I suddenly found myself amidst the three-member jury of the contest, which enabled me to take ethnographic participant-observation in a very direct sense, namely as participant-evaluation. My assignment to the jury put me in a privileged position, from where it was easy to get in touch with all participants in the event and to take active part in the decision-making processes of the dance competition. I discussed choreographies, foot techniques, gestures, and other details of K-pop dance performance with my two fellow examiners, one of whom was a Chinese friend of Driton and the other was a former Kosovan dance professional and also friend of Driton.

The competition was divided into a preliminary round and a final round. Each group had to consist of at least three members and was to perform one cover dance piece at full length. Six out of thirteen groups were selected by the jury to take part in the final round, where they again had to perform the same single piece as in the preliminary round. Finally, three of us jury members appointed the three winning teams. We assessed the dance groups by using a ten-point system applied to the following seven categories: choreography, synchronicity, expression, picture/positions, look/overall picture, outfit, and true to original. The system was adapted from professional dance competitions but showed a lesser grade of differentiation within the categories.

In sum, we observed that all groups were highly motivated and put much effort to take part in that event. Some groups prepared their dance pieces for six months or longer, some groups tailored their own costumes, made their own make-up, and some of them saved their money to organise accommodations and buses or train



tickets to travel to Bremen. Although all groups were amateur dancers, some groups looked highly professional with very talented and ambitious dancers, others were less ambitious but equally happy to participate and to celebrate their fandom in front of other K-pop fans. The atmosphere was less competitive but rather cooperative among the participants. The overall reception of the event was positive and those participants I talked to at the end of the day were not that much disappointed about their low ranks, but they were glad to have joined such a large-scale K-pop fan event, which had not existed before.

Website:

K-pop Dance Cover Contest Germany (<https://www.facebook.com/KPOPDanceGroupCoverContest>)

5. Teaching K-pop at the University of Cologne

In the summer term 2013, I taught a seminar on K-pop at the Institute of Musicology at the University of Cologne. The seminar title was ‘Gangnam Style! What’s that style?’: K-pop and the Globalisation of South Korean Pop Music.’ I designed the seminar for B.A. and M.A. students in Ethnomusicology, as well as for those in Historical and Systematic Musicology, in the first place, but in fact it was also open to students from all faculties. The seminar’s main thematic scope was on positioning K-pop within the complex history of musical and cultural flows between Asia and the West. We took K-pop as a lens through which we were able to observe and discuss the broader formations of cultural globalisation with its multiple effects and processes. In the seminar, we addressed the following key questions: How did these processes affect the production, distribution, and consumption of popular music? What were the cultural, economic, and political contexts and preconditions from which K-pop could emerge and develop? How can K-pop be described in terms of a music genre? What are the genre’s specific technical and aesthetical parameters? How ‘Korean’ or ‘Asian’ is K-pop, how ‘global’ is it? How is the music appropriated in the local contexts of Europe? Next to reading theories on cultural globalisation in Asia and discussing individual K-pop music videos, songs, and groups, the seminar provided

students the opportunity to conduct a small ethnographic fieldwork in order to localise K-pop in Cologne. Basically, each session was roughly divided into two parts. While the first part was intended to provide contextual information by reading theory or thematic case studies, such as on the cultural industry in Korea for example, the second part focussed on specific K-pop idol stars and groups (i.e., Seo Taiji, Rain, PSY, etc.) that the students introduced and discussed in their presentations.

The course outline looked as follows (for reading list, see Appendix II):

Session 1: Introduction

Session 2: Globalization and Popular Culture in Asia / The Korean Wave

Session 3: Overview and History of Popular Music in Korea

Session 4: Language, Voice / Othering

Session 5: Culture Industry and K-pop Production / Rain

Session 6: Digitalization and Distribution

Session 7: Gender and Sexuality I / Girls Generation, Wonder Girls, 2ne1

Session 8: Gender and Sexuality II / Super Junior, TVXQ, Big Bang

Session 9: Beyond K-pop: Hip-Hop, Punk, and Indie-Rock

Session 10: K-pop Reception / PSY

Session 11: (Mapping K-pop in Cologne) / Analyzing Song Forms of K-pop Songs

Session 12: Final Discussion

The course was highly appreciated by the head of the department and other board members, who were extremely kind and helpful to include it—last minute—into the semester term curriculum. Although the official enrolment phase for students had already passed by that time, some late-comers were still able to register for the course. Finally, about ten students joined the class, of which seven were actively participating through paper presentations. The students in the class were almost all B.A. and M.A students in Musicology with little or no knowledge about Korea and K-pop, except of two female students who had their majors in German studies and Media studies and in Mathematics and Biology. They joined the class because they were avid K-pop fans and, as they told me, they wanted to convince the others in the class that K-pop is cool and they wished them to also turn into K-pop fans.



Amazingly, these two students joined the course just out of interest and their fan perspective and enthusiasm enriched the discussions in a very lively and entertaining manner. For example, did they like chatting about the latest K-pop news, next to wearing fan accessories and Korean make-up in the class, or they conducted a quiz with the other class members during their presentation on the transformative gender roles in K-pop. These two fans were twenty-year old white Germans from Cologne, who grew up watching Japanese anime during their teenage years and who had just discovered K-pop in 2012 from randomly watching YouTube clips of Korean dramas, such as *My Girlfriend is a Gumiho*. Next to music and drama, they were also interested in Korean cosmetics and they attend Korean language class at a public learning institution in Cologne.

The other students in the class were also white Germans, except of one male with a Turkish migratory background and one female with a Latin American background. During discussions, the female student sometimes drew parallels between K-pop and media consumption in Latin America, where for example the problem of language barriers between the countries have also yielded specific border-crossing techniques for exporting pop cultural goods. These insights and discussions were helpful in comparing K-pop with other pop cultural production in another region of the world and with evaluating K-pop against the backdrop of bigger and globally operating industrial networks.

Everyone in the class knew the song ‘Gangnam Style,’ so we started our discussion with this particular video clip. It is not that astounding that the students found the video funny, even though they did not understand the lyrics. One student said that the song would not be different to other Western pop songs, though the fact that the singer comes from Asia would be new. Someone else remarked that many Germans would not know that PSY is Korean, but would rather think that he is Chinese, because people knew much more about China and Japan than about Korea. Another student told that he would not see or hear anything specifically Korean or Asian in ‘Gangnam Style,’ but the visual aesthetics may be interesting because the exaggerated bright colours in the clip were unusual in other videos. In general, the students agreed that song works very well as an international pop song with no or only little

reference to ‘Asianness.’ The two K-pop fans added that ‘Gangnam Style’ is not representative of K-pop and PSY not the typical K-pop idol star.

At the end of the semester, I conducted a small survey with the students by asking them the following questions:

1. What do you like or unlike in K-pop?
2. Has your perspective on K-pop changed during the seminar? If yes, how?
3. What do you think is the image of Koreans or Asians in Germany? Do you think that this image has changed or can be changed through K-pop?
4. Do you think there are differences between K-pop and Western Pop? Which ones?
5. What do you think of the fact that the South Korean government supports K-pop and other Korean pop culture in the context of globalising strategies and nation branding?

Re.1 The students mentioned as positive aspects in K-pop the humour, the colourful presentation, the stylistic diversity, the bundle of singing, dancing, acting activities, the fan service, and the non-English language as a fresh alternative to pop mainstream in Germany. Aspects that they disliked were the marginal power of the stars, the highly rationalised mass-production system, the beauty ideal and aspiration to look ‘perfect,’ and the ‘cute’ representation of male masculinity.

Re.2 Except of the two fans, the students had no idea about K-pop before they joined the class. Therefore, most of them answered that they have gained a more differentiated picture about it, whereas two or three of them even admitted that they would be interested in learning more about Korea or to listen to K-pop privately, as one student wrote: ‘Before the course, I thought of K-pop as a copy of American music, but now I see the specificities arising from the Korean contexts. I have to admit that, in the meantime, I really like some of the songs.’

Re.3 Most respondents find that there are a lot of stereotypes about East Asians in Germany, while Koreans appear as rather unknown. Basically, they are sceptical of whether K-pop might change the negative stereotypes among Germans, but at best it could raise awareness about Korea and might bring people to a point where



they would be interested to learn more about Korean culture and its people.

Re.4 The students mentioned a few differences between Western and K-pop, which we also discussed during the seminar, such as the production system, the gender representation, language code-switching in the lyrics, and the fact that boy and girl groups are out of fashion in the West, but not in Asia.

Re.5 The responses were diverse, but the overall tenor was positive towards the aspect that the Korean nation-state supports the K-pop industry. One student wrote: 'This kind of support preserves a certain 'Koreanness' in the music and performance, which is what made K-pop to what it is today. I think, we see it as a positive thing. Support is good, unless the government does not determine the music.'

Unfortunately, none of the students participated in the ethnographic study on the local consumption of K-pop in Cologne, so that we had to change the initial plans for session 11. Instead of the K-pop mapping, we conducted a 'close reading' session. The participants paired in small groups and were given the task to analyse the song form and the flow of one pre-selected K-pop song each. The songs that I selected were 'Tashi mannan segye (Into the World) by Girls Generation,' 'Beep Bo Beep Bo' by T-ara, and 'Rising Sun' by TVXQ. The songs represent very different song forms and dramaturgical ideas in popular music production. By this task, the students learned three things: to listen to a song collaboratively, to analyse musical details by discussing it with their peers, and to visualise and present their results.

Altogether, the seminar not only helped me to teach K-pop and Korea-related issues to students and to discuss and develop arguments, but also gave me the opportunity to use my students as valuable informants about their own attitudes, listening behaviours, aesthetic perceptions, and world view that have partly changed in response to Korean pop music and the issues we discussed in the course.

6. Findings

Participation and Pleasure

The first thing we can observe, on a very general level, is that K-pop's outstanding appeal (to many fans I talked to) derives from a newly combined type of participation and pleasure it offers to its consumers. Next to diverse non-musical forms of fan participation, such as following their stars, gaining information about them, communicating with other fans, creating paratexts (i.e., through fan posts, comments, websites, blogs, fan fiction), attending concerts, and purchasing fan paraphernalia, it is the K-pop dances (as the result of strategic production planning) that invite fans to actively, collectively, and bodily participate in the musical process. Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino wrote in his book *Music as Social Life*:

'[P]articipatory music and dance have special qualities and characteristics for creating solid feelings of community and identity. [...] Participatory music-dance traditions exist the world over, and this suggests that they fulfil some basic human needs and desires.' (Turino, 2008, p.157)

Apart from this anthropological understanding, it is not possible however to grasp K-pop fandom in terms of a single, clear-cut, and stable identity formation. K-pop neither belongs to mainstream culture in Germany, nor does it represent a subculture with a coherent semiotic system, which necessarily counteracts a hegemonic cultural system, and with a shared repertoire of aesthetical values and preferences as we know from early studies on the local appropriation of global styles, such as punk or hip hop. We may rather see K-pop fan communities as what Turino called 'cultural cohorts', a term by which he means 'social groupings that form along the lines of specific constellations of shared habit based in similarities of parts of the self' (Turino, 2008, p.111). It is these *parts of the self* that affirmatively respond to the specific danceability of K-pop songs, thus eliciting forms of pleasure, collectivity and the potential of individual change.



Nancy from the cover dance group UC (Unique and Crazy) clearly point out these aspects by telling us what makes K-pop attractive to her:

They [the K-pop stars] get the fun across pretty well. I think they really get drilled, they take lessons in acting and so on. They are treated harshly, but what they get across is simply pleasure, colours, fun. It's a wide spectrum. It's the big picture that is important. If you would strip it down, there would hardly be anything left.

For Nancy, it is not only the music itself that is important, but the way how it creates collectivity and how it influenced her personal life:

Since we started with K-pop, we have found a lot of friends who are thinking in the same way as we do and who share our attitude. Well, I have to say that I feel like having a family here. These guys are not only my friends; I'd go through hell and high water for them! I am there for them. That is my feeling. You also want to be there for your family, you want to get something and you want to give something. This is hard to find in other genres, I guess. For me, I can say: *K-pop changed my life. Now, I have found people, who share my attitude towards life.* [...] We have become best friends, we're like a family. (Nancy, 15.06.2013, Bremen)

Nancy's experience that can be found among many dance group members in similar ways echoes exactly what cultural studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg once noted on the positive power of fandom:

Fandom is, at least potentially, the site of the optimism, invigoration and passion which are necessary conditions for any struggle to change the conditions of one's life. (Grossberg 1992:65)

Distinction and Transgression

In German K-pop fandom, we can find (at least) two interconnected types of distinction at work: The aesthetic distinction towards the symbolic systems of Western pop music and the social distinction towards the German majority society. To illustrate the first type, we can ask about the differences between K-pop and Western Pop. The members of UC gave the following answer:

Q: *Is there a difference between K-pop and Western Pop?*

Nancy: Besides the language...

Dennis: ...they [the Koreans] have a lot more fun in what they are doing, I think. Well, when you compare Britney Spears' song 'Baby, hit me one more time' and K-pop, I would say: the Korean stars are smiling more. They have much more fun in the whole thing.

Nancy: Yes! But above all, it's so brightly coloured. We don't have that here.

Kadisha: It is fascinating because it is something that does not exist here, in German music.
(Unique and Crazy, 15.06.2013, Bremen)

We also find a tendency that K-pop fans distinguish themselves from German mainstream society or at times feel discriminated by people in their social surroundings (i.e., at their work place, in school class, by their parents).

Nancy: The problem that we have here in Germany is that we are quickly disparaged and put down as freaks, because we are so different. Because we are dressed in brighter colours, and it's weird but even in our private lives we are wearing brighter colours than before. That influenced us a lot. (Nancy, 15.06.2013, Bremen)

It may be subject to further studies whether the sub-cultural capital produced in these K-pop driven forms of aesthetic and social distinction to Germany mainstream society operates in similar ways as can be found in other Asian pop fan communities, such as in the German J-pop scene.

Another aspect that seems to play a significant role in K-pop is the transgression of social boundaries. While fandom always bears a potential of transgressing social categories, we can find in the cast of K-pop cover dance groups good examples of blurred boundaries of ethnicity, age, gender, and class-based education/occupation. Most conspicuous, however, is the aspect of ethnicity. In all five cover dance groups, who participated in this study, we can find members with different ethnic backgrounds. For example, the group One For Nine consists of seven members with German, Turkish, Kurdish, Chinese-Vietnamese, and Vietnamese ethnic backgrounds (Figure 19). In other groups, we also find members of African parentage. Regarding gender, we can observe that even though the majority of K-pop fans is female, cover dance



groups tend to have (or try to have) at least one male member on board. One only-female group told me that they were seeking male members, because male dancers would make them look more special and interesting. The mixed gender and ethnic cast in cover dance groups demonstrates a strong difference to the cast of the original K-pop groups.



<Figure 19.> Mixed Cast (Photo taken by Khoi Chau, used with permission)

Shifting Scenes: from Japanese Pop to K-pop

A specific precondition to German K-pop fandom is the presence of a strong fan base of Japanese Pop. Nearly all K-pop fans in their twenties and early thirties (I talked to) grew up reading Japanese manga and watching anime during their teenage years, of which some also later turned to listening to J-pop and visual kei and to become active members of the local cosplay scene. Paramount to the Japan pop consumption were German TV channels, which began broadcasting new Japanese animation series on a daily base since 1995—mostly after school had finished. *Sailor Moon*, *Dragonball*, *Pokemon*, *Yu-Gi-Oh* and *Inuyasha* thus belong to the shared cultural memory of this generation of Japan pop fans (who call themselves ‘Visus’), who nowadays have shifted their interest to alternative yet Asian forms of pop culture. Many discovered

K-pop videos through their J-pop fan forums and websites and gradually discovered that there were Korean singers involved in anime productions (by singing the opening and ending songs) or being camouflaged as J-pop singers, such as BoA and TVXQ.

The VISUAL CULTURE DJ Team from Dortmund consists of two avid German J-Rock fans: DJ KEI and Djane TOM. They have been organising J-Rock club events and parties since 2005 in bigger cities in North-Rhine Westphalia. For example the Kabuki Rock Style (Figure 20).



<Figure 20.> Kabuki Rock Style Party in Oberhausen (Images used with permission from VISUAL CULTURE)

Since 2012, they included K-pop into their repertoire because the number of guests asking for K-pop songs was increasing from party to party. That K-pop has entered the J-pop scene is of course not without conflict (with die-hard fans of J-pop), but what can be observed is that the demand of K-pop songs is growing and that intermediaries, such as the VISUAL CULTURE DJ Team, that meanwhile runs their own business as an event management company, is capitalising on this trend.



Hierarchy and Credibility: Cultural economy of fandom

This brings us to the observation of a newly emerging cultural economy of K-pop fandom, which is still very small but growing as it is driven by ‘grassroot intermediaries,’ who started as fans and turned into active promoters and providers of K-pop.

One example is Lisa, a twenty-two-year old high-school graduate and paralegal apprentice from Bremen. She started several fan initiatives and websites and became a K-pop dance instructor at the private Driton dance school in Bremen. She turned into an authority within the German K-pop community, as can be sensed from her activities: Next to teaching K-pop in the dance school, she is a member of a K-pop cover dance group, and administrator of two Facebook groups for K-pop fans in Germany: ‘K-pop Fans in Bremen,’ which was launched in 2010 as one of the earliest German K-pop fan sites on Facebook with having about 130 members, and ‘K-pop Meetings in Germany’ launched in December 2010 with more than 6000 likes. The latter website enjoys such a high popularity among K-pop fans that even the booking agency of boy group Beast asked her to help promote the group’s concert in Berlin in 2012. In exchange, she was provided the train fare and a free ticket of the group’s concert. As a die-hard fan, Lisa also travelled to other places such as Dresden and Paris to watch her favourite K-pop groups, she collected fan paraphernalia, and she organised a number of K-pop fan meetings and flash mobs. In 2011, she was interviewed by KBS World Radio on the situation of K-pop fandom in Germany.

In an interview with Lisa, she noted that the term ‘fan girl’ has gained currency among female K-pop fans in Germany. But what makes a fan girl?

Lisa: You should possess fan articles. I mean you should buy albums, posters and other merchandising stuff.

Q: Let’s say, if I were a member of your fan group, but I would just listen to the new song by SM Entertainment once a week.

Lisa: ...well, that would not be enough to qualify you as a big fan. You definitely need to have some knowledge about this field, at least. Knowledge is important! If you don’t have any knowledge, you won’t be accepted and respected by the others. (Lisa, 16.09.2013, Bremen)

Among European K-pop fans, the SM Town show in Paris in June 2011 was notorious for being sold out within ten minutes and left many fans without tickets disappointed. Lisa was among the lucky ones, as she told me:

I've been to Paris twice, for the Super Show 4 and for SM Town. You know, how I got the tickets for SM Town? If you start sitting in front of your computer already one hour before the ticket sale begins and if you then continuously press the F5-button on your keyboard [to reload the website: MF], then you are a big fan! Actually, we were three people continuously pressing the button. Finally, two friends of mine were successful and bought three tickets each, so we suddenly had too many and we had to sell three of them again. (Lisa, 16.09.2013, Bremen)

Lisa is only one example for the growing cultural economy of K-pop in Germany. In her case, the financial capital she gained from her activities is yet low, despite her earnings from the dance school courses, whereas the cultural capital within the fan community is relatively high. In contrast to her, other players have already started to capitalise on the growing fandom and have turned their interest in K-pop into profit-making endeavours, even though they may yet remain small-scale. In this study, the Driton dance school and the VISUAL CULTURE DJ team are part of it as well as the K-pop distributors, such as Daebak, NeoTokyo, and Matrix Anime.

Travel and Collaboration

The example of the cover dance group Stardream Entertainment demonstrates that travel and collaboration are important aspects in the K-pop community. The name subsumes two separated and independently operating dance groups in two different cities: K-Dancer with seven members from Cologne and SDE-M with thirteen members from Mönchengladbach. The two groups joined forces to have a bigger repertoire of songs that can be performed in a one hour show. Meanwhile, Stardream Entertainment acts as a dance collective with two sub-units that train separately, but perform as a show group together at live shows. These showcases take place at anime and manga conventions, at dance contests, and city festivals. In their latest show, the group even gained support by members of a third dance group: ЯE:motion from Neuss. These dance groups collaborate with each other in order to act more



flexible and to provide a greater variety of dance numbers. It is conspicuous that the way how the group presents itself is an obvious reference to Korean entertainment companies, not only by using the name ‘Stardream Entertainment’, but also by their intended creation of sub–units. Altogether, we observed that the translocal collaborations and networks among dance groups have been growing lately.

7. Summary and Outlook

In the case of Germany, we have observed during the eight–months–period of this study that the K–pop fan–base has become stronger and more organised than before, while a range of transformations has been taking place according to the aspects I mentioned in the previous chapter ‘Findings’: participation and pleasure, distinction and transgression, the shift from J–pop to K–pop, the emergence of a cultural economy of fandom, and travel and collaboration. K–pop in Germany is largely based on ‘grassroots fandom’ with small fan communities that are widely spread and relatively self–contained due to the geographical size and federal structure of Germany. The technological barrier, given in the blocking of K–pop music videos on YouTube, renders not a big obstacle to K–pop fans though it has slowed down the process, by which K–pop penetrates into mainstream culture. Nevertheless, K–pop remains highly vital as a niché culture. It is most notable that cover dance groups had been mushrooming in different places over the country. The dance aspect is what K–pop seems to make highly attractive to its predominant female audiences. It can be argued that K–pop is taken by German youngsters as a fresh alternative to Western pop music and to Japanese Pop, while at the same time it connects familiar Hip–Hop beats and moves with new aesthetics considered as ‘Korean,’ such as beauty ideals, looks, and colourful and bright imageries. In this context, it is notable that many K–pop fans had already been familiar with Japanese popular culture. As avid fans of manga, anime, and visual kei, some of them were active or are still active in the Japanese pop scene, whereas the majority grew up watching Japanese anime on German mainstream television. For them, the consumption of Japanese pop goods in the past provided the fertile ground for today’s K–pop fandom. It can be assumed

that the range of transformations that has been taking place with K-pop's inflow to Germany may contribute to a more significant image of Korea among Germans. These transformations are worthwhile to be considered more deeply in the future development of K-pop fan culture in Germany.



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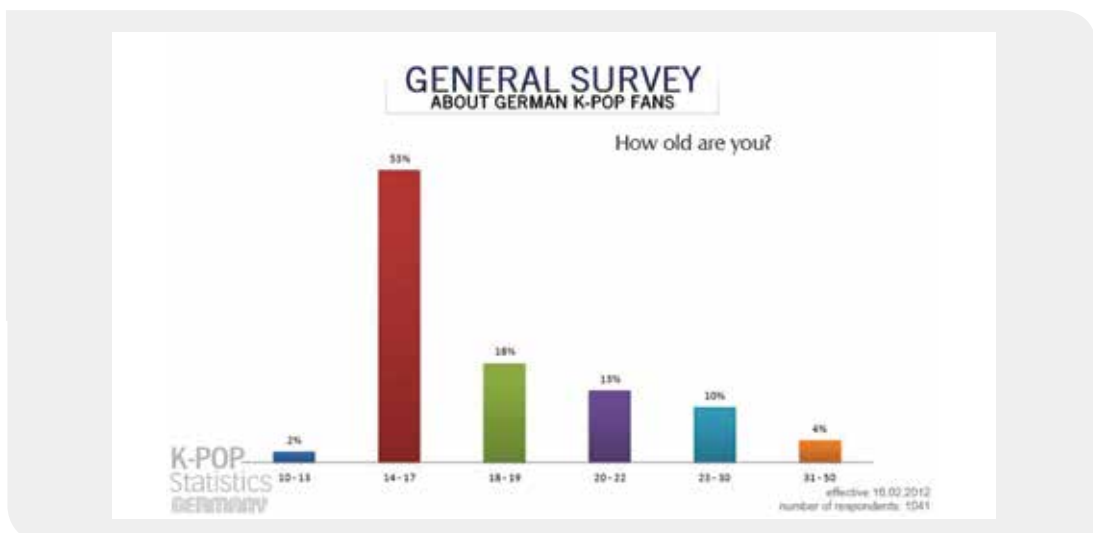
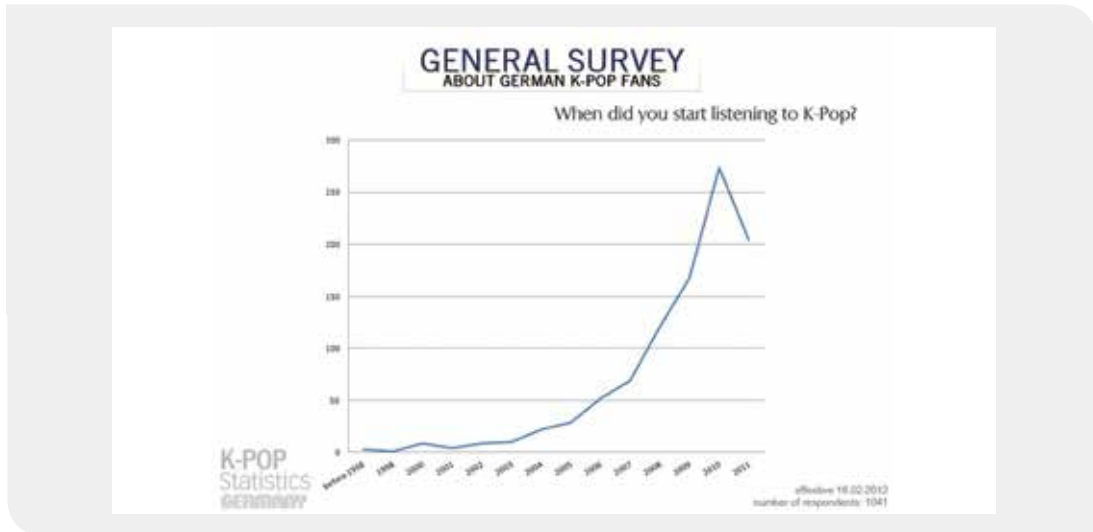
June 26, 2013 (Invited Talk): Title of Lecture: 'K-Pop and European Pop', Special Lecture Series 'Hallyu in Europe – Comparison and Analysis', Korean Studies Department, Free University of Berlin, Germany.

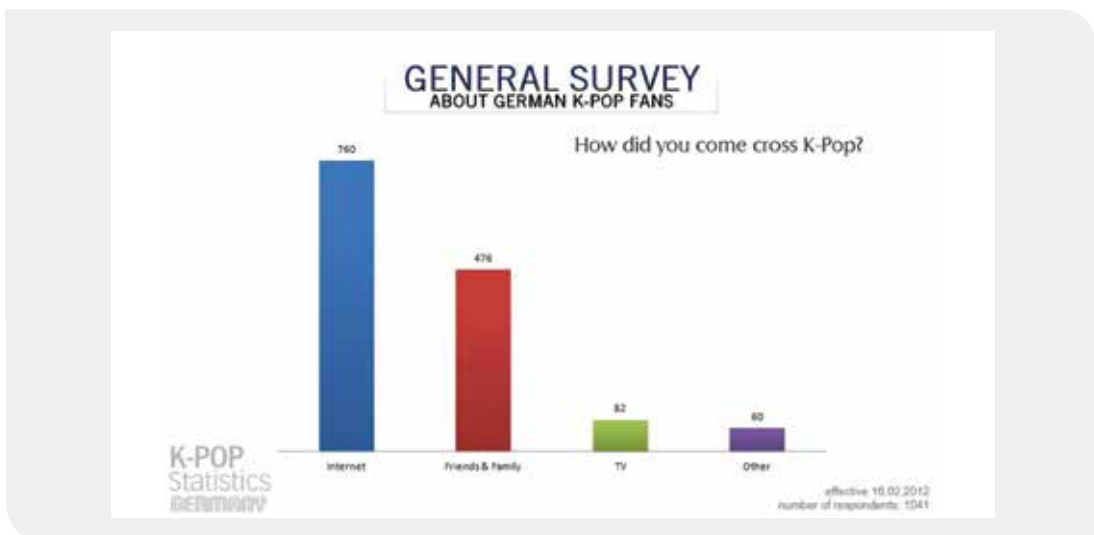
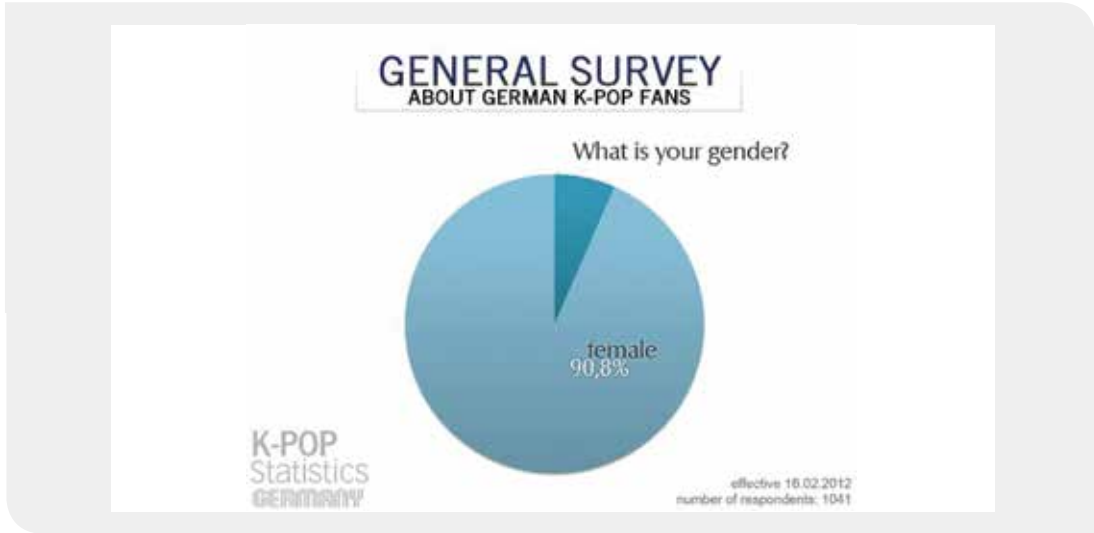
July 3, 2013: Paper title: 'K-Pop Audience Reception and Fan Culture in Germany', International Conference 'POPMAC: Analyzing Popular Music' July, 2–4, University of Liverpool, UK

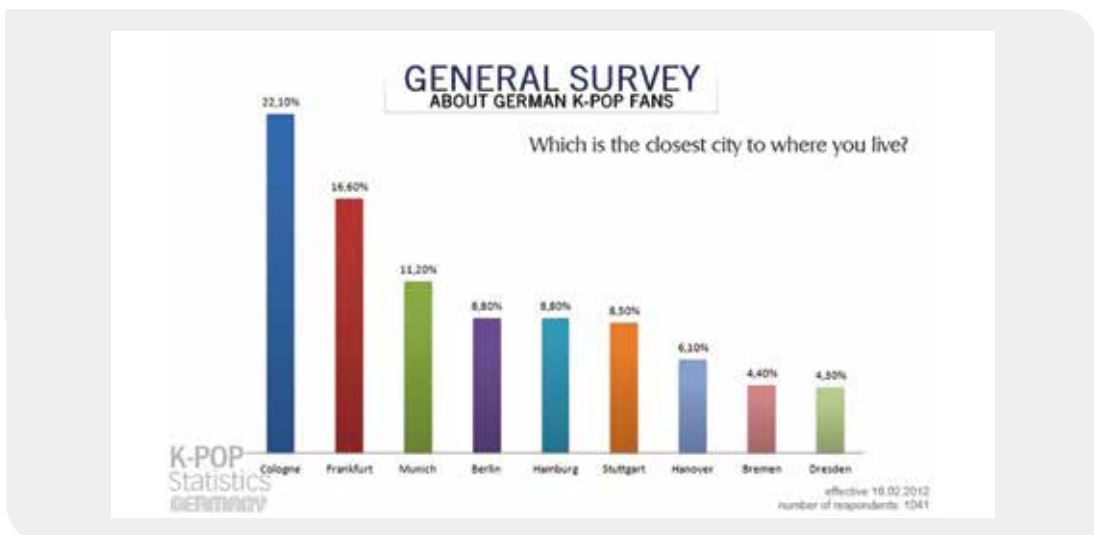
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Appendix I. K-pop Statistics in Germany

(All graphics used with permission from K-pop Statistics Germany, www.re-mark-able.de.)







GERMANY'S K-POP RANKING

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 2066

EFFECTIVE: 12.03.2013

TOP 10 MALE SINGERS

3 VOTES PER PERSON

28.46%	1.	G-Dragon	
14.20%	2.	K.Will	
13.03%	3.	Kim Jaejoong	
	4.	Jay Park	
		Se7en	
	6.	Xia Junsu	
	7.	Rain	
	8.	Yang Yoseob	
	9.	Cho Kyuhyun	
	10.	Kim Jonghyun	

K-POP
Statistics
GERMANY

GERMANY'S K-POP RANKING

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 2066

EFFECTIVE: 12.03.2013

TOP 10 FEMALE SINGERS

3 VOTES PER PERSON

41.21%	1.	Allee	
28.01%	2.	BoA	
10.01%	3.	Hyuna	
	4.	IU	
	5.	Hyorin	
	6.	G.Na	
	7.	Park Bom	
	8.	CL	
	9.	Lee Hi	
	10.	Taeyeon	

K-POP
Statistics
GERMANY

GERMANY'S K-POP RANKING

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 2066

EFFECTIVE: 12.03.2013

TOP 25 BOY GROUPS

3 VOTES PER PERSON

36.12%	1.	BIGBANG		14.	CNBLUE	
11.45%	2.	B.A.P		15.	BTOB	
10.89%	3.	Super Junior		16.	2PM	
	4.	SHINee		17.	FT ISLAND	
	5.	JYJ		18.	NU'EST	
	6.	BEAST		19.	B1A4	
	7.	Infinite		20.	Epik High	
	8.	EXO		21.	Shinhwa	
	9.	Block B		22.	Boyfriend	
	10.	MBLAQ		23.	SSS01	
	11.	U-KISS		24.	VIXX	
	12.	TVXQ		25.	DMTN	
	13.	Teen Top				

K-POP
Statistics
GERMANY

GERMANY'S K-POP RANKING

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 2006

EFFECTIVE: 12.03.2013

TOP 25 GIRL GROUPS

3 VOTES PER PERSON

84,8%	1. 2NE1		14. A Pink	
47,7%	2. Girls' Generation		15. Evol	
28,0%	3. Sistar		16. Orange Caramel	
	4. f(x)		17. D-UNIT	
	5. Secret		Hello Venus	
	6. miss A		19. EXID	
	7. AMINUTE		Rania	
	8. T-ara		Spica	
	9. Wonder Girls		22. Girl's Day	
	10. After School		23. AOA	
	11. Brown Eyed Girls		Davichi	
	12. Kara		25. Dal Shabet	
	Sunny Hill			

K-POP
Statistics
GERMANY

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K-pop on the Global Platform: European Audience Reception and Contexts

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Edited by the Research Team, Korea Foundation of International Culture Exchange

Published by the Korea Foundation of International Culture Exchange(KOFICE),
DMC Hi-Tech Industry Center, 330, Seongam-ro, Mapo-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea

Designed by AZCONCEPT



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