

## **Rethinking Transmedia Storytelling in Participatory Digital Media: What Makes PSY's "Gangnam Style" So Successful?**

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**Abstract:** This study examines some issues regarding transmedia storytelling in the context of Korean Pop (K-pop). Focusing on the recent success of "Gangnam Style" by PSY, a Korean pop-singer which has been widely distributed primarily through YouTube, this study will investigate the diffusion and reception process of the "Gangnam Style" music video as Hallyu (Korean Wave) content. Particularly, this study analyzes a variety of "Gangnam Style" meme videos which have also been diffused through YouTube. This study suggests that meme videos are significant content as well as objects of study that are mainly distributed, received and produced by contemporary popular music fans and thus help us understand what fan-based transmedia storytelling is like and how it works in online popular music industries which are increasingly influenced by digital media technologies such as YouTube and Twitter. We conclude this study by discussing the implications of the success of "Gangnam Style" content including the meme videos in thinking about the meanings and strategies of transmedia storytelling in the seemingly expanding popular music (particularly K-pop) industries in Korea and beyond.

**Key words:** Digital fandom, Korean pop (K-pop), meme video, socialmedia, transmedia storytelling, YouTube

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study examines the transmedia storytelling phenomena that appear in the process of the global diffusion of Korean Pop (K-pop, hereafter). Transmedia storytelling is a process where different parts of a story are systematically dispersed through multiple delivery channels in order to create an integrated and well-organized entertainment experience. This transmedia storytelling case study explores the global diffusion process of "Gangnam Style" by Korean pop-singer PSY who has become sensationally popular since the video's worldwide distribution primarily through YouTube. In particular, this study examines "Gangnam Style" meme videos which were created by the audiences (fans) of the "Gangnam Style" music video and diffused through YouTube.

Meme video represents video content or video clips produced by the creative and active participation of users and audiences. These videos are significantly altered from the original video or content through parody, pastiche and mash-up and are publically dispersed in Internet media such as YouTube and social media (Shifman, 2012). As will be discussed in detail, particular video content is rapidly and widely spread through YouTube or social media. Meme video in general is considered as one of the

core characteristics of digital participatory culture today, operating in the midst of the diffusion and consumption (reception) process of digital cultural contents (Jenkins, 2006; Pearson, 2010). This study pays attention to meme video content and the diffusion process in the study of transmedia storytelling and its strategy since an in-depth understanding of how digital fans consume, distribute and even produce content is essential in understanding transmedia storytelling. Since, meme videos require active participation and interaction of the audiences, they are well suited to reveal the trends and characteristics of digital culture which are based on digital fandom (Pearson, 2010).

Certainly, an understanding of digital fandom cannot be satisfied by just the analysis of meme videos. Yet, not only transmedia storytelling strategy, but also the existing discussions on how to design digital cultural content including K-pop have often concentrated on supplier-centered strategy and analysis (Jin and Ryoo, 2014; Oh and Park, 2012; Shim, 2006). These supplier and platform-centered digital cultural content designs and strategies have not always been successful and effective. Demand forecasting which content will spread and achieve success in digital cultural content markets such as online popular music, is an extremely difficult business. Very often, it is only after the success that we realize

which factors is it melody, lyrics, highly developed subculture or marketing in certain digital cultural content really contributed in success. These digital cultural content designs and strategies which lack an understanding of digital fandom will have certain limitations.

Recently, new efforts to understand these innovative means of diffusion and consumption of digital cultural content have been made through the terminology of transmedia. However, discussions on the phenomenon of transmedia and its strategies tend to assume that understanding digital fandom is too confusing and complex and replace it with a supplier-centered understanding and strategy, or regard it as unnecessary in many cases.

With this awareness of the problem, this study attempts to reveal that what is much needed for new digital content design and the establishment of a strategy for the vitalization of the popular music industry, such as K-pop, is fan-based digital cultural content design and a strategy that is firmly based on an understanding and analysis of digital fandom. Then, what is fan-based transmedia storytelling and how is it possible?

To provide a better developed discussion on the fan-based transmedia storytelling of K-pop and the popular music industry in an altered digital media environment, this study conducted an analysis of “Gangnam Style” meme video images and their diffusion patterns that appeared in the course of the recent global diffusion of the video “Gangnam Style” by PSY. “Gangnam Style” which has >1.2 billion YouTube views (at the time of writing) and won the Guinness World Record for the most liked video on YouTube, has become one of the world’s most popular global cultural contents and did so with a speed and size that no one ever predicted. One could see the success of “Gangnam Style” through the frequent news updates by the Korean press on PSY’s broadcasting activities and the diffusion and consumption of the video through the Internet in the US. Many experts were rushing to find out a secret recipe for the global success of “Gangnam Style”. Many of these experts paid attention to internal factors, while presenting the characteristics and elements of the content of the “Gangnam Style” music video as the reason that it became a worldwide viral video and talking about customized (mostly supplier-centered) strategies on how to replicate the success of “Gangnam Style” as though they reveal a secret recipe. However, unlike the claims of various customized cultural content strategies, it may be almost impossible to predict which content will be publically diffused and succeed in the current digital media environment, where one can only speculate on the

successful dispersion of cultural content. In many cases, the real recipe, including which particular cultural content or specific elements of an image would bring “Gangnam Style” level popularity, is only available after the fact (Burgess, 2008).

Rather than pretending to reveal a single secret recipe for success, what this paper actually attempts to do is make sense of the changing new digital environment and culture that significantly affects the production, distribution and consumption of digital content that is created and driven by the digital media environment. To comprehend this new digital environment and culture, it is crucial to understand the essential elements of transmedia storytelling, that is, the degree of participation of audiences and the condition of mutual interaction with the content. As was mentioned earlier, the meme phenomenon does not only indicate the diffusion of original digital image content by users and audiences through actions such as re-tweet, share, or like, but its contents and contexts are altered and its technical aspects are modified creatively in many aspects through parody, pastiche, mash-up and remix. These meme video images, created and circulated by the active involvement of audiences and the interactions among them, are directly connected with the new mode of digital culture and digital fandom, mostly expressed through reading, writing, parody, remix, prosumer, etc. in YouTube (Pearson, 2010). Therefore, this study attempts to conduct an analysis on the diffusion pattern and content of “Gangnam Style” meme videos to answer the following questions: How can we view the diffusion process of PSY’s “Gangnam Style” music video? What is the relationship between the diffusion of original video and the production and distribution (diffusion) process of the meme video? What are the contents of the “Gangnam Style” meme video and what are their characteristics? What can we learn about the current digital media environment and culture from the global success of “Gangnam Style”?

Based on these investigations, this study aims to help the understanding of the digital fandom that appeared through the diffusion process of “Gangnam Style” meme videos and discuss the implications of the success of “Gangnam Style” in thinking about fan-centered transmedia storytelling strategy in the new digital environment.

**Theoretical background: transmedia storytelling and meme video:** In describing the concept of transmedia storytelling, Henry Jenkins highlighted the creation of entertainment experiences through well-balanced and integrated storytelling via multi-delivery channels and the systematic diffusion of the contents (Jenkins, 2006). In

other words, each medium must contribute to the diffusion process through its unique role and effect in the course of the story. This interest in transmedia storytelling also reflects what Jenkins recently describes as “spreadability,” the transformation of the current digital media environment and cultural content industry where corporations no longer tightly control media distribution and many of us are directly involved in the circulation of content (Jenkins *et al.*, 2013; Jenkins, 2006). Due to processes such as horizontal integration, it is rare for a media enterprise today to own only a single channel through one medium and the new multiplatform media environment provides media firms with incentives to spread and deliver their brands and content through as many media platforms and franchises as possible. Furthermore, by reaching audiences with different preferences and tastes with a differential approach, the current situation may broaden the potential markets for the products of these media firms. In this context, the changes in the new media environment can be better expressed by the concept of transmedia branding or franchising. However, transmedia storytelling needs to be separated from these concepts since they are part of the pre-existing supplier and platform entrepreneur centered discussion and thus have limitations with respect to the understanding of the diffusion process of certain digital cultural content. This limitation needs to be supplemented by an understanding of the diffusion process of fan-centered digital culture and content based on an understanding of digital fandom. In this respect, a re-conceptualization of Jenkins’ transmedia storytelling is essential. First, according to Jenkins, there are two crucial elements to the concept of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006; Dawkins, 1989; Knobel and Lankshear, 2007). One is radical textuality and the other is multimodality. Radical textuality is when there are various texts in one medium or there is movement that crosses between text structures. For example, when there are different characters or various inter-related narratives in a novel or movie, we can regard the story as having radical textuality. If these narratives do not remain in one medium but are instead portrayed in novels, movies, television miniseries, games and other formats, the story can be seen as a transmedia story.

Another element of transmedia storytelling is its multimodality. Multimodality is the different affordance that various media have. It represents different types that various media reconstruct a story. For instance, identical narratives, stories, or characters have different affordance when they are realized through comic books, movies, or games and thus, the way a game interacts with text cannot be the same as the way a book or movie does. Therefore,

a story that is realized through different types of media takes a different style. Jenkins emphasizes that transmedia stories cannot have only one of the two elements and that they must be integrated. According to Jenkins, the general definition of a transmedia story as “one source multi-use” or “one story that lies in various media” is inadequate and needs to be expanded. These concepts which are often confused with transmedia story are rather close to franchising or branding in that the elements of an identical foundation of the story are realized through various media. In relation to Jenkins, these concepts are different from transmedia storytelling and they are more likely to be seen as supplier and platform entrepreneur centered storytelling and digital content strategy. Without digital fandom, radical textuality and multimodality as the essential elements of transmedia storytelling are simply impracticable. In other words, active and creative participation, consumption and not only the action of reading the content, but also writing, modifying and circulating it are necessary. In the context of the conceptualization of transmedia storytelling by Jenkins, radical textuality and multimodality are highlighted as the core elements for a story to become a transmedia story (Jenkins, 2006).

Meme video as a type of UGC (user-generated contents) is one type of content that satisfies the preconditions of fan-centered transmedia storytelling. As mentioned earlier, meme video is the movie content in which the original digital content has been altered by the active and creative participation of the audience. The term “meme” was first adopted by biologist, Richard Dawkins, in his book *The Selfish Gene* in 1976. In this book, Dawkins explained meme as a unit in the field of cultural diffusion (delivery) through a process similar to the reproduction or imitation of genes. According to Shifman (2012), memes experience the process of modification, selection and maintenance just as genes do and many memes compete with each other to receive attention from the host. In this process, memes that are fitted to the current sociocultural environment achieve success through the process of public diffusion while other memes disappear. These memes can be symbols of something or some action, fashion, architectural style, melody or other style. Some memes can be diffused globally and become as popular as “Gangnam Style” while others can be related to certain sociocultural contexts on a more local scale (Jenkins, 2006).

However, using a concept like meme, while emphasizing fan-based transmedia storytelling and willful participation, is somewhat of a contradiction in that it is based on sociobiological conceptualizations such as reproduction, imitation, transformation, selection and

diffusion. Yet as is explored in Jenkins' discussion on fan-centered transmedia storytelling, in the evaluation of this contradictory diction and utilization, it is noteworthy to remember that these contents are not diffused through fundamentalist rules based on some conventional evolutionary theory but instead through complicated and varied sociocultural adoption processes (Jenkins *et al.*, 2013). There are varied factors that need to be considered in this diffusion process. As a type of UGC, meme video has varied values such as functional, emotional, social value according to different usages of UGC. For Jenkins, what defines the different usages of UGC that is meme video is the digital media literacy or technological ability of the users and the very dynamic and complex cultural technology based on cultural and social interactions, motivations and tastes that have been developed over many years. The sociobiological metaphors of replication, proliferation and transformation of UGC including meme video content should be understood in this context. In other words, the process of replication, proliferation and transformation should be understood not as deterministic and mechanical processes but as one of the phenomena of a digital culture and communication appearing as the result of interactions between current digital technologies and society which is increasingly comprised of active users and audiences. These replications, proliferations and transformations of pre-existing original content are occurring as the result of the confluence of highly developed digital technology and accessibility in a sociocultural context of the diffusion of subculture and shared culture (whether through the YouTube community or social media such as Twitter or Facebook). Therefore, meme video content is not a natural or deterministic phenomenon anymore, but is a core factor of the emerging digital environment that has a profound impact on the overall process of digital cultural content production, distribution and consumption. It is not only connected to the spread of content in the digital communications environment, but also to how certain content is diffused and enjoys widespread popularity. These are the benefits of evaluating meme videos.

This study conducted a time-series analysis on the diffusion pattern of "Gangnam Style" meme video images that were distributed, consumed and spread after the official "Gangnam Style" video image was uploaded on YouTube. A contents analysis on the meme video images was also performed. Through these analyses, we looked into the characteristics of the new digital communication environment and culture that were present on the back side of the popular success of the "Gangnam Style" music video, especially the position and the role of the meme video images.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The official music video for "Gangnam Style" was first uploaded on YouTube on July 15, 2012. Meme video data in this study was collected during the initial period of diffusion of the music video uploaded on YouTube from the official music video upload date to August 27, 2012 using an API (Application Programming Interface) YouTube search for video images related to "Gangnam Style." We limited the meme video data research period to the above mostly because it was before the "Gangnam Style" official video was extensively diffused in mass media, especially in the US. Therefore, it shows the relatively accurate role of meme video mainly on Youtube in the diffusion and popularity of the "Gangnam Style" video image. As the number of views on YouTube and the number of tweets reveal, PSY's "Gangnam Style" video entered a new diffusion stage, gaining tremendous popularity one month and a half after the upload of the official music video. It went beyond the stage of previous distribution and diffusion mainly through YouTube, Twitter and word of mouth. It was one and half month later that the "Gangnam Style" official music video was introduced regularly on major television programs, radio shows and in newspapers in the US. This means that the enormous momentum in terms of diffusion and popularity of the "Gangnam Style" music video content through mass media was not really there approximately until the end of August and beginning of September in 2012. Later diffusion thus reflects the influence of meme video through YouTube and Twitter as well as the influence of mass media.

In this study, two search engines were utilized to collect and categorize "Gangnam Style" meme video image data. One was the YouTube search engine and the other was the Topsy search service, one of the Twitter search engines. YouTube is the world's largest video viewing and sharing website and it is almost impossible to obtain perfect sampling on "Gangnam Style" meme video data. Therefore, we conducted a weekly collection on related data through the YouTube search engine seven times, once for every Monday from July 15, 2012 to August 27, 2012. Also, the video images were categorized into four types. Videos that were included in categories such as news release videos were excluded from the search.

Compared to the existing Twitter search engines, the Topsy search service has many advantages. As it is widely known, the real-time search function provided by Twitter is limited in several respects. If popular Twitter users' IDs or certain search words are entered into

Twitter's search window to find out who talked about what subject in Twitter space, the result is somewhat unsatisfactory. When a specific word is searched by using Twitter's real-time search engine, various tweets related to the search words are arranged based on the update time, but it is difficult to understand what is a meaningful tweet and comprehend the overall context and exact meaning, unless the texts from the links are read thoroughly. The search period is also limited; the real-time search engine for Twitter only shows the tweet data for the most recent two weeks and the tweets older than two weeks are not searched. The ID search is the same; therefore, search results are also unsatisfactory when searching tweets from popular Twitter users and friends.

Topsy has several advantages for the meme video diffusion analysis. First, since Topsy shows the search results based on the links attached to the short messages, it does not randomly list the results, but shows meaningful search results after taking into account the Twitter users' publicity and Re-Tweet (RT) counts. Also, each searched tweet shows the number of citations for the corresponding link. When the number of citations is large, the tweet or the link sites are the ones which attracted attention in Twitter space. Thus, we can see the contents of tweets and connected links as well as their importance (or influence) just by looking at the search result. Also, compared to Twitter's real-time search engine that only shows the results for the most recent two week period, Topsy's search time is 18 months.

One official video was selected from PSY's official YouTube channel excluding the concert performance. In the research conducted on July 23, 2012, various videos with the word "reaction" in the title were found. The video images recording the audience's reaction to PSY's "Gangnam Style" video were categorized as reaction video. Reaction video is video in which audiences adopt certain sentences, phrases, or measures from a movie, TV show, or music video and express their instant feelings through similar costumes or expressions. From the research conducted on July 30, 2012, not only the word "reaction" but also the words "cover" and "dance cover" appeared in the titles of related videos. In the research, videos including two search words such as "Gangnam Style"+"reaction" or "Gangnam Style"+"cover" were collected through a YouTube API search. The reaction and dance cover videos were categorized by visiting the URL for each video. Also, in the research conducted on August 6, 2012, parody videos such as "Oppa Daegu Style" "Oppa Hongdae Style," and "Oppa Chicago Style" appeared. Parody videos tend not to have the word

"parody" in the title itself, so each parody video was found and categorized by viewing related video images of "Gangnam Style." From 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. (KST) on August 27, 2012, the "Gangnam Style" meme videos as well as the official music video were categorized into four types (original, reaction, dance cover and parody video) and the number of tweets containing the URL was investigated using Topsy's Twitter search service.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Results on diffusion pattern:** The most distinctive feature of the "Gangnam Style" music video's public diffusion that cannot be found in any other content was its speed of diffusion. When the official music video was first uploaded to YouTube on July 15, 2012, it had already reached 520,000 hits by the end of the same day and it exceeded 10 million hits after only 16 days. Only 25 days later, on August 27, 2012, the original music video had reached almost 7 million hits. This dramatic increase in hits at the beginning of the diffusion process for the original music video is in contrast with the diffusion process for the music video "Call Me Maybe" by Canadian pop singer Carly Rae Jepsen which also enjoyed mass diffusion and success in 2012. The official music video for "Call Me Maybe" was first uploaded on March 1, 2012 through YouTube and by September 24, 2012, it had recorded approximately 260 million hits (Fig. 1).

Figure 1, compared to the official music video for "Call Me Maybe," the YouTube music video hits for "Gangnam Style" show a much more rapid diffusion pattern in a relatively short period. This signifies that the diffusion was explosive from the beginning of public access to "Gangnam Style." This explosive diffusion in the beginning is very important since it was just before PSY earnestly entered the American market through contracts with major American entertainment management companies. It was a crucial period for PSY since it was when the "Gangnam Style" music video received worldwide attention including in the US, that he entered the American market full-scale by making appearances on American television shows. On the other hand, "Call Me Maybe" showed a relatively gradual increase in hits from the time the official music video was uploaded on March 1, 2012 until September 1, 2012.

Next, we analyzed the related video images for "Gangnam Style", the YouTube meme videos, through time series analysis on the diffusion pattern and contents analysis. For the analyses, we categorized each of the related video images for "Gangnam Style" into three groups. The first category included reaction videos

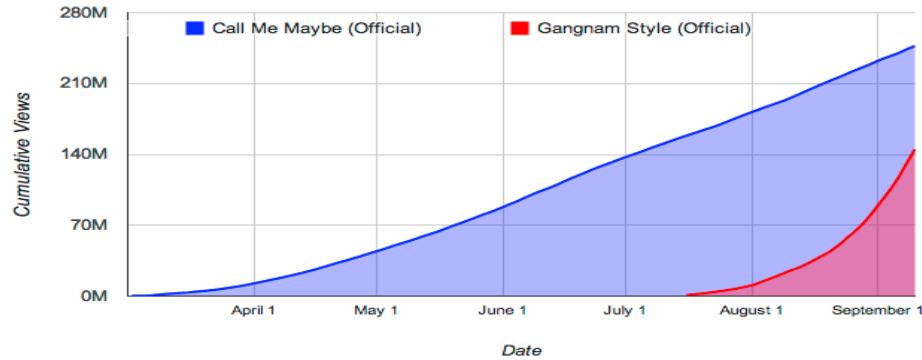


Fig. 1: Time series distribution comparison of YouTube hits “Call Me Maybe” and “Gangnam Style” (Kevin Allocca, 2012, <http://youtube-trends.blogspot.jp/2012/09/gangnam-style-vs-call-me-maybe.html>)

Table 1: YouTube video hits and number of tweets.

Variables	No. of YouTube views	No. of YouTube videos	Percentage of YouTube views (%)	No. of Tweets
Original video	69,674,137	1	67.96	N/A
Reaction video	10,116,252	27	9.87	8,025
Dance cover video	5,705,255	33	5.57	7,261
Parody video	17,020,379	15	16.6	16,784
Total	102,516,023	76	100	32,070

created by ordinary fans recording individual or group reactions to the original music video. These reaction videos are simple in content, (i.e., mostly one shot shooting) and their production time is relatively short. The second category included dance cover videos recording the images of fans dancing to the original “Gangnam Style” music. The third group included parody videos which altered the original images and self-produced new images and even music and recorded parody of the original contents of the “Gangnam Style” music video.

In general, dance cover and parody videos are relatively complex with respect to the subject as well as the technical aspects and take longer to produce. However, as seen in the YouTube video hits and number of tweets, each of the three different meme videos has different effects. Table 1 shows the number of uploads of YouTube meme videos and the sum of the YouTube video hits during the data search period. The number of parody videos uploaded is relatively small, but has 16.6% of hits, the second highest after the original video and the highest among the meme videos. This number reveals that parody videos account for a very significant portion of the diffusion and public interest in original content through meme video. Also, the importance of parody video and its effect on the interaction and degree of participation of the audience is found in the distribution process through a social networking service (in this case, Twitter). The total number of tweets for parody videos is 16,787 and it is responsible for a relatively large

proportion of the tweets. It is also a higher number than the sum of the number of tweets for reaction videos and dance cover videos combined (8,025 and 7,261, respectively), the two other categories of meme video (Table 1).

Looking at the time series distributions of meme videos for “Gangnam Style” as shown in Fig. 2-4, one can see that various meme videos were uploaded through YouTube during the beginning of the diffusion of the “Gangnam Style” music video which is at the beginning phase of the data search period (July15, 2012 to August 1, 2012). Looking at the characteristics of the periodic distribution of the meme videos, reaction video was mostly uploaded soon after the original music video on YouTube during the beginning of the data search period and has a high proportion among the meme videos uploaded during the first 10 days. The number of reaction videos decreased dramatically and almost disappeared after 15 days. Dance cover videos appeared on YouTube on July 24th and were mostly uploaded during the middle phase of the data search period from August2nd through August 14th. The number decreases noticeably from August 15th to August 27th during the final phase of the data search period. For parody video, the total number of uploads is smaller than for reaction video or dance cover video, but its diffusion pattern is closer to dance cover video than reaction video. In sum, among the three types of meme videos, reaction video occupies a large proportion in the beginning of the data search; however, by the middle and final of the data search period, the

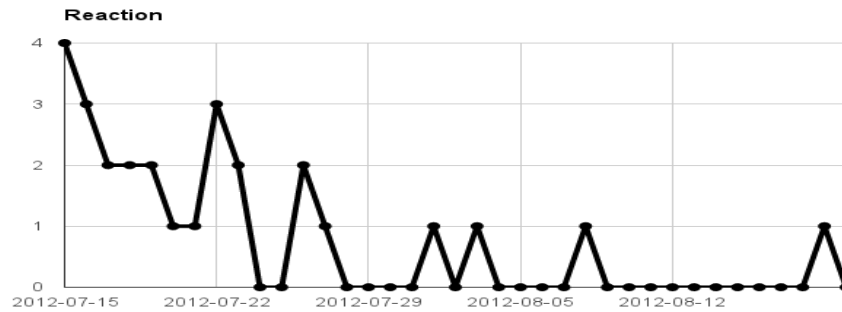


Fig. 2: Time series distribution of reaction video

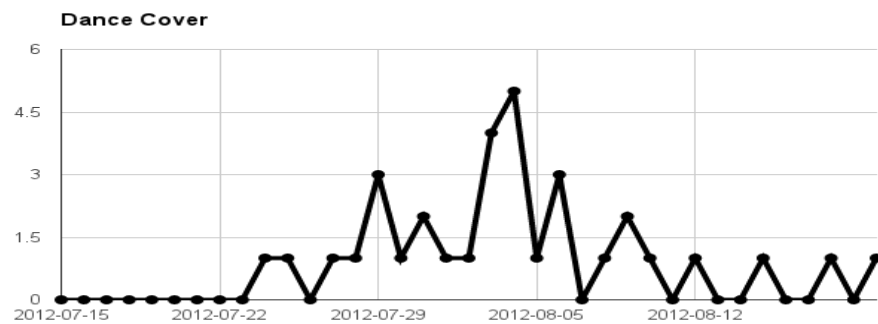


Fig. 3: Time series distribution of dance cover video

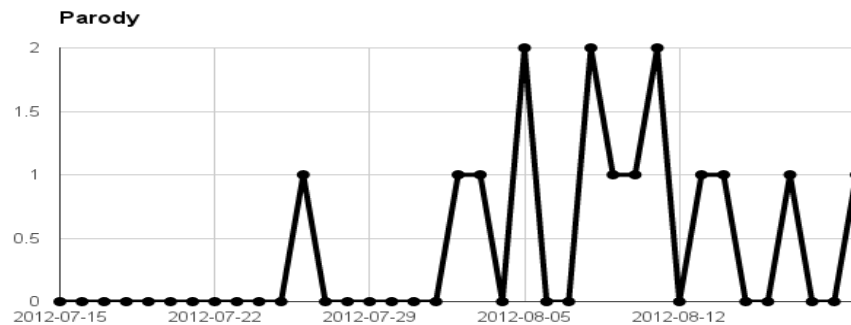


Fig. 4: Time series distribution of parody video

proportion of dance cover and parody videos has grown and the number of reaction videos has decreased or disappeared.

As seen in Jenkins' discussion on transmedia storytelling above, the presence of meme video is a good indicator of the diffusion of original content and the active interaction between content and the audience hidden in the background. The above-mentioned analyses on time series diffusion pattern as well as quantitative analysis (the number of YouTube views and tweets) on "Gangnam Style" meme video images reveal that meme

video images are largely responsible (i.e., in the number of YouTube views and tweets) for the initial diffusion process of "Gangnam Style" related video images through YouTube. Also, it can be assumed that the presence of these meme videos that were uploaded during the initial diffusion and distributed through social networking services such as Twitter correlate with the popular success and rapid diffusion of the music video in the initial diffusion process.

However, the fact that these meme videos account for a relatively large percentage of YouTube video hits and

Twitter traffic only narrowly explains what specific factors enabled the popular diffusion and active interaction of “Gangnam Style” music video images. Explanation on this subject matter may require more data (for example, Facebook data) and more multilateral analysis. In this study, although it is limited, we attempted to find an explanation by conducting contents analysis on the meme video images that received public attention through Twitter and mass media and which recorded an exceptionally large number of hits.

**Results on meme video content:** In this study, YouTube content categorized as reaction video were video images that were created by the general public and the individuals themselves appear in the video. These reaction videos have characteristics of home videos, created for private and intimate communication and expose personal reactions to the original music video mostly through one shot shooting and without any serious special editing. The videos are mostly shot in living rooms, bedrooms, or some private place and are mostly created with friends rather than alone. The form of the video is very typical. By showing the original music video image spontaneously, reaction to the each scene is told through confession style narration that is very private and intimate as if it were a video diary or through extemporaneous dialogic narration as if talking with friends in daily life. After the original video is finished, all of the reaction videos record short reviews on the original video.

Home videos created by and featuring these ordinary fans (not necessarily amateurs), also known as UGC are not modified much from the original content, as the original concept of a meme video would be. However, it seems inappropriate to determine whether the image is a meme video or not by looking only at the degree of modification from the original content mechanically. Since, reaction videos created by ordinary fans paradoxically have a tendency to trigger immediate and explosive reactions and interactions online from the public than any other contents including the original official video, they should be seen as one of the genres of meme video (Shifman, 2012). Another reason that reaction videos should be regarded as a kind of meme video is the emotional work that these video images tend to bring out. The sentiment provided by reaction video is affinity. According to Lange (2009), “videos of affinity” tend to create feelings of communication and connection with people, the other members of a network, or a society. By regarding themselves as the audience of a certain video, these videos have the strong tendency to maintain feelings of communication and emotional bonding with

others who share the reaction and feelings toward the content rather than the content itself. In this respect, even though the content of reaction video is not very much modified, it can still be regarded as one of the essential meme videos since it performs a positive and substantial role in bringing attention to a particular video or content and in encouraging future communication regarding the original. These videos can also create a sense of belonging in the same community or network by connecting audience members themselves through intimate communication and feelings of connection. Therefore, it was assumed that reaction videos were the major type of meme video found at the announcement and during the initial diffusion period of the original official music video. In addition, it was assumed that they had a positive influence on the further meme videos such as dance cover and parody videos which would later be released, as well as on the establishment of various communication networks for fans and audiences online including YouTube.

Compared to the characteristics of private affinity that reaction videos have, dance cover and parody videos have more collective and public characteristics. While most of reaction video was shot in private places such as living room or bedroom (Fig. 5), many dance cover videos and parody videos sometimes have public places such as street, shopping mall, or city square, as their mise en scene, as can be seen in Fig. 6. Many of the viral videos publicly diffused on YouTube take the form of lib-dub videos but in “Gangnam Style” they were mostly dance covers. The reason for this is the Korean language barrier. Also, these dance cover videos were taken in public places such as shopping malls, streets, town squares, or sports stadiums as flash mobs, group dances, or a kind of “Gangnam Style” horse dance tutorial video taken in a place like a fitness club (Fig. 6). These dance guideline style meme videos for “Gangnam Style” reveal that the simplicity and humor of the dance along with the simple and repetitive beat allowed many fans to join a group dance through the existing style of flash mob.

The effects of the humorous, simple and repetitive dance and beat that the original “Gangnam Style” video has can also be compared with the ones of the titles and mise en scene in the parody video. It seems that the geographic indication within the title “Gangnam Style” (Gangnam means the south side of the Han River in the city of Seoul) particularly attracted parodies since parody videos with titles of certain places such as “Hongdae Style,” “Singapore Style,” or “Chicago Style” recorded hundreds of thousands of hits. Furthermore, the visual characteristics of the places and backgrounds where the original music video was shot can also be seen as one of





Fig. 5: Reaction video capture image



Fig. 6: Dance cover capture image

the factors that produce so many parodies. Unlike previous successful music videos which have usually utilized glamorous images and backgrounds, many scenes in the original video show dancing in ordinary and unexpected places such as in a boat on the Han River, on a crosswalk, on the rooftop of a building, inside a bus and subway and in a parking lot. From the parody or imitation perspective, this utilization of everyday places as background can be seen as something that allowed ordinary fans to create parody videos so easily without worrying too much about specific location and background.

## DISCUSSION

How can we view the contents of the “Gangnam Style” music video in terms of transmedia storytelling? Where can we find the radical textuality and multimodality which are the essential elements of transmedia storytelling in the contents of the “Gangnam Style” music video?

What are the implications of the time-series analysis of diffusion and contents analysis on the “Gangnam Style” official music video and meme videos?

First, as a story, the combination of radical textuality and multimodality found in the contents of the “Gangnam Style” music video is different from previous combinations found for example, in Disney animation or Star Wars. Instead to analyze the combination of radical textuality and multimodality found in the contents of the “Gangnam Style” music video, we need to pay attention to a few aspects: the various ordinary places (a racetrack, tourist bus, amusement park at the Han River, elevator, parking lot, etc.) that are utilized for various scenes in the music video; different characters that appear according to these backgrounds and narratives that the “Gangnam Style” dance creates; and the diffusion process through social media such as Twitter. When Jenkins first introduced transmedia storytelling, this concept was understood as a storytelling method or phenomenon such as that seen in Disney animation when one narrative is

achieved through various media. When we simply apply the concept of transmedia storytelling to the “Gangnam Style” music video, it may appear that the video content is irrelevant to the original conception of transmedia storytelling in that the story and narrative of “Gangnam Style” was never realized in different media such as novels, games and movies, at least in the beginning of the diffusion process. In contrast, one of the aspects that existed on the hidden side of the diffusion of the “Gangnam Style” music video involves the role of digital audiences. They while creating and uploading carefully parodied videos which repeated the whole or parts of the video, appeared themselves in a flash mob, group dance in ordinary places and sometimes in the imitation of certain characters or humorous and active dance moves with a strong beat. These are the factors that comprise its story or narrative. Thus, the strong beat, dance and characters of the music video were not realized through novels, games, or movies but were instead reborn as a transmedia story with radical textuality and multimodality through the production of UGC. Digital audiences themselves, who had heard of its fame, dynamically created various kinds of contents, while involving themselves in various actions: selecting the location, choosing similar characters, dancing in groups and recording, uploading and sharing on YouTube. Therefore, it is different from Disney where one story is diffused through various media (movie, TV, game, amusement park) which are all produced and managed by a global media conglomerate.

This difference is one of the factors that Jenkins stresses in his discussion on fan-centered transmedia storytelling as compared to supplier-centered transmedia storytelling. Jenkins highlights that a story can truly become transmedia content through the modification of the original digital content by fans and audiences’ creative and active participation and through the process of the diffusion of the newly created content through the activities of reading, writing, consumption and production. In terms of transmedia storytelling and its strategy, he stresses the new operation of the digital media environment and culture based on digital fandom which is enhanced through the process of the transformation of original content and the participation of active and creative fans and users. In this sense, analysis on meme video in fan-centered transmedia storytelling is crucial. Previous discussions on transmedia storytelling strategy have only focused on supplier-centered strategy and thus, they may exclude discussions on how digital fandom, the audiences and the users of digital content adopt content in the newly organized digital popular music industry according to the currently transformed

digital media environment. The analysis results on meme videos of the “Gangnam Style” music video reveal that in the rapid diffusion of the music video, meme videos such as reaction, dance cover and parody, are massively created and distributed by fans and furthermore play an important role in the diffusion of the original video. This allows us to infer that they acted as the foundation for in-depth communication and active interaction among fans which were the driving force behind the so-called “Gangnam Style” syndrome. An investigation of the more detailed effects of meme videos on the diffusion of an original video might require more varied data and a multilateral analysis; however, it can be said that the phenomena of interest, interaction, communication and participation of fans, as analyzed through millions of YouTube hits and social networking services such as Twitter are the essential subjects in the discussion and establishment of fan-centered transmedia strategy.

Second, YouTube is an important media platform in the global diffusion process of music video content, not only to national fans, but to fans all over the world. In the gradually digitalizing popular music industry, YouTube has become one of the most powerful distribution media platforms. The strength of this media platform is that it is widely connected to the popular music industry, communities and networks that are eager for new experiences, experimentation and participation. Of course, this does not mean that a platform such as YouTube is the ideal place without any restriction or that it completely guarantees a user’s freedom based on openness and sharing. For example, through video identification technology, also known as Content ID, YouTube has obtained systems to detect copyrighted content used in many parody videos created by digital fans in 2007. Nevertheless, low barriers between local and global, another characteristics of the YouTube platform, should be recognized. It is the YouTube media platform where content production and strategy for local fans can be easily transformed into global strategy, production and content for fans worldwide.

As we have seen in PSY’s “Gangnam Style,” it is not a new phenomenon anymore for unknown musicians and amateur fans to spring into fame. Therefore, it is possible that the phenomena of diffusion pattern will likely to be repeated in the future, when musicians are attempting to secure a point of contact with overseas fans through YouTube, accelerate the diffusion with support from social networking services such as Twitter and finally make appearances on existing popular TV programs. In the discussion of transmedia storytelling strategy, it may seem illogical to stress the importance of a single media platform such as YouTube. However, the true point to be

taken from this emphasis on YouTube is not the emphasis on the media platform of YouTube itself, but the profound changes seemingly redefining the distribution and consumption patterns for digital content in the online popular music industry. Therefore, whether it is YouTube or some other media platform, the essential point is the importance of an understanding of the new digital culture and digital fandom surrounding a specific media platform.

We also need to rethink the meaning of transmedia storytelling that usually refers to the new way of production, distribution and consumption of content that has appeared through various media platforms. Here, one of the most pressing questions tends to be how many, or in what proportion of media platforms are involved in transmedia storytelling. These might be meaningful questions for supplier-centered transmedia storytelling strategy. However, from the viewpoint of fan-centered transmedia strategy, to which this study attempts to contribute, these questions cannot be answered without considering the production, distribution and reception processes of new digital content based on a deep understanding of digital media environment and culture. In that sense, we should not ignore the transmedia phenomenon in terms of the convergence of old and new media which can be observed in the distribution process and success of "Gangnam Style." As mentioned earlier, it was the initial success of the "Gangnam Style" content on YouTube that led traditional media (i.e., TV and newspapers) mainly in the US to introduce "Gangnam Style" in-depth and thereby magnify its popularity.

Finally, the last implication of this study in transmedia storytelling strategy is the importance of parody video. As described above, parody video is the content with the greatest impact in terms of fan participation, interest and interaction, as compared to the other meme videos. Also, it is very hard to deny that parody videos played an important role in the rapid diffusion of "Gangnam Style". Especially in the online popular music industry today, parody video content can be one of the most powerful free marketing tools to amplify the diffusion of an original work. However, as shown in the case of the UCC video of a 5-year-old girl singing along with a Korean singer's (Sondambi) song which the Korea Music Copyright Association (KMCA) called copyright infringement and which was erased by the portals in 2010, copyright rules and the distribution environment in the Korean digital popular music industry are very strict and repressive for the free creation of parody. Interestingly, the KMCA is not pursuing any copyright infringement actions or filing any lawsuits against the numerous "Gangnam Style" parody works that have been uploaded through YouTube and other media

platforms. Ultimately, the fact that various parody meme videos have played a role on the backside of the diffusion and success, not only of "Gangnam Style," but of other contents that have achieved global success through YouTube, should be a lesson to the current popular music industry and to the copyright and digital cultural environments (such as in Korea) which have repressed parody productions with standards that are too restrictive and inflexible.

## CONCLUSION

News articles reporting the record number of YouTube hits for PSY's "Gangnam Style" and analysis on "Gangnam Style" syndrome in overseas markets, such as the US, do not provide any analysis or explanation regarding meme videos that exist on the backside of the global success of "Gangnam Style." The instant diagnosis that "Gangnam Style" is simply easy to imitate or that it reflects a preference for "B" rated culture or sentiment is too fragmented and simplistic, if not completely erroneous, to explain the popularity of the "Gangnam Style." In examining the popularity of "Gangnam Style," this study started from the idea that innovation of media can drive the innovation of its content and that digital media may require content that is suitable for it and thus, the reconsideration of new appropriate strategies for production, distribution and consumption of digital cultural content may be required. Of course, there is the possibility of overgeneralization. However, the importance of the media platform is prominent even if we look only at the recent changes in the popular music industry. As the recording industry enters the digital era, one of the most representative services for distribution of digital music is YouTube. As a platform for uploading and watching videos, it is hard to deny that YouTube has recently become the most powerful music distribution platform. YouTube users are mostly from the younger generation, in their teens or twenties; however, as they get older, YouTube could well be recognized as the most commonly used music platform.

By providing multilateral analysis on the diffusion process, pattern and content of "Gangnam Style" meme videos, this study focused on the role of digital fandom, operating behind the global popularity of "Gangnam Style." This study attempted to provide useful discussion not only on the background and reason for the popularity, but also the true components of transmedia storytelling strategy. Therefore, in terms of Jenkins' transmedia storytelling and strategy, this study overcomes the limitations of previous supplier and platform-centered transmedia strategy, emphasizes the importance of

understanding digital fandom and conducts diffusion pattern analysis and contents analysis on meme videos of PSY's "Gangnam Style." In doing so this study not only attempted to reveal the background of the success of "Gangnam Style," which was rapidly distributed through YouTube and which became one of the most popular digital contents in the world but also analyzed the characteristics of content that is widely successful in the recently changed digital media environment that has made it available.

The analysis of meme videos in this study clearly demonstrates that meme videos are the index of desire and active participation of fans that exist on the backside of the diffusion of "Gangnam Style." The diffusion process of PSY's original video and meme videos reveals that a fan-based transmedia storytelling strategy that drives and stimulates fan participation worked well, whether or not intended. We hope that the analysis of the diffusion pattern of meme videos of PSY's "Gangnam Style" and the content analysis can form an important case study to help with the understanding of digital fandom which is the bottom line of the discussion on transmedia storytelling strategy in the era of participatory digital media.

However, there are a couple of limitations in this study that need to be mentioned. First, in understanding digital fandom and the characteristics of fan-centered transmedia storytelling, discussions from a qualitative analysis which could reveal more about the reception process in the daily transmedia environment of fans, particularly audience networks developed around Youtube, were not supported in this study. The focus of this study was not on the audience analysis of "Gangnam Style" fandom itself and it was limited for want of space. A more in-depth discussion would be available from a qualitative audience analysis through interviews or participatory observations and future research is suggested. Second, in order to judge the impact of meme videos, we used the number of tweets in Twitter. However, tweets only reveal the degree of interaction and interest of fans in the content of certain meme videos. A more detailed and accurate analysis would be available if Facebook data on meme videos of "Gangnam Style" was also included.

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