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“Radical Protestors”: How Korean Popular Music Created Online Affinity Spaces of Left-Wing Political Activists: Annotated Bibliography

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In the summer of 2020, millions of Korean popular music (K-pop) fans joined together from across the globe to boycott a Donald Trump political rally, raise over \$1 million for the Black Lives Matter movement, and advocate for those harmed from racial injustice. This annotated bibliography focuses on the historical, cultural, and social context of K-pop, as well as the nature of online communities, especially in regard to social media activism, aiming to highlight the relationship between these two seemingly distant topics.

Bonilla, Yarimar and Jonathan Rosa. “#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Politics of Social Media in the United States.” *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (January 2015): 4-17, <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/amet.12112>.

Anthropologists Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa discuss how “hashtag activism” can document accounts of police brutality and express solidarity with those most affected. Bonilla and Rosa examine the flood of #ferguson tweets soon after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The researchers question if a hashtag can become a field site and believe that a hashtag is useful to “file out” the noise from Twitter as well as receive near-live updates about the events. However, both argue that understanding the context of hashtags and tweets is what makes hashtag ethnography difficult; researchers know very little about the author’s intentions, socio-cultural background, and so on. This argument is important to consider when conducting my own research about #btsarmy and #blacklivesmatter tweets; the words in the tweet only reveal so much. Bonilla and Rosa also grapple with a common argument from activism scholars: is social media “real” activism? While some argue that social media activism is “lazy” and “meaningless,” such as Vincent Miller, author of “Phatic Culture,” Bonilla and Rosa believe that the groups more likely to be affected by police brutality are more likely to engage in social media activism anyways. Additionally, hashtags serve as an important tool for solidarity and information. This article is important to understand the significance of hashtags in Twitter activism and how they can relay various sorts of information.

Helvie-Mason, Lora and Sarah Maben. “Twitter-vism: Student Narratives and Perceptions of Learning from an Undergraduate Research Experience on Twitter Activism.” *Teaching Journalism and Mass Communication* 7, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 47-61.

<https://du.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.du.idm.oclc.org/docview/1877373935?accountid=14608>.

Communications professors Helvie-Mason and Maben take a more outward-focused approach to Twitter activism, in which the two professors design a research project for college freshmen students involving tweet analysis. The project consists of collecting and analyzing tweets from feeds promoting social, humanitarian, and political causes using Grounded Theory and open coding, which means segmenting and categorizing tweets based on topics. The rest of the paper discusses the rest of the freshmen assignment as well as student’s reactions, however, those are less relevant to my research project. This paper is important, however, for understanding one methodology to studying tweets.

Jung, Eun-Young. "Transnational Migrations and YouTube Sensations: Korean Americans, Popular Music, and Social Media." *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 1 (2014): 54-82.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/ethnomusicology.58.1.0054>.

Ethnomusicologist Eun-Young Jung's discusses the role of social media for Korean Americans performing popular music and how that differs from the past decade. An important distinction is that she is not necessarily talking about K-pop stars with formal training and management, but rather those who receive fame from YouTube. She argues that YouTube has provided a "fundamental shift" in the popular music field, providing an equalizing opportunity for those with Internet access. I disagree with this assertion. According to Kim, Heo, and Choi, authors of "Comparative Trends... of K-pop Tweets," there are many factors that drive a tweet to popularity, such as linked URLs or multiple hashtags. YouTube is of course yet another social media site, and I cannot imagine their algorithm is that much different. Although more research into this is required, I predict that factors such as technology quality, title of video, and even race/gender have a role in what makes a viral video. However, I do appreciate that she discusses the issue of race for Asian Americans, particularly the stereotypes of "perpetual foreigner" and "meek and sexually undesirable males," which is partly why the AAPI community has not had musical success in the United States until very recently. Although bands like BTS are extremely successful, the "perpetual foreigner" stereotype is definitely relevant. Only one member can speak fluent English, and based on my observations, fans tend to infantilize the other members for their limited English, which then plays into the "meek" stereotype. Again, these are my observations and will require more specific evidence to back my claims. However, Jung does state that "racial stereotypes inform listening and consumption patterns in music." For example, African Americans have been attributed to a natural sense of rhythm and "hypermasculinity," as Jung describes. The "cute" and "innocent" attribution, as described in Aeilim Kim's dissertation, could be America's racialization of K-pop music.

Jung, Sun. "Youth, Social Media, and Transnational Cultural Distribution: The Case of Online K-pop Circulation." In *Mediated Youth Cultures*, edited by Andy Bennett and Brady Robards, 114-129. London, England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.

Cultural studies research fellow Sun Jung discusses the two-way flow between traditional corporate music industries and grassroots, online distribution, and how that affects the distribution of K-pop music. Contrary to traditional distribution, in which corporate media makes all of the decisions about the music production process, the circulation of K-pop is equally informed by fans' desires, which are expressed on social media. The chapter presents two contrasting case studies comparing grassroots to corporate distribution. The first is Psy's "Gangnam Style," which surpassed 200 million views within two months of its upload on YouTube and was the "most played video of all time," according to the 2012 Guinness Book of World Records. The video became an internet meme and was the basis for countless reaction and parody videos, which were even created by U.S. celebrities. To contrast this, Jung compares the relative failure of The Wonder Girls. Despite having internet success and a fandom community in Asia, they were unable to break into the U.S. pop market. This was even after learning English for three years, recording songs in English, and extensive promoting on iTunes and music stores. According to Jung, the "top-down" approach for music distribution simply does not work anymore; fans really do drive music production.

Kim, Aelim. "Korean Popular Music (K-pop), Youth Fan Culture, and Art Education." MA thesis, University of South Carolina, 2017. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. This dissertation discusses the intersections between Korean popular music and youth fan culture and how that relationship can inspire an art education curriculum that focuses on the technologies used to create content such as fan reaction videos. In particular, I read the chapters on "K-pop as a global phenomenon" and "grassroots youth fan culture of K-pop." According to Kim, K-pop is a global phenomenon because there is something for everyone, whether it be impressive synchronous dances, elaborate costumes, detailed audio-visual design, and so on. Similar to Sutton and Yong's arguments, K-pop also contains elements of multiculturalism, creating the transnational appeal. Oftentimes, K-pop stars sing and rap in English, and the music itself is a combination of R&B, bubblegum pop, hip-hop, and electro. Basically, producers closely study youth fan culture and use that to manufacture popular and attractive K-pop singers. This makes me wonder if BTS started the Black Lives Matter campaign out of earnest, or because their management thought it was "trendy." Like Sun Jung's argument, Kim states that the consumption of K-pop is "active," rather than "passive," and that K-pop can be considered a genre based upon innovative tools that "take advantage of young people's adaptation to digital technology." This "active adaptation" takes the form of YouTube and Twitter discussions, as well as reaction and parody videos. According to Jung, K-pop music videos can be regarded as medium that "reflects the conditions and desires of today's youth." This article highlights the importance of K-pop fan bases, providing context for the tweets I will study. Kim's primary research area is art education, hence the connection to curriculum. However, many of the claims she asserted about K-pop were consistent in other articles, giving her credibility.

Kim, Minjeong, Yun-cheol Heo, Seong-cheol Choi, and Han Woo Park. "Comparative Trends in Global Communication Networks of #Kpop Tweets." *Quality and Quantity* 48 (2014): 2687-2702. https://du-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1jii0mc/TN_cdi_proquest_journals_1550070890.

This article is a study on the context of global conversations centering around the hashtag #kpop, arguing that conversations within this hashtag are a result of interactions between users and the structure of Twitter. In other words, the mystical "Twitter algorithm" plays a hand in the makeup of these conversations, for tweets with URL's and hashtags are more likely to be seen and therefore retweeted. Moreover, the media environment has changed from a top-down approach to a mutual exchange between institutions and users. The significance of online communities for the distribution of media is similar to Jung's assertion about fans and music distribution; they are the reason K-pop is relevant. The three researchers chose the hashtag #kpop for its apolitical nature (although it's not as apolitical in 2020) and for the global community that makes it up. To analyze the tweets, they used an open software called Node XL, which sorts tweets based on criteria that you could pre-determine (location, keywords, and so on). While I am still unsure how I want to collect tweets, Node XL is one option for analysis. From this data, they found that significant clusters of #kpop tweets come from Japan, Indonesia, and North America, proving the "transnational community" that Swan and Jung assert. While reading this article I started to wonder if tweets regarding Black Lives Matter were in the center of the conversation because of the algorithm; exactly how much did it influence the conversations? Information about most of the authors was difficult to find; I do know that Minjeong Kim specializes in Asian American Studies, however.

Miller, Vincent. "Phatic Culture and the Status Quo: Reconsidering the Purpose of Social Media Activism." *Convergence* 23, no. 3 (2017): 251-269. https://du-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1jii0mc/TN_cdi_crossref_primary_10_1177_1354856515592512.

Miller's article takes on a more cynical perspective of social media activism, at least compared to the other authors in this bibliography. While many activism researchers argue that social media is a useful tool for "raising awareness," "organizing and coordinating action," or "inspiring change," Miller believes that most social media "activism" is no more than just engaging in phatic communication. "Phatic," to Miller, means "to express or maintain connection with others in the form of shared feelings, goodwill, or general sociability." In other words, sharing links, reposting infographics, and changing your profile picture is not done to elicit meaningful change, but rather to "look good" or seek approval amongst peers. After a major event in the world, activism is suddenly "cool." People want to look "cool," and thus engage in social media activism. This helps explain why there was an overwhelming rise in tweets and posts about racial justice after the murder of George Floyd this past summer. While it is true that many share and repost to satisfy their need to "do something," it is also important to remember that real change has taken place through collective action, thanks to the help of social media; the BTS Army community raised \$1 million for the Black Lives Matter movement, after all. However, the K-pop community is a very unique space, which is discussed in other annotations. This point of view is the minority in this annotated bibliography, although equally valid. One possible explanation is that Miller is a theology professor, and therefore may hold more conservative views about the influence of social media activism.

Nikunen, Kaarina. "From Irony to Solidarity: Affective Practice and Social Media Activism." *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, 10, no. 2 (2018): 10-21. https://du-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1jii0mc/TN_cdi_doaj_primary_oai_doaj_or_g_article_076d91c5c40542f7853dd10551149eff.

Media and communications professor Kaarina Nikunen analyzes two vastly different types of tweets regarding the refugee crisis in Europe. The first type of tweet concerns anti-immigrant, populist, and alt-right ideologies and primarily uses politics of irony in language and meme creation. This takes place in the form of trolling, "ironic detachment," and "cold humor." While irony is initially harmless, the people who make up these ideologies often target marginalized communities with their posts as well as normalize online hate crimes. Because these posts are rooted in irony, many people who engage in this behavior, such as Donald Trump, feel they can get away with it. This type of framework would be useful as a foil in my research project; perhaps I could compare #BTSArmy tweets to #whitelivesmatter tweets. On the other side, posts promoting solidarity and providing resources for refugees came from those who stood for human rights and equity. These online solidarity campaigns consisted of those offering their home for temporary stay, food and blanket drives, and so on. Nikunen described these solidarity campaigns as "new social movements," which are "decentralized and hierarchical, often with open structures and communication." Many of the online campaigns from this summer had this "decentralized" and "open structure" framework, such as the organized protests and the fundraising campaigns. Like Miller and other articles, Nikunen does mention performative activism, albeit briefly. While her view is not as caustic as Miller's, she does state that performative activism takes places when oneself is in the center, rather than those you are trying

to help. This occurs very frequently because according to Nikunen, “being compassionate is difficult.”

Sutton, Anderson R. “Fusion and Questions of Korean Cultural Identity in Music.” *Korean Studies* 35, no. 1 (2011): 4-24. https://du-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1jii0mc/TN_cdi_proquest_journals_1009286791.

Sutton’s article questions what is “fusion” in Korean music (not limited to popular music) and argues that “fusion music” is an intentional and perceptible mixture between musical genres. In other words, “fusion” is an unambiguous mix between Korean elements and other musical elements with “foreign” origins. Additionally, Sutton questions if there is really such thing as “pure” or “authentic” music; all music and cultural products are influenced by other cultures in some way. This is especially true for Korean music, which has had outside influence from Japan and the West since the 19th century. Sutton pinpoints that Korean music’s identity rests in its fusion elements; Korean music IS fusion music. He also states that identity of any music is dependent on the listener as much as the performer; cultural context matters in the consumption and interpretation of music. This article is significant in that it provides further evidence of “hybridity” in Korean music, as many other authors have claimed. While Sutton earned a master’s and doctorate in ethnomusicology, he currently serves as the Vice Chancellor for University of Hawaii Manoa. This strikes me as a tad odd, for research is no longer his primary focus. However he did chair the department of Asian and Pacific Studies at the same school, meaning he is most likely a position of authority in this topic.

Swan, Anna Lee. “Transnational Identities and Feeling in Fandom: Place and Embodiment in K-pop Fan Reaction Videos.” *Communication, Culture, and Critique* 11, no. 4 (2018): 548-565. https://du-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1jii0mc/TN_cdi_crossref_primary_10_1093ccc_tcy026.

Swan’s article explores the concept of transnational identities and feelings of community and vulnerability in K-pop fan reaction videos. To Swan, “transnational” is defined as “transcending national boundaries;” while fans live across the globe, the community is rooted in a “shared affinity,” a non-space such as Twitter or YouTube. The importance of online fan base is also noted in Sun Jung’s article on K-pop distribution; the online community is a key component to the music’s relevance and circulation and should be closely examined when researching K-pop. Specifically, Swan investigates K-pop fan reaction videos, which are real-time, raw videos expressing reactions to newly dropped music videos. Swan states that the reaction video is a means to bring people together, in that it shows a private side of one’s life (raw emotions, a glimpse into home life), as well as a public side, since the video is on the internet. While fan reaction videos take the space of YouTube rather than Twitter, the idea of community across national boundaries, as well as the significance of vulnerability within these communities can apply to analyzing tweets; fans are still sharing a part of themselves on the internet. Swan is a doctoral candidate, however, that does not make her research any less legitimate. Much of her research is focused on transnationalism, online communities, and content creation.

Ter Molen, Sherri L. “A Cultural Imperialistic Homecoming: The Korean Wave Reaches the United States.” In *The Korean Wave Korean Popular Culture in Global Context*, edited

by Yasue Kuwahara. 149-187. London, England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014. https://du-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/f/1jii0mc/TN_cdi_springer_books_10_1057_9781137350282

Ter Molen's chapter discusses the "contra-flow of Korean media entering the United States." This is significant due to Korea's history of U.S. cultural imperialism, in which media flowed one-way from the United States to Korea. Ter Molen uses a "global cultural flows" framework, which provides an understanding to the movement of people, technology, and ideology, as well as "cultural hybridity theory," which states that globalized US media are taken in by local cultures and reflected in their own media. The chapter then goes on to explain imperial history between the United States and Korea, providing context for the claims of K-pop's hybridity that many of the authors in this bibliography stated. Ter Molen is considered an expert in *Hallyu* (The Korean Wave), proving her authority on this topic.

Yong, Jin Dal. "Critical Discourse of K-pop Within Globalization." In *New Korean Wave*, 111-130. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016.

Yong's chapter explores how Korean popular music is a hybrid between Korean and Western cultures and how local cultures force globalization. Dal Jin Yong is a distinguished media studies scholar, with a specialization in globalization, differentiating him from others in the annotated bibliography. The hybrid is primarily found in linguistic and musical elements; K-pop stars often sing and rap in English, and according to Aelim Kim, K-pop is heavily influenced by the American genres of hip-hop, bubblegum pop, electro, and R&B. Before the 1980's, Korean popular music was primarily domestic in production and consumption. However, once hip-hop arrived in South Korea, popular music included more of those musical elements, making K-pop increasingly more youth-oriented. This proved to be of high commercial success, and Korean music industries embraced this hybrid for commercial capitalism. Yong describes Korean popular music as a "candidate for alternative globalization," in which other cultures penetrate to West, which is the opposite of what has happened in the past. According to Yong, many younger Koreans embrace this globalization, as it adds another element to Korean identity. In turn, A sub-culture of Western audiences embrace this genre as well, although whether or not K-pop is considered "mainstream" remains unclear. This article provides an explanation for why K-pop's hybridity led to its popularity in the West.