Korean Music Promotion in Japan

The Social and Cultural Impact of K-Pop Consumption

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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To my grandparents,

Adalberto, Dina, Faustino and Romilda

Acknowledgement

Abstract

From SM idols, such as BoA and TVXQ to Big Hit's BTS, Japanese promotion of K-pop has been highly successful with K-pop idols selling millions of copies of their Japanese-language albums. K-pop is generally viewed as part of a larger Korean Wave, which in turn has been described as a transcultural flow. In academic terms, a transcultural flow is a movement of products from one country to another that has diverse cultural connotations linked with the country of origin. Existing studies of K-pop have focused on the production and distribution of K-pop at local and global level, the sociocultural impact of K-pop consumption within specific communities of fans and the effect of new media and consumption habits on K-pop's promotion, distribution, and consumption. However, less attention has been paid to the ways in which K-pop has been promoted in Japan, and how that compares with other markets.

This research offers a comprehensive analysis of K-pop promotion and its consumption in Japan *as a transcultural flow in its own right*. It addresses three main aspects to: explore the structure and localisation strategies of Japanese promotion; examine the difference between Japanese, American and Chinese promotion of K-pop; and understand Japanese consumption habits. This thesis adopts a framework which combines Iwabuchi's conceptualisation of a transcultural flow and Appadurai's notion of mediascapes. It draws on interviews and focus groups conducted during fieldwork in Japan and South Korea, alongside a visual analysis of online and offline promotional materials from the four most successful K-pop companies: SM, JYP and YG Entertainment, and Big Hit. It also provides a comparative analysis of K-pop promotion in China and America with that of Japan to highlight differences in the domestic music industries, K-pop's interconnectivity level and the different impact of familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness on K-pop consumption. Through an analysis of the unique approach to the Japanese market, this thesis demonstrates that K-pop can be viewed as a transcultural flow alongside that of the Korean Wave.

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avex Group	**avex**
Bangtan Sonyeondan	**BTS**
Big Hit Entertainment / Big Hit Music	**Big Hit**
Business to business	**B2B**
Business to costumer	**B2C**
Intellectual Property	**IP**
Information Technology	**IT**
HYBE Corporation	**HYBE**
Japanese Korean Pop Music	**J-Kpop**
Japan	**JP**
Japanese Pop Music	**J-Pop**
JYP Entertainment	**JYP**
Korean Broadcasting System	**KBS**
Korean Culture Center in Japan	**KCCJ**
Korean Japanese Pop Music	**K-Jpop**
Korean Culture and Information Service	**KOCIS**
Korean Foundation for International Culture Exchange	**KOFICE**
Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism -South Korea	**MCST-SK**
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan	**MOFAJ**
Ministry of Foreign Affairs – South Korea	**MOFASK**
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade – South Korea	**MOFATSK**
Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai	**NHK**
Recording Industry Association	**RIA**
Recording Industry Association of Japan	**RIAJ**
Republic of South Korea	**ROK**
South Korea	**SK**
SM Entertainment	**SM**
Social Network Service	**SNS**
Universal Music Group	**UMG**
Universal Music Japan	**UMJ**
World Association for Hallyu Studies	**WAHS**
YG Entertainment	**YG**
YouTube	**YT**

Glossary

Debut: the first official release of new music on the market by a new idol or idol group. This term is also used to indicate the first performance, promotion, and music release on a foreign market. Occasionally, it also refers to the first music release for a sub-unit or solo activities of the group's members.

Fan Meetings: small concerts where music performances are interposed by short segments of interviews and games. The idols are usually helped in the delivery of the different segments by a host.

Hallyu, Kanryu and Korean Wave: The terms all indicate the flow of Korean pop cultural products known as the Korean Wave. The term *Hallyu* refers to the Sino-Korean pronunciation of the word 韓流, which is read in Japanese as *Kanryu*.

Idol band: the equivalent of a band, where idols play an instrument on stage while performing their music.

Idol group: formed by two or more idols that sing or rap and dance together on stage. A parallel with other music worlds would equate an idol group to a boy band or girl band.

Idols: male and female singers or rappers that perform K-pop music in Korea. The term indicates a very specific type of performer -read: all-rounder entertainer- that is selected and trained to become a versatile artist that works in the Korean pop music industry.

Meet & Greet: also called a fan signing event. Fans queue to meet their idols face-to-face, receive an autograph, greet them and personally hand them a small gift or present.

Promotional Video or Music Video: in Japan, Music Videos are commonly referred to as Promotional Videos or PVs. In the context of this research, the terms MV (MVs) and PV (PVs) will be used interchangeably as they are both referring to the same type of promotional material.

Solo Activities: idols' activities outside of their group's activities. This can refer to either acting or performing music.

Solo Artists: an idol that performs (sings or raps) alone on stage. In the context of this research, this term is used to distinguish them from group's members as both are known as "idols".

Sub-Units: a smaller unit, comprised of two or more members of the same idol group, releasing and promoting music separately from their group's activities.

Title Track or Title Song: the "main" song in an album or EP. Usually paired with a music video.

Note on Romanisation of Korean and Japanese Words, Places and Names

Throughout this thesis Korean and Japanese names are given in the traditional way of family name first. The only exceptions to this are in reference to authors who have published in English and give their own names with the family name last. All Korean words are transliterated following the Revised Romanization of the Korean system, except in place names that are commonly used in English, such as Seoul. All Japanese words are transliterated under the Hepburn system including the use of macrons, except in place names that are commonly used in English, such as Tokyo. All translations are the work of the author, except for those journal article titles which provide their own English translation. The name of companies and their social media accounts are written maintaining their official style and brand identities, such as avex and SMTown. All the idols' names are written following their company-selected stylisation found in their English-language-based websites, such as BLACKPINK, SHINee and TVXQ!.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In East Asia, the Korean Wave has been particularly successful within the Japanese market, as the success of K-pop music has been steadily growing and Korean idols are now sharing a large portion of the Japanese music market. An example of K-pop's long-lasting success in Japan is the double, platinum disks obtained by BTS for their single album *Mic Drop/ DNA/ Crystal Snow*, released in December 2017 (allkpop, 2018; Cha, 2018; Yonhap, 2018a). Another example is BIGBANG attracting record numbers of concertgoers for their dome tour in Japan, even compared to famous J-pop idol groups (allkpop, 2014a; DI:GA ONLINE, 2017).

Similarly, there is the December 2020 debut of the J-pop & K-pop female idol group NiziU by Sony Music Entertainment (SONY) and JYP Entertainment (JYP) that topped the Oricon chart as well as the Japan Billboard chart with their debut song, *Step and a step*. Just within 29 days of their debut, the group won the *Special Achievement Award* at the *62nd Japan Record Award* (SONY & JYP, 2020) and also took part in the *71st Kōhaku Uta Gassen* broadcasted and organized by NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai) (KYODO NEWS, 2020). On a similar record-breaking track, the Asahi Shimbun reports that BTS is the top-selling artist in Japan for 2021, with $162 million, around 18.50 billion yen (The Asahi Shimbun, 2021). The Japanese music chart Oricon reveals that BTS also topped the annual chart for *Album* with 993 thousand copies sold. According to the chart, the only other foreign artist to achieve such a ranking was Michael Jackson with *Thriller* in 1984 (Oricon Music, 2021).

In addition, in a chart ranking of YouTube views during the period between December 3-9, 2021, six out of the top ten positions were taken by K-pop idols. In 2018, Oricon revealed that the total revenue for Korean pop music in Japan was just shy of $2.6 billion or 298.47 billion yen. These sales figures include only the sales of CDs, DVDs, and Blu-Rays (THE DONG-A ILBO, 2019). Throughout the years, many K-pop artists have topped the Oricon charts and received gold, platinum or both disks for their sales (RIAJ, 2021c; 2018a) from the Record Industry Association of Japan (RIAJ). Just from these numbers and examples, it is evident that K-pop has had and still has a solid presence and audience in Japan.

However, K-pop is not merely a popular product in Japan: it is part of a complex system of consumption that is closely linked with the Korean Wave, or the flow of South Korean popular products that is slowly becoming a global phenomenon. As such, scholarly studies have discussed K-pop's presence in Japan in relation to the consumption

of the Korean Wave. Many studies have been conducted on the reasoning behind the Korean Wave's success in Japan, the negative responses to such fame and, the Japanese audience's consumption practices (Chae, 2014; Chung, 2015; Epstein, 2010; Iwabuchi, 2006; Kim, Juoak, 2015; Lee, Hyangjin, 2010; 2017; Lee, Soobum and Ju, 2011; Lie, 2013b; 2016; Mōri, 2008; Oh, I., 2011; Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014). A key element among those studies is the collocation of the Korean Wave in Japan as a transcultural flow. The idea of a transcultural flow is developed by Iwabuchi as a concept that describes the constant movement of products and information between countries. This term also implies that the constant consumption and presence of foreign products might have an impact on the culture consuming them. In the context of this research, the term is adopted to highlight the consumption of Korean products' impact on the Japanese public[1]. More specifically, the term *transcultural flow* denotes a continuous exchange between the culture behind the products and that of the consumers (Iwabuchi, 2002b; 2005; 2010). In other words, there is a contamination or fertilisation process of South Korean and Japanese cultures that happens through the consumption practices of the Korean Wave in Japan.

As it will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, the Korean Wave has been analysed and debated as a transcultural and/or transnational phenomenon as well as a transcultural *flow*. The terms *transcultural* and *transnational* carry similar meanings. Iwabuchi (2002b) underlines that both terms signify the same process as they result equally in the means of transculturation or cross-contamination between the cultures involved in the flow. In this thesis, I apply both terms with a similar viewpoint. More specifically, the first implies that the phenomenon goes behind cultural barriers and it suggests that national barriers are also broken. The second stresses that it goes beyond national borders. This also implies a certain level of impact on the consuming culture, even though it is not the primary focus.

A transcultural flow is the result of the mutual application of both transcultural and transnational qualities of a phenomenon. Put simply, the effects of transnationality and transculturality influence both the consuming and the producing culture. Discussions on the quality of the Korean Wave as transcultural or transnational can be found in the analysis and studies conducted on the Korean Wave's consumption globally, regionally or by state. Similarly, studies have been conducted on K-pop as a transcultural or

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[1]This point will be further discussed in section 2.1 and 2.2.

transnational element[2], especially in response to the recent international success of BTS. However, few studies consider K-pop as a transcultural flow, particularly in relation to its presence and consumption in Japan.

As such, this thesis challenges the notion that K-pop is solely a transcultural phenomenon belonging to the Korean Wave to demonstrate that it is a *transcultural flow*. It will do so by applying the academic understanding of the core elements of a mediated transcultural flow: familiarity, odourlessness, and hybridity. It will break down the interconnectivity of K-pop's promotions in Japan to showcase its dependence on the Japanese music industry's iron triangle. It will also argue that said interconnectivity has developed transcultural connections between fans that are solely related to the consumption of K-pop in Japan. It will demonstrate the uniqueness of the Japanese promotion for K-pop through a comparative analysis with the promotion in the Chinese and American pop music markets. Lastly, it will argue specifically the academic notion of hybridity in the presence of K-pop in Japan.

This introductory chapter is structured in three sections: 1.1 K-pop in Japan; 1.2 The Korean Wave as a transcultural flow and, 1.3 this project's aim, research questions and structure. In section 1.1, the chapter succinctly presents K-pop's history in Japan: from the *Winter Sonata* phenomenon to the first K-pop idol to debut on the Japanese pop music market. Then, in the next section, it introduces the Korean Wave as a transcultural flow: it sets the argument around the academic debate on the transnationality of the Korean Wave and its characteristics as a transcultural flow. Lastly, it establishes the aim, research questions and structure of the thesis, focusing on highlighting the originality of the project, its framework and methodology.

1.1 K-pop in Japan

In 2003, the Korean drama *Winter Sonata* was broadcasted for the first time in Japan, with a positive response from Japanese audiences: after the first run of the hour-long edited version of the episodes (with dubbed audio in Japanese), NHK was overwhelmed with requests to broadcast the series in its original Korean editing. The company gave in to demand and, in the winter of 2004, the NHK's satellite channel BS2

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[2]In this thesis, the terms phenomenon and element are used to describe K-pop's role within the Korean Wave to indicate that K-pop is analysed and discussed as a core element of a transcultural or transnational flow. As such, from this perspective, K-pop can and is described as a transcultural or transnational phenomenon or element. Both terms are adopted in this research to separate the discussion of *K-pop as a transcultural flow of its own* and K-pop as a core component of a transcultural flow.

re-aired the TV series as requested—in its original Korean audio and with the addition of Japanese subtitles (KOREA.net, [No Date]-a; KOCIS, 2011b; 2011d; Mōri, 2008; Chae, 2014). Slowly, attention was diverted from this initial interest towards other products from South Korea. The *Winter Sonata* phenomenon paved the way for Korean music, television, food, fashion, and games to enter the Japanese market. This sudden interest of the Japanese public in Korean drama and popular music is known as the *Korean Wave Boom* (Chae, 2014; Hirata, 2008; KOCIS, 2011d; Lee, H., 2010; Mōri, 2008; 2009; Yamanaka, 2010).

Among the diverse Korean music labels, SM Entertainment (SM), YG Entertainment (YG) and JYP, are also known as 'The Big Three'. Until recently, they were the most successful and profitable music labels managing K-pop idols and actors. Currently, that title is held by BTS' company, Big Hit[3] (allkpop, 2016; Salmon, 2013). SM is considered the music label that created the contemporary Korean idol system, which was modelled on the Japanese system (Fuhr, 2016; Lie, 2015; Lie and Oh, 2014). The beginning of the Japanese consumption of K-pop can be traced back to the late 1990s (Jung, E., 2015a); however, it was not until the early 2000s that K-pop companies actively tried to promote K-pop idols in Japan.

The first to venture into the Japanese market was Lee Soo Man, founder of SM. Through a partnership with avex Group (avex), the first K-pop idol debuted on the Japanese music market (Lie and Oh, 2014; SMTown, 2020). BoA is considered the most influential female solo artist to have entered the Japanese music market at the beginning of the 2000s; RAIN, a male solo idol, is another idol of the first generation to have been very well received by the Japanese public (Fuhr, 2016; KOREA.net, [No Date]-a; KOCIS, 2011c; 2011d). Since then, BoA has been active and successfully promoting in Japan for the past 20 years (Boa JP Official, 2021). Similarly, TVXQ! are also another K-pop group from SM that has been actively promoting in Japan for the past 15 years. The group, known as 東方神起 (Tōhōshinki)[4] in Japan, celebrated their long career with the new album *XV* (avex, 2019). Following the success of artists like BoA and RAIN, other music labels have steadily included a Japanese debut and a tour for their idols: among the second and third generations of K-pop idols there has been an intense promotion scheme for the Japanese music market.

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[3]Big Hit Entertainment in 2020 changed its structure and rebranded itself into HYBE Corporation. Currently, under HYBE Labels, the music division of the corporation, Big Hit Music is the company managing the septet. In this work, I will refer to the company behind BTS as Big Hit. Section 3.4.1.2 explains this change more in detail.
[4]Section 3.4.1.4 explains the different names for K-pop idols.

1.2 The Korean Wave as a transcultural flow

The term Korean Wave was first used in China in the late 1990s when a Chinese magazine for the younger generations published an article about the sudden influx of K-drama on the Chinese market and the follow-up importation of K-pop. This flow of drama was labelled as "(韩流) by the PRC" (Chua and Iwabuchi, 2008b, p.2); in Korean, it reads as *Hallyu* (韓流). It is said that the term was a pun played on the homonym Chinese word for 'cold current', meant to underline the short-lived course that this influx would have in the Chinese market (Shim, 2019). Despite the negative meaning of the pun, the Korean Wave went on to become an international phenomenon, firstly in Asia, especially in Japan, and then in the USA and Europe with *Gangnam Style*. Nowadays, with BTS, it is considered a global phenomenon.

The Korean Wave is a cultural flow, based on an international and intercultural media flow of products and it has become a global phenomenon (Chua and Iwabuchi, 2008b; Choi, Jungbong, 2015a; Nornes, 2015; Dutton, 2009; Erni and Chua, 2005b; Kim, S., 2019; KOCIS, 2011d). It is a highly complex and articulated phenomenon. It has influenced and is influenced by a myriad of experiences, discourses and cultural practices that are hybrid, translocal, transnational, and national (Lee, K., 2008). This creates the basis to look at the Korean Wave and K-pop as an intra-regional or global media flow which has the characteristic to be analysed from the perspective of Iwabuchi's transcultural flow and Appadurai's mediascapes. As such, it presents details and characteristics that fit those of a transcultural flow. This project adopts Iwabuchi's understanding of a transcultural flow, developed through Iwabuchi's studies of Japanese consumption of foreign pop cultural products and the movement of Japanese pop cultural products towards other East Asian countries (2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2005; 2009; 2010; 2015; 2017a; 2017b).

A transcultural flow is part of the process of globalisation and helps with the development of the process of *transculturation* (Iwabuchi, 2002b). Appadurai describes the same process of globalisation and transculturation through intricate cultural flows. Those flows are diverse in origins and contents, yet they are all mediated and can be analysed through a set of "scapes" (Appadurai, 1996). These "scapes" represent the diverse forms of cultural information and flow that are taking part in the process of globalisation and that help form and develop the process of social imagination (Appadurai, 1990; Appadurai, 1996). This process runs parallel to that of transculturation. It is used to develop deeper understandings and representative images of the flow's

country of origin (Iwabuchi, 2002b; Kim, M. and Kwon, 2019; Kim, S., 2019; Shim, 2019).

The Korean Wave is a transcultural flow based on both Iwabuchi and Appadurai: it has been studied as a mediated cultural flow and as a transcultural way of consumption of Korean popular products (Iwabuchi, 2002a; 2008; 2010; 2013; Jeong, 2012; Jin and Yoon, 2016; Lee, K., 2008; Martin et al., 2020; Ryoo, 2014). Similar studies have focused on the nature of the Korean Wave as a mediated flow and the impact that the introduction of new SNS, sharing platforms and YouTube has had on the popularity and spreading of the flow (Choi, Jungbong, 2015a; Choi, Jungbong and Maliangkay, 2015b; Hong and Kim, 2013; Jin, 2015; 2016; Jin et al., 2021; Jung, H., 2017a; Jung, H., 2017b; Kim, M. and Kwon, 2019; Kim, S., 2019; Lee, K., 2008; Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes, 2015; Martin et al., 2020; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; 2014; Oh, I. and Park, 2012).

The strengths of these studies are their diverse perspectives: some focused on the business changes that occurred after the introduction of new media, such as YouTube and Social Network Services (SNS). According to those studies, the impact of the introduction of new media within the circulation and consumption of the flow helped pave the way for K-pop and its industries to take centre stage in the Korean Wave (Oh and Jang, 2020; Oh and Lee, 2013, 2014; Oh and Park, 2012). Others highlighted how the consumption of the Korean Wave through media, particularly SNS, accelerated the process of diffusion that consequently increased the cultural hybridity present in the flow. Cultural hybridity is innate to the flow as it is the result of continuous exchange at various levels of cultural information between the component of the Korean Wave way and its consumers (Jin, 2015; 2016; Kim, M.-y. and Kwon, 2019; Kim, S., 2019). The term *hybridity* refers to the "celebration of cultural difference and fusion, and it resonates with the globalization mantra […] and the supposedly inevitable transformation of all cultures" (Kraidy, 2005, p.1). The complex articulation of the Korean Wave as a transcultural phenomenon is reflected in the discourses around the global spread of K-pop's consumption. This reflection is particularly evident in the discourses on K-pop consumption in Japan.

1.3 This project's aim, research questions and structure

This research looks at the presence of K-pop in Japan as a core element of the Korean Wave and as a phenomenon that helps the formulation of positive representational ideas of South Korea. The originality lies in the approach used to analyse K-pop's

presence in the Japanese market: it is analysed and discussed as a transcultural flow of its own. Specifically, the notion of K-pop as being simply a transcultural phenomenon is challenged to demonstrate that it is a *flow*. To do so, it is analysed through the key characteristics of any mediated transcultural flow. On one hand, Iwabuchi's characteristics of hybridity, familiarity and odourlessness (2002b; 2005) will be appraised and discussed in terms of K-pop promotional habits and consumption. Specifically, the academic application of hybridity to K-pop's presence and promotion in Japan will be evaluated against its reception by K-pop fans. On the other hand, the mediated transcultural flow will be looked at in terms of mediascapes (Appadurai, 1996) to determine their presence and influence on the notion of South Korea. This research sees the flow of K-pop entering the Japanese market as a transcultural, mediated flow that is distinct but integrated within the larger flow known as the Korean Wave.

As a transcultural flow, K-pop can be looked at as a product of South Korea that has an impact on the reception of Korean products by Japanese consumers. It also can be seen as an alternative form of cultural diplomacy in the form of *transculturation*: a bottom-up approach that sees the process of transculturation being created and developed through everyday consumption habits and intrapersonal, intracultural, and intraregional interactions. As such, this research aims to develop a comprehensive analysis of K-pop promotion and its consumption in Japan as a transcultural flow. It will do so by ascertaining whether the characteristics of a transcultural flow apply to the case of K-pop in Japan. This objective is developed through three research questions:

I) How are Japanese promotions of K-pop structured and localised?

II) How do Japanese promotions differ from K-pop promotions in other foreign countries?

III) How are K-pop promotions consumed in Japan?

1.3.1 How are Japanese promotions of K-pop localised and structured?

With this first research question, this thesis sets to look in-depth at K-pop's approach to the Japanese pop music market. K-pop has slowly and steadily become a core element of Korean culture consumption in Japan, making it not only one of the main aspects of Korean culture used for cultural diplomacy's activities but also a core element of the Japanese pop music market. A key component of this project is the analysis of K-pop's promotional habits and strategies for the Japanese pop music market. K-pop's promotional activities and strategies for this market are highly localised to the point of differing completely from their usual ones. The data relevant to this analysis was collected

through the monitoring of Japanese and Korean websites and social accounts of selected companies, and interviews conducted with experts and Japanese university students that are fans of K-pop. The selected companies are SM, JYP and YG as the 'Big Three' companies behind K-pop as well as Big Hit[5] as it is the company behind BTS. Table 1 and Table 2 in the appendix list all the idols, websites and accounts selected for the data collection. Similarly, Table 4 of the Appendix list the YouTube channels also monitored. The data from the websites and media accounts serves as the base to develop the understanding and analysis of the promotional strategies. The interviews' responses are used to formulate the structure of interconnectivity created among fans both online and in real life.

More specifically, this research examines and analyses the promotional aspects adopted by the selected companies through the lenses of a transcultural flow. It focuses on the promotional aspects that are exclusive to the Japanese music market and their connection to the market's rules and system of promotion. This analysis also emphasises those elements that are linked with the Japanese music market's iron triangle as it has been established that it has a strong impact on K-pop promotion in Japan (Lie, 2013b). Further, it also probes the effect of the Japanese analogue market on the promotions' structure and components to determine the uniqueness of Japanese promotions for K-pop. In this project, the term *analogue[6]* is used to refer to the Japanese pop music market to highlight the central role played by physical forms of advertisement [7] and music consumption such as flyers, billboards, CDs and DVDs. Lastly, this research identifies the points of convergence (Lie, 2016) and contact between fans, both online and in-person, to determine the interconnectivity of Japanese consumption of K-pop.

1.3.2 How do Japanese promotions differ from K-pop promotions in other foreign countries?

To demonstrate the uniqueness of K-pop promotion in Japan, this thesis adopts a case study approach to examine the promotional strategies for the Chinese and American music markets. It offers this analysis as a comparative case for Japanese

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[5] Section 3.4.1 explains in detail respectively the selection process of the participants, the companies, and the idols.

[6] Throughout this thesis, the term *analogue* will be used to refer to the preferred mode of consumption and promotion of the Japanese music market to underline the difference with the more current practices based on digital promotion through SNS and music consumption through online platforms.

[7] This usage of *analogue* is adapted from the term *analogue marketing*, which indicates a form of marketing that principally uses physical forms of promotion instead of relying on more contemporary digital means such as social media and online platforms.

promotions to underline their uniqueness. Since the beginning of K-pop's international success in East Asia, K-pop companies have looked at the Chinese and American markets as key music markets where they could integrate themselves. As such, for the Chinese market, SM has been chosen as a case study to better highlight the similarities with the company's approach to Japanese promotion. Similarly, the case studies for the USA pop music market have been selected to reflect the changes in the structure of American promotion for K-pop throughout the years and the similarities and differences with the Japanese promotion.

The analysis of K-pop promotion is based on secondary, English-language-based archive data. For the Chinese market, the case study focuses on SM and its approach to K-pop promotion in China. It looks at the evolution of said promotion over time and the implications of those changes on K-pop in China. For the American market, the analysis focuses on the USA pop music market: data was collected through official English language resources. The case study for the USA market involves the analysis of SM and JYP's first promotional attempts, *Gangnam Style* and BTS. This approach has been chosen to offer not only a comparison with the first debut cases of K-pop in the USA but also to underline the diverse approach currently in use. It will look at *Gangnam Style* as a breaking point for K-pop within the USA market. Lastly, the analysis of BTS' case demonstrates that their approach and success set them apart from any other approach used, even in Japan.

This analysis is based on the same understanding of transcultural mediated flow adopted for the first research question: it looks at the characteristics of familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness of K-pop promotion in these two markets. This analysis serves two purposes: first, it helps to validate the argument that sees K-pop approaches to Japanese promotion as unique in all forms and shapes; second, it offers the opportunity to analyse the consequences of adopting promotional strategies based on the approach to the Japanese market for the Chinese and American markets. Also, this research closely considers the impact that these different approaches had on K-pop's images and presence in those markets. The analysis demonstrates that even if you use the same approach adopted for the Japanese market, the obtained results vary.

1.3.3 How are K-pop promotions consumed in Japan?

This last research question aims to demonstrate how K-pop is consumed. Addressing this question will demonstrate that K-pop is a transcultural flow and does so through the application of the concepts of familiarity, odourlessness and hybridity.

Particularly, it addresses the application of the notion of hybridity to K-pop presence in Japan to question its reception by Japanese fans. It argues that the notion of familiarity and odourlessness are contextual to the specific circumstances of the fan. On hybridity, it argues that K-pop has the characteristics to be considered a hybrid even in the Japanese market. The concept of hybridity has been discussed and analysed in terms of the overall production of K-pop and the evolution of the Korean Wave (Jin, 2013; 2016; Jung, E., 2015b; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Oh, I. and Lee, H., 2014).

This analysis is based on the interviews conducted and the data collected through the monitoring of official Japanese and Korean websites and accounts of the selected companies. Through a visual analysis of the promotional materials and the comments by the interviewees on their consumption of K-pop in Japan, this analysis looks at the interpretation of those promotions as familiar, hybrid or odourless. It utilises the characteristics of a transcultural flow along with the images and fantasies built through mediascapes to analyse the Japanese public consumption of K-pop promotions. Particularly, it will scrutinise the perception of fans of K-pop and their opinions on Japanese promotions.

1.3.4 Thesis' structure

This thesis has a total of eight chapters. After this introduction, **Chapter 2** is the literature review. It is structured in four sections, each aiming to address key academic studies on the Korean Wave and K-pop. It begins by introducing the academic debate on the description of the Korean Wave and K-pop as transcultural. Through the work of Choi and Maliangkay, Eds. (2015); Jin (2015, 2016); Jin and Yoon (2016) and Lee, K. (2008) and Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes, Eds. (2015), among many other scholars, the chapter presents the debate around the definition of the Korean Wave as transcultural and the impact that new SNS, YouTube and sharing platforms had on its definition and composition (Kim, D. and Kim, M., 2011; Kim, K., 2017; Lee, Sangjoon, 2015; Oh, I., 2009; Ryoo, 2009; Yoon, M., 2017; Yoon, T. and Kang, 2017).

Then, it will offer a brief introduction to the key concepts related to the framework of this thesis: Iwabuchi's transcultural flow and Appadurai's "scapes", specifically mediascape (Appadurai, 1990; 1996; Iwabuchi, 2002b; 2005; 2009; 2010; 2013; 2017b). This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. The chapter also discusses the application of the concepts of hybridity, familiarity and odourlessness to the Korean Wave. To do so, it centres the argument on the work of Dal Yong Jin, who has extensively studied the Korean Wave and its components as a transcultural phenomenon

(2011; 2013; 2015; 2016; 2017; Jin and Yoon, 2016; Jin et al., 2021). Then, this chapter analyses the debate around K-pop's hybridity. Starting with the work of John Lie (2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2014; 2015; 2021) and Fuhr (2016), it will look at the diverse application of the concept as it will be addressed in the analysis discussed in Chapter 8.

The third section of Chapter 2 will focus on the academic debate surrounding the impact of new media and IT on the expansion and evolution of the Korean Wave. Again, the work of Dal Yong Jin, the essays collected by Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes (2015), and those by Youna Kim (2013, 2021) are part of the argumentation, along with the work of other authors such as Oh Ingyu (Oh, I., 2013; 2017; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Lee, H., 2014). Through this discussion, the case study of *Gangnam Style* and BTS is introduced. Lastly, the relationship between K-pop, the Korean Wave and soft power is argued and discussed in Section 2.4. To better situate the debate around the Korean Wave and soft power, the work of Joseph S. Nye on soft power (Nye, J. and Kim, 2013; 2004; 2008; 2009; 2011a; 2017) and works on cultural and public diplomacy (Ang et al., 2015; Brown, 2009; Cowan and Cull, 2008; Cull, 2008; 2012; 2019; Cummings, 2009; Kang, 2015; Kim, H., 2017) are also considered. In the last section, the chapter situates the project within the selected literature and academic debate while also introducing the relevance and originality of this study.

Chapter 3 introduces the framework and the methodology. Building on the brief presentation offered in section 2.1, this chapter argues the relevance and connection between the two concepts adopted as the framework: Iwabuchi's transcultural flow and Appadurai's mediascapes. Then, it addresses the application of the transcultural flow's characteristic to K-pop. This section elaborates in more detail upon the application of the characteristics to the studies on K-pop and per extension the Korean Wave. As they are later applied to K-pop's consumption in Japan, this section also illustrates their use. The third section illustrates the application of the framework, focusing on its relevance for each of the research questions. The last section introduces the methodological tools and analysis adopted and offers insight into the process of data collection and the fieldwork experience. The data analysis with examples and criteria of selection and relevance to each research question is also addressed in this section.

Chapter 4 is the background chapter. It briefly addresses the Korean Wave's boom in Japan with the *Winter Sonata Phenomenon*. Then, it addresses the possible negative side of the Korean Wave's presence in Japan. In doing so, this chapter examines the anti-Korean movement called *Kenkanryū* (嫌韓流) and the connection it has to the perception of the Korean Wave as South Korean soft power and cultural diplomacy. The

responses of K-pop fans to the negative reception of the Korean Wave are included, along with my personal experience and observations from my own fieldwork.

Chapter 5, chapter 6, and **chapter 7** are the three empirical chapters. Each chapter addresses one of the research questions: chapter 5 elaborates on the data and findings for the first research question; chapter 6 develops the arguments for the second research question; lastly, chapter 7 discusses the third and last research question. This structure was chosen to emphasize the uniqueness of the Japanese promotion of K-pop by a) addressing the structuring and localisation of K-pop promotion in Japan in relation to the Japanese pop music market and its rules; b) elaborating on the similarities to the Japanese promotion found in Chinese and American promotion for K-pop to showcase their effectiveness or lack thereof; and, c) by highlighting the consumption of K-pop by Japanese fans to stress the uniqueness of the Japanese approach to K-pop promotions and the reasons for its success.

Chapter 5 addresses the first research question by arguing that K-pop can be considered as a transcultural flow through the analysis of its interconnectivity. The analysis is based on data collected through interviews with experts and Japanese students who are fans of K-pop – 12 interviews in total. This data is paired with that collected through monitoring of Japanese and Korean websites and media accounts of the selected K-pop companies, listed in the appendix's tables. This data gathering spans from 2018 to late 2020, with a period of three-month fieldwork conducted in Tokyo in the summer of 2019. It covers roughly the past 20 years of K-pop promotion in Japan. Combined, this data presents the argument that Japanese promotions for K-pop are heavily influenced by the Japanese pop music markets and its analogue preferences: DVDs and CDs over digital consumption. In this context, the term **analogue** to refer to DVDs and CDs is adopted to reflect the *physical nature* of this type of music consumption. By contrast, the term **digital** is used to represent *online music consumption* through streaming platforms, such as Spotify or Amazon Music or Apple Music, and digital versions of CDs and DVDs, available on platforms such as iTunes. The chapter also demonstrates that Japanese promotions have created a system of connection and points of convergence for fans that are based solely on K-pop promotional habits in Japan. Those connections are linked with the interconnectivity of Japanese promotions for K-pop and create the base for K-pop as a transcultural flow.

The analysis in **Chapter 6** considers the nature of K-pop promotion in the Chinese and American markets. It aims to offer a comparative analysis that better highlights the uniqueness of the Japanese promotion of K-pop. The chapter addresses the

differences and similarities of these three promotional strategies through a case study approach. First, there is the case of SM in China and its promotion strategies. This case demonstrates how the application of a similar system of promotion based on familiarity and hybridity has resulted in very different outcomes. SM has been selected as the case study based on its unique approach to the market: the adoption of the Chinese language as its method of communication, promotions and singing. Second, there is the case study relevant to the USA market. This case study addresses SM and JYP's approach to the music market as well as the case of *Gangnam Style* and BTS as the two milestones of K-pop's history in America. SM and JYP have been chosen as they are known to be the first companies whose idols attempted to establish themselves in the American pop music market. Their failing debut is argued to be lacking in transnationality, as the analysis demonstrates through the breakdown of their familiarity and odourlessness quality. *Gangnam Style* is introduced as the first breaking point: an oddball that created the momentum for the subsequent attempts at an American debut for K-pop idols. BTS' case is the last section on the American promotion of K-pop. Their debut and promotion are evaluated in terms of odourlessness, hybridity and familiarity as well as mediascapes. They are found to be the opposite of the initial approach adopted by SM and JYP, which demonstrates their transnationality.

Chapter 7 is the final empirical chapter and addresses the last research question. It tests the academic notion of the concept of hybridity for K-pop in Japan by juxtaposing it with the Japanese fans' descriptions of K-pop Japanese promotion. In doing so, it examines the perception of familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness by Japanese fans and their implication in the formulation of Koreanness. This last analysis is based on data collected through interviews and the data on Korean music labels collected through monitoring of their promotional activities in Japan. It argues that familiarity is perceived through the adoption of the Japanese language and the connection to the idol through their promotion in South Korea. It is argued that odourlessness and hybridity are present in the promotional strategies adopted by K-pop but not perceived by fans. The focus here is given to hybridity as it has the most complex characteristics, and its description is influenced by odourlessness and familiarity.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion of this thesis. It reviews the findings by addressing them one by one. Through this process, the original and new aspects of this research are also addressed to showcase the relevance of this research in its field of study. Lastly, this chapter presents possible future research on the cultural relation between South Korea

and Japan as well as the Japanese perception of South Korea in the field of East Asian studies and the wider field of cultural studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter aims to situate the arguments introduced and discussed in this thesis within the relevant academic literature while also offering a critical evaluation of the existing literature on the Korean Wave and K-pop as transcultural.

This chapter will discuss and introduce the pertinent academic literature through four key themes: 2.1) the Korean Wave and K-pop as transcultural; 2.2) familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness in the discourses on Korean Wave and K-pop; 2.3) the impact of SNS and media on the Korean Wave and K-pop; and 2.4) the Korean Wave as South Korean cultural diplomacy. Lastly, it will offer some concluding remarks aiming to situate this study in the current academic discourses on K-pop and the Korean Wave.

2.1 The Korean Wave and K-pop as transcultural

Academic discourses around the Korean Wave stress the fluidity of the spreading of Korean pop culture products, their fluctuating success and the understanding that there is an intense network of connections that nurture the popularization of those products outside of South Korea (Chua and Iwabuchi, 2008b; Choi, Jungbong, 2015a; Nornes, 2015; Dutton, 2009; Erni and Chua, 2005b; Kim, S., 2019; KOCIS, 2011d). The Korean Wave is described and studied as a **transcultural and mediated flow** (Jin and Yoon, 2016; Jung, H., 2017a; Jung, H., 2017b; Kim, K., 2017; Martin et al., 2020; Min et al., 2019; Mōri, 2009; Oh, I., 2009) and the term *Korean Wave* describes the "sudden boom of Korean pop music (or K-pop) and drama" (WAHS, [No Date]). The website *Korea.net* describes it as "a term now widely used to refer to the popularity of Korean entertainment and culture across Asia and other parts of the world" (KOREA.net, [No Date]-b).

A transcultural flow is a movement of products from one country to another that has diverse cultural connotations linked with the country of origin. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Iwabuchi adopts this term to identify the flow of products between countries. Specifically, the author focuses his discussion on the flow of products from Japan to other countries and the consequent importation of products from other countries in Japan. The term **flow** is meant to underline the natural fluctuation of the movement of products from one country to another: it implies that over time the quantities and types of products will naturally change to reflect foreign countries' interests. To further highlight the differences between the simple mechanism of importation and exportation of goods, Iwabuchi focuses his analysis on the cultural impact and implications of this flow by looking at the movements of cultural products between Japan and other countries. The same approach

has been adopted in this research and the focus of the analysis is not the personal taste in music of each of the participants but their opinion on specific promotional strategies adopted by K-pop to promote in Japan. Thus, the term transcultural flow is adopted in this research to highlight the movement of products from one country to another. Specifically, it refers to the products and movement's cultural connotations and their positive effect on fostering interest toward its country of origin in the consuming society.

A transcultural flow creates constant opportunities for the process of transculturation to happen across borders and cultures. Iwabuchi clarifies that *transculturation* is a term that identifies a "process of globalization" (2002b, p.40); Appadurai understood this process in terms of "global cultural flow" (1996, p.33) that has been analysed and discussed in terms of "scapes". The process of globalisation is analysed in terms of global relations by Appadurai through five "-scapes": "ethnoscapes", "financescapes", "ideoscapes", "mediascapes", and "technoscapes" (Appadurai, 1996, pp.33-36). Appadurai highlights that these five "scapes" have been adopted "to stress different streams of flow along which cultural material may be seen to be moving across national boundaries" (pp.45-46); just like Iwabuchi's transcultural flow has been adopted to identify and analyse cultural flow at regional and global levels. We experience a transcultural flow on a local and global level at the same time thanks to the hyper-connectivity obtained through IT, SNS and sharing platforms (Kim, S., 2019; Shim, 2019; Won, 2019).

A consequence of this high level of connectivity is also the reconsideration of the meaning of global and local, which are tied together by the hyper-connected world we live in. Through this connectivity, diverse cultures mix to various degrees, resulting in a reformulation of cultural products, the formation of new styles, and the negotiation of cultural values, beliefs and ideas linked with other countries. The Korean Wave is a flow of products and cultures from South Korea to other countries in the world; initially, it had a limited reach—just within the Asian region; then, gradually, it developed into a global flow. Lee, K. (2008, p.175) goes even more in detail and describes the Korean Wave as:

> a highly complex and multi-layered formation that is composed of real, imagined and hybrid cultural practices, a diverse range of lived experiences, and sets of powerful discourses which exist at national, translocal, and transnational levels.

With this definition Lee brings forward a key aspect of the Korean Wave that needs to be discussed at length: as a flow of products and as an intercultural mediated

flow, the Korean Wave is a multi-layered discourse that has national, transnational and translocal levels which define and articulate it differently. It can be said that the Korean Wave is also a new dimension of mediascapes that encounters ethnoscapes "under the great impact of digital cultures and produces new types of cultural practices" (Hong, S., 2017, p.82). All these levels of articulation and definitions can be attributed to the introduction of new communication technologies that helped the process of interconnection among states and citizens. This new connectivity also created a network of links that helped the growth of the Korean Wave, the cultural industries behind it, and the cultures that consume it (Jin, 2015; 2016; Mackintosh et al., 2009). We are talking about SNS, YouTube and many other sharing platforms, and most recently smartphone applications, like LINE or KaKaoTalk and the V App[8] (Hong and Kim, 2013; Hong, S., 2017; Kim, Y., 2011; Lie, 2013a; Shin and Roh, 2011). Recent additions include TikTok, and the website and app Weverse[9], which is an official "global fandom platform for the fans and artists around the world" (Weverse, [No Date]).

As such, the Korean Wave presents a high level of interconnectivity that increases its presence online and offline as well as creating advantageous connections for the fans and the producing companies. A consequence of this interconnectivity and adoption of SNS is the creation of a system that can distinguish between the Korean Wave within East Asia and the Korean Wave "that resulted from the new digital culture" and "as a case of cultural change motivated by new digital platforms" (Hong, S., 2017, p.69). Particularly of interest to this project is the idea that the Korean Wave has been developed around its interconnectivity: media, specifically SNS and streaming platforms like Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube, have been integrated within the consumer's habits linked with the Korean Wave as well as in the Korean Wave's own promotional and diffusion system (Jin, 2015; 2016; 2021; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Oh, I. and Park, 2012). The Korean Wave is an interconnected world where boundaries between different countries and cultures are limited temporarily by the geographical location of the consumers compared with the products' manufacturer and the language barrier. Since these barriers can be overcome thanks to the high level of connectivity and interconnectivity we live in, the Korean Wave is a cultural product from South Korea with a global reach and fandom.

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[8]LINE and KaKaoTalk are two apps popular respectively in Japan and South Korea; the V App is an app and website where different idols and actors upload live-video for their fans, alongside videos of other activities or behind-the-scenes.
[9]Weverse hosts both Korean idols and international artists, such as American singer-songwriters MAX and Alexander 23 and British pop band New Hope Club.

2.1.1 From Hallyu to Hallyu 2.0

The increasing usage of SNS, sharing platforms, and communities' websites for the promotion of Korean-related content has dramatically changed the consumption of the Korean Wave. From being previously vastly unknown to the global public, the Korean Wave has transformed into a mediated transcultural flow, whose consumption is mostly done by mass media (Jin, 2015; 2016; Jin and Yoon, 2016; Jung, E., 2015b; Lee, Sangjoon, 2015; Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes, 2015). Such a shift has been recognised as a new era for the Korean Wave: from *Hallyu* to *Hallyu 2.0*[10] (Jin, 2015; 2016; 2021; Jin and Yoon, 2016; Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes, 2015). This change has brought forward the importance of information and knowledge. The new communication system of the Korean Wave is based on the interaction with consumers and fans through mediated content that circulates online via a myriad of posts and retweets. In the world of K-Pop, contextual knowledge, as well as an understanding of what the public wants, is crucial to obtaining the desired outcome.

Building on the same perspective, Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes (2015), in their edited book *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of New Social Media*, collected numerous works in which the role of social media was investigated and analysed to highlight how their introduction has changed the Korean Wave and its role in spreading the consumption of Korean (pop) culture abroad. It reinforces the idea that the evolution of the Korean Wave has changed drastically since the introduction of new media: the book also advocates that, even though there is a continuum within the reach of the Korean Wave, there has been a drastic change in the mean and contents of it. Key arguments are those of Choi (2015a), Jin (2015), Lee, Sangjoon (2015) and Nornes (2015); they analyse and discuss the changes brought to the Korean Wave by its expansion globally and the introduction of new means of promotion and consumption. Choi focuses on the institutional changes related to the Korean Wave in South Korea's system of cultural industries (2015); while Lee S. (2015) and Nornes (2015), respectively, cue the reader on the constructive changes that the new Korean Wave has brought into its flow and the studies related to them. Yet, the key argument related to this project is discussed by Jin:

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[10]In 2013, the Chief of the Korean Studies Academy declared that the Korean Wave had entered a new phase and as such should be called *Hallyu 3.0* (Bae, J.-s., 2013). This declaration coincides with the idea that *Hallyu* can also be labelled and divided in phases according to the level of international success reached by specific K-pop idols. Some use this classification to also divide K-pop idols and groups into generations. Examples can be found in *New Wave Formations: K-pop Idols, Social Media, and the Remaking of the Korean Wave* (Jung, E.-Y. 2015) and in the book by KOCIS entitled *K-pop Beyond Asia (Korean Culture n°2)* (2015).

the author underlines the fundamental changes brought to the Korean Wave by the introduction of new media. His argument focuses on the importance of understanding the impact of new media on intellectual properties and the expansion of the Korean Wave's consumption at the global level (2015).

Historically, the new popular flow of media and culture has been taking place steadily in Asia since the late 1990s and it entered the rest of the world in the mid to late 2000s. The stable rise in international interest was definitely helped and supported by the innovation in communication technologies (Erni and Chua, 2005b; Iwabuchi, 2005). In the work on the Korean Wave published by the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE), Kim, S. (2019), Shim (2019), and Won (2019) explore in detail the effect and efficiency of media in spreading the Korean Wave and acknowledgement by the culture that is consuming it. Key to their discourse is the role played by the revolution in information technology that kickstarted the process of globalization: this process is also a fundamental part of the progression of the interconnectivity of people and the sharing of information.

It is clear that the impact of the new SNS as well as of YouTube goes behind the simple shift in the mode of production and redistribution of K-pop; their role has been affecting contemporary society at the Korean level (Oh, I., 2009; Oh, I. and Lee, H., 2014) and globally (KOFICE, 2019). One unexpected consequence of the expansion of the reach of SNS was the viral nature of *Gangnam Style* by Korean rapper PSY. Another unexpected result, that had more long-lasting consequence, is the global success of Big Hit's BTS (or 방탄소년단 -Bangtan Sonyeondan). These two global K-pop phenomena have little in common in terms of music style, company, and promotion system; however, what separates them from the rest of K-pop is the nature of their success, which is closely linked with SNS and YouTube, which will be discussed further in section 2.3.1.

The role played by SNS, YouTube and many other sharing platforms in the growth of the Korean Wave, especially since their introduction in the late 2000s, has been the subject of numerous studies. Erni and Chua (2005a) understood the importance of developing media studies within the Asian region due to the increasing exchange of cultural products among countries. Iwabuchi (2002a; 2005; 2006; 2008; 2015) has dedicated many studies and analyses on the process of popularization and consumption of Japanese culture in Asia and on the Japanese consumption of other Asian countries' cultural products. Iwabuchi was among the first to understand that there is a connection between the spreading of media, especially those that facilitate interactions with other cultures, and the increasing interest by foreign countries in other cultures' products. His

analysis of the phenomenon brought forward the idea that behind the spreading of specific products there is an intercultural flow or connection between countries. This flow is helped by different levels of commonalities among the connecting cultures. In their own right, each culture presents a certain level of hybridity that facilitates the bonding processes with other cultures.

2.2 Familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness in the Korean Wave and K-pop's discourses

The ease of the Korean Wave's movement was linked with the idea of different levels of hybridity among the cultures as well as the lack of symbolic images that represent the country of origin. This lack of symbolic images is what Iwabuchi labelled as the 'odourless' aspect of Japanese culture that helped Japanese products spread within Asia (Iwabuchi, 2006). Odourlessness has been described by Iwabuchi as the absence of cultural odours and as the common element of Japanese exportations (Iwabuchi, 2002b). The term *cultural odour* is used to:

> focus on the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national […] way of life are associated positively with a particular product in the consumption process. (Iwabuchi, 2002b, p.27)

Iwabuchi also underlines that a product's cultural odour becomes a "socially and culturally acceptable smell" (read: representative or symbolic idea or images) through the combination of the consumer's perception that the product is "made in Japan" and the "widely disseminated symbolic images of the country of origin" (Iwabuchi, 2002b, p.27). Thus, the lack of such characteristics or features is defined as *odourlessness*, and it implies that any consuming culture will find those products lacking any sort of cultural element because they are not overly marketed or presented as from a specific country. As a result, those products are not identified by the consuming society as the cultural products of any specific country. In this case, it meant that Japanese pop culture's products were not easily linked back to Japan and other countries were more open to their consumption. This implies that a negative value is attributed to the notion of those products being manufactured in Japan: Iwabuchi explains that such an instance was due to Japan's history and past actions in East Asia (Iwabuchi, 2002c; 2006).

This is particularly true for K-pop and its idols: being able to transform your presence online, from being strongly supported by mediascapes related to South Korea to being extensively odourless, is an element that many companies have developed to be

able to promote in foreign countries that require it -i.e., Japan. When applied to the flow of information and products that is K-pop, the term *odourlessness* can only be directed to specific circumstances or aspects of a promotional campaign, such as SM presence in China, K-pop's overall promotional habits in Japan, and the general approach to the American market before *Gangnam Style* and BTS. In the specific case of this project, the term odourlessness is adopted to underline the lack of clear connections between the Japanese-language-based promotion of K-pop in Japan and the South Korean companies behind the K-pop idols.

Iwabuchi's understanding of the cultural flow moving freely within the Asian region at the beginning of the 2000s generated the hypothesis that the transcultural element embedded in it derived from and nurtured native, inner hybridity that helped the flow transform and adapts to each country. Iwabuchi (2002b; 2005; 2010) develops this idea from the conviction that the flow's adaptability and malleability derive from a baseline of shared convictions, values, beliefs, and overall cultural affinities that helped develop and maintain it throughout the years. This hybridity is natural and embedded in each aspect of the transcultural flow and it is also partly due to its own odourlessness. From this perspective, the transcultural aspect of the flow derives from the continuous movement between countries, where the flow acquires new information and assumes new ideas and forms. Specific inter-Asia referencing found in flows of products and cultures within the Asian region reinforces the idea of a hybridization process that is ongoing (Iwabuchi, 2013).

Put simply, it becomes a form of "transculturation" (Iwabuchi, 2002b, p.51): the ability to merge and combine different cultures without the relative baggage of *odours* that would mark specifically the origin of one culture and separate it from others. Through the three flow's characteristics (familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness) the consuming society engages with the representational ideas of South Korea embedded in the flow and simultaneously evaluates them against their society and the already existing ideas and perceptions of South Korea (Choi, Jungbong and Maliangkay, 2015b; Hong, S., 2017; Isar, Y. R., 2013; Iwabuchi, 2002a; 2013; 2015; Martin et al., 2020; Min et al., 2019; Ono, 2013; Sim et al., 2017; Won, 2019). Similarly, the process of social imagination implies a constant and systematic review of the perception of Koreanness following the evaluation of the representations of South Korea and their relation to the actual country[11].

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[11] The process of *social imagination* is similar to that of *transculturation*. It focuses on the consumers' development of representative ideas of the country of origin behind a transcultural product. Won (2019) offers further details in the application of social imagination to the study of the Korean Wave's consumption, particularly in relation to its consumption through SNS.

There is a continuous exchange of information that is generated by the consumption of mediascapes and the process of transculturation. This exchange impacts the perception of Koreanness and the consumption and assimilation of the three characteristics of a transcultural flow. The impact on the Korean Wave's nature is not limited to the spreading of its mediascapes; it also incorporates aspects of cultural consumption that are closely related to cultural confrontation, assimilation, and communication. As a transcultural and transnational flow of mediated content, the introduction of additional layers of information engendered reactions from the public that are complex and that reflect the complicated history between some countries or the lack of integration and acceptance between others. Particularly, it should be stressed that any transcultural flow can affect both positively and negatively the culture consuming it. Examples of negative results are *nationalistic* movements born in China and Japan because of the increased popularity of the Korean Wave. One such example[12] is the *Kenkanryū movement* in Japan and the anti-Korean sentiment held in Japan throughout the years, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The detail of mediascapes plays a key role in this situation as they are the elements embedded in each media that offer information about the country of origin, and are used by the consuming society to reinforce, change or disregard previously owned information and representations of that country (Appadurai, 1996). According to Iwabuchi, Japanese history also plays a key role in the development of the other two aspects of any cultural flow: familiarity and hybridity. Iwabuchi underlines the importance of developing and maintaining a sense of familiarity within each product in the flow as well as in the flow's own characteristics. This sense of *familiarity* is closely linked with the concept of hybridity as both terms imply that the products are easily absorbed and introduced into the consumption habit of a foreign country. Familiarity is also described as the sense of knowledge and déjà vu that might develop when interacting or consuming products based on aspects, values, or beliefs known to the consuming society or on already known and well-received products. Iwabuchi (2002) discusses the concept of familiarity through parallelisms and dissimilarities between cultures: the author develops the discussion in terms of cultural proximity and cultural similarities to underline the connection with hybridity. This aspect of familiarity has been further articulated through "a combination of subtle difference/distance and

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[12] Other examples are the increase of hate-speech based books in Japanese bookstores, demonstrations against the presence of Korean products and Korean-descendant in Japan. For further reading, refer to Oh, Ingyu (2020) and Ahn and Yoon (2020).

similarity/proximity" (Kim, Y., 2011, p.43) that helps the audience engage with and retain information about the culture behind the flow and its products, as well as with a comparison of the audience's own culture.

Similarly, with regards to a sense of familiarity, hybridity is found to be a key aspect of those products and of the flow they belong to because of their easy acceptance in foreign countries. *Hybridity* is a characteristic that is developed when a product is a fusion of different products, among which some aspects or details are from the country that is consuming it. Based on the definition by Lie (2012; 2015; 2021) and Fuhr (2016), K-pop itself is considered a hybrid. Hybridity has also been analysed in terms of hybrid components and influences on the Korean Wave; specifically on Korean drama, movies, and games (Jin, 2013; 2016). When production and commercialization are taken into consideration, hybridity leaves space for odourlessness and *mukokuseki* as a possible interpretation of K-pop and its flow. Mukokuseki[13] represents both a lack of country and a lack of nationality for the consumed products and the culture that is embedded in them (Iwabuchi, 2002b; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020).

In the case of the Korean Wave, analysis and studies based on the notion of mukokuseki and cultural hybridity have been conducted to determine the reasons for the success of its consumption abroad (Mōri, 2009; Ryoo, 2009; 2014; Sim et al., 2017). The diverse and inconsistent results of such an approach to describe each flow imply that neither meaning is correct. Particularly, in the context of the Korean Wave and its global success, Iwabuchi's idea of odourlessness and hybridity cannot be used to fully comprehend the diverse level of connection and interest shown toward the Korean Wave (Oh, I. and Jang, 2020). The focus on the idea that cultural hybridity was reflected within the flow as well as in the culture consuming it implies that there is or should be a baseline of common hybridity present in each culture.

This perspective underlines the presence of cultural elements as a universal aspect that are the reasons for the international success of K-pop and the Korean Wave; however, both K-pop and the Korean Wave have different results and different receptions within foreign countries. Even in the Asian region, they both have been subjected to different levels of acceptance and rejection. This is a particularly relevant point if we consider the contrasting results that the Korean Wave and K-pop have among Japanese, Chinese, and Taiwanese audiences. The shared history among these countries and their troubled political, economic, and diplomatic ties have influenced—if not altered—the

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[13]Chapter 3 will look more in details at *mukokuseki* and its relation to *odourlessness* and *hybridity*.

perception that these countries' general audience had about both the Korean Wave and K-pop.

In other words, "cultural hybridization requires a certain level of similarity to the host culture in order for the foreign popular culture to better communicate and marketize the new commodity" (Hong and Kim, 2013, p.57). A different perspective on cultural odourlessness and hybridity (Iwabuchi, 2002b) has brought forward the idea that the Korean Wave has helped to forge the social imaginary of the societies that consume it via its translocal, intracultural and international level of connections (Jeong, 2012; Kim, Jeongnam and Ni, 2011; Kim, M. and Kwon, 2019; Marinescu, 2014; Rhee and Lee, 2010; Won, 2019). The creation of social imaginary is based on the understanding that there are common places or that there is a common ground upon which the interaction with the outside world shapes our reality and our understanding of it. This comprehensive reading of our reality happens through the levels of connections we establish either through our everyday life or our mediated reality.

2.2.1 K-pop and the concept of hybridity

When considering K-pop, the meaning of the *K* in K-pop and the reasons for which K-pop should be considered anything but Korean have been extensively argued by academics (Lie, 2012; 2015; Oh, I., 2019; 2013; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Park, 2012; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020). The problem is understanding exactly what K-pop is and how it came to be. The easy way to understand this meaning is based on K-pop's origin in South Korea in the late 1990s, when SM founder, Lee Soo Man, decided to promote a boy group (H.O.T.) and a girl group (Baby V.O.X.). According to this perspective, those groups are specifically derived from the initiative of Lee Soo Man to introduce the Japanese idol system to the Korean music market (Lie and Oh, 2014).

The K-pop music style was drawn from *Seo Taiji and Boys*, a boy band that performed music inspired by American rap and hip-pop while showcasing breakdance-style choreography (KOCIS, 2011c; 2015). Jung, E. (2015b) goes as far as labelling the band as the first K-pop band, even though it was not yet labelled as such. Jung introduces the classification of the different generations of K-pop idols, starting with the first idol groups, such as H.O.T. and Baby V.O.X.. A similar division of K-pop idol groups and solo artists can be found in the KOCIS books (2011; 2015), where each generation is presented alongside the most popular type of music released in a sequential and chronological order.

Authors such as Fuhr (2016), Lie (2015; 2012) and Maliangkay (2015a) contemplate how to properly insert K-pop into the history of Korean music, while also acknowledging the American and Japanese influence on the music genre and its innate hybridity. When Lie breaches the topic of K-pop's identity, he starts by stating "for many people, it is [K-pop] simply South Korean popular music" (Lie, 2015; p.96); then he stresses that any correlation with old types of Korean music such as *yuhaennga*, music from the colonial period, or *trot*, from the period of military dictatorship, is imposed retroactively. In an attempt to introduce K-pop and describe properly what it is, Fuhr's book goes more into detail on its production and promotion. The author gives a thoroughly constructed report on the production system of K-pop, while also addressing its internationality and its glocal production[14]. Fuhr scrutinizes each aspect of K-pop from the introduction of English language lyrics in the Korean songs to the idol system and its evolvement; from the structuring of choreographies that are created around signature dance moves to the music video's style that is unique to that idol or band (Fuhr, 2016, pp.59-124).

The relevance of this type of study can be understood by looking at Lie's description of K-pop. The author stresses that "K-pop is inauthentic in that it is neither Korean nor South Korean. Not only is it different from traditional Korean music, it also diverges from the long tradition of Korean popular music" (Lie, 2015, p.140). To clarify this description, Lie underlines that K-pop is a "particular mode of popular-music production, consciously and commercially conceived and expertly and effectively executed" (2015, p.142). In other words, K-pop is a product of cultural industries and as such, Kim, S. (2018) stresses that the *K* in K-pop should stand for the following list of words, which are the makeup of K-pop's hybridity:

> "kaleidoscopic" pop, embracing a wide range of multimedia performance, not just music; "keyboard" or "keypad" pop, which consumers can access digitally rather than through live performance; "Kleenex" pop, highly disposable in nature; "ketchup" pop, which is premade and has a predictable taste; "korporate" pop (I am now using "K" like the Kardashians), a highly polished commercial product whose sole aim is to generate profit in global marketplaces; and, quite obviously, "Korean" pop as the nation's hottest export item. (Kim, S., 2018, p.9)

Furthermore, K-pop is a hybrid product, whose production does not rely solely on Korean talents and producers. The idea of labelling K-pop as a hybrid is based on the

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[14]The 2021 book by Lee and Jin offers a detailed and raw analysis of the production system of K-pop idols.

understanding that the certainty of the Korean nature in the music sold and performed as Korean pop music lays only on the Korean ethnicity of some of the idols that perform it and the localization of the headquarters of the companies behind them. Everything else is the result of Korean and foreign talents' collaboration on a variety of levels. Lie (2015) and Fuhr (2016) both highlight this reality by breaking down the production and promotion system while describing the foreign nature of both. Lie and Oh (2014) demonstrate that even the idol system, which is adopted by the Korean music labels behind K-pop idols, originally comes from the Japanese music market and was introduced to the Korean music scene by Lee Soo Man.

The figure of Lee Soo Man is key to the evolution of K-pop as he is also the person behind the first successful exportation of K-pop in China and Japan. On the exportation and presence of K-pop within the Japanese music market, Jung writes that "because the term K-pop itself is somewhat ambiguous" and "because some of the Korean musicians have become crossover performers of both Korean and Japanese pop music", such a universally descriptive term should not be used to depict the full spectrum of Korean music promotion in Japan (Jung, E., 2015a, p.117). Chapter 6 and Chapter 8 will explore in more detail the presence of K-pop in Japan and the style of music promoted and performed.

Another aspect of K-pop that makes it a hybrid is underlined by Oh and Park (2012): they analysed the mode of promotion of K-pop and how it changed their business strategy to welcome the introduction of YouTube. According to the authors, the new sharing platform, along with the rest of the new media, forced Korean music labels to consider shifting from a B2C system to a B2B system. Yet, new media impacted not just the nature of how Korean companies do business, but also their production system. Production is at a global level: international producers, choreographers, recording studios, and designers are among the many individuals who are recruited constantly to help produce, record, and perform K-pop music. The results of this global collaboration become local the moment it is recorded and sold as K-pop, and then shift to become glocal once it is inserted into the global market (Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Lee, H., 2014; Oh, I. and Park, 2012).

2.3 Social media, the Korean Wave and K-pop

The shift in the approach to new social media is especially relevant when analysed in parallel with the evolution of the components of the Korean Wave and its history: firstly, production is not simply taken care of at a local level, it is done locally

and globally at the same time (Lie, 2013a; Lim, 2008; Oh, I., 2013; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; 2014; Oh, I. and Park, 2012). Consumption, too, "tightly connects the local and the global through the globalized production and circulations of commodities and information" (Park, 2013, p.127). This local and global connection at the production and distribution level is referred to as a 'glocal' (Oh, I., 2013; Oh, I. and Park, 2012). The term *glocal* can also refer to a new level of cultural formation and consumption, even in terms of cultural products, that derives simultaneously from the level of globalization reached and the expansion of the Korean Wave. Then, hybridity also should be considered as the new culture is formed by merging its local and global aspects, constantly reinventing their connections; at the same time, it diminishes the distance between local and global. It derives from the global reach of social media, and the interconnectivity and derived consumption that is behind the increasing spread of the Korean Wave (Hong, S., 2017; Isar, Y. R., 2013; Jin, 2015; Jin and Yoon, 2016; Lee, K., 2008; Lee, Sangjoon, 2015).

The IT revolution and the introduction of new media have brought new ways of connecting and consuming information and cultural products that forced the Korean Wave to adapt. This change has been defined by introducing a breaking point in the Korean Wave's history and the adoption of a new name: Hallyu 2.0, to signify the rapture from the old one and the change and innovation introduced by the new IT, SNS and sharing platforms (Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes, 2015). The breaking point is the introduction of new media, especially the popularity of YouTube, which forced the companies behind the majority of the Korean Wave's products to adapt to it and change their promotional strategies (Choi, Jungbong, 2015a; Jin, 2015; Jung, E., 2015b; Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes, 2015; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Lee, H., 2014; Oh, I. and Park, 2012; Ono, 2013).

Jin (2011; 2016; 2015)[15] is among those scholars who have dedicated time to understanding the impact of IT, media, and the revolution in communication technology on the Korean Wave, its receptions, and creations. Among his numerous studies (Jin, 2011; 2013; 2015; 2017; 2021; Yoon, T. and Jin, 2017a; 2017b), his monograph *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media* (2016) gives a detailed account of the introduction and impact of new social media in the Korean Wave.

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[15]For more recent further reading: the book *Transnational Hallyu: The Globalization of Korean Digital and Popular Culture* (Jin et al., 2021) offers more in-depth analysis of the current level of transnationality of the Korean Wave at the global level. Particularly, it focuses on the North American, South American, and European markets. The book *K-Pop Idols: Popular Culture and the Emergence of the Korean Music Industry* (Lee, Harkjoon. and Jin, 2021) systematically breaks down the processes behind the creation and evolution of a K-pop idol group (Nine Muses) from the set-up to the training and through to the process of recording and performing.

His analysis looks at a new approach to cultural exportation and transcultural power as the consumption of the flow shifts accordingly to the new media introduced as consuming mechanisms. Key to his argument is the idea that during the evolution and expansion of the Korean Wave there is a breaking point: the introduction of YouTube in the promotion and consumption of the wave. He suggests that from this point onward, the Korean Wave has entered a new phase, becoming a 'New Korean Wave' (Jin and Yoon, 2016; Jin, 2015; 2016).

In particular, this shift determined not only a change in the consumption mechanisms but also in the typology of products that now comprises the core of the Korean Wave. K-drama and K-pop are now the central components of the flow, taking the place of games and movies which were the more widely consumed products prior to this breaking point (Jin, 2016). K-Pop has obtained worldwide attention and fans thanks to SNS and sharing platforms' introduction as key components of its promotion. The global reach of the Korean Wave is undoubtedly due to the involvement of SNS, YouTube and other sharing platforms that brings its consumers' communities together (Jin, 2021). This has impacted not only the expansion of the Korean Wave but also the production and promotion of a key component—K-pop.

Through these platforms, fans from all over the globe can consume videos, news, photos, or tweets from their favourite K-Pop acts (Lie, 2016; Oh, I., 2013; 2017; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Park, 2012; Shin and Roh, 2011). These platforms provide fans with the knowledge and the information necessary to push music labels into bringing their artists to perform in concerts or fan meetings in the fans' own countries and to help their favourite win or be nominated for internationally recognised awards. Recent examples of the influential power of the fanbase include some of the most recent USA-based accomplishments by BTS: winning the Billboard Music Awards in early 2017, their performance at the American Music Awards (AMAs) in late 2017, their awards received at the iHeartRadio Music Awards in 2018, and lastly, their award of *Artist of the Year* at the 2021 AMAs[16] (Atkinson, 2018; 2021; Benjamin, 2017; 2018b; Kelley, 2017; Liu, 2017; Lynch, 2017; McIntyre, 2018; Salud, 2017; Soompi, 2017)

Similarly supportive arguments have been put forward by the essays collected in the books *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global* (Ed. Kim, Y., 2013) and *The Soft Power of The Korean Wave: Parasite, BTS and Drama* (Ed. Kim, Y., 2021). The 2013 book underlines the increasingly important influence that the Korean Wave has on the

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[16]They also won the category for *Best Duo or Group Pop/Rock* and *Song Pop/Rock* (Atkinson, 2021).

usage and consumption of media and social services: in this current, evermore globalized world, the Korean Wave embodies a new form of media, information and products' flow that has steadily grown to rival that of other dominant cultures, like American culture (Kim, Y., 2011). Nye, J. and Kim (2013) break down the relation between South Korean soft power and the expansion of the Korean Wave's reach. They offer insight on how to harvest the intrinsic attractive elements of the Korean Wave to improve the country's soft power.

In the 2013 book, the authors concentrated on presenting the diverse types of connections used by fans to consume and interact with their favourite Korean Wave's products as well as the diverse array of media used to describe such consumption. The 2021 collection of essays focuses on exploring the more recent development of the Korean Wave's consumption in the wake of *Parasite* and BTS' international success. The work of Lie (2021), Jin (2021) and Keith (2021) are of interest to this project, as well. Lie (2021) discusses BTS' new understanding of the K-pop music industry that helped BTS in their international success. The author focuses on the new, diverse set-up of the industry and the impacts it has on the current notion of K-pop. Lee, Harkjoon and Jin (2021) expand on this set-up in their book, where they break down the process of creation and formation of K-pop idols.

Jin analyses "new forms of transnational cultural activities"(Jin, 2021, p.143) that have emerged with the deep integration of SNS—new and old—in the consumption and promotion system of K-pop. In particular, he focuses on transnational fan activities and activism, identifying ways in which K-pop played a pivotal role in demonstrating that "fans are utilizing both K-pop and social media […] to actualize their participation in social movements" (Jin, 2021, p.147). Keith (2021) builds upon the studies that focus on the Korean Wave as a form of soft power—i.e. Nye, J. and Kim (2013)—to discuss the role of *cultural ambassador* that BTS has been bestowed with. Her analysis looks at the different interpretations and consequences of this role and its description by other media that underline how important this role is in both representing their country (via soft power and cultural diplomacy) and their artistry (via Korean idols).

2.3.1 The case of *Gangnam Style* and BTS[17]

In 2012 the artist PSY became suddenly widely known due to the music video uploaded on YouTube to promote his new single, *Gangnam Style.* The song and the video, especially the dance portrayed within it, become an overnight hit. As of January 2022,

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[17]Chapter 6 will analyse in-depth these two case studies in relation to K-pop in the USA.

the video has over 4 billion views on YouTube (PSY, 2012) and numerous parody and flash mob videos. In doing so, "the sheer proliferation of downloads and impersonations, copycat videos and parodic performances […] established K-pop […] as a global pop culture phenomenon" (Lie, 2013a, p.40). With this popularity, *Gangnam Style* was crowned as a turning point in the history of K-pop and the Korean Wave's global popularity (Lie, 2013a).

Hu (2015) discusses the basis for this sudden global interest in the song—and the global urge to make it go away as fast as possible. According to the author, the dance style, called "horse dance" by the rapper himself, is what makes the video and the dance so appealing to the wider, non-Korean audience. The global audience is attracted by the simplicity of the dance that, even so, remains impossible to perfect and perform with the same level of "swag" displayed by PSY (Hu, 2015, p.232). The simplicity of the dance, coupled with the song's catchy lyrics and the video's humorous leitmotif, increased the wider global audiences' interest in it. This interest was then multiplied rapidly via the nature of YouTube and SNS, which helped the video reach a global audience and become a viral phenomenon in a very short amount of time.

Globally, the impact of the song went past the simple interest of something that became suddenly viral: Hübinette (2018) is among the many scholars that have analysed the impact of *Gangnam Style* on the increasing interest in K-pop or lack thereof in society. The author noticed the change in the composition of K-pop fans in Sweden and their level of interest after PYS' viral song. The shift was visible immediately, as Hu (2015) also reminds us, due in part to the short-lived popularity of the artists. There is one country in particular, however, where *Gangnam Style* failed to become viral and increase the interest in South Korean pop music; that country, Lie (2013b) tells us, is Japan.

Despite the fact that Japan is the second-largest pop music market globally, the *Gangnam Style* viral phenomenon did not take off there because "some Japanese K-pop fans are adamant that K-pop does not include PSY, because they consider him neither cool nor handsome" (Lie, 2015, p.96). Additionally, the public not only didn't appreciate the song or the dance moves but also prevented PSY from releasing a Japanese version of the song. This Japanese version would have been a parody of the lifestyle of Tokyo's Roppongi, a district that could easily be compared with Seoul's Gangnam and its expensive and stylish lifestyle (Lie, 2013b). The lack of a fertile market for the Japanese debut of PSY prevented the rapper from releasing the Japanese version. To explain the sterile environment that was the Japanese music market, Lie explains the intricacy of promoting K-pop in Japan and the difficulties of captivating a public whose gender

dynamics not only affect their consumption of music but also their consumption of other Korean pop culture products (Lie, 2013b).

Compared to the unsuccessful story of PSY in Japan, BTS is considered one of the most successful K-pop acts to have entered the Japanese and global music markets. In America, for example, BTS won their first Billboard Music Award in 2017 (Liu, 2017) and since then went on to have a successful debut and promotions in the American pop music world (Benjamin, 2017; 2018b; Soompi, 2017; Kelley, 2017; Lynch, 2017; McIntyre, 2018; Odissy, 2020). ARMY—the name given to BTS' fans—helped the band win their first Billboard award via online voting and Twitter; ARMY's total vote reached 300 million (Liu, 2017). This seems an impossible number to obtain when compared to the other nominees, which gathered just over 100 thousand votes each. However, it is important to note that BTS' success—both then and now—is closely linked to their relations with their international and hyper-connected fandom (Kim, M. and Kwon, 2019; Kim, S., 2019). In other words, without the solid integration of SNS and YouTube and the promotion and consumption system of the Korean Wave, BTS would not be as internationally successful as they are today.

Kim, S., (2019) stresses that BTS, as both a group and as single artists, have a strong presence on social media thanks to their ability to incorporate SNS in their activities while also being able to maintain accountability, transparency, familiarity, and authenticity in their relation to both their fans and the world of SNS (Lie, 2021). The point that Kim S. emphasises, which is also revisited by Kim and Kwon (2019), is that the introduction of SNS, YouTube, the V App and many other social media and sharing platforms changed not only the level of the world's interaction but also the nature of that interaction. In other words, social imaginary and cultural hybridity are not the sole reasons for BTS' impact on foreign audiences; fundamental was also the group's ability to understand key social cues that changed with SNS and also their ability to react to them accordingly. A quick Google search showcases all the written articles related to the how and why of their American debut and the subsequent glory. What should be taken away from those media articles is the rapidly increasing interest in BTS and their impact on diverse societies: once again, this could be viewed as the consequence of our globalization and development of society through a global social imaginary.

On the other hand, the success story of BTS in Japan (allkpop, 2018; Benjamin, 2018a; Billboard Japan, 2017; Cha, 2018; Hong, C., 2017; Soompi, 2018a; 2018b; Kim, A., 2018; Yonhap, 2018b; 2018a; 2019) should be considered against the cultural backdrop that was the Korean Boom of the early 2000s. The *Winter Sonata Phenomenon*

paved the way for the Korean Wave to enter the Japanese market; since then, K-pop was promoted in Japan and has slowly taken over a big portion of the Japanese pop music market. Yet there has been negativity directed at BTS and the Korean Wave's presence in Japan (Jung, E., 2015a). Chapter 4 will discuss the relationship between the occasional diplomatic accidents that affected K-pop promotion in Japan and the consumption of K-pop. The background of this analysis will be the *Winter Sonata Phenomenon* and the anti-Korean movement called *Kenkanryū* (嫌韓流).

2.4 Soft Power and the Korean Wave

From a top-down approach, cultural diplomacy has been identified as an item of the taxonomy of public diplomacy as well as a tool of soft power (Brown, 2009; Graham, 2014; Hall and Smith, 2013; Hayden, 2017; Pamment, 2014; 2015; 2018). Edmund Gullion, in the mid-sixties, defined public diplomacy "as a form of influence on public opinion" (Pamment, 2014, p.52). Public diplomacy is a complex structure of power and state-led international relations, whereby actors focus on improving and expanding the influence of their states' image and perceptions by others (Hocking, 2005; Lee, Sookjong and Melissen, 2011; Melissen, 2007; 2015a; 2015b; Olins, 2005; Sohn, 2015). A country's cultural diplomacy is a strategy adopted by the state to alter a foreign public's opinion of the country's images, ideas, and representations. It is aimed to create strategic representations of a country to shift, improve or develop a new understanding of itself among a foreign public (Cowan and Cull, 2008; Cull, 2008; 2012; 2019; Cummings, 2009). Cull describes it as an "attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad" (2008, p.33).

A crucial element that distinguishes cultural diplomacy from any other form of diplomacy is the underlying similarity with the concept of cultural relations (Ang et al., 2015): the latter is a natural, people-led occurrence that happens any time there is interaction within the public; the former is a state-led, government-crafted interaction. Cultural diplomacy is intended to be a mutual cultural understanding reached through cultural relations or interactions among two or more cultures and aimed at creating understanding and acceptance (Kim, H., 2017). However, it is fundamental to understand that this distinction is fragile: culturally led interactions, even in the form of intercultural communications, have an unpredictable side due to their human components. A possible consequence of this negative side of cultural diplomacy is considered to be cultural imperialism or the "forcing [of] one's culture on another" (Kim, H., 2017, p.306). Based

on this possible negative outcome of cultural diplomacy, both Liscutin (2009) and Yamanaka (2010) analyse the social implications and consequences that have recently developed in movements against the foreign country wielding soft power through cultural diplomacy's initiatives.

When analysing the soft power-driven relationship between Japan and South Korea, there appears to be a disconnect between the political and cultural aspects of this relationship (Fukushima, 2011; Lee, Sookjong, 2011). Moreover, as both Liscutin (2009) and Yamanaka (2010) touch upon, nationalistic sentiments were born through the interaction and consumption of products that were heavily linked with cultural diplomacy and soft power. This demonstrates that the shared history between South Korea and Japan is the main cause of the rejection and hate directed toward one another. Both authors analysed the evolution of nationalistic movements that resurfaced[18] along with the increasing attention paid to the other's products in each domestic market. They also discuss the consequences that these movements had on the public imaginary related to each other. The imaginary linked to the countries' shared history is the fuel to any anti-Japanese and anti-Korean movements, as they undermine each government's plan to expand the mechanism and scope of each country's soft power.

Soft power is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies" (Nye, J.S., 2004, X). Soft power's definition as the capability to modify the behaviour of others through attraction and seduction (Nye, J.S., 2004; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2017) implies that foreign states can be influenced to change their attitude toward other countries and, consequently, their foreign policies through elements such as values, ideas, morals and, culture. Those elements represent components of the complete idea of a country that is implanted into their products, policies, and overall internationally projected image. Once a public alters their thinking of a foreign country, the government of that country takes notice of the shift in the public opinion and consequently changes either its policies and the approach to that country, or the overall perception of it, before it attempts to apply that shift to its policies as well.

Particularly interesting is the connection between soft power and the Korean Wave as a progressively mediated flow of products, which attracts the foreign public and creates positive interest in South Korea. On this, Nye, J. and Kim (2013) stress its limits

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[18]Liscutin breaks down the aesthetic, cultural and social meaning of the manga *Kenkanryū* (2009). Yamanaka explores the genealogy of South Korea's popular representation in Japan (2010). Chapter 4 offers more insights on the relationship between the consumption of K-pop and the Korean Wave and the political and historic ties between ROK and JP.

while also underlining its positive impact in many countries, like in the Middle East and Europe. Others, like Choi, Jungbong (2015a), Jang and Paik (2012) and, Kim, Jeongnam and Ni (2011), emphasise the increasing dependence of the Korean Wave on mass media and the resulting interconnection among the consuming public. They understood that the interest in South Korean culture can be comprehended also in terms of cultural diplomacy, in its capacity of being an intercultural and international method of mutual communication. In other words, a two-way flow of information and products that align with a foreign public's understanding of South Korea.

However, the Korean Wave cannot be considered as the sole representation of South Korean cultural or public diplomacy—the complex set of policies and strategies adopted by the Korean Government to help boost, via attraction, the image that foreign countries hold of South Korea. Nye, J. and Kim (2013) offer relevant examples of South Korea's cultural diplomacy, such as the introduction through governmental channels of the popular drama *Winter Sonata* in Middle Eastern countries. Similarly, the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG), through the adoption of popular idols as ambassadors, has been promoting the city and its cultures via what could also be considered cultural diplomacy[19]. The current ambassador for Seoul is BTS, which since 2018 has brought high interest toward the city, its culture, and per extension, the country (SMG, 2018). The most recent campaign for Seoul's tourism is known as *Your Seoul Goes On* and it again features BTS as its ambassador (STO, 2021; VisitSeoulTV, 2021), reinforcing their role as a cultural ambassador for South Korea and strengthening the already present links between K-pop, cultural diplomacy and soft power (Keith, 2021).

Further instances of the Korean Government adopting the Korean Wave and its products as key features of its cultural diplomacy strategies can be found in the White Papers of the current Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the past papers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT). Through a series of appropriate renaming and reshaping of the past and current policies, the Ministries developed practices linked to the promotion of positive images of South Korea with the help of popular movies, drama and music (MOFAT, 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011a; 2012; MOFA,2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2018a; 2019a).

There are historic roots to the Korean Government's interest in developing its cultural diplomacy. South Korean cultural diplomacy has its origin in the years immediately after the Korean War (1951-1953) when South Korea needed to determine

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[19]One of the main campaigns to promote the city is *I Seoul U* (SMG, [No Date]).

a new image for itself that was not linked to North Korea (Jang and Paik, 2012; Kang, 2015; Kim, M., 2011). In the 1960s, the Government set off to improve the "national culture" (Lee, Hyekyung, 2013, p.187) through a systematic rejection and forced revision of the popular culture that did not fit the idea of traditional culture that the regime wished to convey. During the process of democratization and economic liberation, there were substantial changes in the understanding of cultural diplomacy and the creation of the basis for the current Korean Wave (Lee, Hyekyung, 2013, pp.186-190). One of these changes was the addition of popular culture products (such as drama, movies, and music) to the original South Korean cultural diplomacy[20]. In the 1990s, the national culture was substituted with Korean movies and pop music as the key feature representing South Korea, both from an image and branding perspective (Jang and Paik, 2012; Jin, 2016; Kang, 2015; Lee, Hyekyung, 2013). In the mid-2000s, the term Korean Wave was officially adopted by the Roh Moo Hyun government to address South Korea's contemporary cultural diplomacy in order to distinguish it from the previous ones (Kang, 2015; Lee, Hyekyung, 2013).

This administration understood the increasing importance and influence of the Korean Wave in foreign countries, and it was considered a good tactic to adopt the term to identify the government's cultural and public diplomacy (Kang, 2015). Similar to other countries, the South Korean government employed cultural diplomacy as a tool to push for a positive shift in the opinion of the international world, aiming at creating a new image specific exclusively to South Korea. A result of this approach is the creation of a website aimed at promoting South Korean culture: Korea.net, previously known as The Korea Window (Korea.Net, [No Date]-c). This website is coordinated by and accessible from KOCIS and the Ministry of Sport, Culture and Tourism (MSCT) as they too are among the governmental bodies that work to improve South Korean cultural diplomacy and soft power.

In 2015, KOCIS released the latest books to promote the Korean Wave and its components, such as K-movie, K-drama, K-pop, and K-Fashion. This series also serves to underline the various institutional approaches that constitute the core components of the cultural diplomacy of the Korean Wave (KOCIS, [No Date], 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2015). Among these books, there are volumes related to K-

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[20] South Korea's original cultural diplomacy was made up of ten elements: traditional food (*hansik*), the Korean alphabet (*hangul*), traditional clothing (*hanbok)*, ginseng, religion, sport (*Taekwondo*), dance, the Royal Ancestral Shrine (*Jongmyo*), the *Seollak* mountain and, any Korean artist of international calibre. All of these were considered representative of the South Korean traditional culture (Kang, 2015).

Drama, K-Movie, K-Literature, and other aspects of South Korean culture. In 2012, to increase this connection, a compendium was released under the title *Hallyu: from K-pop to K-Culture* (*한류: K-Pop 에서 K-Culture 로*), which contained information relevant to each of the books' topic and their connections to "distinct Korean spirits" (Lee, H.-K., 2013, p.192). All titles of the KOCIS books started with "K-": this is another strategy from the Government to "put almost all areas with which the cultural ministry is concerned […] under the umbrella of the Korean Wave"(Lee, Hyekyung, 2013, p.192). In doing so, it creates a connection with the original set of key components of South Korean cultural diplomacy that was created ad hoc by the Government to represent the uniqueness and attractiveness of the country's culture and costumes (Kang, 2015; Kim, D. and Kim, S., 2011). In 2018 the Government, through its cultural diplomacy division, released a document highlighting the country's soft power and its cultural diplomacy ([MOFA], 2018b). This was followed up by a book entitled *'18 한류 백서 Hallyu White Paper, 2018* (KOFICE, 2019) that aimed at introducing the positive effect of the Korean Wave as both a transcultural flow as well as the Government's cultural diplomacy (Do and Kim, 2019; Kim, M. and Kwon, 2019; Kim, S., 2019; Shim, 2019; Won, 2019).

2.5 Where does this study fit within the existing academic literature?

This project aims to look at K-pop as a transcultural flow of its own, that nonetheless has a constant connection with the Korean Wave. As such, this review looked at the studies that analysed and discussed the Korean Wave and, per extension, K-pop as a transcultural flow. This review focused on four main themes: 2.1) the discussion of the Korean Wave and K-pop as transcultural; 2.2) the application of the concepts of familiarity, hybridity, and odourlessness to both the Korean Wave and K-pop; 2.3) the impact of media and IT evolution on the Korean Wave and K-pop; and, 2.4) the discourses on the Korean Wave as South Korean soft power and cultural diplomacy. It should be noted, however, that these four topics are not the full list of possible arguments and academic debates around the Korean Wave and K-pop. Numerous other studies have been conducted on this topic.

With the selection of the discussed four themes, this review has excluded from its argumentation other studies that discussed the Korean Wave and K-pop from alternative perspectives. Yoon and Kang aptly explain: "scholars all over the world analyze K-pop fandom, Korean girl group's dances, lyrics, fans' reaction videos, and so on." (2017, p.16) Some of those are studies on the cultural changes in the structure of K-

pop fandom in a specific country or ethnicity (Choi, Jungbong, 2015b; Choi, Jungbong and Maliangkay, 2015b; Elfving-Hwang, 2013; Giuffre and Keith, 2015; Howard and Lekakul, 2018; Hübinette, 2018; Lyan and Levkowitz, 2015; Noh, 2011). These studies focus specifically on underlying the socio-cultural implication of the consumption of K-pop and the Korean Wave in selected case studies. Giuffre and Keith (2015) offer an analysis of the presence of *SBS PopAsia* in Australia; Howard and Lekakul (2018) study the relation between Thai dance students and their consumption of K-pop and the Korean Wave with their identity as members of the British Thai community. As discussed in section 2.3.1, Hübinette (2018) investigates the changes within the structure of K-pop fandom in Sweden, while Elfving-Hwang (2013) similarly analysed the composition of Germany's fans. With the recent and steady success of BTS within the USA market, studies conducted to understand the structure and its changes of K-pop and the Korean Wave's fans within the USA have increased.

There are also analyses on K-pop and the relation with fans' identity and gender: studies on masculinity and femininity and identity shifts have been conducted to explore the impact of the promotion of specific images (Anderson, 2014; Aoyagi, 2000; Jung, S., 2010; Maliangkay, 2015b; Laforgia and Howard, 2017; Phillips and Baudinette, 2020). As well, the connection between K-pop and its fans abroad have also been studied in term of reception in particular countries – like China (Jeong, 2012; Maliangkay and Song, 2015; Pease, 2009; 2010; Rhee and Lee, 2010) or Japan (Chung, 2015; Hayashi and Lee, 2007; Iwabuchi, 2008; Jung, E., 2015a; Kim, Juoak, 2015; Liscutin, 2009). Those studies underline not only the positive receptions but also the negative ones; specifically, the Japanese anti-Korean movement, that was born after the Korean Wave boom in 2003. Finally, studies on the history of Korean music and its relation to K-pop (Fuhr, 2016; Lee, Harkjoon and Jin, 2021; Jung, E., 2015a; Lie, 2012; Lie, 2015; Lie, 2021) as well as on the evolution of K-pop's performance (Kim, S., 2018) and interaction with its fandom have been conducted to explore K-pop in all its form and stages of evolution (Choi, Jungbong and Maliangkay, 2015a; Hong, S., 2017; Jung, H., 2017b; Lee, Hyangjin, 2010; Leung, 2017; Min et al., 2019; Won, 2017; Zhang and Fung, 2017). This even includes studies from the perspectives of the music industries' production (Lee, Harkjoon and Jin, 2021).

The selection of the four topics introduced in this review is based on this project's overarching topic: the sociocultural impact of K-pop in Japan. While keeping this in mind, I looked at the relevant literature to understand the current academic debates and their origins. In doing so, I delved into a still dynamic and active academic field that

explores K-pop and the Korean Wave from a myriad of perspectives and possibilities. I had to understand the dynamic of interpreting the Korean Wave and K-pop as transcultural and the implication of such analysis in terms of familiarity, hybridity, and odourlessness. Again, Yoon, T. and Kang expertly summarise the increasing interest in the transcultural aspects of the Korean Wave and K-pop as a shift in "the key concepts in *Hallyu* studies as focusing on cultural imperialism to cultural proximity at first, and then to globalization, and then to glocalization and cultural hybridity" (2017, p.17). Such discourses also highlighted how crucial media and IT are to the development and expansion of the Korean Wave. Particularly for K-pop, the adoption of new media and IT for its promotion and consumption has been shifting and changing the make-up of K-pop fans' groups and their system of interaction, both online and offline as "media technologies have changed the peculiarities of the Korean Wave" (Yoon, T. and Kang, 2017, p. 17).

Through this analysis, this research has posited that as a transcultural flow, the Korean Wave has diverse layers of definition and analysis that reflect the different perspectives through which it can be analysed. Yet, I found that when I investigated K-pop's presence in Japan, few studies look solely at K-pop. Many consider K-pop as a branch of the Korean Wave, relegating its market as a consequence of the expansion of the Korean Wave in Japan. Other studies looked at the presence of K-pop in Japan with the history of K-pop within the Korean music industry. Even those studies that analysed the negative reaction to the Korean Wave considered K-pop as an element of the Korean Wave and not as a flow of its own. Others look at K-pop as a form of consumption of the Korean Wave in specific geographic locations within Tokyo, such as Shin-Okubo (Phillips and Baudinette, 2020).

Fandom studies are closely related to this type of study. They consider not only the socio-economic and cultural background of the fans but also the impact on fans caused by the consumption of K-pop and the Korean Wave. Studies conducted on the Japanese fandom of the Korean Wave focus solely on the consumption of K-drama and its impact on Japanese fans (Chae, 2014; Hirata, 2008; Iwabuchi, 2002a; Lee, Hyangjin, 2010; Lee, Soobum and Ju, 2011; Lie, 2016; Mōri, 2008; 2009; Oh, I., 2011; Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014; Tokita, 2010). Some of these studies focus on the negative side of Japanese consumption of the Korean Wave and delve into the implication of anti-Korean movements and their relation to the Korean Wave. Some others focus on the reaction to the drama *Winter Sonata* to understand the motives behind its incredible success in Japan; still, others focus on the reason behind the consumption of K-drama and the consequences

on their social and cultural background (Chung, 2015; Epstein, 2010; Hanada, 2003; Hayashi and Lee, 2007; Horguchi and Imoto, 2016; Jin, 2011; Jung, E., 2015a; Lee, Hyangjin, 2010; 2017; Tokita, 2010; Yamanaka, 2010).

This study looks at K-pop through the lenses of a transcultural flow rich in mediascape: the analysis examines the presence of K-pop within the Japanese music market to establish how the flow is maintained. To understand the academic debate on this subject, the review offered in this chapter considered the application of concepts like hybridity and familiarity to K-pop as they are also key elements of the framework. Principally, it paid attention to the notion of hybridity as it will be challenged in chapter 7. Through the review of the literature on K-pop and hybridity, this chapter also set the basis for the discussion on the relationship between K-pop, the Korean Wave, and media. The presence of social media and new sharing platforms and media has dramatically changed the configuration and consumption of the Korean Wave as K-pop has incorporated new media forms into its main promotion and circulation system.

This project situates the discussion on K-pop's presence within the Japanese music market as K-pop's interconnectivity, with a promotional system based on SNS. It looks at the approach to the Japanese market as described by Lie (2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019) as the stepping stone for the evolution of K-pop in Japan as a transcultural flow. This argument builds on a business perspective to highlight the interconnection between fans and K-pop created by the promotion and consumption system used in Japan. This argument also expands on the portion of the literature that studies connections between fans and the increasing popularity of the Korean Wave and its culture. Particularly, it develops the discourses by Mōri (2008) and Lie (2016) on fans and their modes of convergence. Lastly, the review of the literature that analyses the Korean Wave as South Korea's cultural diplomacy with its soft power has been introduced in order to set up the background chapter. Chapter 4 will look at the development of the *Winter Sonata Phenomenon* and the anti-Korean sentiment developed after the Korean Wave boom. It will also look at the lack of interest by K-pop fans in the political and diplomatic ties between ROK and JP.

To recapitulate the points discussed in this section, K-pop has been argued as transnational, but this study will look at it as a *transnational flow*. It demonstrates this by discussing K-pop through a) the interconnectivity created by an online and offline system of promotion and in-person consumption of K-pop; b) the specificity of K-pop's promotional system through a comparative analysis with the Chinese and American promotion; and c) the application of a transcultural flow's qualities to Japanese promotion

of K-pop. By doing so, this study offers more insights into the presence of K-pop in Japan and its peculiar relationship with the Japanese music market and its fans.

Specifically, point a) expands on the studies on the Japanese promotion of K-pop by articulating the approach to the Japanese pop music market as the stepping stones for K-pop to become a transcultural flow in Japan. This point also elaborates on the Japanese fans' consumption habits in terms of points of connection and convergence. This argument set out to expand the impact that these consumption habits have on the structure of K-pop fans in Japan. Point b) aims to further the studies on Chinese and American promotion of K-pop by looking at them through the lenses of a transcultural flow. This analysis adopts the transcultural flow's qualities to analyse the approach to these markets and aims to discuss K-pop as a transcultural flow. Lastly, point c) argues the application of the qualities of a transcultural flow to K-pop's presence in the Japanese music market. It sets to expand on those studies developing the arguments of K-pop's familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework and methodology adopted for this research. This study contributes to the wider arguments discussing the Korean Wave and K-pop as transcultural. More specifically, it adds weight to the discussion of K-pop as transcultural to demonstrate that it is a transcultural *flow*. To do so, this study utilises a framework for analysis based on Koichi Iwabuchi's transcultural flow and Arjun Appadurai's mediascapes. Through the four sections of this chapter, the framework, its application, and the methodological tools and analyses are introduced. Specifically, the first section draws attention to the connections between mediascapes and transcultural flows. Then, the second section expands on the topic covered in section 2.2 of the literature reviews, elaborating on the application of the transcultural flow's characteristics to the Korean Wave and K-pop as those will be the focus of the empirical chapters. Then, the third section will illustrate the framework and its application to this research. The last section introduces the methodological tools and analysis used in this research.

3.1 The connection between Appadurai's mediascapes and Iwabuchi's transcultural flow

The concept of transcultural flow and mediascapes have been extensively used to analyse the Korean Wave and K-pop. Both concepts have been adopted, as discussed in the literature review of Chapter 2, to develop a comprehensive analysis of the global phenomenon that is the Korean Wave. Those studies looked exclusively at the transcultural and transnational qualities of the Korean Wave to understand how it has integrated itself into the consumption habits of foreign countries. Most recent studies have individualised the adoption of social media as not only a key aspect of the Korean Wave, but also as a fundamentally new system of sociocultural interaction that is developed around sharing the consumption of specific Korean Wave products via social media (Eds. Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes, 2015; Jin, 2016; 2021; Kim, D. and Kim, M., 2011).

Appadurai offers the possibility to investigate the impact of social media's presence within the promotional aspects of K-pop and the Korean Wave, as the concept of mediascapes is based on the presence of mediated content and its consumption by a specific country[21]. This analysis of the Korean Wave incorporates aspects of cultural

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[21]The paper by Jeong (2012) is an example of other 'scapes' used as the measuring element of transcultural flow between foreign countries. The author focuses specifically on mediascapes, ideoscapes and ethnoscapes to analyse the sociocultural relation between China and South Korea.

consumption that are closely related to cultural confrontation, assimilation, and communication. As it is a transcultural flow of mediated content, mediascapes' details play a key role: they are the elements embedded in each mediated content that offer information about the country of origin. Mediascapes are used by the consuming society to reinforce, change or disregard previously owned information and representations of the country of origin.

As such, mediascapes are considered a key aspect of this research. Appadurai defines mediascape as the distribution of "electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information" and as "the images of the world created by these media" (1996, p.35). More specifically, a mediascape is a virtual, mediated landscape where details of the country of origin of that mediated content are embedded within it. Any mediated content is a mediascape and within each mediascape, the embedded set of details is about a) the country of origin, b) the content created, c) the consumer's society and d) the already existing representations of the producing country. In other words, mediascapes are rich in descriptive elements of any key feature of the country of origin, such as the culture, the society, the ideological and political viewpoints, and the economy.

Mediascapes are a parallel concept to Iwabuchi's *cultural odours*, a core component of Appadurai's analysis and development of transculturation. It derives that the characteristic of odourlessness of any transcultural flow is the lack of cultural odours or any mediascapes. Iwabuchi clarifies that *transculturation* is a term that identifies a "process of globalization" (2002b, p.40) through which diverse cultures mix in various degrees, resulting in a reformulation of cultural products, the formation of new styles, as well as the negotiation of the cultural values, beliefs and ideas linked with other countries. In other words, it is a bottom-up approach to cultural diplomacy, where the process of cross-fertilisation, contamination, and consumption of each other's cultures then generates cultural understanding, interaction, and appreciation.

Jin and Yoon (2016) emphasise this by explaining that there are commonly two types of investigation used to explore the global consumption of the Korean Wave: studies based on the process of globalisation and studies that are user-oriented (Jin and Yoon, 2016, p.1279-1281). More specifically, there are those studies that look at the Korean Wave as transcultural and transnational to posit hypotheses on their international consumption based on the process of globalisation, such as Chua and Iwabuchi, Eds. (2008a), Ryoo (2009; 2014) and Shim (2006), among many others. Other studies evaluate the Korean Wave's consumption in terms of institutional analysis, where the Korean

Wave is assessed as South Korean cultural diplomacy and a form of soft power (Kim, Jeongnam and Ni, 2011; Kim, Y. (Ed.), 2021; Nye, J. and Kim, 2013).

Conversely, there are those studies that focus on user-oriented analysis and the impact of SNS and sharing platforms on the spreading and consumption of the Korean Wave (Oh, I., 2017; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Lee, H., 2014; Oh, I. and Park, 2012). These studies focus on the changes brought by the new consumption system. They analyse the shift from a business perspective and evaluate the changes to the Korean Wave brought by this shift. Similar studies evaluate the impact of IT and media on consuming societies through analysis of the process of transculturation (Choi, Jungbong, 2015b; Jin and Yoon, 2016; Jin et al., 2021; Jung, H., 2017b; KOFICE (Ed.), 2019; Leung, 2017).

The point that should be stressed is that these types of analysis include the discussion of the Korean Wave and K-pop in terms of a transcultural or transnational phenomenon. Particularly, those studies focused on the Korean Wave are based on the association of the Korean Wave to a transcultural flow. As discussed in section 2.1, the Korean Wave is a transcultural flow and it has been analysed and assessed accordingly and based on the qualities of a transcultural flow: familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness. At the same time, those analyses included elements that were based on Appadurai's mediascapes and represented a link between the two understandings of the process of globalisation. As the analysis conducted by Jin and Yoon (2016) demonstrates, a transcultural flow is rich in mediascapes as those are representative of the flow's country of origin. Mediascapes also offer the opportunity to extend the analysis and impact of K-pop's consumption and promotion to virtual spaces like social media.

3.2 The application of a transcultural flow's characteristics to K-pop

This section expands on the topics covered in section 2.2 of the literature review. It looks more closely at the application of the characteristics of a transcultural flow to the discourses on K-pop. Starting with *odourlessness*, it also scrutinises familiarity and hybridity. Then, it elaborates on the concept of cultural hybridity in relation to the global consumption and success of K-pop.

3.2.1 *Odourlessness* or the lack of cultural odour

The term *odourlessness* has been employed by Iwabuchi to describe the lack of *cultural odours* present in Japanese exported goods in the Asian region. The term *cultural*

odours signifies those features of a product that have cultural qualities representing the country of origin of that product (Iwabuchi, 2002b). Similarly, in the application and analysis of mediascapes, both cultural odours and odourlessness can be used to evaluate the presence of features detailing the country of origin as well as the process of *transculturation* in the flow that is analysed.

Studies on K-pop and its quality of transnational or transcultural phenomenon have determined that it is rich in features that can be seen as lacking *cultural odour*. It should be noted that this trait of K-pop derives also from its hybrid nature and process of production. As such, establishing if K-pop lacks cultural odours is done by simply looking at its presence in South Korea as Korean idol pop music. Examples of such investigations are books by Lie (2015) and Fuhr (2016) that look at the origin of K-pop. Both studies determined that K-pop is a hybrid style of music that mixes specific imported music genres with the popular style of Korean music and the imported and adapted idol system. As such, both studies underscore (even if not explicitly) that K-pop should be considered Korean only in name.

This conclusion is built on the same understanding that brings Iwabuchi to Japanese exports of audio-visual materials as the "*culturally odourless* three C's: consumer technologies […]; comics and cartoons […]; and computer/video games" (2002, p.27). This understanding is the notion that these products, even though are known to be *made in Japan*, they do not significantly represent the idea of Japan as they are odourless. Similarly, K-pop is known to be *made in South Korea* but does not represent fully the idea of South Korea. Lie's past paper on this same topic aligns with this conclusion: the *K* in K-pop stand for Korea only if it is considered in term of the location of music labels' headquarters and the ethnicity of the majority of the idols performing it (Lie, 2012). Lie aptly explains that "it is precisely because there isn't very much "Korean" in K-pop" that "the K [...] is merely a brand" (Lie, 2012, p.361). In other words, K-pop should be considered rich in cultural odours exclusively when analysed in terms of music labels and idols' origins. This point will be further explored in Chapter 7 when the analysis will look at K-pop's hybridity and its reception by Japanese fans.

Similar viewpoints are expressed by other academics studying the process of the production of K-pop, particularly on the impact of SNS, sharing platforms and YouTube (Jin, 2013; 2015; 2016; 2017; Jin and Yoon, 2016; Oh, I. and Park, 2012; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020). Their analysis of the production and distribution of K-pop through the new social media demonstrates that it has many aspects that can be used to highlight its hybridity as well as a lack of cultural odours. As discussed in the literature

review, this analysis determined that K-pop is a product of a glocal system of production and consumption. Once again, its origin is the only element that maintains a connection with South Korea and can be used to showcase its Koreanness. The other elements are representative of their hybrid nature and quality and will be discussed in section 3.2.3.

In the context of this research, the term *odourlessness* is used in the analysis of the consumption of Japanese promotions for K-pop in order to determine how and if it is perceived by Japanese fans. This analysis will also help in exploring the consumption of K-pop in terms of mediascapes. It explores the consumption of K-pop in order to better understand the extent to which Japanese K-pop fans perceived its *cultural odours*. This type of analysis falls in line with the discussion on K-pop's hybridity and lack of representational *Koreanness*. The term Koreanness is used in this research with the same perspective that Iwabuchi adopted for the term *Japaneseness*: it is meant to indicate the cultural odours that are representative of South Korea and are socially and culturally accepted. However, even though it is not necessarily a representation of traditional South Korean culture, as Lie has discussed (2012; 2015), K-pop has become one of the most representative elements of the Korean Wave. As such, this research focuses on understanding the types of *Korean* cultural odours that are embedded in Japanese K-pop promotion and how they are understood by Japanese K-pop fans.

3.2.2 Familiarity and Hybridity

The development of a transcultural flow is determined also by the presence of hybridity and familiarity, two qualities that equally affect the producing and consuming culture. Iwabuchi's understanding of familiarity and its presence within the Korean Wave as a transcultural flow have been studied and developed specifically in referment to K-drama and K-movie. This quality, when analysed, defines those aspects of a product that are representative of the culture behind its product as well as that of the consuming society. In other words, it is an awareness that what has been consumed is rich in details that symbolise both the producing and consuming society. When applied to the consumption of the Korean Wave, studies specified that K-drama and K-movie were understood in terms of *familiar* concepts, values, beliefs and other culturally and socially derived characteristics.

Youna Kim appropriately describes the consumption of K-dramas and their receptions in terms of their familiar qualities: those qualities are articulated by respecting their distance and proximity as well as differences and similarities (2011, p.43). Kim builds her understanding of familiarity on Iwabuchi's explanation of *cultural proximity*

(2001). Iwabuchi introduces the concept of cultural proximity (an aspect of familiarity) in his discussion of the success of Japanese popular products in Asia. Particularly, the term is used to discuss Taiwanese viewers' approval of Japanese TV shows. Iwabuchi adopts the term to underline that even though there are aspects of cultural proximity that help the audience relate to the product, there are still major aspects of any cultural proximity that are lacking but that does not hinder the Taiwanese public's appreciation for Japanese TV shows. One such aspect is the lack of a common language.

In the case of K-pop and the Korean Wave, cultural proximity is represented by numerous aspects of the consumed products. It is the audience who evaluates *how* familiar those qualities are and adopts those to arrange their ideas of the country of origin accordingly. By way of explanation, familiarity is a complex measurement of communal cultural and social traits found in drama and movies. The application of familiarity to the reception of Korean drama, especially in Japan, demonstrates that there is an overall sense of a familiar portrait of cultural beliefs and values, as well as social norms and moral conduct (Chae, 2014; Hirata, 2008; Iwabuchi, 2002a; Lee, Soobum and Ju, 2011; Mōri, 2008; Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014; Tokita, 2010). In the context of this research, in the consumption habits of K-pop in Japan, the presence or lack thereof of familiarity is investigated. Focus is given to determining which traits or qualities of Japanese promotions are perceived and described as *familiar* by the fans.

As a common topic among these studies of the Korean Wave in Japan, the importance of the *Winter Sonata* drama will be discussed in Chapter 4. Here, I would like to focus on the aspects of these investigations that are representative of the concept of familiarity. On one hand, there is the discussion that K-dramas are embedded with elements that remind the consumers of common cultural and social traits easily found in the Asian region. Iwabuchi explains this as Japan's desire for *Asianess* (Iwabuchi, 2002a), while others define it in terms of memories, cultural assimilation, and differentiation (Chae, 2014; Mōri, 2008; Tokita, 2010). In the case of K-dramas and movie consumption, *familiarity* is found and elaborated in terms of cultural and social affinities and differences; those elements are then used by the consumers to formulate or modify pre-existing representative ideas of the country of origin.

There is also the notion that the familiarity found in the Korean Wave is due to common cultural traits identified throughout the Asian region. This understanding is built on the notion of cultural hybridity. The term implies that there is a set of values, aspects, beliefs, and other elements of a culture that could be considered universal and are therefore present and visible in all cultures, despite their geographical location or cultural

and sociological background. As the discussion developed, these studies frequently introduce the idea that the success in East Asia is due to a hybrid system of values, beliefs and cultures that help the integration of the Korean Wave in those countries (Dutton, 2009; Erni and Chua, 2005a; Iwabuchi, 2005; 2010; 2014; Cho, 2011; Wee, 2016; Ryoo, 2009; 2014; Lee, Soobum and Ju, 2011).

The starting point is that there is a common level of cultural elements that creates and develops inter-Asian connections, which help to foster foreign cultural products and their consumption. Cho (2011) defines those cultural elements in terms of pan-Asian values and pop-cultural products; while Iwabuchi defines them in terms of Asianess[22] (Iwabuchi, 2002a; 2005; 2010). If something is recognized as familiar and that familiarity is widespread within a region, then that familiar trait is part of all societies and cultures. Iwabuchi's investigation of cultural hybridity, as well as the application of this concept to the Korean Wave, are not utilised in this research. However, it is a frequently explored topic within the studies conducted on the consumption of the Korean Wave and, as such, section 3.2.3 will briefly address its application.

Similarly to the sense of familiarity, hybridity is found to be a key aspect of the Korean Wave and it has previously been extensively analysed Iwabuchi discern in his study the difference between *hybridity* and *hybridism* to underline how the first is related to the identity, while the second reinforces the boundaries between cultures. In other words, *hybridity* is used to underline the cross-fertilisation and cultural exchange among different areas and cultures. *Hybridism* is used to underline the boundaries created through the process of hybridization. In addition, the author stresses how *hybridity* is linked with the cultural and social aspects of the culture behind the consumed products. Iwabuchi identifies this aspect of hybridity as *strategic*: it underlines the idea that foreign products are assimilated into Japanese products without making them lose their cultural odours. In the context of this research and the studies discussed here, *hybridity* is to be intended as a characteristic that is developed when a product is a fusion of different products, oftentimes combined with some aspects or details originating from the country that is consuming it. In this sense, K-pop itself should be considered a hybrid as both Lie (2012; 2015; 2021) and Fuhr (2016) underline. When production and commercialization are taken into consideration, hybridity leaves space for odourlessness and mukokuseki as a possible interpretation of K-pop and its flow.

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[22]Here the term Asianess refers to both Asianness and Asianess. Iwabuchi too adopts the spelling *Asianess* to refer to both connotations of the noun. Thus, I chose to maintain the same spelling throughout the thesis.

Iwabuchi found that the Japanese flow presented some instances of hybridity when its consumption was analysed in the Asian region. Particularly, Iwabuchi identified this particular type of hybridity to be linked with the Japanese concept of *mukokuseki* (Iwabuchi, 2002b, p.71), which means 'without a nationality'(Iwabuchi, 2002b; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020). The term has been described by the author to have two possible, not mutually exclusive meanings: 1) mukokuseki indicates hybridity; 2) it carries the meaning of odourlessness. This line of thought also brought forward the idea that *mukokuseki* represents both a lack of country and a lack of nationality for the consumed products, as well as the culture embedded in them.

Iwabuchi specifies that there is the idea of *mukokuseki* representing the "mixing of elements of multiple cultural origins" (2002b, p.71) or hybridity; then, the author clarifies that there is the idea that it implies "the erasure of visible ethnic and cultural characteristics" –which can be easily reinterpreted into odourlessness (2002b, p.71). Iwabuchi uses both of these meanings, implying that the consumption of Japanese pop-cultural products is affected by both hybridity and odourlessness when analysed within the East Asian region. Both meanings can be used to describe the cultural flow from Japan to Asia and the current global flow of the Korean Wave. However, both do not fully reflect the complexity of the Korean Wave nor the inability of the Japanese flow of products to obtain partial and minimal results outside of specific countries in Asia. As such, this research does not adopt *mukokuseki* to analyse Japanese promotion for K-pop.

3.2.3 Cultural Hybridity and the Korean Wave

When talking about *cultural hybridity*, Iwabuchi's understanding of the characteristics of his transcultural flow and transculturation process offers insights into the influence generated by the flow's odourless and hybrid nature. Aiding the process of transculturation, odourlessness and hybridity are used to describe not only the characteristics of the flow but also those of the culture behind it (Chua and Iwabuchi, 2008b; Iwabuchi, 2002a; 2002b; 2006; 2017b). More in-depth analysis of cultural hybridity has stressed the connection with cultural proximity or affinity, as well as the connection between cultural hybridity and the Japanese term *mukokuseki*. In this context, it indicates those odourless characteristics that are commonly found in the consuming and producing societies.

The works of Mōri (2009), Ryoo (2009; 2014) and Sim et al. (2017) aptly explain the application of the concept of cultural hybridity to the Korean Wave and K-pop. Mōri (2009) explores the links between cultural hybridity, popular music, and the Korean Wave

in Japan to analyse the complex relationship between Japanese pop music and hybridity. In this study, the evaluation of cultural hybridity in Japan is judged on its nature as a characteristic of a transcultural flow. Ryoo (2009; 2014) places the arguments around cultural hybridity and the Korean Wave within the context of the consequences of globalisation as envisioned both by Appadurai and Iwabuchi. On one hand, the adoption of Appadurai's understanding of the process is to highlight that there is more disjunction behind it than what was envisioned. As such, when the globalising process behind the Korean Wave is analysed, the dominant and commonly spread culture is not found to be American or Western. On the other hand, Iwabuchi's transcultural flow and transculturation process emphasises the presence of communal elements that can be considered results of globalisation.

Lastly, the study by Sim et al. (2017) differs from the previously analysed ones because it focuses on using cultural hybridity to explain the evolution of a traditional cultural element of South Korea known as *gwangdae* (clown). This study aims to understand from a cultural hybridity perspective how the traditional element of *gwangdae* has been introduced, developed, and integrated within K-pop. In doing so, the authors analysed K-pop as a form of cultural hybridity that lacks cultural odours. Their study also accentuates that the presence of cultural hybridity within the Korean Wave and K-pop has been the subject of numerous studies, all focused on the lack of concrete Korean features as well as the easiness of its consumption abroad (Sim et al., 2017).

On a similar note, Shim adopts the notion of cultural hybridity to position the consumption of the Korean Wave as a transcultural flow within the discourse of globalization (2006). The author clarifies that cultural hybridity is intended as that process that generates cross-contamination and fertilization. However, the analysis also examines the socio-economic, political, and cultural circumstances behind the formation and expansion of the Korean Wave, specifically on the origin of K-pop. A key point in this paper is the conclusion that, in terms of cultural proximity, cultural hybridity is not enough to explain the reasons behind the international success of the Korean Wave. It might be one factor, but it cannot be considered the only one (Shim, 2006). Particularly, in the context of the Korean Wave and its global success, Iwabuchi's idea of odourlessness and hybridity cannot simply be used to fully comprehend the diverse levels of connection and interest shown toward the Korean Wave (Oh, I. and Jang, 2020).

The studies conducted on cultural hybridity and the Korean Wave offered varied argumentations on the relation between the Korean Wave and its hybridity. The primary focus has previously been on the idea that cultural hybridity was reflected within the flow

as well as in the cultures consuming it. The implication is that there is or should be a baseline of common hybridity present in each culture. Starting with this implication, those studies are basing their understanding on the notion that the Korean Wave is a cultural product and a transcultural mediated flow with a global audience. As such, they focused intensely on the idea that the international success of the Korean Wave is due to its hybridity which determines an easier absorption and integration in the everyday life of foreign countries. This research does not apply the term cultural hybridity to the analysis of K-pop consumption in Japan. It does, however, investigate K-pop's hybridity, odourlessness, and familiarity to determine if K-pop can actually be considered a transcultural flow.

3.3 The framework and its application

This thesis adopts as its framework the concept of transcultural flow as described and analysed by Iwabuchi and Appadurai's understanding of mediascapes. Both concepts have been used to investigate the Korean Wave's spread and consumption. The application of this framework aids in the elaboration of this study's aim: to develop a comprehensive analysis of K-pop promotion and consumption in Japan as a transcultural flow. It does so by determining whether the characteristics of a transcultural flow apply to the case of K-pop in Japan. Three research questions help this process: I) how are Japanese promotions for K-pop localised and structured? II) how do Japanese promotions differ from K-pop promotions in other foreign countries? III) how are K-pop promotions consumed in Japan? This section introduces the framework and its application.

Figure 1 illustrates the framework by highlighting the relations within each component of each level. These connections reflect the conclusion drawn in section 3.1: mediascapes are considered on the same level as odourlessness as they can be used to discuss cultural odours embedded in mediated content. The division of the framework into three levels is introduced to facilitate the explanation of the structure and its application as this follows two simultaneous flows of connections. Each level corresponds to a research question and the focus of the analysis.

The two flows of connection have the same starting point: K-pop. At this level of the framework, there is the interconnectivity of K-pop, which determines not only its characteristic of mediated flow but also develops and encourages its expansions through the second level. More precisely, K-pop's interconnectivity will be the focus of the first research questions: I) how are Japanese promotions for K-pop structured and localised? To address this research question, experts and fans' interviews are integrated with the

comparative analysis of K-pop promotional activities in Japan across SNS, websites and YouTube. Iwabuchi's transnationalism is based on the idea that behind the consumption of a transnational and transcultural product there is a flow of connections. Globalisation has established this flow of connection through a mediated global flow. As a global or intra-regional mediated flow, K-pop can be discussed in terms of its interconnectivity. At the same time, since it is based on a mediated flow and mediated mechanism of expansion, integration, and consumption, it is rich in mediascapes. Through the description and breakdown of the promotional strategies for Japanese activities for K-pop, the analysis also introduces the basis for a comparative analysis of K-pop international promotional campaign.

Figure 1 The Framework's model
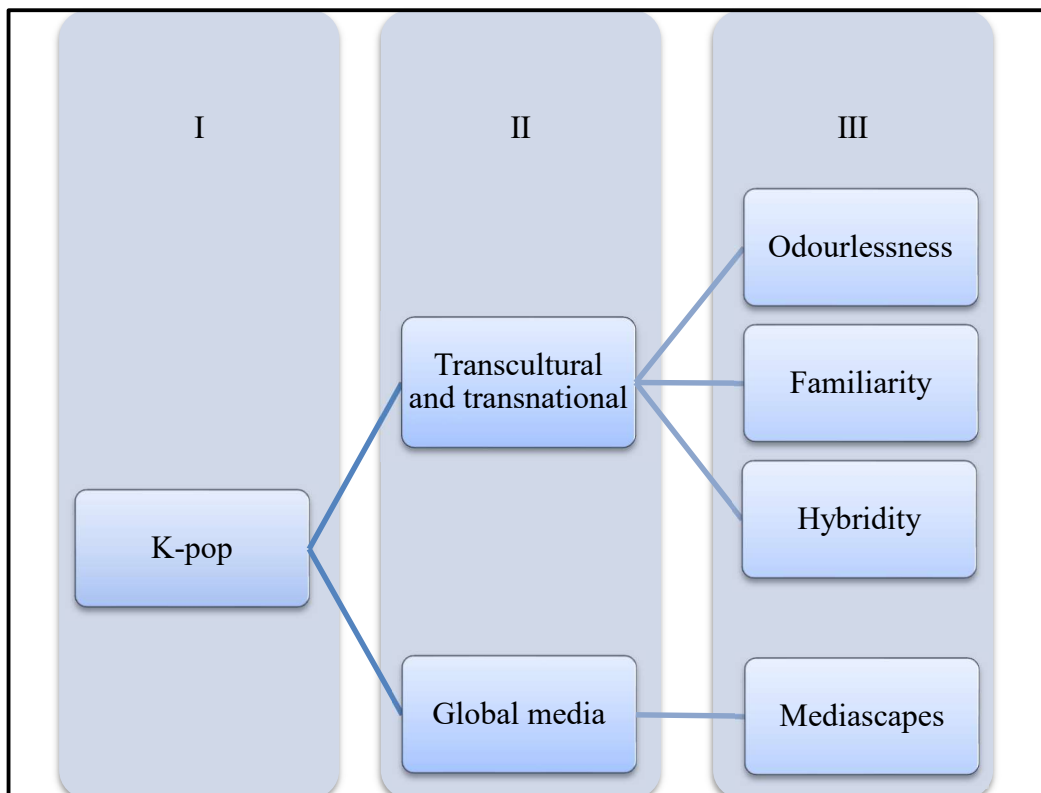
From the first level, the model is divided into two qualities: K-pop as transcultural and transnational, and as globally mediated. These understandings are at the base of any analysis related to the presence of the Korean Wave and/or K-pop in foreign countries and are similarly used here. They are considered for the comparative analysis used to elaborate on the second research question: II) how do Japanese promotions differ from K-pop promotions in other foreign countries? This analysis looks at the similarities and diversities between Japanese, American and Chinese promotions in order to determine the level of localisation, the presence or lack thereof of any of Iwabuchi's key

characteristics of a transcultural flow, and the level of inclusion or exclusion of mediascapes related to South Korea. A comparative analysis of case studies through secondary and primary resources is used to address this research question. Data was collected through the websites of Korean companies and any relevant English-language secondary resources, particularly for Chinese promotions.

To round out this analysis, the third level of the framework is the *process of transculturation* (globalisation). It is used to answer the third and final research question: III) how are K-pop promotions consumed in Japan? The framework is divided into four elements: the three characteristics of a transcultural flow and mediascapes. Iwabuchi adopted these qualities to analyse and discuss the flow of products to and from Japan within the Asian region. This last level of the framework is applied to both the second and third research questions. It is an aid in the development of the comparative analysis and argumentation of each case study adopted to answer the second research question. Its application in the third research question offers the opportunity to explore whether or not K-pop has the qualities to be considered a transcultural flow in Japan. Additionally, it will aid in the investigation of Japanese K-pop fans' understanding of these qualities.

Based on this framework, the analysis looks at the three characteristics and mediascapes as elements of a transcultural flow to assert their presence in K-pop promotional materials and their perception by Japanese fans of K-pop. The responses of focus groups and interviews with K-pop fans are integrated with a visual and qualitative analysis of online and offline promotional materials for Japanese promotions. This analysis is also based on the discourses introduced and elaborated in section 3.2. This section explored more in detail the application of the qualities of a transcultural flow to K-pop by looking at those studies that analyse K-pop in terms of familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness. The next section looks more in detail at the methodological tools and analysis adopted in this research. Section 3.4.2 elaborates on the type of analysis conducted and its relevance to each research question and the research's overall aim.

3.4 Methodological tools and analysis

This section presents the methodological tools and analysis adopted in this research. It is divided into two parts: the first addresses the data collection and the points above mentioned; the second addresses the types of analysis conducted. Before introducing the methodological tools and analysis adopted, it should be stressed that any analysis focused on a *transcultural flow* limits the scope of the study and the type of data that can be used. As the numerous academic studies discussed in Chapter 2 show, an analysis of K-pop as a transcultural flow of its own right in Japan is limited by a) the data; b) the timeframe of analysis; c) the medium of discussion and elaboration and finally, d) the cultural and social aspect of such a study. More specifically, data limits the study and analysis of K-pop as a transcultural flow because if considered in its entirety it would be impossible to study: criteria to select a specific range of data or an approach through case studies are necessary to develop in detail a study of a transcultural flow. Linked with the process of data selection, the timeframe of analysis is also limiting the scope and depth of a transcultural flow study as such it should be considered and adapted to the type of data selected or used as a criterion for data selection. Both of these points will be elaborated in depth in section 3.4.1.

Building on this, the third limitation to a transcultural flow study is the medium of discussion and elaboration. This expression indicates not only the language used for data collection but also that of the researcher and the participants: as the study is conducted on the cultural and social perception of a foreign product, it is important to communicate through a medium that is common to both parties and similarly understood. This point is particularly relevant to my research: my data collection process involved the usage of both English and Japanese language to better reflect the wide range of data needed. However, this system of data collection was also faulty as my own personal lack of knowledge of the Chinese language limited the type of data that I could collect. Lastly, it is fundamental to acknowledge the cultural and social aspects of this type of analysis as it will have an impact on the type of data collected and its relation to the topic. These points are elaborated more in detail in section 3.4.1, where the data collection is introduced.

Fieldwork lasted from June 2019 to August 2019 and took place in Tokyo, Japan, with ten days in Seoul[23], South Korea. Any follow-up trips that were being planned for 2020 were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was collected from late 2017

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[23] This fieldwork provided me the additional possibility to ascertain the difference between Japanese and Korean promotions for K-pop.

to mid-2021, to take notice of any possible difference caused by the pandemic, as the music industries also had to adjust their promotional strategies due to the restrictions in place as protective measures against COVID-19.

3.4.1 Data Collection

For this research, a qualitative approach has been chosen and data was collected and analysed using qualitative analysis. Primary data[24] is composed of the set of interviews and focus groups conducted, observation in loco and the monitoring of the selected companies' promotional activities in Japan. Secondary data includes news, blog posts, articles, data from music charts, and any informative article by music experts on K-pop promotions in Japan, the USA, and the Chinese market. Tale 1 is an abridged version of table 3 in the Appendix, where the complete list of secondary resources can be found.

Table 1 Abridged version of Appendix - Table 3 List of secondary resources

RESOURCE	TYPE	WEBSITE		TWITTER
Billboard	Magazine	billboard.com		@billboard
Billboard Japan	Magazine	billboard-japan.com		@Billboard_JAPAN
Soompi	Online Magazine	soompi.com		@soompi
Tower Record: Shibuya	Retail Company	towershibuya.jp	towershibuya.jp/kpop	@TOWER_Shibuya
Oricon	Media and News Company	www.oricon.co.jp		@oricon

3.4.1.1 INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Interview participants were identified through gatekeepers and via the snowballing sampling technique. Specifically, gatekeepers were used to find experts and to connect with Japanese university students interested in K-pop and the Korean Wave; then the snowballing technique was introduced to have a wider sample of students as many belonged to the same club or circle of friends (Lohr, 2008). Unfortunately, due to the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic, the number of interviews completed (13) is under

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[24]The research originally included the collection of qualitative and quantitative data through a survey aimed at understanding the role of K-pop and the Korean Wave within the broader argument of Japanese pop culture consumption. However, the survey was discontinued as it did not aid in the collection of data relative to the aim of this thesis.

the number originally envisioned at the outset of this project. Many possible participants showed initial interest, yet as time passed, they opted out.

The lack of participants can be also attributed to the worsening of the bilateral relationship between ROK and JP in the summer of 2019. As it is discussed in Chapter 4, the worsening of the bilateral relation did not affect the popularity of K-pop or the Korean Wave; however, it created a less open environment for confrontations with an outsider on the themes of my research. As a gatekeeper also confirmed, the worsening of the relationship caused a general reluctance by Japanese fans to discuss openly their passion for the Korean Wave or K-pop. To overcome the lack of participants, I intended to organise a follow-up fieldwork trip in 2020. However, due to the pandemic, this trip was not completed.

Table 2 List of participants

#	PARTICIPANTS	GENDER	DATE& LOCATION	TOPIC
1	Expert 1	M	July 2019 - Seoul	Korean Wave & K-pop
2	Expert 2	M	August 2019 - Tokyo	K-pop
3	Expert 3	M	July 2019 - Osaka	ROK Cultural Diplomacy
4	Focus Group 1	F&M	July 2019 - Tokyo	K-pop & Korean Wave
5	Focus Group 2	F&M	July 2019 - Osaka	K-pop
6	Student A	F	July 2019 - Osaka	K-pop & Korean Wave
7	Student B	F	July 2019 - Osaka	K-pop & Korean Wave
8	Student C	M	July 2019 - Osaka	K-pop
9	Student D	F	July 2019 - Osaka	K-pop
10	Student E	F	July 2019 – Osaka	K-pop
11	Student F	F	November 2019 - Tokyo	K-pop
12	Student G	F	November 2019 - Tokyo	K-pop
13	Student H	F	November 2019 - Tokyo	K-pop

A complete list of interviewees can be found in Table 2. The language adopted for the interviews and the focus groups was chosen by the participants. Both English and Japanese language have been used and, in some cases, they have been used at the same time to give the participants as much autonomy in their responses as possible. Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants, and as such, the table lists the participants under a pseudonym. Two interviews were with experts on K-pop and the Korean Wave who offered their knowledge and opinion on the presence of K-pop within the Japanese music market. The third expert offered insights on ROK cultural diplomacy and soft power's approach. His expertise was envisioned to help deliver a deeper analysis of the Korean Wave as a form of South Korean cultural diplomacy. However, as the aim of the research shifted, his expertise was not taken into consideration during the analysis. The remaining interviews and focus groups included Japanese university students and fans of K-pop. Two types of interviews were conducted: semi-structured and in-depth interviews. Table

3 and Table 4 offer examples of the interview questions used: these questions were intended to be a framework of topics/questions that needed to be covered across all interviews. The focus groups used the same set of questions as the fans' interviews.

In the case of experts' interviews, semi-structured interviews were conducted following the approval of questions. This method of interview gives more control over the conversations and assures the collection of data relative to the topics or themes crucial to the research (Loosveldt, 2008; Merrison, 2016; Potter, 2018). A similar semi-structured interview style was used during the Japanese students' interviews; however, those sets of questions were easily moved around, changed, or skipped according to the degree of disclosure offered by the interviewee. This approach fits more the in-depth interview style and has been adopted whenever the interviewee felt more at ease with this style of interview. To be sure that each fan's interview covered the same set of key topics, a list of key questions was kept as a guideline to conduct each interview (Dicicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Fowler and Cosenza, 2008; Loosveldt, 2008; Schaeffer and Presser, 2003; Schwarz et al., 2008).

Table 3 List of interview questions - Experts

EXPERTS

How would you describe the Korean Wave?
What is the role of the Korean Wave in promoting Korean culture?
What is the role of K-pop within the Korean Wave?
How would you consider the approach of the Korean Wave to international promotion?
How different is the current Korean Wave from the "original" one?
What was the main reason for K-pop to seek promotions abroad?
Would K-pop "survive" without international promotion?
Would you consider K-pop to be promoted differently in Japan than in any other country?
Would you describe the current style of K-pop promotion in Japan as highly localised?
Would you describe the Korean Wave in Japan to be also highly localised?
Why is it important for K-pop to localise its promotion in Japan?
Is there a tangible difference between the current and past promotional styles for K-pop in Japan?
What do you think is the main selling point of K-pop in Japan/abroad?

Table 4 List of interview questions - Fans

JAPANESE FANS

Do you listen to K-pop?
Why do you listen to it?
When and how did you start listening to K-pop?
How do you listen to K-pop most of the time?
What do you think about K-pop's promotions? What do you like about them?
What do you like about K-pop?
Is there any other genre of music that you like as much?
What do you think about K-pop promotion in Japan?
What do you think about K-pop idols singing in Japanese?
Do you generally like the Japanese language version of a K-pop song? If not, why?
How would you describe K-pop in comparison with J-pop?
Since you've started listening to K-pop, have you explored other Korean products? Like K-drama, K-movies, or K-food?
Do you discuss your passion for K-pop with friends? If not, why?
Would you consider your idea of South Korea to be different since you started listening to K-pop?
Why do you think it changed?
What is your current idea of South Korea? How do you imagine it?

3.4.1.2 K-POP COMPANIES

The data collected throughout the project is relative to the official Japanese promotion of K-pop by the three companies that used to be called "The Big Three" (SM, YG and JYP) and the company behind the worldwide sensation BTS, Big Hit. The timeframe for data collection goes from the early 2000s to 2020. The term *official Japanese promotion* encompasses all those activities that revolve around the promotion of new Japanese music in the form of a single or an EP or a new Japanese album. Anything that was made available to the Japanese public in the Korean language was included in this project for comparative purposes when promotional posts were published by the Japanese accounts on SNSs. Additionally, under the umbrella term *official Japanese promotions*, any activity undertaken in Japan from the debut year to the latest recorded official Japanese release is included. Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7 are the abridged version of respectively Table 1, Table 2, and Table 4 in the Appendix. They offer the list of idols, SNS and YouTube channels selected for each company. Colour coding was used to distinguish between "**solo idols**", "**groups**" and the group's "**sub-unit/s**", and any "**solo activity**" of groups' member/s. Underlined idols are no longer active. The asterisk indicates an artist who had released music under one of the companies used for data collection but has changed company before, during or after the data collection period. For brevity purposes, the artists that belong to the subsidiaries under HYBE Labels, the music division of HYBE Corporation, have been listed under "HYBE".

Table 5 Abridged version of Appendix - Table 1 List of Idols for Each Company

COMPANY	IDOL	START YEAR	END YEAR	DURATION
SM	BoA	2001	2019	18
SM	EXO	2015	2019	4
SM	EXO - CBX	2017	2019	2
SM	Super Junior	2008	2020	12
SM	Kyuhyun (Super Junior)	2016	2017	1
HYBE	BTS	2014	2020	6
HYBE	Gfriend	2018	2020	2
YG	BIGBANG	2008	2016	8
YG	Winner	2014	2020	6
JYP	Twice	2017	2021	4
JYP	Rain*	2006	2006	0

Table 6 Abridged version of Appendix - Table 2 List websites and SNS' accounts used for data collection for each idol

IDOL	JP WEBSITE	SK WEBSITE		INSTAGRAM		SK TWITTER	JP TWITTER
SHINee Taemin (SHINee) Key (SHINee)	shinee.jp	smtown.jp/artists/shinee/	smtown.com	@shinee	@shinee_jp_official	@SHINee	@shinetter
BTS	bts-official.jp	ibighit.com/bts/kor/		@bts.bighitofficial		@bts_bighit	@BTS_jp_official
TXT	txt-official.jp	ibighit.com/txt/kor/		@txt_bighit		@TXT_bighit	@TXT_bighit_jp
SEVENTEEN	seventeen-17.jp	seventeen-17.com		@saythename_17		@pledis17_STAFF	@17_JP_STAFF
AFTERSCHOOL		pledis.co.kr/html/artist/afterschool					
PSY*		pnation.com		@42psy42		@psy_oppa	
Lee Hi*	ygex.jp/leehi/	aomgofficial.com/leehi		@leehi_hi		@leehi_hi	

Table 7 Abridged version of Appendix - Table 4 List of YouTube Channels used for data collection

COMPANY	IDOL	SK YT	JP YT
SM	BoA	SMTown	avex
SM	EXO	SMTown	avex
SM	Kyuhyun (Super Junior)	SMTown	avex
HYBE	BTS	HYBE Labels	UMJ
HYBE	Gfriend	HYBE Labels	KING RECORDS
YG	BIGNANG	YG Entertainment	YG Entertainment
JYP	Twice	JYP Entertainment	TWICE JAPAN OFFICIAL YouTube Channel
JYP	Rain*	RAIN's Official Channel	RAIN's Official Channel

On March 30th, 2021, Big Hit Entertainment changed its name and corporation structure: the company is now named *HYBE Corporation* (Choi, Jiwon, 2021; Cirisano, 2021; Yeo, 2021a). The name "Big Hit Entertainment" has been changed to *Big Hit Music* and it will indicate the label that deals solely with music operations under the new division of HYBE labels (HYBE LABELS, 2021c), which is the music and entertainment division of HYBE Corporation. Since the change affects the entire labels' structure from the end of March 2021 onward, I opted to keep using the terms Big Hit to refer to BTS and TXT's music record company in this research. Along with Big Hit Music, under HYBE Labels, there are Pledis Entertainment and Source Music, which were acquired between 2019 and 2020 (Herman, 2020a; Kelley, 2019), and Belift Lab (co-managed with CJ E&M). Each subsidiary under this label operates independently from the corporation, which offers and grants creative support (Choi, Jiwon, 2021; HYBE LABELS, 2021c). Their inclusion in the data collection process derives from I) their link with Big Hit due to their acquisition by the company; II) their level of success and promotion in Japan; III) their promotion had been carried out in Japan while I was conducting fieldwork there.

Along with these companies' idols, a selection of other idols was also closely observed if they fit two criteria: 1) they were promoting in Japan during my fieldwork trip and 2) they were in the final stages of promotion when fieldwork started, or they were in the initial stages of promotion when fieldwork ended. The first is self-explanatory as it permitted to include all those idols that had an impact on the Japanese K-pop market but that did not belong to the selected four companies, such as (G)I-dle, which belongs to Cube Entertainment, and IZ*One, a South Korean-Japanese idol girl group that is the results of the Mnet reality TV program *Produce 48*. The second criterion was included to accommodate the possibility to record the initial or final stages of promotions for idols whose newest CD was released to the market before or after the fieldwork period. This helped include data of idols such as Monsta X, whose promotion would have taken place after fieldwork, and SEVENTEEN, whose promotion was just concluding at the beginning of fieldwork.

3.4.1.3 OBSERVATION

During fieldwork, data was collected through observations in three different locations across Tokyo: firstly, there is the special ward Shibuya, where observations and data collection took place in Tsutaya and Tower Record principally. Occasionally, data

was also collected in other shops, like the BT21[25] café just outside the entrance to Tokyo's subway in the basement of Shibuya's 109Shop. Secondly, Shin Okubo was also selected as a key location for data collection as it is Tokyo's Korean Town and it is famous for offering a variety of Korean Wave-related products, with a particular predominance for K-pop, K-drama, K-beauty, and Korean food.

Lastly, observation data of promotional materials and their displays in stores were collected in two other locations that were attracting numerous fans: the LINE FRIENDS and BT21 store just outside of Harajuku main road and the pop-up store and café by SM in Tokyo Sky Tree Town. These two locations had occasionally hours-long queues of devoted fans waiting outside for their turn to enter and purchase their desired products or drinks; thus, it was opted for observing and collecting data on the products displayed and their promotional materials in these locations on days when the queue was shorter or non-existent. In Seoul, fieldwork was conducted primarily around the main stores for LINE FRIENDS and Lotte as well as the special district Gangnam to help understand the diverse approach to promotion and foreign fans.

3.4.1.4 IDOLS' NAMES AND STYLISATION: KOREAN, JAPANESE, AND ENGLISH

Japanese promotions for K-pop come sometime with a Japanese adaptation of the idols' Korean name. These adaptations can assume different forms. There is transliteration or adaptation into the Japanese language. For example, for Girls' Generation, the Korean 소녀시대 (*Sonyeo Sidae,* abbreviated into SNSD) is transliterated into 少女時代 (*Shōjo Jidai*); BTS transliterated the Korean 방탄소년단 (*Bangtan Sonyeondan,* in *hanja* 防彈少年團) into 防弾少年団 (*Bōdan Shōnen'dan*), but they also use their acronym. A phonetic transcription in the Japanese alphabet *katakana* is also frequently used: for example, SHINee is known as シャイニー (*Shainī*) and BIGBANG is known as ビッグバン (*BigguBan*). Others prefer to maintain their original name and stylisation, such as TWICE and BLACKPINK. Additionally, some idols change their stage name too, as is the case with BIGBANG members: for example, Seungri used to be known as V.I. and, Daesung is known as D-LITE.

As many other idols have chosen in the past to change their name or adapt it to the Japanese language, the data relevant to their promotion in Japan has been collected using their Japanese name as well as their Korean or international name. The term

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[25]BT21 is the series of characters designed by BTS in 2017 in collaboration with LINE FRIENDS and launched in October 2017 (BIG HIT X LINE FRIENDS ©, [No Date]).

international name indicates the name used by the idols on the global or English language music market: a very well-known example is BTS, as they are known internationally, instead of their Korean full name. As such data have been collected using all the known names for each specific idol. However, it has been decided that for cohesiveness and readability purposes, in this thesis the idols will be referred to with their international name as they are introduced on their companies' English language version of their website.

3.4.2 Data analysis: qualitative analysis, visual analysis, and coding

The data analysis compromises qualitative, visual, and coding. Data was analysed and gathered through a system that echoes the structure of Figure 2. This system reflects the type of materials, career stage, and level of success as the language, promotional strategies and material used are dependent on it. As such, data looked at the debut stage, the rookie, and the fame stage of the career of idols that promotes in Japan. For each stage, notes on the other two elements of the system were taken to understand the differences and commonalities between each stage of the career. For the case study approach adopted for the second research question, the same system was used to gather and classify the data.

Figure 2 Data Collection System
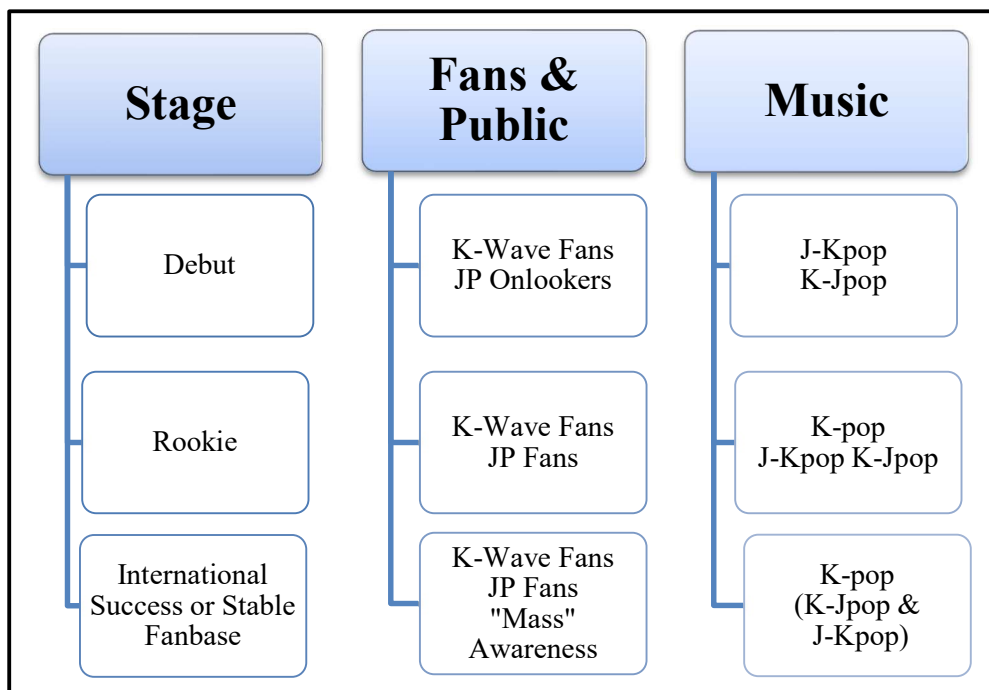
Manual coding was preferred to the usage of software like Nvivo due to the nature of the data collected: screenshots of Tweets, webpages and Instagram posts have

been collected throughout the course of data collection along with manual notes on posts, news and general information gathered while browsing the selected websites and YouTube channels. Along with these sets of multimodal data, photos and handwritten notes have been collected during fieldwork along with a series of screenshots from different sources. As a result of these choices, I preferred conducting the data analysis with manual coding.

The first stage of data analysis is centred on level one of the frameworks: interconnectivity. At this level, K-pop's interconnectivity, and strategic use of SNSs, sharing platforms and websites have been deconstructed to create a baseline of promotional activities that can be used as a comparative tool among all the various approaches used by idols and their respective companies. This first stage aims to address the first research question. To deconstruct the approach to Japanese promotion a comparative analysis of current and past activities has been carried out within each company and among all four of them. This analysis has been integrated with the experts' responses and the comments of fans on their system of consumption. Experts' responses have been analysed through a qualitative approach as their responses spanned the consumption and promotion of K-pop and the Korean Wave. Fans' responses have been used to understand the system of consumption and the points of contact created through those systems of consumption.

Figure 3 Data Collection: Example of Tweets - Secondary Sources

Table 8 Examples of Coding

ODOURLESSNESS		
Cultural Odours: JP or SK	**Lack of Mediascape**	
Presence of reference to SK	Lack of reference to SK	
No reference to the location	Stress on Location: Japan	
The language used: mix	The language used: Japanese	
Type of promotions: JP	Type of promotions: SK & JP	
Japanese style, Japanese stage	Korean style, Japanese stage	
FAMILIARITY		
Familiar Difference	**Distance**	**Proximity**
JP Version – J-Kpop	MV and PV are different	Language
PV built as a déjà vu	K-Jpop	Stage presence
Stress on "Japanese Ver."	Stress on SK	Style of promotion
Similar Layout & Symbol	Reference to International promotion	Topics & Manners
HYBRIDITY		
J-Kpop	SK promotion in JP	
JP promotion in SK	"Made in SK" for Japan	
SK style, JP stage	Language and style	

The second research question corresponds with the adoption of a case study approach to develop the argumentation. This data has been analysed through the same system of coding used for the visual analysis[26] adopted for the third research question. An example of the coding is found in Table 8. Figure 3 (Tower Record Online タワーレコード オンライン, 2020; K-POP NEWS, 2020; Benjamin, 2020) and Figure 4 (Universal Music K-POP, 2020; Universal Music Store, 2020) show examples of Tweets used for data collection. For Chinese promotion, the case study analysed is SM. For the American promotions, SM and JYP have been chosen, along with *Gangnam Style* and BTS. These case studies offered the opportunity to address the beginning and evolution of American promotion of K-pop. Data relative to both case studies has been analysed through a comparative approach that saw the visual analysis being paired with a qualitative analysis of the selected secondary resources. This approach was selected due to a lack of personal knowledge of the Chinese language, which forced me to look at and use English-language secondary resources. Even though it is beyond the scope of this project to analyse the political responses to the Korean Wave in China, Japan, and the USA, it should be noted that my lack of knowledge of the Chinese language precluded the collection of data that would have aided in the comparative analysis of the presence of the Korean Wave in Japan and China. Particularly, it prevented the collection of data

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[26]For examples of the visual analysis see Figures 18 and 19 in Chapter 7.

about nationalistic responses to the presence of the Korean Wave in China and its impact on the Chinese consumption of K-pop. Additionally, the lack of primary resources available for the first stages of Chinese and American promotion was addressed with secondary resources.

Figure 4 Data Collection: Example of identical Tweets - Secondary Sources
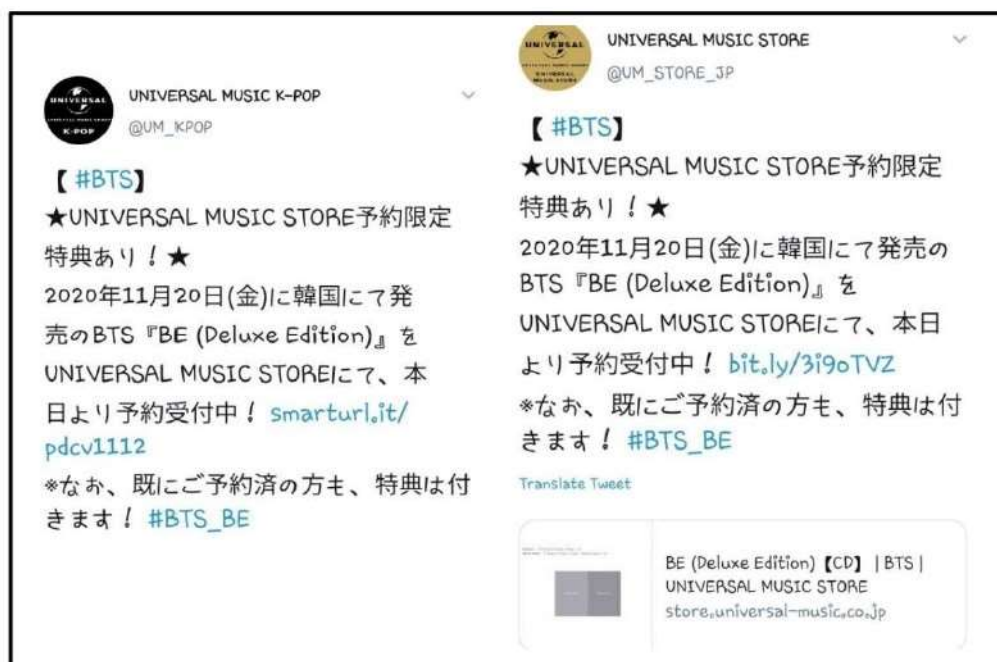
The third research question addresses the presence, or lack thereof, of a transcultural flow's characteristics in K-pop consumption and promotion in Japan. It aims to address K-pop's transcultural quality to determine if it can be considered a transcultural flow. To address this research question, a comparative visual analysis was conducted on the offline and online materials used for Japanese promotions. A comparative qualitative analysis of the responses of the focus group and interviews with K-pop fans has been used to evaluate the results offered by the visual analysis. The analysis focuses on the verbal description, particularly on 1) the vocabulary choices used to talk about South Korea, K-pop and Japanese promotions; 2) the focus of the description; 3) the nuances of language used to describe Japanese K-pop songs used for promotions.

As a result of this framing, a comparative approach was used to determine whether the findings obtained through the visual analysis were also considered by fans. To facilitate the discussion and the comparative analysis, the analysis and discussion of the findings have been divided into three topics. Odourlessness and mediascapes are addressed in the same analysis as the relative data can be used to discuss both. Familiarity and hybridity are discussed separately but with cross-references among each other as they

are related. This approach also offers the possibility to discuss and analyse fans'
perceptions and representative ideas of South Korea. These ideas are discussed in terms
of fans' perception of *Koreanness* through the analysis of the characteristic of
odourlessness and the presence of mediascapes within Japanese promotions.

Chapter 4: The Korean Wave in Japan

This chapter aims to situate this thesis within the wider academic and cultural discourse on the Korean Wave in Japan. Numerous studies have been conducted on the transcultural qualities of *Winter Sonata*: from the importance of memory, inter-Asia referencing and familiarity to underling the transcultural element in the consumption habits of Japanese fans (Chae, 2014; Hirata, 2008; Iwabuchi, 2002a; 2006; Lee, Soobum and Ju, 2011; Lie, 2016; Mōri, 2008; Oh, I., 2009; Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014; Tokita, 2010). These studies help strengthen the conversation around the presence of the Korean Wave in Japan as a transcultural flow.

In addition, among the numerous studies on this matter, Iwabuchi (2008) discusses the impact of the Korean Wave and the representation of Korean cultures on the Korean and Korean-Japanese residents in Japan. Other studies, such as the one from Oh, D and Wha Han (2022), discuss the effect of globalised advertisement on the development of anti-Korean sentiment in Japan. Similarly, Shibuchi (2015) discusses the impact of other cultures on the anti-Korean sentiment in Japan by looking at the relationship between *Zaitokukai*[27] and hate groups[28]. It should be noted that anti-Korean sentiment, as well as cultural nationalism, developed also in other countries, such as China. However, it is beyond the scope of this project to analyse nationalistic responses to the Korean Wave. This chapter serves as a background chapter to better situate the Korean Wave consumption in Japan and as such it will look at the political ties linked with the consumption of the Korean Wave. Two points will be covered: in section 4.1, the importance of memories and the development of anti-Korean sentiment and, in section 4.2, the lack of interest by Japanese fans in political and diplomatic ties between the two countries (Ahn and Yoon, 2020; Hayashi and Lee, 2007; Larsen, 2020; Lee, Hyangjin, 2017; Lie, 2016; Mōri, 2009; Yamanaka, 2010). Lastly, section 4.3 offers a summary of the points discussed in this chapter.

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[27]The term *Zaitokukai* refers to the *Civil Association against Privileges for Resident Korean*.
[28]Related to this argument there is also the increasing number of *hate books* in Japan. For further reading refer to Iwabuchi (2017c) and Oh, I. (2020).

4.1 The *Winter Sonata Phenomenon* and the Japanese audience

As introduced in section 1.1, the history of the Korean Wave's success in Japan begins with the broadcasting of the romantic drama *Winter Sonata*[29]. It was broadcasted for the first time in its abridged and dubbed version in 2003. Since then, the drama has had recurring runs and, "for its fourth run in 2005, NHK […] ran it in the original Korean with Japanese subtitles to preserve the original atmosphere of the show" KOCIS (2011d, p.23). This is the beginning of what has been called the *Winter Sonata Phenomenon*. It consists of the sudden increase in interest in Korean cultural products by Japanese middle-aged women. In other words, it is the catalyst of a series of events that led to the Korean Wave Boom.

Even though the intricacies of the drama's plot are not relevant to this argumentation, two key characteristics need to be highlighted. Firstly, there is a lifelong romance between the two main protagonists. Then, there is the male protagonist's amnesia that led him to assume a new identity. This passage in the narrative of the drama is central as it is related to "the tortuous process of the gradual recovery of his old identity" (Tokita, 2010, p.03.5). This central section of the drama's plot is the key to understanding the drama's success and the intricacies of its effects on Japanese female fans. Particularly, the key passage is the process of recovery of the male protagonist's old identity. It offers two possible interpretations: on one hand, it underlines the importance of memories and their impact on the process of recollection of the past. On the other hand, it highlights the negative effects of amnesia. In other words, reconstructing a long-lost identity is a process that involves filling-in gaps and evaluating known and unknown facts. (Tokita, 2010). The drama deals with the "historiography of oblivion" or the process to "rewrite or excise certain parts of national history"(Tokita, 2010, p.03.4).

This process is also known as the politics of memory. It is related to the process of reconstruction of the shared history between Japan and South Korea, specifically Japan's colonial past. This process has led to the reconstruction of the Japanese memories of the empire and war according to transnational memories of war. This is still a contested topic between Japan, South Korea, and China (Nozaki and Selden, 2009; Schneider, 2008). This argumentation does not aim to invalidate or dismiss the importance and delicacy of this topic; it merely wishes to underline how the initial process of

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[29]The original title is Gyeoul Yeonga (겨울연가). In Japan, it is known as Fuyu no Sonata (冬のソナタ).

reconstruction of this section of history has led Japan to faultily reconstruct its own memories. This process is metaphorically represented in the drama through the story of the main protagonist and his struggle to recall his lost identity.

There are distinct parallels between the gaps in the Japanese reconstruction of the shared history and the gaps in the male protagonist's memories. The process of filling them in, obtaining forgiveness, and then reacquiring the old identity is a symbolic representation of the process of memory reconstruction. The process of "gradual and painful restoration of memory […] involves guilt and recrimination". The subsequent desire for forgiveness and apology[30] is represented by key apologetic refrains in the drama's dialogues[31]. These refrains are suggestive of the "refrain apology in Japan-Korea relation" (Tokita, 2010, pp.03.8-03.9). Through the consumption of the drama, the Japanese audience acknowledges their ignorance of history and South Korea (Yamanaka, 2010). As Tokita highlights, this acknowledgement is proof of the oblivion pervasive in the postwar Japanese attitude toward South Korea (2010). In other words, the drama forced the audience to admit to their ignorance of South Korea and it spurred a curiosity that required satisfaction (Lee, Soobum and Ju, 2011).

Mōri (2008; 2009) and Chae (2014) noticed that this necessity to rediscover South Korea was also supported by the figure of the actor behind the main male protagonist: Bae Yong Jun, nicknamed by his Japanese fans as "Yon-sama"(Lie, 2016, p.127). Yon-sama plays a key role in the development of the *Winter Sonata Phenomenon*[32]: through his character, he reminds Japanese women of something that they might have never experienced personally or something that they might have forgotten about. Simply put, this is a pure love that lasts a lifetime. In other words, fans acknowledge that they are not living life at their best. The concept of melancholia is closely related to this realisation. Oh, I. (2011) and, Oh, I. and Lee, C. (2014) develop this connection by analysing the relation between the female and male audiences of the Korean Wave. In this context, melancholia is that sentiment that female fans develop when they finally acknowledge they do not feel accomplished or satisfied with their personal and professional circumstances. According to Oh, I. (2011), it is the necessary

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[30]For a summary of the key passages in the history of IR between Japan and South Korea, Horowitz offers a detailed analysis in the article *South Korea and Japan since World War II: Between Ideological Discord and Pragmatic Cooperation* (2016).

[31]*I'm sorry* and *God, forgive me* are some of the recurring refrains in the drama's dialogues (Tokita, 2010).

[32]The book 韓流の社会学: ファンダム、家族、異文化交流 (*Kanryū no shakaigaku: fandamu, Kazoku, ibunka kōryū*) by Lee Hyangjin (2008) offers detailed insights on the figure of Yon-sama and his impact on the Japanese female fandoms of K-drama and the Korean Wave.

reconsideration of something loved and then forgotten or, to learn something new when difficult or unexpected problems arise. The consumption of Korean drama nourishes the rediscovery of sentiments long forgotten as well as the notion that their life lacked something vital up to that point (2011).

Part of this process of discovery is the shared consumption of the Korean Wave. Both Mōri (2008; 2009) and Lie (2016) acknowledge the importance of sharing the process of consumption. More specifically, Mōri understood the importance of this practice through the analysis of fans' modes of consumption of *Winter Sonata*. According to the authors, Japanese female fans of the drama created diverse opportunities for convergence (Mōri, 2008). These convergences were based on the necessity to share the passion and curiosity felt toward South Korea, the drama and Yon-sama. The participatory nature of *Winter Sonata*'s consumption is so embedded in the life of Japanese fans that events celebrating the drama or the actor's life[33] take place in Japan (Kwon, 2010).

Similarly, Lie (2016) explores the modalities of convergence[34] of Japanese fans of the Korean Wave as a means to communicate and share their passion, as well as increase interpersonal relations among fans. Examples of such modalities are sharing the process of learning the language or how to use modern technology, or participation in an organized tour of South Korea, particularly if they are tours of K-drama locations (Hirata, 2008; Lie, 2016). The impact of *Winter Sonata* also includes the gender-based division of the Japanese audience's reaction to the *Winter Sonata Phenomenon*. For example, the Japanese female audience and their consumption of the Korean Wave's products contrasted with the Japanese male audience. This section of the Japanese public is considered to be the main actor behind the anti-Korean movement that emerged in Japan as a response to the popularity of the Korean Wave.(Lee, Hyangjin, 2010; Lie, 2016; Oh, I., 2011; Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014; Yamanaka, 2010).

4.1.1 The anti-Korean sentiment and the manga Kenkanryū

Oh, I. and Lee, C. (2014) stress the gendered division of the Japanese public regarding the consumption of the Korean Wave. The authors note how the gendered division also reflects the political and socio-cultural role of the audience. Similarly, the

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[33]Examples of such occurrences are birthday's anniversaries or career related celebrations.
[34]Chapter 5 looks in more detail at these modalities of convergence and their role in K-pop consumption by Japanese fans.

male nature of the anti-Korean movement[35], which is embodied in the publication of the *Manga Kenkanryū* in 2005 by Yamato Sharin, has also been noted by Liscutin (2009), Lie (2016) and Yamanaka (2010). Another key aspect of this movement is its political affiliation: right-wing nationalists are the writers of the manga (Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014). The manga arguments are based on hate speech and nationalistic ideas of Japan that are found in online forums and blogs affiliated with the right-wing nationalistic movement (Liscutin, 2009). Similarly, in the campaign to diminish the success of the Korean Wave and *Winter Sonata*, the author of the manga relies on depicting South Korea as falsely advertised (Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014, p.294; Liscutin, 2009) and wishes to "educate its readers on a wide range of misdemeanours allegedly committed by Korea" (Liscutin, 2009, p.172). The manga *Kenkanryū* contributes "a specific visual grammar and a concise, pungent rhetorical vocabulary to existing 'Anti-Korea' Internet discussions" (Liscutin, 2009, p,192).

The anti-Korean movement and sentiment that spread among the right-wing Japanese public are named after the manga *Kenkanryū* (Liscutin, 2009; Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014; Yamanaka, 2010). As Yamanaka explains, the Japanese term *kenkanryū* (嫌韓流) can indicate hate toward the Korean Wave or the wave of hate toward Korea (Yamanaka, 2010). The first meaning builds on the hatred toward the popularity of the Korean Wave and its products; the second has a broader meaning and is built on the resentment toward South Korea in general. This generalisation encompasses historic ties between the two countries, the perception of the Korean Wave as a resource of Korean soft power and, the general dislike toward the Korean Wave boom (Lie, 2016; Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014; Yamanaka, 2010).

Hayashi and Lee (2007), and Epstein (2010), underline the real-life consequences that the publication of the manga and its relative movement had on Japan. In particular, in their investigation of the media representation of the Korean Wave in Japan, Hayashi and Lee (2007) make note of how the movement had repercussions on Korea's image as used by Japanese media. This harmed the depiction of Japan by Korean media, which Epstein (2010) stresses to be intentionally portrayed as a distant and far land. Similarly, Yamanaka analyses the manga *Kenkanryū* as a way for the Japanese public to analyse and conceptualize South Korea as *other* (2010). Yamanaka's arguments

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[35] For a detailed genealogy of anti-Korean sentiment in Japan, Yamanaka (2010) offers a reconstruction of the popular representation of South Korea in Japan and their connection to the manga. Similarly, Epstein's reconstruction of the visual representations of Japan in South Korea offers insights on their political and sociocultural implications (2010).

reflect that of Epstein: it looks at the formulation of South Korea's identity in Japanese political and socio-cultural discourses as an external identity. This identity is linked to that of Japan as the two countries share part of their history. This connection complicates the construction of South Korea's identity as it has been represented only partially in Japan. Again, the importance of memories and inter-Asian referencing is a key element in the consumption process of the Korean Wave and its integration with the Japanese public (Chae, 2014; Lee, S. and Ju, 2011; Lie, 2016; Mōri, 2008; Oh, I., 2009; Oh, I. and Lee, 2014; Tokita, 2010). As such, the beginning of the Korean Wave consumption in Japan had a big impact on the Japanese political environment. However, the success of the Korean Wave underlines that the current political environment in Japan has little to no impact on its consumption. The next section will elaborate more on this topic.

4.2 The Korean Wave and the ties between ROK and JP

Political and diplomatic ties also might not have an impact on the consumption of the Korean Wave in Japan, even when the diplomatic accidents relate to the shared history between the two countries. This section looks at the climate between South Korea and Japan before and during my fieldwork to highlight how political and diplomatic ties affect the consumption of the Korean Wave. This discussion is based on my personal experience and observation while in Tokyo and the responses of some of my interviewees. It also incorporates two recent studies: Ahn and Yoon (2020) and Shim (2019) as they offer the opportunity to situate this thesis in the current academic debate on the links between the perception of South Korea as *other* and its consumption in Japan.

As elaborated in section 2.4, the Korean Wave is seen by the South Korean government as a form of cultural diplomacy. As Nye, J. and Kim (2013) point out, the Korean Wave has been adopted as South Korean cultural diplomacy to wield soft power with positive results. It has been utilised throughout the years to positively increase the foreign public's opinion of South Korea. The presence of the Korean Wave in Japan has offered numerous opportunities for the Korean Government to implement soft power strategies based upon it. Markedly, the so-called *Korea-Japan Festival*[36] has been adopted by both countries' governments as a key initiative to employ cultural diplomacy through the Korean Wave (COEX, 2018; 2019; Nikkan Kōryū Omatsuri, 2019). The

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[36]This is known as the *South Korea-Japan Cultural Festival* in South Korea; in Japan it is known as the *Nikkan Kōryū Omatsuri* (日韓交流おまつり). It is a cultural festival, co-hosted by both countries since the introduction in 2005 of the "Friendship Year".

festival celebrates Korean culture in Japan and Japanese culture in Korea. It is an event that has been carried out even when the political or diplomatic climate between the two countries was frosty (JIJI, 2019; KOREA.net, 2019; Oh, G., 2019; MOFATSK,2011b).

Similarly, K-pop promotion in Japan has only been slightly affected throughout the years by the two countries' bilateral relationship. Relevant to this thesis are the events that took place before and during my fieldwork trip. To start with, during the summer of 2019, Japan and South Korea's relations had worsened and the delicate balance was deteriorating between the two countries. Since 2018, the relationship between South Korea and Japan has taken a turn for the worst (MOFAJ, 2018a; 2019a; 2019b; 2015; 2018b; MOFASK, [No Date]; 2019b; 2019c; 2019). This downward spiral began when Japan refused to pay the compensation fee for forced labour during WWII, as established by the South Korean Supreme Court. It was ruled that Japanese companies should compensate Koreans for their labour during WWII: this ruling was met with a refusal from both Japanese industries and the government (MOFASK [No Date]; PM Lee Nak-yon 2018a; 2018b; MOFAJ 2018b; 2019b). This resulted in a slow and steady decline in the States' relationship on diplomatic, economic, and political levels.

However, even though there was tension on official political channels, South Korean pop culture's popularity in Japan, related to K-pop and K-drama, did not suffer: for example, take the recognition from RIAJ, the Record Industry Association of Japan, of a double platinum disk to BTS' 2018 latest Japanese album *Face Yourself* (RIAJ 2018a). This certification by the RIAJ is even more relevant and supportive of the above statement since BTS member Jimin has been involved at that time in a scandal due to a wrong styling choice. The idol wore an item that depicted photos of atomic bombs and written words about the importance of learning from history. Due to this, BTS' invitations to appear and promote their album *Face Yourself* on different Japanese TV and radio shows were withdrawn, forcing the band to cancel all promotional activities that would have brought them to Japan (BBC News, 2018; Kstyle Magazine, 2020). This is not necessarily the only case that is supportive of the idea that political and diplomatic accidents have a limited impact on the profitability of Korean Wave products in Japan.

Ahn and Yoon's study supports this hypothesis: the authors investigate the responses of Japanese K-pop fans to the worsening of political and diplomatic ties between JP and ROK. Their conclusion aligns with my observation: there is no direct impact on the fans' consumption habits (2020). Their analysis underlines that to the fans the political and diplomatic ties between the two countries are not relevant to their consumption of K-pop. Similarly, student F underlined this by admitting that many fans

of K-pop do not pay attention to the country's politics as it is not relevant to their consumption. Similarly, Ahn and Yoon report that, according to an interviewed fan, others' political viewpoints should not prevent her consumption of K-pop. Contrary to this approach, Shim (2019) stresses that K-pop consumption is highly affected by idols' mistakes that could be considered diplomatic accidents. Shim bases this argument in part on the impact of idol's mistakes on the relationship between South Korea, Japan and other countries. Moving from one international diplomatic accident to another, the author underlines the impossibility of those episodes to also impact international relations. On top of that, he also demonstrates that it is because of the hyper-connection that we experience that the international audience feels the need to not let go of those accidents (Shim, 2019).

However, over the past years, there have been numerous occasions in which scandals have damaged the reputation of different idols and groups, yet their popularity has still not been fully diminished. Similar, the case of BIGBANG illustrates this point as well. The group's fandom—known as VIP—in Japan has witnessed the aftermath of three big scandals involving the idols. The marijuana scandal[37] concerning the leader G-DRAGON (Soompi, 2012); the driving incident involving Daesung (Soompi, 2011); and the recent scandal related to the rapper T.O.P's abuse of drugs and suicide attempt (Herman, 2017). Nevertheless, the group remained one of the most successful idol groups to promote in Japan: their concert tour in 2014 brought together the second largest number of concertgoers in the whole music industry (allkpop, 2014a) and their most recent tour in 2016 and 2017 was similarly successful and demonstrated that the group's popularity had yet to diminished (BARKS, 2016; DI:GA ONLINE, 2017). This outcome reinforces my own and Ahn and Yoon's conclusions: political scandal or idols' mistakes have little impact on their popularity in Japan.

Contrary to those accidents, the Burning Sun scandal and the Sex Tape scandal depict slightly different examples. The first involves prostitution recruitment to entertain possible investors in the Burning Sun club. The second relates to a series of chatrooms where tapes of sex-related crimes were shared among male idols[38] (Anonymous, 2019;

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[37]The marijuana scandal refers to GDRAGON supposedly smoking a joint while in a club in Japan. Recreational consumption of drugs is prohibited in South Korea and its citizen can be persecuted if they are found to have consumed drugs in foreign countries, even where it is not illegal to consume it recreationally.

[38]For a summary of the Burning Sun scandal, the *Billboard* article by Kelley and Herman (2019) offers a timeline of the main events. McCurry (2019) offers a summary of the legal proceedings. Similarly, Hurts (2019) and McCurry (2019b) offer a reconstruction of the Sex Tape scandal and the main idols involved.

Kelley and Herman, 2019; Hurst, 2019; McCurry, 2019a; 2019b; Yeo, 2021b). These incidents were brought to international attention in late 2018 and their consequences still affect the involved idols. These are just two examples of how accidents can hurt the overall K-pop industry. Particularly of interest is the case of BIGBANG's ex-member Seungri. The idol was at the centre of the Burning Sun scandal and an active participant in the Sex Tape scandal, and as a result was forced to leave the industry (McCurry, 2019a). His ramen restaurant chain *Aori Ramen* subsequently closed due to bankruptcy in the aftermath of the scandals and the difficult economic circumstances that were exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic (SBS News, 2020).

The Japanese press coverage of the Burning Sun scandal and Sex Tape scandals had dwindled by the time fieldwork began. Instead, the scandals were replaced by an intense debate and press interest in the worsening ties and relationship between South Korea and Japan. On television, many debate TV shows discussed the G20 in Japan, the current Moon presidency in South Korea, and the increasing popularity of the anti-Japanese movement that peaked with #BoycottJapan in the summer months (Bloomberg, 2019; Reuters, 2019). The press coverage across a variety of different media sources was highly focused on the debate over the anti-Japanese movement that emerged in those months and the worsening of the diplomatic, political, and economic ties between the two States. Yet, the observation conducted in the key location portrayed an intense interest and passion for South Korean popular culture, particularly K-pop.

The popularity of the Korean Wave did not appear to have been diminishing throughout those months: observations revealed that all the locations scouted were still very popular and the frequency of customers browsing the shelves and displays was still high. Additionally, TV broadcasting companies still promoted and discussed Korean pop music or Korean dramas: particularly interesting is the contrasting approach that some TV programmes adopted when dealing with the Korean Wave and the tense international climate of those months. The TV programme *Mezamashi TV*[39] often offered small remarks on the tense political ties between Japan and South Korea, especially about the #BoycottJapan movement. Instead, there were copious amounts of promotions and comments on the recent most successful K-pop promotions, such as BTS' *Light/Boy With Luv* promotional campaign in July 2019. Additionally, during the three-month fieldwork trip, I did not once witness a weakening of the Korean Wave's popularity. Even during the most active period of the Korean anti-Japanese movements, I viewed long queues to

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[39]In Japanese: めざましテレビ; this is a magazine news TV show that was aired by Fuji TV on weekday mornings.

enter dedicated K-pop cafés or shops where K-pop-related merchandise was sold. In Shin Okubo, food shops, restaurants and food stands were as popular as ever with people queuing for hours in front of them. This underlines how the interest in the Korean Wave is not affected as much by the diplomatic and political ties between the two countries.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter sets out to situate this thesis in the wider academic discourse on Korean Wave consumption in Japan. To do so, it focused on two key topics: the *Winter Sonata Phenomenon* and the impact of politics and idols' scandals on the consumption of the Korean Wave. Firstly, it elaborated on the *Winter Sonata Phenomenon* to explore the connection between the drama and the Japanese audience. In so doing, it highlighted the Japanese political response to the drama and the sudden boom of the Korean Wave. Through this argumentation, it was stressed that the political response of the public was divided by gender. The female audience felt the need to rediscover South Korea and fill in the gaps in their knowledge of the country and its ties to Japan. Contrastingly, the male audience reacted negatively and turned to hate and discrimination toward the Korean Wave. This resulted in the formation of the anti-Korean sentiment and the publishing of the manga *Kenkanryū.*

Next, this chapter looked at the current audience response to political and diplomatic ties between JP and ROK. This section stressed the lack of impact of any political accident on the consumption of the Korean Wave in Japan. Through a selection of key events that preceded my fieldwork trip, the argumentation demonstrated how politics have had little to no impact on the consumption of K-pop in Japan. This also highlighted that any negative reaction by fans is more likely to be caused by idols' scandals. This conclusion emphasised the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of the second section: there is a minimal political or diplomatic impact on the consumption of K-pop in Japan. Independent from political or diplomatic opinions, fans choose to continue their passionate engagement with K-pop and the Korean Wave.

Chapter 5: K-pop promotion and interconnectivity in Japan

This chapter addresses the first research question: I) How are the Japanese promotions for K-pop structured and localised? The chapter argues that the approach to the Japanese pop music market sets K-pop up to become a transcultural flow. It also maintains that K-pop can be regarded as a separate system of consumption that is fully integrated into the Japanese pop music market. Lastly, it explores the network of connections created among Japanese fans of K-pop. To argue these points, the chapter is structured into four sections. The first section introduces the analysis and relative data. The second looks at K-pop's approach to the Japanese pop music market; the second section explores the network of connections and the points of contact; and, the fourth section briefly sums up the findings of the chapters and sets the arguments for the next empirical chapter.

5.1 The analysis conducted and relative data: an introduction

The analysis used the data collected through the monitoring of the websites listed in Table 2 in the Appendix and the responses obtained by the experts and K-pop fans in their interviews. Expert A offered insight on K-pop as a cultural and entertainment industry: the interview focused on understanding how K-pop, as a whole, approaches international promotions. Expert B focused on K-pop as a genre of music and its relation to the Korean and Japanese music markets. Data from the participation of K-pop fans relates to their consumption habits and the type of connections created through it.

This analysis is based on the first level of the framework: K-pop's interconnectivity. Interconnectivity is a key component of any transcultural flow, and as such, it is the first step to be analysed in order to evaluate whether or not the presence of K-pop in Japan is that of a transcultural flow. A part of the interconnectivity is developed by the promotional strategies used for the Japanese market. The qualitative analysis adopted serves two purposes: on one hand, it offered the opportunity to break down in its components the approach to Japanese promotions from the current trend and promotional activities of the selected companies. This deconstruction also helps in formulating and evaluating the impact of the Japanese music market's iron triangle and the analogue nature of K-pop Japanese promotion. The argumentation focused on the iron triangle draws on conclusions by Lie (2013b), whose paper offers insights into the connections

between Japanese pop music's iron triangle and K-pop's presence in the market. By considering his conclusions, I have deconstructed K-pop's Japanese promotions to understand how they are structured and localised.

The term *Iron Triangle* is used to identify the tight relationship between the government, the bureaucracy, and big businesses in Japan since WWII (McCormack, 2002). Here, the term business indicates *keiretsu*—a set of firms and companies informally creating a group, linked together by interlinked business relationships and shareholdings, construction companies and also the health care system in Japan (Kondo, 2005). The term was first used to indicate the power structure and system created by Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei in the 1960s with the creation of local power bases that were tied with the postal system and construction industries (Maclachlan, 2004). Currently, the term indicates any self-sustained, self-reinforcing and isolating power structure and system. In the case of this research, it is used to highlight the closed, interlocked relationship between music moguls, media, and corporate sponsors within the Japanese pop music market.

Then, on the other hand, the qualitative analysis facilitates the discussion of the points of contact and modalities of convergence (Lie, 2016) between fans. Through the deconstruction of the promotional activities, the network of connections based on online and offline promotional materials has been highlighted. This network offers fans diverse points of contact with other elements of K-pop, fans, and products of the Korean Wave. As such, it has been looked at as a network of connections that establishes points of contact between fans. Lie had formulated a similar conclusion in his analysis of the modes of convergence adopted by K-drama Japanese fans. As such, they have been integrated into the analysis to properly address the points of contact identified by me.

5.2 The Japanese music market's iron triangle and its analogue nature

This section will discuss Japanese music's iron triangle and the market's analogue nature as they highly affect the presence of K-pop in Japan. To understand the impact of the iron triangle and the analogue nature of the Japanese pop music market, the analysis considered the current and past promotional activities and materials used by K-pop in Japan. Data collected and analysed covers the last 21 years: from BoA's debut in Japan in 2001 to mid-2021. Any discrepancies in the materials used, such as the shift from

cassettes and vinyl[40] to CDs and DVDs, have not been considered. The adoption of new forms of distribution and consumption of music did not impact the type of promotional strategies. In other words, the new form of distribution and consumption maintained the same role as the old forms within the promotional strategies. In contrast, the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic have been considered to understand the impact on the analogue nature of the Japanese market. This argumentation will focus on the current strategies and promotional materials as they reflect the market's structure and the consumers' needs. The analysis that follows is structured into two parts: the first addresses the iron triangle, the second discusses the Japanese promotions for K-pop and briefly details the analogue nature of the Japanese music market.

5.2.1 Japanese music's iron triangle and K-pop

As mentioned in section 5.1, the arguments set in this section draw on and develop the work of Lie (2013b). In this work, Lie introduces the element of the Japanese music iron triangle to elaborate on *Gangnam Style*'s failure to enter the Japanese music market. The author aptly stresses that to understand the peculiar presence of K-pop within the Japanese music market, the nature of the Japanese pop music market should be considered and analysed (Lie, 2013b, p.50). As such, the presence of the iron triangle and its impact on the construction of promotional activities should be considered. In other words, the integration of K-pop within the Japanese pop music market derives from two key factors: a) the understanding of the market's structure, rules, and nature; b) the adoption of strategies that fully reflect the condition learned from point a).

Key to the success of K-pop promotions abroad is the understanding of the economic and socio-cultural environment in which promotion takes place (Lie, 2019; SMTown, 2020). More specifically, Lie remarks that comprehending the reasons for the public's interest in an idol or an idol group can only be obtained if analysed retrospectively and within a specific timeframe—that of the popularity of that idol or idol group (Lie, 2019). Lee Soo Man further supports this approach by highlighting how BoA's initial approach and success in Japan were possible only due to the market condition of that time and the insider knowledge of the Japanese market at that time. Creating the right circumstances is also fundamental, which Lee Soo Man features by stressing the importance of following the market's own rules (SMTown, 2020).

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[40]Contrasting with this change, BTS and SuperM in 2020 had released music in these formats. SuperM album *Super One* has a limited-edition cassette on sale on the SM Global Shop website. BTS first English-language single *Dynamite* had a vinyl and cassette version available for purchase as well as the CDs.

A similar remark has been offered by Expert A: the interviewee admitted that the survival of K-pop rests on the abilities of the companies behind it to effectively promote abroad. The interviewee suggested that K-pop's promotion success outside of South Korea is due to the music labels' ability to understand and adapt to each foreign market. Similarly, Lie (2013b) and Lie and Oh (2014) accentuate this point by explaining that behind the initial success of K-pop in Japan there is the knowledge of Lee Soo Man, the founder of SM. The point here is that Lee knew the importance of adhering to the rules of the Japanese music market and as such he introduced the first K-pop idol in Japan as a J-pop one (Lie, 2013b; Lie and Oh, 2014). As Lie explains:

> the mainstream Japanese pop-music industry is insular and oligopolistic. The iron triangle of music moguls, corporate sponsors, and the mass media constitutes an industry in which outsiders and independents have difficulty surviving and thriving (2013b, p.50).

Figure 5 Japanese Music Market's Iron Triangle
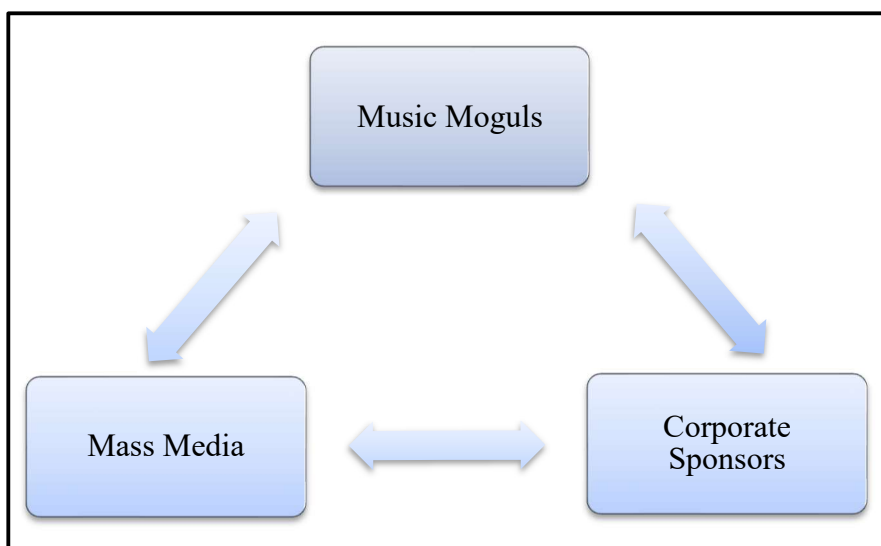
At the top vertex, there are the Japanese music moguls; at the bottom, there are mass media and corporate sponsors, as shown in Figure 5. Each component of the iron triangle is essential for a non-Japanese or independent artist to be able to create, maintain and grow their fanbase within the Japanese music market. As Lie (2013b; 2015; 2019) and Lie and Oh (2014) stress, the system for Japanese music promotion is so inherently Japanese that without the help and association of at least two of these vertexes, there is no possibility to enter and survive in the market. The point is that without understanding and abiding by the rules of the Japanese pop music market, K-pop would not have been able to enter and integrate itself within this market. Failure would have been caused solely by the inadequacy of K-pop music labels' understanding of the Japanese pop music

market and its system; on the other hand, it would also be caused by the lack of integration with the system's key parts.

As a consequence, K-pop adhered to and still adheres to the rules set by the iron triangle and the analogue nature of the market. On this adherence, Expert B agrees that it means to not only work closely with one or more of the key players but also to adapt the promotional system to that market so that it reflects the consumers' needs. Expert A suggested that the export imperative found within the K-pop music world is also visible in the Korean Wave. According to Lie and Oh, SM was the first to understand the necessity of exporting successful products to survive, and when the first attempt at exporting K-pop in China failed, the company looked to their other neighbour, Japan (2014). The authors underline that the export imperative that still rules K-pop's world emerged during the 1997 IMF crisis that strongly hit South Korea's economy (2014, pp.348-349). McClure and Russell write for Billboard:

> The Japanese music market […] is a tempting market for South Korean labels, which has seen sales plummet in recent years. According to the International Federation of Phonographic Industry, the Korean Market was worth $132.8 million at retail in 2004, down 21% from the previous year. The IFPI blames Internet piracy and physical counterfeit for the decline. (2005)

Expert A further explained that exporting the Korean Wave and K-pop to Japan or any other country was seen by the entertainment industries behind it as a matter of survival. Producing K-pop will not generate profit if it is marketed exclusively for the South Korean market. The expert clarified that long-term K-pop production can only be sustained if the product is sold in a larger market as it is too expensive to survive solely on South Korean consumption. During his interview, Expert A also highlighted the impact of piracy and counterfeit products on the initial exportation of K-pop and the Korean Wave. According to him, it was the necessity to enter a market with strong, reliable laws on Intellectual Property (IP) that pushed K-pop's labels to enter the Japanese market. Piracy, counterfeiting and IP infringements have been monitored since the tentative expansion in China and Taiwan[41]. This problem has forced South Korea to seek "revenues from sales of cultural goods, unlike several Western countries that also utilize IP rights" (Jin and Yoon, 2016, p.61). Since Japan is among those countries where there is a "relative fair IP rights tradition" where K-pop could establish a profitable presence

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[41]For further reading, the Korea Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) offers an annual review, written in Korean, on the consumption and dissemination of South Korean cultural flows and cultural industries in foreign countries as well as any issues that might arise over time.

(Jin and Yoon, 2016, p.61), the industries have worked to improve their products and modify them so that they could appeal to the Japanese market.

This attention demonstrated toward adapting the products is partly due to the nature of localisation, which can be associated with the process of "regional product differentiation" (Oh, I. and Lee, 2013, p.113) and the production of K-pop through the system of "global–local-global" production and distribution (Oh, I., 2013; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Park, 2012). This new approach has been known as glocal (Oh, I., 2017; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020) and increased K-pop's cultural reception (Kim, S., 2019). This has been identified as the process of glocalization. In other words, products that are promoted locally but produced and consumed globally (Oh, I., 2013; 2017; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Oh, I. and Park, 2012). Studies conducted on the production and distribution of K-pop highlight how the industries behind it are well-versed in adapting to the new markets and promotional tools.

The term glocal is used to indicate the dual nature of the last step of K-pop promotion and creation: global marketing to sell at a local level, through local strategies and partially local products. The Japanese glocal level can be understood by examining it while considering K-pop a Korean version of Japanese idol pop music. However, for the Japanese promotion of K-pop, a full glocal approach is not considered as it would not work. Localising K-pop promotion in Japan means submitting to the process of production and promotion to Japanese music companies, which are the music moguls of the Japanese music market's iron triangle. This submission results in the integration of the Japanese style of promotions in every aspect of K-pop's presence in the market. This further results in a product that is appealing exclusively to the Japanese music market. As such, a glocal production and distribution would not be successful.

A part of this system was the creation of business deals with Japanese music labels. This is a very common practice in the world of music promotion in foreign markets[42] and this argumentation does not want to diminish its relevance. The point I wish to stress instead is the diverse result: K-pop is altered to become a *Japanese version* of K-pop. The first of such cases was SM's partnership with avex to promote BoA in Japan in 2000. On top of promoting SM in Taiwan and Hong Kong, avex became "the Korean label's licensee in Japan". The significance of this partnership was not lost on

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[42]For example, Big Hit recently signed a contract with UMG for a strategic partnership including Geffen Records to create and promote a USA-based global K-pop group (UMG, 2021; Stutz, 2021). This strategic partnership increases the business connection between Big Hit and UMG as UMG is also the company that promotes BTS and TXT in Japan. Similarly, the group SuperM by SM was promoted in the USA through a joint venture with Capitol Records (SM, 2019).

avex's chairman and Lee Soo Man, and Billboard published a report on it (McClure, 2000). In that report, avex's chairman declared that SM was planning on setting up a subsidiary in Japan "in which Avex will have 15% share" to help manage their idol in Japan (McClure, 2000). This partnership came after South Korea had lifted the import ban on Japanese products (MOFAJ, 1998) and just before co-hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2002—two key events in JP and ROK bilateral relations. Billboard reported that avex wished to explore the connection with SM to promote J-pop in South Korea, taking advantage of the new export opportunities, but it failed. The same cannot be said for SM ventures in Japan (McClure, 2000; McClure and Russell, 2005).

Lie aptly remarked that "it is difficult for a foreign producer to successfully enter the Japanese market unless they work closely with one of the established Japanese promoters or producers" (Lie, 2013b, p.51). Another example of collaboration is the YG partnership with avex to create YGEX: a Japanese-based YG branch to help YG idols promote in Japan (avex and YG Entertainment, 2011). Similarly, Big Hit is promoting BTS and TXT in Japan through Universal Music Japan (UMJ). The most recent partnership is between JYP and Sony to promote NiziU, a Japanese-based K-pop and J-pop girl group (Sony & JYP, 2020). The majority of these business deals between Korean and Japanese music companies are fifty-fifty (Lie, 2013, p.51). This approach develops localised strategies that are executed by the *Japanese* music label linked with K-pop promotions and by the *Korean* management companies.

Expert B underlined that the adherence to the rules of the iron triangle was also to hide the Korean ethnicity of the idols. To do so, it was essential to adopt a fully localised system of promotion that introduced the Korean idol as *Japanese*. As Lee Soo Man fittingly said "we must fit talent to each market that demands different products" (Lie and Oh, 2014, p.350). The result is the adoption of every aspect of the *Japanese* way of promoting. The starting point is the language as a means to communicate but also to deliver songs and messages, connect with the public, and integrate themselves with the process of promotion through mass media, particularly SNS, as well as corporate sponsors—the other two vertices of the triangle. It results in an approach that conforms to the Japanese music market's promotional habits and strategies. As BoA observed in a conversation with Lee Soo Man, SM promoted her in Japan as if she was of Japanese ethnicity (SMTown, 2020). Lie remarks succinctly that "SM Entertainment promoted BoA as a J-pop star—one who just happened to be Korean" (2015, p.101).

Additionally, Lie notes that the necessity to introduce Korean idols as Japanese implies following the same promotional strategies (2013b). As a transcultural

phenomenon, K-pop's presence in Japan can be looked at as the result of business deals and cultural cross-fertilisation. As a result, K-pop assumes a diverse identity from that of Korean pop idols' music: it is a Japanese version of K-pop that has been created *ad hoc* to fit the market and its rules. For this analysis, it is a key point that underlines the extent to which K-pop promotion adheres to the Japanese pop music market's rules. In other words, the adherence is total, and the result could be considered to be a Japanese hybrid of K-pop—it is a hybrid product that has Korean origins and Japanese nuances. Here, I apply the term hybrid following Iwabuchi's understanding of hybridity as one of the characteristics of a transcultural flow (Iwabuchi, 2002b). The term hybrid indicates that a product is a combination of multiple, different products. Among the combined elements, some aspects or details are from the country that is consuming it. This understanding of K-pop's presence in Japan as a hybrid product will be evaluated and elaborated in more detail in Chapter 7. Here this notion serves to underline the point elaborated so far: K-pop's music labels have adopted and incorporated through business deals and insider knowledge the rules and strategies of the Japanese music market to create a product that would fit the Japanese market. In so doing, as a transcultural phenomenon, K-pop has completed the first step to becoming a transcultural flow.

5.2.2 Japanese promotion of K-pop

To reconstruct the approach to Japanese promotion, data was gathered for each company's idols from the websites and SNS listed in Appendix Table 2. The timeframe that was covered was the past 20 years: from 2001 to mid-2021. Among all the materials analysed, there was only one word that was used universally across the companies and idols. That word is *Japanese*. It can be found written in *kanji* or English. More precisely, Japanese was the adjective repeatedly adopted to identify a) the type of promotion; b) the language used for the song; c) the type of music; and d) the type of stage in the career. In other words, any material and product used for promotional activities in Japan is labelled as Japanese: **Japanese** promotion, **Japanese** album, new **Japanese** music, **Japanese** comeback, **Japanese** merchandise, **Japanese** fans and clubs and so on. As such, the full integration with the Japanese music market rules results in a separate articulation of Japanese promotion from that in South Korea. Simply said, there is a ***Japanese version*** of K-pop promotions. Other international promotions for K-pop contrast with this approach. Chinese and American promotions of K-pop do not involve the same level of

localisation[43], making the Japanese promotion of K-pop a unique aspect of the K-pop industry.

Figure 6 illustrates the three stages of K-pop's Japanese promotion and the materials now used for each stage. This figure is built on the results of the categorization of the data completed by following the stages and categories in Figure 2, found in section 3.4.2 (page 67). This process helped in formulating a clear understanding of each stage and the promotional materials used for them. This categorisation also showed that Japanese promotions for K-pop are effectively a *Japanese version* of K-pop promotions: the three stages highlighted in Figure 6 are also present in Korean promotion. There is however a stronger emphasis within the promotional materials that underlines the location as different from South Korea[44]. This emphasis is featured in the promotional material by the constant presence of the word *Japan* or the adjective *Japanese.*

Figure 6 The Three Stages of Japanese Promotion of K-pop

Debut	• **J-Kpop (Japanese version of K-pop songs)** • Single or EP • New PVs • SK albums, DVDs and merchindise is somewhat available
Rookie	• J-Kpop & **K-Jpop (*Japanese original songs*)** • Studio Album, EP & Single • New PVs and adaptation of MVs • SK albums, DVDs and merchindise is available
Fame	• J-Kpop, K-jpop & K-pop • Single, EP, Studio Album & Compilation Album • PVs • SK albums, DVDs and merchindise is largely available

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[43]Chapter 6 will elaborate in more detail on Chinese and American promotions of K-pop.
[44]Only after BTS' success in the American market, the same emphasis on the location is found for the promotion in the USA pop music market.

Figure 7 Examples of current promotional materials for K-pop

These words are used in all promotional materials, online or offline. Online, their presence is found in the name of SNS accounts, any information related to Japanese promotions, and the Japanese fandom. However, it is on SNSs, Twitter especially, where the usage of these words is visible. The tweets, from each of the social media accounts from Table 2 in the Appendix, that advertised Japanese promotions used these words. Figure 7 shows a small sample of these tweets (BTS JAPAN OFFICIAL, 2020a; SEVENTEEN Japan, 2020; YG JAPAN Official, 2021). Through the monitoring of the selected accounts, the constant use of the words *Japan* or *Japanese* contrasted sharply with the lack of reference to South Korea or any other promotional activities outside the Korean border. Offline, the word Japan or Japanese is used in flyers, billboards and handwritten cards used to showcase information related to the album, EP or single currently under promotion. Those handwritten notes are found in Tower Records and Tsutaya's stands. Figures 8, 9 and 10 are examples of promotional stands and handwritten notes.

Figure 8 Tower Records' stand promoting TWICE's *Happy Happy*
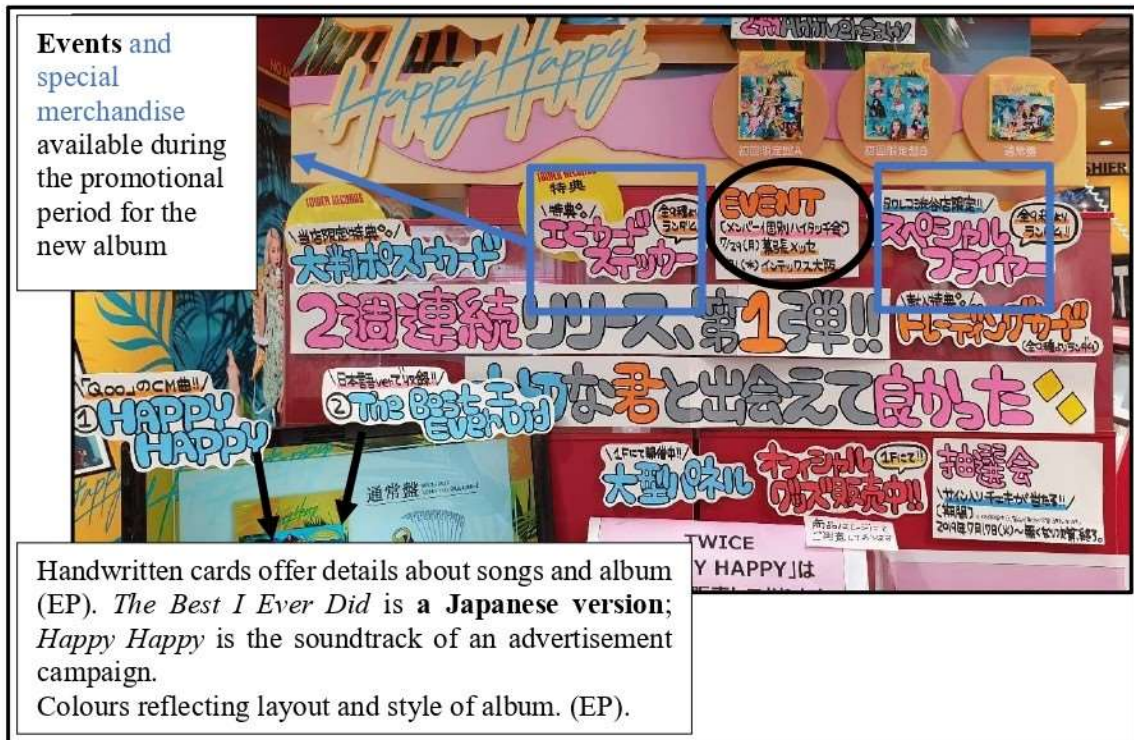
Source: Authors' own, Shibuya, Tokyo

Figure 9 Tower Records' stand promoting GOT7 album

Source: Authors' own, Shibuya, Tokyo

Figure 10 Tower Records' stand promoting Mamamoo's 1st Japanese Album

Of all the materials and accounts monitored, just 1% had the words South Korea or Korean in them.[45] This was used to indicate the origin of the idols (from South Korea) or the language of the songs (Korean). An example can be seen in Figure 11: it is a handwritten note about Taeyeon's "Japanese Original Mini Album" where it is mentioned to underline the country of origin of the idols (Authors' own, Shibuya, Tokyo). Figure 12 offers another example of the word South Korea as a way to emphasise the country of origin and the language. It shows the details of WHONO's promotional stand at Tower Records for his first solo album (Tower Records Shibuya, 2020)

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[45] Secondary resources are more inclined to use both sets of words to properly address the topic of their news post or tweets: examples can be found in the news section of the Oricon websites, where reports on South Korean activities for idols are uploaded. Similarly, the online magazines dedicated to the Korean Wave often used both sets of words to distinguish between Japanese or Korean news and events and to underline their location.

Figure 11 Example of a promotional stand with handwritten notes
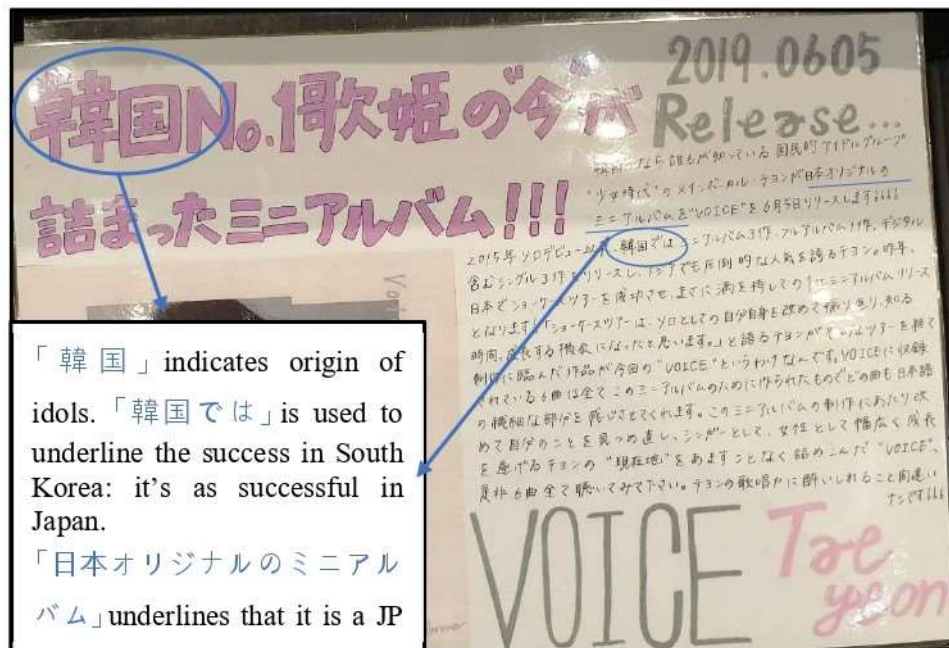
Figure 12 Examples of handwritten notes for advertisement

The interview with Expert B also covered this topic and he suggested that the necessity to separate Japanese promotions from Korean promotions through strong localisation strategies has been left behind since the successful introduction of idols such as Kara and Girls' Generation. Lie also remarked on this by pointing out that after BoA's success, K-pop promotions in Japan were not as strongly localised (Lie, 2013b; 2015). The expert pointed out that the current market is aware of the Korean ethnicity of the majority of the idols and that K-pop is successfully promoted in Japan as K-pop. As such,

he disagreed with the idea that K-pop is still actively localising its promotion in Japan. According to his perspective, the only part that still reflects the localisation adopted at the beginning is the usage of the Japanese language. If that were true, localisation would not be present any longer and K-pop would promote without adopting localised strategies. This would result in K-pop being able to maintain its presence in Japan while idols sing and promote using the Korean language. However, except for the English-language songs by BTS, K-pop official promotions in Japan are still carried out using the Japanese language and Japanese localised promotional activities. This is due to a widespread belief that "non-Japanese language songs will not do well in the domestic pop market"(Lie, 2013b, p.51)[46]. Even if this was the case, the transliteration of Korean songs into Japanese is still a form of localisation that results in a hybrid form of K-pop.

The emphasis on *Japanese* (versions of) K-pop promotions is still present. It is visible in Figure 7, where the words *JAPAN, JAPANESE* and 「日本」 are used in promotional tweets. Lie explains that the current and past promotions in Japan need to abide by the rules of the iron triangle in order to facilitate the promotional campaign and that the adoption of the Japanese language is a necessity (2013b). His suggestion that non-Japanese language songs would fail to do well reinforces the idea that the adoption of the language is based on the market's rules. Yet, the effects of this choice go beyond the simple introduction of the Japanese language as a means of communication. Following the market, rules affect the structure of the promotions as well as the materials used for them. The result is a Japanese version of K-pop promotion that represents a completely separate career for K-pop idols.

Japanese promotions for K-pop are articulated in three stages: debut, rookie, and fame (instead of international success). These three terms are frequently adopted by companies and media to describe in promotional articles and interviews the idols' careers. Figure 6, at the beginning of this section, offers a breakdown of each stage's core components, such as the type of music and medium (EP, album etc) and availability of Korean-language music and albums. The term debut indicates the first performance of a song by a new idol in a specific music market. A Japanese debut reinforces the connection and adherence to the rules of the Japanese music market while at the same time creating a clean slate for the idols to promote themselves. If the point stressed by Expert B was valid and K-pop is, in fact, no longer strongly localised in Japan, then the presence of a

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[46]The results obtained by BTS' English-language songs in Japan would suggest that this statement does not ring true anymore. However, their success is more closely related to the fact that they are performed by *BTS,* and not that non-Japanese language songs are more popular.

Japanese debut in the career of K-pop idols should not be possible. It would mean that, in Expert B's view, there is no need to officially introduce the new idol to the Japanese pop music market. Yet, Japanese debuts are still carried out, as can be seen by looking at the Start Year column of Table 9: the most recent ones are the 2020 Japanese debut of TXT and Stray Kids and, the 2021 debut of Exo's member BEAKHYUN. In doing so, "their presentation follows the received Japanese convention, such as the abundant use of promotional goods and steady support for fan club activities" (Lie, 2013b, p.54).

Table 9 Abridged version of Appendix -Table 1 List of Idols for Each Company

COMPANY	IDOL	START YEAR	END YEAR	DURATION
SM	BoA	2001	2019	18
SM	TVXQ!	2005	2019	14
SM	NCT 127	2017	2021	4
SM	NCT Dream**	2020	2020	0
SM	EXO	2015	2019	4
SM	EXO – BAEKHYUN**	2021	2021	0
SM	Girls' Generation (SNSD)	2010	2015	5
SM	Super Junior	2008	2020	12
SM	f(x)	2010	2016	6
SM	Red Velvet	2018	2019	1
SM	SHINee	2011	2018	7
HYBE	BTS	2014	2020	6
HYBE	TXT**	2020	2020	0
YG	2NE1	2011	2014	3
YG	BIGBANG	2008	2016	8
YG	Winner	2014	2020	6
YG	iKON	2016	2019	3
YG	BlackPink	2017	2021	4
JYP	2AM	2011	2013	2
JYP	2PM	2010	2016	6
JYP	Twice	2017	2021	4
JYP	Stray Kids**	2020	2020	0

During fieldwork, my observations of the promotional materials available in-store in Japan underlined a fundamental difference between the Japanese and South Korean music markets. Japan remains an analogue market, where promotion in stores and the consumption of music through CDs and DVDs is still considered the best practice, whereas South Korea has become closer to a fully digital market where CDs and DVDs are sold and advertised through online shops. Digital consumption of music is also widely spread not only in South Korea but globally. Reports from RIAJ confirm this understanding. RIAJ noticed in its Year-End Books that for the past two years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the consumption of music through streaming platforms had drastically increased compared to the data collected until 2019. However, the final data reveals that the consumption of music through physical means such as CDs and DVDs is

still the norm—if not the favourite means of consumption (RIAJ, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2018b; 2019; 2020; 2021d).

Oricon also acknowledged the shift in Japanese consumption habits and adopted its system of points for its "audio streaming" charts. The chart now also counts YouTube video views towards its point system of classification (Oricon, 2020). The presence of a chart ranking the most viewed YouTube videos reveals that the shift in consumption habits has broadened and YouTube has become a space for music consumption in Japan. Yet, as RIAJ concludes, the Japanese music market is still geared towards the consumption of music through CDs and DVDs. As such, it is not a surprise that even the most recent release offered more than one version of CDs and DVDs. It is a common occurrence for K-pop companies to promote more than one version of CDs. In Japan, this practice is extended to DVDs, which contain behind-the-scenes videos as well as the music video/s released with the album's songs. For example, the SuperM album *Super One* for the Japanese market had five versions of its "Asia Ver." (UMJ, 2020b). This implies that other versions not dedicated to the Asian market are also available for purchase[47]. Similarly, BTS *Light/ Boy With Luv* had four versions (UMJ, 2019). Lie remarks that the importance of CD and DVD sales for the Japanese music market pushed K-pop labels to invest in the process, highlighting how the Japanese pop music market is built on the process of selling CDs and DVDs to fans, along with an incredible variety of merchandise (Lie, 2013b).

Below are two details of Figures 8 and 9, highlighted by a black circle. They are handwritten cards titled "event" detailing special events related to the promotion. These details are of a "high-five" meet & greet event (in Japanese: ハイタッチ会 – *Haitatchi-kai*). Next to each date, details about the locations are included.

Detail of Figure 8	**Detail of Figure 9**
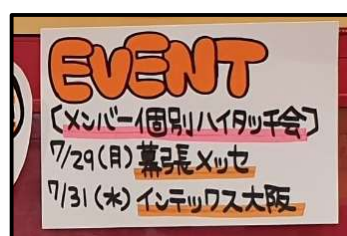
These cards detail the date and type of event related to the selling of the album. All stands had similar notes. They detailed the type or number of CDs or DVDs to buy to

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[47]The website SM Global Shop currently lists three more versions of the album: a limited-edition cassette and two CDs – a super version and a one version. These versions are for the global market, distinguishing them from the "Asia Ver".

a) receive an exclusive poster, photocard or small merchandise; or b) take part in an exclusive meet & greet where fans could interact with the artists; or c) participate in a lottery to win special prizes, such as fan club memberships (which are very expensive to obtain) or fan club-reserved merchandise. Each possibility is an incentive for fans to invest and buy CDs and DVDs, reinforcing the habit of consuming music through physical means. Similarly, the stands also included some form of merchandise or related products, such as magazines with interviews or photoshoots. The high variety of products sold alongside sides CDs and DVDs is typical of the Japanese pop music market as it is a highly lucrative world.

On top of developing a separate career path for idols in the Japanese music market, the adherence to the iron triangle's rules generates the necessity to promote singing in Japanese. As Lie explained, singing in the Japanese language is dictated by the market and as such Japanese promotions for K-pop are carried out using the Japanese language. This is actively reflected in the creation of a new type of K-pop song. These songs are hybrids between J-pop and K-pop. Here the term *hybrid* is used in its intended meaning of identifying a product made by combining two elements -K-pop music with J-pop music. The first is the ***Japanese version of the K-pop song*** or **J-Kpop**. These songs are Japanese language adaptations of the Korean language lyrics of selected K-pop songs. They are marked usually on any promotional materials as "Japanese version" or "JP Ver". This term indicates that the song's original Korean language lyrics have been translated and adapted into Japanese. The second is **K-Jpop** or ***Japanese original songs***, created specifically for the Japanese market but sung by K-pop artists[48]. Those are marked as "Japanese original" or "original song" in promotional materials. Figure 13 (Authors' own, Shibuya, Tokyo) and 14 show promotional materials where J-Kpop and K-Jpop songs are promoted and marked respectively as Japanese version and Japanese original.

Figure 13 Track List of BTS Lights/ Boy With Luv 2019 single

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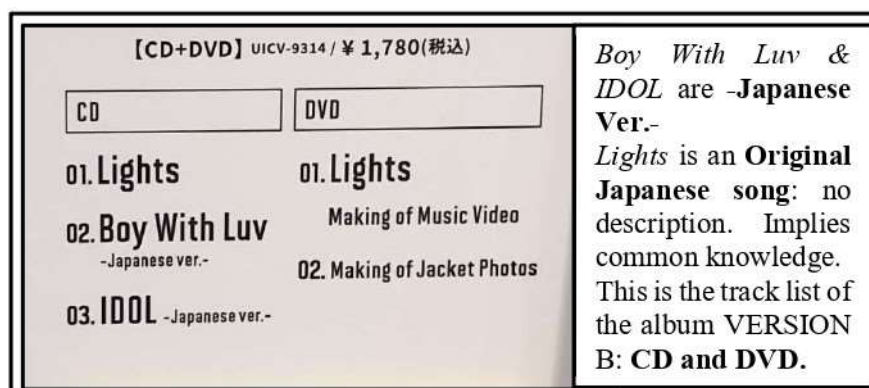
[48]Even though it is not a common practice, some K-Jpop songs have also been translated into Korean. Examples can be found in the discography of TVXQ! and BoA, TWICE and GD&TOP.

Figure 14 Details of Promotional Tweet of BTS Japanese Original song *Film Out*

Source: CDTV (2021)

This distinction helps music addicts, fans and consumers to distinguish the product from the original Korean one. This distinction is also so integrated into the consumption habits of K-pop in Japan that English-language-based news articles also discuss and articulate K-pop's presence and promotion in Japan as *Japanese* K-pop promotions. An article in The Korean Herald underlines that TXT were set to release their first EP in *Japanese* on the Japanese market while also restating that their *Japanese debut* happened in January 2020 (Hwang, 2021). Similarly, Billboard commemorated the release of their first *Japanese* full studio album in a similar way (Aniftos, 2020). *Japanese* promotions for K-pop are not solely considered as such by the K-pop industry to distinguish them from the Korean ones. They are an integral part of the process of promotion and advancement in the career of K-pop idols. In other words, they have been fully integrated within the world of K-pop and established that K-pop is a transcultural flow. The next section looks at K-pop's interconnectivity as a system of consumption through a network of connections that run parallel but are distinguished from the Korean Wave.

5.3 The interconnectivity of K-pop promotion

The previous section argued that the promotional approach of K-pop to the Japanese pop music market established a *Japanese version* of K-pop. This version was created by the South Korean music labels through business deals and localised strategies that adhere to the Japanese music market's iron triangle. In this section, the analysis looks at the network of connections created by K-pop promotional strategies through SNS and websites. To conduct this analysis, responses from fans' interviews were analysed to find points of contact and determine their consumption habits. Their responses have been integrated with an analysis of the network of connections created by the online presence

of K-pop. This part of the analysis is based on the data collected through the monitoring of the websites and accounts listed in Table 2 and Table 3 of the Appendix.

As mentioned in the introduction, this section integrates and expands on the modalities of convergence analysed by Lie (2016). The author looked at the system of connections created by middle-aged female Japanese fans of Korean drama to find that there are modalities of convergence among fans to improve their consumption and relation to the Korean Wave. These modalities are fully integrated into the consumption habits of these women and are an integral part of the Japanese fandom system of the Korean Wave. The analysis expands on these modalities by integrating them into the consumption practices and network of connections established around K-pop.

The integration of the modalities of convergence offers the possibility to view K-pop consumption in Japan as a separate network of connections that is based exclusively on the system of promotion of K-pop in Japan. This interpretation of K-pop's system of consumption does not disregard the presence of connections between the consumption of the Korean Wave and that of K-pop. K-pop can be considered as a separate system of consumption that is fully integrated into the Japanese music market. It is this separation that helps with the formulation of K-pop as a transcultural flow. The separation underlines that K-pop is a separated network of consumption that is also integrated within the Korean Wave. This distinction is built on the understanding that K-pop is both a transcultural *phenomenon* that belongs to the South Korean transcultural flow known as the Korean Wave and a transcultural *flow* of its own right. As such, its consumption system is somewhat tied with the Korean Wave's own consumption system, but it is also independently developed and maintained. This section is divided into two parts: section 5.3.1 briefly introduces the modalities of convergence; section 5.3.2 discusses the application of three key modalities of convergence to the consumption of K-pop in Japan.

5.3.1 Japanese fans and their modalities of convergence: a network of connections solely for K-pop consumption

The pervasive consumption of the Korean Wave in Japan, particularly in the consumption by Japanese middle-aged women, has been analysed in depth. Early studies on the sociocultural impact of K-drama consumption in Japan have highlighted the effects on Japanese female society and its structure (Kwon, 2010; Lee, H., 2008). More specifically, the sociological study by Kwon (2010) underlines the participatory nature deeply integrated with the consumption of the Korean Wave. Similarly, Lee highlights

the impact of K-drama consumption in Japan through an analysis of its effect on Japanese female society (Lee, H., 2008, pp.188-192). Both studies, although different in scope and scale, highlight how K-drama fans in Japan create opportunities to interact with each other. Lie builds on this knowledge and deepens the analysis to highlight the presence of five different modalities of convergence: geographical, linguistic and cultural, technological, genre, and generational convergence (Lie, 2016, pp.124-125.). This analysis will look closely at the geographical, technological and genre convergences and their connection with the social and generational convergences of K-pop.

Lie's convergence points are based on the nature of fandom as they are created to develop networks of connections and consumption of the Korean Wave. Both Kwon and Lee focus on the case of *Winter Sonata* and the consequent boom of the Korean Wave to analyse the commonality of consuming K-drama and the Korean Wave as a means to create a sociocultural point of interest and exchange. Lee suggests that this process of consumption is the direct consequence of the transculturality and transnationality embedded in the Korean Wave (Lee, H., 2008). Both Lee and Lie develop their understanding of transnationality in Japan in the work by Iwabuchi (2001; 2002b) as the author explores the significance of transculturation in Japan. Iwabuchi underlines that *transculturation* is "a process of globalization" (Iwabuchi, 2002b, p.40) through which an asymmetrical encounter of cultures creates new products and new styles. The point is that behind the modalities of convergence and the sociocultural impact of the Korean Wave in Japan there are the transcultural qualities of the Korean Wave. As such, the points of contact between the Japanese culture (the consumer) and the South Korean culture (the producer) are a key part of the process of integration to any intraregional, mediated and transnational cultural flow. Familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness are part of the process that develops and maintains the Japanese fandom of the Korean Wave.

The modalities of convergence create instances in the consumption of K-drama and the Korean Wave's products that nurture and reinforce positive opinions and receptions of the culture behind them (Lie, 2016). As such, the process of popularisation of a foreign popular culture will affect the relationship between the consuming country and the producing one (Kwon, 2010; Lee, H., 2008). In other words, the commonality of the consumption of the Korean Wave and that of K-pop creates occasions in which fans naturally engage in habits that relate to the process of transculturation as a bottom-up form of cultural diplomacy.

5.3.2 The points of convergence or contact for K-pop fans

A key point highlighted, by all participants, is the consumption of K-pop through means that facilitated personal development in taste: those systems of consumption are based on the network of connections created by K-pop's presence online. Korean idols have a *Japanese version* of their websites and social accounts for their Japanese promotions. More specifically, they have a *Japanese version* of their Korean company website and a *Japanese* website that is affiliated with the Japanese music labels under which they are promoting. This creates a network of connections that helps K-pop fans move between promotions and countries. Table 10 is an abridged version of Table 2 in the appendix: it lists all the available *Japanese* (version) websites and SNS accounts for the selected idols. Figure 15 is a simplification of the system of connection between websites and accounts. It visually represents a possible system of hyperlinks that moves fans across platforms and accounts generating different points of consumption and connection.

This system of connections can be equated to the technological convergence that Lie has identified for K-drama fans. This modality of convergence is used to amass information on the fans' favourites and to also create and develop interpersonal communication (Lie, 2016, pp.131-132). For K-pop fans, the interviewed students agreed unanimously that it is a space where consumption happens online, with a minimal budget, and creates instances of connection among fans. The appeal of this method is the opportunity to consume K-pop through a network of online connections that do not depend on the acquisition of CDs and DVDs. At the same time, it offers incredible access to a variety of online resources that can help fans in creating interpersonal connections.

Figure 15 Online Promotional Activities - System of Connections
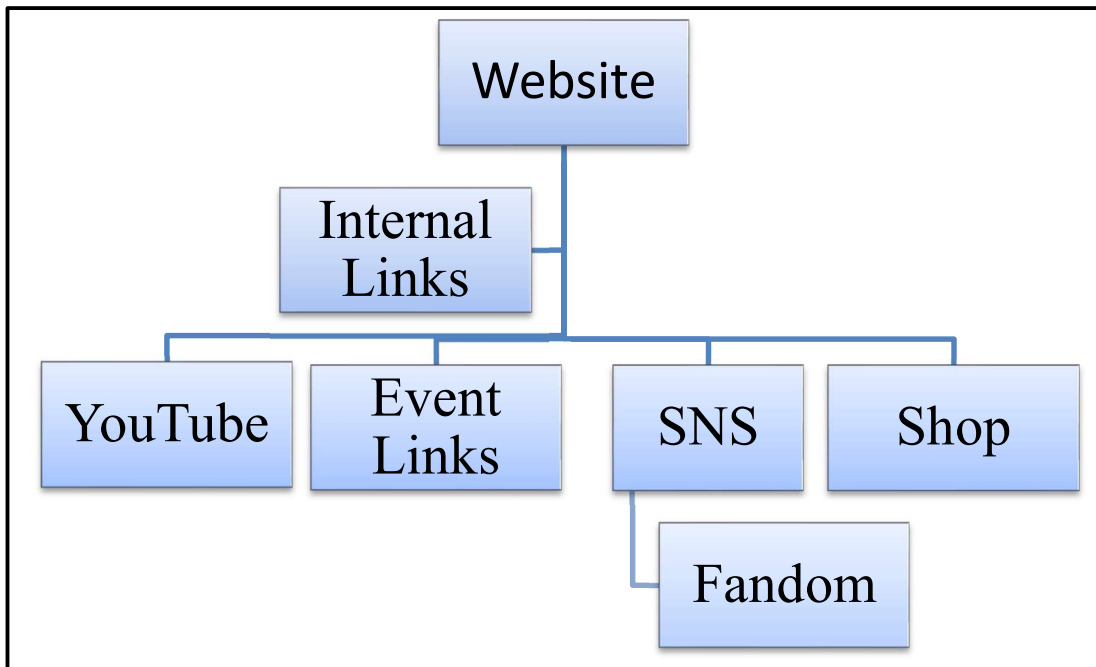
Table 10 Abridged version of Appendix -Table 2 List of Websites and SNS' account used for data collection for each idol

IDOL		JP WEBSITE	SK WEBSITE		SK TWITTER		JP TWITTER
BOA		avex.jp/boa/	smtown.jp/artists/boa/	smtown.com	@BoA_Official		@BoA_avex_staff
NCT	NCT 127	nct-jp.net	smtown.jp/artists/nct/	smtown.com	@NCTsmtown	@NCTsmtown_127	@NCT_OFFICIAL_JP
	NCT Dream					@NCTsmtown_DREAM	
BTS		bts-official.jp	ibighit.com/bts/kor/		@bts_bighit		@BTS_jp_official
TXT		txt-official.jp	ibighit.com/txt/kor/		@TXT_bighit		@TXT_bighit_jp
TWICE		twicejapan.com	twice.jype.com		@JYPETWICE		@JYPETWICE_JAPAN

According to Lie, technological convergences for fans are also reflected in the genre that they prefer consuming. As such they can also be seen as genre convergences (Lie, 2016, pp.132-133): K-pop and K-drama are two genres that do not easily overlap in their consumption as they cannot be consumed via the same means. There are instances, however, in which K-pop fans have explored the world of K-drama. It might happen when idols sing the opening or closing songs for a drama or when they act in it. As Students A and B recall, their consumption of K-drama is usually tied with the involvement of one of their favourite idols. Similarly, when focus group 2 talked about their consumption of K-pop in relation to other Korean Wave's products, K-drama was introduced in the discussion. When asked to elaborate more, two-thirds of the students admitted that they watched a drama solely because an idol they favoured had a part in it. Very similar remarks were also made by the participants of the first focus group, highlighting how K-pop consumption can be separated from that of K-drama but not isolated from it. This implies that the system of consumption of K-pop through the network of online connections does not isolate it from K-drama. However, it favours the separation; it offers the opportunity to explore the presence of K-pop online solely through the system of connection created by the websites and social media accounts.

Another key point stressed by the responses given by fans is the consumption of K-pop through two different patterns: social and personal. Put simply, social convergences are not the only context in which K-pop is consumed. The majority of the students in both focus groups underlined their common practices of consumption. In focus group 1, all students agreed that the consumption of K-pop and music, in general, is as much a personal practice as it is a social one. Yet, when discussing the consumption of K-drama, they all agreed that their practice tended to be more social than personal. This parallel was brought up by the participants as they admitted to also appreciating K-drama. Similarly, the participants of the second focus group agreed that their consumption habits related to K-drama were based on participatory practices. Instead, their consumption of K-pop was more personal as it did not involve the commonality of watching drama together. As such, music was and still is considered a personal choice based on personal preferences. Students' responses aligned with this conclusion as they highlighted that consuming K-pop was a personal experience that they hardly shared in social gatherings not related to it. As such, K-pop can be seen as a genre convergence as well as a multitude of social convergences based on the personal preference of each fan. This implies that social convergences are also based on genre convergence and that they can be articulated in diverse subgroups, such as fan meetings, society gatherings, online events, and so on.

These subgroups are social gatherings that depend on the genre that is consumed. An example is offered by the students' circles at universities: many of those are based on common topics such as K-pop cover dances or K-drama or the Korean Wave in general, where diverse forms of Korean cultural products are consumed and discussed among the members. When exploring the meaning behind this style of consumption of K-pop, three-quarters of the students admitted that they preferred listening to K-pop alone. Commentary and discussion would take place at gathering such as the weekly meetings at the university's "circles". These circles are university societies dedicated to the consumption and discussion of the Korean Wave. The interviewees however admitted that they do not belong to such societies as they preferred to consume K-pop by themselves. In contrast, the participants of focus group 2 were part of a university society[49] dedicated to K-drama and the Korean Wave. All students took part in the society gathering to discuss K-drama, yet they preferred to consume K-pop in private. They agreed that the society was about the consumption of K-drama and K-movie and as such opportunities to talk about K-pop were far and few between. As Student C pointed out, music consumption is a much more personal choice than watching drama. As such, music consumption in larger groups is more difficult as it is not easy to accommodate everyone's tastes.

These comments align with Lie's understanding of the modalities of convergences: the system of consumption of the Korean Wave in Japan is based on common practices that involve social gatherings and the exchange of information to further develop the connection between the fan and Korean culture (Lie, 2016). Similarly, Mōri (2008) highlighted the communal aspect of K-drama and K-wave consumption. The author understood that behind the process of communal consumption there is a network of connections and communication (Mōri, 2008). It is through this system that K-drama fans can converge and discuss the latest K-drama or the Korean Wave. The same pattern of connection was found in the system of consumption of K-pop highlighted by the participants' responses. There is the participation by some students in the universities' societies related to the consumption of the Korean Wave; conversely, there is also the network of connections created by participation in social events, such as fan meetings, concerts, and special events. Additionally, there is also online consumption that offers diverse forms of digitally mediated social gatherings such as blogs, social media and

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[49]When asked to share the name of the society the group preferred not to as they wanted to maintain the name unspecified.

sharing platforms like YouTube. Simply said, this is a form of "*social convergence*: the convergence of fans or the crystallization of fandom" (Lie, 2016, p.130).

Social gatherings offer opportunities for interpersonal connection among fans also in terms of geography, genre, and technological modalities of convergence. As such, participating in a meeting of university's societies or taking part in meeting online or in real life can also depend on the type of product consumed. In other words, the modality of convergence based on the genre develops the different points of contact to that of geographical or technological convergences. Intersections and commonalities are however possible as the student taking part in the second focus group exemplifies. They all belonged to the same university's society, but their personal taste brought them to different genre convergences. For example, two female students admitted that they frequently watched the same drama because they had similar tastes. Yet, the rest of the participants had three distinct tastes in drama and K-pop as such they found themselves belonging to the same community but watching or discussing different topics. Similarly, K-pop consumption online and offline can bring together consumers of different idols or groups through the same modality of convergence.

The study conducted by Larsen offered an example of interpersonal meetings generated through genre and social convergences. Larsen took part in different events and fan meetings for K-pop idols and idol groups. Through the observation conducted during these social gatherings, Larsen noticed that the process of waiting in line to enter the venues created an opportunity to connect and interact with other fans (2020). These connections generated opportunities to discuss and exchange opinions on the idols, their music and other topics related to the consumption of K-pop. I observed a similar pattern of behaviour in fans that waited in line to enter the LINE FRIENDS store, the BT21 café, the SMTown pop-up store and the stores and restaurants in Shin Okubo. Similar to the modality of convergence based on geographical location found by Lie, K-pop fans tend to gather where music or other aspects of K-pop consumption can happen. As such, a point of contact between fans is a social gathering based on a physical location where K-pop can be consumed: stores, cafés and university's circles. Lie calls this geographical convergence as it is the physical manifestation of the social one (Lie, 2016, p.131).

This point of convergence based on geographical locations includes also Tokyo's Koreatown: Shin Okubo. This location has become one of the main points of geographical convergence where any aspect of the Korean Wave can be consumed or cultivated. From K-pop to K-drama, including beauty, fashion, food and language, Shin Okubo has become the heart of the Korean Wave consumption in Tokyo. Throughout the

area, many shops sell products that help in the process of assimilation of the Korean Wave and that of transculturation. It is considered a feminine space where Japanese female fans of the Korean Wave can indulge in their consumption and express their appreciation for the South Korean transcultural flow freely (Lie, 2016; Phillips and Baudinette, 2020). Specifically, Phillips and Baudinette (2020) analysed the Korean Town as a geographical convergence for young female fans where K-pop consumption takes place.

My observation aligns with theirs: Shin Okubo has become a space entirely dedicated to the consumption of K-pop. Through consuming K-pop and related products fans also explore the Korean Wave and Korean culture: shops offer K-pop branded paraphernalia that can be used to learn more about the Korean language or Korean culture in general. In so doing, stores and restaurants have all geared toward selling and advertising their places as a social space where consuming K-pop is possible. The presence of these types of products aligns Tokyo's Koreatown with a language and culture modality of convergence. Language and culture convergences are visible in social and geographical gatherings where fans explore and improve their knowledge of the Korean language and culture. This practice is considered by Japanese female fans of K-pop as well as K-drama to be the ultimate form of devotion toward the Korean Wave (Lie, 2016)

Finally, the social aspect of K-pop consumption involves the creation of interpersonal connections. As such, this form of connection can be compared to the generational convergence found in the pattern of consumption and interaction among K-drama fans (Lie, 2016). As both focus groups agreed, all the participants developed an interest in K-pop and/or the Korean Wave thanks to a friend or a family member. It is through such a connection that the participant started to consume K-pop; some also ventured into the world of K-drama or K-movies. The interviewed fans recalled similar patterns of introductions: friends and family wanted to share their passion for K-pop or K-drama with them and introduced them to it. Student C offered the only slightly divergent story: he admitted that his introduction to the Korean Wave was a personal choice as he wanted to understand more about South Korean culture as his group of friends included Koreans. He then also admitted that some of his friends' suggestions did not fit his taste in music or drama and so he refused to listen or watch to them. Others, such as Student A and Student B, shared that they preferred to follow their friends and family's suggestions regarding the consumption of K-drama. For their consumption of K-pop, they both admitted that it was too personal to always follow others' suggestions.

This type of contact between K-pop and the consumers can be associated with the generational convergence discussed by Lie (2016). According to the author, the

fandom of the Korean Wave in Japan is divided according to the generational relationship between its members. Elderly women and middle-aged housewives are considered to be the bigger part of the Japanese fans of K-drama and K-movie. Their love of K-drama is based on social and cultural aspects that they see lacking in Japan or in their personal lives (Oh, I., 2011; Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014). K-pop fans, instead, are younger Japanese females. Phillips and Baudinette (2020) underline this point by highlighting how Shin Okubo has geared toward younger consumers: teenagers and young adults. Particularly, high school students. There was a consensus among the student of both focus groups on this classification: K-pop fans are made up of the younger female population, while K-drama fans are older women. The students that identified a generational convergence all described it as a tight bond with a female family member: either a mother or a grandmother. Student A admitted that she got into K-pop through her mother, who is an avid K-drama and Korean Wave fan. Similarly, student F got into K-pop because a family member suggested a music video to watch on YouTube. The student recalled that from there she explored more about K-pop music and its music labels. Then through personal connection become aware of the Korean Wave and the intricate system of connection and consumption belonging to it. K-pop has fully integrated itself into the consumption habit of Japanese fans and established itself as a transcultural phenomenon. This set-up offered the opportunity for K-pop to fully develop into a transcultural flow of its own right through its full integration within the Japanese public's music consumption habits.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the first research question: I) How are the Japanese promotions for K-pop structured and localised? It based this analysis on the first level of the framework: K-pop's interconnectivity. It looked at the system of interconnection created by the structuring and localising of its promotion following the rules of the Japanese pop music market's iron triangle (Lie, 2012). It also explored the point of contact created by fans of K-pop as a further exploration of the modalities of convergence discussed by Lie (2016). Through the analysis of the impact of the iron triangle on K-pop's presence in Japan, I demonstrated that K-pop has cultivated and developed a *Japanese version* of itself. This *Japanese version* of K-pop is promoted in Japan, and it is created, developed, and structured as a separate form of K-pop that fits only the Japanese pop music market. This promotional strategy sees K-pop idols enter the Japanese market through a *Japanese debut*, singing songs that are either adapted into the Japanese language (J-Kpop) or are original Japanese-language songs (K-Jpop) and the

idols interact with their fans and the public through the Japanese language. This process is the first step for K-pop to fully develop into a transcultural flow. As such, it is argued in this chapter that K-pop has taken the first step in becoming a transcultural flow.

The second step is the integration in its promotion habit of a system of consumption that can be considered separate from that of K-drama and the Korean Wave. Through the analysis of the points of contact and system of consumption discussed by the participants in the interviews and focus groups, the chapter expands on the conclusion drawn by Lie on the modalities of convergence of K-drama fans. The discussion stressed that K-pop is consumed through a series of interconnected modalities of convergence that reflect the personal and social preferences of the fans. Particularly, it developed the consumption habit of K-pop around the system of online interconnection created by the promotional activities for K-pop in Japan. Through this system of promotions, K-pop fans created modalities of consumption and convergences that offer opportunities for discussion and confrontation with others to arise. It is through this system that K-pop firmly established itself as a transcultural flow as they are opportunities for a bottom-up form of cultural diplomacy to happen. The next chapter will look at the promotion of K-pop in China and the USA to establish how K-pop promotion in foreign countries differs from Japanese promotions. It will base the comparative analysis on two selected case studies: SM in China and the evolution of K-pop's approach to the American market. Both analyses will aim to set K-pop Japanese promotion aside from any other form of international activities conducted by K-pop idols.

Chapter 6: K-pop in China and the USA

Having considered in Chapter 5 K-pop's approach to the Japanese pop music market by looking at the impact of the market's iron triangle, this chapter examines the approach to the Chinese and the USA pop music market. Specifically, this chapter addresses the second research question: II) how do Japanese promotions differ from K-pop promotions in other foreign countries? This question better situates the analysis of K-pop's approach to the Japanese pop music market by offering two comparative examples: the American and Chinese music markets. As mentioned in sections 1.3.2 and 1.3.4, the comparative analysis aims to highlight the uniqueness of the Japanese style of promotion for K-pop by showcasing similar approaches adopted for other foreign markets where K-pop companies hoped to establish themselves. This analysis is based on the second and third levels of the framework: it examines the presence of K-pop in these markets to assess whether or not it could be considered a transcultural mediated flow. To do so, it elaborates on the approach used to promote in terms of familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness.

More specifically, this chapter adopts a case study approach for each market. The first case study is SM's presence in the Chinese pop music market since it was the first company to actively enter the market to promote K-pop male idol groups. It should be noted that my lack of knowledge of the Chinese language limited the type of data that I could collect to English-language-based resources, such as the English version of SM websites and secondary resources that analysed SM idols' presence on the Chinese market. Then, the analysis looks at the K-pop approach to the American market. To fully cover this case study, three main topics were selected, each covering a key passage in the history of K-pop's approach to the USA pop music market.

The first topic covers SM and JYP's first attempts at promoting and introducing K-pop to the American market; then, *Gangnam Style*'s international success is analysed to understand the role it played in encouraging the consumption of K-pop within the USA pop music market. Lastly, the case of BTS is considered the last stage in the history of the K-pop approach to the pop music market. This analysis is based on secondary, English-language resources and the information available on each company's English-language website. The chapter is divided into three sections: the first section addresses SM and K-pop promotion in China; the second section looks at K-pop promotion in the American pop music market. The last section offers a summary of the findings addressed in this chapter.

6.1 K-pop in China: SM approach to Chinese promotions

The presence of Korean pop cultural products related to the Korean Wave in foreign countries can be traced back to the late 1990s when in China the popularity of Korean drama skyrocketed, and the Chinese media took notice of it. The term *Hallyu* is known to have been used for the first time in China in 1997, by a Chinese magazine while addressing the increased influx of Korean drama and related products on the Chinese market (KOCIS, 2011c; 2011d; 2015). Similarly, in the early 2000s, Japan noticed a sudden increase in interest by the female public toward Korean products, particularly Korean drama, and K-pop. Slowly, the foreign interest in the Korean Wave increased to the point of transforming the simple importation-exportation flow of specific products into the current transcultural flow known as the Korean Wave (KOFICE, 2019; Lee, Sangjoon, 2015; Lim, 2008; Marinescu, 2014; Mōri, 2008; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Pease, 2010; Peterson, 2016; Shim, 2019). The expansion within the American and European markets came in the 2000s when K-pop companies started to target and address those markets more concretely.

The rise of the Korean Wave began in China, where the youngest generation started to consume Korean pop music and Korean Drama in the late 1990s and early 2000s (KOREA.net, [No Date]-a; Pease, 2010; Shim, 2019). Even though the Chinese market has been among the first to be entered, the Japanese and American pop market have slowly and steadily increased their consumption of Korean Wave's products to the point of becoming crucial markets, particularly regarding K-pop's promotions and consumption. The American and Japanese markets have been identified, since the beginning of K-pop's approach to overseas promotions, as key markets to enter (Lie, 2015, p.119). The founder of SM understood the importance of breaching the country's border to grow and establish itself (Lie and Oh, 2014) and that the best approach to these markets is through a process of localisation of the products.

The level of localisation depends on the level of reception of the targeted market and the nature of the product itself: the difference between the original market and the local determines the level of localisation. In Japan, the level is extremely high: as previously mentioned, at the very least it requires full incorporation at the local level of the Japanese system. On the other hand, some scenarios do not require such a level of localisation, even if it might seem to be more efficient to do so. The Chinese market is among those cases in which a high level of localisation does not necessarily equate to good results in terms of establishing a lasting presence in the selected market. Similarly,

the American music market has seen both sides of the spectrum of localisation: this suggests that localised strategies may not be as successful as expected and that there is a strong influence on the type of product released in those markets that derives directly from the customers, K-pop fans.

More specifically, K-pop's approach to the Chinese pop music markets showcases two overall different systems for localisation and promotion: on one side, SM has been actively trying to enter and establish itself in these markets thanks to a strong localised promotional strategy; on the opposite side, the other K-pop companies have been approaching these promotions with a slightly reduced localised strategy. The presence of K-pop in China is tightly regulated by the market's own rules and the State's regulation on websites' access limits the resources available and highly conditions that at their disposal. Pease (2009; 2010) stresses how SM undertook the task to promote in China from a very strategic perspective while underlining the lack of such an approach by other companies. They adopt the Chinese language to promote and communicate with those markets and their consumer, as it can be deducted by the number of artists that have a page on the Chinese-based platform similar to both Twitter and Facebook, Sina Weibo. Principally, Weibo shows that K-pop artists that have an account gather more fans than any other global star, showcasing the importance of having the account run by Chinese media companies (Kim, S., 2018, p.35; Zhang and Fung, 2017, pp.131-132). This underlines again the collaborative nature of K-pop promotions and the key role played by local companies in K-pop activities abroad as Lee Soo-Man also stressed Japanese and American promotions (SMTown, 2020).

6.1.1 The three phases of Chinese promotion for K-pop

Focusing on the experience of SM in these markets, it can be noticed how the level of localisation started to become increasingly more present. SM's approach to the Chinese market can be described in three phases as it is shown in figure 16. The first phase is the creation of the sub-unit Super Junior-M; the second phase sees the promotion of EXO in its two sub-units - EXO-K and EXO-M; and the third phase is focused on NCT's Chinese-based sub-unit, WayV. Each phase showcases an increase in localisation with a corresponding growth in metaphorical distance between Chinese promotions and the Korean side of the business. Label V is the company that manages the fully Chinese-based idol group called WayV, which has been created to be part of a bigger project, the multi-subunit group called NCT (Teixeria, 2019). The creation of this company and idol group came after the failure to establish a sustainable presence in the Chinese market.

Figure 16 K-pop in China: A timeline for SM

| 1997 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2012 | 2016 | 2019 |

1997
Breakthrough of Korean Drama in China

Term **Hallyu** is created

K-pop is a by-product of Korean Drama's consumption by Chinese Youth

2008
PHASE 1
Super Junior-M debut

2009
Weibo is introduced as a Chinese alternative to Twitter
K-pop companies open Weibo accounts

From 2009 YouTube is blocked (accessible through a VPN that is located outside of China)

2012
PHASE 2
EXO-M debut

2016
Hallyu Ban due to introduction of THAAD in South Korea

2019
PHASE 3
SM subsidiary Label V is founded
WayV debuts as a Mandopop idol group

First, the initial debut of the boy group H.O.T. generated positive results and income, however, it was soon established that the Chinese market was not a profitable market at the beginning of the millennium (Lie, 2015, p.100; Lie and Oh, 2014). Interestingly, after the discreet success of a concert by H.O.T. in Beijing in 2000, SM along with other Korean music labels decide to try again and promote in China (Fuhr, 2016, pp.74-76). Before introducing more localised strategies, SM attempted the promotion in China through the boy group TVXQ!. The group was created with the idea of separating its member into two sub-units that would promote in Japan and China. To each unit, a new member of Japanese and Chinese ethnicity would be added respectively (Pease, 2009, pp.153-154). These first attempts at establishing a strong presence within the Chinese market all seem to be created through a system that would advertise and promote K-pop in China through mixed channels. On one hand, there is the K-pop that is created for the Korean market and the promotional materials reflect that; on the other hand, SM promotes K-pop in China through a system that resembles the approach used for the Japanese market. The key difference is that the sub-unit's promotion runs almost parallel to that of the main group. From there, one side of the promotion articulates through both physical and digital promotions the idols as Korean pop music artists.

Due to fans' protests and backlash, the new TVXQ! venture was stopped, and the company moved on to Super Junior, initiating the first phase. This phase sees the creation of an additional image that overlaps partially with the one from the Korean image, but it is Chinese in every other aspect. Simply put, there is a partial *Chinese version* of the Korean promotion. It is partially Chinese because the group, that is promoted as if it was Chinese, is a sub-unit and it is known as Super Junior-M: based upon the boy idol group Super Junior by adding Chinese ethnic idols to a skeleton group made of Korean ethnic members and where the *M* stands for Mandarin. Both groups are advertised in China: Super Junior as K-pop, Super Junior-M as Mando-pop. The overlapping finalises an image for the group that is contradicting as it is an *in-between* stage: partially Korean—as it is created based on an already known K-pop group- and partially Chinese—as it is created to fit the Chinese market as a Mando-pop group.

As it is demonstrated by the initial attempts and the first phase, SM's approach to China, which generally reflects the approach used for Japan, is developed around two lines of promotions (a Chinese and a Korean line) and the need to abide by the market system while sustaining K-pop's presence in China as K-pop. More specifically, the first phase sees the second endeavour by SM to be the sub-unit of the company's first large boy idol group: Super Junior. The group was promoted as a whole in Japan, through a

series of Japanese singles and adaptations of original Korean pop music hits; while in China, the company decided to promote the group through the sub-unit Super Junior-M. Principally, the unit was promoted in these markets through a series of an album made specifically for these promotions. The debut album, released in 2008, listed a series of songs that were either Mandarin adaptations of Korean hits or Mandarin songs created specifically for promotion (SM Entertainment, 2008).

The second phase of Chinese promotion for SM began with the introduction of a new male idol group that had been created with a new format: it is composed of two sub-units that will simultaneously perform and promote the same set of songs in China and in South Korea. It is known as EXO and its two sub-unit are EXO-K and EXO-M. The unit EXO-K, which was composed solely of Korean members, would promote the Korean version of the album; while the unit EXO-M, composed of ethnic Chinese members and Korean members, would promote the same set of songs adapted in Chinese on the Chinese market (SM Entertainment, 2012). An example of the system adopted to promote EXO can be found in the first studio album released by the group. A particular point of interest is that SM chose to adopt the same system of promotions for both markets: SNS and YouTube—to gather international attention at a global level (SM Entertainment, 2012). This approach highlights the ever-growing inclusion of new media within the process of promotions of K-pop.

Even though in China there are restrictions on the usage of some of the most frequently used platforms, the alternatives available still offer great interconnectivity and means to encapsulate K-pop within the consumption habits of the country. This approach also reveals the level of inclusion of SNS and sharing platforms within the promotion's strategies for K-pop as they have been steadily introduced over the years as new, key means to improve marketability and connections of K-pop. SM was one of the first companies to fully invest in the idea that YouTube could create revenue while also promoting its own videos and idols through its own algorithm. It is clear that SM sought to change the approach to K-pop promotion from B2C to B2B, developing further the presence of K-pop online by introducing and fully incorporating YouTube and SNS in their promotional system (Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Park, 2012).

When the majority of the ethnic Chinese members of EXO left the company, SM found itself without a stable point of contact within the Chinese market that would carry on the role of Super Junior-M and EXO-M: creating a Chinese presence for K-pop alongside the Korean one. Contrary to Japan, K-pop promotions in China for SM

happened on two sides: side one consists of a version of K-pop that respects the rules of the market and introduces K-pop to the market as Mando-pop. Side two is the Korean pop music idols and idol groups. As mentioned previously, these two sides stem from the same origin (the Korean pop music industry) and they partially overlap as the Mandarin side presents members who are also used for the promotions of the Korean one. Without the Chinese side, SM has only the Korean presence within the Chinese market: considering the current climate between the two countries, the importance of having a Mando-pop presence for K-pop should not be overlooked.

The current climate between China and South Korea began in 2016 after South Korea adopted the anti-ballistic missile system known as THAAD or Thermal High Altitude Area Defense. With this backdrop, it became necessary for K-pop companies to recuperate the lost support from the Chinese markets by letting ethnic Chinese idols concentrate their activities in China (Herman, 2018a; Herman, 2018b; Zhang and Fung, 2017, p.133). It is in this environment that SM's phase three has begun and SM introduced to the Chinese market the idol group WayV, from the subsidiary Label V. WayV is part of the multi-versatile group NCT, which is predominantly active in Korea. The popularity and success of the unit are endorsed by the presence of already known members of the group NCT, its various sub-units, and of new members that have already been introduced to the public through SM Rookies[50] (Herman, 2019b).

6.1.2 *Interconnectivity* and *Familiarity* in the Chinese promotions for K-pop

The consumption habits of K-pop in China as well as in Japan can be applied to the same principles behind the formation of a transcultural flow based on an "intra-regional-media flow". As described by Iwabuchi (2015): the flow can be expressed in terms of a transnational flow that, through the process of transculturation, creates "intercultural connections, transgression, appropriation, reworking and cross-fertilisation" (Iwabuchi, 2002, p.51). In other words, a transcultural flow develops the culture of the country and its representation through a continuous exchange of information and idea, which develops from a base set. As a key component of the Korean

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[50]SM Rookies was a group formed of pre-debut trainees and created to showcase the training process while gaining popularity and fans, before officially entering the market as either a solo artist or a member of an idol group. Red Velvet, NCT, WayV and Aespa's members all originated from this group. The website www.smrookies.com was created in 2014 to introduce the trainees to the market and it seems to have been taken down permanently. The information stored there cannot be retrieved anywhere else: the current SMTown website does not host any information in relation to the group. Information can partially be retrieved from the English-language web magazine Soompi through their archive. For further reading refers to Soompi (2021).

Wave, K-pop not only is a transcultural phenomenon, but it is also a transcultural flow of its own right as its consumption and distribution offer the same characteristics and points of contact—between consumer societies and products' country of origin—of the Korean Wave. Namely points of convergence, consumption, and interconnectivity through the system of intra-regional media flow that sustain K-pop's presence abroad.

SM's approach to Chinese promotions has been consistent across the first and second phases and it reflects what K-pop has been doing in Japan since the beginning. The overwhelming majority of the music promoted in Japan is made of songs translated or adapted into the Japanese language - J-Kpop - and of songs that have been created specifically for the Japanese public - K-Jpop. SM used the same approach for Chinese promotion and released on the market a series of songs adapted into Chinese, specifically Mandarin (M-Kpop) and new songs in Mandarin never promoted in Korea (K-MPop). Specifically, the discography of Super Junior-M is the exemplification of this approach as all their albums are composed of M-Kpop and K-Mpop songs. In contrast, the discography of EXO-M is based on Chinese versions of EXO-K albums: their songs are all Mandarin versions of K-pop songs (M-Kpop). The parallel with Japanese promotion of K-pop however stops here: even though it is relatively not frequent, some K-Jpop songs have been converted into Korean due to their success in Japan, yet, in the case of SM's idols, many albums created for Chinese promotion have also been released in Korean on the Korean market simultaneously or with some delay, increasing the link between the Chinese and Korean promotion.

Particularly interesting is the choice to introduce the debut album of Super Junior-M for the Chinese markets also in the Korean (SM Entertainment, 2011b) and Japanese markets (SM Entertainment, 2011a): this demonstrates that K-pop has further reach than the market which it is aimed at. In other words, the interconnectivity of the world through the Internet, specifically through SNS, has created a level of connection in the K-pop community that reaches behind the border of the market itself. Iwabuchi named this flow of products as transnational cultural flows, where the element of transnational derives from the flow characteristic present in different states, while still being connected with the point of origin. The connection between these three markets (where a K-pop album in Chinese was released through further adaptation to Korean and Japanese markets) can only be found in the cultural flows created by the promotional strategies adopted by K-pop and the interconnectivity of the world. SNS and YouTube offer not only the possibility to develop further B2B relations for K-pop but also immediate access to the majority of the youth currently engaging in K-pop or Korean Wave's product

consumption. This level of exposure creates a network of knowledge, cultivated and developed by converging consumption habits created by fans (Lie, 2016), that sustain a sense of familiarity and interest showcased in the constant presence of K-pop in foreign markets.

Compared to the Japanese system of promotion for K-pop, the case of SM in China presents the promotions of K-pop as they are carried out on two overlapping systems. Even with the introduction of WayV a connection with South Korea is maintained in the form of the idols creating the skeleton of Wavy V. In fact, the nature of the group reinforces the belief that K-pop's success is closely tied with the relation to its own public, the young generations that consume them: the higher and stronger the connection, the higher the possibility to nurture and cultivate it. Closely related to this is also the strong connection found among fans and their need to feel close to their favourite artists. Emotional intelligence (Bland, 2019) and emotional economy (Zhang and Fung, 2017) are considered to be crucial to the process and flow of consumption of K-pop and Korean Wave's products globally and domestically. K-pop music labels work on this connection to reinforce the sense of connection between fans and idols, to aliment their fandom and maintain it at the same time. It also helps that through this process they rise the sense of familiarity embedded in K-pop products and the participatory process of its consumption (Howard and Lekakul, 2018).

WayV was created with the idea of developing the already present fanbase for the members that are part of other NCT activities, and thus already known to the public. This sense of familiarity helped develop an emotional and sentimental connection with the group: K-pop, as well as the Korean Wave, is a "commercially driven phenomenon" (Lee, Suejin, 2011, p.87), in which success is interconnected to the emotions of the consumers. Emotional intelligence (Bland, 2019), melancholia (Oh, I., 2011; Oh, I. and Lee, C., 2014), nostalgia (Mōri, 2008; 2009; Iwabuchi, 2002a; 2006; 2005) and authenticity[51] (Lie, 2019) can all be used to describe and analyse this interconnection. In the case of K-pop presence in China, the approach used by SM can be associated with the concept of familiarity and of emotional intelligence. The sense of familiarity is encouraged in the public by the initial choice of partial localisation of the products: this

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[51]Lie uses this adjective to describe J-pop girl group AKB48's approach to the Japanese pop idol music market. In this case and in the context of this research, authenticity is used to name the series of values and behaviours that are constantly present, from the beginning, in any promotional materials and images. Authenticity is used to maintain and stabilise the basic image and idea behind the members and the group itself, creating a sense of continuity and stability even when concepts and themes change.

includes the creation of a sub-unit, the introduction of members of Chinese ethnicity, and the adoption of the Chinese language as the medium to communicate and sing. It encouraged the development of K-pop promotions through two overlapping levels that build on each other presence. Contrasted with the parallel Japanese system, SM created in China a similar one that should have been able to stabilise K-pop's presence in China in the same way that the Japanese system has done in Japan. However, the changes in the international political and socio-economic environments brought forward changes in the consumption and integration of Korean Wave's products within the Chinese market.

More specifically, familiarity is developed through the localisation strategies and the intense presence of K-pop materials online and it is generated by the juxtaposition of Korean elements and Chinese elements. Korean elements create a sense of belongings and familiarity with the current Korean pop music that has steadily entered the Chinese market since 1997. Adapting the words that Kim, Y. (2011) has used to describe the sense of "close proximity" of K-drama, the presence of Chinese branded K-pop in the Chinese market can be described also in terms of "subtle difference", "distance and similarity" and "proximity". Iwabuchi (2002b; 2005) defines those attributes as "familiar difference": it is the acknowledgement that consumers' reality is reflected partially or totally in the products that are being consumed. For K-pop, this familiar difference is created by the presence of K-pop idols that belongs to an already known group and the introduction of known songs on the market. This sense of familiarity is reinforced by the adoption of Chinese as the language of communication: knowing the language and using it to communicate enables fans to connect more easily with the new product, a K-pop idol group, or a solo artist. Particularly, the subtle differences lay in the presence of Chinese songs adapted from Korean ones that were already known to the market. SM described this process in terms of adaptation and improvements as the lyrics and structure are adapted to the change in meaning articulated by the change in language (SM, 2008; 2011b). The songs are then described as improvements of their original Korean versions, creating a sense of "familiarity" that is also "different".

This acknowledgement is developed and reinforced by the two overlapping sides of promotions used for the Chinese market. In other words, it is formed through the presence on the Chinese market of products that are simultaneously both Chinese and Korean. On one hand, there are the products for the Korean market promoted by the whole idol group; on the other hand, there are the Chinese versions of these products, which are promoted by sub-units formed by members of the groups and externally introduced idols of Chinese ethnicity. Simply put, there are familiar elements in an otherwise different

product. Additionally, distance, similarity, and proximity are reinforced by the creations of sub-units which are separate acts from the main group but also belong to it because their members partially come from the group. A key element of this strategy is the presence of idols of Chinese ethnicity in the group used to promote in China by SM.

Stressing the nationality of these idols, while also highlighting the disconnection with South Korea, has also been a fundamental part of SM promotion for K-pop on the Chinese market. This lack of reference to South Korea, which is strengthened by underling the different ethnicity of the idols and the Chinese side of promotion, virtually nullifies the relation between the idols and the Korean management company. In the case of Japan, the virtual distance created through the two parallel lines and maintained strongly by the Japanese companies had the same effect as stressing the nationality in China: it creates a metaphorical detachment from the Korean pop music market, strengthening the connection to the Chinese or Japanese market. Yet, as for the Japanese case too, the Korean side of promotions prefers to create bridges between the two sides to maintain a connection with the country of origin of the idols' music. The connection between the idol and South Korea is not easily concealed as the online presence of K-pop strongly permeates the web and the links to South Korea are easily identified. Yet, the market knows those idols as Chinese. Similarly, in Japan BoA was promoted as a Japanese idol, and all subsequent Japanese promotions removed from the spotlight the link between the idols and their Korean management.

Interestingly, this approach has yet to be undermined by the increased online presence of K-pop: Lie (2015) accentuates that K-pop's promotion in Japan has left behind the strong localisation that was used at the beginning- with BoA as the starting point. While this is certainly the truth, as it is discussed in Chapter 5, the Japanese promotions are still introduced as *Japanese*. Fans are quick to notice the Korean connection and origin of the idols, as they are already familiar to them because of their consumption habits: YouTube, Twitter and Spotify play a key role in connecting the Korean idol to their Japanese fans, helping them familiarise themselves with the idols' image and products before they enter the Japanese music market. The same happens in China through the two overlapping sides: one side sees K-pop as promoted in China as Korean pop music; the other side sees K-pop as promoted in China as a *Chinese version* of K-pop. This version is *familiar* to the fans consuming it as it has links with the other side. Those links are the members of the group promoting, as they are part of a bigger Korean idol group, and the music they are promoting as it is a Chinese version of a Korean song.

6.2.1.1 THAAD AND THE PROMOTION OF K-POP IN CHINA

The adoption of THAAD by South Korea has created an environment in which active Korean Wave-related promotions cannot happen. Phase three saw the introduction of WayV to the Chinese market in this difficult climate through the subsidiary Label V. In this climate is crucial for K-pop to maintain the connection out of sight. In other words, it is not South Korea promoting a new K-pop group in China, but China promoting a new Mando-pop idol group—one that just so happens to have a connection with South Korea. Both companies and idols are Chinese, and they are promoting a Mando-pop version of K-pop that has no apparent connection with South Korea. Yet, as in Japan, the online presence of K-pop virtually nullifies the effort in putting distance between K-pop and the Chinese market.

This approach to the current THAAD climate between China and South Korea by SM has been very peculiar as it was only adopted by another company: JYP. The rival music company has created a new profitable venture in the Chinese market in the form of Chinese music released by its Hong Kong-based Chinese idol, Jackson[52] (Herman, 2018a). Similar reasoning is behind these new endeavours in China: first, the need to maintain the connection with the Chinese market; second, the need to reinforce the connection created with the fans; and third, the need to constantly evolve and improve their position within the very lucrative world of K-pop, particularly that of endorsements for the Chinese brand.

Even though those new endeavours have only been recently developed, particularly as a consequence of THAAD and the new restrictions, K-pop presence in China has assumed a strong *odourlessness* that resembles that of Japanese products depicted by Iwabuchi. This odourlessness is created by reducing the apparent links with the South Korean music labels and by reinforcing and introducing Chinese labels, in the form of studios and subsidiaries. By erasing their *cultural odours*, K-pop products on the Chinese market lose the characteristics that mark them as *Korean*. Simply put, the products and promotional materials are not any longer perceived as *familiar* because of their links to K-pop, but they result *familiar* because are Chinese as is the case of WayV. However, this approach is the exception to the rule: SM and JYP represent the minority that has chosen such methods to develop their presence in the Chinese market. The majority of Korean music labels, including YG and Big Hit, have been conducting

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[52]Jackson left the company in 2020 along with his fellow members when the boy idol group GOT7 officially disbanded at the end of their contract with JYP.

business in China through endorsements and promotional activities that did not involve the adaptation of any Korean songs into Mandarin.

Particularly, YG's BIGBANG has been promoting in China without the need to convert any of their songs to Chinese while using Weibo as their principal way of communication with their fans, in Chinese. G-DRAGON, the leader of BIGBANG, has recently signed a contract to endorse a Chinese tea: the first contract of its kind after the THAAD ban on K-pop and K-drama (Yonhap, 2020). It is interesting how this news has been compared to that of BlackPink's Lisa and her two contracts to become the endorsing figure of a fabric softener and a dairy brand. Even though the discussion is centred on how these contracts represent the end of the ban, it is crucial to point out a key difference. Lisa is always described as being from Thailand: her nationality is stressed to underline the disconnection it has with South Korea and the current climate between Seoul and Beijing.

Creating distance between the idols and the Korean side of their activities has been a key element to develop the sense of *odourlessness* that permeate K-pop activities in the current Chinese market. In the Japanese market, it was and still is a key feature of any promotion, notwithstanding the incredible easiness with which the link to South Korea can be restored through the online presence of K-pop. Contrary to this approach, the promotions in the American market see a strong and constant connection between the origin of K-pop and its presence in the market. Especially, as it is repetitiously reinforced around BTS' presence and unprecedented success in the American market.

Figure 17 K-pop in the USA: A timeline

2007   2009   2010   2011   2012   2013   2016   2017

SM Town
concert in LA

PSY's *Gangnam Style* goes
viral

Girls' Generation perform
Eng Ver. of *The Boys* on the
Late Show with David
Letterman

BTS wins
Billboard
Music
Award: *Top
Social Artist*
for the first
time

Wonder Girls'
song appears on
a Billboard
chart

**K-
Con** in New York and
Los Angeles

Mnet hosts the **K-
Con** in New York and
Los Angeles

Billboard launches
the column *K-
Town*

Billboard   creates
the *K-pop HOT 100*
music chart

6.2 K-pop in the USA: the case of BTS and their unprecedented success

A timeline of selected key events that break down the presence of K-pop in the USA music market is illustrated in Figure 17. The selected events are of two categories: events related to K-pop's presence and discussion on key American music-related magazines and events related to K-pop's success within the market. While compiling this timeline, which offers a small selection of the key events, I noticed that after the introduction of SNS, the pivoting moment was the year 2012. The timeline can be divided into two: *before* and *after* the viral success of *Gangnam Style* by PSY. The *before* can be summarised as sporadic and limited. The *after* can be described as a tentative interest till the second pivoting point: BTS and their unprecedented success in the USA and globally. This section will discuss American promotions for K-pop in two main arguments: firstly, it will discuss the introduction of K-pop and the initial approach to the market. Secondly, the changes brought over by BTS and their successful approach. The middle ground is the viral success of *Gangnam Style*.

6.2.1 The introduction of K-pop to the American music market.

A recent article in Billboard magazine discusses the circumstances that brought the introduction of the term *K-pop* to the magazine and the beginning of the American music world's interest in K-pop. The term's first appearance was in 1999 in an article related to the improved relationship between Japan and South Korea as a way to translate the Korean term *gayo*, which refers to popular music in the Korean music market (Herman, 2019a). If in South Korea the term specifically refers to Korean popular idol music, with the additional division in all the different genres of music that are used to describe it – such as R&B, ballad, disco, pop and so on-, abroad the term has a different connotation. In China, particularly, it is used to describe Korean pop music that has a distinct lack of traditional *Koreanness*, which is associated with genres like *trot* (Pease, 2010, p.04.2).

Outside of South Korea the term K-pop has been used as an umbrella term, it is indicative of any Korean popular music, from idol music to *trot* and R&B. Similarly, in Japan, the term is used to indicate any Korean music that is released in Japan. Yet, K-pop fans, particularly in Japan, tend to be more precise in their usage of the term: for example, PSY is often referred to as a K-pop artist by foreign media, however, devoted K-pop fans disagree with that definition and precise that the rapper is not a K-pop idol (Lie, 2013b;

Herman, 2019a). A similar approach can be seen in America's growing interest in K-pop: the term grew to acquire the general meaning of Korean popular music throughout the years while fans tend to specify that it stands for Korean pop idol music, which does not include PSY (Herman, 2019a).

From its first appearance in 1999, the presence of K-pop started to increase in terms of coverage by the magazine. Articles were written to discuss the domestic and international success of K-pop: from Japan introducing K-pop as a music genre (McClure and Russell, 2005), to the publication of an article by the first K-pop columnist at Billboard (Benjamin, 2011), to the increasing presence of K-pop in the main Billboard charts and BTS' international acclaim (Herman, 2020b). With each of these passages corresponds a rise in K-pop's songs and albums charting on Billboard's most coveted charts: the *Hot 100* and *Billboard 200*. As the presence of K-pop idols on these charts increased and reached higher positions, Korean music labels started to implement more and more strategies to enter and conquer the American music market. Throughout the years, diverse attempts to break into the American pop music market have been made by major K-pop music labels: this section will concentrate on SM and JYP's approaches as they share similar strategies and results.

SM's failing first attempts at entering the American music market involved the solo idol BoA and the girl group Girls' Generation; JYP's attempt was with the girl group Wonder Girls. Although these attempts were not successful, they still served the purpose of introducing Korean idols and music to the American public. As Lee Soo Man remarks, without the failed debut of BoA and Girls' Generation, BTS would not be able to promote in the USA (SMTown, 2020). The point made is that today's success in the USA comes after the failures of others that have opened the market. Undoubtedly, BTS would not be able to promote in the USA if the market was not aware already of the existence of K-pop. This awareness comes from the failed attempts and the viral success of *Gangnam Style.* To understand the reasons behind these initial failures, their discussion will address each of them chronologically.

6.2.1.1 SM AND JYP'S FIRST ATTEMPTS

The first-ever attempt was done by SM and JYP in 2009: BoA released an album in April (Billboard, 2009), with a series of English songs produced with the collaborations of renewed producers and musicians (SM Entertainment, 2009). The album is the first Korean pop music album to enter the chart *Billboard 200*, inserting officially K-pop within the American music market. Contrary to the predictions (SM Entertainment,

2009), the album failed to aid BoA in her takeover of the American pop market. The approach to this debut follows the same strategy used for Japan: BoA was promoted through a subsidiary, SM Entertainment US, and her album was created specifically for that market, with a series of songs in English and through the collaboration of producers and musicians already known in the US market (Anonymous, 2008). Additional steps, such as starting BoA's Hollywood career were also taken with the ultimate goal of improving her position within the American market (The Korean Times, 2009). Following the path of BoA, JYP promoted the girl group Wonder Girls, with the song *Nobody*, after the group entered the Billboard *HOT 100* music chart, through a series of appearances and events geared toward introducing the group to the masses. A key example is their performance live on US TV, another first for K-pop in America (Anonymous, 2009; Guide, 2009).

Both JYP and SM's approach to the USA market reflects the one used for the Japanese music market: gatekeepers, corporate sponsors and mass media were all accounted for and used to smoothly introduce the idols to the domestic media and the market. Similar to the Japanese promotions, music specifically for the targeted market was composed and released. It follows that this method should have been as successful in this circumstance. Yet, it failed. A reason for this failure was the early approach to the market (SMTown, 2020). In the Asian region, the Korean Wave and K-pop's international success have been the results of good localisation strategies paired with the already existing transnational cultural (transcultural) flow that has been linking the region behind the already existing economic, political, and historic links. Iwabuchi claims that the flow brings a constant exchange of information and knowledge between countries while nurturing the public interest in foreign products. It is through this constant exchange of information that societies develop an interest in and build consumption habits around the flow and its products. Through this process, ideas and interests grow or diminish and this is reflected in the transcultural flow.

Interestingly, it is this side of the transcultural flow that has helped other Asian pop culture products to enter and establish themselves in the Japanese market. In his study of the consumption of Hong Kong's pop culture in Japan, Iwabuchi stresses how Japan's connection to these cultural products is the consequence of deeply felt "nostalgia" for Asia (Iwabuchi, 2002a), or a sense of melancholia toward a past long gone but not forgotten and a connection desired but rarely sought after. In this panorama, the Japanese public grew fond of Hong Kong's pop-cultural products as well as of those from other countries, like Taiwan and South Korea (Iwabuchi, 2002a). If the sentiment illustrated by

Iwabuchi is applied to this context, I could interpret K-pop consumption as part of a wider sense of curiosity and interest that reflects that of orientalism. However, I reject this understanding on the basis that it is faulty as discussing cultural interconnections and exchanges based on a geographical perception does not reflect the complexity of these connections in their entirety. Even the adoption of the term hybrid, which could be beneficial for the discussion of K-pop's consumption in China, Japan, and the USA, is not fully appropriate. Here the term *hybrid* is used in its meaning of a product made by combining two or more different elements. It should not be intended in its meaning of a product created through the merging of different cultural aspects of the consuming society with other cultural elements of the producing society. As such, the term *hybrid* cannot reflect the changes in consumption and appreciation that are not bound to the origin of K-pop or its level of hybridity (intended here as the mix of cultural products and elements) in the local market.

The case of the American debut of BoA shows that the transcultural flow known as the Korean Wave was yet to be established in the USA. As such, in these circumstances, K-pop should not be considered as a transcultural phenomenon nor as a transcultural flow of its own right. Additionally, it demonstrates that the market was not receptive to the kind of music and artistry brought over by SM. As Billboard underlined, the term K-pop was not yet frequently used, and until 2011 there was no need to consider it as a genre of music that interested the American public. It should follow that the transnational cultural flow, that helped the Korean Wave grow in Asia, was not as effective in America. Stating that they were not effective does not exclude their existence as they are an integral part of the interconnection that has developed around the world. As Kim, Y. (2013), Jin (2016) and Lee, Sangjoon and Nornes (2015) highlight in their works, the expansion of the Korean Wave's reach and its transformation into a global phenomenon come only with the increasing spread of SNS. Thus, before the takeover of SNS, the transnational flow was limited, reducing the spread of the Korean Wave and the reach of K-pop. In this panorama, the introduction of an idol, even though gatekeepers and a series of promotional appearances that followed similar strategies to those used by American pop stars, failed to hit the target.

6.2.1.2 THE CONTRADICTION OF K-POP IDOLS SINGING ENGLISH POP MUSIC

This section looks more in detail at SM promotional strategies for BoA in the USA pop music market and aims to compare it with the Japanese promotions for K-pop as well as with the promotional strategies of JYP for the USA market. The comparison of

JYP and SM's promotion shows that both follow a similar pattern, starting with their idea that breaking through the USA pop music market means that you have conquered the world. To reach this outcome, companies invest in developing the promotional campaign for an album fully in English to gain followers and fame. The promotions require the presence of the artist in the USA to engage with promotional performances that fit the market and style of promotion of the pop stars. So far, these sets of promotional strategies reflect the approach used in Japan and China by SM. The main difference is the overall system. In Japan, it was developed around a *Japanese version* of K-pop promotion that runs parallel to the Korean promotion for each idol and idol group. In China, SM created an approach that was partially overlapping in its division into two sides. Moreover, in both cases, the link to South Korea was metaphorically broken and rebuilt through secondary means, such as the bridges created with the online presence of K-pop. In the case of the USA debut, the two sides of promotions (the SK and the USA) are developed as fully overlapping: K-pop is promoted as *English* Korean pop idol music. The contradiction is in the message sent out with the promotions: K-pop idols attempt to enter and conquer the English pop music market with an English album or an English version of a hit song.

Lie's remark on BoA's promotion in Japan is poignant: "SM […] promoted BoA as a J-Pop star – one who just happened to be South Korean" (2015, p.101). It implies that BoA was at all effect introduced as a Japanese idol that would perform and promote J-pop music. Her ethnicity was hidden in the sense that the localisation strategy created a metaphorical distance and avoided highlighting it. For the American promotion, I would change Lie's statement into *SM promoted BoA as a K-pop star – one that happened to be singing English pop music*. The difference between the two pieces of information is clear: the message points to the origin of the artist as a foreigner—a Korean pop idol—while the songs and the album stresses the American side of the promotion and the language used.

This approach contrasts sharply with the approved and successful Chinese and Japanese ones: even though those are to be considered *odourless,* as the mediascapes that should indicate the country of origin are left dormant, the overall message is cohesive and uniform. It appeals to the public because it fits the public's own demand while also highlighting the *familiarity* and *proximity* within it: the approach is calibrated to the market's own rules, while also maintaining a connection to the Korean side of the business, enabling fans and consumers to connect the unsaid with K-pop. In other words, it means establishing a two sides promotional system that develops the transcultural

flow's presence within the market. Remarkably, this connection comes into play only after the full introduction of SNS in our society and the adoption of those as a key promotional tool, along with YouTube by Korean music labels. Originally, the link to South Korea was visible only through the cooperative nature of Japanese promotions as gatekeepers were and still are needed.

In these first American debuts, the links to South Korean pop music were strongly stressed in the way they celebrated the origin of the idol, while they were negated in the music released on the market. The contradiction is visible in the second attempt made by SM: the promotion of the song *The Boys* by Girls' Generation in its English version. The song, performed live at a late-night talk show, received mixed reviews: the song was converted into English from the original Korean one, to make it more appealing to the market. However, the girls' appearances and stage presence were left intact: K-pop was promoted while singing in English. Benjamin (2015) stresses the point by underlining the difference between these approaches and that of the now-disbanded girl group 2NE1[53] from YG.

In his recounting of the first approaches to the USA market by K-pop idols, the Billboard columnist acknowledges the lack of *Koreanness* in the songs promoted while the artist owns *Koreanness* was overstressed. By *Koreanness* it is intended those set of elements that made those artists K-pop idols; among those, singing in Korean, with sporadic English lyrics, is the key element. At par with that, there is the stress on the Korean side of the business; yet, in these first American promotions, these two elements have been overthrown by the need to fit within the pop music market. Therefore, the highly localised music and promotional strategies fit the market, not the public, which lacked a strong connection to the idols and their music. Contrary to these activities, 2NE1's approach reflects that of BTS: calculated and dedicated to cultivating fans and the public's interest by releasing information about themselves, their music and their message through interviews.

6.2.2 The USA and *Gangnam Style*: the middle ground between unsuccessful and successful promotions

Before 2NE1 and BTS' debut on the American market, K-pop history in the USA sees the sudden rise of PSY with his *Gangnam Style*. The song is considered by many as a turning point in the history of K-pop presence in America as it brought to global attention to K-pop and of South Korean pop music, jump-starting the interest of the

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[53]It can be read as "To anyone" and "Twenty-one".

American pop music market in K-pop. Key factors that make *Gangnam Style* the turning point reflect the interconnectivity of K-pop promotions and its online presence: through the continuous interest shown in the song, YouTube became the perfect platform for many to explore K-pop, while the overall public interest in the artist and his songs, led the general public to be curious about the viral video's country of origin. This sudden influx of interest developed a new flow of information and cultural products that quickly benefitted the presence of K-pop in the USA: YouTube's algorithm favours the exploration of new content by showing a selection of suggested videos to any subscribers.

Specifically, it is important to underline how the song, which aims to be a satirical critique of Seoul's high fashion bureau, *Gangnam*, does not carry any element that could be relatable or considered familiar to the American or worldwide audience. Its success, at least globally, is based on the style of the video, the repetitiveness of its dance moves and rhythm: the lyrics, topic and executions are Korean in style and fashion and fit the taste of the Korean public, which was considered the sole receptor of the songs and video (Lee, C.S. and Kuwahara, 2014; Hu, 2015). Testimony of this idea is the aborted plan to release a Japanese version aptly named *Roppongi style*: the song would maintain the same satirical approach but redirect it toward Tokyo's high fashion bureau *Roppongi*. The song was, however, never released as the Japanese public never accepted the original as *K-pop*, imposing their displeasure in labelling PSY as a K-pop artist and rebuking his plan to release a Japanese version of his worldwide hit (Lie, 2013b).

When comparing the Japanese response to the American one, it is clear how the presence or lack of K-pop in those markets is a crucial factor in determining the level of success obtained by the song and its artist. In particular, the response of the public already accustomed to K-pop was crucial in PSY's own endeavour in Japan: in other words, fans and their presence online were the driving force behind the Japanese market rejection of *Gangnam style*, while in the USA, they were the starting point for the recognition of K-pop as a genre of music. Similarly, in Europe, the success of the song was met with interest by the fans that used it as a driving force behind their incessant request to bring more performances of K-pop to the continent. This point is underlined as a crucial passage also by the KOFICE's own research about K-pop's increase in fame within Europe (KOFICE, 2019; KOCIS, 2011c; 2011d; 2015). The results of such interest show how the success of PSY's satirical song brought forward more demands to introduce European stops to K-pop concerts' tours.

Through the online presence of K-pop, the general public's interest was easily diverted or spread to other K-pop artists, creating the opportunity and cultural

circumstances that helped 2NE1 and BTS, among others, in entering and cultivating their fandom. Key to the sudden success of PSY, as well as to BTS' current level of fame, is the usage of SNS and streaming platforms by Korean pop music records to cultivate and grow their fandom and international reach. Another point that must be stressed is the implication of the word K-pop: to many, the word stands for Korean pop music, which is the overall umbrella term used by many overseas media to label popular Korean music that is consumed and appreciated domestically and abroad. *Gangnam Style* is among those songs. In the American market, it had a similar extended meaning as it included all Korean popular music, while recently it has morphed to represent only Korean idol pop music.

Thanks to *Gangnam Style*, more and more Korean idols started to appear in the highest ranking of *Billboard* music charts while also gathering thousands of fans on their worldwide tours. Among those who first committed to and completed a USA leg of their world tour, there are G-DRAGON, the leader of BIGBANG, and BTS. Even though G-DRAGON and BIGBANG are still considered very influential K-pop idols domestically and worldwide, as they were among the first artists to set records in the USA, BTS is the only group to have entered the American music market and maintained a strong presence in it. Their unprecedented success has created even more interest in K-pop, which resulted in more and more artists debuting on the American market.

6.2.3 BTS and their successful debut in the USA

So far, this chapter has discussed K-pop promotions abroad in terms of interconnectivity and promotional sides. It sets out to demonstrate that the approach used in Japan cannot be exported as it is as the results are counterproductive. In fact, in China SM had to shift its approach to fit the market's rules and its socio-cultural and economic background. This led to a system of promotions that resemble the Japanese. It is based on two partially overlapping sides which introduce K-pop as if it was Chinese pop music through Chinese songs and Chinese ethnic members. The link to South Korea is maintained outside the limelight and through the association of the idols to multiple groups – i.e., WayV as a sub-unit of NCT.

Then the discussion moved on to demonstrate that the application of the same system for K-pop promotions in the USA wielded negative results. The argument sets out to break down SM and JYP's initial approaches to this market as ill-equipped to successfully enter it. It demonstrates that the message sent out is ambiguous and that it lacked a point of contact with the public. The two partially overlapping sides of the

Chinese promotion created a sense of familiarity and similarity that helped establish K-pop presence. In the case of American promotions, the sides are fully overlapping creating confusion and uncertainty: the point of contact is the element that is naturally foreign to the flow – English. If in Japan Boa was promoted as Japanese, without highlighting her Korean origin, in America, she was promoted as an English artist as well as a Korean idol. Without a strong presence of the transcultural flow in the American market, these overlapping images and sides of promotions failed to establish K-pop within the Market. Until the sudden viral success of PSY, K-pop was not considered by the mainstream media; once the word K-pop started to be discussed broadly, the Korean Wave could fully establish itself. This section is divided into four sections: the first is an introduction to BTS' approach to the USA market; the second section presents a comparative analysis between BTS and CL's approach as their similarities delivered different results for the idols. In section three, the importance of fandoms and interconnectivity is highlighted to explain the success of BTS; lastly, in the fourth section, the point elaborated in section three are expanded through the analysis of BTS' familiarity and authenticity.

The rise to fame of BTS in the USA and globally is considered not only unprecedented but unmatched in terms of scale and unconditional support from their devoted fans, also known as ARMY. Before addressing the importance of their widespread fandom and the cultural impact that BTS has brought on the American music market, it is essential to analyse the systematic approach they used to enter the market and establish their presence in the industry, while also cultivating their link to their fans. As per *Gangnam Style*'s success, SNS has played a key role in BTS' promotional strategies in pair with their ability to localise their strategies without compromising their message or image. As such, BTS' approach to promotion in the USA can be broken into these stages: a) the introduction of the group to the market and industries through America-style managing; b) the establishment of their name as musicians and producers in the industries through featuring and collaboration with other artists; c) the development of a presence online and offline that is in line with their *authenticity*; and d) the maintenance of a sense of *familiarity* and *proximity* with their fandom even when a high level of localisation of their promotion strategies is required -as in Japan.

Point a) and b) are closely interlinked, particularly at the beginning of the process: BTS' introduction to the market happened over years and resulted in a solid presence, backed up by their connection to their fans. Along with the solid base, there is also a varied list of collaborations and features that helped them establish themselves as artists and musicians within the market. Additionally, this passage sets the septet apart

from other idols' endeavours in the US market as the rappers Suga and RM are the main producers and composers of the groups' songs and are known for their extensive collaborations, featuring and productions for Korean idols as well as foreign artists[54].

In other words, they developed their presence through connections: in the current world, where interconnectivity happens daily, creating a varied system of points of connections that will link back to either the group or K-pop in general, is beneficial. Here the term interconnectivity is to be intended as Iwabuchi (2001; 2002b; 2009; 2010) and Appadurai's understood it (Appadurai, 1990; Appadurai, 1996): globalisation has created a series of links and connections that go beyond the national and geographical boundaries of the consumer's society. As such, the individual can establish connections and maintain them with elements of other countries and cultures through the system of connections created by the current level of technology and widespread usage of SNSs and the Internet. First, it develops the connections to the Korean Wave and its elements; second, it expands the reach of the transcultural flow as it creates ulterior points of contact between the products and the public. The majority of the points of contact are created around the online presence of the group as a unit of seven idols as well as seven individuals. This distinction amplifies BTS' presence online. It follows that points c) and d) are established throughout time and closely monitored and regulated through their presence on SNS, their television appearances, featuring in interviews and their concerts. These points are fundamental in creating and establishing a specific presence and representational image that is used by their fans and their strategies to reinforce the links between them and their supporter. Moreover, this approach helps in avoiding conflicting, representational messages used for promotion like in the case of BoA or Girls' Generation. In other words, their presence on and offline is strictly maintained and managed without compromising their identity and image.

To put it differently, BTS' approach to K-pop promotions abroad follows the key aspects used by the Japanese market understanding and abiding by the market's own rules. Yet, the key difference is that they maintain a united level of promotions – that is outside of Japan. There is no other side of promotions that is either overlapping with the

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[54]As BTS there is the English song *Waste It On Me* by Steve Aoki (Ultra Music, 2018) and their hit 작은 것들을 위한 시 *(Boy With Luv)* feat. Halsey (Big Hit Labels, 2019). Work like *Blueberry Eyes* by MAX features rapper Suga (MAX, 2020); RM features in the track *Champion (remix)* by Fall Out Boy (Fall Out Boy, 2018) or *Seoul Town Road* an *Old Town Road* remix by Lil Nas X (Lil Nas X, 2019). Suga's latest collaboration within K-pop is with solo artist IU for the song *Eight* (1theK (원더케이), 2020a), which the rapper produced and featured in; RM produced and featured in *Winter Flower* by solo artist Younha (1theK (원더케이), 2020b).

first or that runs parallel to it: their interconnectivity runs on the same level and rounds back on the same aspect – BTS. Even though they had to develop and maintain the same parallel, two-sided promotions system in Japan, their global success added on top of their image the role of a *global phenomenon*. This role elevates them from being simply a K-pop group to a category of their own — BTS. It follows that a similar argument could be made for their presence in the USA. To clarify, this section argues that BTS' presence in the USA market follows a similar system to the Japanese one: BTS is K-pop, but their scale and role are different from that of other K-pop idols. Before addressing this argument, the discussion will introduce the failed endeavour to promote in the USA by CL as her promotions were based on an approach almost identical to BTS' one.

6.2.3.1 CL AND THE USA MARKET: A COMPARISON WITH BTS' APPROACH

CL is the leader of the now-disbanded girl idol group 2NE1 by YG. CL attempted to enter the USA market with the help of Scooter Braun, the manager of artists like Justin Bieber, Ariana Grande, and Demi Lovato. The female rapper consolidated her position within the market through her connection with Braun while also collaborating with other artists[55], such as the professional choreographer Parris Goebel for her single *Hello Bitches* (Myers, 2018). CL's approach to promotions in this market follows the examples set by other K-pop artists who have attempted the same previously: the introduction of an American-based manager has been considered key from the beginning, as SM has used the same strategies for its artist. Additionally, there is also the introduction of her presence on the market through collaboration and featuring in other already established American artists: SM has made this its best tactic and has employed it with all its endeavours, from BoA to Girls' Generation.

Yet, the presence of these two well-known and established strategies was not enough to support those endeavours and create a solid presence in the market. This can partially be blamed on a lack of connections within the markets outside of those already known and, partially, on a lesser fandom presence within and outside the market. However, the cause can also be found somewhere else—in the contradiction that exists between her well-known image and the one promoted in the USA. Once again, the two fully overlapping systems create confusion instead of establishing a clear connection between the two systems. It resulted in a lukewarm debut and failed endeavours (Myers, 2018). Even though this approach was not successful, *Billboard* (Benjamin, 2016;

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[55]Some of her more successful collaborations are *Dirty Vibe* and *Doctor Pepper* (Skrillex, 2014; Mad Decent, 2015).

Benjamin, 2014) and *Time* (Lee, J. et al., 2016) published reports that her debut in the USA strongly set her up to become "the future of K-pop in America" (Lee, J. at al, 2016).

Interestingly, these failing endeavours over the years count the introduction on the market of songs crafted specifically for that market, in English, as key promotional moments. Those songs were promoted as the *debut single* of Korean idols in the USA market. As mentioned, this contradictory information was backed up by the promotional materials used and the details encapsulated in them. As both BoA and Girls' Generation were introduced as Korean artists that promoted Korean idol music while singing in English, CL used a similar approach, aiming to showcase her proficiency in the language while also strongly underlying her Korean ethnicity. The contradiction in the information delivered through this promotional approach has been demonstrated throughout the years to be the downfall of any attempt to successfully promote in the USA. Only *Gangnam style* has managed to successfully introduce itself in the market albeit without a specific plan to do so.

6.2.3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF FANS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS OF BTS AND K-POP

Fans are the driving force behind the reach of K-pop and the Korean Wave outside of South Korea. The increased presence of K-pop in online media derives from two key elements: the fans' presence online and an increased interest in K-pop by international media. If the first element can be considered the driving force, the second one is the amplifier: media reflects and increase the discussion and discourse around K-pop through their monitoring of PSY's unexpected popularity and the interest in Korean popular music -K-pop. This interest is then either reinforced or deflected by fans, whose role is to maintain the presence online of their favourite K-pop artist while also cultivating their passion and spreading it. Fundamental to this process is the Internet and SNS through which K-pop fans and Korean Wave fans consume their favourite products, interact with them, and maintain a constant transnational cultural flow between them and South Korea.

There is a level of interconnectivity that runs simultaneously to that of K-pop and the Korean Wave. It is the interconnectivity of fans and consumers that is created through the media flow that brings K-pop to international fans. This flow is developed around the consumption of pop culture's products as well as the details used to disseminate information regarding them. Any interference with this exchange is considered and dealt with through a series of coping mechanisms that amplify the fans and experts' voices while also reflecting the idols' voice and message. Such mechanisms

include blog posts, Tweets, Facebook messages and posts, and articles dealing with such occurrences and wrongdoings[56].

When BTS started developing their presence in the USA it was done through connections within the market: they appeared on an eight-episode reality show titled *America Hustle Life* (IMBd, 2014), where they interacted with hip-pop old stars -Coolio and Warren G (Dorof, 2018). However, this endeavour failed to gain the needed and sought-after access to the American public, forcing the company to change its approach and focus on the group's connection to its fans, ARMY. They also kept working on their connection to their fans, which were and still are the driving force behind their presence in the American music market, as it has been demonstrated by the numerous awards won by the group at American-based music award shows[57].

6.2.3.3 BTS' SUCCESS: A CASE OF FAMILIARITY DEVELOPED THROUGH CONSISTENCY AND AUTHENTICITY

When analysed closely, the approach to localisation in the USA for BTS shows that the company and the artists followed a similar approach to that of other companies; yet they also employed other strategies that helped them connect with the wider audience and increase their chances of developing and maintaining their presence there. Crucial to this strategy was the representation of the band for what they are and not what the market might appreciate more: this move goes against the basic approach shown by SM as well as CL. Contrarily to BoA's introduction as a Korean idol that sings K-pop songs in English, BTS was and still is represented as Korean idols – more specifically a Korean idol group- that sings in Korean. The image, that was chosen as a banner to portray the group, reflected their identity as Korean idols as well as their Korean idol music: paraphrasing Lie's sentence once again, *BTS are a Korean idol group promoting in America -that just happen to sing in Korean.*

Moreover, their identity as an idol group has been managed so that it would remain the same even when abroad. SM has described the new ventures in the American

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[56]Examples of such instances are the numerous *hashtags* used throughout the years by ARMY. The latest worldwide treading hashtags in support of the group were used before, during and after the 2021 Grammy Award Ceremony: *#LightItUpBTS*, *#BTSOurGreatestPrize* and *#SetTheNightAlightBTS*. Particularly widespread was also the hashtag *#JasonDeruloIsOverParty* and it has been used by ARMY and K-pop fans, in general, to bring to the artist and the media's attention the lack of proper credit to BTS when their remix of Derulo's hit *Savage Love (Laxed – Siren Beat)* reached the number one position on the Billboard coveted *HOT 100* chart (BANGTANTV, 2020; Billboard, 2020).

[57]For example, BTS won the Billboard Music Award for *Best Social Artist* for the first time in 2017. The same year, they performed at the American Music Award as the closing act (J.K.,2017; Kelley, 2017; Lynch, 2017).

or Chinese market as improvements and adaptations of the idols' music to that specific market, while Big Hit has talked about BTS' promotion in the USA as an opportunity to expand the reach of the group's message and their fandoms (Bruner, 2019). Naturally, both companies need to be successful in these endeavours as a necessity for surviving the lucrative world of music. Yet, here lies the key difference between SM and Big Hit's approach to localised American promotions. On one side, both companies had invested in localising their approach and marketing strategies to increase their chances of breaking into it; on the other side, SM lacked back-up from the message sent out, while Big Hit developed a cohesive and coherent message that was backed up by the message sent out.

To put it differently, on one side there is the need to fit in, on the opposite, there is the need to fit in without compromising the identity created. Adopting Iwabuchi and Kim, Y.'s words, SM's approach to China and America could be considered to be based on *familiar differences* and a sense of overall odourlessness, which is developed through its localisation strategies. The link between product and country of origin has been severed at least on a public official level. Big Hit's approach should be considered as developed around the concepts of *familiarity*, *distance*, and *proximity* where any odourless aspect is relegated to the specificity of the promotion in the American market, not the music used to enter it. The link between country of origin and product is maintained and constantly reinforced on official and public levels.

Another possible interpretation of familiarity in K-pop promotion has been described numerously in studies looking at fans' consumption of K-pop. Here the term *familiarity* is used according to Kim, Y. understanding and application. In her analysis of K-drama consumption, the author developed Iwabuchi's application of the term *familiar difference* more in-depth through the distinction between similarity, difference, proximity and distance (2011). This approach to understanding the cultural and social connections between the Japanese audience and K-drama can be also applied in the case of BTS and their connection to their fans. Thus, in this context proximity, distance, similarity, and difference are all categories that describe the familiarity felt by fans while interacting with BTS' products and promotional materials. In this sense, this perception of familiarity aligns with the concept described by Kim, Y. as the author adapted it from Iwabuchi's interpretation. Those studies commonly addressed familiarity as shared emotions and messages between fans and idols. Those emotions and messages are described as interpreted and addressed by the idols and felt by their fans, that share similar viewpoints with their idols on those emotions and messages The key point in this argument is that the familiarity of those emotions and feelings is acknowledged by fans across borders and

even cultures (Hübinette, 2018; Jin, 2021; Jung, H., 2017a; Keith, 2021; Kim, S., 2019; Lie, 2021; Lyan and Levkowitz, 2015; Martin et al., 2020; Mōri, 2009; Noh, 2011). Even if this perception of familiarity is entirely dependent on the sensitivity of each fan, this quality is unequivocally fundamental in the creation and development of a fandom. More specifically, the *familiarity* embedded in BTS' promotional activities and materials for USA promotions can be also described in terms of *empathy* and *resonance* as well as in terms of Lie's acceptance of *authenticity* (Lie, 2019). Familiarity is elaborated on in terms of addressing the public and fans with a consistent online and offline presence. Public speeches and personal beliefs are aligned and consistently support each other. The argument by Lie (2021) is developed around the regular and familiar approach of BTS to the K-pop music industry as a whole. The author suggests that the septet's success is also sustained by their consistency in their approach to music, fans and overall promotional strategies. Similarly, to the SM approach, BTS had developed a brand that represents the group as well as each members' personality. Their authenticity is considered by Lie as the familiar trait that has made the difference.

Similarly, in an interview with the magazine *TIME*, the founder of Big Hit, Bang Si-Hyuk elaborates on the global success of BTS (Bruner, 2019). Through the interviews, Bang Si-Hyuk talked about creating and developing BTS as an idol group. Key to this discussion is his comment on the group's role within K-pop and the music industry. He states that part of the success of BTS is due to the group filling a gap in the music industry that was otherwise left open. In other words, the group sings, talks, discusses and promotes the acknowledgement of topics that had yet to be covered by K-pop or pop music in general (Bruner, 2019). Empathy and resonance are two keywords used frequently to describe the impact of BTS songs and their meanings. Even in the numerous interviews released by the group, the idols have expressed their own willingness to discuss topics that they felt were not addressed to their liking in the music world and society.

BTS' public and fans felt that their struggles were reflected and finally addressed in their songs and appreciated the group even more than before. As Keith underlines, BTS are "representative of youth" and as such they "surpassed other groups in establishing social responsibility as a core to their identity" through activities such as addressing the United Nation and donating to various charities (2021, p.158)[58]. Their latest and most

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[58]The role of BTS as cultural ambassador is beyond the scope of this analysis; however, Keith's elaboration also offers insights into the meaning of their role as cultural ambassadors as well as the relation of this role to South Korean cultural diplomacy and the Korean Wave.

impactful donation was in 2020 to the Black Live Matters movement[59]. In the own words of the founder of Big Hit: "BTS touched something that wasn't being addressed […] and the youth reacted" (Bruner, 2019). Current studies on the global fame reached by BTS underline this statement. This statement resonates with the analysis of Jin (2021) on fans' perception of familiarity through emotions, topics and the language used for promotions. In his recent work, the author underlines the importance of fans' networks and their relation to the development of the process of transculturation that helped establish BTS as a key component of K-pop's cultural diplomacy, and per extension of South Korea. BTS' transcultural power has been described as representative of South Korea as well as of universal themes that resonate with the public deeper than other K-pop idols' power - i.e., BlackPink (Jin, 2021).

Authenticity has been used by Lie to describe and identify those common traits visible throughout the career of the Japanese girl group AKB48 and each member. It is intended as a key element that helps the group gain and maintain their fans because even when changes happen, their *authenticity* is left untouched and offer a sense of continuum and familiarity that helps the fan maintain their connection to the group. When applied to BTS, their *authenticity* is in their approach to SNS, to their fans, and to their image online and offline. This has also been acknowledged by the press, particularly the English-language press as they discuss and comment on their various initiatives, promotional events and their career. Keith aptly addresses this by breaking down the media discourses around BTS: the consistent approach to their music and personal and professional beliefs represent their authenticity even outside of their presence online (2021). In terms of SNS, BTS has had and still has the most peculiar presence online: the group divides their own Twitter account among its seven members, developing a unique digital print as a member or individual as well as a group. Their activities reflect their *persona* as a single human being as well as that of the group as a whole unit, which is maintained and grown through interactions with fans. Through every interaction with their fans, BTS developed their image and reinforce their presence as idols belonging to a group as well as singular members, showcasing adaptability and cohesiveness to their overall image.

As I have discussed previously, *familiarity* and *authenticity*'s levels are directly correlated to the knowledge of the public. It follows that the general public and fans' knowledge and understanding of the dynamics between the group's members and their

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[59]In an open-ed for Teen Vogue, journalist and writer Jae-Ha Kim offers a refreshing viewpoint on BTS, racism and the group's influence. For further reading, refer to *On BTS, Anti-Asian Racism, and Reliving Trauma* (Kim, J.-H. 2021).

overall group image vary greatly according to their level of interest in the group. This is reflected in the sense of *distance* and *proximity* attributed to the group: the lesser the knowledge of the public on the group, the wider the *distance* felt toward it. When the opposite happens, the sense of *proximity* helps secure a sense of *familiarity* and *authenticity* developed around and in between the group. BTS opted to solely localised their physical promotion while maintaining their presence, online and not, identical to that used in South Korea: the lack of diversity in the message as well as of contradictive elements creates a solid image that lacks the *odourlessness* embedded in other idols' debut in the American music market. At the same time, *distance* is maintained by underlying their Korean ethnicity and music style: they are Korean idols singing in Korean that happen to promote in the USA. This message was delivered across all platforms and all medium cohesively: in numerous interviews, the group has underlined their origin and their displeasure with the idea of changing their approach to the market by conforming to the need of singing in English and creating a full English language album[60].

Their constant reiteration of this message created a new level of *distance* between them and the public that is reduced through the sense of *proximity* created based on the message embedded in their music and presence online. If familiarity and authenticity are developed through their online and offline presence, a similar development can be attributed to their level of *proximity* to the public. In the case of BTS, *proximity* is reinforced on two sides altogether: first, it is developed and strengthened through the adoption of English as their medium of communication while attending on-site promotional events; second, *proximity* is supported by their message and presence online. Underlying these elements there are two additional key aspects crucial to any promotion: the presence of fans and their interaction with the promotional materials. In other words, BTS' *familiarity*, *authenticity*, *proximity*, and *distance*, even their lack of *odourlessness*, are reinforced, underlined, and reflected online and offline by the group's fans. ARMY has an online and offline presence as strong as that of the group they are

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[60]Today there are four songs in English to be credited to BTS: *Waste It On Me* (Ultra Music, 2018), *Dynamite*, *Butter* and *Permission To Dance* (HYBE LABELS, 2020, 2021a, 2021b). Even though these songs are in English, the group has repetitiously reiterated that they are a group of Korean idols that sing in Korean and thus they will not produce an album in English. On *Dynamite*, the group remarked that it was a song created with the idea of giving back to their fans in the difficult time during the Covid-19 pandemic with the aim of bringing a bit of happiness in their everyday life. See: The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. 2020. *BTS Reminisces on What They Were Like in High School | The Tonight Show.* [Online]. [Accessed 19 March 2021]. Available from: www.youtube.com.

ardently supporting, and their role in propelling BTS to success and fame in both the American market and globally has been and still is crucial.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has argued the answer to the second research question: II) how do Japanese promotions differ from K-pop promotions in other foreign countries? It has discussed this argument through comparative analysis that highlighted how the initial approach to the American and Chinese markets was based on the approach used for the Japanese market. For the Chinese market, the focus was on the approach used by SM as it is the only company that actively promotes Chinese-language songs. This has demonstrated that SM promotions in China are based on two overlapping sides: a Chinese side and a Korean side created to establish a presence in the Chinese market. I argued that the approach used by SM could be broken down into three phases that all build on the failures of the previous one: phase one saw the promotions of Super Junior-M, phase two of EXO-M and phase three of WayV. The analysis of these phases showed that the two sides approach created by SM developed a partially overlapping image for K-pop to reflect both K-pop and Mando-pop's aspects of the promotions. This image was developed to fit the market's rules and the necessity to create a point of contact with the Chinese public.

For the American market, I argued that there were three stages to K-pop promotions: before *Gangnam Style, Gangnam Style* and after BTS. For each stage, the argument set out to discern the differences between the strategies used for the American market and that for the Japanese and Chinese one. It concluded that 1) SM's approach is based on two fully overlapping systems; 2) *Gangnam Style*'s viral success is due to the interconnectivity surrounding K-pop and the Korean Wave; 3) BTS' success was created based on K-pop's interconnectivity and a consistent approach to representational images. To put it simply, instead of developing an overlapping or partially overlapping two-levelled system of promotions as SM did, BTS maintained the same system of promotions.

Lastly, this chapter and the previous one set out to create the base for the discussion in the next two: they argued the creation and maintenance of the interconnectivity for K-pop promotions and the development of a sense of *familiarity*, *similarity* and *proximity*. These three characteristics are crucial for the development of images of the country of origin of any transcultural flow along with the mediascape embedded in the flow's products. As K-pop is a transcultural flow of its own and also an

intra-regional-media flow, the arguments discussed to develop the first and second research questions are also used to develop the argumentation for the next research questions. The question will argue how those characteristics are developed and used by the Japanese public to develop representational ideas and images of South Korea.

Chapter 7: K-pop's familiarity and hybridity in Japan

This is the final empirical chapter of this thesis. This chapter addresses the last research question: III) how are Japanese promotions consumed in Japan? It appraises the notion of familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness in the Japanese consumption of K-pop. The analysis is based on the third level of the framework and explores Japanese consumption of K-pop and representative ideas of South Korea built through this consumption. Through it, this chapter elaborates on the notions of familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness as qualities of a transcultural flow and evaluates their presence in the Japanese promotion of K-pop.

Particular attention is paid to the notion of familiarity and that of hybridity: familiarity is discussed following an adaptation of the application of Kim, Y. (2011) as it offers the best approach to comprehending Japanese promotion of K-pop and its consumption by fans. On the other hand, the notion of hybridity is discussed and challenged in its application to the Japanese promotion of K-pop to better understand if it is perceived by the consuming society. To do so, a visual analysis is conducted of online and offline promotional materials. Online materials have been collected through the monitoring of the websites and accounts listed in the appendix. Particular attention has been given to the materials collected from the links in Table 2 of the Appendix.

Table 11 Abridged version of Table 3 Examples of coding

ODOURLESSNESS	
No reference to the location	Stress on Location: Japan
Type of promotions: JP	Type of promotions: SK & JP
FAMILIARITY		
JP Version – J-Kpop	MV and PV are different	Language
PV built as a déjà vu	K-Jpop	Stage presence
HYBRIDITY	
J-Kpop	SK promotion in JP
SK style, JP stage	Language and style

This visual analysis has been integrated with the materials collected during fieldwork: magazines, photographs, and in loco observation have been analysed to highlight elements that are representative of the qualities of a transcultural flow. The visual analysis has been incorporated with the qualitative analysis conducted on the participants' responses. The interviewees and focus groups' responses have been coded to emphasise the presence of elements or details that explore the fans' understanding of

odourlessness, familiarity and hybridity. An example of the coding is found in Table 11. Figures 18 and 19 offer examples of visual analysis. This chapter is divided into three sections: the first develops the arguments on familiarity with K-pop's presence in the Japanese music market; the second elaborates on K-pop's hybridity and odourlessness; the third offers a summary of the findings and arguments introduced in this chapter.

Figure 18 Data Collection: Example of Layout Analysis of SNS' accounts

Sources: BTS official (2020); BTS JAPAN OFFICIAL (2020b)

Figure 19 Data Collection: Example of Secondary Resources' webpage breakdown and analysis

Links to extra information on K-pop and K-Wave. Develops interconnectivity, creates sense of familiarity and opportunities to develop "sense of Koreanness". Possible convergence points.

Stress on location: "**JAPAN Mini Album**", "**JAPAN 3rd Album**"「日本 2nd シングル」 Contrast with AD for BTS and Astro and ATEEZ: no stess on location nor language. Create distance and detachment from SK. Underline familiarity with language and location. Japan Album = Japanese Lang Songs

「日本ベストアルバム」 Compilation album: J-Kpop & K-Jpop songs. Specific to Japanese market. Stress on「日本」. Creates distance and subtle difference from other AD. Develop sense of close proximity.

AD for the new Single from BTS. No reference to *Language* nor SK. Contrast with AD for their compilation album and the news in K-POP ニュース section. 1st news: about RIAJ awarding BTS platinum, gold, and silver. 2nd news is about BTS appearances on BBC Radio1: Stress on language & location.

Source: Tower Record Japan (2021)

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7.1 Familiarity in the Japanese promotions for K-pop

This section explores the interpretation of the notions of familiarity and odourlessness by Japanese K-pop fans. It seeks to evaluate their receptions by Japanese fans as qualities of K-pop related to a transcultural flow. The arguments introduced here are based on the conclusions reached in Chapter 5, where K-pop promotion in Japan was discussed in terms of structure and localisation. Based on those conclusions, the analysis looked at a range of promotional materials to determine which elements represent the characteristics of a transcultural flow. In doing so, it evaluates the perceptions of those elements by Japanese fans and their application to K-pop as academic notions. Japanese promotions of K-pop are developed to fit the Japanese pop music market by following its regulations and by abiding by its iron triangle. In so doing, K-pop has created a *Japanese version* of K-pop specifically for the Japanese pop music market. It is this version that is analysed and discussed in this chapter.

More specifically, this chapter evaluates the presence and reception of elements of K-pop promotional materials that can be associated with the notions of familiarity and odourlessness. In this analysis, odourlessness is discussed in terms of the lack of cultural odours or mediascapes that are representative of South Korea. This definition allows the exploration of Iwabuchi (2001; 2002b) and Appadurai's (1996) understanding of a transcultural mediated flow's representation of its country of origin. Iwabuchi's definition of cultural odours is equivalent to Appadurai's understanding of mediascapes and both can be applied and used to discuss K-pop's odourlessness in Japan. Similarly, familiarity will be explored through the complimentary viewpoints elaborated by Kim, Y. (2011) on Iwabuchi's definition of familiarity (Iwabuchi, 2001; 2002b; 2005; 2006). Difference, distance, and proximity add to the acknowledgement of familiar elements in the flow and its products by comparing them with the consumer's culture and society. Through the adoption of these comparative terms, K-Jpop and J-Kpop songs are discussed in terms of familiar proximity, familiar distance, and familiar difference. This section is divided into two parts: the first introduces and discusses J-Kpop songs in terms of familiar distance and familiar proximity; the second discusses the usage of the Japanese language in terms of lack of cultural odour or mediascapes detailing the South Korean origin of the idols.

7.1.1 The Japanese language in K-pop promotions: a sense of familiar distance and familiar proximity

As mentioned in section 5.1.1, part of the promotional system for K-pop in Japan is the adoption of the Japanese language in promotional communications and K-pop

music. Key to this approach is the music mastered specifically for this market: it is Japanese in almost all aspects. The music used for a Japanese debut had been consistent with one style and genre—it is ***an adaptation in Japanese of original Korean songs*** or **J-Kpop**. In particular, with the increasing presence online of K-pop-related materials, Japanese debuts and their promotions have been based on the official introduction to the Japanese public of K-pop idols through songs that might already be known. In other words, **Japanese versions,** or **J-Kpop,** of original K-pop songs that are already known by the fans consuming the Korean Wave and K-pop. For example, the debut of Girls' Generation in Japan was through the Japanese version of their hit *Gee* (SMTown, 2012a); EXO debuted with *Love Me Right – Romantic Universe* (avex, 2015) as their Japanese version of their hit *Love Me Right*. Similarly, BTS' Japanese debut was marked with the studio album *Wake Up* (allkpop, 2014b), which included the J-Kpop versions of some of their hits like *Jump*, *No More Dream*, and *Boy In Luv*.

7.1.1.1 FAMILIAR DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY: K-JPOP AND J-KPOP

Figure 20 shows details of handwritten notes at BTS' promotional stands in Shibuya's Tsutaya and Tower Record. The underlined Japanese text offers a description of the type of songs contained in the albums. Detail 3 remarks on the presence of a *Japanese version* (日本語バージョン, in the note) of the songs *DNA* and *Mic Drop*. This sentence underlines that those songs have an original version that is not in the Japanese language. Similarly, the text follows this assertion with the introduction of a new song: *Crystal Snow*. The rest of the details are from handwritten notes for the single *Lights/Boy With Luv* released in July 2019. Through similar language, the handwritten notes introduce *Boy With Luv* and *Idol* as Japanese versions (of their original Korean version) and *Lights* is marked as a Japanese original song. There are two key points in these handwritten notes: the first is the introduction of the songs as a *Japanese original* (for example:日本独自制作された「Crystal Snow」); the second is the indication that those songs, that are marked as *Japanese Versions*, have an original version (in the Korean language) that is popular outside the Japanese music market.

Figure 20 Details of handwritten notes promoting BTS and their music

Source: Authors' own, Tokyo, Shibuya.

Figure 21 Details of promotional stands and flayers for (1) OH MY GIRL, (2) Red Velvet, (3) and (4) TWICE


Source: Authors' own, Shibuya, Tokyo

Expressions such as 「日本語 Ver」 or its English equivalent "Japanese Version" are used to highlight the *J-Kpop* song systematically across all websites and accounts. Figure 21 includes handwritten notes and printed flyers all adopting similar expressions to highlight the type of song promoted. Similarly, *K-Jpop* songs are identified easily through expressions such as 「日本オリジナル」 or their English equivalent "Japanese Original". Online promotional materials adopt similar vocabulary and expressions to underline the language of J-Kpop songs. In contrast to any handwritten materials, online promotional materials do not underline nor highlight Japanese original songs: any K-Jpop song is simply introduced without additional expression that would characterise it as *Japanese original.* This process of introduction is based on two notions: first, there is the necessity to underline that any *Japanese language version* of a song has an original. The implication is clear: there is a song that has been promoted by the same idol but in a different language. Second, there is no clarification of the language used for *K-Jpop* songs in online materials. It is assumed that those songs are sung in Japanese as the promotions are for a **Japanese** album, single or live CD.

It is the distinction between J-Kpop and K-Jpop that creates a sense of familiar distance and familiar proximity between the consumers – the fans- and the product - Japanese promotions for K-pop. Familiar difference is to be intended here as the perception of familiar elements within the products that mark it undoubtedly as *foreign* "to the local audiences' desire and viewing pleasure" (Kim, Y., 2011, p.43). Proximity is developed through the pre-existing knowledge of the idols or idol groups promoted in Japan. These articulations of Japanese promotions for K-pop are exemplifications of both difference and proximity between Korean promotions and Japanese promotions for K-pop. As articulated by Iwabuchi in terms of *familiar differences*, the difference is found in J-Kpop. In contrast, familiar proximity is found in K-Jpop: known Korean idols or idol groups perform and promote Japanese pop music songs never before released on the market.

As can be seen from the example of online promotional materials collected in Figure 22 (avex, 2021; TWICE JAPAN OFFICIAL, 2021; UMJ, 2020a; 2020c; YG JAPAN Official, 2021), any form of promotion in the Japanese pop music market is branded as Japanese and paired with a number or the word *debut* (they are both highlighted by a red circle in the figure). This type of information determines the stage of promotion of the idols: the word *debut* determines the first-time release of music on the Japanese pop music market. Any material, that pairs the word *Japan* with a number, indicates a comeback: the higher the number, the longer the Japanese career of that Idols.

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For example, TVXQ! released *Hot Hot Hot/ Mirrors*, their 47th Japanese single, in the summer of 2019. During the same summer, TWICE released their 4th and 5th Japanese singles, respectively *Happy Happy* and *Breakthrough*; IZ*ONE had their Japanese debut and, BTS released their 10th Japanese single while also celebrating their 5th year of activities in Japan since their Japanese debut. In Figure 23, detail 5 and 6 of figure 20 mark the anniversaries of BTS debuts, respectively in South Korea (6th anniversary) and Japan (5th anniversary).

Figure 22 Examples of Online promotional Materials
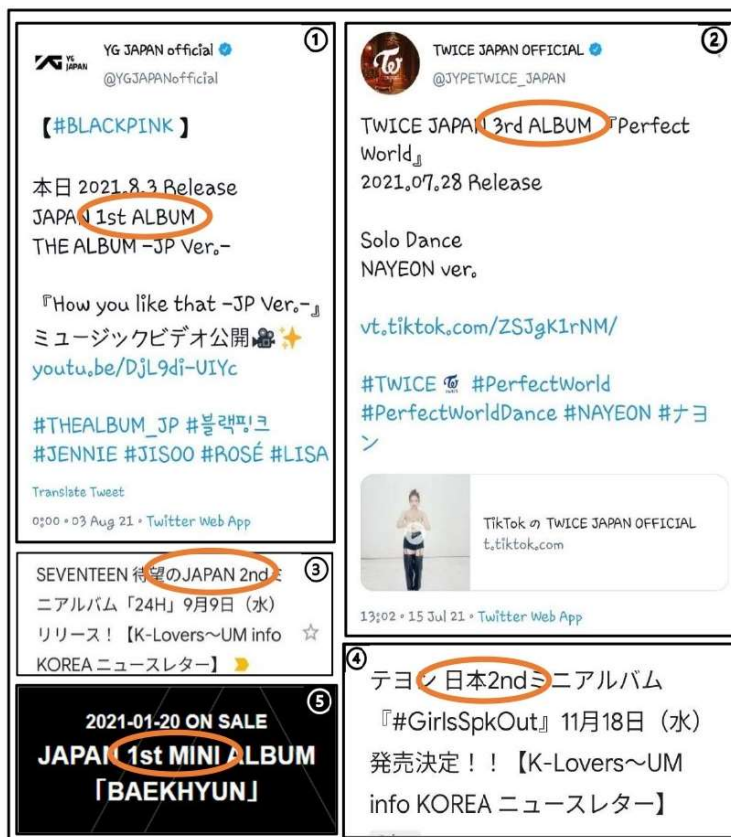
Figure 23 Details 5 and 6: handwritten cards for BTS' Anniversary

The point is that Japanese fans of K-pop and/or the Korean Wave are already familiar, if not well versed, with the latest K-pop music release. Thus, a Japanese *debut* of K-pop idols can only be considered as such by the wider audience that does not consume K-pop or the Korean Wave. This is the difference between considering Japanese K-pop promotions completely separate from their activities in Korea and considering them as an external but integrated part of their career. In other words, a Japanese debut is more of a process integrated with the promotional strategies for the Japanese public and a necessary step to appease the need of Japanese fans of the Korean Wave and K-pop. As addressed in section 5.1., K-pop adheres to the Japanese pop music iron triangle in order to survive in the extremely competitive Japanese music market. In this regard, the introduction of a Japanese debut and the recording of songs specifically for the market in the Japanese language is a necessity dictated by market rules.

As analysed in section 5.2, the system of promotion of K-pop in Japan is developed through a network of connections that links Korean companies to Japanese ones, allowing fans to explore both worlds easily. It follows that many Japanese fans of K-pop are already aware of the existence of the Korean promotion of K-pop. As two students taking part in the first focus group highlighted, following the same stages and steps in promotions helped the integration of K-pop in the market as it is formulated in familiar terms. Those familiar terms are the adoption of the Japanese language as means to communicate, sing, and promote as well as the same structure for their promotions. Therefore, according to the students, both the language and the presence of **J-Kpop** resulted in the creation of a sense of familiarity: firstly, there is the familiarity with the system, the language and the manners and modality of promotions; secondly, there is the familiarity of the songs introduced to the market. The latter is particularly valid for fans as they are already consuming K-pop outside its Japanese promotion. In this regard, out of the eight students interviewed, five acknowledge that their familiarity with Korean promotions for K-pop helps them navigate the Japanese promotions. Expressions such as the *Japanese version* or *Japanese original song* (introduced in Figures 20 and 21) are used by fans to categorize the songs and their promotional videos. If the promotions highlight the presence of J-Kpop (Japanese version) songs, those are already considered to be of less quality than their Korean language counterpart. Contrastingly, K-Jpop songs (Japanese original) are perceived as being better a priori; the familiarity with the original Korean songs is used as a measuring tool to rank the likelihood of appreciating the songs.

When asked to elaborate more on their opinions on Japanese versions of K-pop songs, Students A and B agreed that their appreciation of Japanese versions of Korean songs was lower for J-Kpop songs as they are a bad copy of the Korean original. They further explained that those copies are identical in every other component of a song but the language of the lyrics: rhythm, melody, harmony, beats, and English lyrics are left as they are. The only difference is the language used to convey the message: this creates an oddity in the songs that were not present originally. Student F and Student G also mentioned that they thought that J-Kpop songs were odd. Student G went further in her explanation and stated that she preferred not to listen to those as they are not as good as the original. A similar sentiment can be found in the responses of the other students. The students applied the concept of familiarity and evaluated it in terms of similarity, difference, distance, and proximity. These qualities, as elaborated by Kim, Y. (2011), help the consumers understand the familiar traits embedded in the transcultural flow's products and their own culture. Remarkably, this interpretation of distance is based on the audience's familiarity with the song. In this case, it is the comparison with the original Korean version that results in a sense of familiar difference.

The sense of familiarity, that derives from the presence of the Japanese language in the Japanese promotion of K-pop has ambiguous connotations. On one hand, it is perceived as a willingness to communicate and interact with the fans through the same means. It has a positive subtext: it is a gesture that shows that idols are making an effort in being able to communicate through the same language. This is an important part of Japanese promotion that both Larsen (2020) and Lie (2013b) underline. Lie explains that a key part of the Japanese promotion of idols is the direct interaction with fans at various events. As such, being able to express themselves correctly through the language is vital to the success of the idols and the growth of their fan club. Similarly, Larsen explains how language is seen as a means to consider Japanese promotion of K-pop as manifesting *familiar* cultural traits to create a closer relationship with their fans. This familiarity, however, is withdrawn when the idols make mistakes with their Japanese language (Larsen, 2020). In so doing, the fans mark the idol promoting a *Japanese version* of K-pop in *Japan* using the *Japanese language* as **odd**. Equally, the interviewed students conveyed the same detachment and classification of the language. Simply said, the adoption of the Japanese language to promote in Japan can be considered as familiar, in terms of juxtaposition and similarity, only when used for communication purposes and K-Jpop songs. When it is used for K-Jpop songs, it is considered as distant familiarity:

something oddly familiar but not recognised as fully belonging to the culture of the consumer.

The adoption of the Japanese language favours the development of K-pop as a key element of the Korean Wave: it helps with the integration of K-pop within the consumption habits of the Japanese public as it offers a solid point of contact. The familiarity of the language opens the market to K-pop consumption as it is offered and articulated using the same language, vocabulary and means used to discuss J-pop. It introduces K-pop as already part of the market and it establishes its presence as natural-- the familiarity of the language, the similarity of the vocabulary, and the introduction of K-pop idols as new to the market through a debut develops an image and a presence that is from all perspectives fitting of the Japanese pop music market and its artists. The formation of a transcultural flow is determined by two crucial aspects: the assimilation of the products that constitute the flow within the consumer market and the creation of points of contact between the culture behind the transnational cultural flow and the culture of the consuming country. The adoption of the Japanese language as well as the adherence to the regulation of the Japanese pop music market creates the base for the development and maintenance of these two points.

In contrast, there is also the perception by several interviewees that the *familiarity* of the language used for promoting K-pop in Japan creates a sense of detachment from K-pop. They underlined how its *familiarity* was undermined by the awkwardness of the lyrics used in the **J-Kpop** songs and the greetings used by the idols; according to them, this highlighted the distant and diverse origin of the idols and their music. To them, both **J-Kpop** and **K-Jpop** do not exist as they are naturally considered K-pop: no other genre of music is identified as belonging to K-pop and its promotion in Japan. Similarly, other interviewees acknowledge how the *familiarity* of the songs and the language used during promotion was seen as a way to reduce the distance and difference between the Japanese and Korean music markets. These interviewees understood familiarity in terms of proximity: K-pop's willingness to adapt to the Japanese music market and its rules is interpreted as a sign of closeness and willingness to reduce the distance between the two very dissimilar markets.

Key to this discussion is the Japanese adjective *okashii*. It has two connotations: the first is more positive as it translates to laughable, amusing, or funny. The second is more negative and it stands for strange, odd, or weird. When asked to elaborate more on the meaning of this adjective, all students independently expressed that the song felt *odd* to listen to because the Japanese lyrics were *okashii*. Here the meaning of the word is

used to indicate that the language is familiar and understandable, but it does not sound native. Student F elaborated that to her the oddness derived not from a lack of proper pronunciation or the selection of less than usual Japanese expressions but from the contrast between the Japanese lyrics and the rhythm of the songs. According to her, the lyrics did not fit the rhythm of the songs and as such the experience of listening to the Japanese version of K-pop songs felt odd. Her opinion contrasted with that of the other students that used the adjective *okashii*: according to them, the odd feeling derived from the style of the lyrics. Since it has to fit a pre-determined rhythm and beat, the Japanese language resulted comprehensible but did not sound as natural. The analysis and conclusion drawn by the students on the nature of J-Kpop songs contrast with their thoughts on K-Jpop songs. If the former sounds *odd*, the other is considered natural and accepted as a form of native usage of the Japanese language. When exploring the meaning of the word *odd* in relation to the Japanese promotion of K-pop, the participants were comparing an aspect of their culture with its representation in K-pop Japanese promotion. In other words, they were evaluating the sense of familiarity felt when listening to or interacting with Japanese promotions of K-pop. This familiarity derived from the presence of the Japanese language as mentioned above.

7.1.2 Familiar difference and the feeling of déjà vu in K-pop Japanese promotions

This sense of familiarity can be further expanded as the *feeling of déjà vu* in the promotional materials across accounts and websites and, the similarities between PVs and MVs used for Japanese promotions. Here the term *familiar difference* is to be intended not as the understanding that the consumed product has an element that distinguishes it from the culture of the consumer. In these circumstances, *familiar* refers to the knowledge that what the consumer is consuming has already been consumed in a similar but different form or fashion. Correspondingly, *difference* underlines in this context that there are details within the consumed products that alert the consumers that the product is not identical to what has already been consumed. Additionally, as the term implies, alongside the feeling of familiar difference, there is also the connection with the term *familiar similarity*: this perception of K-pop promotion in Japan derived directly from the application of familiar difference as it is used to evaluate the point in common with the Korean promotions.

Both terms' application follows the understanding developed by Iwabuchi (2005) and Kim, Y. (2011). A sense of familiarity is developed through the

acknowledgement of discrepancies and commonalities between the product, the culture behind it and the culture of the consumer (Iwabuchi, 2005, Kim, Y. 2011). In the case of K-pop promotion in Japan, this analysis offers another possible interpretation of the discrepancies and similarities that are part of the sense of familiarity established through the consumption of products belonging to a transcultural flow. This interpretation is what I call the sense of *déjà vu*, which I use to indicate this feeling of 'having already experienced it' as the French term implies.

The monitoring of the websites and SNS accounts in Table 2, in the Appendix, showed that there is a recurrent practice of organizing their layout and graphics as if they were identical. An example can be found in Figure 18 (at the beginning of this chapter) and Figure 24 (MONSTA X OFFICAL JP, 2021; 몬스타엑스_MONSTA X, 2021). The first figure offers a side-by-side of the Twitter accounts for BTS: on the right, there is the Japanese official account, and on the left, there is the Korean original account. As it is clear from those screenshots, the layout and graphics are almost identical. The details offering more information and marking the two accounts as two different ones are found in the details of the Japanese Twitter account. Separation and differentiation are created by the repetition of the word Japan, indicating the location and type of promotion. Similarly, in Figure 24, the Twitter accounts of MONSTA X show the same usage of graphics and layout. On one hand, they maintain uniformity in the brand of the idol group as they promote their 9th Korean album *One of a kind* on both accounts.

Figure 24 Side-by-side of the Twitter accounts of MONSTA X

Figure 25 YG JAPAN Official Twitter account promoting *THE ALBUM* - JP Ver.- by BLACKPINK

Figure 26 YG JAPAN Official Twitter Account promoting *THE ALBUM* by BLACKPINK

Current promotions of K-pop in Japan also includes the idols' Korean language music as Figure 25 shows (YG JAPAN Official, 2020). Figure 26 (YG JAPAN Official, 2021) offers an example of a tweet for the Japanese version of THE ALBUM for a comparison 'side-by-side' of the Japanese-language promotional post for BLACKPINK's first full album. This creates a sense of familiarity through consistency as they are introduced to the public following the same brand image and style. Yet, there is a distinction between the two: one is dedicated to Japanese promotions, and it underlines again that K-pop in Japan promotes through a Japanese version of K-pop.

7.1.2.1 *WHEN REPETITIVENESS BECOMES FAMILIARITY: IDOLS AS BRANDS*

When familiarity is expressed through consistency it becomes repetitiveness in the form, style, and mode of promotion. As such, this type of familiarity assumes a new connotation that builds on the sense of *déjà vu* as the key element used to distinguish the familiar from the unknown. This approach to promotion is not new to the market: in a *Forbes* article by Salmon (2013), the approach of SM to the world of K-pop is analysed and the author concludes by stating that SM is the first company to develop a brand system for its idols. Each idol group or solo artist is curated as if they were a brand: as such, each one of their promotions fits their "brand". The process could be simplified in

the following steps: 1) creating a music style that fit the group or idol's image; 2) developing a specific style of dancing and 3) selecting the appropriate idol to fit both music genre and style of dance. For example, each SM male idol group is built on the same three characteristics: SM-style of electro music, rhythmic and strenuous dance, and good-looking men (Kim, Juoak, 2015). These three details are then mastered into a combination that fits the idol group and they are maintained constantly throughout its career. TVXQ! is an example of such an approach to music as the group still maintains the same style even after having lost three members[61]. Kim, Juoak (2015) builds the argument of their longevity in Japan on their brand approach to promotion, which is built on their masculinity. Similarly, Lie remarks that their longevity in Japan is due to their unique promotional style: balancing their masculinity with ballads, which is the preferred music genre for J-pop (2013b; 2019).

Expert B expressed similar thoughts when asked to elaborate on the similarities between the graphic, layout, and style of presentation of K-pop idols on their Korean and Japanese social accounts. This has been recognised as a cookie-cutter system by Student F that addressed the similar and uniform presentations of SM idols. This uniformity and similarity are found not only in Korean promotion of K-pop but also in Japanese promotions. They represent the brand SM as well as the idol group. According to her, it fuels boredom as there is not enough diversity or experimentation in SM music. This contrasts with the opinion of Student H, who explained that consistency in the delivery of familiar presentations and promotional material is actually a reassurance for the fans. Knowing that SM idol groups' music will meet your expectation is part of the experience of being a fan of SM. She elaborated that familiarity here is to be intended as the reassuring knowledge that what you will listen to, or watch, is exactly what you would expect from that idol group.

Familiarity can also be seen as a form of consistent representation of aspects of the original products. In the case of SM, the familiar trait of Girls' Generation is the showcasing of slim, long legs and well-poised feminine bodies. Epstein's analysis of Girls' Generation and their international success underlines how in Japan the SM girl idol group is well known for their legs (2015). Simply said, having slim, toned, and long legs could be considered their trademark. In his comparison with the Japanese female girl

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[61]TVXQ! was initially a five-member, male idol group by SM. In July 2008, a lawsuit was filed against SM for unfair distribution of profit and unreasonable length of the contracts. Members Jaejoong, Junsu and Yoochun were behind this lawsuit. Once they won it, they formed officially the group JYJ. For further readings, Lee, Seungah offers a good recollection of the events that lead to the lawsuit and the fans' intervention in it (2015).

group AKB48, Lie underlines how being consistent with your presentation and approach to promotion is key for K-pop, even in the production of music and its promotions (2019). This translates, as aforementioned, to maintaining not only the same style of the presentation but also the same genre of music. A step further is also maintaining a similar style for the MV, and PV used for promotional activities.

7.1.2.2 *DÉJÀ VU IN MVS AND PVS: FAMILIARITY THROUGH SUBTLE DIFFERENCES*

During the interviews, when talking about K-pop promotion in Japan, the argument about MV and PV was also touched upon. All the participants in Focus Group 2 agreed uniformly that there are two types of MV used for promotion in Japan. The first type is used to promote K-Jpop songs and, as such, it perfectly fits that particular song and only that song. It is a new, never-before-seen promotional video. The second type is for J-Kpop songs, and it generates a strong feeling of déjà vu in the fans. It is created for a song that is an adaptation in Japanese of an original Korean song. Here, *déjà vu* implies that the sense of familiarity is developed as the knowledge that something similar, but at the same time different, has been already consumed. As such, familiarity is interpreted and acknowledged through the distinction of all the subtle differences between the Korean original version and its Japanese version. This results in a video that has familiar qualities and reminds the audience of the original version. Similar comments were offered by student D, student E and student F. When asked to elaborate, the examples offered were the PV for the Japanese version of *Blood, Sweat and Tears* by BTS (UMJ, 2017) and the Japanese PV for *Gee* and *Mr Taxi* by Girls' generation (SMTown, 2012a; 2012b).

The BTS' MV has been described, by student F, as *different but familiar,* with a similar atmosphere and visuals. Even though it has a different context, structure and overall image, the result is a video that felt *similar* to the original Korean version. The juxtaposition of scenes from the original Korean MV throughout the Japanese PV is supporting the *familiarity* felt while watching it. In the context of this video, familiarity is acknowledged in the overall feeling embedded in the video and the scattered presence of scenes from the Korean MV. The MVs by Girls' Generation were described, by student D and student E, as completely similar: the feeling of familiarity is felt so strongly by the public that it is equated to that of déjà vu. As such, the PV is perceived as already known and watched. An observant eye would recognise that the Korean MV differs from the Japanese PV in details such as the outfits and the background, but otherwise, the videos are 90% identical. Maintaining the same structure, plot, and overall presentation in the two videos enables the fans to effectively and securely recognise the idols performing.

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As student D and student F explained, the sense of familiarity generated by the similarity in the music videos is also reflected in the familiar presentation of the idols.

To conclude this section, it should be remarked that the analysis of the perception of familiarity has been developed through the usage of the terminology developed by Iwabuchi (2005) and Kim, Y. (2011). These terms have been used to describe Japanese fans of K-pop's interpretation of the notion of familiarity in the context of K-pop promotion in Japan. As such, familiarity has been articulated in terms of familiar difference, familiar similarity, and familiar proximity. The analysis aimed at illustrating how these terms are subjective to the personal and cultural circumstances of the audience. It derives that their interpretation is wider than the meaning adopted by the two authors even though the terms are applied with the same meaning. Such a discussion proved that K-pop has established itself within the Japanese pop music market and with time has evolved into a transcultural flow of its own right. The next section will fortify this conclusion by discussing the notion of hybridity within the Japanese promotion of K-pop.

7.2 Hybridity: K-pop and its Koreanness

In this section, hybridity will be used to discuss the presence of K-pop within the Japanese music market and its reception. It will look at K-pop's presence and essence—in a sense—as a hybrid. This nature will be analysed and discussed as introduced by the interviewees as an alternative perspective to the reception of K-pop's familiar traits: language, system of promotions, and production. This section is divided into three parts: the first discusses the academic application of the concept of hybridity to Japanese promotion and it aims to demonstrate that is an accurate description of the products, strategies and materials used. The second part builds on the conclusion of the first section to demonstrate that even though hybridity can be used to describe the Japanese promotion of K-pop, Japanese fans do not perceive it. As such, this discussion will challenge the academic application of hybridity to K-pop to establish that it is a reality of K-pop that has no repercussions on its identity as Korean pop idol music. Lastly, the third section builds on the previous two discussions: it establishes the ambiguous nature of the concept of hybridity by demonstrating that its application can be seen as an interpretation of the concept of familiarity and odourlessness embedded in the Japanese promotions for K-pop.

The previous section has argued that fans' perception of familiarity is felt in the language used, the mannerism of the idols, the consistency in their promotional approach and style of music, and the promotion of already known songs. Additionally, it is also

interpreted as the presence of familiar emotions and messages: topics known by fans yet explored by other cultural products—in this case, other music genres. Another possible interpretation of K-pop's familiarity is the assimilation of J-Kpop and K-Jpop in J-pop; in other words, the labelling of K-pop idols as Japanese idols. This misunderstanding has been attributed to the nature of K-pop promotion in Japan as well as the level of the public's familiarity with K-pop outside of its promotion in Japan. Lie explains that "although neither BoA nor Tōhō Shinki veiled their South Korean origins, most Japanese fans regarded them as Japanese and as part of J-pop" (Lie, 2013b, p.52)[62]. This assimilation is built on SM's choice to introduce BoA as a J-pop artist that happened to be Korean (Lie, 2015): BoA's style and image fit that of J-pop. Her song *Listen to My Heart* was identical to the style of J-pop songs. More precisely, "BoA and Tōhō Shinki were balladeers and much closer to the J-pop norm" (Lie, 2013b, p.52).

This perspective on Japanese K-pop promotion can also be discussed in terms of odourlessness and hybridity. Iwabuchi discusses hybridity alongside odourlessness as they are not mutually exclusive. Odourlessness is described by Iwabuchi as the lack of elements in a transcultural flow's product that are culturally rich (2002b). When cultural odours cannot be found in the products of a flow, this is interpreted as lacking any concrete reference to its country of origin. In Appadurai's terms, this means a lack of mediascapes or elements embedded in mediated content that offer detail about its country of origin (1996). In this context, hybridity is the capacity to perfectly mix elements and cultural details from various countries with the flow's own culture (Iwabuchi, 2002b).

7.2.1 HYBRIDITY AND K-POP PROMOTION IN JAPAN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACADEMIC APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPT

As introduced in section 2.2.1, applying hybridity to K-pop is easily done: the nature of K-pop itself can be interpreted as a hybrid. Fuhr (2016), Lie (2012; 2015; 2021) and others (Oh, I., 2017; Oh, I. and Jang, 2020; Oh, I. and Lee, 2013; Oh, I. and Park, 2012) have studied K-pop's origin and process of production and promotion. Lie and Fuhr's studies have underlined how musically K-pop has been a hybrid product since the beginning as it has been created by mixing American and, generally speaking, Western music genres. On top of this, the introduction of the idol system by SM founder, Lee Soo Man, is another form of hybridity as it was imported from Japan and then adapted and applied to the Korean music market. The current K-pop idols' system is the evolution of the Japanese idol system (Lie and Oh, 2014). When considered from this perspective, K-

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[62]Tōhō Shinki is the Japanese for TVXQ! or DBSK. In kanji this is 東方神起.

pop is a hybrid and its presence in Japan (with the adoption of the Japanese language, manners, and style of promotion) marks both J-Kpop and K-Jpop as a hybrid.

Oh (2017), Oh and Jang (2020), Oh and Lee (2013) and Oh and Park (2012) looked at this aspect of K-pop promotions and productions from a business perspective. These studies marked the difference in approach as being determined by the necessity to increase the B2B side of the promotions as well as incorporating a global-local-glocal scale and system of promotions and productions. Particularly, it is the glocal aspect of this understanding that plays a key role in visualising K-pop's presence as a hybrid within the Japanese music market. Glocal means thinking local, but producing and advertising globally, through a system of adaptation of internationally produced products that are partially based on local ones (Oh, 2017; Oh and Jang, 2020). In the case of K-pop, these can be visualised as the production at a global level of its songs and their promotion through adaptation at a local level. In Japan, this results in J-Kpop and K-Jpop. For this reason, the Japanese promotion of K-pop can be discussed in terms of hybridity.

7.2.2 K-POP AS KOREAN POP IDOL MUSIC: HYBRIDITY IS NON-EXISTENT FOR JAPANESE FANS

In this section, the notion of hybridity that has been used in the academic context to describe K-pop and its promotion is challenged to demonstrate that it is not perceived by Japanese fans. As such, this section analysis the responses collected during interviews and focus groups as it was clear that K-pop's hybridity is recognized as less accentuated by fans. There is unanimity in the responses given by all interviewees: K-pop is a unique form of music, promotion, and consumption habits. Any variation of K-pop, which can be found in different markets (like the Japanese pop music market), is considered, consumed, and discussed as *K-pop*. In other words, the Japanese fans' perception of K-pop is not altered by the *Japanese version* of K-pop promotion. More specifically, when discussing the adoption of the Japanese language for K-pop promotion in Japan, student F, student B and student H admitted that the language was a method to reduce the distance between the Japanese public and the K-pop idols. It is a way to communicate as well as a tool for performing and promoting in Japan following the market rules. This was echoed by the other interviewees and the participants of the second focus group: *K-pop is* uniquely *Korean*.

To the interviewed Japanese fans, it is Korean pop idol music and is described and perceived as such. This perception is not altered by K-pop's adaptability to various music markets and the introduction of other languages as a means to communicate, perform and promote. In the case of Japanese promotion, the adoption of a *Japanese*

version of K-pop promotion is not seen as generating something different from K-pop. In other words, K-pop's hybridity is seen as an inner, innate characteristic of the product that belongs to its own transcultural flow as well as that of the Korean Wave. This perception contrasts with Lie's studies and understanding of K-pop's nature. Lie has discussed K-pop's origin and hybridity as an indicator of a less than Korean nature. As mentioned in section 2.2.1, the *K* in K-pop can be interpreted as Korean only if the headquarters location of the music companies and the ethnicity of the majority of the idols is considered. Otherwise, K-pop as Korean popular idol music has little to nothing of *Korean* in it (Lie, 2012; 2013b; 2015; 2019).

In terms of hybridity, the data offered two possible aspects that could be considered as the direct results of the application of the concept of hybridity to K-pop's presence in Japan. In one instance, there is the formulation of promotions through two different *Japanese* language-based songs: J-K-pop and K-Jpop. In this case, J-Kpop should be considered the perfect hybrid between K-pop and J-pop: it is a *Japanese* (version of a) K-pop song. K-Jpop is considered also as it is a Japanese pop song delivered and interpreted by Korean idols and advertised and discussed as if it was Japanese. In the other instance, there is the presence online and in form of DVDs of MVs and PVs that are based on their Korean original version and that are created to fit the Japanese version of their original K-pop song. These videos are, similarly to J-Kpop, a hybrid between Japanese music videos and flair and the Korean version that was used to promote and consume the original song.

The perception is of an already *familiar* scene or emotion: familiarity in this case has a double meaning. First, it is intended to be the perception of already known songs and PV as they are a *Japanese version* of K-pop songs; this is the sense of *déjà vu* discussed in section 7.1.2.2. This familiarity is perceived exclusively by fans and occasional consumers who are aware of the existence of the original Korean version. In this case, *familiarity* is also paired with *similarity* as the MVs and PVs might share a similar structure, editing or overall meaning. As mentioned, this is another interpretation of what fans identified as familiar: it interprets K-pop's promotional materials and habits from the technical viewpoint of their productions. Specifically, it is the presence of the country of origin and its full integration within the product that defines the *Japanese* version of K-pop as a hybrid. This includes all songs specifically created for the Japanese market—K-Jpop songs have been recognised by my interviewees as K-pop, as they are performed and interpreted by K-pop idols.

7.2.3 THE AMBIGUOUS NATURE OF HYBRIDITY IN THE JAPANESE VERSION OF K-POP

It has also been stressed that they are not fully *Japanese* as their presentations lack the flair of J-pop. According to two-thirds of the interviewees, that is to says that Japanese promotions for K-pop are still interpreted as K-pop because the idols are K-pop idols. As K-pop idols, Japanese promotions are solely for K-pop. Yet, their music is partially associated with K-pop and partially assimilated with J-pop. This contradiction denotes a lack of clear labelling and incongruencies within their presentation. It derives also from the public's perception of hybridity and odourlessness. Its hybridity creates the circumstances for its reception to be of mixed results. Its odourlessness or lack of cultural odours is the quality that reinforces the reception of K-pop in Japan as a mix of both worlds. In brief, it demonstrates that K-pop's presence in Japan is interpreted by fans as a *hybrid* of K-pop and J-pop. This is particularly true for K-Jpop songs as they are *Japanese* songs but with a Korean level of quality and craft. Still, they do not belong fully within J-pop as they do not reflect J-pop in its integrity. At the same time, they also cannot be K-pop because they are too *Japanese* to be Korean pop idol music. This ambiguity can be explored further if the variable of the language is also introduced in the analysis.

The adoption of the Japanese language can be seen as both a point of contact with the public and a point of separation. Familiar but distant, similar but not identical. If analysed exclusively from the point of view of the Japanese music market, the introduction of the language is a natural consequence of the market's system of promotion and the iron triangle. It also derives from the need to present K-pop within the Japanese pop music market as an integral part of the market itself: everything is exclusively done for the Japanese market. However, with the increased online promotional system through SNS, sharing and streaming platform, the distance between Japanese and Korean promotions is defined specifically through the system of promotion. In other words, Japanese promotions are separated physically, geographically, and logistically from Korean promotions. Yet, they share the same online space for promotions as Figures 24 and 25 show (found in section 7.1.2, page 152): Korean promotions are also carried out through the Japanese social account listed under Table 2, in the Appendix. This forms a cohesive brand image for the idols while also maintaining a sense of familiarity through consistent branding.

Conversely, the language is another point of separation and differentiation between the two markets. It neatly distinguishes them as it highlights and articulates K-pop through its **Japanese versions**—of promotions, tours, songs and MVs. As discussed

in section 5.1, this distinction reinforces the understanding that K-pop promotions in Japan are to the Korean market an extension of the idols' career – another level of their career that just happens to be in Japan, in Japanese and through the Japanese system of promotions. That is, K-pop has created a second image for itself that represents the Korean pop music world through the lenses of the Japanese pop music world: a **Japanese version of K-pop**.

This assimilation helps articulate K-pop promotions in Japan as fundamentally Japanese. At the same time, it reinforces the distance between the two promotions. This duality serves as a reminder that, even in the current market, K-pop would not succeed in Japan without abiding by the rules and the structure of the Japanese market. This includes creating a separate fan club for the Japanese public. The Korean and Japanese fan clubs are distinct and separate. The creation of an exclusively *Japanese* fan club reinforces the association of *Japanese promotion of* K-pop with the Japanese music market. It also indicates the point of fracture between occasional consumers and avid fans: the latter know about both sides of the promotion of K-pop. On the contrary, consuming K-pop only occasionally limits the understanding of the presence of K-pop within the Japanese music market. Fans and occasional consumers react to this distinction differently. Fans recognise it for what it is: an expansion of the Korean promotion within the means and regulation of the Japanese market.

As mentioned, all interviewees stressed how Japanese promotions for K-pop are perceived simply as: *K-pop is promoted in Japan.* Any J-Kpop or K-Jpop music release is seen by them as K-pop; no other alternative is considered. The diverse style in music, performance and promotion is exclusively attributed to the market's rules. Their familiarity and understanding of the K-pop market aid the fans in the process of connection between the Japanese promotion and the Korean one. In contrast, occasional consumers' reactions to the Japanese promotion of K-pop see the adoption of the Japanese system in its entirety as a natural consequence of idols promoted in Japan. This creates the misunderstanding mentioned occasionally by interviewees and gatekeepers: K-pop idols are thought to be Japanese idols. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, BoA's case is the most compelling one. She is a Korean idol who has been promoted in Japan since the early 2000s and her image is linked more closely to that of a Japanese pop idol than a Korean one. This perception derives from the intensive advertisement of the idols at the beginning of her career as a Japanese idol (Lie, 2013b; 2015).

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer the third research question: III) how are K-pop promotions consumed in Japan? It looked at fans' consumption of K-pop and their perceptions of Japanese promotion of K-pop in relation to their consumption of K-pop. It built the analysis on the academic notion of familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness as expressed and introduced by Kim, Y and Iwabuchi. Through the integration of the participant's responses with the visual analysis of the promotional material monitored online and offline, this chapter explored the fans' interpretation of the elements of K-pop promotion that can be assimilated to the qualities of a transcultural flow, focussing on two key elements: familiarity and hybridity. Odourlessness was touched upon during the discussion of the fans' perception of K-pop's hybridity.

Through this analysis, this chapter demonstrated that K-pop's presence in Japan can be articulated in terms of a transcultural flow. As such, its promotional material is consumed and expressed in terms of familiarity and hybridity. Specifically, familiarity is used to describe the approach to the market, with the presence in both online and offline promotional materials of elements recalling the Korean promotion of K-pop. It is also used to assess and evaluate the adoption of the Japanese language as means to communicate, promote and sing. Through this evaluation, the familiarity of K-Jpop and J-Kpop songs is discussed in terms of familiar proximity, familiar distance, familiar similarity and familiar difference. These articulations of familiarity serve to collocate the Japanese version of K-pop, which is used for promotion, in relation to the Japanese and the South Korean market. Through this analysis, familiarity has been established as a trait of K-pop promotion in Japan that is acknowledged by fans, who use it to evaluate their perception of Japanese promotion of K-pop against their own music market as well as the Korean one. Simply put, familiarity is a comparative term between the flow's culture and that of the consuming country.

The chapter then considered K-pop's presence in the Japanese pop music market in terms of its hybridity and odourlessness. Hybridity was found to be represented by K-Jpop and J-Kpop songs. However, the interviewed fans do not identify those songs as hybrid versions of K-pop. As the analysis underlined, K-pop is thought of and discussed solely in terms of Korean idol music. No other definition or interpretation has been given by fans who considered those songs K-pop. This was found also to highlight a strong presence of cultural odours. This perception goes against the idea that a transcultural flow has traits that can be described as lacking cultural odours. Fans' assimilation and description of K-pop hybrid nature as Korean even in Japan determined that

odourlessness is not perceived even if it is sought after by the producing companies. As a transcultural flow, K-pop has characteristics that can be described as familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness. However, this analysis demonstrated that the presence of these characteristics is not always perceived by the public. This lack of awareness does not prevent K-pop to be recognised as a transcultural flow. This conclusion underlines that the presence of K-pop in Japan can be seen as that of transcultural flow through which Korean pop idol music is consumed.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This concluding chapter provides a review of the findings and themes of this thesis while also offering some suggestions for further research. As such, this chapter begins with a recap of the aim and research questions; then it moves on to recalling all the findings chapter by chapter in order to highlight their connection with the aim and its research questions. This breakdown will also serve to remark on the original and new aspects of the research in its fields of study. Lastly, the chapter addresses the prospective research in the field of East Asian studies and the wider field of cultural studies.

8.1 The research questions and findings

This thesis aimed to develop a comprehensive analysis of K-pop promotion and its consumption as a transcultural flow: it broke new ground by analysing K-pop as a transcultural flow. In doing so, it questioned the academic understanding of the core elements of a mediated transcultural flow. Familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness were taken into consideration to test the transnational and transcultural characteristics of K-pop in Japan. Then, mediascapes and the role of media's interconnectivity were assessed to validate K-pop as a transcultural flow. Lastly, this thesis compared K-pop promotion in Japan with the Chinese and American promotions to underline its uniqueness not only in the approach to the market but also in its sociocultural impact. In other words, this thesis questioned the notion that K-pop is solely transnational/ transcultural to demonstrate that it is a transcultural *flow*. This objective was developed through three research questions:

I) How are Japanese promotions of K-pop structured and localised?

II) How do Japanese promotions differ from K-pop promotions in other foreign countries?

III) How are K-pop promotions consumed in Japan?

The first research question aimed to understand the relation between the Japanese pop music market's iron triangle and the approach used by K-pop companies to promote in Japan. It focused on the structure and localisation strategies adopted to develop the Japanese promotion of K-pop to explore K-pop's interconnectivity. This research question also looked at the consumption habits of Japanese fans of K-pop to understand their modalities of consumption and how those reflect the interconnectivity of K-pop. The second research question elaborated on K-pop companies' approach to promotion in China and the USA to evaluate the differences and similarities with the Japanese market. This analysis aimed at highlighting the contrasting results obtained on

the Chinese and American market when similar promotion strategies have been adopted. It investigates the strategies for promotions in terms of interconnectivity and transcultural flows' qualities. These qualities are familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness. Lastly, the third question set out to understand how Japanese promotions of K-pop are consumed by Japanese fans. This question explores the consumption of K-pop promotional material in Japan through the three qualities of a transcultural flow.

Analysis was conducted on data collected through the monitoring of the selected companies and relative SNSs and YouTube accounts, and on data collected during a three-month fieldwork trip in Tokyo in the summer of 2019. During this fieldwork, observations of stands and advertisements for K-pop promotion were made in Tokyo and interviews were conducted among experts and Japanese university students who consume K-pop. Secondary, archive data was used to collect information on Chinese and American promotions. The next section will recap the findings as presented in each chapter, starting with Chapter 5, where I developed a hypothesis on the lack of interest in political ties between JP and ROK by Japanese fans of K-pop.

8.1.1 K-pop's interconnectivity and promotion in Japan

Chapter 5 focused on the first research question: I) How are the Japanese promotions for K-pop localised and structured? The analysis of this chapter was conducted on the data collected through the monitoring of selected companies' websites and the interviewees' responses. Analysis broke down the approach of K-pop to Japanese promotion to highlight three key points: 1) its dependence on the iron triangle and analogue nature of the Japanese music market; 2) the exclusive network of connections created through the SNSs and websites' interconnectivity; and, 3) the relevant points of connection created via the explored interconnectivity that helps fans consume and connect with K-pop as a transcultural flow.

The breakdown of the promotional strategies for K-pop in Japan situates them in relation to the market's rules and iron triangle (Lie, 2013b; Lie and Oh, 2014). The dependence highlighted in this chapter was also actively addressed in the investigation of the promotional structure and materials used by K-pop in Japan. As such, the analysis addressed the presence of music and material specifically created for Japanese promotions. These materials are considered a uniqueness that distinguishes K-pop promotion in Japan from that in South Korea or other countries, such as China and the USA. Recognizing their role within the promotional system of K-pop in Japan also aids

in understanding the approach used by the companies and the role of these materials in developing K-pop's presence within Japan as a transcultural flow of its own.

Through this analysis, this chapter also focused on the role of SNSs and websites in creating a network of connections that help K-pop fans in their consumption and interconnectivity. For this section of the analysis, I examined the connections established online between SNSs, websites and the presence of K-pop in Japan: I also looked at the network of connections established as a system of promotion for K-pop that is exclusive to Korean pop idol music. In doing so, the analysis looked at this network of connections as points of contact between K-pop in Japan (as transcultural) and its country of origin, South Korea. Subsequently, this chapter also looked at these connections in correlation to the points of contact created by fans through their consumption habits. This correlation generated points of contact and convergence between fans and K-pop where the process of transculturation could happen. This analysis was also integrated with the modalities of convergence found by Lie among older Japanese fans of K-drama (2016) and the responses given by the interviewees on their consumption habits.

Analysis has demonstrated that K-pop can be consumed through a separate network of points of contact and convergence that is solely based on the system of promotion created through SNSs and websites. This understanding does not imply that there is no connection with the system of consumption of the Korean Wave, as the integration with the modalities of convergence underlines. Instead, it suggests that there is a system of consumption of K-pop that is integrated fully within the Japanese music market and is separated from the Korean Wave. It is through this separation that K-pop can be considered a transcultural flow on its own. Put simply, K-pop in Japan can be addressed as an integral part of the Korean Wave as well as a flow of its own, with a network of connections that is established exclusively through its promotional system in Japan.

8.1.2 The comparison between Japanese, Chinese and American promotion of K-pop

Chapter 6 addressed the second research question: II) how do Japanese promotions differ from K-pop promotions in other foreign countries? This analysis is based on secondary data: as I adopted a case study approach, the relevant data was collected accordingly. It should also be noted that the data relevant to Chinese promotion is through secondary, English-language resources due to my personal lack of knowledge of the Chinese language. The data collected for American promotion has been selected

according to the chosen case studies and their relevance to the overall arguments of this chapter.

The analysis looked at Chinese and American promotions of K-pop to demonstrate that 1) the approach used for those promotions had been initially built to mimic the Japanese one; 2) that the presence of K-pop in China is still lacking the characteristic of a transcultural flow, even though it could be considered as transcultural; and 3) K-pop's debut and promotions in the USA market have evolved through the years into a transcultural flow that could be considered separate from that of the Korean Wave, in the same way as in Japan. This finding highlights how K-pop is a transcultural *flow* that has integrated itself in the consumption habits and pop music markets of other countries, particularly, the American and Japanese pop music markets. This conclusion was demonstrated by adopting two case studies: for the Chinese promotion, focus was given to the SM approach to the Chinese market; for the American one, focus was given to the evolution of K-pop's approach to the market. For this analysis, the SM and JYP approach was examined, followed by the effect of *Gangnam Style* and finally focus was directed at BTS' promotion. As such, this analysis demonstrated the uniqueness of the Japanese promotional style and the diverse results from the Chinese and American markets.

SM's approach to Chinese promotion has been divided into three stages through which the level of hybridity, familiarity and odourlessness used in the promotional material changed from minimum to maximum. The analysis demonstrated that, if initially SM adopted an approach that totally mimicked the promotion style used in Japan, then the last promotional materials for the Chinese market should be considered the opposite. It found that the last promotional material with WayV results in the adoption of full odourlessness and hybridity. As such, familiarity was found in the formation of WayV, whose idols are only of Chinese ethnicity, but some are already part of another idol group, NCT. The continuation in the adoption of Mandarin as the language to promote and sing is another familiar and constant peculiarity of SM promotion in China. However, this analysis also found that Chinese promotions for K-pop are yet to establish a strong presence in the market that would facilitate the formation of a transcultural flow for K-pop. In contrast with this, the analysis for American promotion showed that the initial presence of hybridity and odourlessness in the K-pop flow has been left behind.

The analysis conducted on the case studies selected for the USA promotion showed that initially K-pop was introduced through mixed signals: on one hand, there was the imposition of hybridity in the creation of a debut of a Korean idol that sang a

translation of an original Korean song in English. Then, this message was contradicted by stressing the country of origin of the idol and the type of music promoted. In other words, the initial approach by SM and JYP promoted an English pop singer that sang K-pop songs in English but that was of Korean ethnicity. This style of promotion was partially abandoned after *Gangnam Style* which served as a cannonball for the introduction of new K-pop idols to the American market. Yet, these debuts were found to again be lacking the right combination of transcultural characteristics to appeal to the market.

When taking into consideration BTS' approach to the USA pop music market, the analysis covered their approach as well as that of CL, the ex-leader of the former girl idol group 2ne1 of YG. These two cases were compared in order to demonstrate the importance of coherence and authenticity in the approach to the music market. This analysis adopted the definition by Lie (2019) of authenticity, which was further elaborated in his latest paper on BTS (2021). It was found that BTS approached the market through a very organic system of promotional strategies that reflected the same approach used elsewhere but was adapted to the American market's rules. As such, it demonstrated that BTS' promotion showed strong cultural odours, which can also be understood as mediascapes and familiarity while limiting their hybridity to their in-person promotional strategies. In other words, they were promoted as K-pop idols who sang in Korean on the American market. The flow of K-pop developed into a transcultural flow like that in Japan.

8.1.3 The notion of familiarity, hybridity and odourlessness in Japanese consumption of K-pop

Chapter 7 dealt with the third and last research question: III) how are K-pop promotions consumed in Japan? This chapter looked at the consumption of K-pop and the fans' representative ideas of South Korea built through their consumption. The analysis evaluated the academic notion of hybridity, odourlessness and familiarity in relation to the presence of K-pop in Japan and its promotional materials. To do so, I conducted a qualitative analysis of the interviewees' responses and a visual analysis of the promotional materials available online. The coding adopted for both analyses highlighted the elements of K-pop promotion that are representative of hybridity, odourlessness and familiarity.

The results of the coding process demonstrated that familiarity is developed in relation to the 'already known factor' and the language used for promotions. Fans are

already familiar with K-pop idols because they have been consuming their music prior to their Japanese debut. As such, they are well versed in distinguishing between Korean and Japanese promotions. Moreover, the Japanese language is discussed as an element of familiarity and hybridity. The analysis demonstrated that the presence of K-pop within the Japanese pop music market offers the possibility to study K-pop as a form of a hybrid product, which aligned with the already existing idea of K-pop as a hybrid (Fuhr, 2016; Lie, 2012; 2015; Lie and Oh, 2014). Another form of hybridity is found in their promotional strategies: the adoption of the Japanese language, the release of music as J-Kpop and K-Jpop, and the full integration with the Japanese music promotion system.

However, the analysis also found that the interviewed K-pop fans do not perceive nor acknowledge this hybridity. Their response clearly shows that even when performing and promoting in Japanese, the idols are considered to be delivering K-pop music. Additionally, it was found that the sense of familiarity offered by the presence of the Japanese language does not hit the spot when utilised to promote J-Kpop songs. Similarly, the notion of odourlessness should identify Japanese promotion as such for a high level of localisation—particularly so if we look at K-pop's initial promotional activities in Japan and the reasoning behind them. Nevertheless, the responses of the interviewees indicated a strong presence of cultural odour that still identified K-pop as Korean idol pop music. Those cultural odours have been acknowledged by fans to be the result of their consumption of K-pop outside of the Japanese market: the lack of interest in K-pop promotion in South Korea implies a weaker presence of cultural odours. In other words, this analysis suggests that the consumption of K-pop solely through the Japanese channels of promotions would earn an odourlessness quality to K-pop promotional activities. In contrast to this perception, there is the identification of K-pop as such by its fans even when consuming K-Jpop songs.

Lastly, this chapter looked at the representative ideas of South Korea by Japanese fans of K-pop. In doing so, this chapter demonstrated that the representative ideas of South Korea built by K-pop fans are created solely on the images of K-pop outside their presence in Japan. The lack of perception of odourlessness suggests that K-pop fans in Japan are so well versed in the consumption of K-pop that they can see through the adaptation of its promotional strategies. Moreover, the lack of interest in the political and economic ties between JP and ROK, hinted in Chapter 5, indicates that the representative images built on K-pop mediascapes have little to no political ties. Put another way, the representative ideas of South Korea are built on romanticized ideas and representation polished by K-pop promotions.

8.2 Summary and prospective research

Paraphrasing the findings discussed so far, this thesis broke new ground in the analysis of K-pop promotion and consumption in Japan by arguing that K-pop is a *transcultural flow of its own right*. This conclusion has been demonstrated and argued through three key points: a) K-pop's interconnectivity and the connections and mode of convergence created through online and offline consumption habits; b) the uniqueness of the Japanese approach to K-pop promotion by highlighting the inconsistent results of the application of a similar approach to Chinese and American promotion. Lastly, c) there is the application and evaluation of a transcultural flow characteristic of K-pop's presence in Japan. Through these three points, this thesis contributed to the studies on K-pop consumption in the Asian region, specifically in East Asia.

Even more in detail, it contributed to the studies analysing and discussing the Korean Wave consumption in Japan. By arguing that K-pop is a transcultural flow, it explored the exclusive connection between K-pop consumption in Japan and the popularity of Korean cultural products. The introduction of the comparative analysis offered new insights into the global consumption of K-pop. Particularly, it highlighted how K-pop has yet to become a transcultural flow of its own right in China, whiles it has become a transcultural flow in the USA. This distinction opens the analysis and discussion of K-pop consumption in foreign countries to its analysis as a distinguished flow from that of the Korean Wave. Lastly, there is the elaboration on the presence and reception by Japanese fans of a transcultural flow's qualities in the Japanese promotion of K-pop. By questioning the reception by Japanese fans of these qualities, this thesis showcased K-pop's nature as a transcultural flow. Simply put, this analysis offers more insights into the consumption and presence of K-pop within the Japanese music market by highlighting its reception and disconnection from the Korean Wave. Through this evaluation, K-pop's presence in Japan has assumed a new depth and understanding as it is no longer considered a by-product of the Korean Wave's presence.

Building on the points just highlighted this section introduces some suggestions for further research. There are three areas that I would like to explore further.

1) the impact or lack thereof of JP-ROK bilateral relation of Japanese consumption of K-pop

This research area is based on the topics introduced in Chapter 4. It is based on my personal experience and the paper by Ahn and Yoon (2020). It expands on my personal experience during fieldwork, which showed that even though ROK and JP relations in the summer of 2019 were going downhill, the popularity of K-pop and the

Korean Wave remained stable. This statement is in alignment with a paper by Ahn and Yoon (2020) that addressed the lack of concern by K-pop fans toward political or economic matters. As they analysed and discussed the responses obtained, they concluded that there is a net separation in the matters of being a K-pop and Korean Wave fan and being actively involved in the politics of Japan (Ahn and Yoon, 2020). K-pop fans separate their role as fans from their role as members of Japanese society. Their position as Japanese fans of K-pop is kept separate from their position within Japanese society regarding JP and ROK bilateral relations.

2) Japanese K-pop fans and their notion of *others* in relation to the Japanese promotion of K-pop

This research topic is based on the paper by Larsen (2020) that looked at the role of Japanese fans in the creation and formulation of the notion of *otherness* toward K-pop idols and their Koreanness. The author looked at the lack of clear distinction between being Japanese and being non-Japanese as a factor that supports the interest in K-pop and Korean idols. I would like to further explore is the relation between K-pop as *other* and not *Korean*. In other words, there is a homogeneity in understanding K-pop idols as simply *others* that undermine their status as Korean idols when they perform in Japan in Japanese. The hybrid nature of their performance puts them in a perfectly unbalanced position of being *Korean* idols singing in *Japanese* to a *Japanese* audience as if they were *Japanese*. A factor that Larsen used to explain how the Japanese formulated their idea of *otherness* in relation to K-pop was also the fluency or lack thereof in the Japanese language of K-pop idols. This aligned with the idea formulated by my observations and the comments of some of my participants: they talked about the Japanese language of K-pop idols and their J-Kpop songs as "okashii" (odd). Yet, the language was also found to be considered a trait of K-pop promotion in Japan that established a sense of familiarity. An opportunity for further analysis would be to investigate the role of the Japanese language as a way of developing a sense of *familiarity* as well as of *otherness*. A comparative analysis of the consumption of BTS' English-language song in Japan could offer further details in the construction of the idea of *otherness*, intended here as an extension of the meaning of *gaikokujin*, as well as the fans' perception in this case of familiarity and hybridity.

3) South Korean cultural diplomacy and K-pop consumption through a case study approach

Many scholars have studied the role of the Korean Wave as a form of cultural diplomacy and soft power, as well as the Government's involvement in the creation and

expansion of policies dedicated exclusively to the utilisation of the Korean Wave as soft power. Potential further research in this area could include an analysis of ROK and JP cultural diplomacy interactions, based upon the Korean Wave and K-pop and investigate the response of Japanese audiences. This analysis could also be expanded to other countries, such as the USA or UK. Through a comparative analysis of country case studies, the adoption of the Korean Wave as South Korean cultural diplomacy could offer further insights into the perception of South Korea by foreign audiences. A possible case study could be the presence in JP and the UK of the Korean Culture Centre (KCC): this governmental agency offers the opportunity to explore the Korean culture through events and ad hoc courses (KCC-JP, [No Date]; KCC - UK[No Date]). An additional option for this study could include the examination of the demographics of participants within the courses related to South Korean culture as well as their reasons for attendance.

I would also consider comparing the opinion of members of foundations dedicated to the spreading of the consumption and interest in Korean culture and their understanding of the political and diplomatic relations between JP and ROK. A possible case study is the Nikkan Bunkakōryū Kikin, also known as the Japan-Korean Cultural Foundation, funded in 1983 (Kōeki Zaidan Hōjin Nikkan Bunkakōryū Kikin, [No Date]). Another foundation that could offer insight is the Japan-Korean Cultural Exchange Association (Nikkan Bunka Kōryūkai), an NPO organization behind the *Sapporo K-pop Festival* and many other activities related to the consumption of the Korean Wave. Comparing the demographic, activities, and reasons behind attending courses and/or taking part in initiatives organised by those associations could offer further detail to the Japanese public understanding of the Korean Wave and its cultural diplomacy.

In sum, it has been suggested to deepen the understanding of the concept of familiarity in relation to the adoption of the Japanese language to promote and elaborate on the notion of *otherness*. This analysis links to the discussion of the presence of the Korean Wave in Japan as South Korean cultural diplomacy. To further develop this topic, I propose to look at the opinion of the participants on the activities and courses developed by the Korean Culture Centre, with the opportunity to also adopt a comparative analysis with the UK. Lastly, I also suggest investigating the consumption of the Korean Wave and K-pop in Japan and the lack of interest by fans in political and diplomatic ties between the ROK and JP. These proposed studies all represent opportunities to further cultivate the studies on Japanese consumption and the reception of the Korean Wave and K-pop as part of East Asian studies.

Appendix

Appendix -Table 1 List of Idols for Each Company

COMPANY	IDOL	START YEAR	END YEAR	DURATION
SM	BoA	2001	2019	18
SM	TVXQ!	2005	2019	14
SM	U Know (TXVQ!)**	2015	2015	0
SM	Changmin (TVXQ!)**	2015	2015	0
SM	TRAX	2005	2007	2
SM	The Grace*	2006	2009	3
SM	Sunday (The Grace)*	2004	2005	1
SM	Shinhwa	2006	2006	0
SM	NCT 127	2017	2021	4
SM	NCT Dream**	2020	2020	0
SM	EXO	2015	2019	4
SM	EXO - CBX	2017	2019	2
SM	EXO – BAEKHYUN	2021	2021	0
SM	Girls' Generation	2010	2015	5
SM	Taeyeon (Girls' Generation)	2018	2020	2
SM	J-MIN	2007	2014	7
SM	Super Junior	2008	2020	12
SM	Super Junior-K.R.Y.	2013	2015	2
SM	Super Junior-D&E	2012	2018	6
SM	Kyuhyun (SuJu)	2016	2017	1
SM	Ryeowook (SuJu)**	2019	2019	0
SM	Yesung (SuJu)	2014	2019	5
SM	Super Junior-T**	2008	2008	0
SM	f(x)	2010	2016	6
SM	Red Velvet	2018	2019	1
SM	SHINee	2011	2018	7
SM	Taemin (SHINee)	2016	2019	3
SM	Key (SHINee)**	2018	2018	0
HYBE	BTS	2014	2020	6
HYBE	TXT**	2020	2020	0
HYBE	Gfriend	2018	2020	2
HYBE	SEVENTEEN	2016	2020	4
HYBE	AFTERSCHOOL	2011	2015	4
HYBE	Orange Caramel (AFTERSCHOOL)	2012	2013	1
HYBE	NU'EST	2014	2020	6
YG	Epik High*	2014	2016	2
YG	Gummy*	2011	2013	2
YG	2NE1	2011	2014	3
YG	PSY* **	2012	2012	0
YG	Seungri (BIGBANG)*	2012	2013	1
YG	Lee Hi*	2018	2018	0
YG	Sech Kies*	2017	2017	0
YG	BIGBANG	2008	2016	8
YG	G-Dragon (BIGBANG)**	2013	2013	0
YG	D-LITE (BIGBANG)	2013	2017	4
YG	GD&TOP (BIGBANG)*	2011	2011	0
YG	Winner	2014	2020	6

COMPANY	IDOL	START YEAR	END YEAR	DURATION
YG	iKON	2016	2019	3
YG	BlackPink	2017	2021	4
JYP	2AM	2011	2013	2
JYP	Jinwoo (2AM)**	2016	2016	0
JYP	Wonder Girls **	2012	2012	0
JYP	2PM	2010	2016	6
JYP	Taecyeon (2PM)**	2017	2017	0
JYP	JUN.K (2PM)	2014	2020	6
JYP	Nichkun (2PM)	2018	2019	1
JYP	Wooyooung (2PM)	2015	2017	2
JYP	Junho (2PM)	2013	2019	6
JYP	Chansung (2PM)	2018	2018	0
JYP	Twice	2017	2021	4
JYP	Day 6	2018	2018	0
JYP	Rain*	2006	2006	0
JYP	GOT7	2014	2019	5
JYP	Stray Kids**	2020	2020	0
CUBE Ent.	(G)I-dle	2019	2020	1
EMI Records	IZ*One	2019	2020	1
Starship Ent.	MONSTA X	2017	2020	3

Legend: in Purple are the idol groups; Red is for solo idols; Light Blue is for solo activities of groups' members; sub-units are in Light Green; underlined idols refer to idols not active anymore or disbanded group; (*) indicates an artist who has changed company before or during or after the data collection period, but had released music under one of the companies used for data collection: (**) indicates artists with only one year of official Japanese activities so far, represented also by a 0 in the "duration" column.

Appendix -Table 2 List websites and SNS' accounts used for data collection for each idol

Idol		JP Website	SK Website		Instagram		SK Twitter		JP Twitter
BOA		avex.jp/boa/	smtown.jp/artists/boa/	smtown.com	@boasmtown		@BoA_Official		@BoA_avex_staff
TVXQ!									
U Know (TXVQ!)		toho-jp.net	smtown.jp/artists/tvxq/	smtown.com	@tvxq.official		@TVXQ		
Changmin (TVXQ!)									
TRAX		smtown.jp/artists/trax	smtown.com						
The Grace		smtown.jp/artists/tenjo	smtown.com						
Sunday (The Grace)		smtown.jp/artists/tenjo	smtown.com						
Shinhwa			shinhwacompany.co.kr/album/		@shinhwa_official		@ShinhwaCompany		@ShinhwaJAPAN
NCT	NCT 127	nct-jp.net	smtown.jp/artists/nct/	smtown.com	@nct	@nct127	@NCTsmtown	@NCTsmtown_127	@NCT_OFFICIAL_JP
	NCT Dream					@nct_dream		@NCTsmtown_DREAM	
J-MIN		smtown.jp/artists/jmin/	smtown.com						

Idol	JP Website	SK Website		Instagram	SK Twitter	JP Twitter
Super Junior	superjunior-jp.net	smtown.jp/artists/superjunior/	smtown.com	@superjunior	@SJofficial	@SJ_NEWS_JP
Super Junior-K.R.Y.						
Super Junior-D&E						
Kyuhyun (Super Junior)						
Ryeowook (Super Junior)						
Yesung (Super Junior)						
Super Junior-T						
f(x)	fx-jp.jp	smtown.jp/artists/fx/	smtown.com	@fx.official		
Girls' Generation	girls-generation.jp	smtown.jp/artists/girlsgeneration/	smtown.com	@girlsgeneration	@GirlsGeneration	
Taeyeon (Girls' Generation)						
EXO	exo-jp.net	smtown.jp/artists/exo/	smtown.com	@weareone.exo	@weareoneEXO	@EXO_NEWS_JP
EXO - CBX						
EXO – BAEKHYUN						

Idol	JP Website	SK Website		Instagram		SK Twitter	JP Twitter
Red Velvet	redvelvet-jp.net	smtown.jp/artists/redvelvet/	smtown.com	@redvelvet.smtown		@RVsmtown	
SHINee	shinee.jp	smtown.jp/artists/shinee/	smtown.com	@shinee	@shinee_jp_official	@SHINee	@shinetter
Taemin (SHINee)							
Key (SHINee)							
BTS	bts-official.jp	ibighit.com/bts/kor/		@bts.bighitofficial		@bts_bighit	@BTS_jp_official
TXT	txt-official.jp	ibighit.com/txt/kor/		@txt_bighit		@TXT_bighit	@TXT_bighit_jp
Gfriend						@GFRDofficial	@GFRDofficialJP
SEVENTEEN	seventeen-17.jp	seventeen-17.com		@saythename_17		@pledis17_STAFF	@17_JP_STAFF
AFTERSCHOOL		pledis.co.kr/html/artist/afterschool					
Orange Caramel (AFTERSCHOOL)		pledis.co.kr/html/artist/orangecaramel					
NU'EST	nuestjapan.com	pledis.co.kr/html/artist/nuest		@nuest_official		@NUESTNEWS	@OfficialNUESTjp
Epik High*		epikhigh.com		@blobyblo		@blobyblo	
Gummy*		c-jes.com/New/artist/news.asp		@cjes.tagram			
2NE1							
PSY*		pnation.com		@42psy42		@psy_oppa	
Lee Hi*	ygex.jp/leehi/	aomgofficial.com/leehi		@leehi_hi		@leehi_hi	

Idol	JP Website	SK Website	Instagram	SK Twitter		JP Twitter
Sech Kies*	ygex.jp/sechskies/	ygfamily.com/artist/Main.asp?LANGDIV=E&ATYPE=2&ARTIDX=71				@YGJAPANofficial
BIGBANG				@YG_GlobalVIP		
G-Dragon (BIGNANG)	ygex.jp/en/bigbang/	ygfamily.com/artist/About.asp?LANGDIV=K&ATYPE=&ARTIDX=3	@xxxibgdrgn	@IBGDRGN		@YGJAPANofficial
D-LITE (BIGBANG)						
GD&TOP (BIGBANG)						
Seungri (BIGBANG)						@ForvictoRi
Winner	ygex.jp/winner/	ygfamily.com/artist/Main.asp?LANGDIV=K&ATYPE=2&ARTIDX=53	@winnercity	@yginnercircle		@YGJAPANofficial
iKON	ygex.jp/ikon/	ygfamily.com/artist/Main.asp?LANGDIV=K&ATYPE=2&ARTIDX=67	@withikonic	@YG_iKONIC		@YGJAPANofficial
BLACKPINK	ygex.jp/blackpink/	ygfamily.com/artist/Main.asp?LANGDIV=K&ATYPE=2&ARTIDX=70	@blackpinkofficial	@BLACKPINK	@ygofficialblink	@YGJAPANofficial
2AM				@follow2AM		
Wonder Girls				@WonderGirls		
Jinwoo (2AM)				@follow2AM		

Idol	JP Website	SK Website	Instagram		SK Twitter	JP Twitter	
2PM	2pmjapan.com	2pm.jype.com	@2pm_official_jp	@real_2pmstagram	@follow_2PM	@follow_2PM	@JYPE_JAPAN
Taecyeon (2PM)							
JUN.K (2PM)							
Nichkun (2PM)							
Wooyooung (2PM)							
Junho (2PM)							
Chansung (2PM)							
TWICE	twicejapan.com	twice.jype.com	@twicetagram	@jypetwice_japan	@JYPETWICE	@JYPETWICE_JAPAN	@JYPE_JAPAN
Day 6	day6.jype.com	day6.jype.com	@day6kilogram		@day6official	@day6_japan	
Rain*		raincompany.co.kr	@raincompany_official		@raincompany_	@RAIN_JapanCloud	
GOT7	got7japan.com		@got7.with.igot7		@GOT7Official	@GOT7_Japan	
Stray Kids	straykidsjapan.com	straykids.jype.com	@realstraykids	@straykids_official_jp	@Stray_Kids	@Stray_Kids_JP	

IDOL	JP WEBSITE	SK WEBSITE	INSTAGRAM	SK TWITTER	JP TWITTER
(G)I-dle	gidle.jp	cubeent.co.kr/gidle	@official_g_i_dle	@G_I_DLE	@G_I_DLE_JP
IZ*One	izone-official.com	cafe.daum.net/official-izone	@official_izone	@official_izone	@official_izone
MONSTA X	monstax-e.com	monstax-e.com	@official_monsta_x	@OfficialMonstaX	@Official_MX_jp

Legend: in Purple are the Idol Groups; Red is for Solo Artists; Light Blue is for Solo Activities of groups' members; Sub-units are in Light Green; (*) indicates an idol who has changed company before, during or after the data collection period but had released music under one of the companies used for data collection; underlined idols are no longer active; **empty** cells indicate a lack of websites and SNS' accounts: the data was collected through secondary resources.

Appendix -Table 3 List of secondary resources

RESOURCE	TYPE	WEBSITE		TWITTER
Billboard	Magazine	billboard.com		@billboard
Billboard Japan	Magazine	billboard-japan.com		@Billboard_JAPAN
RIAJ	RIA	riaj.or.jp		@riaj_prinfo
Soompi	Online Magazine	soompi.com		@soompi
Tower Record	Retail Company	tower.jp		@TowerRecords
Tower Record: Shibuya	Retail Company	towershibuya.jp	towershibuya.jp/kpop	@TOWER_Shibuya
Tower Record: Kpop	Retail Company	tower.jp/genre/World-Reggae/k-pop_hot_topics		@TOWER_KPop
Jeff Benjamin	K-pop Columnist			@Jeff__Benjamin
TBS Channel	TV	tbs.co.jp/tbs-ch/		@tbschannel
Kpop Starz JP	Online Magazine	kpopstarz-smashing.com		@KpopStarzJP
KStyle	Online Magazine	kstyle.com		@Kstyle_news
UMJ	Music Record Company	universal-music.co.jp/jp/k-popkorea/		@UM_KPOP
Oricon	Media and News Company	www.oricon.co.jp		@oricon

Appendix -Table 4 List of YouTube Channels used for data collection

COMPANY	IDOL	SK YT	JP YT
SM	BoA	SMTown	avex
SM	TVXQ!	SMTown	avex
SM	U Know (TXVQ!)**	SMTown	avex
SM	Changmin (TVXQ!)**	SMTown	avex
SM	TRAX	SMTown	
SM	The Grace*	SMTown	
SM	Sunday (The Grace)*	SMTown	
SM	Shinhwa	Shinhwa Official	Shinhwa Official
SM	NCT 127	SMTown	avex
SM	NCT Dream**	SMTown	avex
SM	EXO	SMTown	avex
SM	EXO - CBX	SMTown	avex
SM	EXO – BAEKHYUN	SMTown	avex
SM	Girls' Generation	SMTown	avex
SM	Taeyeon (Girls' Generation)	SMTown	avex
SM	J-MIN	SMTown	avex
SM	Super Junior	SMTown	avex
SM	Super Junior-K.R.Y.	SMTown	avex
SM	Super Junior-D&E	SMTown	avex
SM	Kyuhyun (Super Junior)	SMTown	avex
SM	Ryeowook (Super Junior)**	SMTown	avex
SM	Yesung (Super Junior)	SMTown	avex
SM	Super Junior-T**	SMTown	avex
SM	f(x)	SMTown	avex
SM	Red Velvet	SMTown	avex
SM	SHINee	SMTown	avex
SM	Taemin (SHINee)	SMTown	avex
SM	Key (SHINee)**	SMTown	avex
HYBE	BTS	HYBE Labels	UMJ
HYBE	TXT**	HYBE Labels	UMJ
HYBE	Gfriend	HYBE Labels	KING RECORDS
HYBE	SEVENTEEN	HYBE Labels	SEVENTEEN Japan official YouTube
HYBE	AFTERSCHOOL	HYBE Labels	avex
HYBE	Orange Caramel (AFTERSCHOOL)	HYBE Labels	avex
HYBE	NU'EST	HYBE Labels	NU'EST
YG	Epik High*	Official Epik High	Official Epik High
YG	Gummy*	YG Entertainment	YG Entertainment
YG	2NE1	2NE1	2NE1
YG	PSY* **	officialpsy	officialpsy
YG	Seungri (BIGBANG)*	YG Entertainment	YG Entertainment
YG	Lee Hi*	OfficialLEEHI	OfficialLEEHI
YG	Sech Kies*	SECHSKIES	SECHSKIES
YG	BIGNANG	YG Entertainment	YG Entertainment
YG	G-Dragon (BIGBANG)**	YG Entertainment	YG Entertainment
YG	D-LITE (BIGBANG)	YG Entertainment	BIGBANG
YG	GD&TOP (BIGBANG)*	YG Entertainment	BIGBANG
YG	Winner	YG Entertainment	WINNER
YG	iKON	YG Entertainment	iKONIC4iKON
YG	BLACKPINK	YG Entertainment	BLACKPINK
JYP	2AM	2am	2am

COMPANY	IDOL	SK YT	JP YT
JYP	Jinwoo (2AM)**	2am	2am
JYP	Wonder Girls **	JYP Entertainment	Wondergirls
JYP	2PM	JYP Entertainment	2PM Japan Official YouTube Channel
JYP	Taecyeon (2PM)**	JYP Entertainment	2PM Japan Official YouTube Channel
JYP	JUN.K (2PM)	JYP Entertainment	2PM Japan Official YouTube Channel
JYP	Nichkun (2PM)	JYP Entertainment	2PM Japan Official YouTube Channel
JYP	Wooyooung (2PM)	JYP Entertainment	2PM Japan Official YouTube Channel
JYP	Junho (2PM)	JYP Entertainment	2PM Japan Official YouTube Channel
JYP	Chansung (2PM)	JYP Entertainment	2PM Japan Official YouTube Channel
JYP	Twice	JYP Entertainment	TWICE JAPAN OFFICIAL YouTube Channel
JYP	Day 6	JYP Entertainment	Warner Music Japan
JYP	Rain*	RAIN's Official Channel	RAIN's Official Channel
JYP	GOT7	JYP Entertainment	GOT7 Japan Official YouTube Channel
JYP	Stray Kids**	JYP Entertainment	Stray Kids Japan official Youtube
CUBE Ent.	(G)I-dle	(G)I-DLE (여자)아이들 (Official YouTube Channel)	UMJ
EMI Records	IZ*One	Stone Music Entertainment	official IZ*ONE
Starship Ent.	MONSTA X	starshipTV	UMJ

Legend: in Purple are the groups; Red is for Solo Artists; Light Blue is for Solo Activities of groups' members; Sub-units are in Light Green; (*) indicates an artist who has changed company before or during or after the data collection period but had released music under one of the companies used for data collection; underlined artists are no longer active; **empty** cells indicate a lack of official upload of Japanese MVs on YouTube.

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