

An Exploratory Study on the Power of Media in the U.S. Music Industry in the Post-Digital Era

- Focusing on Gatekeeping Theory -

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Abstract

It has become a cliché to discuss how the media is pivotal in the music market. In addition, it is a common proposition that the New Media has had considerable power from the fourth industrial revolution era through the digital period. This study, however, will discuss how neglected old media has gained power through collaborating with new and emerging media outlets.

In order to meet its research goal, this study examined Psy, the South Korean rapper and producer, and the Korean boy band group, BTS, also known as the Bangtan Boys. Recently, BTS has been in the spotlight as yet another globally successful K-Pop artist group; ever since Psy kicked the door to the worldwide music industry open in 2012 such artists have been allowed easier entrance to this highly sought after industry. Psy is widely referred to as the first K-Pop success story in the U.S. music industry, a challenging market in which to gain entry, especially with songs written and performed exclusively in Korean. Since Psy's success, several K-Pop artists have tried to achieve success and gain fame within this industry. However, there have been no outstanding results thus far.

In 2017, BTS was on a roll very similar to Psy's in 2012. There are various factors as to why BTS has succeeded in the U.S. music market and even in the worldwide music industry. One of the most salient factors is that BTS's Twitter account reached 14 million followers and they received awards during the Billboard Music Awards for Top Social Artist in 2017 and 2018. Similarly, Psy achieved a great amount of fame via YouTube. Therefore, it is clear that their success has come greatly from using social media and new media outlets to spread their popularity. However, there is still the question of how much of Psy and BTS's success were due to the so-called neglected or old media, which still holds a great amount of power in the U.S. and other countries, and how much of it was due to new Media outlets such as SNS, which are mainly credited for their aforementioned success.

Based on this scenario, this study aims to examine how Psy's recognition among American music fans has been changed by passing through the complicated gatekeeping process in the U.S. radio industry. This is done specifically by using Ahlqvist and Faulkner's (2002) four types of programming repertoires in commercial radio to show how their airtime success catapulted them to overall success in the American music market.

This study will shed new light on neglected media and suggest one strategy for increasing the recognition of culturally distant foreign musicians among American music fans through airtime exposure.

1. INTRODUCTION

Most foreign musicians seek to enter the U.S. music market even if they've achieved success in their home countries. This begs the question; why is success in the U.S. music market so sought after? Power and Hallencreutz (2007) addressed that the U.S. music market has long played a leading role in the music industry and it has had a determining effect on other music markets in the world due to its sheer size and influence. The size of the U.S. music market is a lucrative proposition for them. However, many foreign musicians have been less successful in the U.S. music market than in their home countries.

Power and Hallencreutz (2007) pointed out that there was a crucial and potentially insurmountable factor - a culture and knowledge gap between the USA and the rest of the world. Moreover, it was increasingly difficult in the USA to get a gatekeeper such as a radio gatekeeper to listen to unsolicited material. Typically, gatekeepers only listen to music sent through personal contacts and connections. Thus, they asserted that the conditions of access in the U.S. music market as well as progress beyond main gatekeepers is critical to success in the U.S. music market and explains why foreign music occupies such a small share in the market.

Lee(2013) and Ferreira & Waldfogel(2013), however, have examined that the evolution of new technology has taken over the traditional gatekeeper's role. They argue that the Web has supplemented the role played by traditional media such as radio or TV in the music industry. It is undoubtedly true that the electronic distribution and promotion of music over the Internet and mobile devices is already a well-established medium for the music industry. Furthermore, advances in communication technologies have enabled the world's music producers to gain access to the world music market. Therefore, when foreign musicians want to introduce their music globally, using new media outlets such as YouTube or iTunes is enough to reach a global audience without traditional gatekeepers as used in the past. If so, is it possible to apply this phenomenon to the U.S. music market as well?

In 2012, a Korean artist Psy became successful in the U.S. with the song Gangnam Style. It had overtaken Justin Bieber's Baby as the most-watched YouTube video with more than one billion views within just five months of its release. Aside from Psy, Korean R&B singer Jay Park's album "New Breed" was ranked No.1 on the R&B/Soul charts on U.S. iTunes in 2012¹. The New York Times² reported that "Jay Park is bypassing traditional media

gatekeepers locally and gate-crashing his way globally onto overseas charts via social media.”

As aforementioned, Psy and Jay Park are considered success of culturally distant foreign artists who broke into the U.S. music market via digital distribution. However, those two artists received different recognition among American music fans. Although Jay Park was praised by the New York Times, he received attention from a limited group of people, unlike Psy who gained fame among a variety of listeners. Even former U.S. President Barack Obama attempted Gangnam Style’s signature dance moves at a joint press conference with former South Korean President, Park Geun-hye in 2013. Psy has achieved a much greater level of success in the American market with Gangnam Style than any other songs released by Korean artists before him.

This simple example demonstrates that promotion through only new media outlets might not allow artists to reach a larger public audience in the US music industry. Rossman (2012, p95) quoted Neuman’s prediction (1991) that “the vast majority of blogs would go unread and the incumbent mass media would retain the bulk of the audience.” This means that new media outlets make it easy to reach an unspecified number of the general public, but it is not guaranteed that these new media outlets can reach and retain the majority of listeners more effectively than traditional media outlets.

In reviewing radio consumption in the United States, radio still remains the dominant way for people to discover music (48%). According to Nielsen’s second-quarter 2017 Comparable Metrics Report, 93% of Americans tune in to the radio each week - more than watching television or using a smartphone, TV connected device, tablet or PC - and radio remains a constant in their daily lives, spending around two hours per day to tune in to the radio. Hendy (2000) describes radio as a cheap and accessible means of communication and, simultaneously, a highly intimate medium capable of building large communities of listeners scattered across the country. Moreover, radio is a pervasive broadcaster of globalized music products and in its many formats, such as internet radio and satellite radio, it is a medium to listen to music for free; it is still a pivotal medium in the United States in the digital age.

Based on these assertions, this article explores the following questions: 1) who are the main gatekeepers that culturally distant foreign musicians should progress beyond in the U.S. music industry in the digital age? 2) what are the guidelines for them to pass through gatekeepers in the U.S. radio industry?

In order to contextualize the findings of this study, it aims to examine a stylized model

to access gatekeepers in the U.S. radio industry based on Ahlqvist and Faulkner's (2002) four types of programming repertoires in commercial radio. As Ahlqvist (2001) stated, the radio network is a complicated ecosystem containing various gatekeepers including the program director, music director, DJ, general manager, and operations manager. It explores how culturally distant foreign musicians utilize radio to enter into the U.S. music market based on the above model. After examining their model and applying it to cases of Psy, revising their typology in order to suit the current media environment and draw an implication for culturally distant foreign musicians to increase their recognition among American music fans.

As Caves (2000, p61) notes, nobody knows which record will be successful because 80 percent of albums and 85 percent of single records usually fail to even cover their production costs. Thus, this article sheds light on one of the guidelines for culturally distant foreign musicians to reduce uncertainty within the music industry and offers a strategy to provide lasting, rather than one time, recognition of foreign music among fans in the U.S. music market.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Cassidy (2006, p6) addressed that gatekeeping theory has been among the most easily accessible and most enduring theories in mass communication research. In general, gatekeeping literature has focused on the role of the gatekeeper as the primary determinant in who controls what messages to reach the audience (Slack & Allor, 1983). However, the conceptualization of this theory has extended as technology has advanced in mass communication fields. Thus, gatekeeping theory still holds in the digital age.

This study examines gatekeeping theory to investigate who the main gatekeepers are for foreign musicians in accessing the U.S. music industry. The gatekeeping theory has been studied at an individual and an organization level; this study will focus on examining the individual level reflecting on the current media environment which has been personalized due to technological progress. Specifically, programmers in the radio industry are the main focus of investigation in this study.

A basic requirement for musicians to gain popularity is for their music to be appreciated by a large audience. Zwann, et al (2009, p96) argue that before an artist reaches an audience, multiple selection processes are involved. First, artists have to attract attention

and are either contracted or rejected. After signing and having their music recorded, new selection processes begin and their music has to be exposed to media gatekeepers. Finally, they are presented to the general public through various forms of media.

Knab(2013) suggests a diagram (FIGURE 1) representing a list of the gates that must be unlocked for musicians to reach the audiences. This diagram can be applied on the Internet in a unique way. In FIGURE 1, the stage Radio Station Music Director is an important stage for musicians because it is the first stage of exposure to the public. Recently, there are various media outlets that can give exposure to a song. However, exposure on the radio is a more critical way to achieve mass appeal. As Knab (2011) depicted, “radio airplay is traditionally the best way for a record label to get their music heard by the public. The more a song is played on the radio, the higher the chance that the song has become a part of the public’s consciousness. If people hear a song often to get familiar with it, they may like it and want to buy it – that’s why a record label invests so much time and money in getting airplay.”³

Figure 1. List of the Gates in the Music Industry



It is noteworthy to investigate how the current music industry, in which every

musician is able to produce music and bypass the gatekeeping process with new technological developments, can accommodate the traditional gatekeeping process in granting artists exposure on the radio. Bhatia and his colleagues (2003) state that digital delivery has already proven to be a valid way for new music to access audiences without label support. Additionally, individual bands can now distribute their music online and potentially reach millions of listeners rather than more direct methods in the past, such as selling from their car trunks or giving out their music during live concerts/shows. Currently, recorded music readily pervades virtually every culture and every level of society (Vogel, 1998, p132). It is time to consider who will be a gatekeeper in the modern music industry.

Electronic distribution and promotion of music over the Internet or mobile is an emerging medium for the music industry. Power and Hellencreutz (2007, p381) address that the market for music is characterized by almost infinite choices, as over 10,000 new albums are annually released in the U.S. alone. Faced with such abundant information, both consumers and firms not surprisingly rely heavily on the power of the media to filter and disseminate information by what is available. Williamson and Cloonan (2007) address that the media, specifically radio, is the conduit of music industries' information to the general public. However, Chris Castle, a music industry attorney, stated that "it's very hard to break into radio for foreign musicians."⁴

Exposure on radio is a crucial prerequisite of sales success, but a radio station would be hard-pressed to play more than a fraction of the release (Hendy, 2000). It is ironic that exposure on radio is a prerequisite of success for musicians, but if the musicians are not popular enough to be on the air, their music is buried and doesn't reach the playlists. This creates a Catch-22⁵ situation for musicians.

Recently, radio selects and plays music to accumulate profit rather than to introduce new content. As Silva and Silva (2009) stated, playing songs that listeners want to hear is one way to attract a large audience and accompanying advertising revenue. Thus, commercial radio stations understandably play songs that are likable, current (e.g., classic) or potential (e.g., heavily screened singles). Therefore, the artists who do not meet industry criteria usually conform to current market trends because of a clique of powerful gatekeepers who make the ultimate decisions about what is played (Kubacki & Croft, 2005, p233).

A number of gates are involved in one song to reach an audience in the U.S. music market. Despite the various emerging mediums due to new technology, radio remains

powerful as a gatekeeper in the U.S. music industry by selecting music to earn a slot on the air. As aforementioned, the gatekeeping theory has been studied at an individual versus an organizational level. While various scholars consider radio as an institutional or organizational gatekeeper, this article focuses more on radio station personnel, specifically programmers, to look into how they act as gatekeepers in selecting music for their playlists to reflect the original gatekeeping concept with a focus on individual practice.

How do radio stations decide music to play on the air? In the radio industry, there are personnel gatekeepers including programmers, music directors, DJ, and executive managers. Programmers and music directors mostly decide songs to be on the playlist. Music directors search recently released songs and make a potential list for programmers to select. Music directors would thus be the front line of gatekeepers in the radio industry. However, programmers usually perform as music directors as well. Thus, this article focuses on programmers as a main gatekeeper for foreign musicians to pass through.

In examining how radio stations decide what to play on the air, Ahlqvist and Faulkner (2002) interviewed thirty two programmers at twenty eight commercial music stations in the United States. They examined the programming practices to determine what records would work for their station's format as they mediate between record companies and audiences. Wallis and Malm (1993) address that the most common assumption is that programmer practices are quite homogeneous and programmers are constrained by organizational and economic factors to select music on the playlist, thus their examination is noteworthy. However, it is necessary to be aware of the various programmer practices in selecting music for commercial radio stations, thus their study is noteworthy.

They described the following four types of programming repertoires in commercial radio from interviews with programmers:

- a **The Subjective Repertoire.** It describes a set of programming practices grounded in the programmer's personal musical sensibility and taste.
- b **The Objective Repertoire.** It guides programmers toward practices that are based on the assumption that what matters in the profession is an ability to objectively assess audience demand and record viability, rather than an ear for music.
- c **The Populist Repertoire.** It makes up of a set of practices that enable programmers to be the institutional ears of their target audience, selecting records based on criteria

similar to those used by the station's listeners. It leads to minimizing the gap between the radio professional and the listener.

- d **The Synergistic Repertoire.** The synergistic repertoire not only offers programmers a way to offset the risk of breaking records but includes practices designed to help the station get the most out of promotional incentives available from record companies. In this repertoire, the record company plays an important role in supporting a record.

Caves (2000, p61) addresses that nobody knows which record to succeed because usually 80 percent of albums and 85 percent of single records fail to even cover production costs. Furthermore, the odds of artists being successful in their second albums are not high even with a successful debut album (p62). Thus, Ahlqvist and Faulkner's study can be characterized as one of the guidelines for foreign musicians to reduce uncertainty within the music industry.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is designed as a single case study to examine these two questions. Yin (2014) addresses that 'the single-case design is eminently justifiable under certain conditions – where the case represents (a) a critical test of existing theory, (b) an extreme or unusual circumstance, or (c) a common case, or where the case serves a (d) revelatory or (e) longitudinal purpose (p56).'

This study examines Korean pop singer Psy's two songs: Gangnam Style and Gentleman. There are surely many culturally close foreign musicians who made a presence in the U.S. music market including Christina Aguilera, Westlife, Ricky Martin, Adele, Rihanna, and Olly Murs. Furthermore, there are several Asian American musicians who are renowned in the U.S. music market covering Bruno Mars, Far East Movement, CoCo Lee, and Hikaru Utada. This article excluded Asian American musicians born or raised in the United States because they are not culturally distant in a strict sense. Nonetheless, there are few culturally distant foreign musicians who have been successful in the U.S. music market. The following Table 1 presents the musicians who debuted on the Billboard Hot 100 single chart since 1970s.

Table 1. List of culturally distant foreign musicians who debuted on Billboard Hot 100

Year	Name	Song Title	Billboard Single Chart / Peak Position	Weeks on Chart	Nationality
1979	Pink Lady	Kiss in the Dark	Top 40 at number 37	11	Japanese
1990	Seiko Matsuda	The Right Combination	Hot 100 at number 54	13	Japanese
2009	Wonder Girls	Nobody	Hot 100 at number 76	1	Korean
2009	Charice Pempengco	Note to God	Hot 100 at number 44	1	Filipino
2010	Charice Pempengco	Pyramid	Hot 100 at number 56	2	Filipino
2012	Psy	Gangnam Style	Hot 100 at number 2	31	Korean
2013	Psy	Gentleman	Hot 100 at number 5	15	Korean

As shown in Table 1, there have been Japanese, Filipino, and Korean musicians who entered the U.S. music market. However, none of them ranked among top ten on the Billboard chart. Furthermore, they didn't stay long on the chart. Even though Japanese musicians Pink Lady and Seiko stayed on the chart for more than 10 weeks, those musicians are not comparable to Psy; Kiss in the Dark was released by the American record label Elektra Records, owned by Warner Music Group, and The Right Combination was a duet with boy band New Kids on the Block singer Donnie Wahlberg. Both were primarily products of the American recording industry. Also, both songs feature English-only vocals. As Castle notes, 'if a foreign music act sings in English, the fact that they're from somewhere else can actually be a plus in terms of marketing a band in the U.S.' A case of Charice is also not comparable to Psy's case because she was already well known due to appearing various media before she released her first single. She became an international media sensation with a mighty soprano voice reminiscent of Celine Dion and Whitney Houston. After her performance gained popularity on YouTube, she was invited to the United States for appearances on television variety shows such as The Ellen DeGeneres Show and Good Morning America in 2007. After these appearances, she released her first single: Note to God in 2009, and Pyramid in 2010⁶. Nonetheless, her two songs didn't stay on the chart for more than 2 weeks.

Simply put, while there are a few culturally distant foreign musicians who have been

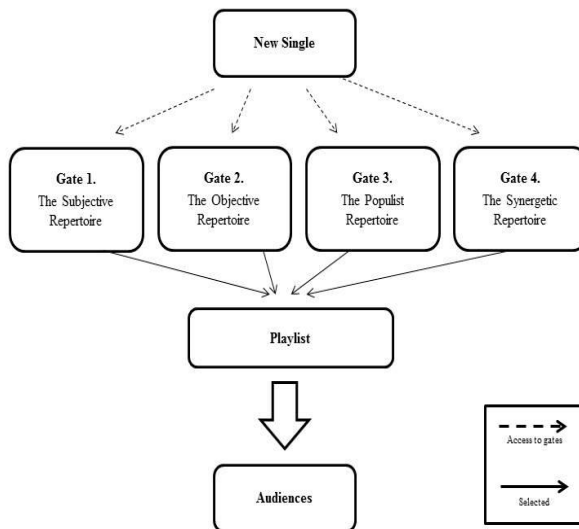
successful in the U.S. music market, none of them ranked within the top ten on the Billboard chart and their songs didn't stay long on the chart. Furthermore, they released their songs on American record labels and featured English vocals. Psy's case is thus valid representative of the completely culturally distant foreign music act who made a presence in the U.S. music market. Furthermore, this study deals with Psy's two songs because both songs gained exposure through radio airplay, as compared with other K-Pop songs which tried in vain to penetrate into the U.S. music industry in a different manner.

4. RESEARCH MODEL AND ANALYSIS

I. Research Model

Ahlkvist and Faulkner (2002, p190) examined various practices that programmers used in selecting music on the station's playlist. We drew a schematic diagram to summarize Ahlkvist and Faulkner's research (FIGURE 2). As exhibited in FIGURE 2, a newly released song must pass through one of the four gates in order for a programmer to select. Once it is selected, that song can reach for a larger audience. This schematic diagram is for American musicians including culturally close foreign musicians. For instance, Pharrell Williams' song, Happy, has been highly successful, peaking at number one in the United States as well as other nations. This song received critical acclaim from music critics, entered the number one slot on the US Airplay Top 100, and stayed on chart for 23 weeks from one month since it was released⁷. This song passed through objective repertoire: reviews from critics and top rankings on charts in many countries including Australia, Denmark, and France.

Figure 2. Access to Gates for American Musicians



Those four repertoires suggest one of the ways to access gatekeepers, specifically, programmers in the radio industry. Therefore, foreign musicians who seek to enter the U.S. music market are aware of the criteria required for their music to be selected by programmers. This model represents how programmers select music playlists for release in the U.S. radio industry.

A central issue in this article is that the U.S. music market still relies on radio airplay and entry onto radio playlists is not easy for foreign musicians despite their success on the Web or in their home country. A number of concepts and assumptions implicit in this article are taken from Ahlqvist and Faulkner's programmer repertoires and elaborated on by investigating the viral and airtime success of Korean rapper Psy's two songs: Gangnam Style and Gentleman.

Most experts in the industry focused on YouTube views or other technically advanced media outlets as measurements of Psy's success. However, it is important to consider different perspectives on his success in the U.S. music industry.

II. Analysis

i. Gate 1 - The Subjective Repertoire

Programmers in Gate 1 should balance their musical preferences between the radio station's profit and maintaining relations with record companies which don't follow the station's format, as Ahlqvist and Faulkner found. This means that even if a record of a programmer's selection is not profitable to the station, the programmer will put it on the playlist even though it does not fit with the station's format. Thus, a programmer in Gate 1 is the most powerful gatekeeper, i.e. one who can fully decide which records will be played on the air.

Those examples show that a programmer's musical preference is a key to being selected for the playlist in Gate 1. In addition, multiple individual gatekeepers decide which record would be on the playlist. This gate might be easily accessible for foreign musicians if programmers select their records based on personal preference. It is the hardest gate to pass through because each programmer has his/her own various aesthetic evaluation standards for records. In fact, if a song passes through Gate 1, it is not necessary to consider other gates to pass through. However, since programmers have diverse tastes, it is hard to satisfy all of them simultaneously. Thus, this article draws an outline for how foreign musicians can access mass audiences in the US by passing through each gate despite a complicated eco-system.

The first step for foreign musicians to pass through Gate 1 is that programmers should be familiar with their music or genres. The genre at hand in this paper is categorized as K-Pop. K-Pop had been an unknown genre of music in the United States before Gangnam Style became a hit on YouTube. Viral success should be a major premise condition for K-Pop to gain recognition by programmers. Gangnam Style solidified this premise and made a step forward in the U.S. music industry. However, even if one song is a great hit on the Web, if a programmer doesn't select the song on the playlists, it is hard to reach mass audiences. Thus, Gate 1 is the most pivotal and the hardest gate to pass through. Gangnam Style passed through Gate 1. Danny Howard, a program director at Hits 96, remarks "We thought the song (Gangnam Style) might really have some potential, although we did view it as a novelty track. Psy is Korean, the song is in another language, but it was so catchy and the video went viral. We thought we might spend a week or two with it as a skit record. It obviously turned into a huge hit."⁸ Hits 96 was the earliest adopter of Gangnam Style in August, 2012 along with 99.7 FM.

Gentleman has a different story from Gangnam Style even though it was also a hit on YouTube. As aforementioned, Gangnam Style introduced K-Pop to radio programmers as

well as U.S. music fans. After Gangnam Style, most professionals commented that Psy would be a one hit wonder whereas some experts expected him to release a follow up song. When Gentleman was released on April 12, 2013, Silvio Pietroluongo, a Billboard director of Charts, said, “it’s possible that thanks to the hearty YouTube numbers Gentleman might have a chance at matching or surpassing the Gangnam peak.”⁹ Music editor Duane Doobie¹⁰ also commented, “I wouldn’t be surprised if Psy turns out to be a two-hit wonder.”

Despite some expert predictions that Gentleman would be another hit song, the result was disappointing. Howard (Kinosian, 2013) contended “We have brought Psy’s Gentleman into our music meeting twice, but major releases the past six weeks are making it more of an uphill struggle for an act like Psy to piece through the clutter. Daft Punk came on the chart from out of nowhere with Lucky at number 30, Anna Kendrick with Cups at number 31, Kesha with Crazy Kids at number 43 and just yesterday, a new Mariah Carey song.” As stated by Howard, Gentleman was not attractive to programmers and was in competition with the songs of established artists. In the end, it failed to pass through Gate 1 even though it was a hit on the Web, having been ranked 8th in a list of most viewed YouTube Videos as of August 20, 2014. This indicates that when foreign music act debuts in the U.S. music market, a viral hit allows them a chance to grab programmers’ attention. However, when a musician releases a follow-up song after a first hit song, there are higher expectations for grabbing the programmers’ attention. Gate 1 is a complicated ecology of a programmer’s subjective musical preference and the record’s objective data such as viral success in the Web. Ironically, viral success should be preceded to appeal to programmers. However, viral success is not all that is required to pass through Gate 1.

Through the examination, one thing to note about Gate 1 is that if an artist is not established in the U.S. music market yet, there are two ways to gain competence in Gate 1. If a foreign artist is newly introduced in the U.S. music market, blasting into the Web would be a key decision factor by programmers. However, professionals in the music industry and music fans have higher expectations when the artist releases a follow-up to a hit song. Thus, the different response of programmers to Gentleman when compared to Gangnam Style might not be surprising. However, this response implies that even though Gentleman succeeded in viral markets, it gained little attention from programmers.

In addition, Gentleman’s popularity was influenced by head-to-head competition with songs from established artists such as Mariah Carey and Chris Brown during the same

period. It is too abrupt to conclude that the limited success of Gentleman was due to direct competition with songs from established artists. Nonetheless, Gangnam Style was selected by programmers. Thus, this result indicates that the second album or single is more responsive to programmers' subjective preferences and unless it is great enough to overcome it, it cannot gain acceptance by the gatekeepers.

ii. Gate 2 - The Objective Repertoire

As in Ahlqvist and Faulkner's statement, programmers select records for their playlists to conform to their target audiences' taste. The target audiences are important resources for commercial radio stations to maintain their relationship with advertisers. Thus, for programmers, research data is a main barometer in Gate 2 of how not to lose their audiences and their advertisers; there are surely diverse audiences as well as programmers, each with individual preferences that do not reflect audience response.

Mostly, programmers rely on audience research in Gate 2. In addition, programmers selected music that audiences already recognized and liked, already being played. Hendy (2000) quoted Negus (1993) that programmers didn't play newly released music even if they were satisfied with it until further evidences from the record company and other radio stations. McCourt and Rothenbuhler (1987, p102) also added "radio airplay determined in part by radio airplay." Thus, programmers are not fully reliant on the research data, but heavily influenced by major stations' actions. As Ahlqvist and Faulkner (2001) note, if the song of an established artist is played on a major station, programmers on other stations select that song to play on their stations because familiarity to the audience is a key in selecting a song.

Due to advances in technology, there are various ways to conduct audience research other than direct surveys. YouTube and Spotify are new ways to investigate an audience's taste. Gangnam Style ranked number 1 as the most watched video on YouTube. Since Gangnam Style was released on July 15th, 2012, it was ranked in the World Singles Top 40 in the first week of August. Before its first appearance in US Airplay Top 100 on September 16, 2012, Gangnam Style was ranked on most European single charts including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, and France. This result describes that Gangnam Style elicits various objective data along with YouTube views.

As aforementioned, Gangnam Style passed through Gate 1 since the end of August,

and it passed through Gate 2 since September 10th, 2012. Pietroluongo (Kaufman, 2013) stated “Radio programmers were slow to catch the Gangnam Style tail with most beginning to spin the song well after it had already reached serious viral impact.” Furthermore, programmers wait until other stations play the song and make sure this song is right for their station. Thus, the heavy rotation of Gangnam Style happened two months later than it was released. This result represents that while viral successes in YouTube or other social media influence programmers’ awareness of a song, it is not a key issue in selecting the song for the playlist until they are assured through other objective data.

Other than YouTube views, Gangnam Style provided other objective data which programmers used in selecting the song for their station and thus passed through Gate 2. For instance, Psy performed at the 2012 MTV Video Music Awards, received an award on September 6th, and appeared on The Ellen Show on September 11th, dancing his signature dance with Britney Spears. Brad Waldo (Kinosian, 2013) stated “we also pay attention to things that are playing on television shows or in movies. We might play a song that may not have any other radio airplay, but is familiar to many people because they have been exposed in a variety of different ways.” Another example of Gangnam Style passing through Gate 2 is the video as a viral phenomenon. Radio programmers listen first and watch second, but if the video is very powerful and it becomes familiar, that usually enters into the process, according to Howard’s statement.

Finally, Gangnam Style’s spin number went through dramatic changes after passing through Gate 2. In fact, Gangnam Style passed through Gate 2 in two steps. The first step was its great success in YouTube views and its being ranked on various charts around the world. The second step was its showing up on various mediums other than new media outlets, such as TV programs. In addition, most radio stations waited to see the responses from other major radio stations before playing the song on their own stations. That’s why it took so long to be on the playlists even though it was already being spread through various new media outlets. To confirm the result of passing through Gate 2 in two steps, it started at 634 spins on September 10th, 2012 and on October 28th peaked at 8,906 spins, even though, according to Mediabase, it did not last long compared to his great viral success.

AT40¹¹ reported “Gangnam Style follow-up Gentleman didn’t match the viral success of its predecessor; it still broke a handful of YouTube records and has been viewed 690 million times to date.” Even though Gentleman also ranked high on YouTube views and

peaked at number 5 in Billboard Top 100, it had a different story from Gangnam Style. Howard remarked on Kinoshian's report that 'The number of YouTube views is right there at the top of record labels' speech along with radio airplay and sales. However, not everything that is a great YouTube 'view' translates well into the audio only form of radio.'

To note, viral success is not an essential factor for programmers. Gentleman has achieved a viral success in YouTube views and digital streaming sales. However, Gentleman did not pass through Gate 2. Travatto¹² (Kinoshian, 2013) points out that "I would bet most of YouTube views more than one-half billion plays/views are international. As with any other piece of information, YouTube figures have to be appropriately categorized and prioritized based on your station's needs." Viral success cannot be excluded, but it is not a crucial indicator for radio programmers while selecting a record for their playlists.

Gangnam Style also produced a large number of video parody by the public, TV talk show appearances, and horse riding dance. Meanwhile, Gentleman had viral success in YouTube views and digital streaming sales, but it failed in reaching mass audiences among various viral outlets. Thus, this result indicates that viral success only makes it more difficult to grab massive audiences' attention unless the target audiences are designated. In addition, if there are no massive interests among music fans in various viral outlets, it is hardly taken as objective data for programmers for selection on the playlist.

To summarize Gentleman's case on Gate 2, YouTube views will remain a factor to pass through Gate 2, but are not an essential factor for foreign musicians to rely on. Turow (2005) described the current U.S. audiences as frenetic, self-concerned, attention-challenged and that they expected special treatment from advertisers in the marketing perspective. This can be interpreted that one becomes more personalized to get information via millions of websites and it becomes harder for marketers to reach their target audiences. Thus, viral success from YouTube views alone is not enough to match with the objective data for radio programmer. Familiarity among audiences is a key, thus to meet the criteria of Gate 2 media should be exposed various outlets to become familiar to greater public. Only then do foreign musicians have a chance to pass through Gate 2 like Gangnam Style.

iii. Gate 3 - The Populist Repertoire

It is pivotal for programmers to know about their target audiences in this repertoire,

thus programmers should seek direct audience feedback on important sources of information, (Ahlkvist and Faulkner, 2001). They pick music if the music strikes them, and expect that the music will strike audiences as well, but they don't select music based on their personal music preference or subjective aesthetic criteria, but rather on how a typical listener might respond to that music.

In Gate 3, programmers are passive in selecting a song for the playlist, in contrast to the selection process of Gate 1. Of course, in Gate 2, they passively act as a gatekeeper, but at least they filter the objective data with their subjective criteria in Gate 2. However, in Gate 3, they thoroughly rely on the listeners' response. Programmers don't educate the audiences about their subjective criteria, rather they simply follow if the audiences like the songs.

Then, do those songs pass through this gate? Gangnam Style passed through Gate 3 as well as Gate 1 & 2. As aforementioned, Howard selected the song because he thought it had some potential. In the beginning, he planned to play Gangnam Style for a week or two, but he got a positive response from the listeners and therefore kept playing it.

Meanwhile, Gentleman didn't get the same sort of response from the listeners, thus it didn't last long on the playlist. Hayes, PD at 105.3-The Buzz, said "I didn't play Gentleman no matter labels are attempting to break. Record reps will send us lyric links to videos, but it is not going to replace my usual way of looking at things. In order for me to add something, I have to hear it and like it. It has to be a song that my audience will react to regardless what YouTube says." He added that the reason Gangnam Style was played on the radio was that there was something there not to be ignored and the question was if his audiences would accept (Kinosian, 2013). In passing Gate 3, the response of listeners is pivotal. The failure in passing through Gate 3 can explain why Gentleman had limited radio airplay even with its blistering number of YouTube views.

Through examining the complexity of each gate, it becomes clear that passing through them is a complicated process. Furthermore, each gate is related to other gates; this is indicative of a particular order with which one must pass through each one. It is not a simple system of suggesting how to access and pass through each gate, but the result of passing through Gate 3 for each song represents how to grab the listeners' attention and to get a response.

iv. Gate 4 - The Synergistic Repertoire

Even if radio programmers and record companies have a close relationship, programmers often remain objective and the close relationship does not guarantee the pass. Programmers in this repertoire pay close attention to industry indicators of how records that promoters want them to add are doing at other stations and on the trade charts.

The role of label companies is predominant in Gate 4. Indeed, Gangnam Style hit before contracting with a label company in the United States. Thus, it is hard to say if Gangnam Style passed through this gate. However, we presume that the song's relatively short stay on the playlist, as compared with its great viral success, might be related to label companies not cooperating with the programmer. This indicates that even if there is no support from label companies, once a song greatly satisfies the criteria to get through Gate 1, 2, and 3, it is not mandatory to pass through Gate 4.

In the case of Gentleman, the U.S. label company, School Boys, released the song to the programmers. Due to the label company's effort, the song's three week mainstream CHR chart history was number 64, 68 and 64. Pietroluongo (Kaufman, 2013) stated "But this time, with the help of a label and the backing of Justin Bieber's manager, Scooter Braun, there is likely to be a stronger, more organized push to radio."

However, the failure of passing through Gate 3 caused it to have paucity of radio airplay. Kelly (Kaufman, 2013), Vice President of Music Programming at Sirius XM satellite radio, clarified "radio will play Gentleman and we will know quickly through research if it's resonating with the audience. The song will debut on the charts this week, but it won't be until next week that we will have a full seven days' worth of data to gauge audience interest." In addition, the industry indicators are not good enough to keep it longer on the playlists. In summary, even if a song passes through Gate 4, Gate 3 critically influences a song's ability to stay on the playlist and its ability to pass through Gate 4 is vulnerable if it does not pass through other gates.

Overall, Gangnam Style passed through Gate 1, 2 and 3 and Gentleman passed through Gate 4. American and/or Canadian musicians only need to pass through one of these gates to be on the playlist. For example, the song, Baby, performed by Canadian recording artist Justin Bieber, received airplay directly after receiving positive reviews upon its release, and then, officially impacted mainstream and rhythmic radio.¹³

However, we found in examining two cases that foreign musicians should pass

through at least two or three gates. However, in this case, the passed gates should be stronger than the non-passed gates. For example, Gangnam Style did not pass through Gate 4, but it strongly passed through Gate 1, 2, 3, thus it was on the playlist for 140 days according to Mediabase. As aforementioned, if Gangnam Style passed through Gate 4 as well, I expect it would have stayed on the playlist longer.

In addition, there is an order in which foreign musicians must pass through gates. In the case of Gangnam Style, it hit first in YouTube views (Gate 2) and second it grabbed programmers' attention and familiarized them with an unknown genre, K-pop (Gate 1). Ramsay (2012) addressed that even though there are several successful K-pop groups throughout the world, the genre still has far to go in the U.S. music industry.¹⁴ Because K-pop is still a relatively unknown genre in the U.S. Music market, its artists have to attract gatekeepers who will then filter and disseminate songs to mass appeal. This process has to be done in order to be discussed, enter, or succeed in the U.S. music market. This process doesn't mean passing through Gate 2, which is its own difficult and complicated process.

After passing through the first part of Gate 2, programmers waited to collect objective data beyond just viral success such as appearance on TV shows, parodies of music videos, and other stations' reaction (the second part of Gate 2). This indicates that Gangnam Style passed Gate 2 twice. Gangnam Style made programmers become familiar with an unknown genre first, and then sustained its YouTube view fame via various media outlets. Finally, programmers made the song stay on the playlist due to the audiences' response (Gate 3). As aforementioned, an important requirement for musicians to be successful is that their music should have the potential to be appreciated by a large audience. Audiences' response to a song is pivotal for the song for selection and stay on a radio playlist. Gate 1 is also pivotal. As for the question of which one is more pivotal, it is open to debate. However, we presume that Gate 3 is the most sensitive among the others because even if one song gets through the gates and achieves mass appeal, if there is no response from the audiences, it is not worthy to strongly pass through the previous gates.

In Gangnam Style's case, Gate 4 did not make an impact to be selected for the playlist, but it influenced the song staying longer on the playlist. On the other hand, Gentleman only passed through Gate 4 even though it had a certain viral success. It indicates that viral success covers a larger area including TV show appearances, viral appeal videos, and additional channels besides YouTube views. Also, limited radio airplay for Gentleman implies that even

though it passed through Gate 4, to sustain status on the playlist requires other industry indicators be satisfied.

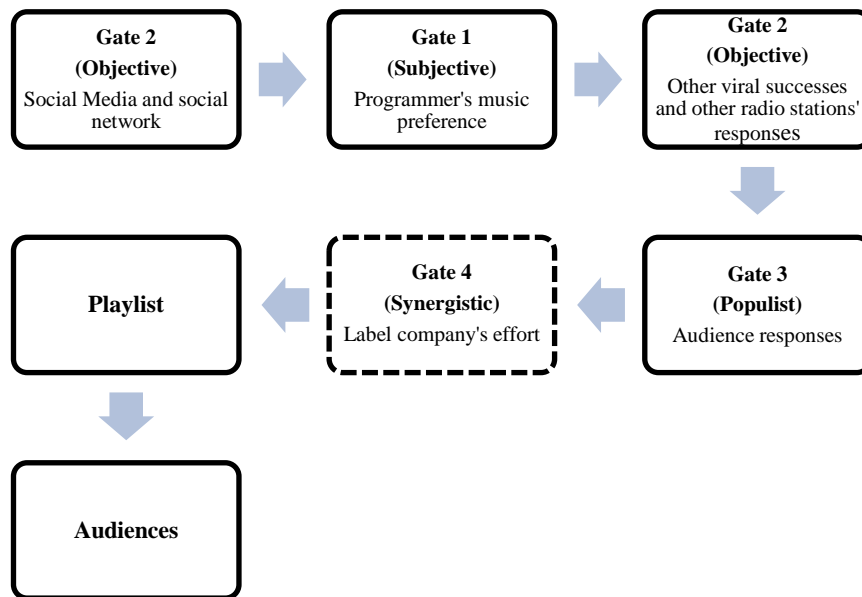
Through examination of two songs: Gangnam Style and Gentleman, based on Ahlqvist and Faulkner's model, it is interesting to find that passing through each gate is not a simple system; gates are connected and mutually influencing. Simply put, the relationship between gates is complex and dynamic and filtered through various forces. A more interesting point is while most scholars and professionals evaluated Psy's success in the U.S. music market as viral success, radio also played some part in his success.

v. Modified Research Model

The following, a revision of Ahlqvist and Faulkner's research model, suggests a path for foreign musicians to have their music selected by radio programmers in order to gain acceptance by gatekeepers. This article does not suggest how to increase album sales, but rather recommends a strategy to progress beyond the main gatekeepers to increase recognition among American music fans. To reiterate the rationale and research expectations, we posit that radio exposure is a key issue in increasing foreign musicians' recognition in the U.S. music industry.

The modified and expanded research model is divided into two typologies. One is for foreign musicians who debut their first album or single in the U.S. music market and the other typology is for their second record after a successful debut album or single. Once again, there is an order with which to pass through each gate.

Figure 3. Typology of Debut Album or Single for Culturally Distanced Foreign Musicians



As shown in FIGURE 3, foreign musicians who seek success in the U.S. music market for the first time should pass through Gate 2 in two steps. Firstly, they should pass through Gate 2 with viral success in social media to grab the attention of radio programmers in order to pass Gate 1. Once they get attention from radio programmers and programmers are aware of their music, then they should succeed in other media outlets such as TV or achieve other forms of viral success. Programmers thus can collect objective data for selection on playlists. As aforementioned, it is noteworthy if other major radio stations play a particular song; programmers place emphasis on selecting songs through other stations' responses in order to reduce risk.

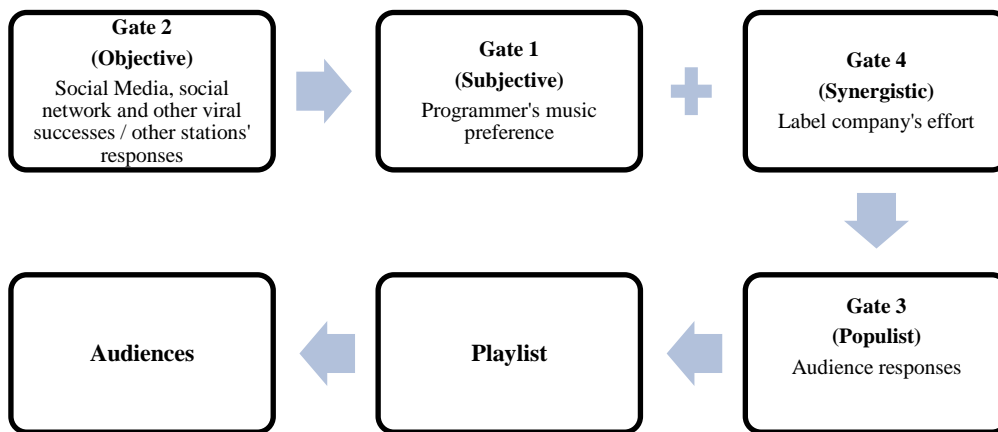
After passing through to Gate 2, foreign musicians look for the audiences' responses to pass through Gate 3. If there is no response from the audiences, even if the song passes through Gate 1 and 2, it can't last long on the playlist. Commercial radio stations are sensitive about sustaining their relationships with advertisers, thus it is not worth playing the song if the audiences are not interested.

To remark on Gangnam Style, it passed through Gate 1, 2, 3, and even though it took a while to get through the second step of Gate 2 due to the late response from other stations, overall it passed strongly through three gates. In this scenario, Gate 4 is not a crucial gate to pass. It indicates that if one song strongly passes through Gate 1, 2, 3, then Gate 4 is optional.

Previously in this paper, we suggested that foreign musicians should pass through all four gates. In the case of Gangnam Style, it didn't pass through all gates, but it still gained heavy rotations on the radio. Nonetheless, while ideally a song should pass through all gates, Gate 4 can be optional. However, if Gangnam Style had passed through Gate 4, it would be expected to have stayed longer on playlists or gained more heavy rotations to accompany its success in YouTube views.

The other typology is for culturally distant foreign musicians' second record after a successful debut album or single.

Figure 4. Typology of Second Album or Single for Culturally Distant Foreign Musicians



As aforementioned, Caves (2000) stated that the chances for the second album/single to succeed were lower than those for a successful debut album. Commonly noticed, the expectation of audiences and many experts who are in the music industry for the second album are higher than the first debut album. Thus, the standards of passing through each gate are assumed to be higher for the second album.

As shown in FIGURE 4, culturally distant foreign musicians who released a second album or single should pass through Gate 2 first, just as foreign musicians who debuted for the first time. However, the difference from the first typology is that the second record should be widespread in social media networks, and achieve other viral successes simultaneously in order to pass through Gate 2. In addition, major radio stations need to play a song for the other stations to take notice and select the song for their playlists. As aforementioned, the

expectation for the second album or single is higher, thus only success in YouTube or digital sales is not enough to pass through this gate. For debuted musicians, success on the Web is enough to grab programmers' attention, as shown in the first typology, but for the second album or single to pass through it has to actively seek out their attention.

After passing through Gate 2, foreign musicians should appeal to programmers' music preferences to pass Gate 1. At the same time, the label must strive to have the song appeal to the programmers. In the first typology, Gate 4 was not a crucial factor to be a record on the playlist, but in the second typology, appeal to programmers' music preference (Gate 1) and the efforts from the label (Gate 4) are simultaneously required to reach at the next gate, Gate 3.

Overall, these two typologies are one guideline that culturally distant foreign musicians must meet if they wish the entry into the U.S. music market. It is one way to increase their recognition among American music fans and their marketing success for the future.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The U.S. music market is an attractive market for culturally distant foreign musicians as it is lucrative due to its sheer size and as it is a pathway to global fame. However, entry into that market is extremely difficult and musicians must pass through various gatekeepers. This article examined one gatekeeper in the U.S. music industry, specifically, the radio programmer.

As aforementioned, one main argument of this article is that radio plays a powerful role as a gatekeeper in the U.S. music industry by looking into what music earns a slot on the air; radio remained important despite newly emerging mediums in this digital age. As Hendy (2000) notes, radio is not just a cheap and accessible means of communication but a highly intimate medium capable of building large listener communities widely scattered geographically. Furthermore, radio is a pervasive broadcaster of globalized music products and in its many formats, such as internet radio and satellite radio, it is a free medium to listen to the music.

Nonetheless, radio is considered a neglected medium in the digital age. Ahlqvist and Faulkner (2002) explain that this is due to the empirical scrutiny of commercial radio; it is

neglected even though it plays a pivotal role in making recorded music popular. Simply put, all artists have equal opportunity to produce, promote, and sell their music through the use of various new forms of technology. In addition, gatekeepers have been disempowered. Thus, radio is often considered an unnecessary medium for song promotion. However, this study showed that the role of the radio still exists, but the ways of carrying it out have changed. For example, A&R department looks for emerging artists through YouTube or other social mediums instead of casting on the street, receiving demo CDs from artists, as in the past.

When discussing Psy's success in the music industry, new media outlets are the main discourse of his success. However, we have questioned whether or not his success only relied on new media outlets. As discussed throughout the article, radio has clearly played a part in his success and his songs passed through the complicated gatekeeping process. Gangnam Style, which passed through Gates 1, 2, 3, got numerous radio spins and Gentleman, which passed through only Gate 4, got a paucity of airtime.

This article discusses about the main factors to be considered when culturally distant foreign musicians seek to enter the U.S. music market. In the past, radio was a way for a song to reach mass audiences. It might seem cliché still to discuss radio as an important medium in promoting songs in the digital age. Yet, it remains a powerful force and should be considered an important promotional tool in the U.S. music market.

Through the examination of the case of Psy, it becomes clear that various steps exist to pass through each gate as well as various forces working for, such as access to objective data and the programmer's subjective music preferences. Indeed, the audiences' response is pivotal in passing through each gate and in sustaining a song's status on radio playlists, which in turn leads to recognition among American music fans. This article reveals that radio programmers are the most important gatekeepers for musicians. If a song passes through the subjective repertoire (Gate 1), and gets a response from an audience (Gate 3), the song's recognition can simply increase, thus not necessarily going through the complicated gatekeeping process. However, it is not clear what each programmer's musical preferences are and how audiences will respond to the music. Again, as Caves notes, nobody knows.

As Hendy (2000) addresses, radio provides a medium for constructing identities and nurturing musical tastes. It is thus important for culturally distant foreign musicians to consider radio along with digital forms of media when introducing their music to American music fans because culturally distanced foreign popular music is still not familiar to most

American music fans. Thus, this study draws an outline for foreign musicians for how to progress beyond the main gatekeepers and have their music be introduced to fans.

This study suggests that research on gatekeepers within the radio industry would benefit from attending to variation in the practices that radio programmers perform when dealing with selecting a song for the playlist. Therefore, it can potentially help culturally distanced foreign musicians increase their recognition among American music fans. Awareness of suggested typologies would be enhanced by accounting for both utilizing new media outlets and radio, which includes extended formats that have come about due to technological development. In addition, it draws the outline of how variation in programmers' decision-making criteria is related to structural factors.

On a broader theoretical level, I outlined an approach for explaining how radio programmers select a song for their playlist based on the gatekeeping process. In addition, I explained why foreign musicians need to pass through the complicated gatekeeping process. While, in this digital age, most people focus on new media outlets, this study devotes a different perspective for foreign musicians to be aware of when seeking to increase their recognition in the U.S. music industry. In fact, BTS has been leading another paradigm shift for culturally distant foreign musicians to penetrate into the U.S. music industry through using SNS, cultivating fandom, etc. mostly through new media outlets. However, besides within the 10-20 age group, legacy media such as radio is a useful medium to reach other age groups, so it shouldn't be neglected.

As demonstrated in the case of Psy, it is important to utilize radio along with digital media. This study, however, only deals with Psy's case and further it doesn't cover the genres or contents of songs in relation to popular music in the United States. In order to get more accurate and relevant results, cases of culturally closed foreign musicians should be discussed. Further research can lead to new paths through which to explore how foreign musicians utilize radio as an effective marketing medium, rather than only discuss how to pass through gatekeepers in the U.S. music industry. Nonetheless, this article suggests guidelines for culturally distant foreign musicians on how to traverse main gatekeepers in the U.S. music industry.

¹ “Jay Park Reaches No.1 on U.S. iTunes R&B/Soul Chart” February 8, 2012.

<http://www.soompi.com/2012/02/08/jay-park-reaches-no1-in-us-itunes-rbsoul-chart/>

² Sang-Hun Choe. “Bring K-Pop to the West” *The New York Times, Global Business*, March 4, 2012

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/05/business/global/using-social-media-to-bring-korean-pop-music-to-the-west.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&

³ Christopher Knab “How Record Labels and Radio Stations Work Together” Music Biz

Academy.com, 2010. <http://www.musicbizacademy.com/knab/articles/radiostations.htm>

⁴ Louis Hau “America’s Top Pop Imports” *Forbes*, February 26, 2008.

⁵ A Catch 22 is a paradoxical situation from which an individual cannot escape because of contradictory rules. Catch 22s often result from rules, regulations, or procedures that an individual is subject to but has no control over. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.

⁶ <http://www.billboard.com/artist/298944/charice/biography>

⁷ The US Airplay Top 100; Resen, Jody “Pharrell – Happy” *Rolling Stone*, November 23, 2013; Wood,

Mikael “Pharrell Williams, a Happy and Busy Guy” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 2014

⁸ Mike Kinosian “Is Psy a One Hit Wonder?” *RadioInfo*, May 7, 2013.

⁹ Gil Kaufman “Psy’s Gentleman Nears 125 Million Views, but Can It Match Gangnam Style?” *MTV*

News, April 17, 2013.

¹⁰ Industry News, *RadioInfo*. Monday, April 15, 2013.

¹¹ “Psy Announces New Single, ‘Gangnam Style’ Hits 2 Billion YouTube Views” *AT 40 News*, June 02, 2014.

¹² Tony Travatto, Clear Channel mainstream CHR WKQI, Detroit Producer

¹³ Jean-Pierre Hombach, *Justin Bieber*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, February 22, 2012

¹⁴ Colin Ramsay “Psy and Gangnam Style” *Music Business Journal*, October, 2012.

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