VIRAL MARKETING IN THE ARTS: THE CASE OF PSY'S GANGNAM STYLE

Authors

CHANG, WOONG JO
Assistant Professor, Graduate Program of Arts Leadership, Seattle University

PARK, SHIN-EUI,
Assistant Professor, Dept. of Arts & Cultural Management, Kyung Hee University

Keywords
Viral Marketing, *Hallyu*, Korean Wave, Social Media, Arts Marketing

ABSTRACT

Introduction
Viral marketing or viral advertising is referred to as a marketing strategy that takes advantage of the pre-existing social network to achieve certain marketing goals, such as increasing product sales or brand awareness (Cruz & Fill, 2008; Ernest, 2007; Gibbon & Hawkes, 2006; Hausmann, 2012; Park, 2012; Qualman, 2009; Stencel, 2009; Wuyts, 2010). Within the context of the Internet and the social media, "viral marketing" has been a buzz term because it has been dramatically enhanced by the ease of self-replicating viral processes through the Internet and mobile phones just like computer viruses.
This paper aims at identifying the elements of viral marketing that can possibly be utilized in the arts sector. To do that, it takes the case study of a recent success story of a Korean rapper, Psy, with his global hit song, *Gangnam Style*. Within the case study, we not only track Psy and *Gangnam Style,* but also observe how other individual artists and small arts groups use viral marketing by riding the wave of the popularity of *Gangnam Style*. We believe that this research can lead us to important findings for individual artists and small arts organizations regarding viral marketing, which can aid them in their daily operations so that they may defy their financial constraints in marketing their work.

Background
In the last decade, South Korea's arts and culture have been enormously popularized in neighboring Asian countries including China, Japan, and many Southeast Asian countries. Recently, the phenomenon also spread to Europe and the Americas as well as to the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa. This sensation has been referred to as *Hallyu,* which literally means the Korean Wave. Among many disciplines in the popularized Korean arts and culture such as TV dramas and movies, Korean pop music, known as K-pop, has been the spearhead of the *Hallyu* powerhouse.
Encouraged by its success in Asian and Latin American countries, K-pop producers began to knock on the door of the US market, which has been, without much argument, considered the bonafide hub of pop music. Despite considerable investments, major Korean K-pop production companies have largely been unsuccessful in entering the US market, because of the insurmountable cultural barrier. However, a solo musician, who debuted in 1999 and has been intermittently active due to drug problems and military duty, suddenly defied the cultural barrier with a single song, *Gangnam Style*. He was a Korean rapper, named Psy.
Since the music video of Psy's *Gangnam Style* was first introduced through YouTube on Jul 15, 2012, it has had over half a billion hits to date, and is still growing. *Gangnam Style* ranked first in the official music charts of more than 30 different countries worldwide, including the UK charts and Australian charts, and it has been second for six weeks in a row in US Billboard charts. Psy's *Gangnam Style* went massively viral on the web and generated countless reactive and parody videos. Its online popularity quickly led to the actual purchase of the song, even though it had not been officially launched and released in the US.

SESSION G1
VALUE

Research Questions

This paper attributes the unprecedented and ongoing success and popularity of a K-pop song to the viral effect of the Internet and social media. Since we believe that Psy's success highly depends on the viral process, our case study will provide us with valuable insight into the applications of viral marketing in the arts and cultural sector. Mainly, this paper investigates what makes the case of Psy different from the previous popularity of K-pop within *Hallyu* and what the key elements of viral marketing in the arts are. Because of the uncontrollable characteristic of a virus, we also investigate whether viral marketing can be applicable with manageable controls.

Methodology

To answer these questions, we are conducting a case study on the phenomenon of Psy's *Gangnam Style*. We have been analyzing the comments that were written by viewers of Psy's music video on YouTube. Based these analyses, we will develop a grounded theory of the issues discussed above. We also have been using *Google Analytics* to view the worldwide pattern of viewers of Psy's *Gangnam Style*. In addition, to confirm the grounded theory, we will conduct four different focus group interviews (FGIs) in the US and in Korea, as elaborated below. We will formulate two FGI groups in the US: one composed of a group of people for whom Psy is their first exposure to *Hallyu;* the other, composed of a group of people who have participated in the *Hallyu* fandom. As evidenced by the statistical data from Youtube, both of the groups in the US will be comprised of fans in their 20s, who are the most frequent viewers of the video. We will also formulate two FGI groups in South Korea: one composed of a group of young Korean self-described Psy fans; the other, composed of a group of Korean experts on cultural studies of *Hallyu,* including researchers on *Hallyu* and music critics. By weaving the four FGIs, we will identify the elements of viral marketing in the case of *Gangnam Style*. We will also look for similarities and differences among the groups, by tracing and analyzing members' answers to questions regarding how they came to be fans of Psy and *Hallyu*, how they personally relate to this phenomenon, and how they experience and deal with cultural identity and difference.

Expected Findings and Conclusions

We believe that the case of Psy provides a model for how a fandom is formed and how it expands through viral marketing in the arts sector. Clearly, the viral effect of the social media has made Psy famous on the web. Psy's popularity on the web was quickly picked up by the mass media; and later, he became "famous for being famous" on the web.

We expect that the success of Psy's *Gangnam Style* phenomenon has a lot to do with how much people can relate to him. Psy made room for his fans to engage in the phenomenon, and not just to listen to his music. Thus, to go viral, it appears to help if the artist is not necessarily perfect, but human. The Internet and the social media certainly provided Psy fans or *Gangnam Style* fans with a huge field in which to create their habitus, as termed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977).

We also expect that Psy's ability to contextualize his music into other cultures immensely impacts his success. The difference between Psy and previous artists who knocked on the door of the pop music market in the US may be that, although all of Psy's songs were basically in Korean unlike those of previous artists, Psy was very fluent in English, so that he could deliver his story by narratives to Americans and contextualize his music. We speculate that although earlier artists like Wonder Girls and SNSD have released their music with English lyrics, they could not have chanced to talk in English with the mass media in the US, partly because they were a large group and it was difficult to invite all of them to an interview and partly because most of them were not fluent in English (even though some members of the groups were born and raised in the US).

We also speculate that a single successful viral marketing in the arts provides invaluable opportunities for individuals and small groups to market their art works. This was evidenced by a Russian guitarist Igor Presnyakov and a New York-based à capella group, Pentatonix, and many others. By riding the wave of their fame on the web, their reaction (or rearranged performance) videos vastly outnumbered their ordinary videos on the Internet and dramatically increased the circulation of their music worldwide.

MAIN REFERENCES

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice. Cambridge*, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Chang, W. (May 10. 2008). Korean B-Boys and the advent of audience 2.0. Paper presented at the 2008 Technology in the Arts: Canada conference, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON, Canada.

Chang, W. (July 5. 2011). Game changer: Social media for small arts organizations. Paper presented at the 11th International Conference on Arts and Cultural Management, Antwerp, Belgium.

Chua, B. H., & Iwabuchi, K. (2008). *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Chung, H. (2012). Medium hot, Korean cool: Hallyu envy and reverse mimicry in contemporary U.S. pop culture. In D. Kim & M. Kim (Eds.), *Hallyu: Influence of Korean popular culture in Asia and beyond*. Seoul: Seoul National University Press.

Chung, W. & Lee, T. (2012). Hallyu as a strategic marketing key in the Korean media content industry. In D. Kim & M. Kim (Eds.), *Hallyu: Influence of Korean popular culture in Asia and beyond*. Seoul: Seoul National University Press.

Cruz, D., & Fill, C. (2008). Evaluating viral marketing: isolating the key criteria. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 26*(7), 743-758.

Dawkins, R. (1989). *The selfish gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ernest, H. (2007). Watch out, it's catching - Hugh Ernest on why viral marketing is becoming one of the most powerful and trusted methods of communication. *Museums Journal, 107*(11), 30.

Gibbon, T., & Hawkes, R. (2006). What's next for viral marketing?. *Admap*, 472, 53-55.

Graham, G. (2002). *Genes: A philosophical inquiry*. London: Routledge.

Hausmann, A. (2012). Creating -buzz-: opportunities and limitations of social media for arts institutions and their viral marketing. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, 17*(3), 173-182.

Howard, K. (2006). *Korean Pop Music: Riding the Wave*. BRILL/Global Oriental.

Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Fller, J., Mueller, J., & Matzler, K. (2011). Communitition: The Tension between Competition and Collaboration in Community-Based Design Contests. *Creativity and Innovation Management, 20*(1), 3-21.

Kim, D. & Kim, S. (2012). Hallyu from its origin to present: A historical overview. In D. Kim & M. Kim (Eds.), *Hallyu: Influence of Korean popular culture in Asia and beyond*. Seoul: Seoul National University Press.

Kim, J. & Nam, Y. (2012). The effect of ego-network and cultural familiarity in hallyu. In D. Kim & M. Kim (Eds.), *Hallyu: Influence of Korean popular culture in Asia and beyond*. Seoul: Seoul National University Press.

Kim, J. & Ni, L. (2012). The nexus between hallyu and soft power: Cultural public diplomacy in the era of sociological globalism. In D. Kim & M. Kim (Eds.), *Hallyu: Influence of Korean popular culture in Asia and beyond*. Seoul: Seoul National University Press.

Kim, K. (2011). *Virtual hallyu: Korean cinema of the global era*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Kim, M. (2012). Riding the Korean Wave of Multiculturalism: Review and Future Prospects. In D. Kim & M. Kim (Eds.), *Hallyu: Influence of Korean popular culture in Asia and beyond*. Seoul: Seoul National University Press.

Park, S. (2012). Empathic Virus - Viral Marketing in the Arts, *Journal of Arts and Cultural Management*, *8*(1), 3-27.

Park, S. & Chang, W. (June 24. 2012). The Korean Wave: Cultivating Global Fandom. Paper presented at the 17th International Conference on Cultural Economics, Kyoto, Japan.

Potts, J., Hartley, J., Banks, J., Burgess, J., Cobcroft, R., Cunningham, S., & Montgomery, L. (October 01, 2008). Consumer Co- creation and Situated Creativity. *Industry & Innovation, 15*(5), 459-474.

Qualman, E. (2009). *Socialnomics: How social media transforms the way we live and do business*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Ravina, M. (2009). Introduction: conceptualizing the Korean Wave. *Southeast Review of Asian Studies, 31.*

Russell, M. J. (2008). *Pop Goes Korea: Behind the Revolution in Movies, Music, and Internet Culture*. Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press.

Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P. N., & Rook, D. W. (2007). *Focus groups: Theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Shin, H. & Roh, H. (2012). Foreign Media Coverage of Hallyu and Suggestions for Public Relations Strategies. In D. Kim & M. Kim (Eds.), *Hallyu: Influence of Korean popular culture in Asia and beyond*. Seoul: Seoul National University Press.

Stencel, M. (2009). Anti-Viral Marketing. *Congressional Quarterly Weekly, 67*(3), 116-117.

Stratten, S. (2010). *Unmarketing: Stop marketing. Start engaging*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Wuyts, S. (2010). *The connected customer: The changing nature of consumer and business markets*. New York: Routledge.