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Business Modelling in the Entertainment Industry: The Case of BTSMANIA

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摘要

在这篇论文中，分析了 BTS 取得巨大成功的原因。 K-Pop（代表韩国流行音乐）不仅对韩国的 GDP，而且对已经开始在世界各地发展的各种粉丝社区产生了不容忽视的影响，从而激发了研究问题。作为 K-Pop 最成功的例子，防弹少年团获得格莱美提名，让他们在竞争中脱颖而出的问题自然而然地出现了。

因此，本论文将尝试为以下问题找到合适的、统计相关的答案：(1) 歌曲的流行是否与其结构音乐特征有关； (2) 在美国和韩国上榜的音乐在统计上是否存在显着差异； (3) 是否可以将 BTS 的音乐归类为更美国而不是韩国； (4) 防弹少年团的歌曲所探索的主题是否与美国顶级排行榜歌曲所唱的主题有根本的不同。

为了回答问题（1）、（2）和（3），将进行定量统计分析。用于回答（1）的相关分析结果证明音频特征和流行度之间确实存在相关性。用于回答（2）的分析结果证明，美国听众和韩国听众在品味上存在差异，至少就音频特征而言。用于回答 (3) 的分析结果让人相信 BTS 的歌曲，尤其是他们最近发行的歌曲，确实被归类为美国而不是韩国。最后，就 (4) 而言，美国主题和 BTS 主题之间似乎存在重大差异。

通过采用 Askin 和 Mauskapf (2017) 的最优分化理论，本论文推断防弹少年团的受欢迎程度可以通过该集团提供音乐典型产品的能力来解释，该产品在歌曲的主题和歌词方面区别于竞争。

关键词：BTS、K-Pop、产品开发、音乐产业

English Abstract

In this thesis, the reasons for BTS' impressive success were analyzed. The research question was spurred by the no longer ignorable impact that K-Pop (standing for Korean pop music) has not only on South Korea's GDP, but also on various communities of fans that have started to develop everywhere around the world. As BTS, K-Pop's most successful example, obtain a nomination for a GRAMMY, the question of what sets them apart from their competition came naturally.

Consequently, this thesis will attempt to find suitable, statistically relevant answers to the following questions: (1) whether the popularity of a song can be related to its structural musical characteristics; (2) whether there is a statistically significant difference between the music that charts in the United States and in South Korea; (3) whether one would be able to classify BTS' music as more American than South Korean; (4) whether the themes explored within BTS' songs are fundamentally different from those sung by American top charting songs.

To answer to questions (1), (2) and (3), quantitative statistical analyses will be conducted. The results of the correlation analysis used to answer to (1) prove that there is indeed a correlation between audio features and popularity. The results of the analysis used to answer to (2) prove that there is a difference in taste between American listeners and South Korean ones, at least as far as audio features are concerned. The results of the analysis used to answer (3) lead to believe that BTS' songs, especially their most recent releases, are indeed classified as American rather than South Korean. Finally, as far as (4) is concerned, a substantial difference between American themes and BTS' ones appears to exist.

By adopting Askin and Mauskapf (2017) theory of optimal differentiation, this thesis infers that BTS' popularity can be explained by the group's ability to offer a musically typical product, that differentiates itself from the competition in the themes and lyrics of the songs.

Keywords: BTS, K-Pop, Product Development, Music Industry

Introduction

Ever since the development of the MP3, music has rarely left humanity's proverbial side. Thanks to the internet, and perhaps the seemingly unstoppable trend towards a more globalized world, it is exceptionally easy to come across music from various countries. Yet, it is still difficult for the majority of 'local' music to become fully mainstream–that is, to reach a level of visibility and popularity alike that of top pop artists that, unimpressively, all come from the United States. There is much talk in academia about cultural imperialism and cultural demise: power influences cultural flows, which are then naturally structured as unilaterally moving from West to East. This implies the domination of one culture, the one where power lies, and that all others be relegated to the peripheral role of being influenced without a chance to give back (Schiller, 1976; Fraser, 2003; Petras, 1993). However, K-Pop is but one stark example of how the theory of cultural imperialism may not be apt to fully describe the process of back-and-forth influence we witness in our everyday life. Increasingly, people all over the world are exposed to cultural products that are not exclusively American-produced: we eat Japanese food in the ever-popular all-you-can-eat restaurants; the Eurovision winner achieves worldwide fame; Bollywood and Nollywood movies are watched all over the world. South Korea is but one of the most flourishing media industries, with movies, food, traditional culture, and music being all in the spotlight in the stage of popular culture.

It is not uncommon today to hear talks on *Hallyu* (韩流, as *Hánliú* or 한류, lit. "Korean Wave"). The term, coined in the 1990s by Chinese journalists, refers to "the impulsive spread of South Korean popular culture overseas, [and] it involves a wide range of Korean media products such as K-Pop music, films, TV dramas, computer products, online games, fashion, beauty products, food and lifestyle" (Kim, 2003; Song, 2020). Hallyu, since its beginning in the 90s, has impressively aided South Korea's economy, boosting exports up to USD 9.48 billion in 2018. Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange's

“Report on the Effects of Hallyu 2018” reports an increase of +9.1% between 2017 and 2018 in Hallyu exports, with USD 430 million coming from music exports.

It is widely accepted that Hallyu started with the raise in popularity of K-Dramas in China (Hwang and Epstein, 2016). Heralds of this global phenomenon are *What is Love?* (1992), *My Sassy Girl* (2001), *Winter Sonata* (2002) and *Jewel in the Palace* (2003-2004). These dramas achieved impressive popularity throughout Asia: *What is Love?* recorded a viewership rate of 4.2% in China, meaning that 120 million Chinese people watched the show (Hwang and Epistein, 2016). *Winter Sonata* single-handedly imported the Korean Wave in Japan; Bae Yongjoon, the male lead actor, rose to such heights of popularity among Japanese middle-aged women that then-Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro said that the actor was “more popular than he was in Japan”. In 2003, the show drew 20% of prime time, with a total of 330,000 DVD sets sold (The Korea Herald, 2011). Nevertheless, at this time, Hallyu was mostly centered around TV dramas which embodied universally recognized Confucian values. Consequently, researchers were lead to believe that Hallyu was to be seen as an exclusively Asian phenomenon, with few chances to gain a foothold in the global market for media consumption, heavily dominated by American products. When K-Pop artists of the first wave, such as *Wonder Girls, Rain, Girls’ Generation, BoA* and *Se7en,* tried to export their music to the West, they did so with lukewarm results.

Hallyu 1.0 was an Asian phenomenon; Hallyu 2.0 set off to take over the world. It is hard to forget the *Gangnam Style* craze that overwhelmed the entire world in 2012, when then-YG Entertainment’s PSY became viral with his hit song thanks to a catchy refrain and an easily reproduceable and iconic choreography. PSY’s *Gangnam Style*, a satire of Seoul’s wealthiest district, is the first YouTube video to get to 1 billion views in 2012, then the first to reach 2 billion views in 2014. The release of the video brough a share price increase of 26% to YG Entertainment (NYMag, 2012). It is possible to maintain with a certain degree of confidence that *Gangnam Style* was the first K-Pop production to taste what being in the mainstream feels like. As it is often said among fans of the genre, PSY “paved the way” for next generation K-Pop groups in their challenge to become visible in the West.

If PSY shows the way, it is clear to many that BTS were the ones to run across it the fastest. The HYBE-managed group is today at the forefront of the global music industry. In 2021, they became the first and only K-Pop group to receive a GRAMMY nomination, with their popular single *Dynamite*. Albeit not winning, the song still achieved impressive feats, such as debuting in the Billboard Global Chart at number one, and staying in position for 18 weeks. Moreover, *Dynamite* alone made USD 1.43 million in revenues, and alone would be able to sustain the creation of 7,928 jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, adding USD 1.4 billion to the South Korean economy (News18, 2020). It isn't that other K-Pop groups aren't popular: in 2019, YG Entertainment's BLACKPINK, a four members girl group, featured in Coachella, perhaps the most popular music festival for pop music, held every year in Indo, California. EXO's (SM Entertainment) members are all extremely popular in the fashion industry, being ambassadors of popular high fashion brands such as GUCCI, Acqua di Parma, Ermenegildo Zegna, BVLGARI, and PRADA. Monsta X, NCT, supergroup Super M, have all featured multiple times in popular American talk shows, such as the Ellen DeGeneres Show, The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon and Jimmy Kimmel Live!. Yet, their popularity doesn't come close to that of HYBE's seven-member boy group. BTS' latest single, *Permission To Dance* (written for the group by Ed Sheeran), reached 72.3 million views on YouTube in the first 24 hours, making it one of the top ten biggest opening days in the history of the platform. Earlier this year, *Butter* earned 108.2 million plays in the first day it was viewable (Forbes, 2021).

In 2020, the group's management company, HYBE (the Big Hit Entertainment), filed for an IPO. It was valued USD 4.1 billion, and issued shares at an offering price of USD 115 each, and an effective starting price of USD 235 each. The previous year, the company registered USD 84 million of operating profits, and USD 550 million in pure revenues, 97% of which all came from BTS' activities (CNN Business, 2020). Ever since the IPO, HYBE has been at the center of various international operations. Founder Bang Sihyuk stepped down from his position as CEO after HYBE formed a joint venture with Universal Music

Group and acquired Scooter Braun's Ithaca Holdings to strengthen its position in the US and "fully transplant the K-Pop business model to the US market" (HYBE, 2021).

It is thus unquestionable that BTS have become a global phenomenon that can hardly be topped by their competitors in the once-niche market that is K-Pop. This thesis wants to acknowledge the economic impact that K-Pop has in South Korea, and the social impact is has worldwide. It is, in fact, thanks to the interest and devotion from global fans, that group together thanks to online social media platforms, that BTS and K-Pop were able to reach the heights they have today. Nevertheless, one may want to investigate what differentiates BTS' phenomenon, the peculiar hype that surrounds the group that so often brings critics to associate them with The Beatles, with other K-Pop groups. What makes BTS so extremely popular, while other groups struggle to reach the same level of visibility? It often happens, as a K-Pop fan, to find non-fans having no knowledge of most Korean music production; yet they know of BTS. According to Bang Sihyuk, the reason for BTS' impressive success can be found in luck, and spreading the right message:

> *"Fundamentally, [I] believe BTS' success in the US had a lot to do with luck. It wasn't my brilliant strategy or BTS being such a perfect fit for the US market. It was rather that their message resonated with a certain demand, and through digital media it spread quickly. And BTS touched something that wasn't being addressed in the US at the time, so American youths reacted, and that was proven through numbers."* (Time, 2019)

This thesis aims at figuring out, through statistics and mainly quantitative analysis, if and how was the product which can be identified as BTS' discography fits with the demands of the American market, and what exactly is this "something" that makes their music resonated with American youths, which they couldn't find in their own country-produced mainstream music. Specifically, the research question can be summed up as the following:

Is BTS' music popular in the US because it sounds American, while touching upon themes that are new and speak more loudly to an American audience?

The United States are taken as reference for this study because of their still unquestionable preponderance in the music industry. Not only is the American music industry the one most globally acclaimed, but their market is also universally recognized as the most ambitious (and thus, hardest) to conquer. “Making it” in the music industry is often synonym to becoming mainstream in the American market.

This thesis is structured as follows. After this introduction, Chapter 1 starts with an introduction to South Korea, its economic and political system; then, it delves into the country’s history, with the aim to highlight how historical, political and economic events are strongly intertwined with developments in music. The aim of this chapter is to highlight how the phenomenon of K-Pop came to be within the particular events that riddled South Korean’s history. Chapter 2 rapidly reviews the literature on the topic of K-Pop, finding a gap in current research that this thesis will aim to fill; namely, there is a lack of studies focusing specifically on researching the way the product of K-Pop is crafted for different audiences around the world to enjoy. Chapter 3 overviews the methodology, summarizing the theories underlying this work (the “optimal differentiation and standardized typicality” in music as explained by Askin and Mauskapf, 2017), presenting the process used to extract the data and the dataset selected, and reviewing the statistical methods that will be employed to conduct the quantitative analyses. Finally, Chapter 4 presents the results: through correlation analysis, comparison of means analysis, discriminant analysis and content analysis, this thesis is able to conclude that there is a degree of typicality in BTS’ music. Specifically, in the raw musicality of their production, which especially in the latest releases “sounds” more American than South Korean. At the same time, “optimal differentiation” is obtained by singing about themes that are substantially different from the ones that the American youth is attuned to. In a sense, then, this thesis is a quantitative support to what Bang Sihyuk claims when saying that “BTS touched something that wasn’t being addressed in America”, this something being themes of self-love, acceptance of oneself, finding courage to face problems and hard times head on. In the conclusions of the thesis, a summary of the work done, the limits of the present work and ideas for future

research, and finally a brief answer to the research question will be presented.

1. K-Pop: History, Economy, and Impact

1.1 Introduction

This thesis has the objective of understanding the reasons that underlie the global success of K-Pop and, specifically, why the boy-group BTS, among all others, managed to achieve stardom in the universally-recognized most important music market in the world: the United States. In order to reach sound conclusions, this chapter starts with an overview of present day South Korea: its geographical position, economy and political system. Then, paragraph two delves deeper in the history of South Korea, focusing at the same time on historical events (including political, economic and social events) and the evolution of music as these events happen. This overview will start with Joseon dynasty Korea; this point in time was chosen for it is during this time that Korean music first start evolving. Much of the Korean music until the 1992 debut of Seo Taiji and the Boys is inherently Asian: the scale employed is pentatonic (while Western music uses a diatonic scale), and the beats is either that characteristic of Korean traditional music, the *jangdan*, or a two- or four-beat that is typical to trot. Overall, South Korean music appears to be heavily influenced by Japan and the United States' musical preferences, given that both of this countries exercised much political and social control over the peninsula at various stages of its history. The final paragraph presents modern K-Pop and the agency of BTS, today called HYBE. Its origin and how the group came to be will be analyzed; finally, an overview of how the industry is organized, with this export imperative and global-local-global value chain will be offered in order to gain a deeper understanding of the economics behind the production of one of today's most acclaimed musical product.

In the conclusions, a summary of the reasons that have led to an ideal environment for the birth of K-Pop is presented by implementing the PESTEL framework for macro-environment analysis.

1.2 South Korea

The Republic of Korea, widely known as South Korea, is the country that occupies the southern half of the Korean peninsula, bordering the Sea of Japan (east) and the Yellow Sea (west). It is situated in the Eastern Asia, with 193 kilometers separating it from the principal Japanese island of Honshu and Kyushu. It has an overall area of 98,480 square kilometers, which represent 45% of the whole peninsula (the rest being North Korean territory). South Korea can be divided into four general regions, and its home to three terrestrial ecosystems: Central Korean deciduous forests, Manchurian mixed forests and Southern Korea evergreen forests. Most of the terrain of the southern part of the peninsula is mountainous, and thus not arable.

Figure 1 is a map of the country, and it shows its location *vis à vis* the world map.

Figure 1 – South Korea

Source: McCoy, J. (2003); Geo-Data: The World Geographic Encyclopedia, Third Edition; Gale.

South Korea is a constitutional democracy where the executive, judicial and legislative powers are divided between three bodies. The executive and legislative powers operate at the national level, but given that local governments are semi-autonomous, local executive and legislative bodies also exist. The constitution was first promulgated in 1948. Under the current constitution, South Korea's Sixth Republic has a president (Moon Jaein) and a

Prime Minister (Kim Bookyum), who is the chief executive of the country. The country is divided into eight provinces and six metropolitan cities. Additionally, Seoul has the status of special city and is the current capital of South Korea, where around 25 million of the total 51 million South Koreans reside. Ethically speaking, ethnic Koreans represent around 96% of the entire population of the country; moreover, a majority of the population of the country (56.1%) is non-religious.

Economically speaking, South Korea is a highly developed mixed economy. The main form of enterprise is represented by family-owned conglomerates called *chaebol*. These enterprises are at the forefront of technological innovation. South Korea, being a country with a lack of natural endowed resources, has post-1997 IMF crisis much invested in the development of internet technologies, R&D, and on the cultural sector. Nevertheless, the country's main industry is still, among others, electronics, with major producers such as Samsung and LG. The country is also an extremely active exporter, so much so that its balance of trade is positive, with exports surpassing imports in value. Its main exports are integrated circuits, cars, refined petroleum, vehicle parts, and passenger and cargo ships. Exchanges are mainly carried with China and the United States. The country's currency is the Korean won; as of March 2021, EU 1 corresponds to KRW 1,348.78. Its current GDP is USD 1.8 trillion as of 2021, ranking the country 10th in terms of GDP globally. GDP is comprised for 58.3% by services; much of the labor force of the country (70.6%) is also employed in this sector. GDP per capita is USD 34,865.

Table 1 summarizes key events in South Korea's history from the beginning of the Joseon dynasty until the 1997 IMF crisis. The musical overview that follows in the next paragraph will roughly follow the events reported below.

Table 1 – Key historical events in South Korea

Year	Event
1392	Yi Seonggye is crowned king. Start of the Joseon dynasty
1396	Capital moved to Seoul
1446	Promulgation of Hangul
1592	Japanese invasion repelled by Admiral Yi Sunsin
1627	First Manchu invasion
1866	French Campaign against Korea
1871	United States expedition to Korea
1876	The Treaty of Ganghwa opens Korean ports to Imperial Japan
1895	China recognizes Korea's independence
1896	King Kojong flees to Russia
1905	Korea becomes a Japanese protectorate
1910	Korea is annexed to the Japanese Empire
1919	Governor Saito Makoto starts a period of "cultural policy". The Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea is established in Shanghai
1945	Japan surrenders to the Allies. Korea becomes independent, but is divided into two areas of influence by the 38th parallel
1948	Establishment of the Republic of Korea (South) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North)
1950	The Korean War begins
1953	The Korea War is halted by the Korean Armistice Agreement
1960	A student raises against the First Republic of South Korea. Yi Sungman resigns
1961	Park Chunghee overthrows the Second Republic and establishes a military regime
1962	Start of the first Five-Years plan
1965	Japan and South Korea sign the Treaty on Basic Relations
1977	Export gains reach USD 10 billion
1979	Park Chunghee is assassinated. Chun Doohwan gets military power
1987	A student uprising leads to the overthrowing of the Fifth Republic of South Korea. Democratic elections are announced

1988	24th Olympic Games in Seoul
1991	South Korea joins the United Nations
1997	Asian financial crisis

Source: Own Elaboration

1.3 History

1.3.1 *Gugak*, and the Joseon dynasty

The Joseon Dynasty is the last dynasty to reign over the Korean peninsula, at a time when North and South were still not divided into two different States. The dynasty started in 1392, with the fall of the Goryeo dynasty at the hands of general Yi Seonggye, who became the first king of the Joseon dynasty with the name of Taejo (태조, lit. "the Great Ancestor"). In 1396, King Taejo first moved the capital city from Kaesong, which was the capital during the Goryeo dyansty, to what is today known as Seoul. Then, moved by the need to compensate those that helped him overthrow the previous dynasty, he created the *Dopyeonguisasa* (도평의사사, lit. "Supreme Court"), a body of fifty-five members who served as the executive power of the newly founded dynasty. This era is one characterized by many intellectually infused reforms and publications: for example, this is the time when Korea saw the printing of its first "national" currency; when printing devices started to be systematically used, which in turned helped the production and diffusion of books on all branches of human knowledge, from geography to medicine. Additionally, it is King Sejong, forth king after Taejo, that in 1446 promulgated the new alphabet, which will later be known as the *hangul* that Koreans still use today. Led by enlightened monarchs, the first years of the Joseon dynasty are remembered for the incredible developments in law, agriculture, and for ultimately being able to define the borders of modern Korea. Yet, these years were also riddled by violent and bloody schemes, ordained by those court members that were unhappy with the ruling party. In fact, the kings of this dynasty were decisively anti-Buddhist, and acted to reduce the power and influence of the temples, the number of which was also reduced. At the same time, the aristocracy's power was also attacked. In fact, during this era, those who mostly had the power to influence the politics of the country were not simple aristocrats, but more specifically, Confucian literati. The influence of Confucian scholars had always been high, from the start of the dynasty during Taejo's reign. As kings succeeded one another, it wasn't uncommon to find a Confucian literati to their side, advising on the best course for the politics of the time. This, naturally, fueled the disapproval of the upper echelons of society; alongside bloodsheds for the rightful

succession to the throne, the Joseon Dynasty was not entirely peaceful, not even during its brightest years.

This era sees the first developments of a exclusively Korean identity, one that is separate and unique from the Chinese influence that dominated the previous dynasty. 'Koreanness' was, after all, something Taejo needed to justify its rebellion against the previous dynasty, seen as corrupt and evil and not worthy anymore of leading Korea. Moreover, the Chinese Ming Dynasty fell in 1644, overtaken by the Manchurian Qing. Manchurians were considered by Koreans as nothing but barbarians; consequently, as they came to dominate over China, with which Korea always had an intimate relationship, Joseon-Koreans (at the very least, the educated elite) came to see themselves as the true keepers of an authentic Confucian tradition, otherwise trampled over by the Qing. This Confucian tradition is deeply embedded in the status division of *yangban* (양반, lit. "two classes", the aristocrats), *jungin* (중인, lit. "middle people", the upper middle class who made up the ruling bureaucracy) *yangmin* (양민, or more accurately *sangmin*, 상민, the commoners who paid most of the taxes) and *cheonmin* (천민, the vulgar commoners who did "unclean" jobs, like butchers and performers, below which were also the untouchables, the *baekjeong* and the slaves, the *nobi*) that characterizes Joseon Korea. Because of these distinctions, while it is true that Confucianism influences most of the cultural production and the life of the upper echelons of society, it is still important to highlight that most of the population was generally non-Confucian. The poorer strata of society, mostly farmers working for the landed elite, started to emulate Confucianism as a way to feel closer to the prestige of the higher levels of society; still, most people remained largely loyal to shaman, non-Confucian traditions and sounds. Ultimately, Korea in the Joseon Dynasty era was largely non-unified. This social divisions was enhanced by a general lack of development of the economy of the country. Confucianism is based on an overall skepticism towards mercantilism; thus, the whole country's wealth rested on agriculture, and was closed to any form of commercial or diplomatic interactions with foreign countries, except for China and Japan. Systematic commercial activity started only during the XVIII century, when the population of the peninsula grew exponentially, so much so that the usual activities of

bureaucracy and agriculture were no longer able to employ everyone. Nevertheless, Korea remained a peninsula decidedly closed off to foreign influence, especially during the reign of the Taewongun (1864-1873), who employed a strong policy of isolationism and xenophobia.

The Joseon dynasty is relevant because it is during this time that the first revolution in music happens in Korea. During the Joseon dynasty, music was *gugak* (국악, lit. "national music"), and its nature heavily depended on the function it needed to absolve. *Jeongak* (정악, lit. "orthodox, right, proper music") was the music of the aristocracy. The monarchy and the landed elite employed music for state rituals and personal cultivation; thus, art music was the music of the elite. Elite music was slower, had longer tones, regular rhythms, and syllabic notes. More expressive and emotional, *nongak* (농악, lit. "farmers' music") was the music of the lower classes, or most commonly, of the people. It was a music characterized by faster, shorter, irregular and melismatic sounds. Nevertheless, these distinctions in music were not as strict as their social counterparts. While the society of the Joseon Dynasty was strictly caste-like, music blended easily between the different strata of society. There were many genres that were popular both among the *yangban*, the *yangmin* and the *cheonmin*. *Pansori* (판소리), which in 2003 was nominated intangible cultural property by UNESCO, was born during this period: it is a genre featuring a solo singer reciting an extended oral narrative accompanied by a drummer. There were courtesans that systematically performed people's music to literati and aristocrats; among these, *minyo* (민요), a category of folk music, was popular. Scattered around the peninsula, there were also groups of itinerant entertainers presenting shows of masques, acrobatics, dance and music. Finally, the Buddhist and shamanists, engaged in musical practices that were different from all those mentioned so far.

Despite the many genres that were born and developed during this long era (the Joseon dynasty ended in officially in 1905, practically in 1897), overall Korean *gugak* still has overreaching characteristics. Different from the music Western audiences are used to, it employs a pentatonic scale, and uses a set of rhythms and modes with a linear system that

is substantially nonharmonic, characterized by variable pitches accompanying free transpositions. What this means is that to a Western, or simply modern ear, *gugak* sounds like alien improvisation.

1.3.2 *Yuhaengga*, the Japanese rule and the post-Liberation Period

Japan's protectorate over Korea started in 1905. Admittedly, Japan's presence in Korea started way before that. The nineteenth century in Korea is riddled with numerous efforts of the Japanese to conquer Korea's territory. This was especially true from 1868, when Meiji Japan started its path of modernization. Naturally, Korea soon appeared in the radar of a nation who had the great ambition to overtake the entire Asian continent. Various diplomatic and political events bring to Korea losing its identity to Japan in 1910, when the territory fully and officially became a colony. One of the relevant causes of Korea's tragedy was that Japan had managed to create a fierce military power, which led to the complete defeat of both the Chinese empire (weakened by the boxer's revolt) and the Russians (which fought meaninglessly against the Japanese between 1904 and 1905), competitors in the rush to annex the Korean peninsula. Moreover, the last years of the Joseon dynasty are characterized by kings with almost no real power, practically unable to resist the disturbing forces coming from the outside. Consequently, when King Kojong tried to send a delegation of literati to the West, hoping to obtain support in defense of the independency of Korea, naturally it was for naught. Ultimately, in 1910, Korea's Prime Minister Yi Wanyong and Japanese governor for the Korean territory Masatake Terauchi signed the treaty who would signify the end of the existence of Korea. It is understandable, then, that this day is remembered in the history of Korea as the *nalaga eobseo jideon nal* (나라가 없어 지던 날), the day in which the motherland disappeared.

With the Japanese regime came the first, systematic entrance of Western culture in the Korean peninsula. Especially in the cities, Western popular culture and music rapidly spread among the population. Admittedly, Western culture (and especially, music) was not foreign to Koreans at the time. Indeed, the 1592-1598 war against the Japanese for the first time brought Christian missionaries in the peninsula, and their presence attuned the Korean

ear to the new scales and melodies of Western music. Nevertheless, it is through Japan and its modern culture, already a *pastiche* of Western influences and Chinese tradition, that institutionalized 'Westerness' for Koreans. Again, this change happened quite exclusively among the elite, to which education to Western *gusto* soon became an imposition from the Japanese government. The *yangban*, once fond of formal and refined music, soon professed great love to whatever educated Japanese people seemed to like. Folk music and, especially, the music of itinerant performers (who were, since the Joseon period, *cheonmin*), were yet again degraded to nothing but noise. On the contrary, the lower strata of society would consider all types of Western music, from military marches to *bel canto*, bizarre, if not outright repulsive. Consequently, *nongak* remained deeply rooted in the countryside, albeit with many local variations that enhanced divisions among the poorer. Ultimately, Western, European music was the sound of power and authority; it was too educated for the majority of the Korean population, who remained illiterate.

It is at this point in time that the European soundscape influences the Asian one, creating new genres of music. *Changga* (창가, lit. "choral song") is one example of this. It can be considered as an amalgamation of American hymns, European anthems, Western folk tunes, and Japanese choral music. Ultimately, *changga* was a lot of things, but surely it was not *gugak*, and it was not *minyo*, despite the strong folk influences. In fact, because of the diaspora that characterizes the history of twentieth century Korea, many Korean folktales and songs were not systematically preserved. Exemplary is the fact that one of the most popular and representative examples of Korean *changga* is not a Korean song, but the American "My Darling Clementine", translated in Korean. Politics soon became a fundamental aspect of *changga*, which obtained the status of music of the resistance. Obviously, the Japanese rule reacted by banning that which was considered delinquent *changga*; censorship was ever-present during the colonial period. Indeed, the Japanese rule in Korea is remembered by history as brutal in the entirety of the forty-five years it lasted. Technically, these years are divided into three phases: the 1910-20, characterized by the attempt to oppress the very identity of Korea and incorporate it in Japan's; the 1920-30, when Japan opted for an "enlightened" management of the country, after forceful

incorporation failed to produce meaningful results; and the years of the World War II, riddled with massacres and abuse. Many Koreans were forced to left the country, and organize various forces of opposition from abroad. At the same time, Japanese rule in the peninsula got to the point of forcing Koreans to replace their native language with Japanese; in 1939, the Japanese government mandated that all Koreans change their names to Japanese ones. In 1935, Korean governmental officials and students were all forced to attend to *shinto* ceremonies, which meant the imposition of a specific religious creed on a population that had so far seen the blooming of various cults.

At the same time, the new genres of *gagok* (가곡), extremely Western influenced solo singing, and *tongyo* (통교, "children's song"), started spreading in the peninsula. *Tongyo*'s pioneering song was Yun Kukyong's 1924 "Pandal" (판달, lit. "half moon"), which employs the pentatonic scale and is performed in a 6/8 time; a rhythm that is familiar to those still unused to Western-style music. Nonetheless, all of these genres (*changga, gagok* and *tongyo*) remained quite exclusive to the upper echelons of society, and strongly influenced by sentiments of political subversion.

The forced Western (musical, but not exclusively) education imposed by the Japanese on Korean elite offspring meant the start of a generation attuned to Western sounds. One that, inevitably, would grow to find *gugak* "bizarre and repulsive"; this time inevitably marks the end of *gugak*'s supremacy. Soon, Western-influenced music would grow to surpass not only *gugak*, but even 'unfiltered' Western music. Western-influenced Korean music is called *yuhaengga* (유행가), or *sin kayo* (신 카요). Yet, popular music is often difficult to define. "Popular" can signify something less prestigious—and interestingly, the common Korean term for popular music is indeed *daejung umak* (태준 음악), which means "mass music". The term 'mass' sets a strong distinction between refined, elite music and the one listened to by the vulgar and low. Additionally, "popular" is also meant to identity a music that is listened to as a form of entertainment, to accompany conversation and festivity. Thus, 'popular' is the opposite of 'artistic', and art music is that which one listens to in contemplation.

Because ‘popular’ music entertains, it has to be universally enjoyable. Consequently, popular music is simple, ephemeral and inferior—and naturally easier to sell. The spreading of popular music is deeply and inherently intertwined with the industrialization and commercialization of art, and specifically, of music. It is not by chance that popular music became widely appreciated by Koreans; in fact, it could often be heard in theatres and cafés. Unlike *changga* and the other new genres that sprouted during this time, *yuhaengga* was the music of the lower strata of society. Because the entertainment business was intimately connected with less than legitimate businesspeople (if not, full blown *yakuza* and other various types of gangsters), *yuhaengga* was often associated to sex, drugs dealing and hanging out with mobsters. Thus, it was seen as inherently lower, and the upper strata of society preferred to steer clear from it.

Nevertheless, popular music needs technology, to make it easy to reproduce. Such technology was imported in Korea by the Japanese in the 1920s, when SP records, gramophones and projectors were introduced. In 1927, the first radio broadcast started. Now, perhaps, it is appropriate to open an economic parenthesis. Under Japanese rule, Korea starts a path of economic growth: per capita GDP rose about 52%, from USD 745 to USD 1,094. Moreover, while it is true that most of the population remained employed in the agrarian sector (which still in 1953 made up 47.3% of the country’s GDP), Korea became progressively more industrialized. Industry growth fueled economic growth and foreign trade. Cities were soon filled by *yuhaengga*, which remained quite universal in sound, mixing Korean, Japanese and Western *gusto* in a unique way that appealed to a new, urban audience. In themes, *yuhaengga* was mainly about private and sentimental issues, such as lost love and other nonpolitical themes. This differentiated it from the heavily political *changga*, even though some listeners still found anti-Japanese hints in *yuhaengga*. This being said, one has to remember that *yuhaengga* was ultimately a Japanese genre. In fact, most examples of early *yuhaengga* were nothing more than translations of Japanese *ryukoka* (流行歌, lit. “popular song”); yet another example of the impressive influences Japan had on Korea despite the resistance to its rule in the peninsula. As it often happens

with cultural flows, influence was not a one-way road. Korean contributions to the Japanese soundscape were substantial as well. One example is represented by the Japanese composer Koga Masao, who incorporated Korean elements in his "Koga Melody". Many Koreans who ended up finding themselves in Japan, either by choice or forcefully, adopted Japanese names and became popular Japanese musicians.

Joseon-era genres, such as *pansori* and *minyo*, did not die completely either. *Sin minyo* (신민요), a fusion of tradition folk and the new *yuhaengga*, is but an evolution of Joseon-era *minyo*. The essence of *sin minyo*, despite the great diversity of the songs that were said to belong to this genre, was an inherent link to the countryside and its agrarian elements, accompanied by strong feelings of nostalgia. Still, *sin minyo* too was not able to escape being influenced by the West and Japan; *sin minyo* was, ultimately, another of the many faces of *yuhaengga*. In the meanwhile, other genres arrived in Korea as well: American jazz, French chanson and Latin music. Following the example of the Japanese, the first Korean-managed record label was established: Okeh Records. Its manager, Yi Chol, was also the one to assemble a series of singers to organize the first concerts and musical contests. Soon enough, Korean singers started dispersing to China, Manchuria and elsewhere in Asia to export the music of the peninsula. Another genre that came up during this period is *kokumin kayō* (国民歌謡, lit. "national song") and its variation *gunkoku kayō* (軍国歌謡, lit. "military song"). Both very similar to *yuhaengga*, they were promoted by the Japanese authorities to spread positive messages about the otherwise oppressive Japanese rule.

Despite this impressive variety of genres that started to convey in the melting pot that is *yuhaengga*, music remained mostly Eastern in that it still employed a pentatonic scale and the 6/8 time of *jangdan* (장단), the traditional three beats rhythm of Joseon music. Only with the end of the Japanese rule after the defeat of the country in the World War II and the beginning of the US presence in the country did the soundscape of Korea start to change. The Americans arrived in the country after 1945, when the last Japanese governor, Abe Nobuyuki, left the control of the peninsula to American general J. Hodge. Korea's

economy, despite its initial leap towards modernization, was deeply and negatively impacted. Not only was the country heavily dependent on the stability of Japan's economy, but also, during the last phase of the war, the Japanese had left Korea with nothing but deteriorated plants, machines and equipment. Initially, it was established by the winning forces that Korea would not become part of any one government, but that it would be assisted in independently forming its own. Nevertheless, the US refused to support the temporary government who had formed in Shanghai, with Kim Ku as its leader. What really did happen was that, by the end of WWII, the then-USSR and the US substantially divided Korea in two areas of respective influence. Consequently, in 1946 the USSR created a 'popular court' in the North of the country, as the US established a 'democratic court' in the South. This symbolizes the start of what will eventually lead to the Korean War. While a communist government started forming in the North, the Americans in the South used violence to get rid of all and every opposition. Many citizens of the South were unhappy with the American administration, often strongly elitist, and thus revolts often spurred in the territory–they were systematically repressed with the employment of "death squadrons", and the blame of their existence pinned on the communist North. As the American felt they were losing control of the situation in Korea, they decided to arbitrarily organize democratic elections in the country. The elections, which happened in 1948, were not accepted by the communist North. Consequently, the North refused to participate, and instead proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), in opposition to the American-institutionalized Republic of Korea (ROK). Still, both governments (the communist North led by Kim Ilsung and the American south led by Yi Sungman) yearned to conquer the other side. A war was the natural conclusion to this extreme tension. The Korean war started in 1950, and, given the deep interrelation between the events that happened post-WWII in Korea and the Cold War, it involved many global superpowers. It ended only in 1953, when the North Koreans sign an armistice with the Americans. The result of the armistice was the definitive separation of the two countries, to whom was forbidden any contact with the other. Still today, North and South Korea have an active military force and an unstable diplomatic relationship. The war left South Korea with production levels that averaged 28.8%, and were lower than those of 1939.

Most of the industrial production of the peninsula had been organized in the North: about 54% of the industrial output and 86% of heavy industry production was concentrated in the Northern territories. South Korea mainly had light industries, the majority of which saw their plants completely destroyed, along a quarter of the entire infrastructure of the country. Consumption naturally dropped: from USD 71 in 1949-50 to USD 50 in 1952-53. By the end of the Korean War, South Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world.

With the liberation from the authoritarian Japan and the separation from the communist North Korea, willing or not South Korea had to turn to the United States as an example to emulate. Still, strong class divisions persisted. Given that the elite had lost its main status symbol with the land reform of the 1950s, they had to find a new symbol of their status. This became the role of education, which was strongly influenced by Western standards. Traditional Korean culture was not regarded as refined; on the contrary, it was European classicals that radiated prestige and sophistication.

In popular music, South Korea was soon overtaken by American sounds, characterized by a bright timbre and upbeat lyrics. After all, after the liberation Japanese cultural contents were banned, and with the destruction brough by the Korean War, only the Americans and what they fancied remained as available consumers of and types of cultural products. Consequently, South Korean musicians ended up learning how to play what the American soldiers asked them to play. American music quickly spread also thanks to live shows, and the diffusion of the radio and the television, which aired programs mainly transmitted by American organizations. Nevertheless, music was far from being a daily thing in the 1950s, when South Korea was a poor, underdeveloped country. Most people had no hope to own a phonograph, especially in the countryside. This meant that traditional genres such as *pansori* and *nongak* remained popular, as well as *sin minyo* and *tongyo*. South Koreans in the countryside still found American music foreign, and rather preferred a musicality that was more reminiscent of colonial, if not Joseon, Korea.

After the Korean War, the Yi regime (1948-1960) started a process of "translation" of American popular songs and classics into Korean. Yi was not a loved ruler, and as such, it is understandable that he opted for an harsh process of censoring music that had even the semblance of wanting to oppose his rule. The impact of the American soundscape was initially limited, but strong enough in the cities. For example, light music, which was called *gyeong eumag* (경음막), was extremely popular in urban South Korea. Despite the presence of American camp towns, though, most American songs still arrived in South Korea through Japanese music (which was mostly illegally consumed and pirated, given the ban on Japanese cultural products).

1.3.3 *Trot*, and the Park Regime

The Yi regime ended in 1963, with the *coup d'etat* carried on by Park Chunghee. Yi Sungman had actually been forced to resign already in 1960. In that same year, he had yet again won the election with unfair means; to keep governing the country, he had in 1954 emended the Constitution to get rid of the limitation of presidential mandates. The discovery of the body of a student, killed during one of the many anti-regime manifestations, ignited a rebellion which involved practically all strata of society.

During this period, trot (트로트) became the most popular genre. Trot was of European inspiration; it was played with European instruments, which frequently consisted of an orchestra. Its presentation was urban and modern: singers often wore Western clothing. The typical singers was Korean, but had trained in Japan and European classics, or had performed jazz or other Wester-inflected popular genres. Trot songs were often composed in the pentatonic minor scale, of Japanese inspiration, and had a two- or four-beat rhythm. The lyrics were exclusively in Korean, and sang in a style that mimicked that of *pansori*, with a bright timbre and high pitch (at least higher than that of Japanese *enka* (演歌), to which trot is often compared). The themes were melancholic and emotional; stories were often about leaving the countryside, lasting friendships and romances or catastrophic breakups and family troubles.

In the 1980s, economic growth and urbanization made it possible for everyone in South Korea to own a radio, and especially a television. The Park regime mark the beginning of an era of steady economic growth for the country. The military regime conceived a first five-year plan with the objective to turn South Korea in a fully industrialized country. During 1962-1966 annual GDP growth averaged +8.5%. A second five-year plan (167-1971) was developed with the intention of creating a more sound infrastructure for the country; at this time, South Korea's export soared, topping the USD 1 billion mark in 1971. In a richer society, trot was able to spread among all strata thanks to television broadcasting and music shows, which increasingly featured trot singers as opposed to light pop (which was mainly featured in KBS' pioneering *Sho Sho Sho*). Nevertheless, trot was often accused of having a distinct Japanese color, being apparently so similar to *enka*, and was soon subjected to strict censorship. Japanese influences in trot were inevitable, both because trot came from *yuhaengga* (and *yuhaengga* was distinctively Japanese), and because of the deep history between the two countries. One shouldn't forget that Japanese culture remained widely consumed by Koreans, despite censorship. Consequently, albeit the hatred for the oppressive Japanese regime and the intense anti-Japanese policy enacted by the newborn South Korean State, it shouldn't surprise that South Korean culture was still heavily dependent on Japanese heritage. Additionally, unlike Yi, who is said to have had a visceral hate for anything Japanese, Park had been trained in the Japanese military academy and, thus, apparently had a peculiar taste for Japanese music. It doesn't sound too odd then that trot-singer Yi Mija, despite having much of her production banned, was invited by the President to the Blue House to sing for him. Regardless, not all trot was banned. Only *waesaeg* (왜색, lit. "Japanese color") trot could hardly escaped censorship. Yet, trot was popular because of its high degree of variety: some of it was closer to *sin minyo*, some other to American pop and rock, with a singing style that was similar to *gagok* than to *enka*. This type of trot had no reason to be banned, and consequently, could legally gain traction among Korean (and not surprisingly, Japanese) audiences.

Other genres existed during the Park Regime. For example, rock, called "group sounds", appeared in the 1960s thanks to the Americans, and gave birth to Sin Junghyeon. Sin

debuted in 1964 with a rock sound very reminiscent of the early Beatles. His music was loud, with fast singing and upbeat pitch and tempo, pronounced bass lines and percussive beats. Everything was strikingly non-Korean, not only the music but the fashion he donned as well. Sin was innovative; it was his creativity that introduced progressive American music to South Korea, from light pop to ballads and psychedelic rock and funk. Moreover, Sin was also renowned for producing and composing for other artists, such as the Pearl Sisters, who were the first to add dance routines to their light pop songs. Obviously, because of the inherent "deviancy" of this extremely American style, South Korean rock was banned by the government, with the suspicion that these musicians were secretly sending messages and signals to North Korea. Interestingly, not only music, but even rock fashion was banned: in 1970, having long hair became illegal, and in 1973 women were forbidden to wear miniskirts. Sin was imprisoned in 1976, after the 1975 Presidential Emergency Decree Number 9 banned 222 South Korean songs and 261 foreign records.
Folk music, instead, emerged as an alternative, anti-government genre. It soon became the genre of the politicized, university youth, as it embodied the ideals of wholeness and integrity by having a solo singer who was also the writer of the songs and the player of the sole instrument, the guitar played while sitting on a barrel (from whence the name, 통기타, *tong kita*, barrel guitar). Melodies of folk were accessible because they were simple and mellow.

Ultimately, music during the Park Regime was under strict surveillance by the government, always on the lookout for subversive messages hidden in wailing lyrics, upbeat rhythms, or nostalgic melodies. In an attempt to gain popularity, the government came up with *geonjeon kayo* (건전 카요, lit. "healthy popular songs"), which were said to have been written by President Park himself. Despite the strict censorship, people in South Korea maintained a taste for an ample variety of genres. By the end of Park's regime, yet another, new genre of post-trot popular music emerged: Cho Yongpil's rock-trot, and Hye Uni's pop ballads.

1.3.4 The Seo Taiji Revolution

The Park Regime ended in 1979, when President Park was assassinated by his once friend Kim Jaegyu. After more *coup d'etat* and armed confrontations which closely resembled the events of the Korean War, the country was left in the hands of Chun Doohan. Chun tried almost immediately to adopt a policy of tight control over the media, but unlike Park, he lacked the authority to rule by force. Consequently, he came up with the infamous '3S policy' of screens, sex and sports to enslave a population who kept growing progressively tired of the violent lack of democracy in the country. In 1982, the nocturnal curfew was lifted to allow people to assist to the first, widely popular, erotic South Korean movie, Madame Aema (애마부인, *Aema buin*). Entertainment was widely encouraged, and even government-sanctioned. *Geonjeon kayo* became peppy, upbeat, and fundamentally mainstream pop. Despite the consistent unrest, the dramatic juxtaposition of poverty and military rule that controlled everything, televisions displayed the image of a tranquil, if not static, country. All programs aired where depoliticized, and meant to appeal to the wider population. This was the basis for the creation of an integrated national audience, which South Korea had so far lacked. General preferences shaped into slow, virtuosic singing with music composed in the pentatonic scale.

Economically, the country kept growing. In the five-years between 1972 and 1980, South Korea was fully committed to catching up with other countries. The government focused on developing strategic heavy and chemical industries (HCI). Despite the oil shocks of the 1980s, which hampered South Korea's growth, per capita GDP surged from USD 289 in 1971 to USD 1,597 in 1980. The 1988 Olympic Games, held in Seoul, brought by a new intense wave of exports, which was also aided by the depreciation of the dollar, to which the Korean *won* was pegged.

The ballads of the 1980s started incorporating folk music's simplicity and colloquialism into post-trot. Ballads were especially popular at this time, as an alternative option for those who weren't particularly 'into' trot. Away from the television screen, the new *minjung kayo* (민중 카요, lit. "people's song") also surfaced as an amalgam of folk and popular songs

expressing protest against the authoritarian regime. This genre was intimately connected with social protest, and specifically with university students that were involved in anti-government activities. *Minjung kayo* rapidly became part of the taste of South Koreans thanks to the first airing in 1977 of an annual university song festival, called *Taehak Kayoje*, by MBC, one of the two television stations that had survived the purge of media companies enacted by Chun right after obtaining power. In the college area, group sounds also survived, albeit donning the new robe of soft-rock.

At this time, young people finally became a distinct social category with discretionary spending power, and thus the ability to influence markets with their own preferences. Up to this point, when poverty was a distinct characteristic of the wider population in South Korea, most households held exclusively one television set, or one radio. Thus, given that one television means that only one person get to choose what will be watched (and the others have to comply) it follows that in a society that values age so highly, young people had no way to influence what the family watched. Incidentally, the balladeers Hye and Lee Seonhui were popular because they were able to meet the demands of all age groups. Additionally, technology that allowed one to listen to music privately, like MP3s and headphones, either did not exist yet or was not available to the general population in South Korea. Only with the enrichment of the country did the youth finally gain the financial means necessary to buy records, and listen to them with additional phonographs the families were able to afford. With the newfound financial power also came an era of less serious, more fun-loving youth; a striking difference from the serious and sincere students that were their parents, who lived considering fun a mere frivolity.

Additionally, the 1980s see the introduction of the music videos, and MTV. After all, the K-Pop we know today is nothing but an evolution of what Michael Jackson did on MTV, after its launch in 1981, with songs like *Thriller* and *Billie Jean*. South Korea finally starts seeing the first precursors of K-Pop: peppy songs with meaningless lyrics, a fun and cool attitude, glittering clothes, energic and dynamic dancing. All these elements were visibly different from what South Korea was used to, with still and soulful trot.

In 1987, the group Sobangcha (소방차, lit. “fire truck”) debuted with the song *Eojesbam iyagi* (어젯밤 이야기, lit. “Story of Last Night”), and K-Pop was officially born. In 1988, the massive political protests and mobilization of the previous year, which involved the entire population, finally brought by the strongly yearned for democracy to South Korea. In popular music, a revolution of similar impact happened in 1992, the year of the televised debut of Seo Taiji and the Boys (서태지와 아이들, *Seo Taiji wa Aidul*) with the song “Nan Arayo” (난 아라요, lit. “I know”). Despite receiving the lowest score and harshest criticism from the judges of the show, Nan Arayo sold 1.7 million copies and remained South Korea’s top-selling song for seventeen consecutive weeks. Seo Taiji and the Boys’ performance featured rapping and break dancing, and was not too dissimilar from contemporaneous American popular music. For once, it was not in the pentatonic scale, like much of the music that had so far dominated the South Korean scene. Actually, post-Nan Arayo, the use of the pentatonic scale started to steadily decline. Seo Taiji abandoned tha style of singing that was characteristics of trot, and started a trend of adding rap to pop songs, one which is very much still present in modern K-Pop. Even the fashion changed, from conservative attires to the bling and baggy of the hip-hop aesthetic. With just a song, Seo Taiji not only legitimated rap and hip-hop in South Korea (both genres had in fact already been introduced in the country), but also narrowed the perceived gap between the country and a superpower like the United States. Moreover, they singlehandedly brought R&B to South Korea, which practically did not exist in the country before 1992.

Seo Taiji and the Boys were a rare example of self-produced and self-promoted group, politically independent and musically innovative. Their songs actively challenged the status quo. Moreover, Seo Taiji was an avid fan of American groups, such as the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Rage Against the Machine. With the liberalization of study abroad in the 1980s, many South Koreans moved to the United States to study. These students, along the diasporic South Koreans, were able to experience the vibrant music scene of the States first hand, and come back to the country with the newfound knowledge. It is then easy to understand how the new sounds from the US, a country which many South Koreans had come to idolize, made their way in Seo Taiji’s songs.

The Seo Taiji Revolution culminated in the production and consequent debut of idol groups. The first of these was the 1996-debuted H.O.T (High Five of Teenagers), managed by SM Entertainment, which was founded by Lee Sooman in 1995. The group's debut song, *Jeonsa ui huye* (전사의 후예, lit. "Warrior's Descendant"), still retains hues of the polemic *gusto* of Seo Taiji, with its criticism of schoolyard violence and unsympathetic parents. But their next song, Candy, is exemplary of the immortal classic that is "bubblegum pop". The members of the group sing nonsense lyrics, happily bouncing around. H.O.T ultimately created a social phenomenon, as they were the first group to have a fanbase, in the modern sense of the word. Merchandise of the group was systematically sold; boys even started emulating the hair style and fashion of the members of the group. In the wake of H.O.T.'s popularity, similar groups followed; soon, trot and ballads would be quite entirely swept away.

1.4 BigHit Entertainment & BTS

Defining the perimeter of K-Pop is a difficult task. A first hypothesis ventures that K-Pop is simply Korean popular music; this would force the inclusion of traditional genres such as *yuhaengga* and trot in the realm of K-Pop. But to many of K-Pop's fans, this inclusion would be absurd. K-Pop clearly identifies an entirely new genre, one born from the influence of J-Pop and the revolutionary impact of Seo Taiji and the Boys on the one hand; on the other, from a business, and specifically, an export imperative that overtook the South Korean music industry in the 1990s.

Musically, K-Pop is substantially idol and dance-pop, infused with aromas of R&B, rap, hip hop, and even jazz. All of its songs present substantially the same structure: intro, first verse, pre-chorus, chorus, second verse, repetition of pre-chorus and chorus, mid 8, chorus and hook. Usually, the songs will be upbeat, high-pitched and bright-timbred, with rhythmic bass and sixteen-beat hip hop or synthesizer-driven techno four beats. A rap part will almost definitely be featured (usually either in the chorus or the mid 8), as well as a dance break where expertly trained idols can showcase their coordinated signature dance moves and precise choreographies.

Perhaps more importantly though, K-Pop is a export business. An export imperative is somehow culturally embedded in South Korea; during Park's regime, the country's economic policy was to close the country to foreign products, and at the same time create incentives for local industries to sell their own production abroad. When K-Pop started making its way among traditional music genres in the 1990s, it was through the establishment of entertainment agencies, *de facto* companies who excelled in the formation, production and marketing of solo and group acts. Among these, Lee Sooman's SM Entertainment (1995), Park Jinyoung's JYP Entertainment (1997) and Yang Hyunsuk, one of Seo Taiji's Boys, YG Entertainment (1996) are still considered the Big Three in a highly concentrated industry. Still, these companies are not *chaebol*, and the market is not a monopoly; on the contrary, competition is extremely high, with around 50 groups debuting

each year. Around them, many other smaller companies exist, a few examples being represented by CUBE Entertainment, Pledis Entertainment, CJ Entertainment & Media, FNC Entertainment, and Big Hit Entertainment. K-Pop's business attitude reflects the attitude of the whole country: ever since Park's militaristic rule, Korean business has always seen their own market as too small to herald sufficient profits. For cultural production, this is due to the rooted unwillingness of the government to protect copyrights. This means that, unlike Japan where copyrights are strictly enforced, piracy was a normal occurrence in the first years of life of the K-Pop industry; and piracy meant that the price of legitimate records had to be lowered to appeal to customers who had unstable streams of income, especially after the 1997 financial crisis. Lower cost for records and songs still persists today. A single track has a nominal cost of around KRW 600 (which is USD 0.52); considering the effective purchasing system and the various discounts, the actual price drives down to KRW 30-50 (USD 0.03-0.04). This means that Korean people can legally buy 250 songs with the same money it would take Americans to buy a single CD on iTunes in 2012. Still, in 2002 the South Korean music industry had a value of merely USD 296 millions; nothing compared to the USD 12.6 billion of the United States, or even the USD 5.4 billion of Japan. K-Pop agencies, then, felt compelled to find fame and fortune abroad; which, altogether, fit perfectly within the push of the government for the global spreading of Korean culture as a way to achieve soft power and become, then, relevant in the international stage.

Big Hit Entertainment (today, HYBE) was founded by Bang Sihyuk in 2005. Before that, Bang had worked as a producer with JYP Entertainment, penning many hits of popular boy-group g.o.d and other JYP acts such as Wonder Girls and Rain. Initially, the company managed some of JYP's trainees and group under co-management agreements between the two companies. This was the case of Big Hit's first soloist, Lim Jeonghee, and group, 2AM. Nevertheless, as the company still didn't have a clear strategy yet, it struggled to gain a steady foot in the industry. K-Pop's industry strong concentration means that, unless the company is one of the aforementioned Big Threes, with ample valuable contacts and resources, it is difficult to market and train singers. Normally, the training for a new trainee

costs an agency millions of dollars. SM Entertainment revealed that the training of BoA, SM's most long-living soloist, costed USD 3 million; usually, a single trainee costs USD 27,000 per month. It is then understandable that, unless the trainee is able to earn as much after debut, the business of harvesting K-Pop idols is extremely costly, and consequently risky. Not many companies are able to succeed, especially when competition is high and slots to appear in music competitions are limited. Music competition, aired weekly on South Korean television, are one of the primary forms of advertisement for K-Pop acts.

Nevertheless, the struggle faced by Big Hit in its first years of life prompted the company to reassess its resources and strategies. Consequently, the company and its employees stopped all managing operations in 2011 to focus on market research, to understand what exactly was the public expecting from an idol group. At the same time, the company analyzed its competitors, understanding their best practices in order to reproduce them, and transform the typical K-Pop system, substantially invented by Lee Sooman, in a sustainable business model.

It is after this 2011 effort that the idea of BTS (방탄소년단, Bangtan Sonyeondan, lit. "Bulletproof Boy Scouts") was born. At the time, Big Hit was about twenty times smaller than SM Entertainment. Admittedly, Big Hit already had plans for the member who would become the group's leader, Kim Namjoon (RM). Indeed, Bang had heard one of RM's demos, and was so impressed that he felt it was his personal mission to debut him. But his initial plans for RM were to create a purely hip hop act; the idea of the idol group only came after 2011, and at that point Big Hit started looking for individuals who would complement RM's talents. Vocal members Jin (Kim Seokjin), Jimin (Park Jimin), Jungkook (Jeon Jungkook) and V (Kim Taehyung) were consequently added to the proto-group made of RM, j-hope (Jung Hoseok) and SUGA (Min Yoongi), who were originally part of that hip hop concept Bang had envisioned for RM. With this formation, BTS debuted in 2013 with their first album, still heavily hip hop oriented: 2 Cool 4 Skool. The group was received without too much enthusiasm by the South Korean public. Still, the group started a massive use of social media, which will later prove pivotal to their success.

Through a group account, BTS posted pictures of their daily lives and interacted with fans. They were thus seen as real human beings, as opposed to the manufactured idols that came from the other agencies. The group differentiated itself from the competition also through their mission: they wanted to give voice to the abused youth, and create music in which they could find solace. Many saw this as an effort to create a more thoughtful tone within the exhausting energy of K-Pop. Yet, it wasn't until BTS' third album, Skool Luv Affair, that fans started noticing the group. Maybe more impressively, by the fourth album (Dark & Wild), the group even garnered a foothold in the US market, with a force unlike that of those who had tried conquering the American market before. Indeed, JYP Entertainment Rain and Wonder Girls had tried, with lukewarm success; and the very same PSY, who in 2012 became a global superstar, was more of a fad than a long lasting presence in the Western soundscape. On the contrary, BTS harvested their success, and by the YEAR release of Fire, they managed to find their way into the American market. Fire was specifically built to appeal to the American market; as Bang himself put it, it wasn't a song for the South Korean market, but one that needed to sound more American than Korean. Starting 2016, with the album Wings, Bang's strategic line for BTS finally becomes that of overtaking the West, even surpassing One Direction's undoubted impact.

BTS' sales grew to constitute much of Big Hit's total revenues. When the group debuted in 2013, Big Hit registered a total of USD 4 millions in total revenues; the figures are, today, up to USD 489 millions. A recent study also attested that BTS contributed USD 4.9 billion to South Korea's GDP. Big Hit went public in 2020, with a valuation of USD 4.1 billion. They acquired competitors Pledis Entertainment and Source Music (managing famous groups like Seventeen and G-Friend), debuted new groups (TXT, and Enhypen, which is co-managed with CJ Ent.), and established offices in the United States. Recently, the renamed HYBE also bought Scooter Braun's Ithaca Holdings, that houses artists like Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande. The acquisition meant the introduction of Scooter Braun in the ranks of HYBE's upper management. By exploiting the synergies between the two entities, Bang has an opportunity to further solidify BTS' position in the global market.

According to Scooter Braun, this merger should enhance exponentially the opportunities for K-Pop, and bring by a revolution of the entirety of the global music industry.

What is evident at the moment, is that HYBE (not unlike its national competitors) employs a value chain which is strongly globalized. All South Korean music agencies offer a package of services to their artists, from management to marketing, distribution, tour organization, finding sponsorships; these same services are offered by global labels such as Universal, Sony and Warner by employing people from external service. The real difference is that all that is needed to produce and market a musical product is harvested and kept 'in-house'. Not surprisingly, many South Korean agencies have producers, backup dancers, choreographers, video makers and so on as exclusive employees, and not mere independent contractors who are called whenever there is a specific project to realize. These employees, fundamental to the creation of the final K-Pop products, come from all parts of the world. Figure 2 shows the parties involved in the value chain of the Big Three (SM, YG and JYP) for some of their major acts, demonstrating how K-Pop can indeed be seen as a global project which involves local components as well.

Figure 2 – The actors of K-Pop's global value chain

MNEs	Producers	Composers	Choreographers	Distributor
	Name/ K-pop Singers	Name/ K-pop Singers	Name/ K-pop Singers	
SM Entertainment	Teddy Riley/ Girls Generation Polow da Don/ Girls Generation	Busbee/ Girls Generation Alex James/ Girls Generation KalleEngstrom/ Girls Generation Oslo Recordings/ Super Junior Jeff Hoeppner/ f(x) Thomas Troelsen/ f(x) WellemLaseroms/ f(x) NaoKanata/ BoA RyojiSonoda/ BoA, TVXQ Thomas Troelsen/ SHINee	Nick Bass/ Super Junior, SHINee Misha Gabriel/ BoA, SHINee	Youtube
YG Entertainment	Will.i.am/ 2NE1 Rodney "Darkchild" Jerkins/ SE7EN	Daishi Dance/ BigBang Nagao Dai/ SE7EN		
JYP Entertainment	Nick Cannon/ WonderGirls	Claude Kelly/ WonderGirls	Jonte/ WonderGirls	

Source: Oh, I. (2013). The Globalization of K-Pop: Korea's Place in the Global Music Industry. Korea Observer 44, pp.389-409.

Scholars call this a strategy of glo-lo-globalization. Initially, K-Pop companies outsource the production of music to global composers (often Swedish, American and British); they then adapt the product to the genre of K-Pop, for example by changing the lyrics in Korean; finally, the turn to global distributor like YouTube (fundamental element to K-Pop's worldwide success) to reach a wider audience. Such a strategy needs the adaptation to the local to be an element of stark product differentiation. K-Pop agencies usually achieve this through the number of singers stages at a time (usually, groups are made from four to even twelve members); physical attractiveness; and powerful and coordinated choreographies.

1.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter offered an overview of the history of South Korea from the Joseon dynasty of 1392 to today's Republic of South Korea. Specifically, historical events were linked with the evolution of music: from the traditional pentatonic-scale genres to the modern dance-pop music that is steadily overtaking the global market. In particular, it was highlighted how South Korea came to interact with other countries (namely, Japan and the United States), and how this impacted music to the point of, ultimately, erasing traditional Korean sounds to the soundscape of the country. As Lie (2015) puts it, there is at this point nothing Korean about K-Pop–or rather, nothing musically Korean about K-Pop. Indeed, pre-K-Pop Korean music, even the popular genres of *yuhaengga*, *sin minyo* and trot have nothing in common with K-Pop, which is rather a mixture of dance-pop, R&B, and hip hop; all genres coming from the Western soundscape. Perhaps interestingly, the majority of K-Pop is bubbly and meaningless, definitely lacking that dimension of political protest that was typical all of Korean music genres pre-K-Pop.

It is interesting to note here the intricate relationship that exists in South Korea between music and political power. This relationship is often complex to describe. In which peculiar way audiences relate music to specific political messages is mostly obscure (Pedelty and Keefe, 2010). Yet music is often used as propaganda, or perhaps most importantly, as a way to subjugate an entire population to the hegemony of a limited group. After all, "no hegemonic class can wield its power and its ideology in total arbitrariness, solely from above downward" (Canclini, 1993). In the context of South Korea's modern history, music has been used by the authoritarian military hegemony to assert control over the ruled majority of the population; even before that, music control had been used by the Japanese colonizers. It is understandable why authoritarian regimes would need control over musical production. Music has the peculiar ability to evoke and harness images, but most importantly emotions. Consequently, it can be a powerful tool of propaganda, and at the same time, of subversion. Music that created transgressive identities, such as *waesaeg* trot and rock in Park-governed South Korea, has to be kept under strict control. Although

naturally, this attitude heralds the formation of resistance music, expressing the discontent of the oppressed. Studies on rock, punk, rap, dance music suggested that not only is music escapism and entertainment, but also a way to create a space in which acts of resistance could be articulated (Street, 2003). Countering the hegemony of the ruling class, the ruled create their own spaces in which they can freely express their own visions of the world. What changes between the apparently linear progression from *gugak* to trot, where music has always been socially and politically pregnant, is that music becomes a product. It is not by chance that the Big Three of K-Pop all have their birth date in the 1990s. Creative industries produce goods that are governed by their realization value, rather than their own specific content and harmonious formation (Brecht and Suhrkamp). Adorno (1975) explains it quite clearly: "[The culture industry] forces together the spheres of high and low art, separated for thousands of years. The seriousness of high art is destroyed in speculation about its efficacy; the seriousness of the lower perishes with the civilizational constraints imposed on the rebellious resistance inherent within it as long as social control was not yet total". K-Pop, as a culture industry rather than a mass culture phenomenon (where the two currents are opposed, as speculated by Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947), does not need to be meaningful; it simply needs to be efficient, and thus profitable. It is perhaps natural that, after having achieved democratization in 1988, with a GDP that now rivaled that of global superpowers like the United States, South Korea music could finally 'retire' from its role of aid to political rebellion.

This brief recollection of South Korean music history finds the pre-conditions to the advent of K-Pop. In order to better summarize the results of this chapter, a PESTEL framework might be useful. PESTEL is a framework used to analyze the macro-environmental factors that influence an organization's performance. In this case, elements related to the areas of interest of the PESTEL framework (namely: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal) have been highlighted as having had an impact on the evolution of music in South Korea up to the point of K-Pop's appearance in the global music market. Thus, each area will be now reviewed based on the historical overview offered in this chapter.

Political factors are related to the impact the government has on the otherwise independent working of a market. In this case, political factors will be related to the historical events that shape the political system in South Korea. First, the division of the South from the North after the Korean War seemed necessary for K-Pop to be born. Only the forceful interaction with international superpowers that South Korea was subjected to because of its relation with the United States could lead to a decisive industrialization of the country. This industrialization allowed South Korea to start a journey of enrichment, so that people from the 1980s onwards were richer than pre-Korean War Koreans. Indeed, despite the 1997 Asian financial crisis dramatically overwhelmed South Korea, the country was still the quickest to repay its debt to the International Monetary Fund. A richer population means people have disposable income to invest in entertainment, and perhaps most importantly, that families now have money to spare and thus young people have the capacity to be a target market. K-Pop is music for the younger generation, and only with them as main spenders can it thrive.

Economic factors determine the performance of a country's economy (on the macro level), or of an industry performance (on the micro level). It was highlighted that, from the Japanese colonial rule, Korea started living a first period of economic development, which came with the forceful industrialization of the country. World War II and the subsequent Korean War left the country struggling, but the authoritarian regime of Park and Chun reorganized the country, investing heavily on the HCIs which lacked in South Korea after the separation from the North. By Seo Taiji's 1992 debut, the main contributors to South Korea's GDP were trade (28.6%) and industry (28.2%); agriculture, who had sustained the country up until the Japanese colonization, had dropped to 7.4% of GDP. South Korea's workers became richer, with average annual income raises up to USD 10,206 in 1998, and were generally more educated than their parents, given that literacy rate rose to 90% in 1987.

On the micro-level, K-Pop is, ultimately, an industry which is born on two pillars: the Johnny's *Jimusho aidoru* (アイドル) model; and the country's overall "export orientation",

which leads K-Pop agencies to strive to create a product that can easily be enjoyed globally. It is not by coincidence that many K-Pop agencies follow a G-L-G' mode of globalization, which practically implies adding local elements to a globally-engineered and then globally-distributed product in order to differentiate it from the competition. K-Pop's peculiar differentiation elements are the group formation, the chiseled physical attractiveness, and the perfectly executed choreographies; elements that are absent from non-Korean music.

Social factors embody characteristics of a population, such as customs, norms and demographic characteristics. K-Pop depends on the surge of the youth as a profitable target market. Young people became more fun-loving and carefree by the time idol music arrived in South Korea. The youth of the trot era, even those who found solace in the rebellious messages of rock, were not only poorer, but also more serious. Without the stability brought by industrial growth, K-Pop wouldn't have found a stable market to interact with. Most importantly, it possibly wouldn't have been able to find fertile grounds on which to saw the seeds of modern fandom culture which brings people to spend any sum of money for the idols they admire. It is interesting to note that, unlike pre- K-Pop music, which still could have been said to retain elements of the Confucianism that dominated South Korea, K-Pop is not Confucian at all. The liberalization of costumes that came with the fall of the Park regime allowed young people to adopt Western fashion, show skin and change their hair length and colors. It brought dancing to South Korea, which had been (with some exceptions) used to clothed, motionless trot singers up until the coming of Sobangcha in 1987. The freedom to be influenced by Western customs was paramount to K-Pop's evolution.

Technological factors pertain to technological innovations which end up having a positive (or negative) impact on the operations of an industry. One prerequisite to K-Pop's popularity boom is the investment infrastructure and technology that South Korea as a whole went through. In fact, the industrial policies implemented by the government from the Korean War to present times pursued not only import-substitution and export promotion, but also the development of an high-tech industry. Internet technologies and

specifically the advent of social media and Youtube play a fundamental part in the development of K-Pop. The marketing of idol groups rests heavily on creating a connection between the idol and the fan. Social media allows for the easy creation of a sense of "digintimacy", that is the concurrence of technologically rendered immediacy and cultural/physiological intimacy (Choi, 2015). Fans feel close to their favorite idols, they believe them to be their best friends despite not only having never had a conversation with them, but also even if they don't ever have the chance to see their idols in person. Moreover, it is common for music revolutions to be accompanied by technological revolutions as well. The era of K-Pop came with the MTV revolution, the advent of the MP3 and, eventually, of YouTube. YouTube, as explained by Oh and Lee (2013), was chosen by K-Pop companies as main distributor for their product because it allowed for easy exportation, despite the low profit margin. Still, because the low profit margin kept other players, such as Japanese and American music producers, wary of using YouTube, K-Pop was able to substantially built a stable position for itself in the YouTube environment.

Environmental factors include ecological and environmental aspects. In the case of South Korea, perhaps it is only relevant to highlight here the country's strategic geographical position, which has made it often the colonization objective of foreign forces. Despite the peninsula tradition of striving to remain closed off to foreign influence, it is thanks to the multiple foreign occupations that the country's music evolved with time and the influence of new traditions.

Legal factors specific laws that influence industry practices. K-Pop has not only been sustained by a lenient tax policy and industry subsidies, but also by a not so strictly enforced copyright law. Consequently, South Korean entertainment companies do not fear exploiting the new marketing opportunities offered by the new technologies, such as smartphones and the Internet. They allow the proliferation of fan-made translations and content, like the many dance covers videos or reaction videos that one can often find on YouTube or TikTok. These videos more often than not represent a clear violation of copyright laws. Nevertheless, South Korean companies allow these videos to exist because

they understand that, ultimately, they represent a viral (and thus powerful) marketing tool. According to Jin and Ryoo (2014), fan covers and dance videos have been a key factor in the global popularity of K-Pop. Additionally, one cannot forget to mention how the South Korean government, especially after the failure of the big *chaebol*s during the 1997 crisis, started a massive plan of investments (KRW 4,104.8 billion in 2013, accounting for 1.19% of government budget) in what South Koreans define as “cultural technologies”.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Methodology: Systematic Literature Review

To comprehensively analyze the current literature on K-Pop, we decided to follow Tranfield et al. (2003)'s systematic literature review (SLR) methodology. This choice was made as SLR allows for higher transparency in data collection and synthesis, resulting in a higher level of objectivity and reproducibility (Transfield et al.). Traditional, non-structured, literature review methodology, consisting in a subjective summary of existing literature, allows for the use of unrepresentative samples and unsystematic procedures, and is thus regarded as more "unscientific" (Murlow, 1994; Oakley, 2002). Moreover, the lack of systematization and transparency makes it easier for the researcher to fall victim to subjective biases while conducting a traditional literature review (Hodgkinson and Ford, 2014; Murlow, 1994). Conversely, SLR implies following a systematic methodology meant to synthetize knowledge coming from published contributions (Tranfield et al., 2003) by using a pre-defined process. Rather than simply summarizing the current literature, a SLR's objective is that of analyzing and comparing what has already been published on the topic (Jones and Gatrell, 2014). This ultimately results in a more thorough, objective review of existing studies, giving a broader understanding of current results and creating more solid foundations for future research (Kraus et al., 2020).

As noted by Kraus et al., there are multiple processes available to conduct a SLR, as indicated by different authors. Nevertheless, there are four main, reoccurring steps: *planning the review*; *identifying and evaluating the studies*; *extracting and synthetizing the data*; *disseminating the results*. Consequently, this thesis will complete these steps.

2.1.1 Planning and Identification of Studies

The first step of a SLR is understanding whether there is a need for a systematic literature review in the first place. Usually, if there is already an SLR covering the research topic,

authors are advised to consider whether a second SLR is needed to ask a different research question. An SLR typically responds to questions related to synthetizing what is known and what isn't about a research question, hypotheses, methodology, applied methods or topics (Briner and Denyer, 2012).
By using Google Scholar, we found that there is a published paper that is a SLR of Hallyu papers published between 2000 and 2019 (Ganghariya and Kanozia, 2020). Still, the paper, by focusing on the broader concept of Hallyu rather than one of its specific manifestations, lacks a particular focus on papers written specifically on K-Pop; consequently, we believe that SLR could still useful to map the current developments in K-Pop studies and research.

This SLR's specific research questions are adapted from Ganghariya and Kanozia, and are the following:

- To understand when and where studies on K-Pop are being conducted;
- To understand the key areas, subjects and subthemes of K-Pop research;
- To understand what are the dominant theories within the field of K-Pop research.

2.1.2 Identifying and Evaluating the Studies

The review started by picking a number of keywords and inputting them in the Scopus database. Such keywords were: "Korean Music", "K-pop", "Korean Pop", to look for studies focusing on the Korean music and entertainment industry; and combinations of the above keywords plus "Marketing", "Marketing Mix", "Audio Features", "Spotify", to understand whether studies similar to this thesis had already been published on the database. Incidentally, no such study was found, which in itself already indicates a lack of papers correlating K-Pop's global popularity to the musicality of its production, at least on the Scopus database.

A keyword search on Scopus produces articles in which the keyword appears either in the

title, abstract, or keywords of the studies. The research output was then limited to papers written in English. Only the papers that, based on the title, seemed relevant to the research topic of the thesis were then selected. This produced a list of 111 documents. This resulting dataset was then cleaned, looking for irrelevant articles and 'false positives', i.e. if the article uses a keyword used during the search process but appears to identify a different topic (Linnenluecke et al., 2019). This process further reduced the dataset to 71 documents.

2.1.3 Extracting and Synthetizing Data

Relevant documents were then added to a research list built on Scopus, and extracted as a comma-separated values (CSV) file. The file contains, for each document, the following information:

- Citation Information: *Author(s), Author(s) ID, Document Title, Year, EID, Source Title, Volume/Issue/Pages, Citation Count, Source & Document Type, Publication Stage, DOI, Open Access*;
- Bibliographical Information: *Affiliations, Serial Identifiers (e.g. ISSN), PubMed ID, Publisher, Editor(s), Language of Original Document, Correspondence Address, Abbreviated Source Tittle*;
- Abstract & Keywords: *Abstract, Author Keywords, Index Keywords*;
- Other Information: *Conference Information, References*.

The information was retrieved directly by and from the Scopus database; this process avoids bias by the researchers, remaining objective.

2.1.4 Dissemination of Results

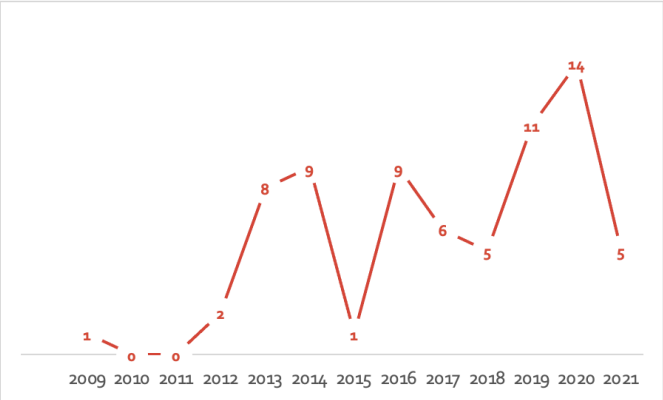
The extracted CSV file was then uploaded on VOSviewer, a software used to provide and visualize bibliometric measures (Van Eck and Waltman, 2014). The results are presented more in-depth in the next section.

2.2 Results - Primary Descriptive and Bibliometric Analysis

To answer our first research question, we mapped the temporal and geographic distribution of the papers currently uploaded on Scopus that cover K-Pop related themes.

As shown by Figure 3, there has been an increase in the number of papers studying the K-Pop phenomenon starting 2012. The upward trend (from 0 articles in 2010/2011 to 8 articles in 2013, and 9 in 2014) is understandable if one considers that 2012 was the year PSY's *Gangnam Style* became a worldwide phenomenon, possibly kickstarting K-Pop rise to a globally demanded product. Regardless, the publishing trend looks uneven, demonstrating an unstable interest in the topic. The year 2020 is the most prolific year, with 14 articles published. Additionally, Figure 3 highlights that the topic is a recent one: before 2012, there are no if few (1 in 2009) articles published in the Scopus database. This is explained by K-Pop being, generally, a recent phenomenon. Despite the origin of K-Pop being dated back to 1992, with the first successful examples debuting in 1996, until very recently K-Pop has mainly been a cultural phenomenon limited to Asia, and in the broader context of *Hallyu*, obscured by the brighter popularity of K-dramas.

Figure 3 – Publishing trends, by year

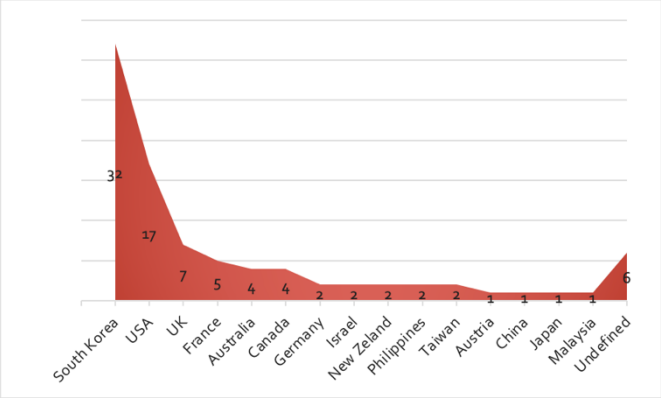


Source: Own Elaboration

Figure 4 shows the geographic distribution of the analyzed papers. The country with the most publications is South Korea (32), followed by the United States (17). It is important

to notice, though, that by selecting exclusively papers written in English, this research has a fundamental bias, which removes all articles written in local Asian languages. There may very well be many papers regarding K-Pop and its impact on the culture and the habits of the local population in China, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong; or in South-Easter countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia. These countries are not only geographically and culturally closer to South Korean than European countries that appear to produce most of the literature in the dataset, but are also those to have been first to experience K-Pop and the Korean Wave. It is then a limit of this research to not be able to look for and consequently analyze papers produced by these countries.

Figure 4 – Publishing trends, by country



Source: Own Elaboration

Table 2 shows a ranking of selected countries by citation. The table confirms South Korea as the country not only with the most written articles, but also with the most citation. We still find the United States after South Korea, possibly because the country has been the target of more or less evident attempt at tackling the Western market by various K-Pop entertainment agencies, thus spurring an interest in academia as well. Canada takes third place with 41 citations, despite having fewer articles than the United Kingdom (which only has 13 citations), and France (with 40 citations).

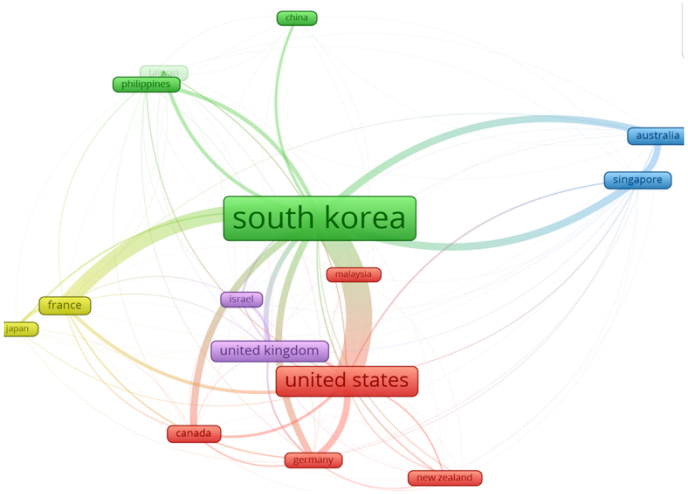
Table 2 – Top countries in terms of citations

Country	Citations
South Korea	220
United States	194
Canada	41
France	40
Australia	35
Germany	19
United Kingdom	13
Japan	11

Source: Own Elaboration

Figure 5 below shows how the countries, and the citations, are linked.

Figure 5 – Map of interrelations between country's citations

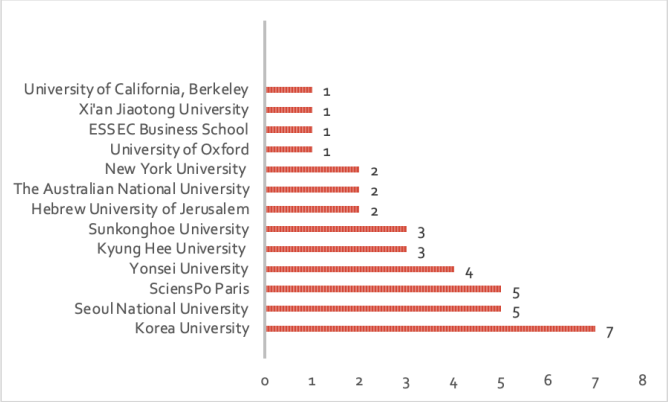


Source: VOSViewer Elaboration

South Korea's supremacy in the production of K-Pop-centered papers is confirmed by the distribution of the affiliation of the documents analyzed. The first Universities per production are Korea University (7 articles), followed by Seoul National University (5), Yonsei University (4) and Kyung Hee University (3). Interestingly, SciencePo Univeristy of Paris ranks second per production, with a total of 5 articles among those selected penned

by the University. This could be related to France, and Paris specifically, being one of the first European countries to experience K-Pop, thanks to the 2011 SM Town concert held in Paris. The event is regarded as a catalyst for the diffusion of K-Pop among French and European youth. The distribution of the 71 articles is shown below. Only the first 13 affiliations were added to Figure 6.

Figure 6 – Publishing trends, by affiliations



Source: Own Elaboration

To determine the cumulative impact of the papers in the dataset, the H Index is one of the most useful metrics. The H Index is a quantitative metric which provides an estimate of the importance, significance and broad impact of a scientist's research contribution (Hirsch, 2005) by quantitatively analyzing related publication data. The H Index is usually provided by many databases; one of these is Scopus, which provides the H Index for each author. Based on Scopus' data, Table 3 shows the Top 5 authors per H Index. Note that only first listed author for each paper was considered.

Table 3 – Top 5 Authors, by H-Index

Author	H-Index
Kim, S.	16
Jin, D.Y.	15
Messerlin, P.A.	12
Lee, H.K.	11
Tan, F.T.C.	11

Source: Own Elaboration

The average H-Index for the authors in the dataset is 5.34, which overall might indicate a certain level of immaturity of the research field. According to Hirsch, an H-Index of 20 after 20 years of research is considered good. Our dataset starts roughly at 2011, which means that by 2021, a good average H-Index should be at around 10; currently, it is at about half of the expected value. This could signify a still unripe interest in K-Pop as an academic topic.

The top cited works within the dataset are shown in Table 4. To adjust for the time a certain paper has been published, citation per year was chosen as opposed to absolute number of citations for this ranking.

Table 4 – Top 5 Articles, by Citations per Year

Authors	Title	Source, Year	Country, Affiliation	*Citations*	*Citations per Year*
Lie, J.	What is the K in K-Pop? South Korean popular music, the culture industry, and National Identity	*Korea Observer 43(3), pp. 339-363, 2012*	United States, University of California Berkeley	***65***	***7.22***

Oh, I., Park, GS.	From B2C to B2B: Selling Korean pop music in the age of new social media	*Korea Observer 43(3), pp. 365-397, 2012*	Japan, Kansai Gaidai University	***55***	***6.11***
Shin, H.	Have you seen the Rain? And who'll stop the Rain?: The globalizing project of Korean pop (K-Pop)	*Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 10(4), pp. 507-523, 2009*	South Korea, Sungkonghoe University	***56***	***4.67***
Chen, S.	Cultural technology: A framework for marketing cultural exports – analysis of Hallyu (the Korean wave)	*International Marketing Review 33(1), pp. 25-50, 2016*	United States, California State University Fullerton	***20***	***4***
Yoon, K.	Global Imagination of K-Pop: Pop Music Fans' Lived Experiences of Cultural Hybridity	*Popular Music and Society 41(4), pp. 373-289, 2018*	Canada, University of British Columbia Okanagan	***12***	***4***

Source: Own Elaboration

Lie (2012) focuses mainly on two questions: what are the reasons for the global, beyond-borders success of K-Pop; and what is the relationship with K-Pop and contemporary South Korean culture, and more broadly South Korea's modern society. The author does so by retracing the history of music in South Korea from the Choson-dynasty (1392-1897) to the

modern days (2011). The paper highlights the deep and inescapable connection between music and politics: especially during the authoritarian regime of President Park Chung-hee (1963-1979), music was an important expression of anti-government sentiments. To explain the emergence of K-Pop as a popular music genre in Asia and beyond, the author proposes two main reasons (which incidentally, also explain why other candidates, such as J-Pop, for such a prominent role in the global scene of pop music couldn't raise to K-Pop's levels of popularity): the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, which drastically reduced South Korea's consumption levels; and the introduction of new technology for music reproduction, such as the MP3 (which arrived in South Korea in 1996) and YouTube (2005). The first reasons explains why South Korean entertainment agencies, which had begun to spur during the 1990s, following the groundbreaking debut of SeoTaiji and the Boys in 1992, had to concentrate their efforts on foreign markets, rather than developing their home market. Conversely, Japan (home to the niche-famous J-Pop, which is incidentally one of the main stylistic references of K-Pop) had no such need, given that the Japanese music public was homogenous and provided ample profit. The MP3, and perhaps more importantly YouTube, were fundamental means of diffusion, especially of a genre so visually constructed such as K-Pop. Moreover, it allowed to reach a wide audience, with virtually no costs. Still, Lie concludes the article by noting that, ultimately, there is nothing Korean about K-Pop. The traditional sounds of Korean music are alien to the average K-Pop fan, who accepts K-Pop and is enamored with it especially because, ultimately, it is a form or Western music (Mamoru, 2011).

Oh and Park (2012) explore how new social media like YouTube have contributed to the global success of K-Pop. They propose that the advent of YouTube in 2005 fundamentally changed the Korean entertainment industry's business model to a business to consumer (B2C)-oriented model, to a business to business(B2B)-oriented model. K-Pop producers upload their musical content on YouTube, where consumers can access it free of charge. By clicking on the video, fans of K-Pop music make the video of their favorite groups an attractive advertisement spot of multinational companies, which pay YouTube to force its users to watch a few seconds-long ad before their favorite K-Pop videos. This way, value

is created for both YouTube and the K-Pop producer. Within this system, the authors highlight that the artist, who is perfectly mass produced by South Korean entertainment agencies through a strict, Spartan, military-like training regime, is the one reaping the least profits from the value chain. Ultimately, music production and traditional activities such as producing music albums, selling concert tickets and organizing fan meetings become accessory activities; the core business is B2B business projects, such as licensing agreements with foreign distributors, spot agreements for TV appearances with broadcasting companies and modeling gigs with MNEs. Basically, K-Pop entertainment agencies no longer gain profits from the musical production of their stars, but from renting them out to MNEs for commercials and endorsement events. According to the author, this new business model incentivizes K-Pop producers to create a universally appealing product; after all, K-Pop revenues depend entirely on foreign distributors. They conclude their paper with an interesting note: that there is nothing Korean about K-Pop, if not for the tendency to mass produce idols, and a business model mainly centered around exports. Musicality and visuals are necessarily universal, both because they are produced for global providers like YouTube, and because they are produced by a globalized value chain, where music engineers and choreographers are hired from all over the world.

Shin (2009) studies the case of JYPE-managed solo-singer Rain (*Bi*), and his debut in the United States, to understand what is behind Korean Pop's debut in the global music market. Rain, the Americanization of the stage name of Jung Jihoon, is considered by the author as a representative of K-Pop's rise to global stardom: despite his lukewarm debut in the US, the strategies behind the organization of the debut itself represent a change in established marketing industry practices, if not the first ambitious attempt to export K-Pop in the West. The author explain the characteristic in-house management system of K-Pop agencies, and how its success is deeply intertwined with the new digital economy and the financial markets. Shin posits that the economic and cultural change that South Korea experienced at the end of the 1990s, meant the need for a different idol paradigm. When popular groups such as H.O.T and g.o.d disbanded, it wasn't because their popularity had declined; rather, the cause has to be looked for in the diminishing profits of the media mix

these groups used, such as music show programs in free-to-air television channels. Consequently, only those agencies (and the artists they manage) that can risk trying to adapt to the new digital economy will be able to thrive, and avoid disbandment. This change involved the presentation and marketing of the artist as well. Those original idol groups were seen as a commodity for teenage girls, mass produced to appeal to their target market. New age idols needed to be more real and authentic, and had a different target (20-30 years old women with larger buying power). Rain represented a state-of-the-art mix of the old narrative of hard work and 'hunger for stardom', which was a fundamental characterstic of the first wave of K-Pop idol groups, and the new concept of rising to stardom from obscurity, having humble origins. Another interesting conclusion the author reaches in this paper is how 'Asianness' doesn't seem to be a factor of success of artists in the United States. The marketing of *Bi* had but a weak correlation with anything Asian (due to his link to Jinyoung Park, head of JYP Entertainment, and an artist renowned for his lyrics centered around the theme of enjoyment of sex, which is seen as highly inappropriate in a Confucian-ruled society). Conversely, *Rain* was the epitome of Asianness: delicate and sensitive music, accompanied by crispy and precise choreographies. Still, this strategy didn't seem to help Rain achieve stable success in the West. Shin's conclusion is that being Asian or Korean (or having any deep link to any specific regional flavor) doesn't matter in the mass market of the pop industry, which rather seems to prefer artists with an international repertoire: a pop star with an Asian background, rather than a global Asian pop star.

Chen (2016) asks himself how is it possible for marketers to position cultural products that are produced in a language that the general global population may not understand. It is, indeed, challenging to sell goods that can't be adapted to markets that are different, and possibly culturally distant, from the product's home market; this is especially true with music, that is more often than not written in the home market's language, which international consumers can't understand, thus creating an explicit language barrier to the enjoyment of the cultural product at hand. The author finds in the 'cultural technology' framework implemented by South Korean entertainment agencies the answer to this

question. ‘Cultural technology’ refers to the culture of production, knowledge and practices used to create and market South Korean TV dramas, music and film; this framework is usually credited to Lee Soo Man, founder of SM Entertainment. Specifically, by comparing South Korean entertainment agencies’ cultural technology framework with the traditional modes of entry in foreign markets adopted by internationalizing firms, Chen finds that South Korean firms tend to implement either an export or a strategic alliance strategy, without following a hierarchical pattern (which would imply export first, as it is less risky, and a joint venture at a later stage), but adapt their mode of entry based on the talent or album project at hand. Moreover, in contrast with the general literature on the topic of global brand positioning, Chen highlights that K-Pop marketers are able to implement global and local strategies simultaneously for the same product or brand, meaning that the theories of global consumer culture positioning (GCCP, which posits that the removal of cultural odor is necessary to facilitate the adopting of cultural products worldwide) and foreign/local consumer culture positioning (F/LCCP, where cultural odor is seen as a fundamental aspect to attract consumers to cultural products) are neither both wrong nor both right approaches to marketing of cultural products. Still, it is interesting to notice that this author too reports how K-Pop is a genre of music that is born from a mixture of Western musicality and Korean gusto; this strategy is called by the author ‘strategic hybridism’.

Finally, Yoon (2018) studies how K-Pop influences fans’ perceptions of and experiences with globalization. His studies involves in-depth semi-structured interviews with K-Pop of non-Korean descent based in Canada, specifically in Toronto, Vancouver and Kelowna. Interestingly, the absence of a deep Korean essence in K-Pop is what makes it easily accessible to Canadian fans. More specifically, Yoon finds three different modes of imagining globalization among Canadian K-Pop fans. The first is participatory globalization, which represents how K-Pop fans are able to participate in K-Pop despite it being a cultural product from elsewhere. Still, the lack of a specific ‘Korean’ nature, also formalized by the English mixing present in the lyrics, make it easier for non-Koreans around the world to add their own readings to K-Pop lyrics and visuals. The second form

of globalization is cosmopolitan globalization; non-Korean K-Pop fans accuse both the Western disproval of K-Pop, as it's often (and, according to these fans, inappropriately) accused of being too 'inauthentic' and thus unoriginal. At the same time, these fans find themselves in contrast with Korean K-Pop fans, who see K-Pop as a national product they are exclusively entitled to. This way, Canadian (international) K-Pop fans find themselves in a third space compared with two opposing forces. Finally, the third mode is that of cute globalization, associated with the 'softer' images of K-Pop, that usually lacks the strong images of sex, violence and drugs that characterize most Western and American music. Interestingly, the author argues that the interviewed fans are aware of the commodified nature of this 'softness', and go even as far as criticizes it. Nevertheless, they still enjoy consuming these pictures, which give them a more approachable and acceptable image of globalization. Thus, through these different forms of imagining globalization, Canadian (and thus, by generalization, international) K-Pop fans who lack resources and authority are able to negotiate dominant social orders, finding alternatives routes of cultural globalization.

VOSViewer allows an easily readable visualization of various information. Among these, occurrence analysis can help identify the most relevant keywords, while a co-occurrence analysis will create various clusters of related keywords.

Table 5 below shows the most relevant keywords based on the number of occurrences per keyword, and how they have been clustered by VOSViewer. The list of keywords was built with a relevancy threshold of at least three occurrences per keyword. Both index and author's keywords were used.

Table 5 – Clusters of Keywords Occurrences

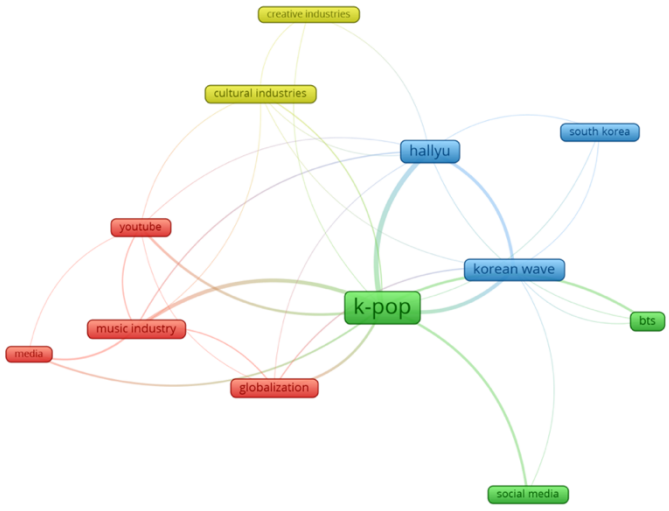
Cluster	**Keyword**	**# of Occurrences**
Cluster I (red)	Music Industry	7
	Globalization	6
	YouTube	4
	Media	3

Cluster II (green)	K-Pop	26
	BTS	7
	Social Media	4
Cluster III (blue)	Hallyu	12
	Korean Wave	10
	South Korea	5
Cluster IV (yellow)	Cultural Industries	4
	Creative Industries	3

Source: VOSViewer Elaboration

Additionally, VOSViewer creates a map of co-occurrences between the keywords, as shown in Figure 7 below. In the map, bigger bubbles signify a higher number of occurrences per keyword; a thicker link between words signifies a stronger link between the topics.

Figure 7 – Map of Keywords Co-Occurrences



Source: VOSViewer Elaboration

Table 5 and Figure 7 identify four major clusters of keywords: Cluster I, in red, with four items and, cumulatively, 20 occurrences; Cluster II, in green, with three items and 37 cumulative occurrences; Cluster III, in blue, with three items and 27 cumulative occurrences; and Cluster IV, in yellow, with two items and 7 cumulative occurrences. In Cluster III, the keywords '*hallyu*' and '*korean wave*' have the same meaning, still their use

could not perfectly overlap; thus, they were both kept as relevant.

Cluster I sought to highlight the important relationship between K-Pop's popularity and digitalization, concluding that the Korean music industry was able to reach the peak of its current popularity because it took advantage of YouTube as a new distributor, whilst other local music industries (for example, Japan's J-Pop) failed to do so (Oh, I et al.; Parc, J., Kim, SD.).

Another group of articles argued about the reasons for K-Pop's global success through an analysis of the factors that bring this success, either among specific regional populations or on online social media platforms (Kim, S. et al.; Ryu, J. et al.; Capistrano, E.P.; Lee, JJ. et al.; Kanozia, R., Ganghariya, G.; Wong, E..). Among these, interesting is the study by Kim et al. (2021), in which the authors try to understand whether the current configuration of the K-Pop industry is sustainable, from a SNS citizenship behavior point of view, and what are the factors influencing this sustainability. It is indeed of significance to wonder whether K-Pop has the structure of a fad, or that of a long lasting, industry-changing product. The authors reach the conclusion that K-Pop can be sustainable because of the peculiarity of its features, mainly: content, social media usage, casting, training, and promotion/production. On the topic of globalization, Park (2013)'s work is of paramount importance. He theorizes a new framework to understand K-Pop's phenomenon: glocalization, which he dubs as the process of importing a foreign product (in K-Pop's case, American music), then infusing it with local taste until it becomes a new, unique product that has a demand not because of its origin, but because it has been transformed into something new. Generally, Cluster I seems to focus on the reason for K-Pop's global success, and in doing so it predominantly adopts a qualitative approach, save for a few exceptions (Kim, JH. et al.; Kim, S. et al.; Kim, JO.).

Cluster II, besides including this research's main keyword (K-Pop), draws an interesting connection between K-Pop's overall popularity and BTS. This may already help us infer that BTS is, at least today, one of the main drivers of K-Pop's global popularity; consequently, researchers have found interest in understanding what are the reasons that

justify the BTS craze that has swept the world, and how they can be generalized to K-Pop as a whole. On the topic, Lee et al. (2020) use a multi-method quantitative approach to find that BTS' popularity if mainly attributable to ten factors: communication via SNS, empathy through music, storytelling and world view, performance quality, music video quality, overseas expansion at an early stage, effort for self-development, teamwork among members, fans' loyalty and an active, far reaching global fandom. BTS' fandom has been recognized has one of the main driving forces of the group's popularity by main others. Chung (2020) uses the case of BTS' fandom to study the requirement for sustained consumer brand engagement (CBE). The author's finding are very similar to those of Lee et al., in that Chung also finds that high quality music/performances with empathetic lyrics are of paramount importance in explaining why fans of BTS stay loyal to the group (which, in a broader sense, can be interpreted as a brand). According to Chung, inspiring messages, along with sincerity and personality, are also relevant to a sustained CBE.

Cluster III appears to include most of the articles in the dataset. Using the "Hallyu OR 'Korean wave' OR 'South Korea'" research string on Scopus, in fact, outputs 70 out of the 71 articles included in the dataset. It appears that most articles in the dataset include one of these keywords, possibly as a way to identify the context in which K-Pop was born and develops. Indeed, the term "Hallyu" (and its literal translation "korean wave") refers to the global diffusion of South Korean cultural products such as music, dramas, movies but also style, fashion, food and more broadly culture (language, interior design, traditional clothing). There appear to be no studies strictly related to Hallyu and its global diffusion within the dataset. The usage of these keywords shows how K-Pop studies are but a branch of a wider research stream that recognizes the impressive spreading of South Korea's culture in recent years. Most of the research about Hallyu does not apply a business or managerial perspective to the phenomenon. The tendency appears to be an analysis that is strictly sociological, where the reasons for the success of a local culture at a global stage are found in the cultural proximity between the exporting culture and the importing one. Still, some believe that K-Pop's success can't be ascribed simply to the similarities between, say, Chinese and Korean cultures. At the same time, the other classical

explanations of the diaspora of South Koreans around the world facilitating the discovery of their culture doesn't entirely justify how K-Pop has been able to reach, in recent years, the mainstream of pop music, which has been dominated by American and generally English-language productions. Thus, studies on K-Pop differ from the broader context of Hallyu research in that they attempt to find in the peculiar organization of the K-Pop industry and its agencies the reasons for this never-seen-before success.

Cluster IV aims at studying K-Pop within the extended domain of cultural and creative industries. The definition of creative and cultural industries has been the topic of intense debate over the years (O'Connor, 2000). A discussion of those definitions is beyond the scope of the current analysis; a good review is provided by Mitkus, 2016. For what concerns us, sufficient to say that creative and cultural industries are all those activities that comprise the cycle of creation, production and distribution of goods and services that use intellectual capital as their primary input (UNCTAD, 2008). As such, creative and cultural industries are necessarily linked with copyright; the same can be said for K-Pop. Interestingly, the success of K-Pop is associated with a rather laxly enforced copyright regime, and especially with the advent of piracy, which actually helped the development and competitiveness of K-Pop. K-Pop, unlike for example the neighboring J-Pop, has worked for years under a copyright regime that did not meet OECD standards. Mainstream theory would suggest that in such a unregulated industry, creative industries wouldn't be able to thrive; K-Pop is a real life example that proves the opposite to be true. Korean entertainment firms have, from the very beginning, profited from distributing their content freely and legally to the end consumer. Regardless, the core business activity of these firms isn't selling CDs on and offline, but rather the market of "touring" and good attached to K-Pop's stars' popularity. Thus, a more easily accessible discography can contribute to enhancing the group's popularity and increase demand for these (only apparently) side products. Moreover, by looking back to the origins of South Korean's music industry, it is evident that pirated albums couldn't be the real reason to the decline in sales of original, physical albums. This is due to the fact that pirated albums targets a widely different group of customers: while official physical albums were bought primarily by income earners,

pirated albums (which were easily distinguishable from originals due to government authorizations) were sought by students. Counterintuitively, pirated albums were able to sustain the underdeveloped South Korean music market during the 1960s-1980s (Parc, J. et al.). More broadly, this cluster seems to focus on governmental policies in support of cultural/creative industries (of which K-Pop is but one ramification), and the hows and whys of its success compared with the policies implemented by governments of different countries (Yim, DS. et al.; Otmazgin, Z.; Ryoo, W., Jin, DY.; Lee, HK.; Holroyd, C.; Parc, J., Moon, HC.).

2.3 Chapter Summary

Using the Scopus database and VOSViewer, a systematic literature review allows researchers to analyze the current developments on a certain topic without bias. Through a restricted dataset of 71 selected articles, we were able to identify four cluster of research. Cluster I, focusing on the relationship between K-Pop and globalization, and most importantly, K-Pop and its new social and traditional distributors, and how they contribute to its domestic and global success. Cluster II studies K-Pop's relationship with the new social media, and specifically sees BTS as one of the most prominent examples of K-Pop's newfound global popularity. Cluster III relates K-Pop to its origins: the Korean Wave, or Hallyu, a broader movement of cultural diffusion of which K-Pop is but the newest example of; and South Korea, K-Pop's country of origin with which the music itself has nothing but a weak correlation with, having become a hybrid commodity on which fans of every nationality can ascribe their own, personal meanings. Finally, Cluster IV links K-Pop to the research on cultural and creative industries, analyzing its successful example to draw meaningful conclusions and suggestions for managers from other industries such as movies, drama and videogames.

Additionally, we were able to understand where and when the research on K-Pop has been so far conducted. K-Pop research has been increasing since 2011, the year of *Gangnam Style'*s global success. Moreover, there is a primacy of South Korea and the United States in the study of K-Pop; still, we admitted the limits of our review, as only papers in English have been included in the dataset. This means that papers in South Easter Asian languages may have escaped the grasp of this research; those are the countries that first and more intensively are affected by Hallyu, thus it is highly likely that more paper on the subject were written since the beginning of the phenomenon.

Through this review, we can highlight a lack of research focusing on the factors that contribute to the success of K-Pop groups specifically in the Western region of the globe. Despite there being general studies on K-Pop, or some of its groups (Kim, JH et al; Kim,

S. et al; Lee, SH et al.), these studies do not relate K-Pop's success to any specific marketing practice or strategy; rather, they find in K-Pop's lyrics and visually appealing performances, in the fans' 'labor' and their loyalty, and in an active use of social media the reason to its widespread success. Consequently, by using Askin and Mauskapf's theory of optimal differentiation as a framework to understand the deeper reasons to BTS' (specifically) and K-Pop's (more broadly) overseas success, this thesis fills a gap in the current literature. Specifically, we have found no study that aims at finding if K-Pop's musicality is indeed a determinant of worldwide success–as hinted, but not quantitatively demonstrated, by various research papers (Lie, J.; Shin, H.).

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In academic research, the formulation and implementation of a research design is of paramount importance. When a researcher has decided upon one or more research questions (that is, hypothesis their study aims to test), the question of methodology arises. Theoretically, 'methodology' is a concept that can be understood either as theoretical or practical approach to research. Within the theoretical approach directory, 'methodology' can either be inductive or deductive (despite there existing those who refusing the strict adherence to any methodology *per se*; see Feyerabend, 1975). Practically, 'methodology' means those technical procedures used to solve specific problems and answer questions.

It is then a necessary step in a research design that of choosing the most adapt theory, among those accepted by academic community, that better fits the questions at hand. Typically, whichever theory the researcher decides to use is arbitrary. The objective should be that of using the obtained results to expand upon the existent theory (this effort is generally referred to as *theory testing*). Nevertheless, there does not exist a general theory, one that could be conveniently used to explain all observations in either field, and specifically this is true for research focusing on economic matters. All theories tend to focus on a subset of variables, or on a single variable. It is then possible that the researcher will find themselves in such a situation that no theory among those generally excepted is able to be used as foundations for the researcher's study. In this case, the objective of the research should be that of creating a new theory, or pave the way for the development of a new theory (in which case, we are talking about an *exploratory study* and *theory building*).

Choosing a certain framework, by which we refer an underlying accepted theory that the researchers intends to build their own research upon, still does not imply the usage of specific 'practical' methodologies. Practical methodologies can either be quantitative or qualitative, and within a single study, a researcher could very well use multiple

exclusively-quantitative or qualitative methods, or use quantitative and qualitative methods at the same time, to answer different questions.

Based on a recent review of international research in the field of economic research[1], the majority of the 1884 articles that were the object of the review were empirical studies (65.2%), as opposed to theoretical ones (34.8%). Empirical studies are those that imply the formulation of research questions that the study aims to verify through an empirical testing. Theoretical research is, for the most part, based on deductive reasoning and usually do not apply empirical testing. Additionally, empirical research usually utilizes quantitative methods (49.3%) rather than qualitative ones (15.9%); theoretical research is quite exclusively conducted through qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are, for example: case studies; scenario analysis; content analysis. Quantitative methods are, for example: multivariate statistics; descriptive statistics; structural equations.

[1] SIDREA, Gruppo di Studi sul "Metodo". *Il metodo negli studi di Economia Aziendale: Continuità e Prospettive di Cambiamento.*

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 Theoretical framework

This thesis positions itself in the stream of studies that tries to understand the reasons that explain why certain songs reach "hit status", while other does. This research field has been dubbed "hit song science", and by certain authors has been considered difficult, if not somewhat useless (Dhanaraj and Logan, 2005; Pachet and Roy, 2008). The difficulty in trying to predict whether a song would be a success or not is explained by the very nature of creative products, the evaluation of which highly depends on subjectivity (Krueger, 2005). Even after a product has become a success, reverse engineering the reason that can explain the product's hit status can be difficult (Lieberson, 2000). Nonetheless, it is only natural for researchers to ask themselves what are the reasons that bring people to appreciate a product versus a competitor; this holds true for music, especially of the commercial kind. Not all songs become a hit, not all artists become superstars. Thus, economists and sociology experts alike wonder what are the information audiences seek to determine which new release deserves their attention. These information has been interpreted as characteristics and networks of cultural producers (Peterson, 1997), preferences and social influences dynamics (Lizardo, 2006), elements in the external environment (Peterson, 1990) and other institutional forces (Hirsch, 1972). Ultimately, what define the taste of an individual for different cultural and creative products is the individual's very own past experiences, and the social context they are exposed to. These factors are all external to the product, and they do not speak of the inherent quality of a song. This might be explained by the fact that, up until recent developments in MIR tools and data analytics, finding quantitative appropriate measures of a song quality has been difficult. Nevertheless, Hamlen (1991) notices that it is possible for certain product features to signal quality; and these features are what enables audiences to recognize the product as belonging to a specific category, which is of peculiar importance in the cultural and creative industries, where products are often perceived in relation to one another.

This being said, this thesis follows the example of Askin and Mauskapft (2017), and utilizes the theoretic framework of category research and product features. Category research highlights how social classification systems organize consumers' expectations and preferences (Hsu, 2006) and help them draw connections between products, ultimately organizing product markets and consumer choice. Product labels reflect universally shared meanings that are attributed to certain groups of products. Still, recent research shows that these categories may not be as static as they have been so far understood. Lena (2015) maintains that category labels may not always reflect how audiences understand products, especially when these are complex and tastes are dynamic. Consequently, while category labels should help consumers understand the implicit relationships between various products by summarizing various information about their features and quality, in such industries they end up not providing adequate information. Music is one of those industries that heavily relies on category labels to explain the competition that happens within it (Frith, 1996). Askin and Mauskapft propose that audiences use musical signals to find latent associations between products. These musical signals are summarized by a song's sonic features, which range from relatively objective musical characteristics to more perceptual features of a song's musicality. Unlike categories, which are socially constructed, sonic features provide more fine-grained information about a product's underlying composition and position in "conceptual space" (Kovacs and Hannan, 2015), which can be understood as a competitive market place where products are clustered together with their most similar peers, and are distant from competitors that are different. The authors' results prove that, despite the mainstream opinion that songs are most likely to succeed when they adhere to a conventional and reproducible template (Thomson, 2014), most successful songs are those that find an optimal trade-off between typicality and uniqueness. Consequently, the authors speak of "optimal differentiation", which is obtained by those songs that have a feature combination that evokes previously successful hits while adding some degree of novelty that keeps the audience interested in the product. This result is interesting in the context of creative industries, because it implies that product engineering in creative fields is influenced by industry technology standards, until it isn't–which happens when the artist is allowed to express their own creativity, and their efforts end up contributing to the

existent pool of creative products incrementing it. Ultimately, this creates a space for cooperation and dialogue between economic and artistic logics.

It is a belief that this thesis aims to prove that BTS' popularity in the United States is explained by BTS' music owning sonic features that are similar to that of hit songs in the US. After all, audiences evaluation of products are shaped not only by the characteristics of producers and consumers, or social influences pressures, but also by a product's position within a broader ecosystem of cultural production and consumption (Askin and Mauskapft, 2017). This means that audiences seek products that have features they are used to; this is true at least for the music industry, where listeners tend to listen to songs that give them some sense of familiarity.

3.2.2 Hypothesis and Propositions

This thesis aims at understanding what are the causes for BTS' success in the West, and specifically in the United States. The United States has been chosen as a representative of Western countries not only because of the homogeneity and global relevance of its music market *vis-à-vis* Europe, but also because of BTS' indisputable success in the country, proven by their songs frequently ranking high (if not first) in Billboard charts, and by their recent nomination to a GRAMMY, one of the highest achievements recognized to an artist in the music industry. Specifically, this thesis argues that BTS' success may be linked to the musicality of the group's discography being similar to the tastes of the American public.

To prove this, the research design implies the following steps:

(1) test whether the popularity of a song is linked with its structural musical characteristics, represented by selected audio features;
(2) test whether there is a statistically significant difference between the music that charts in the United States versus that which charts in South Korea;
(3) test whether it would be able to classify BTS' music as more American than South Korean;
(4) study the themes explored within BTS' songs.

Step (1), (2) and (3) will be conducted through quantitative, statistical analysis; thus, various statical methodologies will be used: correlation analysis, test of means, and discriminant analysis. Step (4) will use a software (LIWC; Pennebaker et al.) to conduct a content and sentiment analysis of the lyrics; thus, it will use a qualitative methodology. All steps translate in related hypothesis (where quantitative analysis can be used) or research questions (when statistical analysis will not be implemented). Consequently, this study aims to either confirm or reject the following hypothesis:

HP1. There is a statistically relevant correlation between the popularity of a song and its structural music characteristics.
HP2. There is a statistically significant difference between the audio features of music that charts in the United States and that that charts in South Korea.
HP3. BTS' music has sonic features which are more similar to popular American songs rather than popular South Korean songs.

The content analysis won't make use of statistical methods *per se*; consequently, the use of hypothesis is not appropriate. As for the content analysis then we will try to find answers to the following question:

Q1. Are BTS' lyrics different from the lyrics of top charting popular songs in the United States?

3.3 Statistical Tools

3.3.1 Correlation

Correlation analysis is one of the most used statistical methods; its purpose is to determine if a relationship of dependency exists between a dependent variable (y) and an independent variable (x), and how strong this relationship is. Correlation analysis is most often conducted through the usage of Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient, which is defined as the number one obtains from dividing the covariance between x and y by the product of the standard deviation of x and the standard deviation of y. Nevertheless, Pearson's correlation coefficient studies the existence of a linear relationship between the two variables with the assumption that their distribution is normal. When this assumption can't be confirmed, non-parametric alternative such as the Kendall's Tau and the Spearman's Rho can be used, as they do not need the assumption of normal distribution to work.

A correlation analysis will be conducted to understand whether popularity of a song is influenced to any degree by the specific values of its audio features. Studies on what influences popularity of a song abound. Specifically, these studies have used linear regression analysis (of which correlation analysis is a part of) to understand if specific factors have any influence on popularity. Usually, superstar factor, label, debut position in charts, time of release, and type of release (whether the song is an EP, LP or a single). On the topic, interesting are the conclusions of Asai, 2008 and Interiano et al., 2018.

This thesis will use correlation analysis to demonstrate that, taken the dataset of top charting American and South Korean songs, their popularity (as calculated by Spotify's algorithm) is somewhat influenced by the songs' audio features. This conclusion will be used as basis to further study the distribution of these features and how they differ between the two countries. After a statistically significant different has been established, BTS' discography will be analyzed. The establishment of a relationship of dependency between

popularity and these audio features is fundamental to later draw conclusions on how these audio features help BTS' success in the United States.

3.3.2 Comparison of Means

Comparing the means of two groups of data can be useful to check whether two samples show relevant differences, and is a method frequently implemented in medical research. When the assumptions are met, the independent samples *t*-test is the most powerful test for comparing means between two independent samples (Sawilowsky and Blair, 1992). Conversely, when the samples are dependent, provided that the assumptions are met, the paired samples *t*-test is the most powerful tool for comparing the means of the two samples (Zimmerman, 1997). The assumptions to perform either test are the following: (1) the samples have equal variances; (2) the samples are normally distributed. When either one or both of the *t*-Test assumptions are not met, the Mann-Whitney *U*-Test can be used. Additionally, to check for homogeneity of variances, either the Welch Test or the Student *t*-Test can be used.

The analysis of means tests the following hypothesis:

H_0: *The difference between the means is equal to zero.*

RULE: ACCEPT WHEN $p > alpha$

H_1: *The difference between the means is different from zero.*

RULE: ACCEPT WHEN $p < alpha$

For the purpose of this thesis, the analysis of means will be conducted to test whether there is a difference between music that charts in the United States and in South Korea, based on Spotify's audio features extracted for the Top 50 charting in the Billboard Hot 100 for the United States, and in the Gaon Top 100 for South Korea (both dated 2020 Year End).

3.3.3 Discriminant Analysis

Discriminant analysis as a research technique can be useful in the investigation of various aspects of a multivariate research problem (Huberty, 1975). Practically, this methodology allows to, given two groups, assign an observation to either group. Discriminant analysis is comprised of various phases: (a) identifying significant group differences; (b) explaining these differences; (c) using the information from the samples studied to classify a future individual known to belong to one of the groups represented (Tatsuoka and Tiedeman, 1954).

In the context of the present thesis, discriminant analysis will be used to create and test a model to predict whether a song "sounds" South Korean or American. This model will use Spotify's audio features are independent variables; thus, the objective of the model is to classify a song as either South Korean or American based on the the song's specific audio features. This is based on the assumption that audio features for American and South Korean songs are different.

The model is going to be developed from a sample of top charting songs in the United States and South Korea, respectively selected from the Billboard Hot 100 and the Gaon Top 100 2020-Year End Charts. The resulting equation will be used to test whether the model would classify BTS' discography as belonging to the South Korea or the United States category. This method allows to either confirm or refute the hypothesis that BTS are popular in the United States because their music sounds more American or South Korean. To conduct this statistical analysis, the SPSS Software by IBM will be used.

3.3.4 Content Analysis

Content analysis is an often employed technique to study socio-cognitive and perceptual constructs; this can be specifically useful to examine the societal trends, and even in a business context, understand the nuances of organizational behaviors and stakeholder perceptions. Content analysis is also used in management research. In practice, it involves

systematic reading and observation of texts, or other equivalent means of transmission of thought, to then transform the content into data that can be quantitatively or qualitatively studied.

In the field of music psychology, examples of usage of such a method to understand the content of lyrics and their change through time abound (Czechowski et al., 2016; Petrie et al., 2008; Madanikia and Bartholomew, 2014; Christenson et al., 2019; Pettijohn & Sacco, 2009). This thesis will follow the current literature and methodological approach on the topic to offer an overview of the main themes analyzed in BTS' lyrics and how they change with time, along the eras in which their discography is usually dividend into. This effort is done in order to offer an analysis of the product that is as complete as possible. In fact, one cannot consider a song in only its melodical dimension, as it is necessarily a mix of music and lyrics (with the obvious exception represented by classical and instrumental music).

In order to conduct a quantitative content analysis, a computerized text analysis program (*Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count*, LIWC) will be used. The program was developed by Pennebaker, Booth and Francis in 2007, and it relies on a word-count method to estimate the percentages of words that fall into various psychosocial categories. The program will be used to answer to our last proposition, that is to try and gain some insights into how BTS' music evolved over time, based on the words used in their works. Moreover, the results obtained from the LIWC analysis will be compared with DeWall et al. (2011) who conducted an analysis in similar fashion that centered around topics explored in top charting Billboard songs between 1980 and 2007. This will be done in order to understand what is the relationship between BTS' themes and that which are appreciated by the general American public. DeWall et al. conclude that over time, usage of words related to others, social interactions and positive emotions decreased in favor of words related to self-focus and antisocial behavior. We maintain that a reason for BTS' striking success is being able to diverge from this trend of enhanced negativity in lyrics by offering their target market in the United States music that has similar musicality to what they are used to and want to listen to, but with messages that are overall more positive.

3.4 Datasets

3.4.1 Playlists

Data retrieval started with a selection of relevant charts for each of the two countries analyzed within this study, namely the United States and South Korea.

Billboard Hot 100 was chosen for the United States. Billboard is a magazine/website reporting on the music industry with a global focus. Its Top 100 is considered the standard record chart in the United States, and is published weekly. The information used to compile the Top 100 charts include sales (physical and digital), radio play and online streaming in the United States, and is obtained thanks to the collaboration between Billboard and Nielsen SoundScan. The chart isn't limited to a single genre of music. For the purpose of this thesis, the 2020 Year End chart was selected as the most recent source of data on popular songs in the United States. The Year End chart is calculated from the first week of December to the last week of November from a cumulative total of yearlong sales, airplay and online streaming.

Gaon Top 100 Digital Chart was instead chosen for South Korea. The Gaon Chart is produced by the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, established to support and invest in the entertainment industries, which became one of the main areas the South Korean government sought to develop after the financial crisis of the 1990s. Given that the Gaon Chart was established to emulate the example of the United States' Billboard Chart, the two charts can be considered comparable. Moreover, like the Billboard Hot 100, Gaon Top 100 Digital Chart is considered the music industry standard record chart in South Korea. The Digital Chart is compiled from an aggregate of downloads, streaming and background music, exclusively for singles. It excludes airplay time and physical sales, unlike the Billboard Hot 100. The chart includes both national and international releases. For the purpose of this thesis, the 2020 Year End chart was selected as the most recent source of data on popular songs in South Korea.

The charts were accessed through the official Billboard and Gaon websites; the Gaon chart was accessed through an archived webpage[2]. The charts were then imported on Spotify in two separate playlists. The Billboard Hot 100 playlist for the year 2020 was already present on Spotify, so the research uses that playlist; the Gaon Top 100 Digital for the year 2020 had to be manually created[3].

The creation of a Spotify playlist was paramount to obtain values for each songs on audio characteristics that Spotify dubs "audio features". Spotify is a widely used subscription based streaming platform; it serves 178 countries and has a total of 365 million users, who can listen to an international repertoire of 70 million tracks[4]. Since its acquisition of EchoNest, Spotify allows interested parties to obtain audio features data, which are calculated using an algorithm (Skidén, 2016), through its Web API that can be accessed through Spotify for Developers. A description of each audio feature, as reported by Spotify[5], is provided by Table 6 below.

Table 6 – Definition of Spotify's Audio Features

Variable	Description
Acousticness	A confidence measure from 0.0 to 1.0 of whether the track is acoustic. 1.0 represents high confidence the track is acoustic.
Danceability	Danceability describes how suitable a track is for dancing based on a combination of musical elements including tempo, rhythm stability, beat strength, and overall regularity. A value of 0.0 is least danceable and 1.0 is most danceable.
Duration	The duration of the track in milliseconds.

[2] Billboard Hot 100, Year-End 2020: https://www.billboard.com/charts/year-end/2020/hot-100-songs.
Gaon Chart Top 100 Digital, Year-End 2020 (archived):
https://web.archive.org/web/20210108022224/http://gaonchart.co.kr/main/section/chart/online.gaon?nationGbn=T&serviceGbn=ALL&termGbn=year&hitYear=2020&year_time=3.

[3] Billboard Hot 100, Year-End 2020: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3jRu2y2IGWzl2uDnayCPUW?si=78bc8e5aed7c49e8.
Gaon Top 100, Year-End 2020: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0HfkNnVzpEd1yvOR1rfj0i?si=fd91dbf310634d84.

[4] Spotify – Company Info: https://newsroom.spotify.com/company-info/.

[5] Reference Index, Spotify: https://developer.spotify.com/documentation/web-api/reference/#object-audiofeaturesobject.

Energy	Energy is a measure from 0.0 to 1.0 and represents a perceptual measure of intensity and activity. Typically, energetic tracks feel fast, loud, and noisy. For example, death metal has high energy, while a Bach prelude scores low on the scale. Perceptual features contributing to this attribute include dynamic range, perceived loudness, timbre, onset rate, and general entropy.
Instrumentalness	Predicts whether a track contains no vocals. “Ooh” and “aah” sounds are treated as instrumental in this context. Rap or spoken word tracks are clearly “vocal”. The closer the instrumentalness value is to 1.0, the greater likelihood the track contains no vocal content. Values above 0.5 are intended to represent instrumental tracks, but confidence is higher as the value approaches 1.0.
Key	The key the track is in. Integers map to pitches using standard Pitch Class notation . E.g. 0 = C, 1 = C♯/D♭, 2 = D, and so on.
Liveness	Detects the presence of an audience in the recording. Higher liveness values represent an increased probability that the track was performed live. A value above 0.8 provides strong likelihood that the track is live.
Loudness	The overall loudness of a track in decibels (dB). Loudness values are averaged across the entire track and are useful for comparing relative loudness of tracks. Loudness is the quality of a sound that is the primary psychological correlate of physical strength (amplitude). Values typical range between -60 and 0 db.
Mode	Mode indicates the modality (major or minor) of a track, the type of scale from which its melodic content is derived. Major is represented by 1 and minor is 0.

Speechiness	Speechiness detects the presence of spoken words in a track. The more exclusively speech-like the recording (e.g. talk show, audio book, poetry), the closer to 1.0 the attribute value. Values above 0.66 describe tracks that are probably made entirely of spoken words. Values between 0.33 and 0.66 describe tracks that may contain both music and speech, either in sections or layered, including such cases as rap music. Values below 0.33 most likely represent music and other non-speech-like tracks.
Tempo	The overall estimated tempo of a track in beats per minute (BPM). In musical terminology, tempo is the speed or pace of a given piece and derives directly from the average beat duration.
Valence	A measure from 0.0 to 1.0 describing the musical positiveness conveyed by a track. Tracks with high valence sound more positive (e.g. happy, cheerful, euphoric), while tracks with low valence sound more negative (e.g. sad, depressed, angry).
Popularity	The popularity of the track, calculated by an algorithm and based on the number of plays the track has had and how recent those plays are. Generally speaking, songs that are being played a lot now will have higher popularity (closer to 100) than songs that were played a lot in the past. Popularity may lag by a few day since the value is not updated in real time.
Genre	A musical genre is a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules (Fabbri, 1982). Pulls the genre(s) associated with a track.

Source: Own Elaboration

All these features were extracted, but only a few were selected to conduct the statistical analyses that follow. Specifically, *danceability*, *energy*, *loudness*, *valence*, *acousticness duration*, and *tempo* were deemed of interest to the study. Thus, *key*, *mode*, *speechiness*, *instrumentalness* and *liveness* were excluded. The reason for this exclusion is specific to

each variable. *Speechiness* is a value that allows to distinguish podcasts from songs and instrumental tracks; as such, it is substantially irrelevant to this study, that works exclusively with songs. *Liveness* refers to the presence of a live audience in the recording; all selected tracks are studio recordings, and thus lack an audience. *Instrumentalness* refers to the absence of lyrics in a recording; again, all tracks analyzed are songs. There are a number of purely instrumental lyrics, but their number is too small to be considered to bear any statistical difference to the study. By calculating the mode for both *key* and *mode* we find that they are identical for both datasets, meaning that there is a standard among popular music, which is generally of the pop genre. Indeed, pop music tends to be composed in Major scale, either in C or G key. This standard seems to be respected in the majority of the analyzed songs.

The values for these variables were pulled from Spotify through a Python code, adapted for the purpose of this thesis from Heggli et al. (2021). The code is show in Figure 8. The same source was later used to obtain certain visualizations of the data.

Figure 8 – Python Code, data extraction

```
#!/usr/bin/env python3
# -*- coding: utf-8 -*-

# First import GSA and pandas
import GSA
import pandas as pd

# Then authenticate, so you can access the Spotify API through Spotipy
# Make sure you have filled in spotifyConstants.py with your own information
GSA.authenticate()

# Now get information on one playlist.
# You need to give the function the Spotify ID of the playlist.
# See GSA_example for more details.
# Here's an example playlist ID: 37i9dQZF1DX3hgbB9nrEB1
myPlaylist = GSA.getInformation('[PLAYLISTID]', verbose=True)

# myPlaylist now contains the location of a .pkl-file where the information is stored.
# We save the information to a .pkl-file for easier processing of multiple playlists

# Read the .pkl-file to get a dataframe
myPlaylistInformation = pd.read_pickle(myPlaylist)

## Print on Excel
df = pd.read_pickle(myPlaylist)

# Create a Pandas Excel writer using XlsxWriter as the engine.
writer = pd.ExcelWriter('/Users/[USERNAME]/[PATH/[FILENAME].xlsx', engine='xlsxwriter')

# Convert the dataframe to an XlsxWriter Excel object.
df.to_excel(writer, sheet_name='Sheet1')

# Close the Pandas Excel writer and output the Excel file.
writer.save()
```

Source: Spyder Elaboration

GSA (GeneralizedSpotifyAnalyser) is a Python script developed by Heggli et al. to more conveniently access metadata and features from a Spotify playlist. To access Spotify's API and allow GSA to get the desired information from the platform, a Spotify for Developers account is needed. A Spotify user can freely and easily create such an account. From the account, it is then necessary to create a Spotify App, and obtain a Client ID and a Client Secret ID. Both information are needed to run GSA. The Spotify packages Spotipy, Pandas and XlsxWriter were also used. The code was run on the Spyder IDE. The result was an Excel (.xlsx) file containing two sheets, one per playlist. The code extracted Spotify's audio features for each track contained in the Billboard Hot 100 Chart and in the Gaon Top 100 Digital Chart, Year-End 2020.

The same Python code was used to extract the same audio features for BTS' discography. BTS' discography was added from the artist's profile on Spotify to a playlist that was manually built[6]. Releases sung in Japanese were excluded for this analysis. After running the code, the resulting 209-entries dataset was processed. First, the songs were divided into four subsets based on the 'eras' in which BTS' production is canonically divided into by fans. These eras are identified mainly by a change in themes explored within the lyrics; arguably, each era is also different from the other based on which country the albums aimed to target. For example, the first era, usually dubbed 'school trilogy' (albeit containing four albums), features songs that are centered around the experience of the band members' school years, characterized by personal hopes and outside expectations which the student has to shoulder. These albums targeted the South Korean market. On the contrary, the second era, usually called 'youth trilogy', is centered around the insecurities and uncertainties, but also the feelings of excitement and daringness of the first years of adulthood. This albums targeted more explicitly the Chinese market; such a strategic decision seems evident in the Chinese titling of the album. 'The Most Beautiful Moment in Life' is in fact a translation of the original Chinese title '花樣年華' (*huā yàng nián huá*,

[6] BTS' discography playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5iehyqTZ0HsLOJKg4mYGqv?si=2405514d158841a0

lit. ‘Flowery Years’), which is the title of 2000 Hong Kong romantic movie by famous director Wong Kar-wai (‘In the Mood for Love’).

The first dataset, named ‘SCHOOL’ includes the first four albums: 2 Cool 4 Skool, O!RUL8,2?, Skool Luv Affair, Dark & Wild. The second dataset, named ‘YOUTH’, includes: The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt.1, The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt.2, The Most Beautiful Moment in Life: Young Forever. The third dataset, named ‘WINGS+LY’, includes: Wings, You Never Walk Alone, Love Yourself: Her, Love Yourself: Tear, Love Yourself: Answer. Technically, Wings and You Never Walk Alone constitute a separate era. Nevertheless, because You Never Walk Alone is a repackage of Wings, thus containing the substantially the same tracks, after cleaning for doubles the dataset resulting dataset contained too few entries. Given that Wings and the Love Yourself trilogy were released within a short time distance from each other (You Never Walk Alone, the last album from the Wings era, and Love Yourself: Her, the first album from the Love Yourself era, were both released in 2017), the two eras were treated together in the same dataset. The forth dataset, named ‘MOTS+BE’, includes: Map of the Soul: Persona, Map of the Soul: 7, BE, and all the releases that lack an album, such as the latest ‘Butter’ and ‘Permission to Dance’, the OST for the BTS mobile game ‘BTS World’, and the featuring tracks BTS did with other artists, such as Lil Nas X, Steve Aoki and Lauv. A more readable representation of the datasets is provided in Table 7.

Table 7 – BTS’ Discography divided per eras

Dataset Name	**Era**	**Albums**
SCHOOL	*School Trilogy*	2 Cool 4 Skool O!RUL8,2? Skool Luv Affair Dark & Wild
YOUTH	*Youth Trilogy*	The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt.1 The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt.2 The Most Beautiful Moment in Life: Young Forever (repackage)

WINGS+LY	*Wings*	WINGS You Never Walk Alone (repackage)
	Love Yourself Trilogy	Love Yourself: Her Love Yourself: Tear Love Yourself: Answer (repackage)
MOTS+BE	*Map of the Soul*	Map of the Soul: Persona Map of the Soul: 7 (repackage)
	BE	BE
	Singles	Butter (+Remixes), Savage Love (ft. Jason Derulo), Waste It On Me (ft. Steve Aoki), Dream Glow (ft. Charli XCX), A Brand New Day (ft. Zara Larsson), All Night (ft. Juice WRLD), Old Town Road (ft. Lil Nas X), Make It Right (ft. Lauv), Permission to Dance

Source: Own Elaboration

After the songs were so separated, the resulting datasets were checked for double entries. In K-Pop, repackages are common. A repackage is a re-release of an album with the addition of one or two new tracks. Within BTS' discography, The Most Beautiful Moment in Life: Young Forever, You Never Walk Alone, Love Yourself: Answer, and Map of the Soul: 7, are such albums.

The processing procedure resulted in four subsets of data, each containing 41 entries (SCHOOL), 29 entries (YOUTH), 50 entries (WINGS+LY), and 43 entries (MOTS+BE); for a total of 163 tracks.

3.4.2 Lyrics

For the purpose of the content and sentiment analysis that will be conducted through the LIWC Software, lyrics for each unique song produced by BTS were obtained. Given that all of BTS songs that were sung in either Korean or English were selected, with the sole exclusion of Japanese releases, we can assume to have obtained the entire population of

BTS' discography as our dataset. The English translation for most lyrics isn't official, but provided by fan translators and uploaded online. All translations, both official and fan-made, were obtained from BTS' wiki on fandom.com, and later checked for errors and overall translation quality by comparing them with another source, colorcodedlyrics.com. This resulted in a dataset of 141 songs–this number excludes a few songs that are exclusively instrumental.

The checked songs were then divided into seven documents, based on eras. The first four albums' lyrics can thus be found in the 'SCHOOL' document, the following three albums' lyrics can be found in the 'YOUTH' document, and so on. Unlike the pairing that was done for the audio features dataset for Wings and the Love Yourself trilogy, and the Map of the Soul and BE albums, such matching was deemed not useful in this context. Consequently, each document refers to one of the classically recognized eras in BTS' production.

3.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, established theoretical frameworks in the field of hit song engineering research were presented. Moreover, an overview of current adopted methodologies in managerial and economical research proved useful to determine which method to implement in this research. Consequently, this thesis will be of the deductive type, and will employ both quantitative methods, such as the statistical tools of correlation analysis, comparison of means and discriminant analysis; and quali-quantitative methods, such as the content analysis of the lyrics. An overview of these tools has also been provided, along an explanation of the used data and how they were obtained. As far as audio features are concerned, the used playlists were built based on official charts monitoring top popular songs in the United States and in South Korea. BTS' playlist was built selecting all BTS' South Korean songs, excluding Japanese releases. The audio features data was extracted from Spotify using Python. The lyrics were obtained from the web and different fan translations were compared in order to obtain the most accurate version, given that official translation currently do not exist. Additionally, hypothesis and additional non-statistical questions were formulated. This thesis will attempt to test three hypothesis, which analyze the impact of audio features configuration on popularity and how BTS' musicality relates to the United States standard, derived from the configuration of top charting songs in the country. Finally, the last question tries to understand what are the main themes of BTS' songs, in order to figure out if their lyrics are different from those of popular songs in the US.

In the next chapter, the proposed hypothesis and propositions will be tested using the tools selected. The chapter will end with an evaluation of the results *vis à vis* the theoretical framework of optimal differentiation between typicality and originality summarized in this chapter.

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 offered an overview of the theory which is the basis for this thesis; the idea that 'hit' music is that which reaches optimal differentiation, being at the same time typical but unique. On the literature's results, three hypothesis were developed on the peculiar case of BTS. First, HP1 maintains that audio features influence the level of popularity obtained by a song. Second, HP2 states that the audio features which most influence popularity are different in different countries, namely the US and South Korea, which are the two countries taken in exam in this thesis. Third, HP3 proposes that BTS' popularity is explained by the audio features of BTS' discography are more similar to those of popular ('hit') American songs than those of South Korean hit songs, and that this similarity can explain the impressive popularity reached by the group in the US. Finally, the themes of BTS' lyrics were also chosen as a topic of analysis, in order to understand whether they can be considered an element of differentiation between BTS and hit American songs.

In this chapter, the results of the analyses conducted to confirm or disprove the hypothesis will be presented. The chapter is divided as follows: first, descriptive statistics for the audio features obtained with Python from Spotify will be presented for all three datasets (Top 100 US, Top 100 South Korea, BTS full discography). Then, the three hypothesis will be checked using the three chosen statistical methods. Paragraph 5.2.2 tests the first hypothesis, using correlation analysis. In order to understand which type of coefficient to use, the normality assumption will also be checked. Paragraph 5.2.3 tests the second hypothesis, using a comparison of means analysis. Lastly, paragraph 5.2.4 tests the third hypothesis with a discriminant analysis. Additionally, to understand what are the causes of differentiation in BTS' musical production, if there are any, we explore the themes of BTS' songs in paragraph 5.3. The content analysis software LIWC will be used, and the results

from it will be shown. This chapter will end with a discussion of the obtained results, comparing them with the currently available results in hit song engineering literature.

4.2 Audio Features

4.2.1 Descriptive Statistics

The following figures will provide an overview of the descriptive statistics (such as mean, variance, minimum and maximum value, standard deviation) for the datasets used in this study. Figure 9 shows the descriptive statistics for the United States' dataset. Figure 10 shows the descriptive statistics for the South Korean dataset. Figure 11 shows the descriptive statistics for the BTS' dataset.

Figure 9 – Descriptive Statistics, United States

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
danceability	100	0.34	0.94	0.6976	0.12470	0.016
energy	100	0.23	0.95	0.6045	0.14546	0.021
loudness	100	0.71	0.96	0.8915	0.03645	0.001
acousticness	100	0.00	0.90	0.2318	0.22755	0.052
valence	100	0.06	0.89	0.4880	0.20274	0.041
tempo	100	74.94	180.05	119.6799	27.45726	753.901
duration	100	114893.00	261493.00	195622.300	26519.7539	703297344
Valid N (listwise)	100					

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Figure 10 – Descriptive Statistics, South Korea

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
danceability	100	0.273	0.874	0.59442	0.142303	0.020
energy	100	0.178	0.961	0.61012	0.197212	0.039
loudness	100	-11.991	-1.072	-5.31644	2.147797	4.613
acousticness	100	0.002	0.910	0.38816	0.320026	0.102
valence	100	0.088	0.896	0.45868	0.216919	0.047
tempo	100	67.347	189.142	124.89260	24.742926	612.212
duration	100	68670.000	345620.000	219605.550	37116.2524	1.378E+9
Valid N (listwise)	100					

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Figure 11 – Descriptive Statistics, BTS

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
danceability	163	0.252	0.926	0.61585	0.127082	0.016
energy	163	0.167	0.993	0.75623	0.173246	0.030
loudness	163	-21.117	-0.826	-5.17647	3.009764	9.059
acousticness	163	0.000	0.915	0.13790	0.199464	0.040
valence	163	0.135	0.929	0.54381	0.199847	0.040
tempo	163	73.995	189.577	119.22496	27.237431	741.878
duration	163	41757.000	321664.000	215510.804	48976.0549	2.399E+9
Valid N (listwise)	163					

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Additionally, the Python package ptitprince and RainCloudPlots were used to create the following visualizations of the data. The code used is shown in Figure 12, and was adapted from both Heggli et al. and Poggiali et al.

Figure 12 – Python Code, data visualization

```
#!/usr/bin/env python3
# -*- coding: utf-8 -*-

# for handling data
import pandas as pd
# plot-related libraries
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
import ptitprince as pt
```

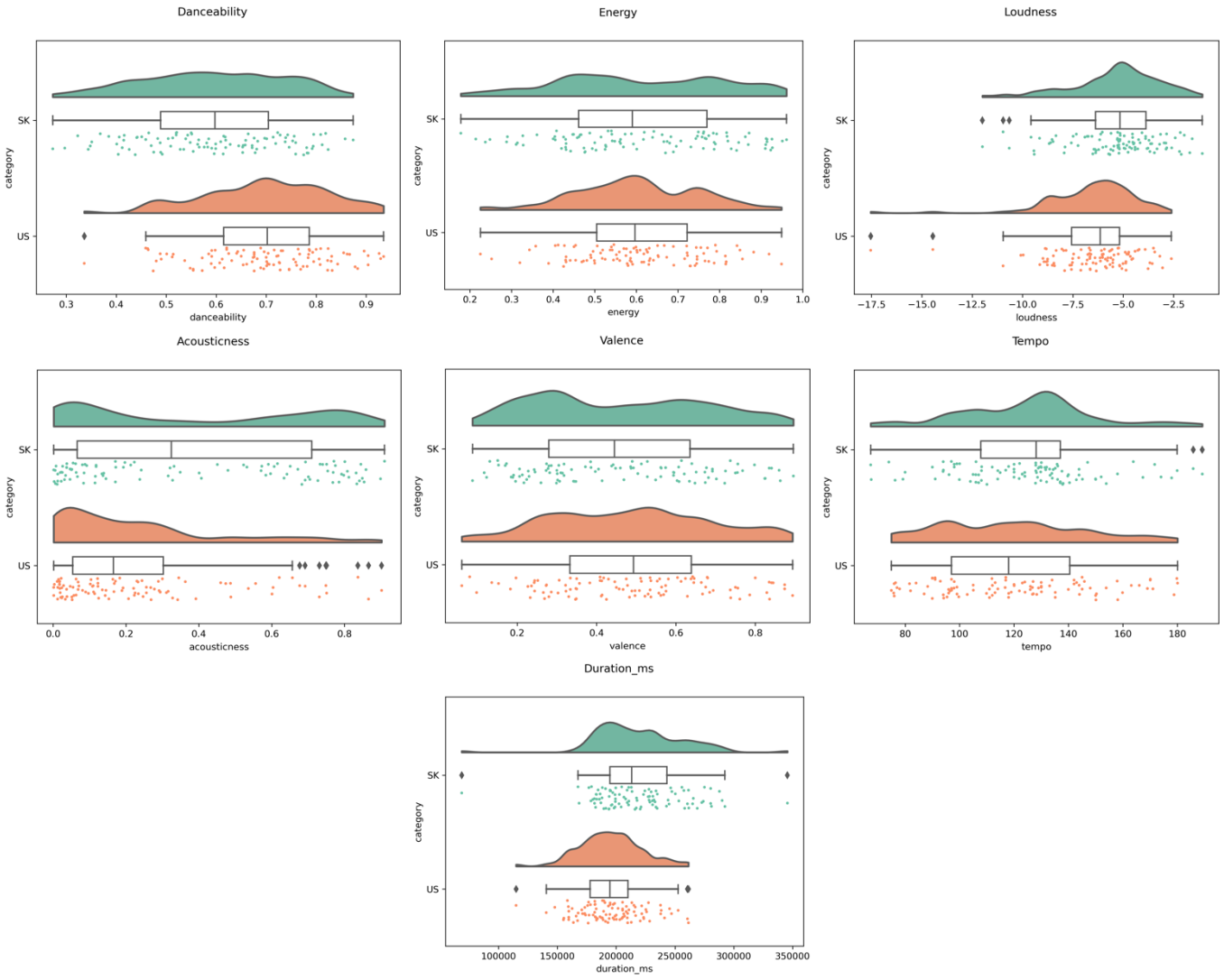
```
#%% Read in dataset

dataset = pd.read_excel('/Users/[USERNAME]/[PATH]/[FILENAME].xlsx')

audiofeatures = dataset[['category',
                         'danceability',
                         'energy',
                         'loudness',
                         'acousticness',
                         'duration_ms',
                         'valence',
                         'tempo']]

# we'll separate the data into two dataframes
SKValues = audiofeatures[audiofeatures['category']=='SK']
USAValues = audiofeatures[audiofeatures['category']=='US']

# We'll make raincloud plots for most of the audio features by looping through them
features = ['danceability','energy','loudness','acousticness',
            'duration_ms','valence','tempo']
```

```
# make the plots in a loop
for thisFeature in features:
    # Make a name for the figure
    saveName = 'Plots/ChartsComparison-' + thisFeature + '.png'
    # draw the plot
    f, ax = plt.subplots(figsize=(7,5), dpi=300)
    pt.RainCloud(x='category', y=thisFeature, data=audiofeatures, palette='Set2', bw=.2,
                 width_viol=.6, move=.2, ax=ax, orient='h', point_size=3, jitter=1,
                 linewidth=2, cut=0., scale="area",
                 box_showfliers = True)


    # add title
    plt.suptitle(thisFeature.capitalize())

    # save the figure
    plt.savefig(saveName, bbox_inches='tight')
```

Source: Spyder Elaboration

The visualizations of the data for each variable is shown in the following figures (Figure 13). Each figure presents the distribution of the value, both with a cloud (which can be understood as a smothered version of an histogram), with a scatter plot and a box plot. These representations are able to make us intuitively and visually see that the means for some of these variables (for example, *danceability*) are different in the two countries.

Figure 13 – Data visualization



Source: Spyder Elaboration

4.2.3 HP1: Correlation between popularity and audio features

In this paragraph, the first hypothesis, which aims at understanding whether audio features have a statistically significant impact on popularity, will be tested. The hypothesis put to test is the following:

> *HP1: There is a statistically relevant correlation between the popularity of a song and its structural music characteristics.*

When the distribution of the values associated with the tested variables can't be assumed to be normal, a non-parametric test carries more apt results in the context of a correlation analysis than the Pearson's coefficient. Consequently, in order to understand whether the Pearson's coefficient could be appropriately used in this context, we first need to check the assumption of normality. The following Figure 14 show the results of a Test of Normality realized using IBM's SPSS Software.

Figure 14 – Test of Normality on selected variables

	Statistic	df	Sig.
danceability	0.986	200	0.041
energy	0.987	200	**0.067**
loudness	0.945	200	0.000
acousticness	0.859	200	0.000
valence	0.973	200	0.001
tempo	0.986	200	0.047
duration	0.964	200	0.000
popularity	0.924	200	0.000

Source: SPSS Elaboration

At an *alpha* value of .05, corresponding to a confidence level of 95%, a normal distribution can only be assumed for *energy* ($p = .067 > .05$). The other variables cannot be assumed to be normally distributed. Consequently, a non-parametric test will be used to check the correlation between popularity (dependent variable, *y*) and each audio feature. The

following matrix, shown in Figure 15, displays the results of the Spearman's Rho test. Spearman's Rho was chosen as the alternative non-parametric test after the results of Bishara and Hittner (2017).

Figure 15 – Correlations Matrix

Correlations

			danceability	energy	loudness	acousticness	valence	tempo	duration	popularity
Spearman's rho	**popularity**	Correlation Coefficient	0.410**	0.032	-0.216**	-0.274**	0.194**	-0.131	-0.362**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.655	0.002	0.000	0.006	0.064	0.000	.
		N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200

Source: SPSS Elaboration

The output one gets from a Spearman's Rho correlation analysis can be interpret similarly to that one would get running a Pearson's Correlation analysis. Consequently, the correlation coefficient is paired with a *p*-value, which tells of the significance associated with the coefficient. In Figure 14, with a *p*-vale of above .05, *energy* and *tempo* (respectively, $p = .655$ and $p = .064$) seem to be uncorrelated with *popularity*. Contrarily, *danceability, loudness, acousticness, valence,* and *duration* all show a *p*-value of above .05, and thus we can conclude that there is a correlation between those variables and the dependent variable *popularity*. As for the strength and direction of this correlation, *danceability* is the only variable that seems to be positively correlated with *popularity*. All the others have a reverse correlation with the dependent variable. The strength of this relationship is shown by the absolute values of the coefficients, which makes *danceability* the strongest determinant of popularity among the analyzed audio features for the datasets that are object of this study. Consequently, we can confirm HP1, and conclude that there is a statistically significant correlation between audio features and popularity of a song.

4.2.4 HP2: Differences between US and South Korea's music market

The second hypothesis, which aims at understanding whether musical tastes with regards to audio features are statistically different between the US and South Korea, will now be tested. The hypothesis put to test is the following:

HP2: There is a statistically significant difference between the audio features of music that charts in the United States and that that charts in South Korea.

The purpose of comparing the means of two samples is to understand if there is a statistically significant difference between the two samples. In the context of this analysis, the comparison of means will be used as a way to statistically demonstrate that music tastes among Americans and South Koreans differ. The test will be conducted on the selected audio features of *danceability*, *energy*, *loudness*, *acousticness*, *valence*, *duration*, and *tempo*. All analyses will be done via IBM's SPSS Software.

First, the assumption of normality will be checked to understand whether the Independent Samples *t*-Test is appropriate. Figure 14 demonstrates that a normal distribution can be assumed for *energy* only. Thus, the Independent Samples *t*-Test to compare the means will be exclusively used on this variable. For *danceability*, *energy*, *loudness*, *acousticness*, *valence* and *duration* we will use the Mann-Whitney *U*-Test. SPSS allows the researcher to do both tests. Moreover, in all following figures and analyses, 1 is used to indicate values for the United States' dataset; 0 is used to indicate values for the South Korea's dataset.

Figure 15 shows the results for the Independent Samples *t*-Test conducted on the distribution of the *energy* values. The assumption of the homogeneity of variance is included through Levene's Test for Equality of Variances. Given that the *p*-value is lower than the selected *alpha* of .05 at a 95% confidence level, we can assume that the variances of the two distributions are equal. Given that the *p*-value is higher than the *alpha* value of .05 at a 95% confidence level ($p = .819$), we can conclude that there is no significant statistical difference between the means of the *energy* distribution of values for the United States and South Korea.

Figure 15 – Independent Samples t-Test for Equality of Means, energy

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
energy	Equal variances assumed	16.047	0.000	0.229	198	0.819	0.005610	0.024505	-0.042715	0.053935
	Equal variances not assumed			0.229	182.116	0.819	0.005610	0.024505	-0.042741	0.053961

Source: SPSS Elaboration

For the remaining variables, given that we can't assume a normal distribution of the values, we will conduct a Mann-Whitney *U*-Test. Figure 16 below shows the results of such test for the *danceability* values. Given that the *p*-value is lower than the *alpha* value .05 at a 95% confidence level ($p = .000$) we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the two distribution of values for *danceability* in the United States and South Korea.

Figure 16 – Mann-Whitney U-Test for Equality of Means, danceability

Test Statistics[a]

	danceability
Mann-Whitney U	2980.500
Wilcoxon W	8030.500
Z	-4.935
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

a. Grouping Variable: nationality

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Figure 17 shows the results of such test for the *loudness* values. Given that the *p*-value is lower than the *alpha* value .05 at a 95% confidence level ($p = .000$) we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the two distribution of values for *loudness* in the United States and South Korea.

Figure 17 – Mann-Whitney U-Test for Equality of Means, loudness

Test Statistics[a]

	loudness
Mann-Whitney U	3292.000
Wilcoxon W	8342.000
Z	-4.173
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

a. Grouping Variable: nationality

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Figure 18 shows the results of for the *acousticness* values. Given that the *p*-value is lower than the *alpha* value .05 at a 95% confidence level ($p = .003$), we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the two distribution of values for *acousticness* in the United States and South Korea.

Figure 18 – Mann-Whitney U-Test for Equality of Means, acousticness

Test Statistics[a]

	acousticness
Mann-Whitney U	3796.500
Wilcoxon W	8846.500
Z	-2.941
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003

a. Grouping Variable: nationality

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Figure 19 shows the results for the *valence* values. The computed *p*-value for is higher than the *alpha* value of .05 at a 95% confidence level ($p = .273$). We have to conclude that there is no significant statistical difference between the means of the *valence* distribution of values for the United States and South Korea.

Figure 19 – Mann-Whitney U-Test for Equality of Means, valence

Test Statistics[a]

	valence
Mann-Whitney U	4551.500
Wilcoxon W	9601.500
Z	-1.096
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.273

a. Grouping Variable: nationality

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Figure 20 shows the results for the *tempo* values. The *p*-value computed is higher than the *alpha* value of .05 at a 95% confidence level (p = .089). We have to conclude that there is no significant statistical difference between the means of the *tempo* distribution of values for the United States and South Korea.

Figure 20 – Mann-Whitney U-Test for Equality of Means, tempo

Test Statistics[a]

	tempo
Mann-Whitney U	4304.000
Wilcoxon W	9354.000
Z	-1.701
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.089

a. Grouping Variable: nationality

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Finally, Figure 21 shows the results of such test for the *duration* values. Given that the *p*-value is lower than the *alpha* value .05 at a 95% confidence level (p = .000) we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the two distribution of values for *duration* in the United States and South Korea.

Figure 21 – Mann-Whitney U-Test for Equality of Means, duration

Test Statistics[a]

	duration
Mann-Whitney U	2958.000
Wilcoxon W	8008.000
Z	-4.989
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

a. Grouping Variable: nationality

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the most popular songs in South Korea and the United States mainly differ in regard to *danceability*, *loudness*, *acousticness* and *duration*. This is interesting when compared with the results obtained from the correlation analysis conducted in 1.1.2. Indeed, the correlation analysis revealed that *danceability, loudness, acousticness* and *duration* were also the variables most intensively correlated with popularity. Consequently, given that it has been proven that *popularity* is indeed influenced by these variables; and that these variables have different distributions within the two countries under study (US and South Korea), we can conclude that there is a statistically significant taste in top charting (and thus, popular) music as far as the configuration of these audio features is concerned.

Table 8 summarizes the conclusions of the comparison of means analysis.

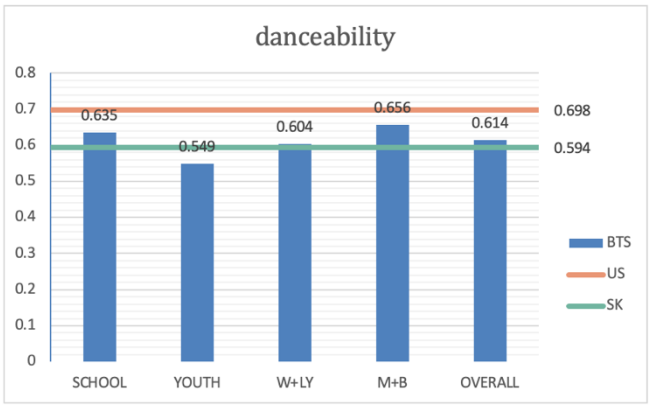
Table 8 – Summary of Equality of Means Results

Variable	Different Means?
Danceability	Yes
Energy	No
Loudness	Yes
Acousticness	Yes
Valence	No
Tempo	No
Duration	Yes

Source: Own Elaboration

After having proved that there is a significant different between the means of the values for *danceability, loudness* and *duration*, Excel was used to show how BTS' discography through the years fares with regards to the mean value for those same variables. This was done to see whether there has been a variation in the production of BTS; specifically, the aim is to see if BTS made music that sounds progressively more 'American'. Figure 22 shows the results for such visualization for the variable *danceability*. Mean values for the subsets were calculated on SPSS.

Figure 22 – Comparison of Means, BTS values on danceability

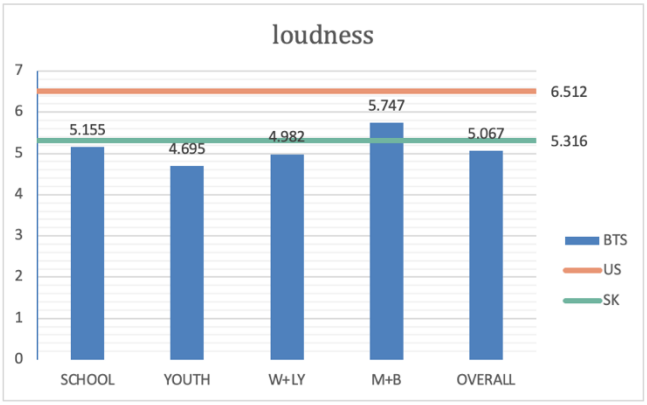


Source: Excel Elaboration

With the exception of the "youth trilogy", BTS' values for *danceability* tend to progressively approximate the mean for the United States. Indeed, starting with the Wings album, the first one to more deliberately target the Wester/American market, BTS' music with regards to *danceability* seems to aim at sounding closer to American music.

Figure 23 shows how BTS' means fare compared to the mean values for South Korea and the United States, for the variable *loudness*.

Figure 23 – Comparison of Means, BTS values on loudness

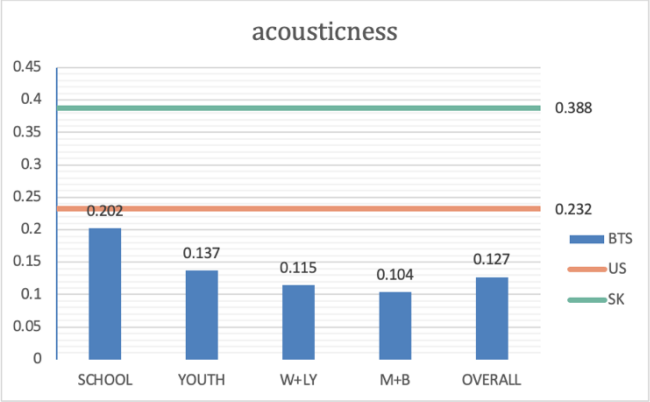


Source: Excel Elaboration

As much as *danceability*, we see that BTS music grows closer to the American standard with regards to *loudness* as well.

Figure 24 shows how BTS' means fare compared to the mean values for South Korea and the United States, for the variable *acousticness*.

Figure 24 – Comparison of Means, BTS values on acousticness

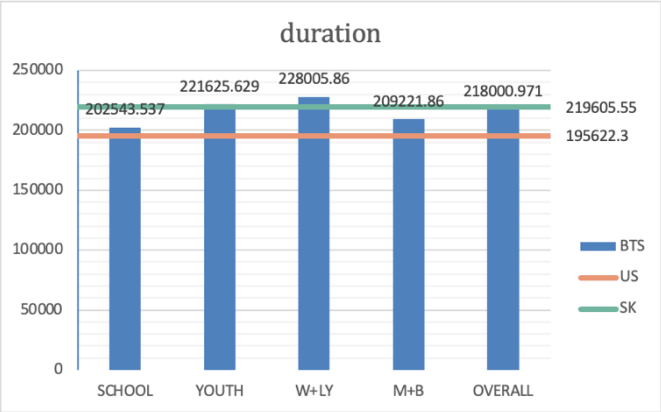


Source: Excel Elaboration

Technically, BTS music isn't exactly up to par with any one particular mean value. This can be understood as BTS not doing music that is acoustic. Generally though, even this stylistic musical choice puts BTS closer to the US, rather than South Korea. From the different mean values, we can understand that South Koreans tend to appreciate acoustic music more – given that there is a higher mean value for *acousticness* levels among top charting South Korean songs.

Figure 25 shows how BTS' means fare compared to the mean values for South Korea and the United States, for the variable *duration*.

Figure 25 – Comparison of Means, BTS values on duration

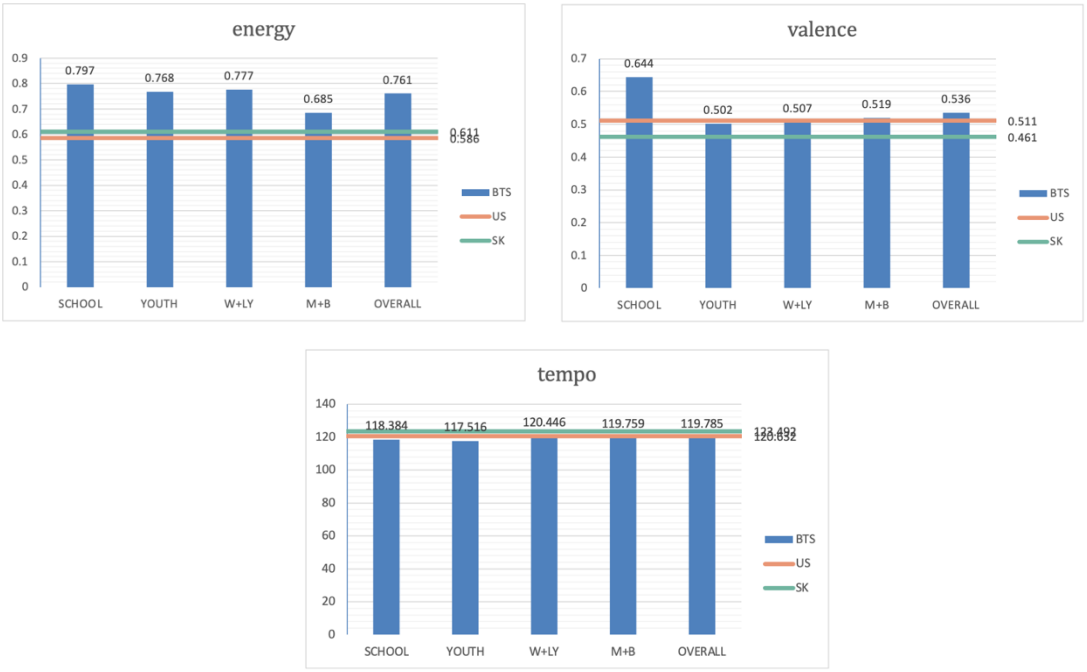


Source: Excel Elaboration

Despite an initial growing trend in terms of *duration* of the tracks in milliseconds, which places BTS' discography closer to South Korean standards, it seems that in BTS' latest singles *duration* values dropped considerably. Consequently, the value for this variable is also rather close to American standards.

Non-significantly different variables were also analyzed to get a more complete picture of the distribution of the values for all audio features for BTS, compared with the means observed for American and South Korean top songs. Figure 27 shows the graphs for *energy, valence and tempo*, respectively.

Figure 27 – Comparison of Means, non-relevant variables



Source: Excel Elaboration

Consequently, we can confirm HP2, and conclude that hit songs in the United States and South Korea show a statistically significant different in their sonic feature composition. Moreover, we can already attest to the increasing similarity between BTS' music and American standards in musicality, an hypothesis which will further be tested in the following paragraph.

4.2.5 HP3: Discriminant analysis and BTS' market positioning

The third hypothesis, which aims at understanding whether BTS' music should be classified as American or South Korean based on its sonic features' configuration, will then be tested. The hypothesis put to test is the following:

> *HP3: BTS' music has sonic features which are more similar to popular American songs rather than popular South Korean songs.*

This section will present the results of the application of a discriminant analysis to the data. According to Brown and Wicker (2000), discriminant analysis can either be descriptive, when it is used to describe the characteristics that are specific to distinct groups; or predictive, when its aim is to classify cases (i.e. individuals, subjects, participants) into pre-existing groups based on similarities between the case and the other cases belonging to the groups. This study will first perform a descriptive discriminant analysis on the combination of the South Korea and the United States top charting songs datasets to determine the characteristics that distinguish South Korean songs from American ones. This is a necessary step to later conduct a predictive discriminant analysis. In fact, predictive discriminant analysis can be done only through the usage of a set of classification rules that result from a descriptive discriminant analysis. The output of the descriptive discriminant analysis can be understood similarly as that of a linear regression analysis. The classification rules are no different from derived weight and linear combinations; thus, the analysis results in coefficients that are associated with each independent variable. The result of the initial descriptive discriminant analysis will then be an equation somewhat similar to a linear regression equation. When a satisfying equation is obtained, it will be applied to BTS' discography subsets to understand whether the model would classify BTS' music as either American or South Korean.

Discriminant analysis requires the following assumptions to be met: (a) independence of observations; (b) multivariate normality; and (c) homogeneity of covariances matrices. (Brown and Wicker, 2000). Nevertheless, discriminant analysis is still robust to violations of assumption (b) and (c) (Stevens, 1996).

The following figures shows the results of the discriminant analysis conducted on IBM's SPSS Software. This first model includes all independent variables (*danceability, energy, loudness, acousticness, valence, tempo* and *duration*). Figure 28 shows the preliminary classification results of the analysis.

Figure 28 – Classification Results

Classification Results[a]

			Predicted Group Membership		
		nationality	0	1	Total
Original	Count	0	77	23	100
		1	23	77	100
	%	0	77.0	23.0	100.0
		1	23.0	77.0	100.0

a. 77.0% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

Source: SPSS Elaboration

As shown by the classification results, the model is able to accurately classify 77% of the observations into their original groups. Specifically, we can see that the model is able to correctly place songs within the South Korean group 77% of the times, while the predictions for the United States are correct 77% of the times. A model can be considered meaningful if its predictions are more accurate than a random attribution of group membership. To check whether this model can be considered valid, we can test if the reported percentages of correct classification are more predictive than randomness by multiplying the prior probabilities for groups (shown in Figure 29) by 1.25.

Figure 29 – Prior Probabilities for Groups

Prior Probabilities for Groups

		Cases Used in Analysis	
nationality	Prior	Unweighted	Weighted
0	0.500	100	100.000
1	0.500	100	100.000
Total	1.000	200	200.000

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Given that .5 * 1.25 = .625 < .77 and .5 * 1.25 = .625 < .77, we can conclude that the model's predictions are indeed more accurate than randomness.

Figure 30 shows the results of the Box's Test. The Box's Test checks the assumption of homogeneity of the covariance matrices. The hypothesis for Box's Test are the following:

H_0: The within-class covariance matrices are equal.

RULE: ACCEPT WHEN *p > alpha*

H_1: The within-class covariance matrices are not equal.

RULE: ACCEPT WHEN *p < alpha*

Given that the significance of Box's Test is lower than the chosen *alpha* of .05 (p = .000), we should conclude that the within-class covariance matrices are not equal. While it is an assumption of the model of discriminant analysis that the covariance matrices should be equal, it is also accepted that the model holds despite violations of this assumption. Thus, we proceed with our analysis.

Figure 30 – Box's Test of Equality of Covariances Matrices

Test Results

Box's M		70.934
F	Approx.	2.438
	df1	28
	df2	136609.220
	Sig.	0.000

Tests null hypothesis of equal population covariance matrices.

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Figure 31 shows the eigenvalues. Eigenvalues indicate the ratio of between-groups variability to within-groups variability for a function (Brown and Wicker, 2000). Technically, the larger the eigenvalue, the more variance the function explains. The eigenvalue for this model in .438. The canonical correlation (which can be understood as unsquared R in a linear regression model) is .552. Finally, the Wilks' Lambda allows to

determine whether the model is statistically significant. Given that the *p*-value is lower that .05 ($p = .000$) it is possible to conclude that the model is indeed statistically significant.

Figure 31 – Eigenvalues and Wilks' Lambda

Eigenvalues

Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation
1	0.438[a]	100.0	100.0	0.552

a. First 1 canonical discriminant functions were used in the analysis.

Wilks' Lambda

Test of Function(s)	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	0.695	70.676	7	0.000

Source: SPSS Elaboration

The following results shown in SPSS are the Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients. These are shown in Figure 32. Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients are analogous to beta-coefficients in the context of a multiple regression analysis. These coefficients are those that one should reference when attempting to rank the relative contribution of each predictor to the discriminant function (Klecka, 1980; Pedhauzer, 1997). Relevant contributions are represented by coefficients that are higher than .3 in absolute value (Pitch and Stevenson, 2016). Thus, the relevant variables according to these table would be *danceability* (-.345), *loudness* (.724), *acousticness* (.569) and *duration* (.452).

Figure 32 – Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Function 1
danceability	**-0.345**
energy	-0.071
loudness	**0.724**
acousticness	**0.569**
valence	0.199
tempo	0.129
duration	**0.452**

Source: SPSS Elaboration

The Structure Matrix follows, in Figure 33. The structure matrix contains structure coefficients which represent the correlation between each independent variable and the discriminant function. Structure coefficients higher than .3 (Pedhauzer, 1997) or .33 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013) can be considered meaningful. Consequently, *danceability* (-.586), *duration* (.564), *acousticness* (.428), *loudness* (.419) can be considered meaningful.

Figure 33 – Structure Matrix

Structure Matrix

	Function 1
danceability	**-0.586**
duration	**0.564**
acousticness	**0.428**
loudness	**0.419**
tempo	0.151
valence	-0.106
energy	0.025

Pooled within-groups correlations between discriminating variables and standardized canonical discriminant functions
Variables ordered by absolute size of correlation within function.

Source: SPSS Elaboration

In an attempt to build a more precise predictive model, we will thus exclude the following independent variables, which from both the Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients and the Structure Matrix are considered non-meaningful: *valence*, *energy*, *tempo*.

Figure 34 shows the classification results for the new model.

Figure 34 – Classification Results

Classification Results[a]

			Predicted Group Membership		
		nationality	0	1	Total
Original	Count	0	78	22	100
		1	22	78	100
	%	0	78.0	22.0	100.0
		1	22.0	78.0	100.0

a. 78.0% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

Source: SPSS Elaboration

In this second model, 78% of the observations are correctly classified into their original groups. Specifically, we can see that the model is able to correctly place songs within the South Korean group 78% of the times, while the predictions are correct 78% of the times. We then check whether this new model can be considered more predictive than randomness by multiplying the prior probabilities for groups (shown in Figure 29 above) by 1.25. Given that .5 * 1.25 = .625 < .78 and .5 * 1.25 = .625 < .78, we can conclude that the model's predictions are more accurate than randomness.

Figure 35 shows the results of Box's Test of Equality of Covariances Matrices. Given that the significance of Box's Test is higher than the significant *alpha* of .05 (p = .001), we can assume that the covariances matrices are not equal. This implies that the output of the discriminant analysis won't be linear, but rather, quadratic.

Figure 35 – Box's Test of Equality of Covariances Matrices

Test Results

Box's M		30.445
F	Approx.	2.978
	df1	10
	df2	187429.482
	Sig.	0.001

Tests null hypothesis of equal population covariance matrices.

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Figure 36 shows the eigenvalues. The eigenvalue for this model in .423. The canonical correlation is .545. Finally, the Wilks' Lambda shows a *p*-value of .00, which is lower that .05; we can conclude that the model is statistically significant.

Figure 36 – Eigenvalues and Wilks' Lambda

Eigenvalues

Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Canonical Correlation
1	0.423[a]	100.0	100.0	0.545

a. First 1 canonical discriminant functions were used in the analysis.

Wilks' Lambda

Test of Function(s)	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	0.703	69.074	4	0.000

Source: SPSS Elaboration

The following results shown in SPSS are the Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients and the Structure Matrix (Figure 37 and Figure 38). Given that all coefficients (except *danceability* in the Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients table) are higher than either .33 or .30, we can assume that all independent

variables in the model have a significant impact in determining whether an observation belongs to a group or the other.

Figure 37 – Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Function 1
danceability	-0.273
loudness	0.754
acousticness	0.586
duration	0.452

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Figure 38 – Structure Matrix

Structure Matrix

	Function 1
danceability	-0.596
duration	0.575
acousticness	0.435
loudness	0.426

Pooled within-groups correlations between discriminating variables and standardized canonical discriminant functions
Variables ordered by absolute size of correlation within function.

Source: SPSS Elaboration

Given that this model contains only significant predictors, we can continue our analysis. Figure 39 shows the Group Centroids. Centroids are the mean discriminant scores for each group. A discriminant score is the result of the discriminant equation.

Figure 39 – Group Centroids

Functions at Group Centroids

nationality	Function 1
0	0.647
1	-0.647

Unstandardized canonical discriminant functions evaluated at group means

Source: SPSS Elaboration

SPSS calculates a discriminant score for each entry within the dataset using this function. Then, the group centroids are calculated as the mean of the discriminant scores for each entry belonging to each respective group. The absolute magnitude of the group centroids indicates the degree to which a group is differentiated on a function, and the sign of the centroid indicates the direction of the differentiation (Brown and Wicker, 2000).

Figure 40 shows report the output of the analysis for the first 20 entries in the dataset. We can see that in 20 entries, only two were misclassified (entry 11 and 16). The discriminant scores for these entries are -.432 and -1 respectively. To justify the assignment to a certain group rather than the opposite, one should check the squared Mahalanobis distance between this value, which represents the observation, and each group's centroid. The Mahalanobis distance is indeed a measure of the distance between a point and a distribution, and is based on the idea of measuring how many standard deviations away the point is from the mean of the distribution. The usage of the Mahalanobis distance implies that each observation is assigned to the group to which it is closer. Given that the values of -.432 and -1 are closer to group 1 (with a centroid of -.647) than to group 0 (centroid equal to .647), it is understandable that the program attributed those two entries to group 1 rather than group 0.

Figure 40 – Selected Results

Casewise Statistics

	Case Number	Actual Group	Highest Group: Predicted Group	Highest Group: P(D>d | G=g) p	Highest Group: P(D>d | G=g) df	Highest Group: P(G=g | D=d)	Highest Group: Squared Mahalanobis Distance to Centroid	Second Highest Group: Group	Second Highest Group: P(G=g | D=d)	Second Highest Group: Squared Mahalanobis Distance to Centroid	Discriminant Scores: Function 1
Original	1	0	0	0.980	1	0.691	0.001	1	0.309	1.608	0.621
	2	0	0	0.531	1	0.506	0.393	1	0.494	0.444	0.020
	3	0	0	0.470	1	0.855	0.522	1	0.145	4.064	1.369
	4	0	0	0.656	1	0.565	0.198	1	0.435	0.719	0.201
	5	0	0	0.704	1	0.586	0.144	1	0.414	0.836	0.267
	6	0	0	0.865	1	0.649	0.029	1	0.351	1.261	0.476
	7	0	0	0.514	1	0.843	0.426	1	0.157	3.788	1.300
	8	0	0	0.283	1	0.903	1.154	1	0.097	5.605	1.721
	9	0	0	0.687	1	0.795	0.162	1	0.205	2.876	1.049
	10	0	0	0.945	1	0.679	0.005	1	0.321	1.499	0.577
	11	0	1**	0.830	1	0.636	0.046	0	0.364	1.163	-0.432
	12	0	0	0.696	1	0.582	0.153	1	0.418	0.815	0.256
	13	0	0	0.944	1	0.678	0.005	1	0.322	1.496	0.576
	14	0	0	0.575	1	0.528	0.314	1	0.472	0.537	0.086
	15	0	0	0.055	1	0.965	3.692	1	0.035	10.336	2.568
	16	0	1**	0.724	1	0.785	0.125	0	0.215	2.713	-1.000
	17	0	0	0.755	1	0.607	0.097	1	0.393	0.963	0.335
	18	0	0	0.935	1	0.720	0.007	1	0.280	1.892	0.729
	19	0	0	0.215	1	0.920	1.539	1	0.080	6.422	1.887
	20	0	0	0.910	1	0.666	0.013	1	0.334	1.395	0.534

Source: SPSS Elaboration

The computations for BTS' discography are shown in Figure 41 below. For these elaborations, XLStat was used. XLStat is an add-in for Microsoft Excel which enhances the program to compute complex statical analysis. In particular, it allows the user to not only run a descriptive discriminant analysis, but also test its predictive power on a testing dataset. This dataset will have to contain ungrouped observations, each characterized by a value for each independent variable which is part of the descriptive model that the program built. In our case, this dataset will contain *danceability, loudness, acousticness* and *duration* values for BTS (divided per era).

Figure 41 – Prediction Results

	Predicted class	Pr(0)	Pr(1)	F1
BTS_SCHOOL	1	0.393	0.607	-0.012
BTS_YOUTH	0	0.523	0.477	0.454
BTS_W+LY	0	0.526	0.474	0.284
BTS_MOTS+BE	1	0.300	0.700	-0.375

Source: XLStat Elaboration

Interestingly, SCHOOL and MOTS+BE were categorized as American songs by the program. The classification of SCHOOL within the American group may be explained by the strong presence of hip hop sounds among the first releases of the group. Hip hop is a genre born from and developed by the Black American community in the States. Incidentally, this is usually the reason by which BTS initial meek success in South Korea is explained. Nevertheless, MOTS+BE songs being a part of the American group shouldn't be explainable by strong genre-specific influences, given that BTS has long since abandoned their hip hop inspirations in favor of more traditionally pop sounds. Thus, we can venture the idea that our discriminant model was able to assign BTS' latest discography to the American group because of more explicit similarities between the sound of BTS and that of popular American music. If anything, we can conclude that BTS doesn't necessarily sound like Korean or K-Pop music.

A study of the discriminant scores for each dataset also shows a progressive change, in time, within BTS' production. The 'F1' column in Figure # shows the computed discriminant scores for each era, represented by the different subsets. 'SCHOOL' is associated with a discriminant score of -.012, and thus placed within the American group. Still, this value is but vaguely close to the centroid for the US group (-.647). On the contrary, 'MOTS+BE' has a discriminant score of -.375, which places it soundly among popular American music. 'YOUTH' and 'WINGS+LY' have, respectively, scores of .454 and .284. The youth trilogy was, more or less explicitly, thought of as a product intended for the Chinese market. Indeed, after BTS' lukewarm debut in South Korea, the group's management had hoped to enhance the seven-members boyband's success in foreign markets. China was the most proximate, and thus an album with the Chinese market in mind was produced. This strategic intention can be seen in the sounds of the songs present in these three albums, which are overall not so different from the sounding of popular South Korean songs. Indeed, 'I Need U', which is the youth trilogy's title track, was not ill-received by the South Korean market either. In fact, it was BTS' first song to enter within the top five places in the Gaon Chart, and win BTS' first award in one of the country's popular weekly music shows (Onsen, 2015). Nevertheless, a study on Chinese

listeners' taste with regards to these audio features could be insightful, and could further the current understanding on the similarities in taste between neighboring Asian cultures.

Wings was the first album to target a different market. As one can see from Figure #, it carries a discriminant score of .284. While this score still safely places this section of BTS' discography in the South Korean group, the lowering of the score has still a relevant meaning. Indeed, it shows the start of a journey of change among the music produced by the group. The score diminished from .454 to .284, which means BTS' music moved from the center of the South Korean group to its outskirts.

Consequently, we can confirm HP3, and conclude that, as one could already picture, BTS' songs show similar sonic features to American hit music, rather than South Korean top charting songs. This can perhaps be interpreted as one of the reasons for their significant success in the United States.

4.3 Lyrics

LIWC2015, which is the most updated version available for purchase, will be used to conduct a content analysis on BTS lyrics. LIWC counts words and operationalizes them into variables that are suitable for quantitative data analysis. It then calculates a percentage of words falling into a specific category of language (Czechowski et al., 2016). LIWC works using an internal dictionary which uses more than 80 categories (Pennebaker et al., 2007), and each word is assigned a category based on how much it relates to a specific topic. Albeit not considering all the vocabulary usable in English, LIWC is a widely used program in conducting content analysis, and thus this thesis will not question the validity of the results obtained from it.

First, categories to study were selected. Based on previous research, this thesis decided to use the following categories, mainly in order to obtain results that could later be used in a comparative way. The chosen categories are shown in Table 9, and were selected from the LIWC2015 Dictionary.

Table 9 – Dictionary Definitions

Category	***Definition***
Individual focus	Usage of first-person singular pronouns
Collective focus	Usage of first-person plural, second-person and third-person pronouns
Social Interactions	i.e. Family, Home, Friends, Affiliations, Female, Male
Antisocial Behavior	i.e. Anxiety, Anger, Sadness, Death
Positive Emotions	i.e. Love, Nice, Happy, Sweet
Negative Emotions	i.e. Hate, Worthless, Enemy, Loneliness
Uncertainty	i.e. Risk, Tentative Verbs, Interrogatives

Aspirations	i.e. Achievement, Power, Reward, Money, Drives
Sex	i.e. Sex, Lust, Fuck

Source: Own Elaboration

After having selected these categories, the program was run on the 141 lyrics. Figure 42 shows some preliminary results which are of overall nature. *Word count* reports the total words counted by the program for each document. *Analytic* is a measure of usage of words that are logical, and suggest hierarchical and formal thinking patterns; contrarily, *authentic* reveals speech patterns that are more personal, humble and vulnerable. Finally, *tone* includes both positive and negative emotions codes, giving an overall indication of whether a text can be considered happy or sad. Values below 50 indicate a more negative emotional tone.

Figure 42 – General Descriptors

ERA	WORD COUNT	ANALYTIC	AUTHENTIC	TONE
SCHOOL	20550	23.06	81.04	47.07
YOUTH	9915	17.99	90.60	54.25
WINGS	7227	17.89	96.62	15.46
LOVEYOURSELF	11748	15.90	83.80	71.90
MOTS	9209	23.66	92.58	34.23
BE	2904	40.02	98.41	44.70
OTHERS	1972	35.33	98.65	40.35

Source: LIWC Elaboration

Conclusions can already be drawn from these preliminary results. Firstly, as one could expect from songs, lyrics tend to be more authentic than analytical. The most interesting data from Figure 42 is represented by the *tone* column: we can see that BTS' songs tend to overall display an average value of 43.99, which by being lower than 50, suggests a discography that delves on negative emotions more than it expresses positive thoughts. Within this context, there are a few relevant exceptions, namely the Youth trilogy and the Love Yourself trilogy. Also interestingly, the lowest value for tone is that of Wings (15.46).

These values are interesting when compared to the overreaching themes of these albums. Thus, it seems relevant at this point to spend a few words on the topics of these albums.

The school trilogy is, as per its namesake, mainly focused around the struggles of high schoolers. Many of the albums tracks (such as Boy in Luv and War of Hormone) revolve around the theme of first love, the frustration at not understanding where these feelings come from, and the angst of unrequited love. Maybe more interestingly, some songs also express anger and frustration against an academic system that oppresses the individual. BTS' debut song, No More Dream, talks about the struggles of being forced to go to school, seen by the overall society as the only outlet to reach one's dream. The members, though, have a different perspective: *"boring same day, every day repeats / adults and parents tell us the same dream / future job number one, public officials? / it's not a forced dream, a relief pitcher"*. The path of "going to school to get a decent job" is seen as a forced, oppressive and thus 'fake' dream by the members of the group. "*Ask yourself 'bout the profile of your dream / become the subject of your own life, away from suppression*", they say, inciting the listener to throw away the fake dream and the hypocrisy of a society that isn't willing to accept the braveness of students who wish to follow their own path. One of the members, in regards to No More Dreams, stated that the lyrics touched on the anxiety that comes from the vague realities students face. It is interesting to note that criticism of the school system and its inability to foster students' individualities was a common theme in the group that is credited with the birth of K-Pop as a standalone genre, Seo Taiji and the Boys. As noted by Jung Eun-Young in *Made in Korea* (Routledge, YEAR), despite the stunning economic growth that interested South Korea during the 1980s, there still existed an educational system that redefined and sharpened class distinctions. Academic achievement was seen as a mark of social status of outmost importance, and parents, seeing the education of their children as their prime responsibility, put heavy pressure on students to perform well. The employment of a "spying system", where student reported on each other's misbehaviors or below-average performances to teachers, wasn't unusual. Most relevantly, unsatisfactory performances often brought by corporal punishments, a practice that remained in place at least until the 1990s. Anxiety and paranoia, embarrassment and self-deprecation were all enhanced by the existence of winners and losers' classrooms. A lot of students committed suicide or run away from home. Seo Taiji and the Boys were the

first group to ever dare sing in opposition to such an established school system. It seems that with their first production, BTS follows the example set by SeoTaiji, which can be found in the strong hip hop references and sounds employed in these first tracks.
Overall, the lyrics within these first four albums touch heavily on negative emotions (anxiety, rejection, oppression, dissatisfaction, frustration) but also show the positive light of first love, the strength of young people's self-confidence and lightheartedness.

The youth trilogy follows the growth of the members. Finally out of school, the members experience the thrill of young adult life for the first time. 'I Need U' still retains hues of anxiety and uncertainty, as it features the angst of love that the members feel they are about to lose. Nevertheless, the second album in this era abandons the theme of the frustration of being oppress by adults who aren't willing to let young adults be themselves, and instead offers words of comfort and encouragement: "*change the rules, change change / the ones who came before us want to, want to maintain / but we can't do that, bang bang. / this ain't normal.*" The members all stated that they felt the need to give comfort that was expressed with more than the blank "cheer up" and "be strong" which one often offers to struggling people.
Consequently, it is understandable that this trilogy would sound overall more positive than the first, given that the members are in that stage of life where they cannot simply notice the hardships they face, but they feel the imposing need to take a stance against unfair expectations and start finding their own way in life.

The album that follows, Wings, is the least positive among all albums. The songs in this release revolve around the theme of temptation and desire, and how easy it is to fall for them and vacillate. Still, the title track 'Blood, Sweat and Tears', whose visuals are heavily inspired by Herman Hesse's *Demian*, have an overall positive outlook, where they members aim to use their 'wings' to go far, despite the obstacles that temptations prove to be. Other themes explored in this album are the loneliness that comes from missing someone who is away, the hardship of being an underdog or otherwise part of a minority in society. Wings features mostly solo tracks, where the members explore their personal

temptations and hardships. It is then understandable that this era is the one with the lowest tone score.

The following trilogy, Love Yourself, has a striking more positive outlook on life. After having hardly strived away from temptation, the path to adulthood is riddled with feelings of being inadequate and losing love for oneself. Love Yourself aims to remind listeners that "if you're not true to yourself, your love won't last forever. The love could be person to person, it could be between me and myself"[7]. Still, the songs in these album are intentionally less angry and more hopeful, as represented by the tone score calculated by LIWC. The title track for the first album, DNA, is also the first song to gain some popularity in the United States. It's an upbeat song where the theme of love is explored without the uncertainty and angst of not knowing whether the love is mutual. On the contrary, the love in DNA is so strong that is written in the persons' DNA.

Finally, Map of the Soul is a more introspective journey, to understand the difference between real self and social self, and to go back to the feelings the members felt at the start of their path to adulthood. The members face what has become of their future, how they need to shoulder responsibility and fear the impressive growth of their success. These two albums (Persona and 7) are mostly a journey of reminiscence for the group; in many ways, it's like a traveler stopping to look back at his progress so far.

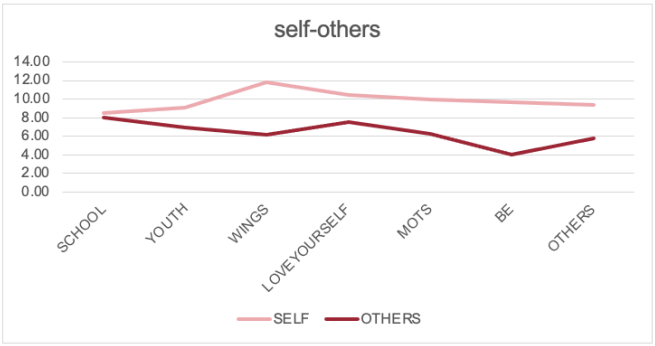
BE is the latest full release from the group, and it tries to give a positive message during a time of hardship (namely, the COVID-19 pandemic). The singles that the group released afterwards, like *Dynamite* and *Butter*, serve a similar purpose. We can indeed see a rise in tone score for the latest releases, going from 34.23 in MOTS to 44.70 (BE) and 4035 (OTHERS, which contains single releases like *Dynamite* and *Butter*).

The following figures show the progression of the usage of certain categories of words along the eras. The aim of this analysis is to compare the category usage of the wording of

[7] RM, Apple Music Interview. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Wtv8ydpJVM.

BTS' songs with that of popular American songs. The data for the American songs are taken from DeWall et al. (2011). Figure 43 shows the comparison of individual and collective focus in BTS' songs.

Figure 43 – Self-Others

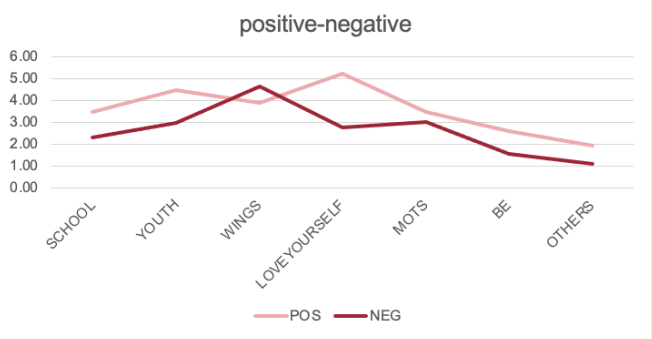


Source: LIWC Elaboration

The use of self-centered pronouns is higher in BTS' discography. This can be explained by their songs describing a personal, albeit easily universalizable, journey of growth. This trend is similar to what DeWall et al. see with Billboard top charting songs from 1980 to 2007.

Figure 44 shows how the relationship between positive and negative emotions expressed in BTS' lyrics. As one would expect, negative emotions abound and surpass positive ones during the Wings era. Overall, BTS' discography seems to be more positive than negative, albeit an evident downward trend in latest albums. When compared to DeWall et al.'s results, it seems that BTS' lyrics follow the general trend seen in American music in the past years; that is, a general, shared negativity expressed by music. According to DeWall's study, this progressive reduction in positive emotions in songs mirrors psychological and social changes in the US. Indeed, one can say that the precariousness that has characterized both the social and economic situation of many around the globe during these past decades can be cause for a shared lack of positive outlook.

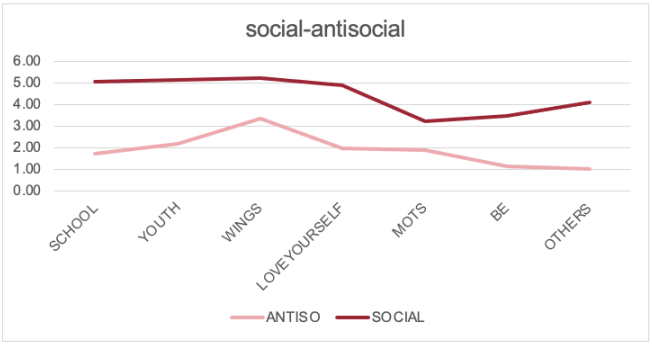
Figure 44 – Positive-Negative Emotions



Source: LIWC Elaboration

Figure 45 shows the usage of words related to either social interactions or antisocial behavior. Except for Wings, we can see that generally BTS' songs display low levels of antisocial word usage. This is a finding that goes against DeWall et al., in which US songs were shown to display a high rate of words related to anger, and a negative correlation over time between years of release and positive social interactions expressed within the song. It is a belief of DeWall and colleagues that the reduction in positive social interactions goes hand in hand with an increase in antisocial constructs being expressed through the lyrics of a song. Nevertheless, this doesn't appear to be the case in BTS' songs. Indeed, save for the first albums (where the main theme was that of oppression and dissatisfaction towards ones' own situation), BTS' lyrics strive to send positive messages of comfort. This can be seen in a choice of words which are, in strike contrast with what overall can be seen in the United States, positively related to family, friends, and community.

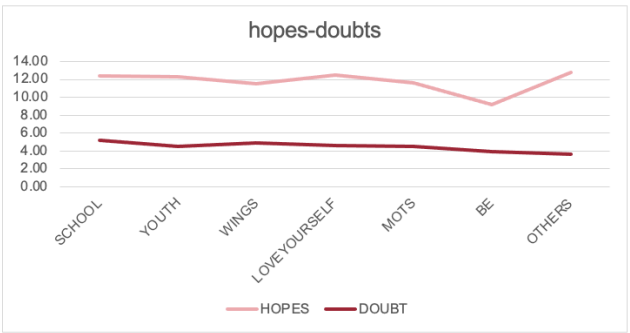
Figure 45 – Social-Antisocial Behaviors



Source: LIWC Elaboration

Finally, Figure 46 shows the distribution of words related to Aspirations (Hopes) and Uncertainty (Doubts). This analysis isn't present in DeWall et al., but it was still considered apt in the case of BTS, given that their production is often see as heavily referencing to dreams, hopes for the future, and the path one has to travel to reach them. Indeed, BTS' lyrics seem to be highly related to words of hope, aspirations, and dreams. The drop in aspirations-related words that we see for the album 'BE' might be related to this album being released during the COVID-19 lockdown. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that BTS' songs generally lack a high degree of negativity, antisocial behavior, extreme narcissism and social disconnect, which are characteristic of US-produced songs.

Figure 46 – Hopes-Doubts



Source: LIWC Elaboration

Figure 47 shows the percentage of words related to sexual acts that one can find in BTS' songs. American music is more often than not associated with violence, drugs, and most importantly, sex. Conversely, BTS' music seems to lack these topics entirely. There is absolutely no mention of drugs in BTS' lyrics, or drugs usage. The discussion so far conducted showed that pictures of violence (accounted for in the antisocial behavior category) are decisively less frequently expressed than thoughts and ideas of community and self-love. More importantly, the reference to violence in BTS' overall production is decidedly lower than in US' music. Figure 47 allows to additionally conclude that sex is not a predominant, nor secondary theme in BTS' music. This might be related to the fact that it is a requirement for producers of K-Pop music to avoid using explicit sexual words, curse words, and drug related words as well. An exemplary case of this is represented by the song 'Lotto' by SM Entertainment's EXO. The song's title is, as evident, related to the world of gambling. Still, because of censoring policies in South Korean's media stations, which avoid broadcasting anything that is against morality, the lyrics and title of the song were changed to 'Louder' for the TV-version of the song only.

Figure 47 – Sexual Words

ERA	SEX
SCHOOL	0.05
YOUTH	0.06
WINGS	0.08
LOVEYOURSI	0.03
MOTS	0.00
BE	0.00
OTHERS	0.05

Source: LIWC Elaboration

In this paragraph, an answer to Q1 has been found. Q1 states the following:

> *Q1: Are BTS' lyrics different from the lyrics of top charting popular songs in the United States?*

Q1 aimed to find a reason of optimal differentiation in BTS' musical production, and posited that such a reason could be that the themes proposed by the group in their songs

were different from those the American public is used to hear from songs that reach hit status in the United States. By using LIWC, such a difference in topics and words chosen to express them was found. It is thus possible to infer that BTS are able to address the need of the American public for different messages in popular music.

4.5 Discussion

This thesis had the objective to find a plausible answer to a series of questions, mainly: how and why a South Korean pop group would be able to become popular in the United States. Popularity has been differently defined by authors: length of airplay time (Rossman, 2012), economic success (Dertouzos, 2008), or peak chart position and sustained chart presence (Askin and Mauskapf, 2017). For the purpose of this thesis, a popular song is a mainstream song; concretely, a song that the general public would know. In fact, K-Pop as a genre has steadily been spreading throughout the globe, but in many countries, it still is relegated to a niche position, where only specific categories of people know about and listen to it. Usually, a pre-existent interest in Asian countries and cultures is observed in people of different ethnicities that became curious about K-Pop. Consequently, BTS' recent debut in mainstream charts and media (with TV appearances and radio stations playing their songs) would strike the average K-Pop fan as somewhat odd. Most importantly, one would ask themselves how is it that BTS managed to 'make it', while other K-Pop groups did not.

This thesis has tried to find the reasons for BTS' mainstream success in the specific features of the product they offer to the market. It is somewhat controversial to interpret a cultural or creative product with the stone cold logics of management and economy: an interesting paper by Eikhof and Haunschild (2007), in analyzing the working of theatres in Germany, highlights how economic logics of production tend to hinder artistic logics, and end up endangering the very resource that is vital to cultural production. It has been indeed noted before that it is a shared belief that cultural and creative companies shouldn't be studied as normal industries; that, because art cannot be limited to the workings of demand and supply, the management of cultural and creative production cannot be considered as that of producing and marketing any other product. Nevertheless, it is still true that creative and cultural product exist to satisfy a need, which is the very fundamental reason for existing of any product, as economic theory intends it. One could say that because creative and cultural products require the presence of two actors, one supplying

the product and the other demanding it, and because these two actors together work to complete the process of production (Dupuis, 1981), then these products too can be considered economically. Consequently, it is not absurd to try and understand what are the features and attributes which make a product acceptable by the market. In this context, we try to consider which are the attributes that characterize a top hit in the American musical market; in a way, one could consider the absence of these attributes as creating somewhat of a barrier to entry, in the sense that music that does not own those attributes cannot hope to enter and enjoy a sustained presence in the charts.

The study firstly aimed to establish a correlation between popularity and these attributes, which were intended as a series of audio features obtained from Spotify. This link is of outmost importance, as it helps conclude that audio features have indeed an impact on popularity and influence its ultimate intensity. It was the outcome of this analysis to highlight that, among all the studied features, *danceability, loudness, acousticness, valence* and *duration* were significantly correlated with popularity. The impact of the correlation is stronger for *danceability* and *duration*. Interestingly, *duration* is negatively correlated with popularity, meaning that longer tracks are usually not appreciated by the general public. After all, it seems that there is an average length among pop tracks, which hardly surpass 3:30 minutes in length. Longer tracks would be considered, possibly, as 'alien' to a veteran pop listener, and consequently would find it more difficult to find a place in the top charting songs' list. Thus, we were able to conclude, based on our hypothesis, that indeed popularity is influenced by *core* attributes of music. This result is consistent with Interiano et al. (2018), who found that successful songs tended to be happier, more danceable, more 'party-like' and brighter; and Askin and Mauskapf (2017), which found by studying Billboard's Top 100 songs between 1958 and 2013 that several music characteristics related to the track's success. Additionally, a similar study is provided by Kim and Oh (2021), who studied weekly Billboard Top 100 songs between 1998 and 2016, and determined that predictability of success in increased by adding information about certain audio information, such as danceability, happiness, timbre and pitch.

Secondly, this thesis aimed to understand if tastes among listeners from different countries (namely, the US and South Korea) varied based on a song's *core* attributes. The result of this analysis was that, indeed, there is a significant difference among Americans and South Koreans' tastes when it comes to *danceability*, *loudness, acousticness* and *duration*. It is a thesis of many authors that music, being strongly related to culture, assumes different forms in different countries. It is then understandable that the US and South Korea would have developed different tastes for different kind of music. Nevertheless, because cultural production is based on frequent referencing to previous works (Tamma and Curtolo, 2009), it is but a predictable consequence that pop music (as music of any other genre) would present very similar characteristics altogether. This is true especially for a music industry that employs a highly globalized value chain (on the topic, the works by Oh, I are particularly relevant). This analysis was, despite various considerations on globalization of tastes around the world, successful, and supports our claim that, when it comes to *core* audio features, there exists a space of difference between the US and South Korea.

HP3 maintained that BTS' success in the United States could be explained by these proved differences in taste between the United States and the group's home country, South Korea. We used a discriminant analysis to see whether BTS' music would be classified as South Korean, or American. This effort is useful, because it implies that one cause for success in a foreign market is 'sounding' like local music. Indeed, our model was able to classify BTS' most recent production as American, rather than South Korean. The latest albums, especially most recent releases like *Dynamite* and *Black Swan*, are what cemented BTS' presence in the American market. Both these songs were included in the last era, which the model classified as American. Previous production, with the exception of the first trilogy, had more South Korean sounding characteristics, which allowed BTS to be accepted as a K-Pop product by their home market. It is relevant to notice that the groups' first album (the school trilogy) were not successful in South Korea. This may be explained by how the first albums are strongly influenced by hip-hop, a genre that is conventionally considered traditional in the United States. Consequently, our model identified these first albums are American, rather than South Korean. Ultimately, our hypothesis that one of the reasons for

BTS' success in the American market was confirmed. This implies that there exist certain 'barriers' which are represented by a standard in music that, if met, allows a product to be accepted by the target market. This doesn't necessarily mean that a sufficient condition for success is producing a song that respects these requirements in musicality. Marketing and promotional efforts, as well as production company, distribution label, 'superstar' factor, tie-in with other media, debut rank in charts (Asai, 2008; Bhattacharjee et al., 2005), have been proved to be influential in creating long-lived success. Indeed, as Backer puts it, cultural products are perceived in relation to each other; this implies that one could believe that even in music there are certain standards to respect in order for audiences to recognize the product as being part of a category. The theory of category labels seem to play an important role in creative and cultural production research, as they are believed to structure taste and consumption behavior (Bourdieu, 1993); and these labels are tightly interconnected with a set of underlying features, which can be understood as the audio features analyzed in this study. Consequently, by proving that BTS have similar audio features to popular American music, this thesis was able to support the thesis that BTS music is part of a similar category label around which taste of the American audience are shaped.

As far as lyrics are concerned, this thesis proposes an overview of the themes of BTS' songs in relation to themes usually explored by American popular musical production. DeWall et al. (2011), whose findings have been taken as references to compared BTS' lyrics to that generally observed in American music, highlight a tendency towards first-person singular pronoun usage (which the authors link with an increase in narcissistic tendencies among the American population), words that refer to antisocial behavior, negative emotions; a decrease in positive emotions, others-focused pronouns and social interactions. On the contrary, our analysis of BTS' lyrics show that overall, and especially in the group's latest releases, songs tend to be more positive, with a higher relative presence of words related to positive emotions and social interactions than negative feelings and antisocial behavior. This is an interesting finding, and one that can be linked to Askin and Mauskapf (2017)'s idea of "optimal differentiation". In fact, the statistical analysis conducted prior to the content analysis of lyrics demonstrated that, musically, BTS' song

follow the standards set by top charting music in the United States, ultimately falling within the same category label, where a category label is a set of musical attributes that are shared by all songs within a same label. Yet, Askin and Mauskapf find that truly popular song, despite what one may think, "do not all sound the same". Hit songs are those that successfully manage a similarity-differentiation trade-off. They "invoke conventional feature combination associated with previous hits while at the same time displaying some degree of novelty distinguishing them from their peers" (Askin and Mauskapf, 2017). The authors call this 'optimal differentiation'. We argue that BTS obtain optimal differentiation by offering a product that has the core features required by the market to accept a product (they, consequently, respect the industry standards and pass the 'barrier to entry' represented by them), but still add to their songs an element of differentiation, which is represented by lyrics that are overall more hopeful, positive, social than what the general American public is used to.

The results of this thesis support the hypothesis that music popularity is somewhat correlated to the very own musicality of a track (represented by its audio features), and that BTS' popularity in the United States can be explained by their music having features that are similar to those of popular American tracks. A limit of this study is, first and foremost, not being able to provide a comprehensive analysis of the product of BTS: indeed, in the present time, a musical product isn't comprised exclusively of music and lyrics, but there is a fundamental visual aspect (represented by not only the music video, but also the choreography) that is intimately related to the track. One could say that a song is but a tridimensional product, made of music, lyrics, and visuals. Despite there existing methodologies that one can implement to analyze video content, as they fall more within the realm of sociologic and linguistic analysis, they were considered too beyond the scope of this thesis. It would be interesting for future studies to research the impact of music videos on the economic performance (which one can interpret in terms of popularity) of a track.

Additionally, the present study has worked on a reduced sample size of 200 songs to build the discriminant model that was used. Future research could work on bigger sample sizes, perhaps including top charting songs of different years. Moreover, future studies could also adopt the same approach to compare different countries, perhaps to understand if there are differences between the listening preferences of American and Italian consumers of music. Overall, the approach implemented in this thesis can be employed for a variety of different countries. The United States was chosen as a reference point because of it still being one of the biggest markets for music, despite its population counting but for a limited percentage of the overall world population. An artist is often considered to have really achieved stardom only when they become mainstream in the United States. As such, this study provides insights that could be useful for music managers and musicians to engineer a product that has the structural characteristics to 'make it' in the American market. To universalize the conclusions of this thesis, future research that includes different countries is needed.

As far as the lyrics analysis goes, a limit of the present thesis is having compared BTS' songs only to American data, without a reference to K-Pop's lyrics. Future studies could seek to understand if there are differences in what BTS writes and what other K-Pop groups sing about. Moreover, this thesis has not established any sort of correlation between popularity and themes of songs. Albeit interviews with fans having exposed lyrics and their ability to give them comfort as one of the main reasons why they appreciate BTS' music, such interviews were too few in number to be statistically relevant. Future research could conduct in-depth interview with fans and try to correlate their appreciations for the lyrics to BTS' level of popularity in the United States, or elsewhere in the world.

4.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we were able to test the hypothesis explained in Chapter 4. First, conducting a correlation analysis we were able to conclude that audio features do influence popularity. This result is consistent with current literature on sonic features and popularity of a product in the music industry. Specifically, we demonstrated that all variables with the sole exception of *energy* have a statistically significant impact on popularity. We then demonstrated the difference in tastes between South Korea and the US; the two countries' top songs differ in terms of *danceability, loudness, acousticness* and *duration*. This result was obtained by statistically comparing the means of the values for each variable and each country. The last hypothesis, tested with a discrimination analysis, helped us conclude that of BTS' songs, the first and last eras are, with regards to their audio features, more American than South Korean. Discriminant analysis outputs a discriminant function that is able to assign new observations to either one of two groups, which are defined from a training set. By using the Top 100 US and Top 100 South Korea datasets, we used SPSS to build two groups, and then used Excel to test to which group BTS' discography would be a part of. This analysis demonstrated that BTS' first and last eras are indeed more American than South Korean in their audio features.

The final analysis presented in this chapter is a content analysis of the lyrics of BTS' songs. By using LIWC, a content analysis software, we conclude that BTS' lyrics tend to be more positive and express words related to social behaviors. This represent an element of differentiation between BTS' songs and American hit songs. By comparing our results with those of DeWall et al. (2011), we find that BTS' lyrics are different from the mainstream in popular American music. In conclusion, there are reasons to believe that the themes explored in BTS' lyrics and the choice of words used can be considered a cause of positive differentiation between BTS and popular American music.

In conclusion, it can be stated that BTS' music appears to be more similar to American hit songs than South Korean ones. This conclusion was reach first by establishing that the analyzed variables were relevant by highlighting their significant impact on popularity of a song. Then, the existence of a difference between countries in tastes in music was also statistically proved. This conclusion was needed in order to then use the two categories of South Korean hit songs and American hit songs to build a discriminant model that was then applied to BTS' discography. The fact that BTS' music was classified as American can be understood as BTS' production having similar sonic features to American music. Consequently, BTS' songs have a degree of typicality in the American market for music that is needed, according to currently accepted research, to obtain success. Nevertheless, the literature stresses how typicality is a necessary, yet not sufficient condition to reach hit status in the music market. A degree of originality, an element of differentiation, is also needed. By analyzing BTS' songs and their lyrics, it is possible to posit that BTS find their element of differentiation in the American music market in offering different messages to the American public. While hit songs in the US from 1958 have been riddles with negative emotions and antisocial behavior-related words, BTS' songs tend to propose messages of hope, redemption and determination in the face of hardships. Possibly, the inherent positivity of BTS' lyrics can be seen as an element of optimal differentiation, and thus the combination of typical musicality and different messages expressed by lyrics can be understood as a reason for their American success.

Conclusions

This thesis was written with the objective of finding, through quantitative and statistical analysis, the reasons that set BTS' as a product of the music industry aside from its competitors. The main research questions tackled have been:

HP1. There is a statistically relevant correlation between the popularity of a song and its structural music characteristics.
HP2. There is a statistically significant difference between the audio features of music that charts in the United States and that that charts in South Korea.
HP3. BTS' music has sonic features which are more similar to popular American songs rather than popular South Korean songs.

Through correlation analysis, it was possible to demonstrate that there is indeed a statistically relevant correlation between audio features, intended as a track's core musical characteristics, and that same track's popularity. This was done by calculating, through SPSS, the Spearman's correlation coefficient between audio features obtained from Spotify's API and the track's popularity, computed by Spotify through an algorithm. Analysis of means was used to compare the characteristics of popular tracks in two different markets, the United States and South Korea. By using the Mann-Whitney U test, we were able to compare the means of the distributions of the values for each audio feature calculated on the United States and South Korea Top100 datasets. This analysis allows to infer that there is a difference in the composition of songs that are popular in the two country, at least as far as core musical features are concerned. This analysis helps in finding an answer to HP2, and allows to confirm it. Finally, discriminant analysis was employed to check whether BTS' production "sounds" more American than South Korean. Discriminant analysis allows for the computation of a discriminant function, based on an observation set; the discriminant function can then be used to understand whether new observations are part of a group or the other. In this case, discriminant analysis was used

on the observation set made of the Top100 American and South Korea tracks; then, the model was employed to test HP3. Indeed, BTS' newest production appears to be more American than South Korean in sound.

Additionally, this thesis wanted to find an answer to the following question:

Q1. Are BTS' lyrics different from the lyrics of top charting popular songs in the United States?

By using the content and sentiment analysis software LIWC, an analysis of BTS' lyrics was conducted. The results were then compared with the literature on the themes and word usage in American lyrics. It was interesting to notice that there is a fundamental difference between the themes and words used in BTS' music and top charting American tracks. American music tends to employ more negative, antisocial and aggressive words; on the contrary, BTS' music seems to resonate with younger audiences as the themes start from narrating the struggles of school life to the difficulties one faces when growing up, and give positive messages of self-love and hope while doing so.

These results are in line with the theory proposed by Askin and Mauskapf in 2017. Most popular tracks are those that "invoke conventional feature combinations associated with previous hits while at the same time displaying some degree of novelty distinguishing them from their peers" (Askin and Mauskapf, 2017). The authors call this the "similarity-differentiation trade-off". This thesis claims that one way to explain BTS' success in the United States is that the group was able to develop a musical product that finds an optimal balance between the need for similarity and differentiation. Similarity is obtained through similar audio features distribution; differentiation is obtained through unique lyrics that speak loudly to young people in the United States, offering them "something" that they weren't able to find in their own market.

The results of this thesis offer an interesting starting point for future research, which could further test the assumption and model employed to universalize the method. Ultimately, the conclusion that there are certain 'hard characteristics' that indeed influence the level of popularity of a track could be of use to music managers and engineers in the process of production the beat for a new song. Moreover, this same method could be used to understand the reasons for the success of other musical acts in countries different than their own. For example, of latest striking success in Italy is rock band Maneskin: after winning Sanremo (a nation-wide popular music contest) and Eurovision, their popularity sky-rocketed worldwide. The same method used in this thesis could be useful in researching where Maneskin obtain an optimal tradeoff between typicality and differentiation. At the same time, this method could also be used on other K-Pop acts: it could be helpful to find out if the first requirement of optimal differentiation and typicality is fulfilled, and thus if the reason for a lack of impact as impressive as that of BTS should be looked for elsewhere.

Naturally, there are limits to this research. Firstly, this thesis couldn't offer a comprehensive analysis of BTS' product. No analysis of the videos for BTS' top singles was done, mainly due to a lack of knowledge regarding software and methodologies that could be used to do so. Future works could focus on what are the main characteristics of BTS' music videos and what impact they have on the final product and its typicality-differentiation level. Additionally, the sample used in this work is indeed quite reduced (only 200 observations were obtained for the test set). Future studies could aim at expanding this set, perhaps including top charting songs from years before 2020. Another limit is that the lyrics comparison was done exclusively between American lyrics and BTS' lyrics; it could be interesting to understand what difference exists (if any at all) between BTS' lyrics and South Korean music lyrics. Moreover, the comparison of lyrics was done through mostly unofficial, fanmade translations of the original Korean lyrics. Perhaps a study conducted by researchers with knowledge of the Korean language could enhance the validity of the results obtained in this thesis.

In conclusion, this thesis is able to fill a gap in the literature about K-Pop. Specifically, there are no studies that this thesis could find that inquired about the nature of BTS' musical production, about its core features and the nature of its lyrics. While most literature focuses on the sociological impact of BTS' mania, and the role the band's fanbase has in shaping its global success, this thesis wanted to analyze what were the causes of the group's success that could be related back to the group itself–as opposed to external forces such as fans or the impact of social media usage.

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