Mapping out the K-pop fandom in the UK

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Abstract
This study offers an ethnographic account of cultural practices of the K-pop fans in the UK. It considers the ways in which the UK's social milieu receives culturally hybridized K-pop, in particular how young fans consume this cultural import. While focusing on the emergence, development and prospects of K-pop fandom, it also examines the ways in which the media – both the British and the Korean – responded to K-pop phenomenon and how the fans have appropriated the media representation. The theoretical framework of this study comes from relevant literature on the Korean wave, on fandom, and on popular music and youth culture. In the British context, the emergence of the K-pop fandom cannot be attributed to the cultural similarities and geographic proximity nor the popularity of the Korean dramas; it was social media that facilitated the spread of K-pop popularity. The study reveals that the UK K-pop fans are media literate and well-mannered, far from the stereotyped image of fans being obsessive loner or hysterical crowd. It also shows that there is a potential to develop a distinct subculture: within the K-pop fan community, 'subcultural' sensibilities were found in the ways that they often used their knowledge of music, dance, and music industry in cultural production as well as cultural consumption. Media representation was found lagged behind the times in that the British media was Orientalist while the Korean counterpart was nationalistic. Although K-pop does not seem to have 'invaded' Britain and there is quite a long way to go before K-pop is accepted by the mainstream media and music industry, this study concludes that 2011 clearly marked the landing of the K-pop in the UK. Subtle approach in a long term, with not too much of a commercial drive at first, is recommended in arguably the most 'impermeable' British market.

Introduction
Historically, South Korea (hereafter Korea) has been concerned more about the influx of foreign cultures - be it Chinese, Japanese, or American - than the advance of its own; however, Korea has successfully reinvented itself within the past decade from an obscure cultural backwater to a new centre of cultural production in Asia (Joo 2011: 489-490). The flood of the Korean popular culture – films, pop music and especially TV dramas – into the rest of Asia around since the late 1990s became to be known as the 'Korean wave' (Hallyu or Hanryu in Korean) (Huat and Iwabuchi, 2008: 2). The origin of the term can be found when the Korean television drama, What is Love? (Sarang-I Mwogille 1991) was screened on Chinese Central Television (CCTV) in the People Republic of China (PRC) in June 1997, of which the audience share was 16.6%, the highest record achieved by any foreign drama series to be broadcast in the PRC up to that time (Jung 2011: 1). Started with the television dramas, the Korean wave was soon expanded to films, pop music and video games. Overall in 2009, the country exported nearly $3 billion in entertainment, more than double 2002 exports, and hence dubbed as "the Hollywood of the East" (Farrar 2010). Korea was introduced as 'arguably the world's most exciting filmmaking country' in the BBC 4 documentary called 'Jonathan Ross' Asian Invasion' (24th January 2004). To name a few, such Korean directors as Im Kwon-taek, Lee Chang-dong, Kim Ki-duk, and Park Chan-wook won the major awards at the Film Festivals in Cannes, Venice and Berlin between 2002 and 2004. In particular, Park Chan-wook's Old Boy (2004) - what has been billed as Asian extreme cinema - won the Grand Prix (second prize) at Cannes, which facilitated a wider British fanbase for the Korean films. It is the Korean popular music, called K-pop, that this paper aims to focus on. In April 2011, BBC News reported that "K-pop is a hit with fans around the world: the

industry is worth $2 billion (£1.2 billion) a year to the nation's economy" (Willamson 2011b). While conglomerates such as Samsung and Hyundai still form the backbone of the country's financial structure, for young people all across Asia - and increasingly in Europe and the US too - Korea of today is just as likely to be associated with pop music or TV dramas as with cars or microchips, said another BBC report (Williamson 2011a).

The Korean pop music has been brushed aside by television dramas in terms of their popularity overseas; however, Korean music industry's conscious efforts to mix Korean sentiments and global styles paid off, firstly at home, and then abroad (Shim 2011: 15). Indeed, Ryoo (2009: 140) states that while the Korean dramas are still the most popular branch of the Korean popular culture in many Asian countries, the love of K-pop is also swiftly making its presence felt. What especially initially gave an edge to K-pop was localized hip-hop that toned down the harsh beats of the American genre, dealing with issues more resonant with the Asian youth (Yoon 2001: 92–93). K-pop songs are often seen as showing a fuller affinity for the region's character, and to express more soulfulness than Western music (Ryoo 2009: 140). In 2002, Korean teenage pop sensation BoA's debut album reached the number one spot on the Oricon Weekly Chart, Japan's equivalent of the American Billboard Charts (Shim 2006: 28-29). Other Korean pop singers and bands have become household names throughout Asia.

In recent years, K-pop has gained an increasingly wider fanbase in terms of its geographical and cultural context, for example Europe and North America, largely thanks to the social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and user generated contents (UGC) website YouTube. In April 2011, a K-pop star Rain (Bi) was voted one of the most influential persons of the year by Time magazine (Time, 21st April 2011). A Korean girl group Wonder Girls' single Nobody made it into the Bill Board Hot 100 in 2009, the first accomplishment for an Asian musician for 30 years (Shim 2011: 15). Taeyang, a member of the Korean boy band Big Bang, released his first solo album, Solar, online in July 2010 and it hit No. 2 on iTunes' R&B sales charts in the U.S. and No. 1 in Canada — a first for an Asian artist (Yoon 2010). 2NE1, another Korean girl band, released their music video 'I am the Best' on YouTube on 28th June 2011 and it recorded 1.7 million hits in two days which made it the second most watched clip worldwide and within the top 10 on iTunes' electronic charts in North America and Europe, says YG Entertainment (Yonhap News 30th June 2011). A member of the Korean girl group 4minute, HYUNA was top of YouTube's "Most Watched Today" chart after the video "Bubble Pop!" – the title track of her solo album released on 5th July 2011 - was viewed over a million times in two days (Independent 6th July 2011). Within two weeks since the release, HYUNA's video has been watched over 9 million times and the UK website Popjustice.com listed her song as the 'Song of the Day', which was the first for any K-pop (Kang 2011). For many artists in Korea's booming music industry, social media like YouTube and Twitter have become crucial tools to reach audiences in formerly hard-to-access markets like the U.S. and Europe (Yoon 2010). There have been fans' flash mobs in LA, Paris and London asking for K-pop concerts in their cities. SM Entertainment held two-day concerts in Paris in 10th - 11th June 2011 and according to the Director of the company Lee Su-man, their Paris concerts were decided on the basis of SM videos' popularity online, namely YouTube (Jung, H. 2011).

The consumption of music by today's youth is very much different from that of the past. Since the early 1990s, the World Wide Web has facilitated the uploading and sharing of sound and images, increases in memory and storage capacity and the development of file-compression formats such as MP3 have made it easier to store file containing music and moving images (Blake 2007: 25-26). Young people are increasingly and actively engaged with SNS; the World Wide Web has also

transformed the space of fandom by providing an infinite and at least partly unregulated space in which those across the world with quite specific interests can exchange information, ideas, and images with others unreachable before the Internet (Couldry 2003: 91). K-pop or in general the Korean wave in the UK has been made possible thanks to YouTube and increasingly diversified consumption of popular culture by young people. The phenomenon has only recently been recognised; for example, the country is not included in the extensive list of 18 countries (13 in Asia, 3 in North/South America and 2 in Europe/Africa) in the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange's (KOFICE) 2010 report on the Korean wave (KOFICE 2011). There has been no Korean drama shown in the British terrestrial broadcasting channels to date. This paper offers an ethnographic account of the K-pop fans and their cultural practices in the UK. It considers the ways in which the UK's social milieu receives culturally hybridized K-pop, in particular how young fans respond to and consume this cultural import. It discusses the emergence, development of K-pop fans in the UK; it also examines the ways in which the media – both the British and the Korean – responded to K-pop phenomenon and how the fans have interpreted and appropriated the media representation. The theoretical framework of this study comes from the following three strands of research: first, the existing discourses around the Korean wave; second, the studies on fandom; and third, popular music and youth culture.

The Korean wave

The concept of the Korean wave was originally used to refer to the pan-Asian popularity and cultural dissemination of the Korean popular culture within Asia but it can also refer to the circulation of Korean popular culture outside Asia (Jung, S. 2011: 173). Some used the term in the global context whereas others kept its original sense, distinguishing the regional Asian popularity from the Western cult fandom of Korean genre films (see Jung 2011). The last decade has witnessed the wealth of literature on the Korean wave, analysing from the representation of masculinities of Korean idols to the influence of the Korean wave on the tourism industry. Recently more studies tend to locate the topic in the context of cultural hybridization (see Shim 2006, 2011; Ryoo 2009; Hong 2011; Jung, S. 2011). In these studies, the Korean wave, as an example of a regionally specific phenomenon of transnational popular cultural flow, has been used to illustrate the complexity involved in cultural hybridization and the implications that it has for the globalization of culture. It has also been argued that the Korean wave is a sign of how a country considered 'in-between' (or sub-periphery) can find a niche and reposition itself as a cultural mediator in the midst of global cultural transformation (Ryoo 2009: 137).

Since the 1970s the three dominant models of international communication have been the media/cultural imperialism model, media development model and global/local model (Gillespie, 2005: 144-148). The first model is the process by which global capitalism allows developed western nations to dominate the world, politically, economically and culturally (Tomlinson 1991). The problems with this model are, however, that it is based on an overly simplistic view of audiences as passive, vulnerable and undifferentiated and that it is founded on an uninterrogated model of media effects and a linear conception of the communication process that assumes a one-way transmission of messages from sender to receiver. In addition, in this model the media are seen as a monolithic locus of economic and political power and as exerting power over audiences in uniform ways. The second model of media development is based on the idea that media can be used as a tool of social, economic and political development but it has also been criticised for its ethnocentrism, for encouraging, rather than combating, dependency on the west. The third model of global/local emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, emphasising the multi-directional flows of media around the world. More and more nations from the South are producing and exporting media, which has been

seen by some as challenging the media imperialism of former decades, and creating alternative transnational circuits that disrupt the hegemony of US and other western media. In this model the contradictions and tensions between global systems of production and local processes of consumption are emphasised.

Further to this third model came discourses that identify cultural hybridity and that investigate power relations between centre and periphery from the perspective of postcolonial criticism (Shim 2006: 27). Whilst the conventional model of cultural exchange presumes the existence of a pure, internally homogeneous, authentic, indigenous culture which becomes subverted or corrupted by foreign influences, the reality, however, is that every culture has in fact ingested foreign elements from exogenous sources, with the various elements gradually becoming 'naturalised' within it (Morley and Robins 1995: 129). In this transnational context of a meeting between the centre and the periphery, hybridity reveals itself as new practices of cultural and performative expression (Shim 2006: 27). Cultural hybridity, for Bhabha (1994), is constructed by circuitous power dynamics where globality is contested and negotiated by locality by moving through semiotic or symbolic detours (Ryoo 2009: 138). In the process of the Korean struggle for cultural diversity in the face of a possible erosion of their cultural particularity, Shim (2006: 38) argues that cultural hybridization has occurred as local cultural agents and actors interact and negotiate with global forms. Cultural similarities and geographical proximity between countries in Asia have been frequently used to explain the Korean wave, for example, sharing an Eastern mentality despite the differences in languages and a low cultural barrier to crossover with Korean contents; however no such cultural discount can be applied in the British context. Furthermore, Shim (2006: 39-40) argues that the factor of cultural proximity is not enough to explain the success of the Korean pop culture across the region. It is also the fact that "Korean pop culture skilfully blends Western and Asian values to create its own" and hence cultural hybridization thesis is useful.

To have a brief look at the development of the Korean wave, Huat and Iwabuchi (2008: 4) state that the penetration of Korean TV dramas into East Asian markets in the late 1990s is the consequence of felicitous timing. The government has also backed the expansion of the country's culture industry abroad, seeing it as a vehicle for soft power – a tool to boost Korea's reputation in the region (Farrar 2010). It was felicitous because the post-1997 Asian Financial Crisis that savaged the Korean national economy contributed to the stepping-up of the exporting of Korean pop culture as part of the national export industry. Affected by the same crisis, television industries in other East Asian countries were looking for cheaper programmes than the relatively expensive Japanese dramas. Huat and Iwabuchi (2008) argued that the confluence of these two separate industry strategies led to the rapid importation and screening of Korean TV dramas in the rest of East Asia, except Japan, creating the so-called 'Korean Wave' in the region. The Korean wave then hit Japan when the TV drama called Kyoul yonga (WinterSonata) was screened (in full, four times between 2003 and 2004) by NHK, Japan's public service broadcaster (Jung 2009: 74). Winter Sonata and the love of the main actor Bae Yong-jun – the so-called Yonsama - became emblematic of the Korean wave. The following table (Table 1.) summarises the key points about the development of the Korean wave, based on relevant journalistic and academic materials.

Table 1. The Korean wave 1997 - present
Period 1997- early 2000s Mid-2000s Late 2000s – present   Keywords Beginning of the Korea wave Growth of the Korean wave, followed by dipping Reviving and diversifying the Korean wave   Main genres Drama, music Drama, music, film, video game Drama, music, film, video game, animation, food, language   Main Areas China, Taiwan, Vietnam China, Japan, Taiwan, East

Asia   China, Japan, Taiwan,
Asia, Africa, America, Western Europe   Examples of content   What is Love?
Stars in My Heart
Clon, HOT Winter Sonata, Jewel in the Korean Palace (Daejanggeum)
BoA, Rain (Bi) Idols (Big Bang, Kara, SHINee, Girls' Generation etc.)
Online video games   My table.
(Source: Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange)

As shown in the above table, the characteristics of the Korean wave in recent years – what is sometimes called the 'new Korean wave' or 'Korean wave 2.0' – are the diversification and the growth in cultural exports such as music and video games. As of 2009, according to the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, there has been rapid growth in video games (13.4% compared to the previous year) and in music (striking 89.7% compared to the previous year) (HYPERLINK "http://www.mcst.go.kr"   www.mcst.go.kr). The nationalistic tones concerning the Korean wave phenomenon throughout the above period is well noted. For example, Joo (2011) examines how transnationalization of Korean popular culture has been largely seen in Korea within nationalistic discourses and interests or ''pop nationalism.'' Joo (2011: 497) argues that the Korean media not only echoes, but also fuels the nationalistic euphoria and celebration concerning the Korean Wave phenomenon. Here, historian Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of 'imagined community' is useful because he argues that the modern nation is not just a political, economic and territorial entity but a cultural construction, an 'imagined community'. Anderson (1983) argues that the simultaneous consumption of national media (novels, newspapers and broadcasting especially) plays an important role in how we imagine ourselves as members of a national community (Gillespie 2005: 140). It is the media that provides narrative of the nation, myths and symbols, ceremonies and traditions – and indeed in this case, the success of the nation's own culture overseas – and this creates a feeling of national unity and belonging, a sense of solidarity and furthermore develops a national identity. According to Joo (2011: 489), since Korea has never enjoyed regional as well as international acclaim for its popular culture, the transnational recognition of its pop culture has become a point of national pride in Korea. However, there has also been the growing uneasiness with the Korean Wave phenomenon in Asia in the sense that some Asians (for example, the Chinese and Vietnamese) are now critical of the Korean Wave as cultural imperialism (Joo 2011) much like the Koreans in the late 1980s when they charged against American cultural imperialism. There have been varied responses to the fandom of Korean wave; for example, the backlash against the Korean wave led to anti-Korean wave and in China some criticize infatuation with Korean music as 'unpatriotic' (Farrar 2010). CNN reported that "female fans of K-pop boy bands have to form password-protects online groups to fend off accusations that their fetish with cute Korean singers is anti-Chinese" (Farrar 2010). Here, we can witness that the discourse around the Korean wave and its fandom has been affected by the sense of nationalism and ethnocentrism. Ethnocentricism involves a belief in the centrality or superiority of one's own ethnic or cultural group and a dislike or misunderstanding of groups defined as alien or 'other' (Gillespie, 2005: 141).
A development in the discourses about the Korean wave was the focus on the aspect of mugukjeok (non-nationality) or Chogukjeok (trans-nationality) in Korean popular culture which is hybridized and influenced by various foreign cultures through transcultural flows largely facilitated by advanced media technology and globalization. Iwabuchi (2002) suggests the concept of mukokuseki (non-nationality or non-Japaneseness), where he emphasizes "culturally odourless" aspects of Japanese consumer products such as the Sony Walkman or computer games. He argues that the trait of being culturally odourless mukokuseki in these Japanese consumer products is one of the main reasons behind their global popularity. Jung, S. (2011: 3) uses the term mugukjeok the Korean equivalent

(which shares the same Chinese characters with mukokuseki), within the paradigm of transcultural hybridity, to refer to how popular cultural flows enable the mixing of particular cultural elements (national, traditional, and specific) with globally popular cultural elements, which then causes those particular cultural elements to become less culturally specific.

Another aspect of the existing research on the Korean wave focuses on the economic and cultural reverberations. Korea has suddenly emerged as one of the most popular tourist destinations, as TV dramas have brought in a spate of the ''Korean Wave tourists'' from various corners of Asia (Joo 2011: 495). Japanese tourism to Korea alone increased by 40% during the first ten months of 2004 (Onishi 2004) and the number of Taiwanese tourists to Korea also increased from 108,831 in 2000 to 298,325 in 2003, despite the general decline in overseas travel in Taiwan during the same period (Onishi 2005). Couldry (2003: 75) calls the 'ritual space of the media', that is, the hinterland of categorisation and ordering that lies behind the practice of media rituals. The notion of 'media pilgrimages' is used to describe specifically journeys to points with significance in media narratives. Through media pilgrimages, not only is the abstract nature of the media production system 're-embedded' in an encounter, for example, with a site of filming or celebrity, but the significance of places 'in' the media is more generally confirmed (Couldry 2003: 76-77). Given the palpable economic and cultural spin-offs of the Korean wave, the Korean government also implemented various measures to bring the Korean wave and tourism industry together, for example, using the Korean wave stars as tourism ambassadors for the Korea National Tourism Organization (under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) and opening the Korean Entertainment Hall of Fame in September 2004 (Joo 2011: 498).

K-pop, idols, and YouTube culture
The size of the Korean music industry has been doubled throughout the 1990s while the market share of domestic music products far exceeded that of international ones by more than three times (Shin 2002: 16). Lee (2009: 491) demonstrates that a few features crystallized in the late 1990s characterise the Korean music industry: the training and management of teenage acts, heavy promotion and marketing through mainstream media and the quick appropriation of international music trends. More importantly, he argues, the Japanese-originated 'idol star system' settled down in the mainstream. It is exactly these aspects of the Korean music industry that the European media, for example Le Monde and BBC, criticised – the condition and treatment during and after the training and management of teenage idols in the current entertainment management system. The so-called 'slave contract' and the lack of financial rewards for the artists from digital downloads were discussed in detail (see Williamson 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Le Monde 11th June 2011). In these reports, whilst young boys and girls are said to have been trained and exported, replacing Samsung and Hyundai products, the long exclusive deals that tie the trainee-starts into the so-called slave contacts, with little control or financial reward, are described as the 'dark side of the Korean pop music'. About a K-pop concert - the Dream Concert, at which up to 20 K-pop bands perform - in Seoul's 66,800-seat World Cup Stadium, the fandom was referred to as "teenage crushes" "on a once-a year date in a national love story, where commitment is measured in coloured balloons, and devotion is knowing all the words" whilst the performing bands were described as "highly produced, sugary boy- and girl-bands with slick dance routines and catchy tunes" (Williamson 2011c). The editorial take in the above news stories can be interpreted from various angles and viewpoints, one of which is 'Orientalist' approach in the mainstream Western media. Developed by Edward Said (1979), Orientalism refers to those practices, writings, policies, philosophies and ideologies that construct a sense of the Orient (Hartley 2002: 169-170). It is not to be understood as a form of racism; rather, Orientalism is a discourse because it arises from the intention of understanding

disparate and different cultures. The concept of Orientalism is useful in this study for analysing media (in particular, the BBC reports) as much as nationalism and ethnocentrism are useful concepts understanding the Korean wave-related media representation. In fact, the use of the concept of Orientalism need not be restricted to discussing national or religious cultures. Said (1985: 105) called for 'a plurality of terrains, multiple experiences and different constituencies'. This concept has been applied to the category of youth. The usefulness of Said's concept of Orientalism in this study is twofold. Firstly, Youth like the Orient, is often captured through a discourse that relies on generalisations. Youth is imagined as the helpless Other and the world of adulthood collectively is imagined as responsible, enlightened and able. This is well illustrated in a later section on fandom. Secondly, it helps explain the ways in which some interviewees understand and make meanings of the representation of the Korean wave, in particular K-pop industry, in the Western media.

It is well known that the K-pop traineeship requires a long period of generally three to four years (sometimes longer), during which period, young idol star-wannabes learn not only to be skilful singers/dancers but also to be multi-entertainers (Jung, S. 2011: 183). A large portion of the idol star management practices originated from the Japanese entertainment industry (see Stevens 2008). Idol stars often cross the boundaries between diverse entertainment media platforms: for example, acting in television drama series and movies, hosting popular music programs, and guest appearing in game shows and reality shows. As the interview used in BBC report reveals, it is perhaps not only because idols want to but they have to. Bernie Cho of DFSB Kollective, the company which markets and distributes a range of Korean music, says:

"If you bought a single on iTunes in the US, you're paying around $1. In Korea, the price was originally 50 cents, it dropped to 12 cents, then it dropped to six cents. And the artists are getting 35% of that - they're making two cents a download…Music is so heavily discounted in Korea that a lot of them are looking to go overseas, or are relying on their popularity to boost their income in other ways, like acting or advertising" (Williamson 2011b).

Regarding the so-called 'slave contract', Lee Su-man of SM Entertainment argues that it is exactly the aspect under so much scrutiny that has been the driving force behind the Korean wave as what we have now (Jung, H. 2011). In response to the criticisms against the conventions of excessively long-term contracts in Korean entertainment management industry, the length of the contract – 13 years, in some cases – takes into account the time for the bands to build their fanbase in different regions, say, Korea (3 years) followed by Japan (3 years), Asia (3years) and then the worldwide (3 years); during that time, his company believes in and invests in the idol bands in that extensive training in singing, dance, acting as well as foreign languages (Jung, H. 2011). Lee's argument is that the Korean system is therefore different from the American model of entertainment agencies whereby the relationship between the entertain companies and the musicians/bands lies in mere contract form with a limited investment (Jung, H. 2011). However, he goes on to say that to rectify the situation, SM Entertainment had a number of talks with the Fair Trade Commission in Korea, which led to the revision of the details in their contracts: in particular, the length of the contract period has been reduced to 7 years if a band is only promoted in Korea and reduced to 10 years if worldwide. He contends that there is a need for a long-term contract for entertainment companies to invest in finding out and upbringing the world-class 'stars' by extensive training. This very issue was extensively discussed in the interviews in this study of which the findings are discussed in later sections.

The success of the Beijing concert of a Korean boy band H.O.T. concert in February 2000 has been said the first sign of K-pop's popularity in the region, followed by many more boy bands such as TVXQ, Super Junior, Big Bang, and SHINee. These idol boy bands can be an exact embodiment of the well-planned Korean popular culture products that are carefully manufactured to target a broader consumer demographic, argues Jung S. (2011: 170). The culturally mixed and versatile features of

idol boy bands travel easily across cultural and national borders and this shows the significance of the amalgamation between the Koreanized and the globalized - in other words, culturally hybridized chogukjeok (Jung, S. 2011: 170). The "idol" phenomenon is a spectacle founded on the creation, perpetuation, and maintenance of specific kinds of careful structural consumer relationships (Fairchild 2007: 355). Given that a music industry is now permanently embedded in the larger structure of the entertainment industry, idols has proven to be a bundle of highly successful methods for making money from popular music (Fairchild 2007: 357). As mentioned earlier, it is now not only in Asia but also across the globe that K-pop is consumed. YouTube among other social media has made a huge contribution to this phenomenon. YouTube, shared media portal, provides a distribution channel for amateur and semiprofessional media content and functions as a media archive where amateur curators scan the media environment, searching for meaningful bits of content, and bringing them to a larger public (Jenkins 2006: 274-275). Jenkins (2006) explains that participation occurs at three distinct levels: production, selection, and distribution. Although none of these activities is new, even in the context of digital media, YouTube was the first that brings all three functions together into a single platform and direct so much attention on the role of everyday people in this changed media landscape. Talking about YouTube content as spreadable also enables us to talk about the importance of distribution in the creation of value and the reshaping of meaning within YouTube culture. Jenkins (2006: 276) argues that in the age of convergence culture, there may no longer be a strong mainstream but rather a range of different niche sites of media production and consumption; second, in the cultural context of YouTube, what might once have felt like fringe activities are increasingly normalized, with more and more people routinely checking out and discussing content produced by amateur media makers and with mass media institutions routinely reworking their practices to incorporate this alternative site of cultural activity. According to Jenkins (2006: 322), convergence describes technological, industrial, cultural and social changes in the ways media circulates within our culture. This includes the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, the search for new structures of media financing that fall at the interstices between old and new media, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want. Convergence is understood as an ongoing process or series of intersections between different media systems, not a fixed relationship. Jenkins' work on fandom is further explored in the next section.

Fandom

Fans have been, and often are, negatively stereotyped, or 'pathologized' in Jenson's (1992) terms. At its root, the word "fan" originates from the Latin 'fanaticus,' by which we derive the word "fanatic" (Jenkins 1992: 12). Jenson (1992: 9-12) suggests that there have been the two images of fans – the obsessed individual and the hysterical crowd. News stories of 'crazed' acts of 'obsessive' fans such as Mark David Chapman's killing of ex-Beatle John Lennon, and John Hinckley's attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan (to gain and keep the attention of actress Jodie Foster) are frequently brought up as iconic examples of the obsessed loner type. Alongside this loner characterization, there is another version of fan pathology: the image of a frenzied or hysterical member of a crowd. This is the screaming, weeping teen at the airport glimpsing a rock star, or the roaring, maniacal sports fans rioting at a soccer game. The influence of the media, a narcissistic society, hypnotic rock music, and crowd contagion are invoked to explain how fans become victims of their fandom, and so act in deviant and destructive ways. This image of the frenzied fan predominates in discussion of music fans and sports fans. Fans have thus been seen as being irrational, out of control while being conceptualized as deviant, even dangerous 'others'. This would reinforce social values and provide reassurance, argues Jenson (1992), that 'we' are safe, normal, orderly, educated, discriminating, superior, and self-aggrandizing. Jenson (1992: 10) argues that the

characterization of fandom as pathology is based in, supports and justifies elitist and disrespectful beliefs about our common life. The notion of fandom as elitist is elaborated as follows:
"Fandom, it seems, is not readily conceptualized as a general or shared trait, as a form of loyalty or attachment, as a mode of 'enacted affinity'. Fandom, instead, is what 'they' do; 'we', on the other hand, have tastes and preferences, and selected worthy people, beliefs and activities for our admiration and esteem. Furthermore, what 'they' do is deviant, and therefore dangerous, while what 'we' do is normal, and therefore safe" (Jenson 1992:19).

Jenson (1992: 10) says that the fan is defined as a response to the star system, which means that passivity is ascribed to the fan – he or she is seen as being brought into (enthralled) existence by the modern celebrity system, via the mass media. Overall, Jenson (1992) argues literature on fandom comes from a place of "smug superiority" and the media effects research founded on ideas of 'them' as not 'us'. However, what differentiates fan from expert? Fans have been more positively defined as 'specialised audiences with very intensified relationships to content'. Jenkins (1992: 214) contends that "fans produce meanings and interpretations; fans produce artworks; fans produce communities; fans produce alternative identities: in each case, fans are drawing on materials from the dominant media and employing them in ways that serve their own interests and facilitate their own pleasures". Here, Fiske's (1992) concept of the tertiary text is useful whereby fans use intimate knowledge to add meaning and to subvert the text. In other words, viewers create meaning in the context of their own lives. Examples of the appropriation of fan texts are abundant: for example, fanzines (fan magazines), fan fiction written by female fans subverts gender stereotypes, and fan fiction written by gay and lesbian fans subverts heterosexual narratives. The latter two types are called slash fiction, which demonstrates homoerotic desire and fulfilment. Slash is defined as a genre of fan fiction - or of fan cultural production more generally - that imagines a homoerotic relationship between fictional characters taken from mass media texts (Jenkins 2006: 332). There is also an activity called filking, fan music making of songs performed in character.
Jenson (1992) laments that there is little literature that explores fandom as a normal, everyday cultural or social phenomenon. However, the emergence of the internet changed the ways in which fans can practice fandom and more recent studies on the topic reflect this. Fornas et al. (2002: 23) comment 'recent digital technologies have radically enhanced the kinds of interactivity by explicitly emphasizing the user's response and active assistance in the formation of the media text itself and by developing particular tools to facilitate this. Indeed, audiences and users of new media are increasingly active – selective, self-directed, producers as well as receivers of texts; and at the same time, they are increasingly plural, whether this is conceptualized as multiple, diverse, fragmented or individualized (Livingstone 2004: 79). Hence, key terms in audience research are more, not less, significant in the new media environment – choice, selection, taste, fandom, intertextuality, interactivity. Fandom is increasingly important as audiences fragment and diversify. As media become interconnected, increasingly intertextual, it is content irrespective of the medium that matters to people qua fans, for they follow it across media, weaving it seamlessly also into their face-to-face communications (Livingstone 2004: 81). In recent years, fans - the "rebellious children" and "cultural scavengers" in Jenkins' (1988: 86) terms are more often examined thoroughly from their own viewpoint. The ethnographic turn in media research looks at how fans interact with texts and it demonstrates multi-layered and complex relations fan audiences have with the text and with each other. In other words, fandom and the audience engagement are situated in the context of personal, domestic and social life. As can be seen in the earlier discussion of YouTube culture, fans are indeed engaged with cultural production as well as cultural consumption.
Popular music and youth culture: the British context
Thanks to the successful diffusion of recording and broadcasting technologies up to and including

MP3 players and smartphones, we now live in a world characterised by the availability of music in almost all genres everywhere: most of the music ever recorded is available, and more is being released, mashed-up, remixed, file-shared and playlisted all the time (Blake 2007: 33). Popular music, in particular, is a primary, if not the primary, leisure resource in late modern society (Bennett 2001: 1). Since the late 1960s, popular music has become a key focus in the related disciplines of cultural and media studies and sociology. In particular, the British cultural studies tradition has made a significant contribution to subcultural studies in relation to popular music. Subculture is defined as "a group of individuals who share particular interests, ideologies and practices" (Hartley 2002: 220). Early studies on subculture, for example, Hebdige (1979), discussed how subcultural groups' use of style was used to form their identity in opposition to a dominant culture, and as a visible challenge to the hegemony of the mass culture. Hebdige (1979) argues that the cultural significance of the punk style must be read in the context of the social decay of Britain during the late 1970s – the dismantling of the welfare state, the rising level of unemployment, the race riots in Britain's inner cities and the increasing frustration of young people (Bennett 2001: 62-63). It was through his work that the concept of bricolage, the French term referring to the cultural transformation of the meaning of objects and symbols, first acquired a currency in youth cultural studies. Hebdige (1979) emphasized the bricoleurist quality of the British punk scene. Here, the notion of subculture is important: it describes a social group distinguished from the dominant society by its own normative structures, rules and, in the case of youth subcultures, style of dress and musical taste.

Taking this further and adapting Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'cultural capital', Thornton (1995) is concerned about what she termed 'club culture' - the stylistic sensibilities of contemporary dance club crowds – and the aspects of taste distinction 'within' dance music culture. While Hebdige (1979) was primarily concerned about the notion of resistance, Thornton (1995: 3) argues communities are being formed not so much out of resistance but out of shared tastes and interests. According to Thornton (1995: 4), club cultures celebrate technologies that have rendered some traditional kinds of musicianship obsolete and have led to the formation of new aesthetics and judgements of value. In the 1990s, records have been enculturated within the night life of British dance clubs to the extent that it makes sense to talk about 'disc cultures' whose values are markedly different from those of live music cultures (Thornton 1995: 29). She goes on to say that producers, sound engineers, remixers and DJs – not song-writing guitarists - became the creative heroes of dance genres. The DJs and dancers share the spotlight as de facto performers; the crowd becomes a self-conscious cultural phenomenon. More importantly, Thornton (1995) suggests that clubbers use a range of resources – for example, particular knowledge about dance music, personal image, access to certain more 'exclusive' clubs through social networks, access to and expertise in the use of certain drugs to elicit particular forms of club experience – as 'subcultural capital'. 'Subcultural capital' describes the way in which style of dress, knowledge of a particular genre of music, dancing ability are used by young people as a means of articulating their status as authentic clubbers in relation to those who are deemed to lack such knowledge and personal clubbing attributes and hence demonstrating their membership of and 'status' within subcultural groups (Thornton 1995). Despite Thornton's constructive engagement with the politics of taste and the problems this poses for the implicit homogeneity of terms such as 'scene' and 'style', Bennett (2000) argues that the London-centred concern of Thornton's study fails to take into account how locality impacts upon issues of subcultural capital. Bennett (2000) considers the role of music in relation to the local settings in which it is consumed and inscribed with cultural meaning in the ethnographic study of the dance music scene in Newcastle, UK. He also examines the key studies of popular music styles and their audiences from 1950s rock'n'roll to contemporary dance music (see Bennett 2001).

Asian influence in the British music scene: Bhangra

The case of Bhangra is an example of Asian element gradually becoming 'naturalised' within the British pop music scene. Bhangra is based on a Punjabi folk music style, but uses electric guitars and keyboards alongside the dhol drums   (Blake 2007: 12). During the early 1980s bhangra was fused with elements of western pop music by Asian musicians in Britain (by Asia is meant India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka). The result was a distinctive bhangra-pop fusion which quickly found a wide appeal among Asian-diaspora populations in many different parts of the globe. Bennett (2000: 104) suggests that bhangra provides a sonic underpinning for a new Asian culture, especially for young people of Asian ethnic minority groups. However, bhangra's global audience remains essentially Asian. It was during the 1990s that South Asian music and musicians became a routine part of the British music industry: indeed, people such as Apache Indian, Bally Sagoo, Najma Aktar, and Jay Sean each made a contribution (Blake 2007: 12). Also in the 1990s the guitarist Nitin Sawnhey moved between North Indian forms and jazz, and composed soundtrack scores for film and television; the 'indie' (independent-label) pop of Cornershop, led by Tjinder Singh, and the eccentric musings of White Town made it into the mainstream pop charts. Other examples include the singer Sheila Chandra and Bally Sagoo. Talvin Singh also made music for the dance world, and won the prestigious Mercury Music Prize in 1999 for his album OK. Thus, musical Britain became partly Asian in the 1990s (Blake 2007: 5). Does this then mean that the recent arrival of K-pop will also be likely to be embraced by the mainstream music industry in the UK?

Research methodology

This study employs an ethnographic approach to the cultural practices of the K-pop fans in the UK. Ethnography is a method of research that evolved out of the field of anthropology and it studies a group 'from the inside' (Hartley 2002: 84). Relying on participant observation, this method involves the researchers immersing themselves with a nominated group in an attempt to gain insight into their choices and behaviour. Since the 1980s, audience researchers, particularly in cultural studies, have seen ethnography as a method that can offer rich insights into the social and cultural complexities of audiences (Gillespie 2005: 151). The ethnographic approach is, according to Bennett (2000: 2), crucial in gaining an understanding of how popular music features in the lives of young people in the context of their everyday lives. From February 2011, the author has paid close attention to various K-pop Facebook fan pages and groups ("K-pop Team", "Korean Fan Committee (KFC)" and "Bring YG to the UK"), K-pop/Korean wave related websites ("allkpop", "Koreaboo" and unofficial UK Big Bang fan club), and YouTube clips on K-pop. As a "Facebook friend", I have made participatory observations on the online fan activities and attended a number of the K-pop events such as the K-pop dance contest held in the Korean Cultural Centre UK (hereafter KCC UK) on 3rd June 2011 and the flash mob at Trafalgar Square on 9th July 2011. Interviews and discussions with K-pop fans, together with observations made through visiting clubs, venues and other events provided insights into mapping out K-pop fandom in the UK. It was through these activities that the interviewees were recruited. Exchange of emails and conversations on Facebook made it possible to identify the fans who were interested in taking part in this research. The web hosts of the above fan communities were most helpful in terms of the recruitment of participants by the snowballing sampling technique. The profiles of the interviewees are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Profiles of Interviewees

Names	Age/sex	Occupation	Nationality/resident in
NL	19/female	College student	Scottish/Aberdeen
MY	19/female	College student	British/Essex
ES	19/Female	College student	British/Middlesex
YS	15/Female	Secondary school	

student British/London   JN 25/Male K-pop promoter British/London   FR 19/Female College student French/London   HJ 19/Male College student British/London   JS 19/Female University student British/Cambridge   DK 20/Female University student Korean/London   KK 18/Male College student Korean/London   HP 16/Female Secondary school student British/Surrey   KC 17/Male College student British/Surrey   HL 16/Male College student Korean/Surrey   ZK 19/Female University student British/London   MN 19/Female University student British/London   MJ 40/Female Housewife/College student Korean/London   GB 43/Male Academic British/London   AC 50/Male Academic British/Norfolk   JD 50/Female Academic British/Essex   AB 53/Male Academic/musician British/London   YC 45/Female Academic/musician British/London   JK 49/Female Journalist Korean/Seoul   TK 44/Male Journalist Korean/London   HJ 43/Female Artistic Manager Korean/Oxford   My table.

Interviews took place during June – July 2011 in London. Interviewees have various nationalities and ethnicities and most of them live in London and vicinity areas. First group of the interviewees are aged between 15-25, who are active fans of K-pop. Second group of the interviewees are the academics specialising in cultural studies, music culture studies, and journalism; they either published book(s) on the topic or themselves active musicians. All five informants were recruited by personal contacts in the British academia. Lastly, third group of interviewees are the journalists – previous and current UK correspondents of the Korean media and those who are employed by the KCC UK. Other materials that have been consulted include some unpublished materials produced by the KCC UK, the reports from Korean Culture and Tourism Organization, and relevant websites such as BBC Music Chart, UK Official Music Chart, Apple iTunes UK and Popjustice.

Interviews were semi-structured in the sense that rather than posing structured questions on their practice of fandom and the consumption of K-pop, the interviewees were introduced to the main topics for the conversation but were encouraged to talk freely about their experiences. The kind of probes used to initiate the conversation or to change the topic of was as follows:

Are you a K-pop fan, or generally interested in Korean popular culture? How long?
How would you describe yourself as a fan? What kind of fan activities?
Any comment on your consumption of k-pop, use of Facebook, YouTube, and any other website for K-pop news, music download and fan clubs.
Any favourite band/idol? why? what do you like about him/her/them?
Your thoughts on the recent BBC report on the dark side of Korean pop music and more generally, what do you think about the Korean media on the Korean wave, for example, the media representation of the flash mob (asking for YG Entertainment's concert in London) and any other K-pop event. How do you feel about the involvement or the role of the KCC UK?
Any comment on the present and future of K-pop?

Discussions were not limited by the above topics and indeed the interviewees freely talked about related issues, interests and genres, for example, J-pop, manga, BBC programmes on Asian culture, Korean history, food and travel.

Findings and discussion
Music knows no national boundaries but does K-pop naturally mix into British pop music? Is there

such cultural affinity that allows the British audience to enjoy the Korean popular culture? Peculiarity of the British context is that there has been little or no presence of Korean drama, the genre that started the Korean wave in many countries. An interviewee said that there have been numerous attempts to promote Jewel in the Korean Palace (which has now been screened in the Middle East and Africa let alone Asia and America) on the British TV but without any success (HJ, 43, Artistic Manager). Instead it has been primarily the Korean films that established some reputation and manias over the last decade, especially since Park Chan-wook's Oldboy won the Grand Prix at Cannes in 2004. Jonathan Ross on BBC 4 introduced Korea as 'arguably the world's most exciting filmmaking country' (Jonathan Ross' Asian Invasion, 24th January 2004). The London Korean Film Festival, in its fifth year as of November 2010, has become well-respected on the British film festival circuit (Hallett 2010).

Most interviewees agreed on the fact that, in recent years, there has been growing interest in Korean culture in general in the UK. For example, the Korean language classes offered at the KCC UK are proven extremely popular and hence over-subscribed at times (HJ, 43, Artistic manager). In other European countries (such as France), people at the Korean language classes often formulate a group to learn more about the Korean culture beyond just language, which lead to establish a fan community for the Korean dramas and pop music. That was, however, not the case in the UK. Demographic of the learners of Korean at the KCC UK consists of middle-aged, City-working professionals (HJ, 43 Artistic Manager). They are not particularly within the age group that K-pop tends to attract nor is targeting at. A number of news stories in the Korean media regarding K-pop's growing popularity in Europe tended to treat the whole of Europe as undifferentiated market but the above description of peculiarity of the British context shows each country or culture has different pre-existing conditions for the new wave of K-pop to arrive at. The emergence of the Korean wave, especially K-pop fandom, cannot be attributed to the cultural similarities and geographic proximity nor the popularity of the Korean dramas; it was social media that facilitated the spread of K-pop popularity. Interviews revealed that fans became to know about K-pop from friends and/or via social media such as Facebook and YouTube and they got to enjoy the K-pop music in clubs, mainly in the London area. An interviewee said "I feel that with the sudden uprising of social media, the Korean wave has taken a great leap" (MN, 19, University student). Established in 2006, "K-pop Team" is the group who has been promoting K-pop music with around 5 DJs specialising in K-pop. An interviewee from "K-pop Team" said the following:

I'm a k-pop promoter, been doing k-pop events for 7 years. I've seen the difference in crowds, and in music types. So for me, it's not a big increase in fans; it's the same. It has been a great learning experience for me, met many new people. I think it raised its profile in the UK. (JN, 25, K-pop promoter).

K-pop nights in clubs are regularly promoted and well attended; it was February 2011 that K-pop fandom in the UK has been recognised to the level that the KCC UK held the first K-pop night at their own venue, turned into a club for one night, in Trafalgar Square, London. Some 600 fans gathered from all over the UK from several hours before the event (HJ, 43, Artistic Manager). Since then, there has been a K-pop Contest in June 2011 whereby the fans were invited to enter their own music/dance videos which were shortlisted by YG Entertainment in Seoul. The top 5 teams had the live performance and everyone attending that night had one vote each to select the winners. This was in tune with what characterised Facebook and YouTube generation – participatory culture. The most impressive part of that night for me was to see the sheer joy on the face of a young girl when she received 'signed' CD of Big Bang from a raffle event. This study does not aim to test empirically the question of whether or not K-pop fans have dramatically grown in size as the Korean media tends to imply, but it intends to discuss what makes these fans so drawn to K-pop and the ways in which the K-pop fans practice their fandom.

6.1 The identity of K-pop

To begin with, a minority of interviewees expressed their concerns about the term K-pop. One interviewee said:

I don't like the label, K-pop, because of two reasons: first, it sounds like spin-off of J-pop and second, I don't know what it entails. Can we categorize what is K-pop and what isn't? … I think the label K-pop is very passé. Does it encompass the whole of Korean music, or just an idol culture? The British perception of it would be the latter. (JS, 19, University student)

This is an extremely fair point to make. A 40-year-old interviewee said that "K-pop is for young people. I don't know who's who and there seem so many of them in each group as well" (MJ, 40, Housewife/college student). Is K-pop a narrow genre of the Korean popular music that is dominated by young idols and dance music or is it something broader than that? Here, an example of two hip hop bands – Supreme Duo and Dynamic Duo - is useful. Whereas Supreme Duo participates in TV programmes such as Music Bank that most idol groups appear, Dynamic Duo does not. Are they idols or are they not? It seems that "the label, K-pop idols, brings more attention whereas non-idols would imply they are more of an artist", said another one interviewee (MN, 19, University student). What we can see is the urgent need to define what K-pop is and what it entails. One comment during the interview process and informal conversation stood out as it highlighted this problem: "I don't like K-pop but I like Korean music". Alongside such pretentious aura of music, what can be read here is that K-pop is not the Korean music, cannot be representative of the Korean music, and may be inferior to some other genres in Korean music (with K-pop being dominated by young idols in dance music). Further readings are also possible: for example, the constituents of K-pop are carefully manufactured idols and their music, seem rather 'standardized', not worthy of universal appreciation.

In 1941, Adorno published an influential essay called 'On Popular Music' in which he claims that popular music is 'standardized' and that once a musical and/or lyrical pattern has proved successful, it is exploited to commercial exhaustion, culminating in 'the crystallization of standards' (Storey 1996: 93-94). In order to conceal standardization, the music industry engages in what Adorno calls 'pseudo-individualization': 'standardization of song hits keeps the customers in line by doing their listening for them, as it were. Pseudo-individualization, for its part, keeps them in line by making them forget that they listen to is already listened to for them, or "pre-digested" '(Storey 1996: 94). One might argue that Adorno's argument is to an extent outdated, especially because he understood the audience of popular culture in general as undifferentiated, passive mass. However, it was a surprise to see his accusations against popular music, for example 'standardization', echoed by a 15-year-old K-pop fan when she said K-pop idols seem to be "coming from factories".

When I was first introduced to Korean music, it seemed like just a few pretty idol groups. There seemed only to be a few. But nowadays, there are so many of them just scattered around the place. It's this craze where these idols are just all of a sudden debuting and it's like they all come from factories there are just too many of them! (YS, 15, Secondary school student)

Indeed, in addition to the issue of identity of K-pop, some interviewees discussed how "too much of an influx of K-pop idols might lead them to over-saturated, undervalued and mistreated" (MN, 19, University student); "there are so many idols around Korea, some don't really seem to shine" (HP, 16, Secondary school student). Whilst some fans expressed their concerns about the ambiguity of

the label K-pop and its identity, most interviewees seem to embrace it without serious questioning. The following section is about how they describe themselves as K-pop fans and the reason why they are so drawn to K-pop.

6.2 Imagining the Other: "K-pop is different"
A number of interviewees revealed that they like K-pop because "it is different". "Different" was the keyword that came out repeatedly. K-pop is said to be different in terms of music and also choreography.

I like SHINee because they are different. (NL, 19, College student)

I like SHINee because their music is really different. (MY, 19, College student)

K-pop is really different, it's addictive, catchy, and I like their choreography as well. (ES, 19, College student)

SHINee is my favourite because they're different, all amazing at singing, all good-natured and funny, and also really good at dancing. …Out of girl groups, I like f(x). They are definitely not like any other girl groups these days. They aren't afraid to be different, and they are very unique. (YS, 15, Secondary school student)

I started with J-pop and was looking for something different. (HJ, 18, College student)

I would say that my favourite idols would be Super Junior as they really were the group that got me into the k-pop fandom and mentality. I think I like them because the song which I heard first 'Sorry Sorry' really stood out to me and was really an enjoyable song which I could dance along to even though I didn't understand the words and as a group, even though they had a lot of members, they still seemed to complement one another. (MN, 19, University Student)

As shown above, fans love the type of music that is created, which is felt different. K-pop's general type of music was most often described as 'catchy' and 'addictive'. This is perhaps to do with the so-called 'hook song'. 'Hook song' tends to be composed around a short and simple, repetitive and catchy 'hook' in order to impress listeners within 8 bars, which is the duration of the mobile ringtone or 'preview' on the internet (Hankyoreh 2009). This has been problematized by some music critics, which illustrates the response from the traditional music industry to the changing intermediation and experience of music in which hits become less predictable and mainstream taste is harder to define (Lee, J. 2009: 502). On the topic of the ringtone, Blake (2007: 60) states that the mobile phone is potentially the consummate contemporary cultural object and the ringtone is the musical sign of its carrier's identity. If the element of 'hook song' is the dominant feature of K-pop music as Lee says (Jung H. 2011), one might argue that this reinforces the validity of Adorno's point about 'standardization' and 'peudo-individualization'. The second most frequently quoted reason for liking K-pop was about the performative aspect: dancing and choreography. "Typical dance routine for K-pop bands could be described as a group dance and this is something that we don't see very often in the UK" says one interviewee (HJ, 43, Artistic Manager). Another interviewee puts it: "the way that they perform is so aesthetically pleasing" (JS, 19, University student). K-pop Contest event at the KCC UK and less formally structured dance competition at some K-pop themed club-nights also demonstrated that the minute details of dance routines of K-pop bands were impeccably followed and reborn on the stage by the fans.

Older interviewees grasped and used the concept of 'difference' in a more abstract way. "K-pop is Not-Japan and Not-China, just as British pop culture has been Not-USA" (AC, 51, Academic).

Whereas people in the West may previously have looked upon 'the East' as something exotically not quite real (imagining it … as a figment of imagination), my hunch is of a growing sense that the East is somehow more real than the West. Of course this is likely to result in a largely fictitious version of 'reality'. Equally, K-poppers may choose to play along with this if it gets them wider exposure. (AC, 51, Academic)

Interviews with academics proved that in case of the K-pop, geo-politics is important. Some interchangeably used the term J-pop with K-pop with J-pop and pointed out that it is unlikely to influence the mainstream music industry or appear in music-related journalism (as mentioned by the K-pop promoter earlier):

[K-pop is] A head-scratcher for me. My two cents here is that the UK J-pop (and K-pop) comes from two specific groups – 'cosplay' kids i.e. UK fans of manga and anime, whose tastes are not exclusively tied up with Japanese pop culture; young-ish (25-40) intercontinental travellers, as part of their professional commitments. They acquire an in-flight love of J-Pop (and K-Pop) which they stick with. I think it is hard to convert either group into some kind of 'mass movement' in press coverage, because there is not really enough of them and the J-pop overshadows the K-pop.(GB, 42, Academic) There was also a sense of media/cultural imperialism in approaching K-pop, together with an element of continuity in a more personal level of consumption of popular music.

For Western audiences, I think there is a subtext that says: we in the West are streetwise (we monopolise the 'cultural capital', if you like); Koreans are allowed to be younger siblings, so long as they play girlie and/or geeky. …Perhaps K-pop provides a fresh, young update on the now middle-aged (50 something) tradition of not having to grow up (as shown in the book Arrested Development: pop culture and the erosion of adulthood). In this sense there is an element of continuity. (AC, 51, Academic)
While acknowledging that the analysis of the 1980s and the 1990s will have only limited efficacy, for example, the limitations and problems of media/cultural imperialism thesis, the academics who were interviewed somehow reflected the overall tone of BBC reports on K-pop. They were somewhat puzzled by being asked about K-pop (often unknown to them before the interview). Fans' responses to the BBC reports are discussed later.

Fans were not just exoticizing the Other as for them it was also something real: sheer hard work that had been gone through. Although there was not a single concert by any K-pop bands in the UK, fans had a sense of proximity and affinity towards these idols. This must be to do with social media and online fandom: for young fans, 'real' and 'virtual' space worked together. Long period of traineeship and harsh training conditions (as mentioned earlier the so-called slave contract) were not unknown to the fans: indeed, they showed a great deal of knowledge on this issue, following the media coverage, and were able to reflect critically upon it.

6.3 The ethos of hard work and 'the dark side of K-pop'?
In addition to being 'different', the ethos of 'hard work' was the recurring theme. Whilst well informed about 'the dark side of K-pop', fans highly appreciated the amount of work and training that the K-pop bands went under: "The Korean bands do twice as much amount of work as others in

EU" (FR, 19, College student). This is echoing what Pai said (2008) in the Taiwanese context, "As for the K-pop lovers, they know that Korean singers and dancers far outdo their Taiwanese counterparts." One interviewee said "I admire their work ethos: it is a sheer hard work. These beautiful girls/boys have not just a gift but the whole set of gifts: they sing and dance, basically look good on stage" (JS, 19, University student). Due to huge popularity of reality TV shows and talent competition programmes in the UK such as X Factor and Britain's Got Talent, young people in the UK seem to find the selection and celebrity manufacturing process of the Korean idol star management practices familiar (HJ, 43, Artistic Manager). The presence of K-pop idols' hard work was felt in many other popular genres apart from music: for example, "some of the bands/idols shine out to me through their variety show appearances" (MN, 19, University student). However, as the following extract suggests, fans were well aware of the harsh reality that "despite all the hard work and fierceness" some newcomers "will always end up losing out".

I believe that right now is the best time to be a K-pop idol. There are a lot of opportunities available and k-pop stars are extending their repertoire by going into acting, MC-ing, dramas, musicals and there is quite a bit of money to be made. But the concepts keep on getting re-used and it is quite hard to be truly original. There is always a comparison being made whenever an artist releases a new song and with rookie groups debuting on average every 3 months, it's quite hard to keep track of who is who in the industry. There is also the fact that there is need for young blood and fresh talent so the debut ages keep getting younger and younger and their concepts riskier or more controversial. There is already a huge following for the established artists so the rookies despite all their hard work and cuteness/ fierceness will mostly always end up losing out.(MN, 19, University student)

In a similar vein, other interviewees talked about how young artists' naivity might be exploited by the music industry.

As artists are recruited when they are young it becomes very easy to take advantage of their naivity about the industry which is arguably exploitation. As the idol culture grows it spurs on more young people to want to be like them. (ZW, 19, University student)

The major entertainment companies make a vast amount of turnover, however, the artists themselves are the one that are being exploited, the amount of artist income is appalling, and standards should be improved greatly. Furthermore the ever-growing manufacture of idol groups, is turning the music industry very predictable and somewhat bland, with more focus on the title of idol rather than singer, getting into the industry is much harder now as trainees are expected to have awesome dance and singing abilities needed to even dream of setting foot on a stage. (HJ, 18 College student)

This is naturally related to the discussion of how fans 'worked with' the recent BBC reports on K-pop. The responses were well divided: there was a whole spectrum of views from "very true and accurate" to while "badly researched and condescending".

The recent coverage of K-pop from the BBC was a very accurate and detailed picture of how the industry works. (HJ, 18, College student)

About the BBC reports, I think it's true that some artists work hard but don't get too much benefit from it. (FR, 19, College student)

I did not feel that the report really showed what k-pop really means to people. I know that there is a lot of hard work and a lot of time, sweat and money put into creating an idol but the feeling that they give their fans through their music is something that I feel cannot be put into words sometimes. And through their performances you can see when they are putting their heart and soul into it. Sure there are a lot of things wrong but I feel it is wrong that they kind of pushed to the side all the things that are right. The music industry no matter where it is located always has some underside of it and

most of it is not broadcasted but it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist everywhere. There are always sacrifices to be made for fame.(MN, 19, University student)

I got so upset when I saw the report that I sent it to many Facebook friends. I think it's either badly researched or Orientalist. There was not a mention about how K-pop has been received in, say, France or North/South America. It's not only condescending but also a kind of stereotypical grouping. Usually 'most read news' about Far East is about natural or man-made disaster, or some weird fans. I think that overall it's outdated and hugely assumptive. (JS, 19, University student)

Arguably artists get benefits in other ways other than being paid. They are provided with accommodation, food, travel etc. I suppose payment for coaching, choreography and such like must come from somewhere. As with any other career it requires investment to make the finishing product.(ZK, 19, University student)

As seen in the above extracts, these fans were indeed extremely media literate, deconstructing and critically reflecting upon the news messages. Fans mostly recognised "the dark side" of K-pop but they were philosophical about it realising that, as shown above, "there are sacrifices to be made for fame" in order "to make the finishing product". They also pointed out although the dark side exists as in other entertainment industry, that does not necessarily mean it is prevalent. This is, I would argue, what demonstrates the high level of media literacy which reflects 'subcultural sensibilities'.

6.4 Subcultural sensibilities

Fans were expressing their opinions and making suggestions about how the industry as well as the artists themselves need to respond to the over-saturated market.

I believe a group should only debut if they feel they have a strength which they can bank on will make them great such as JYP has done with Miss A. Looking at them I couldn't believe they were rookies with their professionalism and talent and they weren't really rookies as the two Chinese members had previously been promoting in China and had media experience and one of them was fiercely working in the USA and trying to understand what sets you apart there. The youngest also already had a tough backbone due to working as a model and was experienced enough. I know most companies won't have the funds available to extensively try out those they think have potential and are keen to start getting back their deposits on the idols but a bit more polishing to make sure your group won't be forgotten in the next year is always good to have (MN, 19, University student).

A lot of my friends who don't listen to k-pop usually give me weird looks and stares when I'm listening to it/ fangirling about so-and-so band and why they are so special and if it doesn't convince 1 person, it's going to be quite hard to convince millions of people. Sure, they could debut with something more western but I feel like they would lose that special something which seems to flow through k-pop (ZK, 19, University student).

Further evidence for subcultural sensibilities is the following call (posted on Facebook early July 2011) from the Korean Fans Committee (KFC) for friendly gathering of K-pop fans, without the agenda to get the Korean media's attention (my emphasis).

This is the first official event hosted by Korean Fans Committee (KFC). All the K Pop events held in the UK so far have been with the aim to get the Korean media's attention. We decided that we want to get to know K Pop fans personally and make friends with K Pop lovers so we thought we would have this event. First, it starts at Buckingham Palace and we will have speakers and do a small march. Make Banners!! We will sing and dance our hearts out here to K Pop. After this we will go to Hyde Park and have our K Pop picnic. This is the part that is aimed at getting to know many K Pop fans. Also, K Pop t-shirts will be selling here so if you want to show case your love of K Pop to the world you can buy a top to go home with. It would be a lot cheaper as you won't have to pay for shipping.

Dress Code: We thought it would be a lot of fun if everyone dressed up as their K Pop idols, but you

can dress up casually too.
Time: 2011.8.23. Tuesday. 12-5pm

A number of interviewees said that they welcomed the publicity about K-pop (largely from the Korean media) but at the same time they were overwhelmed by the unexpected level and intensity of the Korean media's attention, which explains why the above gathering has been organised. Discussions about the recent flash mobs in Trafalgar Square included mixed responses from the fans.

ZK: It is an effective way of creating "obsession" in young people, and a phenomenal marketing ploy in my opinion. (19, University student)
DK: I was surprised to see that there seemed more press people than the fans. (21, University student).
MN: Mostly I think it is just a way for the Korean media to tailor their news more internationally as they can be sure of their overseas presence growing. (19, University student).
ZK: Any publicity is a good publicity. (19, University student).
JS: Some critics say that the Korean wave is blown up to a huge scale. I don't think they [the Korean media] are overdoing it from what I've seen. But the exception to this was the flash mob: it was shameful. I hope the KCC UK would stay out of it. Let it grow indigenously, not an artificial growth (19, University student).

HJ: The recent Hallyu wave produces a vast entity into other countries the recent SM town in Paris was a big hit. With more and more foreign fans every minute, allowing for an exposure of Korea and the culture around it the recent flash mobs in LA, Paris and London beg the question – "will K-pop ever be a hit in the US, France and UK?"(19, College student)

This flash mob to ask YG Entertainment's concert in the UK appeared in a number of news stories in Korea (see Sports Chosun 27th June 2011; Donga-ilbo 27th June 2011; My Daily 28th June 2011; Herald Economy 28th June 2011; MBC Today 28th June 2011). Some critics said that the Korean media was overly celebratory while blowing up the scale of the popularity of K-pop (Han 2011). Han (2011) argues that it is problematic that the government organisation such as the KCC UK made a considerable intervention in the voluntary act of the local fans which led to excessive media coverage and that the Korean media not only responded to this call but also played a significant part in creating this bubble of K-pop Korean wave in Europe, arising from 'soft nationalism'. Han (2011) goes on to say that this reflects a kind of 'inferior complex' toward the West. My observation of the flash mob and the group discussions made me partly agree with Han's (2011) concluding remark about the so-called new Korean wave in the UK or in general in Europe has already been 'upgraded' in its status by the KCC UK abroad and the Korean media. I totally agree with YG Entertainment's statement that "this is a case of 'wait and see'". What is more important here is the following: at the flash mob, K-pop fans were very well-mannered, far from stereotyped image of an obsessive loner nor hysterical crowd. A number of fans produced their own memoir of the event and posted them on Facebook and YouTube to share. These fans were engaged with cultural production as well as consumption. These amateur cultural artefacts were commented upon, liked, shared and forwarded: this collegial appreciation was a token of participatory culture in Facebook and YouTube. The rationale behind the organisation of 'K-pop picnic' shows that the fans are critically self-reflecting on the past events and their own practices of fandom, almost as if having a break from the media attention.

Thornton's concept of 'subcultural capital' was found when the fans demonstrated their abilities to

distinguish different types of music and fans. Using a range of resources such as their knowledge about music, dance, personal image, their taste and style, access to social networks, the fans were analysing various aspects of K-pop and its fan community.

For a K-pop promoter, what's interesting was to see people's interests and loyalties split – some are loyal to SM town, others loyal to YG. (JN, 25, K-pop promoter)

The fact that HyunA's 'Bubble Pop' graced the front of the YouTube page is something that I have a bit of doubt about as most people will view the video thinking that k-pop is all like that when it really isn't (MN, 19, University student).

I use allkpop site a lot because it uploads all the K-pop news and translated articles but sometimes I feel that the stories are engineered in a careful way. Some of the comments are the fans are so ignorant that you end up feeling sick. Some fans defended Daesung (a member of Big Bang who was recently in car accident) to the level of simple blindness. Other fansites have fanfic – almost pornographic slash fanfic – which I don't particularly enjoy (JS, 19, University student).

It has been observed at various K-pop events and fan activities on Facebook that the UK K-pop fans are significantly gendered. One interviewee said that the K-pop event ticket sales shows 18.2% male and 81.8% female (JN, 25, K-pop promoter). When discussing fan fiction (fanfic), some interviewees used the word "fangirling", which in a way reflect gendered consumption of pop music. Amber, a member of a Korean girl group f(x), is a good example. With a pretty boy image, Amber often cross-dresses, appears in slash fanfics and she has a huge female fanbase. One interviewee said that "whereas "boys looking up to boys are tabooed, girls looking up to girls are seen as an innocent girl crush" (JS, 19, University student). Although none of the interviewees was active producers of fanfic but they were informed consumers: they also said they frequently make video clips to share with other fans. Different types of these clips are: reporting K-pop events (like flash mob) and announcement of future events, self confessionary monologue, remixing/subtitling of the existing music videos, and simple posting of the media coverage. During the period of this study, some interviewees posted several videos on a daily basis.

The future prospect of K-pop in the UK is quite hard to see, as most interviewees said. Most interviewees seem to feel not too positive about hitting the mainstream in the UK music industry, which is described "impermeable".

The future of k-pop is quite hard to see. I would like to obviously see some k-pop bands gracing my TV screen but I feel that there is still quite a way to go before k-pop is fully accepted by all. It's quite a hard one to see but if they manage to at least get the world to listen, that alone is good in itself. (MN, 19, University student)
K-pop is a very niche market, it won't hit the mainstream in the UK. People aren't open to foreigners even if they sing in English. (JN, 25, K-pop promoter)

I think K-pop will keep growing but the Britain will probably be the last place as it is so impermeable. I won't say it's prejudiced but they are mostly guilty of being ignorant. Britain is such a multicultural society that they can't even comprehend that they are prejudiced. (JS, 19, University student)

Getting across the foreign cultures is not easy. Any exports, cultural products included, must win a permit from the importing country before they are allowed in. The importing country needs also to

be quite open and inclusive - and mature, too - to accept cultural imports (Pai 2008). As mentioned earlier, there has been K-pop concert and party circuit among young people since around 2006 of which the tickets sold quite in advance. However, in terms of empirical evidence on the music charts, it was only very recent in the electronic charts that a few K-pop songs were listed. As K-pop CDs are not sold at the mainstream record stores and most fans either download their music (legally and illegally) or use a website like YesAsia (about which some interviewees said the price is cheap and the delivery is reliable) for the purchase, the sales does not register in the pop charts. Is Britain, too, embracing the Korean Wave?

Conclusion: "there is still quite a way to go…"
The study reveals that the UK K-pop fans are media literate and well-mannered, far from the stereotyped image of fans being obsessive loner or hysterical crowd. It also shows that there is a potential to develop a distinct subculture: within the K-pop fan community, 'subcultural' sensibilities were found in the ways that they often used their knowledge of music, dance, and music industry in cultural production as well as cultural consumption. Interviewees certainly seem to possess what constitutes the 'subcultural capital' in Thornton's terms. I do agree with Hong (2011) when she argued, in the French case of K-pop and the Korean wave in general, that it is too early to say that K-pop culture has formed a subculture in France or any other European countries. As one interviewee said, "there is still quite a way to go before K-pop is fully accepted by all" but the implication is that there is a way. Negative stereotyping of fans as excessive behaviour could not be found and instead their cultural practice of fandom emcompassed the critical readings of the media representation, production and re-production of cultural artefacts (made available on Facebook and YouTube for sharing). A range of resources – for example, particular knowledge about dance music, personal image, dancing ability, use of social networks – were used, similar to what Thornton (1995) described as 'subcultural capital'. Participatory culture was also prevalent in the fan community whilst critically self-reflecting on the past events. Regarding how K-pop is represented in the mainstream British media such as BBC, the global-local nexus is very much associated with the dichotomy of 'centre' and 'periphery' and the overall editorial take could be seen as Orientalist. Interviews with academics also proved that this dichotomy was present while their narratives transpired to be influenced by media/cultural imperialism. Fans liked K-pop because it is 'different' and K-pop idols 'work hard'. Said (1978) said that the eroticization of the Orient is expressed through notions of the Orient as 'exotic', feminine, mysterious and unruly. Still imaging the Other as exotic, young K-pop fans in the UK, as opposed to arguably Orientalist media and establishment academia, seemed to take neo-Orientalist approach in that more hybridized pattern of transcultural and transnational cultural flow is freely taking place and that 'real' and 'virtual' space worked together. Fans were equally critical and apprehensive about the Korean media's role: it was argued that instead of 'artificial growth', K-pop's popularity needs to 'grow indigenously'. It is true that recently K-pop related media content has been dynamically circulated in the bigger popular culture market beyond Asia through new media technologies such as fan blogs, social networking websites, UGC websites, and P2P websites (Jung 2011: 170). In the case of the emergence of K-pop popularity in the UK, an element of 'pop-nationalism' was seen in the overly celebratory Korean media's euphoria. 'Pop nationalism' in Korea, while seemingly celebrating ''national'' popular culture, is in fact an articulation of Korean popular culture that exists in the transnational context as the surge of national pride in Korean popular culture is made possible by its ''transnational'' recognition and visibility. (Joo 2011: 502). While 'Pop nationalism' articulates the continued significance of the nation-state and nationalism in shaping globalization, it is an articulation of the nation and nationalism that are situated within and reworked by ongoing globalization. Ethnocentric understanding of popular culture was present in both the British and the Korean media. Fans were

well aware of corporatism and commercially driven nature of the music industry.

In the British context, the emergence of the K-pop fandom cannot be attributed to the cultural similarities and geographic proximity nor the popularity of the Korean dramas; it was social media that facilitated the spread of K-pop popularity. The scope and intensity of media and cultural flows from Korea to the UK is not comparable to those from Korea to other Asian countries. Too much of a commercial drive of the Korean media will weaken or shorten the life of the Korean wave and as one interviewee said, we need to think about how best to "let it grow indigenously". As discussed earlier, there has been an Asian influence – notably bhangra - in the British music scene since the 1990s: although bhangra is a different from the case of K-pop in that it did not flow from Asia but grew in the UK with an Asian element. More subtle approach working on the grassroots level will broaden the K-pop fanbase and increase the recognition of K-pop in the mainstream music industry. For example, (as YG entertainment is considering K-pop's first concert in the UK,) it would be a right move to take part in Thames Festival in September 2011 so that K-pop and Korean culture in general has the maximum exposure, not just to young people but much broader spectrum of the British society. In the UK, there is also a culture of regional festivals and therefore further opportunities could be found in Liverpool - Europe's Culture Capital and the birthplace of Beatles – and the Edinburgh Festival. It is also now a common practice among Korean entertainment management companies to make their trainees learn foreign languages and/or recruit foreign artists with the aim of conquering the broader overseas market (Jung, 2011: 168). Beginning with Asian – such as Japanese and Chinese – members, such practice has now expanded to recruit American – mostly Asian American – members to target the US market in particular, and the English-speaking market in general. It could now be further expanded to the UK and Europe in general.

The limitation of this study is that it dealt with a relatively small sample of fans primarily based in London and vicinity areas. Future research could look at bigger sample in a wider geographical context. In addition, a closer look at club culture will be welcomed. The role of DJs and club culture has been significant in spreading the K-pop in the British context. Five DJs are identified actively to promote K-pop since 2006 with the establishment of K-pop Team. DJs are associated with certain sounds and crowds (Thornton 1995: 112) and they are also close to what Levi-Strauss (1976) called a 'bricoleur' or craftsperson who makes use of musical fragments in order to create new music. The existing discourses around the Korean wave and methods for researching transnational/transcultural consumption need to be extended to new media as well as accommodate a different cultural environment where the Korean wave arrives: in the context of K-pop in the UK, that is club culture. The concluding remark of this study is that K-pop has not 'invaded' Britain but 2011 clearly marked the landing of the K-pop in the UK. With the sudden uprising of social media, the Korean wave has taken a great leap. Subtle approach in a long term, with not too much of a commercial drive at first, is recommended in arguably the most 'impermeable' British market.

Notes
1. In this article, the McCune-Reischauer system is used to Romanize Korean words and names, except for the names of people quoted from other sources or where there is already widely accepted Romanization such as Bae Yong Joon. Complying with the Korean practice for Korean names, the family name precedes the given name. In the case of Korean dramas, films and musicians, the Korean title precedes the English title and then the English title is used throughout the article.

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