Transversal Korean Waves:
Speculating on the Next Wave With Netflix and Korean Gaming

TAE-JIN YOON
Yonsei University, Korea

YAEWON JIN
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
The Game-n-Science Institute, Korea

This article examines the potential collaboration between Netflix and the Korean gaming industry and how it could impact the Korean Wave. Using the concept of *transversality*, it explores hypothetical directions of collaboration that could create a new facet of the Korean Wave, called *Transversal Korean Waves*. This collaboration could blur the boundaries between virtual and physical reality, integrate content and form into a metaverse, and establish a new digital economy and ethics. This study also contends that this new wave challenges the notion of cultural product ownership and encourages collaboration across boundaries. The article concludes that transversal Korean Wave's sociocultural implications lie in rediscovering cultural marginalities that were left out in the fast adaptation to universality.

Keywords: transversality, Korean Wave, Netflix, Korean gaming

Over the last two decades, the Korean Wave has taken the world by storm with its films, Korean[1] popular songs (also known as *K-pop*), and/or Korean television dramas (also known as *K-drama*). As it became evident that the Korean Wave was not a fleeting trend, scholars in the field of media and cultural studies started to take notice of this unprecedented sequence of cultural phenomena. As Yoon and Kang (2017) pointed out, more scholars have recently focused on the roles of mobile media and media platforms in the ever-expanding Korean Wave. This is because many believe that digital and social media play a decisive role in the Korean Wave's dissemination and reproduction (Yoon & Kang, 2017, p. 17).

While the Korean Wave has gained global popularity thanks to the proliferation of social media, the rise of global over-the-top (OTT) companies has been another driving force behind its spread. The term *OTT*

Tae-Jin Yoon: gopher@yonsei.ac.kr
Yaewon Jin: yaewon.jin@gmail.com
Date submitted: 10-27-2022

[1] In this paper, any references to the country and society of Korea are intended to specifically refer to the Republic of Korea, which is commonly known as South Korea.

refers to the Internet-based distribution of media content and services without requiring a traditional cable or satellite TV subscription. Among popular streaming services, Netflix's investment in and global distribution of the Korean drama *Squid Game* (Hwang, 2021) was a massive success and thus sparked a debate about the future of the Korean Wave. It resulted in both optimism that new possibilities for the Korean Wave had been discovered and pessimism that foreign capital would hinder the autonomy of the Korean creative industry. Concerns were also raised about whether the symbiotic relationship between Netflix and the Korean creative industry was sustainable. In other words, people started to wonder about the future direction of the relationship between Netflix and the Korean creative industry. The question mentioned above serves as one of the two key drivers behind launching this study.

The second motivation for conducting this study is the observation that, in recent years, the continued growth and expansion of the gaming industry is being combined with broadcast services. Notably, in Korea, the gaming industry has surpassed the broadcasting industry, and three-quarters of the adult population is found to engage in gaming activities (Korea Creative Content Agency [KOCCA], 2023). Gaming has become a more popular universal pastime than watching television in Korea, and the number of viewers turning to watch gameplay through streaming services has increased dramatically. It is not surprising that Netflix is considering incorporating a game streaming into its services, as it indicates that the gaming industry has developed its interest in broadcast services. Given Korea's status as the birthplace of online gaming and esports, it seems natural that the country's gaming industry has garnered the interest of global OTT companies.

The purpose of this study is not to make predictions about the industry's future or to recommend marketing strategies for global OTT providers that distribute and deliver Korean games. Instead, the article examines the historical and cultural significance of the collaboration between a global OTT company like Netflix and the Korean gaming industry, explores what this means for the future of the Korean Wave, and proposes the necessary conditions for the Korean Wave to overcome its current limitations and leap to the next level. In other words, the ultimate goal of this study is to envision the future of the Korean Wave based on insights learned from theoretical considerations and historical review. The Korean game industry will be mentioned as a significant factor, not because it is important to analyze the current state of the industry, but because the cultural characteristics of the Korean game industry provide philosophical and theoretical clues to the future of the Korean Wave. While the relationship between Netflix and the Korean Wave has been widely debated (e.g., Kim, 2022; Noh, 2022; Park, Kim, & Lee, 2023), little attention has been paid to the relationship between the Korean Wave and gaming, as well as the relationship between Netflix and Korean gaming industry in particular. The study borrows the philosophical term *transversality*, which generally denotes the tendency/phenomenon of creating new entities or collectiveness through the crossing, intersecting particularities. In today's vastly changing world, the notion of transversality has been widely adopted for its usefulness in mapping the various changes that occur by considering the systems of coordinates and articulating interrelations. The upcoming sections will provide a full explanation and its relevance in understanding the Korean gaming and entertainment industry.

Transversality

Before delving into a discussion of the Korean Wave, OTT, and the Korean gaming and entertainment industry, we need to introduce a concept of *transversality*. This idea can help explain the

complex relationship between these agents. The concept of transversality originated from a mathematical idea of transversal, a line that intersects two or more lines, producing new angles around the cross-point as the result of the intersection. The idea has been formalized to describe how different spaces intersect with one another in the academic area of differential topology. This term transversality has since entered the vocabulary of cultural studies, philosophy, and social science through the work of Guattari's psychoanalysis (see Guattari, 1984, 2006, 2015; see also Braidotti & Fuller, 2019). In his work, transversality is a "means of finding a way beyond the specific form of the transference in psychoanalysis" (Braidotti & Fuller, 2019, p. 11). Through the alteration of material and immaterial arrangements, the levels of transversality are achieved, which "change the data accepted by the super-ego into a new kind of acceptance of initiative" (Guattari, 1984, p. 13). The concept of transversality involves the intersection of sets (spaces, roles, hierarchical plane, work, etc.) through the mapping of "one entity or mode of mapping onto another" (Braidotti & Fuller, 2019, p. 11). This process creates new institutional *part objects* or new systems of coordinates that arise from an unconscious collective construction (Braidotti & Fuller, 2019; Goffey, 2016).

The rapid social change brought by technological breakthroughs has witnessed the collision or confrontation, convergence, or cooperation among previously unrelated fields, systems, and substructures. Thirty years ago, only a few people argued the telephone would compete or converge with television, but now we are witnessing not only a technological convergence of the two but also a clash or compromise of values, attitudes, and cultures in many other cases. This applies similarly to Korean dramas, movies, and songs, which are now widely consumed around the world thanks to the proliferation of digital media. Technological advances and content excellence are not the only reasons for the Korean Wave boom. The cultural phenomenon of crossing the borders of two or more countries with different histories, cultures, economic systems, and industrial bases is not so simple to explain. The dynamic between factors shaping Korean Wave highlights the importance of Guattari's concept of transversality.

There are several layers of transversality that could benefit the Korean Wave studies. First, transversality maps the preconditions that enable a new *dynamic of unification*. This condition supports the *crossing* or *intersecting* of diverse value systems, interpretations, and interests. The dynamic of unification brings forth a communicative praxis that expands beyond the given boundaries and amplifies the forces and opportunities. Transversality is particularly relevant in the current era of the digital revolution and globalization since it is closely related to the ability to combine and cross different value systems and interests, creating new opportunities and expanding beyond existing boundaries. Coming from a political-philosophical perspective, Jung (2014) suggests that transversality is a synonym of *trans(univ)ersality*, applying to the conditions of seminal humanity in the process of a paradigm shift toward a new global regime of ontology, culture, ethic, and politics beyond the modern world of universalism. He actively embraces the concept of transversality to deconstruct Western centrism and reorganize the global village into a form in which the West and the East coexist through cultural communication. In other words, he advocates for transversality to replace the dichotomy of universality and individuality. Rather than relying on the modern universality of Eurocentrism, it is necessary to form a true global village through multiculturalism based on the crossing and communication between the West and the East.

Therefore, understanding Korean culture as an exceptional case of non-Western popular culture gaining popularity in the West is still a result of modernist binary thinking. Much like the concept of cultural

imperialism that dominated the academic world half a century ago, understanding Korean culture as a counterexample or variant of cultural imperialism represents a *modern* approach rooted in binary thinking. Transversality theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the communication between modernity and postmodernity, universality and individuality. It breaks down the logocentrism on which modernity is based and operationalizes diversity to promote communication between differences. Rather than viewing Korean culture as a non-Western cultural product exported to the West, one can perceive it as a phenomenon in which cultural heterogeneity responds appropriately to each other, increasing the possibility of mutual communication and preserving diversity on this basis. As Schrag (1997) points out, the concept of transversality seeks "convergence without coincidence, conjuncture without concordance, overlapping without assimilation, and union without absorption" (p. 128) between differences. It is probably not too much of a stretch to substitute the word *the Korean Wave* for *transversality* here.

Transversality also helps us to understand the methods, values, and desires that drive changes based on social and technological norms. In modern societies, people have the desire to pursue transformation and recreate new ways of thinking and acting beyond physical boundaries. Posthumanities understanding of transversality suggests the unconscious dynamic of humans on a global scale "by forming alternative assemblages and collective praxis to discover the unrealized or virtual potential of what *we* are capable of becoming" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 1187). In doing so, the dynamic of transversality often relies on the form of humor or joke, "puns, double meanings, irony, misinterpretation, symbolism, and the occultation of things," to deconstruct and reimagine the world (Braidotti & Fuller, 2019, p. 12). This implies that transversality, rather than directly resisting or replacing existing ideologies, seeks to overcome them in creative and playful attitude, in order to become a collective without preserving particularities and to encourage spreadability and participation.

The claim that the methodology of transversality is based on humor is another interesting aspect that explains the potentiality of the Korean Wave. Slowly moving away from the era of rationalism that began with the Renaissance, people are now living in an era where emotions, pleasure, and visuals are much more powerful than reason, logic, and the literal aspect. Therefore, seeing the globalization of Korean popular culture as simply the distribution of cultural products across cultural boundaries would be a narrow interpretation. The popularity of the Korean Wave may be a small indication that the modern era, which relied on rationality, is coming to an end. Whereas in the modern era, there was one-way transmission of knowledge and defined relations between nations, the postmodern era may enable the construction of a global village that allows for the crossing of popular cultures (such as the Korean Wave). Furthermore, digital games are the cultural product that best exemplifies the transversality of popular culture.

In sum, transversality is an approach or a useful conceptual tool for understanding the ever-changing cultural phenomenon by mapping the conditions, relations, and collective aims and attitudes. After all, the Korean Wave is a transversal phenomenon, with diverse cases as temporary relational entities produced as consequences of specific social, political, technical, geographical, and temporal conditions. The Korean Wave is not a whole but an open whole that is renewed every time fragments are added or replaced. As each stage of Korean Waves requires new theoretical perspectives to make sense of its interrelations with other conditions, the notion of transversality could provide insights into the recent unfolding of the phenomenon. It can be achieved by mapping the overall process and directions, especially with the

accelerated broadening of the boundaries of evolution. With such implications, transversality is also used in New Materialism and Posthumanities to represent emerging methodology characterized by the active interdisciplinary attempts (Braidotti & Fuller, 2019) beyond the researchers' given discipline to understand various relations created among the valid claims of modernity (i.e., human-nonhuman, digital-analog).

The out-of-nation borders perspective, which offers a larger, alternative lens than ultranationalistic or national economy-first frameworks, also makes it possible to explore the cultural ramifications of the Korean Waves in global culture. We can situate Korea and the Korean Wave as a location and a scene of the high level of transversality, where the fast adaptation of globalization and digital revolution intersect with the heightening predicaments of capitalism in one of the most hierarchical societies. The collaborations between Netflix and Korean content are the foremost example of transversality at the industrial paradigm level. *Squid Game* (Hwang, 2021) and *Kingdom* (Kim & Park, 2019), some of the most successful cases, are consequences of Netflix's Korean playbook, a unique hybridization made possible beyond the valid claims of capitalism in the television era, which scrapped marginalities that were not socioculturally accepted by the existing logic of Korean cultural industry and formatted them into the unprecedented mixtures of content and in-between structure that were neither films nor television drama (Jin & Yoon, 2017, p. 2242). Thus, transversality lets us explore the Korean Wave from the view of sociotechnical conditions in space-temporal situations, the aim and related attitudes to overcome the limitations of the conditions and to evolve further, and the interrelations and type of hybridizations of the new objects that enable such processes. Transversality is beneficial because it allows to examine particularities of Korea as a nation and to look beyond the nationalistic view at the same time, situating the phenomenon on a planetary scale in the post-digital era in which the national boundaries weaken. The identities of cosmopolitans are discussed more actively, yet letting the observation of its meaning without dissolving the particularity. In our purpose, this approach also lets us speculate the near future images by examining the current conditions and understanding the aims and pursued relations.

Imagining the Next Korean Wave:
Why Does Netflix Need Korean Games, and Vice-Versa?

Interestingly, Korea, the home of the Korean Wave, is also a powerhouse of the traditional gaming and esports industries. The status of Korea, in both industry capacities and the cultural history of gaming, is quite outstanding. Because of the early adaptation of network technology, Korea has been considered as an "online gaming empire" (Jin, 2010) since the 2000s. As a first nation with popular online gaming, Korea has influenced shaping the current digital gaming culture greatly, and now is a symbolic place in the cultural history of digital gaming. This may not be a coincidence; cultural products of Korea's creative industries share a common quality, which may have been responding well to the postmodern call for transversality. Also, the rise of Korean games and esports coincides with the birth and first heyday of the Korean Wave. Korea's gaming market has grown steadily over the past two decades, reaching approximately $18 billion in 2021, recording 11.2% increase from the previous year (KOCCA, 2023, p. 26). Korea's gaming industry accounts for 7.6% of the global gaming market, which ranks fourth after the United States, China, and Japan (KOCCA, 2023, p. 31). Compared with other cultural products, the gaming industry stands out in Korea. As of 2020, the total revenue of the gaming sector's cultural exports far exceeds the total revenue combined from all the other sectors including music, broadcasting, film, animation, publication, etc.

Meanwhile, *Gaming* is expanding its scope and implications further in the digitalized global world. Esports is a noteworthy example of how specific cultural consumption practices (e.g., gaming) can be built into a new cultural sector (e.g., esports) of hybrid actualization from its original place as a paratext industry. *Paratext* means supporting text to other media artifacts. Games can become paratexts for other text or could have paratexts within games (Consalvo, 2017). Esports supports the original game text as a paratext industry and can shape "how we view, play, and understand video games" (Consalvo, 2013, para. 1). It traverses the geography and media sectors and, most importantly, designates roles and hierarchies of producer and consumer; collectives' input of creativity and creations is adopted as the driving force or strategy of its fluid development (Jin, 2021). The growth of esports not only changes the gaming industry but also challenges existing notions of other cultural sectors such as sports, TV, and media entertainment. As the field is expanding, it is also constantly creating new values, rules, and formats (Jin, 2021). Such reorganization of thoughts and structures is heavily supported by transversal communication beyond the national boundaries, which supports the crossing of the multicultural, alternatively translated in the esports' digitally presented world.

In today's rapidly evolving media landscape, gaming does not only refer to playing but also to "viewing and playing," which go "hands in hands" (Newzoo, 2021, p. 11).[2] The development of 5G and cloud technology is dissolving the distinction even further. At their crossroad, the convergence of Gaming (Google Stadia, Facebook Gaming, Tencent), OTT (Netflix, Amazon, Disney +, Apple TV, Hulu), and connected TV (XBOX, Playstation, Smart TV's) is actively imagined with new buzzwords Paas (Platform-as-a-service) or Gaas (Gaming-as-a-Service), as a next popular form of a digital platform that creates new intercultural relations. As the competition in the OTT market intensifies, Netflix is also following this trend, revealing the increasing limitations of film and drama content. Regardless of whether it is Korean drama or any other content, its platform access time cannot exceed its running time. Even though users may be loyal to a particular content or its intellectual property, there is no compelling reason for them to remain loyal to the platform. After watching desired content, they break away from the subscription model until the next attractive content becomes available. From a business perspective, Netflix cannot be satisfied with increasing the number of subscribers by broadcasting Korean movies or dramas. To retain viewers on the Netflix platform, it requires either an unlimited supply of content or a significantly different strategy. This is where digital games are considered valuable, as Netflix emphasized the increasing importance of gaming in a letter to its shareholders in 2019. "We compete with (and lose to) *Fortnite* more than HBO," the letter emphatically stated (Priye, 2021, para. 5). And then, on September 28, Netflix opened its gaming service in Italy and Spain with three titles (Leston, 2021). ". . . Since we are nearly a decade into our push into original programming, we think the time is right to learn more about how our members value games" (Perez, 2021, para. 21), the company explained.

Netflix's approach to the gaming field can be categorized into three dimensions: game development and publishing, releasing content based on Game iP, such as Arcane animation based on *League of Legends* (2009) Lore, and incorporating interactive formats. By April 2022, Netflix has released a total of 16 games, which are all accessible to the platform subscribers. Netflix was not the only one with an eye on the gaming

---

[2] Newzoo's research on Generation Z presents that 71% of Generation Z population both plays and views in gaming activities, while only 25% plays only, and 4% views only (Newzoo, 2021).

industry. Amazon has been working on its content business, including games, since around 2010. It created the Amazon App Store for the Kindle, began developing and sourcing casual games for the store, and in 2011 launched a subsidiary, Amazon Games. Like Netflix subscribers, Amazon Prime subscribers can play Amazon games for free, earn free items and boosts for existing games such as *League of Legends* (2009) and *Candy Crush Saga* (2012), or get a free month of Twitch Prime, which Amazon acquired. Collaborations with Korean games are also active. Amazon obtains the publishing rights of Korean game developers and handles global or Western publishing. For example, Amazon handles the European and North American publishing of *Lost Ark* (2019) by Korea's Smilegate.[3] It was reported that the company also works with NCSOFT in Korea.

However, it is difficult to classify the strategies implemented by Netflix and Amazon as transversal. Netflix's efforts to enter the gaming industry have failed to meet expectations, as its current subscriber base has shown low levels of engagement with games, and the quality of the games has been evaluated as relatively poor. The mobile gaming market currently dominates the global gaming industry compared with the PC/console market, and PC games like MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) are primarily distributed through platforms like Steam. Hence, Amazon's publishing role is likely to be limited. To put it differently, Amazon's role is restricted to designing business models and marketing strategies, and it can be regarded as a conventional collaboration that does not deviate significantly from the existing industry. In contrast, Netflix retains a larger subscriber base in both the United States and global OTT markets (Kats, 2022), and the Netflix app has the advantage of functioning as a gaming platform in its own right. Nevertheless, Netflix's venture into gaming, as well as its status as an OTT provider, also requires further innovation.

In a way, the Korean gaming industry and Netflix, as the consequences of newly produced assemblages with the digital technologies' affordance, supported the first stage of transversality in common. The focus of the Korean gaming industry on MMORPG and other multiplayer online game genres has provided the possibilities of constructing an alternative world in digital spaces, assisted in how such ludic space can be interrelated to the perceived social realities, and supported the lateral communication among individuals beyond the boundaries of geography, class, age, and gender. Netflix, with its subscription model, digital accessibility, and multicultural organizations, has provided people with access to multicultural experiences, liberating them from social constraints and injecting new ideas into the cultural industry. However, their shortcomings are in similar places, in that not being able to progress to the next level.

As cultural industry entities, both the Korean gaming industry and Netflix accomplished transversal innovation during the digital revolution around 2010s, but both are now losing their grip on dominance and are in need of a new phase shift. It appears that they are unable to achieve this within their own boundaries as their technicity, as a way of thinking and doing things, has lost the continuity

---

[3] *New World* (2021), released by Amazon in September 2021, was an immediate success, reaching 700,000 concurrent users upon launch. However, it quickly fell out of favor after being criticized for having an awkward user interface (UI) and poor quests. In contrast, *Lost Ark* (2019), released in February 2022, has been a huge success, reaching over 1.3 million concurrent users (Lee, 2022).

from emerging sociotemporal conditions. It is increasingly clear that their content has lost the charms to younger generations.

The current situation of the Korean game market reveals two intriguing phenomena. One is that the most popular games are not the same as the highest-grossing games. The top 10 most-played games in Korea do not include some high-grossing games (e.g., Kakao Games' *Odin: Valhalla Rising* (2022), NCSOFT's *Lineage M* (2017) and *Lineage W* (2021) series) (KOCCA, 2023, p. 113). This means that a small number of gamers in their 30s and 40s, often referred to as *whales*, account for a large percentage of game company revenue. Younger gamers are disappointed with the *pay-to-win (P2W)* focus of major Korean games, leading to protests, boycotts, and refund lawsuits. Another phenomenon is that people in their 30s and 40s prefer Korean games, while teens and people in their 20s are increasingly playing foreign games. For the Korean games *Lineage M* (2017) and *Lineage W* (2021), nearly 70% of gamers were in their 30s and 40s, while for the Chinese game *Genshin Impact* (2020), nearly 80% of users were in their teens and 20s, and for the Japanese game *Uma Musume: Pretty Derby* (2021), nearly half of the users were men in their 20s (Park, 2022). The fading appeal of Korean games among young people raises concerns about the industry's future, revealing invisible barriers despite its thriving exports and revenue.

Their incapabilities mostly come from being stuck in the past technicity or playbook of their earlier success of innovations both in aim and industry structures. Although Korean gaming has made a significant contribution relevant in imagining the world where the digital and analog collide, including its technicity, ways of thinking, and doing things, it has not been able to move past the universalist perspective. The alternative worlds only produce alternative universality or even crueler representations of the neoliberal ideals and social inequalities, thus constantly forcing players into universal rules of power and capital that place players in other hierarchies and competitions. Furthermore, in transitioning from PC gaming to mobile gaming, the game mechanisms were even transformed to pay-to-win logic. With such aims in designing the alternative society, Korean games failed to travel beyond Asia,[4] even though the digital constituents of in-game world presentations are already cultural hybrids. And its limited affordance for interactivities very much resembles the popular media such as television, in terms of their one-way cramming of information or hierarchies between producers and consumers, which neither acknowledge or allow the audience agency nor empower them for configuration. In short, although Korean gaming industry and Netflix surely helped stimulate transversal communications at the outset, they are only imposing a different kind of universality which exposes their tendencies to treat people as mere masses and consumers of modernity. Such attitudes seem to be the reason that younger generations, in particular, shy away from them and call them "uncool."

---

[4] While the economic size of the Korean game market itself cannot be considered to be declining, the fact that the games of major companies driving the sales volume are focused on pay-to-win MMORPGs using existing iPs shows the weakening of the sustainability and global growth potential of the Korean gaming industry, that is, a qualitative decline. The recent trend of Korean game exports to China and Southeast Asia shows a concentration in the region. In the last four years, the share of exports to China and Southeast Asia has increased from 44% to nearly 70%, while the share of North America and Europe has decreased from 28% to less than 20%, and the share of Japan has also decreased from over 20% to 3.7%. In markets with growth potential, such as India, Brazil, and Mexico, the share of Korean games is negligible (KOCCA, 2023).

While they do not seem to be capable of transversal innovations on their own, their industrial capacities in digital technology and need for change in order to survive present some possibilities for imagining their collaboration. After all, Netflix needs to venture into the gaming industry and the Korean Gaming industry needs stimulants to voyage further on a global scare. They both have global reach and accessibility, translatable contents/IP, and industry capacity to experiment with each other.

Envisioning the Next Korean Wave With *Transversality*

Korean gaming industry and Netflix pose diverse dimensions and constituents that can intersect. Using the notion of transversality as an approach to map the conditions and possible hybrid relations, we attempt to imagine some potential visions of the Next Korean Wave. As we have already declared, we are not proposing business strategies that the Korean game industry and Netflix can implement immediately. What we propose in Table 1 is to explore the values and implications of the philosophical direction of transversality for the future of the Korean Wave at a time of rapidly shifting the paradigms of human-technological-cultural relations.

Table 1. Transversal Korean Waves, Built on the Collaboration Between Korean Gaming Industry and Netflix.

Constituents of Gaming and Global Media Platforms		
Korean Gaming	**Netflix**	**Transversal Korean Waves**
Gaming industry capacity • Large-scale firms and creative labor force • Massive open-world game production experience and knowhows in long-term operations	**Digital Platform capacity** • Global scale audience accessibility • Transformable/expandable platform structure	**Industrial structure convergence** A new trans-sectoral, multifunctional, metaverse-like platform-gaming space
Histories in providing alternative society • Capacity to run digital economies • High-quality research capacity • Experiences in Game log data analysis	**Histories in delivering alternative perspectives and values** • Familiar with iPs in various sociotemporal settings • Data-driven research capacity	**Content/format Convergence in new part objects** Molecular interactive content that functions as a social-experiment or education for post-digital society (digital economy, new ethics and values, human-AI interactions)
Collective praxis in Gaming culture / Gamer generation	**Multinational organization structure and accessibility**	**Reconfiguration of cultural practices**

• National brand in the Gaming sector • Strong and distinct digital community platforms	• Need of Gaming sector strategy • Capital	Alternative formats of Festivalization based on bottom-up participation

The first vision we propose is a new trans-sectoral multifunctional space, a sort of metaverse. The idea is derived from speculating the *industrial structure convergence* (Dal Zotto & Lugmayr, 2016; McPhillips & Merlo, 2008), "moving beyond the boundaries of existing industries and creating new system entities divergent from them" (Jin & Yoon, 2021, p. 197). The most distinct identities within Netflix's global platform city and the Korean gaming industry, such as the ability to produce MMORPG or large-scale open-world games, have the potential to be base of a structural change or the adaptation to the environment to create a new system entity. Here, Korean gaming's open-world digital universe and Netflix's platform would be diagonally crossed.

Netflix recently declared that its main competitor is *Fortnite* (2017), not HBO (Priye, 2021), which suggests that it recognizes the need to expand beyond its current limitations. *Fortnite* (2017) is a game developed by Epic Games and is one of the most popular games among younger Western gamers. While *Fortnite*'s core-gameplay mechanism was built around the battle royale genre, similar to the Korean game *PUBG: Battleground* (2016), the journey of evolution has been very different. Despite providing alternative modes such as Save the World, Fortnite Creative, *Fortnite* (2017) serves as a platform for creative and interactive experiences such as concerts, film festivals, and esports arenas. It places itself in-between games and platforms, going beyond mere distribution and enabling various interactive production of contents and meanings. It creates diverse dimensions of spaces that blur the distinction between virtual and physical reality, allowing participants to move transversely with virtual identities. *Fortnite* (2017) provides a single situation within the game's lore, and it is up to the players to choose how they want to celebrate the memorable event and share it on other platforms like Twitter. Players can play an active role in shaping the collective memory and history of the game's lore.

Suppose the intersection becomes actualized of Netflix's broad relations with the global audience as a platform and the capacity of the Korean gaming industry to create the MMORPG genre, a massive open-world game with complex constructing elements that support various desires and intentions of players. Then we can imagine a new trans-sectoral, multifunctional cultural space/platform entity that allows entering into various interactive modes of experience of various Netflix stories with the safety of virtual identity and alternative social scene. Moreover, such a new system entity can support the dispersed, rhizomatic trajectories of personalized experiences, which cannot simply be curtailed into certain clusters of taste data sets erasing the context and particularities of people.

We can also consider the interrelations between various partial capacities to envision different components and functional entities that serve the values of transversality, as understood in philosophy. The proposed objective here is to provide people with the means to engage in social experiences which they can collectively enjoy. Both the Korean gaming industry and Netflix have been assisting people in the initial stage of transversality, that is, their realization of alternatives. However, they have been unable to provide

the tools for the next step, that is, the collective configuration of the direction after such realization. Netflix does possess a diverse range of familiar iPs with sociotemporal, or technical settings, while the Korean gaming industry has worked on various ludic algorithms that support social, economic, and explorational intentions. As a result, there are ample opportunities for them to collaborate and form connections.

Many game players are already discovering the narrative appeal of movies and TV shows in games and experiencing alternative forms of entertainment. *Assassins Creed* (2007) and *The Walking Dead* (2012) series are examples of how multicultural broadcast audiences can become game users or vice-versa and engage with the content with different experiences. Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* (2007) is a linear single-player game, where players assume the role of an assassin in various historical eras, including ancient Greece and the French Revolution. The game not only offers diverse modes for alternative user experiences but also serves as a figurative means of history education because of its careful design and incorporation of historical evidence. The discovery mode, for instance, enables players to become virtual tourists, exploring specific places and eras without engaging in the original gameplay. This mode allows interaction with historical non-player characters (NPC) and objects, offering players opportunity to learn about the art and politics of the era. Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* (2012) series, similar to Netflix's interactive formats, immerses players in the first-person perspective. The game presents players with urgent situations in a post-apocalyptic society setting that require them to make choices related to various ethical dilemmas. After each episode, players are provided with an overview of statistics, which allows them to see how many previous players made similar choices or opted for different actions.

Combining the ludic and systematic mechanisms of games with various sociotemporal settings can help people with in-depth exploratory and playful experience driven by strong ludic compulsion loops, ultimately resulting in a sense of achievement. In a way, such objects can also serve valid educational purposes, extending beyond the traditional notion of games and visual content as mere leisure activities and breaking away from the modern labor-leisure dichotomy. The ludic interactivity and affordance found in such entities can facilitate a deeper understanding of standpoint ontologies, explore various possible relations (human-nonhuman, digital-analog, national-global), and facilitate collective praxis in creating new knowledge and values. Play, while it has been perceived as something unproductive, is actually a "practical and problem-oriented philosophy" (Gorbunova, 2013, p. 13) and a "form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of engaging with others" (Sicart, 2014, p. 1).

Last but not least, the collaboration between the Korean gaming industry and Netflix also produces a new form of cultural practices as a consequence. *StarCraft* (1998) and *League of Legends* (2009), some of the most successful and institutionalized forms of modern esports, were born and gained their reputation at the crossroads of global game development firms and the Korean game scene's participation and imagination. One of the strengths of Korean gaming practices is the collective social consumption based on the cultural contexts in Korea. The characteristics of Korean gaming are not limited to embracing the world and rules of the digital world for creating the norms of specific gameplay. On the contrary, they extend to the collective praxis of reconstructing the digital elements into a common myth, ceremony, rituals, and industry entities. With the craze of cultural history in the world of gamers, the national image of Korea has been fantasized as a *heaven of gamers* or *capital of esports* and the land of legendary players. While Netflix's

strategy toward the gaming industry should be able to capitalize on the rich cultural history of the Korean esports industry, it should not just be about something like broadcasting esports events.

Esports may be a distinct form of *festivalizations* that arises from the practice of gaming, representing the yearning to envision alternative realities beyond the perceived reality of the modern world. Festivization refers to the process of transforming regular, routine activities into meaningful events. This allows individuals to engage with and experience a particular culture, and festivals function as a way to celebrate the cultural diversity of modern society (Taylor, Bennet, & Woodward, 2014). Similarly, esports has transformed games from domestic pastimes for teenagers into mass sporting events, allowing people to dream of alternative worlds. However, the significance of Korean esports is not simply the festivalization and industrialization of the game. Instead, it is significant because it does not conform to the conventions of the modern media sports industry and, in the process, transcends the values of universalism. Two key elements for the growth of esports in Korea are the introduction of PC bang culture and the establishment of the television broadcasting system specializing in video games and esports (Yoon & Lee, 2023). PC bangs first appeared in the late 1990s, when *StarCraft* (1998) began to gain great popularity in Korea and soon exploded in number. It was the place where game players, mostly youngsters, met offline collectively and competed collectively. Rather than playing privately at home, people would gather at well-equipped local PC bangs to play with their friends, and PC bang owners would often hold *StarCraft* (1998) tournaments with small prizes to attract more customers. Although the popularity of PC bangs has declined since the 2010s, the collective, community-oriented, gamer-centric culture is deeply imprinted on the current Korean esports ecosystem. The success of Korean esports was, in other words, driven by the grassroots efforts, and even after being established industry, esports often share their ownership of the iPs and assets with the fans to foster the festive scene more exuberantly and to use the creative imaginations and marketing capabilities they provide.[5]

If the Korean gaming industry and Netflix can identify and tap into the untapped potentials of the Korean gaming scene—such as the enthusiastic gaming communities and their creative ludic capacity, the national brand as the capital of esports and home of esports heroes, talents, or even unique formats of gaming contents—they can establish new relations or playbook beyond the traditional producer-consumer divide. By doing so, they may discover the potential for the next form of a festival or cultural practice, such as esports.

Discussions and Conclusion: Toward Transversal Korean Wave

This article explores the Korean Wave as a discontinuous series of cultural events. Over the past 25 years, conceptual tools for understanding and analyzing the Korean Wave have also evolved from the notions of media imperialism and the cultural discount to more recent ideas such as cultural hybridity and multiculturalism. With OTT services taking over the role of traditional broadcasters and movie studios and mobile media becoming more prevalent than computers and console games, what trajectory will the Korean Wave embark on next and what conceptual tools will be necessary to comprehend it? We attempt to address this question by adopting the idea of transversality and, in particular, focusing on digital games, a significant

---

[5] Refer to Jin (2022) for a detailed discussion of how the birth and development of Korean esports differs from the media sports industry in the United States and Europe, and how it clashes with Western-centered universalism.

cultural product of Korea that aligns well with the concept of transversality. Therefore, we proposed rather provocative speculation: the intersection of global OTT platforms with the Korean gaming industry has the potential to create an entirely new facet of the Korean Wave that has never been seen before. The goal of this article was not to make any practical suggestions for the future of the Korean Wave industry or Netflix's business strategy. Instead, we sought to comprehend the cultural essence of the Korean Wave in the post-digital era, marked by globalization and the digital revolution, and to identify the direction and implications of global cultural transformation.

The speculated findings about the expected visions of Netflix, Games, and their many possible intersections do seem to suggest that the Korean gaming industry and global media platforms have numerous ways to collaborate in the near future. While some of our speculations might seem far-fetched, the suggested domains are not the wildest or hollowest imagination but are based on careful examinations of the existing conditions of the Korean gaming industry and global streaming services, as well as the emerging conditions of cosmopolitan, posthuman desires, and technical developments. For discussion, a temporary name of *Transversal Korean Waves* could be assigned.

Transversal Korean Waves suggest that the next step of the Korean Wave—"strategies around creating new cultures and digital technologies" (Jin, 2021, p. 4160)—should concentrate on *how to collaborate* rather than focusing *ownership of a sector* or *driven by local*. In the post-digital era, the convergence of the global cultural landscape would be the process of further conditioning the already heightened level of transversality. It is characterized by fluid cultural products that constantly change the structure of relations with other technical developments. The relational consequences will be part of objects or industry-level convergence in various dimensions and trajectories that continuously merge and rewrite the sectoral distinctions. It will continuously generate ontological questions, such as whether so-called metaverse platforms or even esports can be treated within the boundaries of existing categories like games or sports. In such a trans-sectoral flow, the notion of cultural product ownership undergoes constant change, as the production chains are no longer solely owned by a single industrial entity but are constructed with rhizomatic relations among diverse hierarchies of participants. In such a vein, the adaptability and willingness to explore collaborative opportunities across national and ontological boundaries, as well as the ability to negotiate relations, seem to be key. Such strategies also suggest thinking about technology beyond the confinements of the anthropocentric view since technology is not just a tool for producing and spreading cultural content but is a condition that enables new thoughts and is a collaborator.

Transversal Korean Waves challenge establishing ownership of production location by an individual entity, and digital technologies continue to promote collective production beyond the traditional roles of producer and consumer. Then, is it possible to theoretically understand the encounter between Netflix and the Korean gaming industry/culture as an extension of the Korean Wave? Games, for instance, are already *hybrids of hybridity*. Forms and/or content of cultural elements are altered not because of clashes or frictions between two cultures but rather when undefined identities encounter hybrid cultural components through digital translation. Although the hybridity of K-pop, often defined as a fusion of local, regional, and Western cultures, forms, styles, genres, narratives or identities, represents significantly deterritorialized assemblages extending beyond its place of origin (Lie & Oh, 2014), the roam of Transversal Korean Waves is "contextualized as an open-ended and promiscuous Web of temporal and spatial interlacings" (Jung, 2009,

p. 425) that expands even beyond the dimensional distinctions of the virtual (digital) and the real (physical). In this sense, fostering future Korean Waves depends on how actively we can discover and negotiate the cultural marginalities (values, technicity, historical elements, etc.) within hybrid assemblages.

Transversal Korean Wave is also a concept that seeks a new ontology for the seminal human beings. Through transversality, we can find a way to overcome Western universalism by looking at the East from a postmodern perspective. In a philosophical context, the term East does not refer to a specific geographical location. Instead, it encompasses everything that the West has left behind or excluded based on a dividing line established on the night of Western philosophies' inception (Afary & Anderson, 2005, p. 18). Rethinking the next Korean Wave also aims to uncover the East in terms of philosophical concepts that have been neglected or overlooked in universalism and that hold relevance for humanity at a global level. This implies that the sociocultural implications of the Korean Wave in the post-digital era lie in its ability to rediscover cultural marginalities that were somehow left out in the fast adaptation to universality. This rediscovery aligns with the contemporary ethos of playfully overcoming the confinements of universalism. Such a search can only be achieved through collective praxis that traverses temporal and dimensional boundaries and with active participation from grassroots movements.

Recognizing the importance of the active participation of the grassroots movement in achieving transversality, it is crucial to acknowledge that *games* will play a pivotal role in driving Transversal Korean Waves. The reference to Korean gaming in this context does not imply only commercialized game texts or paratexts but also the distinctive culture of game creation, enjoyment, and appropriation. For example, the recent trend in the Korean gaming scene is to organize truck protests to express their dissatisfaction with game companies and their opposition to game policies. The so-called *Truck Protest* is a form of protest where disgruntled video gamers express their anger toward certain game companies or game-related government offices. The protest involves driving trucks adorned with banners and slogans to demonstrate their frustration. The protesters who participate in the *Truck Protest* drive around major cities to draw attention to their grievances and demand actions from game companies or government offices related to gaming. While the value of the truck protests may be up for debate, it is evident that they represent a growing trend among gamers seeking to take voluntary action in the industrial and political intervention sphere in response to their experiences. Compared with traditional media and cultural industries, the development of esports is highly influenced by grassroots or homegrown stakeholders. The bold inference that Netflix and Korean gaming can come together to bring about the next phase of the Korean Wave relies on the fact that they both share a bottom-up culture from the grassroots. The trend is likely to intensify as the structure of the Internet transitions from web2's mega-platform, which currently underpins OTTs, to the decentralized structure of web3. In the era of the Transversal Korean Waves, younger generations who grew up with *Roblox* and *Fortnite* (2017) will require media experiences that allow them to exert direct agency, beyond the diverse experiences of one-source-multiuse.

Understanding cultural change can be challenging, and predicting its future is not always straightforward. No one anticipated the global success of K-pop, K-drama, or the rise of Korea as an esports mecca or foresaw how OTT services like Netflix would undermine the established TV industry. Nowadays, the success of the Korean Wave is frequently misunderstood as a victory of Korean cultural policy or oversimplified as the consequence of Korean ingenuity, while others assume that the essence of the Korean Wave is a global

fandom enamored of and comforted by Korean idols. Are the major events in front of us keeping us so preoccupied that we fail to notice the fundamental change taking place in human history? In this article, we underlined that deviating from current academic discourse will be necessary if we are to explore the next stage of the Korean Wave. The next stage of what we call the transversal Korean Wave is one in which convergence, cultural peripherality, and grassroots activity become more prominent, and unidirectionality, Western universalism, and national boundaries are blurred. One cultural phenomenon that already has these characteristics is (Korean) gaming and esports culture. This is why an imagined collaboration between Netflix and the Korean gaming industry could be exciting. It is not only a precondition for the continuation of the Korean Wave but also a trigger to change the very nature of the Korean Wave. Furthermore, it could even be the cultural symptom to show the end of the Western-centered universalism that has dominated the world for so long. Their collaboration should not be evaluated at the level of simple marketing strategy.

References

Afary, J., & Anderson, K. B. (2005). *Foucault and the Iranian revolution: Gender and secudtions of Islamism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Assassin's Creed [Video Game Series]. (2007). Ubisoft. Retrieved from https://www.ubisoft.com/en-gb/game/assassins-creed/all-games

Braidotti, R. (2019). Transversal posthumanities. *Philosophy Today, 63*(4), 1181–1195. doi:10.5840/philtoday2020128318

Braidotti, R., & Fuller, M. (2019). The posthumanities in an era of unexpected consequences. *Theory, Culture & Society, 36*(6), 3–29. doi:10.1177/0263276419860567

Candy Crush Saga [Video Game]. (2012). King. Retrieved from https://www.king.com/ko/game/candycrush

Consalvo, M. (2013, March 12). Raiding the paratexts of Lara Croft. *In Media Res*. Retrieved from https://mediacommons.org/imr/2013/03/08/raiding-paratexts-lara-croft

Consalvo, M. (2017). When paratexts become texts: De-centering the game-as-text. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 34*(2), 177–183. doi:10.1080/15295036.2017.1304648

Dal Zotto, C., & Lugmayr, A. (2016). Media convergence as evolutionary process. In A. Lugmayr & C. Dal Zotto (Eds.), *Media convergence handbook* (Vol. 2, pp. 3–16). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer Publishing Company.

Fortnite [Video Game]. (2017). Epic Games. Retrieved from https://www.fortnite.com/

Genshin Impact [Video Game]. (2020). miHoYo. HoYoverse. Retrieved from https://genshin.hoyoverse.com/

Goffey, A. (2016). Guattari and transversality: Institutions, analysis and experimentation. *Radical Philosophy*, *195*, 38–47. Retrieved from https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/guattari-and-transversality

Gorbunova, L. (2013). Transversality as a modern intellectual strategy. *Moldoscopie, 1*(60), 7–15.

Guattari, F. (1984). Transversality (R. Sheed, Trans.). In F. Guattari (Ed.), *Molecular revolution: Psychiatry and politics* (pp. 11–23). Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

Guattari, F. (2006). *The anti-Oedipus papers*. New York, NY: Semiotext(e).

Guattari, F. (2015). Transdisciplinarity must become transversality. *Theory, Culture & Society, 32*(5–6), 131–137. doi:10.1177/0263276415597045

Hwang, D. H. (Executive Producer, Writer, & Director). (2021). *Squid game* [TV series]. Los Gatos, CA: Netflix.

Jin, D. Y. (2010). *Korea's online gaming empire*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Jin, D. Y. (2021). Ten myths about the Korean Wave in the global cultural sphere. *International Journal of Communication, 15*, 4147–4164.

Jin, D. Y., & Yoon, T.-J. (2017). The Korean Wave: Retrospect and prospect: Introduction. *International Journal of Communication, 11*, 2241–2249.

Jin, Y. (2022). *A study of post-digital culture through the analysis of technicity of esports.* (Doctoral dissertation, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea). Retrieved from http://www.riss.kr/link?id=T16373934

Jin, Y., & Yoon, T.-J. (2021). Convergence of music and esports. In D. Y. Jin (Ed.), *Global esports : Transformation of cultural perceptions of competitive gaming* (pp. 184–201). New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

Jung, H. Y. (2009). Transversality and the philosophical politics of multiculturalism in the age of globalization. *Research in Phenomenology, 39*(3), 416–437. doi:10.1163/008555509X12472022364208

Jung, H. Y. (2014). Transversality, harmony, and humanity between heaven and earth. *Diogenes, 60*(1), 97–104. doi:10.1177/0392192113519953

Kats, R. (2022, January 4). How many subscribers does Netflix have? Member stats (2022). *eMarketer*. Retrieved from https://www.insiderintelligence.com/insights/netflix-subscribers/

Kim, S. H. (Director), & Park, I. (Director). (2019). *Kingdom* [Series]. Los Gatos, CA: Netflix.

Kim, T. (2022). Cultural politics of Netflix in local contexts: A case of the Korean media industries. *Media, Culture & Society, 44*(8), 1508–1522. doi:10.1177/01634437221111917

Korea Creative Content Agency. (2023). *2022 White paper on Korean games*. Naju, South Korea: Korea Creative Content Agency.

League of Legends [Video Game]. (2009). Riot Games. Retrieved from https://www.leagueoflegends.com/

Lee, S. (2022, May 10). *Lost Ark* destroys Amazon's pride . . . Beats *New World* to become the world's No.1. *Korea Jeongkyung Shinmun*. Retrieved from http://kpenews.com/View.aspx?No=2378435/

Leston, R. (2021, September 29). Netflix continues to roll out its mobile gaming service. *New Musical Express*. Retrieved from https://www.nme.com/news/gaming-news/netflix-continues-to-roll-out-its-mobile-gaming-service-3058390

Lie, J., & Oh, I. G. (2014). SM Entertainment and Soo Man Lee. In F. L. T. Yu & H. D. Yan (Eds.), *Handbook in East Asian entrepreneurship* (pp. 7–13). London, UK: Routledge.

Lineage M [Video Game]. (2017). NCSOFT. Retrieved from https://lineagem.plaync.com/

Lineage W [Video Game]. (2021). NCSOFT. Retrieved from https://lineagew.plaync.com/

Lost Ark [Video Game]. (2019). Smilegate. Amazon Games. Retrieved from https://www.playlostark.com/en-us

McPhillips, S., & Merlo, O. (2008). Media convergence and the evolving media business model: An overview and strategic opportunities. *The Marketing Review, 8*(3), 237–253. doi:10.1362/146934708x337663

New World [Video Game]. (2021). Amazon Games. Retrieved from https://www.newworld.com/en-us

Newzoo. (2021). *Generations of gamers: How different generations engage with games*. Retrieved from https://newzoo.com/resources/trend-reports/newzoos-generations-report-how-different-generations-engage-with-games

Noh, H. J. S. (2022). Romantic blockbusters: The co-commissioning of Korean network-developed K-dramas as "Netflix originals." *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema, 14*(2), 98–111. doi:10.1080/17564905.2022.2120341

Odin: Valhalla Rising [Video Game]. (2022). Lionheart Studio. Kakao Games. Retrieved from https://odin.game.daum.net/odin/index

Park, J. H., Kim, K. A., & Lee, Y. (2023). Netflix and platform imperialism: How Netflix alters the ecology of the Korean TV drama industry. *International Journal of Communication, 17*, 72–91.

Park, Y.-J. (2022, October 28). A mobile game that changes generations . . . Standing out in the 20s. *inews24*. Retrieved from https://www.inews24.com/view/1533314

Perez, S. (2021, September 28). Netflix launches new mobile games in Poland, Italy and Spain as a members-only perk | TechCrunch. *TechCrunch*. Retrieved from https://techcrunch.com/2021/09/28/netflix-is-launching-a-trio-of-members-only-casual-games-in-poland-italy-and-spain/

Priye, R. (2021, November 10). Netflix gaming service: A timeline of everything we know till date. *Fossbytes*. Retrieved from https://fossbytes.com/netflix-gaming-service-everything-we-know-till-now/

PUBG: Battleground [Viedo Game]. (2016). Krafton. Retrieved from https://pubg.com/

Schrag, C. O. (1997). The self after modernity. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sicart, M. (2014). *Play matters (Playful thinking)*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

StarCraft [Video Game]. (1998). Blizzard Entertainment. Retrieved from https://us.shop.battle.net/en-us/product/starcraft-remastered

Taylor, J., Bennet, A., & Woodward, I. (2014). *Festivalisation of culture*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.

The Walking Dead [Video Game Series]. (2012). Telltale Games. Retrieved from https://store.steampowered.com/app/207610/The_Walking_Dead/

Uma Musume: Pretty Derby [Video Game]. (2021). Cygames. Retrieved from https://umamusume.jp/

Yoon, T.-J., & Kang, B. (2017). Emergence, evolution, and extension of *Hallyu studies*. In T.-J. Yoon & D. Y. Jin (Eds.), *The Korean Wave: Evolution, fandom, and transnationality* (pp. 3–21). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Yoon, T.-J., & Lee, K. (2023). Techno-orientalism in global/Korean esports. In Y. Kim (Ed.), *Introducing Korean popular culture* (pp. 201–209). London, UK: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781003292593