

Transnational Effects of Sharing on Social Capital among Young Adults: How the acts of sharing strengthen relationships between givers and recipients

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Cross-culturally, acts of sharing are recognized as an effective method to initiate and maintain human relationships in real-life situations by promoting continuous reciprocal exchanges between donors and recipients. Specifically, this study examines the effects of sharing a media product from the perspective of the givers, as compared to effects on the receivers. “Gangnam Style,” a Korean music video, is of interest because it was spontaneously shared worldwide by young adults who used it as a vehicle to build and strengthen social relationships, among young adults. While both the givers and receivers of the “Gangnam Style” benefited from bridging new relationships, the results of this study found that those who gave “Gangnam Style” benefited more in terms bonding already existing relationships, compared to those who received materials. This study provides further evidence in support of the “sender-effect” paradigm and enhances our understanding of how online sharing contributes to the construction of social capital among the young adults.

Keywords: Transnational Studies, Social capital, Online Sharing, Sender-effect, Young adults

In dramatic contrast to traditional media, often devalued for one-way communication in which producers create content that is issued to passive recipients, new media is defined by its distinguishing characteristic of two-way communication. The Internet’s interactive features have encouraged the creation of a new type of audience called “prosumers,” a term that stands between producers and consumers (Jenkins, 2006). Increasingly, audiences are creating a participatory culture “in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 331).

More recently, the advent of social networking sites (SNS), referred to as social media, has expanded the Internet’s primary function from that of an information tool to a social tool. As

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implied by its name, social media offer various features such as “like” and “share” that help users to quickly spread content via online social networks. Inarguably, one of the more attractive characteristics of social media is its ability to help people to easily distribute content to many others or to distinguished individuals. This is precisely why Jenkins and other colleagues (2013) conceptualized social media as “spreadable media.”

The explosive popularity of “Gangnam Style,” a Korean music video of a horse-style dance, is attributed to the technology behind social media that made possible the rapid distribution of the video, easily and quickly among mass audiences. While the technological aspects are essential to this process, “Gangnam Style” audiences themselves also made significant contributions in terms of literally “driving” the spread of the popular music video by their individual acts of sharing. In other words, the act of sharing involved a fundamental human factor that was essential in creating a participatory culture that spread “Gangnam Style,” providing strong evidence that in the new media environment users are not passive recipients, as in the traditional media but rather, are active givers for high-speed circulation of new content among their immediate contacts and globally (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

Recent studies on Internet studies and participatory culture emphasize the need for more research on the general topic of sharing (John, 2012), an observation that supports the goal of this study to direct attention toward users by calling attention to their sharing activities. By looking at the case of “Gangnam Style,” this study examines how the two dimensions of sharing – the acts of giving and receiving - differ in terms of influencing people’s attitudes toward content. This study explores also the social implications of sharing “Gangnam Style,” in particular, in terms of its ability to bridge and bond social relationships. Finally, this study seeks to expand our understanding about what it means to share and what sharing of “Gangnam Style” may have left us with.

Literature Review

The transnational boom of Korean popular culture, referred to as “Korean Wave” emerged around the end of the 1990s, led by Korean TV dramas that were viewed by audiences in other Asian countries (Shim, 2006). The dramas featured Korean popular songs (K-pop) that soon entered the broader Asian music market and attracted a huge fandom culture throughout Asia, eventually fueling the greater Korean Wave, from which “Gangnam Style” descended and immediately became viral.

Global fever for K-pop reached its peak when “Gangnam Style” was released through YouTube on July 15, 2012. However, it was a tweet by Scooter Braun, who is Justin Bieber’s manager, that put “Gangnam Style” in the spotlight. Braun was soon followed by other celebrities, such as T-pain and Britney Spears, who posted tweets about “Gangnam Style.” Like wildfire, individual users’ cover-dance videos of the horse-riding dance and flash mobs took off via YouTube. Not surprisingly, ordinary people who participated in this dance routine also became mass producers and distributors by sharing videos of themselves and friends via social media. At the center of the

unexpected popularity of “Gangnam Style” was the power of sharing among millions of individual agents.

Theory of Gift Sharing

As defined by Belk (2007), sharing is “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use” (p.126). As implied in Belk’s definition, sharing implies the situation where the giver normally left with less once the giver shares his/her resources with others (John, 2012). In this sense, sharing is a critical practice for oneself as well as for those who receive a benefit as sharing literally means less for the giver and more for the receiver. John notes that sharing involves distributive logic in which finite resources are given away, often defining the boundaries of an individual’s personally valuable online social network (2012).

Besides the distributive logic of sharing, John also describes a communicative logic of sharing where people share emotions and information (2012). With the advent of the Internet, the communicative practice of sharing has become much more prevalent. By posting a link or sending emails, the giver’s transaction costs when sharing with others are significantly reduced. Social media, the so-called “spreadable media” (Jenkins et al., 2013), allow users to spread messages even more easily by simply clicking “like” or “share.” By use of these features for sharing, sharing is no longer a zero-sum game. Givers do not lose anything of their own when they share. In fact, John argues “Not only is this not a zero-sum game, but it is a form of sharing that leaves us with more than when we started” (2012, p. 171).

While sharing may influence both givers and receivers, it is important to question whether givers and receivers gain equal benefits from sharing. While sharing in an online environment may not entail large transaction costs on the part of the givers, sharing content is still a burdensome task for many people. In that sense, individuals are likely to experience different levels of benefits from sharing because of different levels of activeness and motivations that are involved with the two distinctive modes of sharing (Choi & Lee, 2015; van den Hooff & de Leeuw van Weenen, 2004). In fact, several political communication studies suggest that expressers and listeners may benefit from discussions at different levels (Pingree, 2007; Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009; Yoo, Kim, & Gil de Zuniga, 2016). In those studies, results suggest that the expressers strengthen a commitment to the views they express (Gil de Zuniga, Bachmann, Hsu, & Brundidge, 2013), elaborate more of their views (Yoo et al., 2016), and even become mobilized to support their opinions (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009). These findings are significant in redirecting our attention to the giver from that of the receiver in the traditional “receiver-effects” paradigm of communication research (Pingree, 2007).

According to Bem (1967; 1972), people tend to infer their attitudes toward objects based on observations of their own behavior. That is, if individuals are actively committed to sharing “Gangnam Style” materials with others, this behavior may lead them to develop positive attitudes

toward material that tends to reduce psychological dissonance between their behavior and attitudes. In fact, a recent study conducted by Odeldorf-Hirsh and Sundar (2015) found that people become more cognitively involved with material once they share the material with others. Further considering the online communication environment where posting and sharing can be an act of expression, it is not a far stretch to assume that sharing “Gangnam Style” has likely impacted people’s attitudes. It is also important to note the difference in weight that givers and receivers hold in the process of sharing. That is, the act of giving may have more persuadable power than the act of receiving in terms of encouraging more positive attitudes toward “Gangnam Style.” Based on this discussion, the following hypotheses are set forth:

H1: The more engaged people are in sharing “Gangnam Style”, the stronger attitude people would hold towards the “Gangnam Style” music video.

H2: The act of giving “Gangnam Style” has stronger influence on shaping positive attitudes towards “Gangnam Style” than the act of receiving.

Perceived Social Connectivity: Bridging and Bonding Relationships

Social capital, originally mentioned by Hanifan in 1916, has been refined by several scholars, namely Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993), who has expanded thinking about social capital from an egocentric to a socio-centric concept by describing social capital as all the resources that individuals or groups can reach through their social networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). According to that definition of social capital, the act of establishing new networks and maintaining existing social relations is a key factor in many treatments of social capital.

Putnam further extended the concept of social capital by breaking it down into two different types: bridging social capital and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital is formed via casual and weak ties that involve diverse social groups which offer useful information or new perspectives (Granovetter, 1973). By comparison, bonding social capital is generated via dense social networks, such as close friends and family, who can offer assistance ranging from emotional support to more substantive and scarce forms of resources (Williams, 2006). In short, different formulations of social relationships lead to different outcomes of social capital.

In recent years, social media have facilitated a revitalization of the concept of social capital in communication studies. Scholars have consistently found that social media uses help to create social capital by building bridging and strengthening bonding relationships (Burke, Kraut & Marlow, 2011; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2011). Yet, these scholars have given greater attention to the power of the medium rather than to social behaviors, such as “sharing,” that serve to build ties and strengthen relationships where social capitals is said to reside. Thus, the time has come to focus on behaviors, themselves, that construct and maintain relationships.

Sharing is unquestionably an effective method to initiate and maintain relationships by promoting continuous reciprocal exchanges between donors and recipients (Ska°geby, 2010). That is, from

the perspective of recipients, resources received from their social networks are viewed as a form of a gift (Portes, 1998), thereby creating social debts that perpetuate the exchange process (Belk & Coon, 1993). Whether the exchanges are concrete materials or intangible assets, they are known to lead to positive emotions that also reduce relationship uncertainty between donors and recipients, thereby helping to reinforce relationships (Darr, 2003; Larsen & Watson 2001; Lawler, Yoon & Thye, 2000; Sherry, 1983).

Yet, just as expressers and listeners may benefit from discussions at different levels, it is reasonable to expect that perspectives of givers and recipients may differ also in terms of the overall quality of the giver/recipient relationship. A study conducted by Choi and Lee (2015) found that two dimensions of news sharing on social media – news seeking and news sharing – have different networking consequences for those who are involved. Building on these findings, it is feasible to assume that when users shared “Gangnam Style” materials that their relationships, in general, may have been strengthened. However, questions remain about whether sending the materials influenced the donors and recipients in similar ways. Based on this discussion, the following hypothesis and research questions are posited:

H3a: The more engaged users are in sharing activities, the stronger bridging relationships they perceive to have built.

H3b: The more engaged users are in sharing activities, the stronger bonding relationships they perceive to have built.

RQ1: How are the acts of giving and receiving related to users’ perceptions of (a) bridging relationships and (b) bonding relationships formed during their sharing activities?

Methods

Using web-based survey software, Qualtrics, an online survey was conducted to examine the effects on attitudes and relationship building among online senders and receivers as a result of their sharing the “Gangnam Style” materials. In this study, “Gangnam Style” materials indicate all forms of offline and online media content associated with “Gangnam Style,” such as the song, the music video, news articles about the album, user-generated content (e.g., Parody video) and etc. Thus, the act of sharing indicates respondents’ previous experience of sharing those content with others.

To recruit survey participants, an email directory of students enrolled for Fall 2013 at a U.S. public state university was used. Survey invitation emails were sent out to 8,000 students whose email addresses were randomly selected from the directory. The invitation email included a link for the survey along with a short description of the study and a consent form. Data were collected in 2013 between November 6 and November 28. Students who completed the survey were enrolled in a drawing for \$100, \$75, and \$50 cash prizes as compensation for their participation. While this particular university may not be representative of all universities in the United States, similarities

among state universities in terms of their systems, public mission, and diversity of student population make the choice of one state university relatively more representative of other universities, compared to private universities, many of which differ in terms of systems and students populations depending on the institution's mission.

Sample

A total of 699 students completed the survey: the response rate was 8.4 percent. While the response rate was relatively low, the total of 699 responses was considered sufficient to produce reliable result (Shin & Fan 2009). In addition, a priori assessment of statistical power (see <http://danielsoper.com>) indicated that 76 was the minimum sample size required to detect an effect of the model with 11 independent variables, a statistical power level of .80, effect size of .15, and probability level of .05. Further, comparisons between characteristics of survey respondents and the university's undergraduate academic demographics were made in order to gain a better understanding of the validity of the survey results (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000): female (68.2% sample vs. 57.1% university); White (60.9% vs. 73%); African American/ Black (4% vs. 8%); Asian (20% vs. 9%); and Hispanic (0.4% vs. 0.5%). Among survey participants, 88.7% were between the ages of 18 to 25 (vs. 95% university). Overall, there was positive correspondence between the survey sample and demographic enrollment statistics of the university, supporting representativeness of the university's population.

Independent Variables

The Act of Giving. The level of participants' involvement in giving activities, which contributed to spreading the "Gangnam Style," was measured by asking respondents: "How often did you pass along Gangnam Style-related materials to those groups of people? 1) Spouse, partner, family relatives or close friends, 2) Former high school or college friends, former co-workers or former colleagues, 3) Current co-workers or colleagues, 4) Acquaintances, 5) Strangers, 6) Others." Respondent's act of giving to each group was measured on seven-point scale from "Not at all" [1] to "Very much" [7]. The six items were then averaged for analysis ($\alpha=.69$, $M= 2.24$, $SD= 1.32$).

The Act of Receiving. To measure the extent to which people received Gangnam Style-related materials from others, participants were asked to indicate how often they received Gangnam Style-related materials from the following groups of people: 1) Spouse, partner, family relatives, or close friends, 2) Former high school or college friends, former co-workers or former colleagues, 3) Current co-workers or colleagues, 4) Acquaintances, 5) Strangers, 6) Others. Respondent's act of receiving from each group was measured on seven-point scale from "Not at all" [1] to "Very much" [7], and the six items were then averaged to produce a scale score ($\alpha=.84$, $M= 3.10$, $SD= 1.27$).

The Act of Sharing. In this study, the act of sharing was measured as a combination of the act of giving and receiving based on the definition of the act of sharing as the act of distributing and the act of receiving (Belk, 2007). Therefore, the averaged six items from the giving variable and the averaged set of six items from the receiving variable were averaged to create the composite measure ($\alpha=.84$, $M= 2.67$, $SD= 1.14$).

Korean Cultural Proximity. Since people are known to generally prefer culture or media products that are culturally familiar, Korean cultural proximity was included as a control. Participants rated their proximity to Korean culture across three different dimensions: interest, knowledge, and relevance. They were asked to answer how much they were interested in, how much they knew about, and how much they thought they were related to the Korean culture on seven-point scale from “Not at all” [1] to “Very much” [7]. A composite score was created by averaging the three items ($\alpha=.90$, $M= 2.80$, $SD= 1.54$).

Interest in Music. Since participants’ intrinsic interest in music could be an important factor influencing their motivation or reaction to “Gangnam Style” (self-determination theory; Ryan & Deci, 2000), the respondents’ interest in music was included in the analysis as a control variable. Participants’ general level of interest in music was measured by asking them to rate on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” [1] to “Strongly agree” [7] five items: I like to listen to music, I like to look for music-related information, I like to purchase music albums, videos, instruments, accessories, etc., I like to attend concerts or participate in fan club activities, I like to talk about music. Items were averaged across the five subscales to form a scale score ($\alpha=.79$, $M= 5.24$, $SD= 1.23$).

Exposure. Many media studies have shown that the type of medium used is an important factor in influencing people (Bezjian-Avery, Calder & Iacobucci, 1998; Ha & Kim, 2008). Thus, participants’ exposure to “Gangnam Style” via different media was also controlled. Participants were asked to answer to the following five questions: “Since the day you first learned about ‘Gangnam Style,’ how often have you been exposed to ‘Gangnam Style’ through... 1) mass media (e.g., TV, radio, and newspaper), 2) online websites, 3) social media, 4) offline conversation, 5) others?” The scale ranged from “Not at all” [1] to “Very much” [7].

Demographic Control Variables. Since social relationships are often based on similar demographic characteristics, such as age, gender and ethnicity, those factors were included in the analysis to control for potential confounds.

Dependent Variables

Attitude toward the Gangnam Style. Using three items on a seven-point Likert scale, respondents’ attitude toward “Gangnam Style” was measured by three items ranging from “Not at all” [1] to “Very much” [7]. The three items were “How much did you like listening to Gangnam Style?” “How much did you like watching ‘Gangnam Style’ music video?” and “How much did you like talking about ‘Gangnam Style’?” The scores for the three items were averaged to create the composite measure ($\alpha =.90$, $M= 3.52$, $SD= 1.68$).

Bridging. To measure the influence of the act of sharing on bridging relationships among people with different cultures, interests, and beliefs, three items were adapted from Norris (2002), asking how much ‘Gangnam Style’ has helped you to: 1) Connect with people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds? 2) Connect with people from different economic backgrounds? and 3) Connect with people of different ages or generations? ($\alpha=.91$, $M= 1.76$, $SD= 1.26$). Again,

participants answered items on a seven-point scale ranging from “Not at all” [1] to “Very much” [7]. The three items were averaged for analysis.

Bonding. As adopted from Norris (2002), the bonding scale was used to measure how the act of sharing contributed to relationships among people with similar cultures, interests, beliefs, etc. Four items on a seven-point scale from “Not at all” [1] to “Very much” [7] were measured. The items were: “How much has ‘Gangnam Style’ helped you to: 1) Become more involved with groups and organizations you already belong to? 2) Connect with groups and organizations that are based in your local community? 3) Find people or groups who share your interests? 4) Find people or groups who share your beliefs?” To create a scale score, the four items were averaged ($\alpha=.94$, $M= 1.60$, $SD= 1.12$).

Statistical Analysis

Six sets of ordinary least square (OLS) hierarchical regression were employed to test the hypotheses and examine the research questions. The orders of block entry in the hierarchical regression models were grounded on theoretical relationships discussed in the literature review. As control variables, factors of gender, age, ethnicity, and general interest in music were entered in the first block. Then, four media-related variables (e.g., the amount of exposure to “Gangnam Style” through the mass media, online websites, social media, and offline conversations) were entered in the second block, and general interest in the Korean culture was then entered in the third block. Finally, the act of sharing (H1, H3a, H3b) and the act of giving and receiving (H2, RQ1a, RQ1b) were entered, respectively, in the fourth block, depending on the specific hypothesis or research question.

Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between the act of sharing and attitude toward “Gangnam Style.” As shown in Table 1, the hierarchical regression model accounted for a total variance of 23% for attitude toward “Gangnam Style.” Further, a statistically significant relationship between the act of sharing and attitude toward “Gangnam Style” was detected at ($\beta =.437$, $p <.001$) even after controlling for all demographic, personal dispositions, and media-related variables. Therefore, H1 was strongly supported.

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression Testing demographic, personal disposition variables, media related variables, and act of sharing as predictors of the attitude toward Gangnam Style

Hypothesis1 (Attitude toward the Gangnam Style)		
Predictor	ΔR^2	β
Block1:	.024*	
Gender		-.090*
Age		.077*
Ethnicity		-.069
Interest in music		.027
Block2:	.048**	
Mass media exposure		-.090*
Online website exposure		.055
Social media exposure		.055
Offline exposure		-.075*
Block3:	.031**	
Korean cultural proximity		.115*
Block4:		
Act of sharing	.139**	.437**
Total R^2	.230**	
N	699	699

Note. Betas are for the final model in which all variables are entered into the model. The last column indicates the increment to variance explained associated with the variable or block of variables listed, after controlling for variance due to all prior blocks of variables in the model. $N=699$.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .001$

The second hypothesis (H2) predicted a much stronger effect for the act of giving than for the act of receiving in terms of shaping positive attitudes toward “Gangnam Style.” As a result of the hierarchical regression test (see Table 2), it was found that the giving activities had much stronger relations than the act of receiving with a positive attitude toward “Gangnam Style.” After controlling for other independent variables, the act of giving was found to be strongly related with attitude toward “Gangnam Style” ($\beta=.485$, $p < .001$) while the effect of receiving was not significant. Therefore, H2 was also strongly supported.

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Testing demographic, personal disposition variables, media related variables, and act of giving and receiving as predictors of the attitude toward Gangnam Style

Hypothesis2 (Attitude toward the Gangnam Style)		
Predictor	ΔR^2	β
Block1:	.024*	
Gender		-.063*
Age		.070*
Ethnicity		-.059
Interest in music		.030
Block2:	.048**	
Mass media exposure		-.061
Online website exposure		.057
Social media exposure		.098*
Offline exposure		-.086*
Block3:	.031**	
Korean cultural proximity		.113*
Block4:		
Act of giving	.189**	.485**
Act of receiving		-.016
Total R^2	.280**	
N	699	699

Note. Betas are for the final model in which all variables are entered into the model. The last column indicates the increment to variance explained associated with the variable or block of variables listed, after controlling for variance due to all prior blocks of variables in the model. $N=699$.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .001$

Hypothesis 3a and 3b examined whether the act of sharing had a positive relationship with perceived bridging (H3a) and bonding (H3b). Results of two hierarchical regression tests revealed a significant effect for sharing activities on perceived bridging and bonding. First, as shown in Table 3, the act of sharing explained a statistically significant increase in the variance of perceived bridging while controlling for other variables ($\Delta R^2=.130$, $F[10,680]=30.209$, $p < .001$). Specifically, the result indicated that each standard deviation increase in the act of sharing led to .498 of standard deviation in perceived bridging ($\beta=.498$, $p < .001$). In addition, the significant effect of the act of sharing on perceived bonding was also found. The result indicated that the amount of sharing activities could have a significantly important influence on perceived bonding

($\Delta R^2 = .155$, $F [10,680] = 24.416$, $p < .001$). And this effect remained even after other independent variables were taken into account. The regression test indicated that for every one-point increase in the act of sharing, there was a .462 point increase in attitude toward “Gangnam Style” ($\beta = .462$, $p < .001$). Therefore, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were both supported

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Testing demographic, personal disposition variables, media related variables, and act of sharing as predictors of bridging and bonding

Predictor	Hypothesis3a (bridging)		Hypothesis3b (bonding)	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Block1:	.038**		.032**	
Gender		-.071*		-.065
Age		.084*		.033
Ethnicity		.027		.042
Interest in music		.019		-.004
Block2:	.046**		.046**	
Mass media exposure		-.033		-.027
Online website exposure		.008		.018
Social media exposure		-.063		-.070
Offline exposure		.022		.037
Block3:	.043**		.031**	
Korean cultural proximity		.140**		.112*
Block4:	.130**		.155**	
Act of sharing		.498**		.462**
Total R^2	.308**		.264**	
N	699	699	699	699

Note. Betas are for the final model in which all variables are entered into the model. The last column indicates the increment to variance explained associated with the variable or block of variables listed, after controlling for variance due to all prior blocks of variables in the model. $N=699$.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .001$

The first research question examined the influence of the act of giving and receiving of “Gangnam Style” on perceived bridging (RQ1a) and bonding of social relationships (RQ1b). First, to examine RQ1a, perceived bridging of social capital was regressed on demographic variables, media-related variables, personal disposition variables, and the act of giving and receiving. The overall multiple regression was statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .327$, $F [11,679] = 29.931$, $p < .001$), and the act of giving and receiving accounted for 19.9% of the variance in the perceived bridging. Further, the

acts of giving ($\beta=.431$, $p < .001$) and receiving ($\beta=.118$, $p < .05$) also had a statistically significant relation with perceived bridging, controlling for other independent variables. Therefore, it could be concluded that with regard to perceived bridging, the effect of the act of giving carried more influence than the act of receiving.

To test RQ1b, another hierarchical regression test was performed. Again, the overall regression model was statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .287$, $F [11,679] = 24.796$, $p < .001$), and the act of giving and receiving accounted for 17.8% of the variance in the perceived bonding of social relationship. Further, the effect of the act of giving on perceived bonding was significant ($\beta=.422$, $p < .001$), while the effect of the act of receiving was not statistically significant. This effect remained even after other independent variables were taken into account. Hence, the act of giving the “Gangnam Style” had a significant positive relationship only on bonding social capital.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Testing demographic, personal disposition variables, media related variables, and act of giving and receiving as predictors of bridging and bonding

Predictor	RQ1a (bridging)		RQ1b (bonding)	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Block1:	.038**		.032**	
Gender		-.054		-.048
Age		.080*		.028
Ethnicity		.033		.048
Interest in music		.021		-.002
Block2:	.046**		.046**	
Mass media exposure		-.015		-.008
Online website exposure		.009		.019
Social media exposure		-.037		-.041
Offline exposure		.014		.029
Block3:	.043**		.031**	
Korean cultural proximity		.139**		.111*
Block4:	.199**		.178**	
Act of giving		.431**		.422**
Act of receiving		.118*		.084
Total R ²	.327**		.287**	
N	699	699	699	699

Note. Betas are for the final model in which all variables are entered into the model. The last column indicates the increment to variance explained associated with the variable or block of variables listed, after controlling for variance due to all prior blocks of variables in the model.

$N=699$.

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .001$

Discussion

Truly, the world witnessed the power of sharing through the explosive popularity of “Gangnam Style.” Yet, it is true also that the power of sharing has received little attention due to the heavy research focus on the power of technology, more precisely social media. This study, therefore, attempts to move away from medium-oriented studies to user-oriented research by looking at the process of sharing and its relations with people’s attitudes and networking among one another.

A series of hierarchical regression models revealed that the more users engaged in the act of sharing, the more likely they were to have a positive attitude toward the shared material. This result suggests that the behavior of sharing means more than a mere material exchange. Therefore, findings of this study strongly support that the act of sharing is not just a process of mere exchange but rather represents sharing as a possibly important path for people to build their opinions.

More importantly, it was further found that the building of social relationships - both bridging and bonding – is strongly associated with the process of sharing. More interesting findings were displayed when the effects of sending and receiving were examined separately. First of all, when the act of sharing occurred among people, the act of giving was found to have more powerful relations than the act of receiving in building stronger relationships. Possibly, this happened because users need to selectively decide what to share among a flood of media products, and further they need to decide with whom to share selected material. That is, when the process of giving occurs, people need to invest much more time and effort than in the act of receiving, which entails a passive process of information taking. Therefore, users may feel a much stronger responsibility toward or emotional attachment with what they convey to others, and this cognitive effort or emotional attachment then contributes to the act of giving a much stronger predictor of attitude formation.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the roles of giving and receiving were remarkably different in building relationships among homogeneous (bonding) and heterogeneous groups (bridging). Specifically, while both giving and receiving activities showed a positive influence on bridging relationships, only the act of giving played a significant role in bonding relationships. In the case of bridging relationships that involved heterogeneous groups, the strength of relationships was relatively weak or nearly non-existent. Therefore, even small interactive activities may help to initiate or build relationships. In response, the relatively passive act of receiving may give rise to feelings of appreciation and positive sentiment, which then lead to the reinforcement of relationships within heterogeneous groups. However, in the case of bonding among homogenous others, users showed a relatively strong sense of belonging or attachment to other group members.

Generally, within homogenous groups, exchanges of social activities and interaction are considered common phenomena, leading members within those groups to become comfortable with a certain amount of social activity. Therefore, within homogenous groups, there tends to be a much stronger commitment of time and effort to improve the quality of relationships. This could explain the reason why the effects of receiving tend to diminish while the effects of the act of giving become more powerful in bonding social relationships.

Taken together, findings of the current study provide a meaningful contribution to the communication literature. First of all, this study extends participatory culture studies by empirically testing the effects of sharing on participants' attitudes and relationships within their social networks. Specifically, this study revealed the influence of sharing behaviors on attitude formation, thereby increasing our understanding about attitude-behavior relationships within the context of communication. Furthermore, the findings extend our understanding of online social capital by examining how people, particularly young adults, build new networks as well as further bonding existing relationships. Finally, this study provides meaningful insights into the direction of communication research by supporting the "sender-effect" paradigm.

This research further provides meaningful implications for practitioners, as well. Based on observations, this study demonstrates that people who engage in the act of sharing tend to build more positive attitudes and, as a result, develop societal benefits (e.g., relationship building). In that sense, the findings of the study may imply that media products that are designed primarily to gain attention but with little value for sharing information with others may be less popular in the market. Thus, it is essential for practitioners to determine which particular medium and features encourage sharing.

The current research has limitations that need to be acknowledged. First of all, this study performed the hierarchical regression analysis with cross-sectional data to test hypotheses. Therefore, the results of the study cannot derive casual inferences from the relations among variables. Even though we suggested possible causal interpretation based on the theoretical basis, it should be noted that the opposite directions of relationship are also possible. To further confirm the causality among variables, for future research we strongly recommend the use of a panel survey that asks for the actual development of relationships based on frequency of interactions among the same respondents who have previously shared Gangnam Style materials.

Since this study examined only the effects of sharing in the context of "Gangnam Style" by surveying relatively young participants, generalizability of the findings is limited. Nonetheless, since the act of sharing "Gangnam Style" was an international, rather than regional, phenomenon from 2012 to 2013, this study is meaningful as a cornerstone for understanding some of the principles that underlie users' sharing activities. In order to further develop theoretical groundwork in participatory culture studies, it is recommended that future research examine other cases with a more general population. Furthermore, the act of sharing via specific media was not measured because the focus of the study did not look at different roles played by media relative to the act of sharing but only the effect of sharing itself. Therefore, in future studies, it is recommended that the act of sharing be examined relative to the use of different types of media.

In conclusion, this study deepens our understanding of the power of sharing by considering the mechanisms that underlie the act of giving and receiving. It further explains how the acts of giving and receiving function differently in the psychological and social domains, based on the concept of sender-effects. These insights within the new media environment strongly suggest that researchers give closer attention to participatory culture from the perspective of “how” people use media to share with others.

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