

Reconsidering Digital Distribution

Viki: Possibilities for Interactive Digital Distribution

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I argue that flow via community is a unique approach to keeping viewer attention. As an object of study, I want to consider the site [Viki](#). “Viki” is the merging of the terms “video” and “wiki.” The site is an online community that relies on its members to translate international (mostly Korean) media the company legally acquires through creative commons license. Members of this community work to create high quality subtitled translations of regional film, music videos, and (predominantly) television shows from their original language into 160 languages. These translations are crowd sourced, with a team of volunteers working together to segment, translate, edit, and distribute the content on the site. Content is then streamed online in standard definition with commercials, or at HD with a monthly subscription. Once translations have been edited into a high quality text, distribution deals are arranged with well-known subscription streaming sites (Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime).

Viki members can shift between being television consumers, producers, and critics all within the same site. Members of the community can be as involved as they choose. This keeps them invested in the cultural products they contribute to and create in a unique way. I argue that Viki is another possibility for structuring a distribution channel and reimagines a sense of flow. While Viki may not be the only site that uses a community of fans as volunteer labor, I want to highlight how this practice creates a very different kind of flow than we are accustomed to talking about. In this instance, Viki has achieved a kind of interactive convergence culture that broadcast television has tried to accomplish using social media since the 1990s, including contemporary attempts where shows rely on viewers to comment on the shows they watch through Twitter and Facebook to create cultural capital the shows could not obtain on their own and allows for conversations to extend beyond both the duration of the show and the ‘talk around the water cooler’ the next day.

The involvement of this community, I argue, rests in the global reach of the digital distribution platform and the desire of many of its community member to consume large amounts of regional cultural content. Viki, while it hosts television and film from many countries, is grounded in capitalizing on the hallyu movement, a political and cultural push of Korean cultural products to international, particular East Asian and Southeast Asian, markets 1990s and 2000s. For those who are part of this Korean cultural movement there has long been demand for more Korean cultural content than there has been a supply. Also, the cost of these niche market products has been a key hurdle to entering this community. Internet users have gone about creating online translation communities that include discussion forums. This has by and large been done without the consent of the copyright holders. Viki provides the possibility for a bigger community than these smaller

sites could provide, but also secures the licenses that these communities need in order to both lawfully participate and share the content they create in these communities.

I recognize that at the core of the success of this particular format lies the activity of segmenting and translating these texts, something that other distribution channels may not have the luxury of participating in. Additionally, there is a body of research that looks at the complicated relationship that copyright holders have with fans using and modifying their material. At the same time, bigger channels like Netflix are doing very little to highlight a community element. Even reviews of films and shows are buried several pages into most of these sites. By and large, distribution channels have chosen to instead manage just the distribution of media, allowing other platforms to host fan created texts based on primary media. I am interested in continuing to discuss the ways digital distribution channels open up intersections of global media and participation. I am also interested in further discussion on the way that we see volunteerism and ownership on a platform like Viki.