

RESEARCH ARTICLE

APT: The Intersection of Music, Culture, and Societal Resistance in a Globalized World

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Abstract

Music has always been a powerful tool for cultural expression, social critique, and resistance. The 2024 global hit APT by BLACKPINK's Rosé and Bruno Mars exemplifies the intersection of music, culture, and societal resistance in a globalized world (ROSE, 2024). Drawing inspiration from the Korean drinking game "Apartment," the song seamlessly blends playful lyrics with profound themes of rebellion, escapism, and connection. This article explores APT as a cultural artifact that reflects the challenges of modern life, critiques societal pressures, and highlights the role of music in fostering collective identity and resistance. By situating APT within broader global trends such as the "lying flat" movement, the rise of digital intimacy, and the cultural commodification of leisure, this analysis underscores music's capacity to challenge dominant ideologies, inspire social change, and foster solidarity across cultural boundaries.

Keywords: Popular Culture, Societal Resistance, K-Pop Hybridization, Cultural Commodification, Cross-Cultural Collaborations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Music as a Tool for Cultural Reflection and Resistance

Music has long been recognized as a powerful medium for cultural expression and social critique, serving as a reflection of societal values and aspirations. The collaboration APT by BLACKPINK's Rosé and Bruno Mars exemplifies this role, merging playful elements with profound themes of rebellion and connection. This song draws inspiration from the Korean drinking game "Apartment," transforming a local cultural practice into a global phenomenon that resonates with contemporary audiences.

Historically, music has been a catalyst for social change, uniting marginalized communities and inspiring movements (Danaher, 2010). For instance, protest songs have played a significant role in various social movements, from the Civil Rights Movement

to contemporary expressions of resistance in genres like hip-hop and K-pop (Watson & Drakeford-Allen, 2016; Parncutt et al., 2019; Benedict, 2021). APT aligns with this tradition by using its catchy and celebratory tone to critique societal pressures, thereby reclaiming leisure as a form of defiance against the relentless demands of modern life (Turner, 2023; Webster, 2021; Benedict, 2021).

Moreover, the song's incorporation of the "Apartment" game highlights the importance of cultural rituals in fostering social connections, reflecting broader themes of community and shared experiences (Parncutt et al., 2019; Karimi, 2017). By bridging cultural boundaries, APT not only honors its Korean roots but also introduces global audiences to the joy and spontaneity of Korean social life, thus promoting cross-cultural understanding (Webster, 2021; SOUZA-LEÃO, 2023).

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The significance of APT lies not only in its musical composition but also in its ability to transcend cultural boundaries and address universal themes. By examining the cultural roots of the song, its lyrical and thematic content, and its broader societal implications, this article seeks to uncover how APT exemplifies the role of music as a tool for cultural resistance in a globalized world.

2. The Historical Role of Music in Resistance Movements

2.1 Music as a Catalyst for Social Change

Music has historically played a pivotal role in inspiring and mobilizing resistance movements, serving as a unifying force for marginalized communities. Protest songs, such as Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" and Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," have challenged societal norms and exposed systemic injustices, illustrating music's power to influence public consciousness (Jolaosho, 2019; Rühlig, 2016). In this context, the song APT by BLACKPINK's Rosé and Bruno Mars, while seemingly lighthearted, critiques societal pressures and emphasizes joy as a form of rebellion, aligning with the tradition of music as a tool for resistance (Sadler, 2022).

2.2 The Evolution of Resistance in Popular Music

The evolution of resistance in popular music reflects the complexities of a globalized world. Contemporary artists often employ metaphorical language to address societal issues, blending entertainment with social commentary. For instance, Beyoncé's "Formation" and Childish Gambino's "This is America" tackle themes of race and inequality through rich narratives (Jolaosho, 2019; Sadler, 2022). Similarly, APT uses the metaphor of the "Apartment" to critique societal pressures while celebrating human connection and joy, showcasing how music can adapt to address modern challenges (Sadler, 2022).

3. The Cultural Roots of APT: "Apartment" as a Social Ritual

3.1 The Korean Drinking Game "Apartment"

The Korean drinking game "Apartment" serves as the foundational cultural element for the song APT. This engaging game involves participants chanting "아파트" (apartment) while stacking their hands in a tower-like formation. A player calls out a number, and participants must sequentially count, raising their hands in turn. The player whose turn coincides with the designated number loses and drinks (Sierra-

Mohamed, 2024). This repetitive and rhythmic activity fosters camaraderie and breaks down social barriers, making it a staple of Korean social gatherings (Hone & McCullough, 2015; Roscoe et al., 2023).

The incorporation of the "Apartment" game into APT transforms a local cultural ritual into a global phenomenon. The song's repetitive chorus mirrors the rhythm of the game, creating a hypnotic effect that draws listeners into its playful yet profound narrative. By celebrating this cultural tradition, APT not only honors its roots but also introduces an international audience to a key aspect of Korean social life (Terry-McElrath et al., 2022; Polizzotto et al., 2007).

3.2 Drinking Games as Cultural Artifacts

Drinking games like "Apartment" are more than just forms of entertainment; they are cultural artifacts that reflect societal values and norms. In Korea, such games serve as tools for breaking the ice, fostering group cohesion, and creating shared memories (Šisler, 2016; Zamboanga et al., 2016). They often feature simple rules and interactive elements that encourage participation and laughter.

By transforming this tradition into a global anthem, APT highlights the universal human desire for connection and play (Borsari et al., 2013; LaBrie et al., 2013). The social dynamics involved in drinking games can also be seen as a reflection of broader cultural practices, where communal activities serve to strengthen social bonds and create a sense of belonging among participants (Pedersen & LaBrie, 2008; Usdan et al., 2008).

3.3 Cultural Appropriation or Cultural Celebration?

Understanding the business strategies behind cultural commodification provides a foundation for evaluating whether such practices celebrate or exploit cultural heritage. This context is essential for analyzing the ethical complexities surrounding APT's incorporation of the "Apartment" game.

The entertainment sector's reliance on cultural commodification as a strategy for attracting diverse audiences is evident in the case of APT's incorporation of the Korean drinking game "Apartment." This practice exemplifies how traditional cultural elements can be recontextualized into formats that appeal to global audiences, thereby enhancing cross-cultural understanding and driving business growth (Saraswati, 2023). However, this commodification raises ethical concerns regarding the commercialization of cultural heritage, necessitating a balance between celebrating

cultural roots and avoiding exploitation for profit (Loukaitou-Sideris & Soureli, 2011; Prasiasa et al., 2023). The success of APT illustrates that when cultural commodification is executed thoughtfully, it can foster appreciation for diverse cultures while simultaneously serving business interests (Bing et al., 2023). As the entertainment industry continues to evolve, the challenge remains to navigate the complexities of cultural representation and commodification in a manner that respects and honors the original cultural contexts (Nieborg & Poell, 2018).

One of the most intriguing aspects of APT is its ability to globalize a uniquely Korean cultural practice. While some critics might argue that this represents cultural commodification, the song can also be seen as a celebration of Korean culture. Through its playful lyrics and catchy melody, "APT" introduces an international audience to the communal joy and spontaneity of Korean social rituals, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation (Linden-Carmichael & Lau-Barraco, 2017; Dumas et al., 2022). The discussion surrounding cultural appropriation versus cultural celebration is complex, particularly in the context of globalized music. Critics often highlight the risks of commodifying cultural practices without acknowledging their origins, while proponents argue that such exchanges can lead to greater cultural appreciation and understanding (Borsari et al., 2007; Pennay et al., 2023).

4. Lyrical Analysis: Layers of Meaning in APT

4.1 Repetition as a Tool for Collective Energy

The lyrics of APT are characterized by their repetitive structure, with the word "아파트" serving as both a chant and a metaphor. This repetition mirrors the rhythm of the drinking game, creating a sense of collective energy and participation. The simplicity of the lyrics belies their deeper significance, reflecting the communal joy and energy of the game. Repetition in music has often been used as a tool to evoke emotional resonance and collective participation, as seen in protest songs and anthems throughout history (Beighey & Unnithan, 2006; Cannon & Greasley, 2021). This technique fosters a shared experience among listeners, encouraging them to engage with the music on a deeper emotional level, which is particularly effective in creating a festive atmosphere that invites participation (Margulis, 2013).

4.2 Themes of Escapism and Transformation

Lines such as "Turn this 아파트 into a club" and "Drink,

dance, smoke, freak, party all night" emphasize themes of escapism and transformation. The mundane apartment becomes a space of liberation and joy, reflecting the song's celebration of leisure and play. This transformation serves as a metaphor for the human capacity to find joy and connection even in the most ordinary settings. The emphasis on escapism resonates with a generation seeking refuge from the pressures of modern life (Jones, 2018; Merwe et al., 2023). The lyrics suggest that through communal activities, individuals can transcend their daily struggles and create moments of joy, reinforcing the idea that music can serve as a vehicle for emotional release and social bonding (Jiang & Sun, 2021).

4.3 Critique of Societal Pressures

The lyrics also convey a subtle critique of societal pressures and expectations. Lines like "Sleep tomorrow, but tonight go crazy" reflect a rejection of the relentless pursuit of productivity and success. Instead, the song advocates for living in the present and prioritizing personal happiness—a sentiment that aligns with the ethos of the "lying flat" movement, which critiques the hyper-competitive culture of modern society (Romero, 1990; Messick & Aranda, 2020). This critique is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced world, where individuals often feel overwhelmed by societal expectations. By promoting a message of enjoyment and spontaneity, APT encourages listeners to prioritize their well-being over societal norms, thus fostering a sense of empowerment through music (Lehman, 2020).

4.4 Digital Intimacy and Connection

In lines such as "Kissy face, kissy face sent to your phone," the song explores the paradox of modern relationships, where technology facilitates communication but often leaves individuals longing for deeper, face-to-face interactions. These lyrics highlight the tension between digital intimacy and emotional connection, adding a layer of complexity to the song's themes (Laughey, 2006). The juxtaposition of digital gestures with the desire for physical presence underscores the challenges of maintaining genuine connections in an increasingly digital world. This theme resonates with many listeners who navigate the complexities of modern relationships, emphasizing the importance of authentic interactions amidst the backdrop of digital communication (Ridder et al., 2020).

5. Societal Implications of APT: A Reflection of Modern Trends

5.1 The “Lying Flat” Movement and Generational Resistance

The “lying flat” (or Tangping) movement, which originated in China, has become a symbol of resistance against the hyper-competitive and productivity-driven culture of modern society. This movement advocates for minimalism, leisure, and the rejection of societal expectations tied to material success. While the movement is most prominent in East Asia, its ethos resonates globally, particularly among younger generations who are increasingly disillusioned with traditional markers of success, such as wealth accumulation and career advancement. (Boer et al., 2023; Horwood et al., 2022).

APT reflects the spirit of “lying flat” by celebrating leisure as an act of rebellion. The song’s lyrics, which encourage listeners to “turn this apartment into a club” and “party all night,” reject the notion that one’s worth is tied to productivity or societal approval. Instead, the song promotes the idea that joy and human connection are valuable pursuits in their own right (Husain, 2024; Hartonen et al., 2022). This aligns with a broader cultural shift toward prioritizing mental health, self-care, and work-life balance over the relentless pursuit of achievement (Korczynski, 2015).

By embedding these themes in a playful and accessible format, APT serves as a subtle critique of societal norms while offering an alternative vision of fulfillment and happiness. The song’s popularity among younger audiences underscores its resonance with a generation that values authenticity, community, and personal well-being over traditional success metrics (Şahin et al., 2019; Winter & Lavis, 2021). This cultural shift reflects a growing awareness of the importance of mental health and the need for societal change to support individual well-being (Ganz et al., 2018; Soriano et al., 2017).

5.2 Burnout Culture and the Psychology of Escapism

In today’s fast-paced, hyperconnected world, burnout has become a pervasive issue. The constant demands of work, social obligations, and digital connectivity leave little room for rest or self-reflection. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), burnout is now recognized as a legitimate occupational phenomenon, characterized by chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced personal efficacy (World Health Organization, 2019).

APT addresses this phenomenon by offering listeners a sense of escapism. The song’s celebratory tone and emphasis on living in the moment provide a temporary reprieve from the pressures of modern life. Lines such as “Sleep tomorrow, but tonight go crazy” encapsulate the desire to escape the monotony of daily routines and embrace spontaneity and joy. This message is particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated feelings of isolation, stress, and disconnection for many individuals (George & Ilavarasu, 2021).

Psychologically, escapism through music can serve as a coping mechanism, allowing individuals to temporarily distance themselves from their problems and recharge emotionally. Research in music psychology suggests that upbeat, rhythmic songs like APT can elevate mood, reduce stress, and foster a sense of belonging (Kohl, 1997; Kawakami et al., 2014). By tapping into these psychological benefits, APT not only entertains but also provides a form of emotional support for its listeners.

5.3 Digital Disconnection and the Search for Authentic Connection

In an age dominated by social media and digital communication, the paradox of connectivity has become increasingly apparent. While technology has made it easier than ever to stay in touch, it has also created a sense of disconnection and superficiality in many relationships. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok often emphasize curated personas and highlight reels, leaving individuals craving deeper, more authentic connections (Gülü et al., 2023; Metcalfe & Llewellyn, 2019).

APT addresses this tension through its exploration of digital intimacy. The lyric “Kissy face, kissy face sent to your phone” highlights the ways in which technology mediates modern relationships, often replacing face-to-face interactions with virtual gestures. However, the song also emphasizes the importance of physical presence and shared experiences, as seen in its references to communal activities like dancing, drinking, and playing games. By juxtaposing digital and physical forms of connection, APT underscores the value of genuine human interaction in an increasingly virtual world (Laughey, 2006; Baldassar et al., 2022; Walton et al., 2022).

This theme resonates with a generation that is both deeply immersed in and critical of digital culture. As young people navigate the complexities of online identity and relationships, songs like APT offer a

reminder of the joy and fulfillment that come from real-world connections and shared experiences (Firk et al., 2021; Chia et al., 2022). The ongoing dialogue about the impact of digital communication on social relationships highlights the need for balance between online and offline interactions, reinforcing the idea that authentic connections are essential for emotional well-being (Guo et al., 2022; Козюк, 2021).

6. Expanding the Global Impact of APT

6.1 K-pop as a Vehicle for Cultural Diplomacy

As part of the global K-pop phenomenon, APT exemplifies the genre's ability to transcend cultural boundaries and foster cross-cultural exchange. Over the past decade, K-pop has emerged as a powerful form of cultural diplomacy, introducing international audiences to Korean language, traditions, and values. This "soft power" has not only boosted Korea's global influence but also created opportunities for cross-cultural understanding and collaboration (Doobo, 2021; Seo et al., 2020; Diao, 2023).

APT builds on this legacy by incorporating a uniquely Korean cultural practice—the "Apartment" drinking game—into a global pop song. By doing so, the song invites listeners from diverse backgrounds to engage with Korean culture in a playful and accessible way. This approach reflects the broader trend of cultural hybridization in K-pop, where traditional elements are seamlessly blended with global pop aesthetics to create music that is both locally rooted and universally appealing (Baek, 2014; Schneider, 2023).

The incorporation of cultural practices in K-pop, such as the "Apartment" game, not only enhances the authenticity of the music but also serves as a bridge for audiences to connect with Korean culture. This phenomenon illustrates how K-pop acts as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy, promoting mutual understanding and appreciation across different cultures (Li, 2024; Diao, 2023). As K-pop continues to gain popularity worldwide, it fosters a sense of community among fans, transcending geographical and cultural barriers (Chen, 2023; Putri, 2023).

The global music industry has emerged as a vital economic driver, with K-pop exemplifying the potential of cultural exports. South Korea's "Hallyu" initiative strategically promotes K-pop alongside other cultural products, enhancing its soft power and contributing to economic growth (Oh & Lee, 2014). The success of K-pop groups, such as BTS, illustrates how music can generate substantial revenue through diverse channels, including album sales, merchandise, and concert tours (Timokhovich&Nikuradze, 2022).

Furthermore, the viral success of K-pop on platforms like TikTok highlights the critical role of digital marketing in maximizing economic returns (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2023). Social media has transformed music promotion, enabling artists to engage directly with fans and create personalized experiences, which significantly boosts attendance at events and overall consumer engagement (Hudson & Hudson, 2013; ,Rahmadini& Halim, 2018). This cross-cultural exchange not only fosters appreciation for diverse musical genres but also cultivates new opportunities for economic collaboration and innovation within the global music landscape (Jung & Shim, 2013; ,Salo et al., 2013).

These economic benefits are deeply intertwined with the role of cultural diplomacy. By promoting Korean cultural practices through music, K-pop not only enhances South Korea's global influence but also strengthens its position as a cultural and economic powerhouse. This dual impact of cultural diplomacy and economic growth underscores the strategic importance of integrating cultural exports into global markets.

6.2 Cross-Cultural Collaborations in Music

While cultural diplomacy focuses on the broader impact of music as a soft power tool, cross-cultural collaborations operate at the micro level, where individual artists and producers navigate cultural differences to create globally resonant music. The collaboration between BLACKPINK's Rosé and Bruno Mars exemplifies how such partnerships can bridge cultural divides while fostering innovative artistic expressions. Rosé, a New Zealand-born Korean artist, and Bruno Mars, an American artist of Filipino and Puerto Rican descent, merge diverse musical styles and cultural narratives, creating a sound that resonates globally (Burton, 2011). This partnership highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and creative synergy in fostering authentic artistic expressions (Pati et al., 2015).

Effective management of such collaborations requires producers and managers to facilitate communication, ensuring that both artists' creative inputs are respected and integrated (Petrušić&Šešelj, 2021). Additionally, leveraging digital platforms and social media enhances global reach, allowing artists to connect with diverse audiences and amplify their impact (Dong et al., 2011). As the music industry continues to navigate these complexities, it can foster innovative collaborations that not only celebrate cultural diversity but also resonate with a wide array of listeners (Mellizo, 2023).

Cross-cultural collaborations highlight the ways in which music can serve as a bridge between different cultures. By combining diverse musical styles, languages, and traditions, such collaborations foster mutual appreciation and understanding. This is particularly significant in the context of globalization, where cultural exchanges are increasingly common and necessary for fostering global connections (Boer et al., 2012). Moreover, these partnerships challenge the notion of cultural ownership, demonstrating that art is a shared human endeavor that thrives on diversity and exchange (Beier et al., 2022; McKinnon, 2010).

The blending of distinct musical traditions not only enriches the listening experience but also promotes cultural dialogue. This approach reflects a broader trend in the music industry, where artists from various backgrounds collaborate to create innovative sounds that resonate with diverse audiences (Nethsinghe et al., 2022). Such collaborations can also serve educational purposes, as they expose listeners to different cultural narratives and practices, thereby enhancing cross-cultural awareness and appreciation (Joseph & Cabedo-Mas, 2021).

6.3 The Role of Social Media in Amplifying Cultural Trends

Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have played a crucial role in amplifying the reach of APT. The song's catchy chorus and playful dance moves have inspired countless user-generated videos, turning it into a viral sensation. This digital amplification underscores the power of social media in shaping cultural trends and fostering global connections (Kertamukti, 2022; Hardie et al., 2023).

The success of APT on social media also highlights the democratization of cultural production and consumption. In the past, the global music industry was dominated by a few major players who controlled access to audiences. Today, platforms like TikTok allow artists and fans to co-create cultural moments, blurring the lines between producers and consumers (Vogel et al., 2020; Tarrío-Concejero et al., 2022). This shift has not only expanded the reach of songs like "APT" but also created new opportunities for cultural exchange and innovation (Jones, 2018). For instance, the interactive nature of social media encourages users to engage with content creatively, contributing to a collective cultural experience that transcends geographical boundaries (Paulo et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2023).

Moreover, the viral nature of social media trends can significantly impact the music industry, as seen with

APT. The ability for users to share and remix content fosters a sense of community and shared identity among fans, reinforcing the song's themes of connection and joy (Rodríguez et al., 2020; Musdalifah, 2019). This participatory culture not only enhances the song's visibility but also encourages a deeper engagement with the music and its cultural context.

7. Conclusion: The Lasting Legacy of APT

APT by Rosé and Bruno Mars is more than just a song—it is a cultural artifact that reflects and shapes the values of a globalized world. By drawing on the Korean drinking game "Apartment," the song celebrates connection, play, and rebellion against societal pressures. Through its catchy melody, playful lyrics, and universal themes, APT has captured the imagination of a global audience, offering a message of joy and escapism in an increasingly complex world (Deniar et al., 2019; Yoon, 2022).

Beyond its cultural significance, APT exemplifies the economic potential of global music as a driver of cross-cultural exchange and innovation. The song's success highlights how cultural diplomacy and strategic commodification can amplify the reach of local traditions, transforming them into global phenomena. Furthermore, the collaboration between Rosé and Bruno Mars underscores the importance of cross-cultural partnerships in creating music that resonates universally while respecting diverse cultural narratives.

At its core, APT demonstrates the power of music to transcend cultural boundaries, challenge societal norms, and foster solidarity across diverse communities. Whether through its critique of burnout culture, its celebration of human connection, or its role in promoting cross-cultural exchange, the song serves as a testament to the enduring relevance of music as a tool for resistance, expression, and transformation (Wullur, 2023; Mazumdar, 2021).

As we continue to navigate the challenges of a rapidly changing world, songs like APT remind us of the importance of joy, community, and cultural understanding. In doing so, they inspire us to imagine new possibilities for connection, creativity, and collective action (Cruz et al., 2019; Chen, 2024). The legacy of APT is not only in its musical composition but also in its ability to resonate with listeners across the globe, fostering a sense of belonging and shared experience in an increasingly fragmented society.

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- While some critics might argue that this represents cultural commodification, the song can also be seen as a celebration of Korean culture. Through its playful lyrics and catchy melody, "APT" introduces an international audience to the communal joy and spontaneity of Korean social rituals, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation (Linden-Carmichael & Lau-Barraco, 2017; Dumas et al., 2022). The discussion surrounding cultural appropriation versus cultural celebration is complex, particularly in the context of globalized music. Critics often highlight the risks of commodifying cultural practices without acknowledging their origins, while proponents argue that such exchanges can lead to greater cultural appreciation and understanding (Borsari et al., 2007; Pennay et al., 2023).
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