

**A Study of '88rising' and their YouTube Approach to
Combine Asian Culture with the West**

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Abstract

88rising, as a fledgling new media company based in the USA, has been trying to connect Asian youth culture with the west through its musical and cultural content published on the YouTube channel for the last three years. It is a record label for Asian artists and also a hybrid management company which not only covers music, art, fashion and culture but also creates a hybrid culture of their own. The aim of research to understand the impact of 88rising on Asian representation in the west as well their unique business model for a new media company in the information age.

The research is studied through the development of the company, successful cases of its artists (Keith Ape, Rich Brian, Higher Brothers, Joji and others), interviews and articles from reliable online sources, comparison with new media companies Hypebeast and Highsnobiety, as well as statistical data of its YouTube channel. Based on the study, 88rising has been changing the representation of Asian artists utilizing their viral content creating strategy. As a result, artists from Asia, especially hip-hop musicians, are accepted by western music market and the content they created has been able to reach more audience globally. At the same time, as a culture-driven new media company, 88rising developed a new hybrid management business model that is unique, creative and diverse.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The aim of this research paper

There is no doubt the rapid development of Internet changed the way how artists communicate with their audience, the power of information technologies made it easier than ever for artists to deliver their works to the public through internet by only a few clicks on their laptop or mobile devices. The distance between continents is no longer a barrier for people from different cultures around the world. In the information age, using social media and content publishing platforms as a tool, a new media company will be able to find talents, create contents in a way that is impossible in the past.

88rising, as a new media company, is experimenting their unique approaches to build a bridge to introduce Asian culture to the western world. The study is to analyze the successful cases of 88rising's artists, how the company is connecting Asian culture with western culture through content publishing platforms especially YouTube to create their own hybrid culture.

1.2 Background

"88rising", founded by Sean Miyashiro in 2015, is an American based new media company which operates as not only a record label, content creation, and marketing company but also a cultural internet hub that connects Asian youth culture to the west. Although the content of 88rising is diverse; it is clear that at the moment hip-hop related musical content is its core. As Hua described in his article: "88rising is distinguished by its idiosyncratic tone and its up-to-the-nanosecond appreciation of hip-hop's youthful, Internet-driven trends" (Hua, 2018).

1.3 The origin of 88rising

After working as Executive Strategist with Recreation Worldwide and VICE Media Inc. to create a website called "Thump" dedicated to EDM (Electronic Dance Music), Sean Miyashiro and his team founded "CXSHXNLY" (the former name of 88rising). There was no plan of how the company should operate, at the time the company was more of a record label for Asian internet artists. Sean and his employees looked for talents online and oversee a roster of artists (Leonard, 2017) at his office in New York. Dongheon Lee (As proficiently known as Keith Ape) is a Korean hip-hop artist 88rising first approached in 2015. He was famous for his single "잊지마" ("It G Ma"). Which was described by critics of The New York Times as "a cross-cultural curiosity and also a clear inheritor of Southern rap rowdiness that requires no translation" (Pareles et al., 2015). Soon

after Keith Ape, 88rising discovered several artists from Asia including a young Indonesian rapper named Brian Imanuel (As proficiently known as Rich Brian, former Rich Chigga), a Japanese-Australian singer and producer named George Miller (as known as Joji) who is formerly Youtuber and Internet meme creator and also a Chinese hip-hop group called Higher Brothers.

The name of the company is 88rising, and its logo features number 88 followed by an “↑” (up arrow). There was no direct explanation on how they come up with 88rising as the name, but from the article about 88rising (Hua, 2018), we can conjecture that the meaning of number 88 is from a Chinese character “囍” which means “Double Happiness.”

The main platform 88rising uses to publish content to the audience is Youtube, Its YouTube channel was created on 18th of March, 2016. In two years’ time, its subscribers grew dramatically from 0 to more than 1.6 million with around 500 million total views for 350 videos at the time of writing. According to an interview with Sean by Chen Wu from AdAge, 50% of their audience comes from East Asia, 35% from the USA and 15% spread over the rest of the world. However, 88rising’s target audience is everyone. (Wu, 2018)

Chapter 2 – Methodology

2.1 Methodology

To understand the phenomenon of 88rising and its impact on the western world, the most suitable approach to study the topic is by reviewing available resources which will be presented in chapter 3. Because the topic is relatively new, and resources are limited, related data will be gathered and analysed from 88rising’s history, the growth and development of the company and the career development of Keith Ape, Rich Brian, Higher Brothers, Joji and other artists. There will also be a comparison between 88rising and other leading new media companies such as Hypebeast and Highsnobiety to understand the core concept and the possible future development of 88rising.

2.2 Limitation

The primary constraint of the research is the limitation of resources. As mentioned, 88rising is a relatively fledgling company with only three years history. Its development process and concept is unique so that no similar cases can be found. The time frame is also a constraint, to obtain more primary data, an interview with the company would be ideal. However, 88rising is a developing company, the schedule of their artists and team members are tight, the nearest available interview

time will be outside the given time frame. Thus, the primary weakness of the methodology will lack primary data. As a result, for future study related to this topic, it is necessary to arrange an interview or focus groups to obtain more primary data.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The sources relate to the topic is relatively new, so most of the literature around the area will be analysed according to credible and reliable news and business websites, original media content from their YouTube channel and other social media platforms. The literature review will be a critical analysis based on available resources. The analysis will be presented in a chronological order: start with the origin of the company from 2016 to the time of writing, finish with the plan of 88rising moving forward. It will contain company development as well as individual developments of the founder and artists. Individual developments will also be chronologically ordered (from Keith Ape to Rich Brian, Joji, Higher Brother and other artists) in each year and Rich Brian, as 88rising's most iconic artist, will be mentioned several times in different stages of the company's development.

3.2 Company Development

3.2.1 Early 88rising

The early stage of 88rising was not a hybrid management media company, but a small record label with less than five employees including its founder, and the name was "CXSHXNLY" (Leonard, 2017). Similar to a small record label in the information age, CXSHXNLY looked for talented artists online then got in contact with them through the internet, but unlike a small record label, although the company is based in the states, they did not limit themselves by location. Instead of looking for talents locally, they focused on discovering artists from Asia, the hybrid culture background of 88rising's founder Sean played a crucial role in this decision.

Sean grew up in San Jose, California, his father is a mechanical engineer from Japan, who had been a jazz DJ in college, and his mother is from Korea, who favoured Michael Jackson and the Beach Boys (Leonard, 2017). For decades, hip-hop has been central to young Americans' understanding

of what is cool (Hua, 2018), growing in a multi-cultural environment, Sean understood the cool for both American and Asian. He went to a high school with a sizable and competitive Asian-American population and then studied at San Jose State University. During his time in university, he enjoyed putting on small concerts/shows/parties for others, which helped him to receive a marketing job in the bay area. Music is always an important part of Sean's career, around 2013, when EDM (Electronic Dance Music) was the new trend in the music industry, Sean would be able to spot musical talents in EDM area for VICE media. Therefore, he became one of the founding members of VICE's electronic music outlet "Thump" (Hu, 2018). During his time in "Thump," he developed his skills in media sector while started to consider about creating a meaningful cultural company or brand. VICE has typically been a media company which focus on content for young people. It covers art, fashion, music, news and so forth around the world. From working with VICE, Sean had more exposure to multi-cultural popular content which provided him with the inspiration for creating a company as a bridge between Asian and western culture.

After he left VICE and started CXSHXNLY, from his experience and personal music sense, Sean predicted that the next trend in the industry would be hip-hop music (especially trap: a hip-hop subgenre originally from southern America). Trap music typically features slow, heavy 808 kickdrum, fast double or triple-time hi-hat plus dark, dreamy synthesizers. The genre is very much influenced by the drug dealing, gangster, violence phenomenon from its origin: a small part of Atlanta where people are struggling on the street and making a living through drug dealing, the name trap is the word used to describe this activity. In around 2010, EDM producers started to use trap element in their music. As a result, trap EDM became a popular genre around the world. Recently, trap music has been affecting the styles of both hip-hop and non-hip-hop music significantly, trap and trap infusion pop music are still taking a significant portion of major music charts globally including Asian countries. For Sean, coming from Asian roots and born and raised in the USA, It is interesting to see how an American born genre developed in the environment of Asian culture. Therefore Sean and his team in CXSHXNLY began to find young and talented artists from Asia through Internet. After the successful attempt on the promotion of Korean rapper Keith Ape, CXSHXNLY drew attention from the western media, raise funding from several investors. For example, Third Wave Digital, a California based venture capital investment company focused on digital media sector (Leonard, 2017). After, they started to reposition themselves from a record label to a hybrid management media company: 88rising.

Traditionally speaking, a record label is a company in charge of recruiting, managing artists, handling the promotion, marketing, publication and distribution of the content created by these

artists including music, video and more. 88rising started as a record label for Asian artists, but they are moving towards something more than a record label. The content they created is not only from their artists, they will also introduce artists that fit in 88rising's overall image to the audience even if they are from a different record label or company. Moreover, educational or experimental content relate to Asian culture also plays a considerable amount of role in 88rising. That is the reason why Sean refused to call the company record label, instead, he described 88rising as a "hybrid management, record label, video production, and marketing company." (Leonard, 2017) The word "Hybrid Management" means the mixture of their content as well as the cultural combination.

The creative strategy of the company comes mainly from Sean's content creating experience with "Thump." During his time in Thump, Sean learned not only how to start and operate a media platform but also the required operation and production skills for high-quality content (Smith-Strickland, 2018), more specifically, how to create high quality Asian popular cultural content that has potential to be viral in a western environment.

3.2.2 Korean pop Influence

Generally speaking, Asian food, Japanese animation, Japanese pop music and Korean pop music are the most accepted popular Asian cultures around the world. Besides food, Korean pop music (as known as K-pop) had become the most popular one in the last decade especially after the tremendous success of "Gangnam Style" in 2012. The additive beats, pretty faces, and unique dance moves are three most important elements that make K-pop different from others. Despite the beautiful appearance of K-pop, there is no secret that three giant entertainment companies (S.M Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment) are factories which produce K-pop stars, most of the K-pop stars went to these entertainment companies in very young age to be trained as a K-pop star. When they finally became famous, these entertainment companies will still have absolute control over them until the contract is finished or breached. The processing of star-making is arguable, but there is no doubt it is a successful business model that made K-pop industry an essential part of Korean economics. Under the influence and growth of K-pop, more people in the west began to notice these artists from the other side of the world. Also, it provided opportunities and a strong foundation for Sean and 88rising to import Asian culture and create a hybrid culture then deliver to the west.

K-pop does have some crossover in 88rising's development, but the primary approach they took is the opposite of K-pop. 88rising is not trying to shape artists in the way K-pop does, what they are trying to do is to discover artists from Asia and then connect them with the resources in the west and to create a bridge between both sides. To compare K-pop with 88rising, firstly, the majority of K-pop stars are trained when they were young, entertainment company will decide whether the trainee should be solo or part of a group; if in a group, what role (rapper, dancer, or singer for instance) will they be and whether they are qualified to debut or not. 88rising is the opposite of K-pop giants' star-making program, Sean and his team look for artists they like on the Internet and try to connect with them instead of train someone from the beginning. The second difference is K-pop company often has a market-oriented plan for structuring their artists; they try to reach to as many as potential target audiences possible, the increasing number of Chinese members in k-pop group is a good instance. 88rising, on the other hand, is more artist-oriented where they do not promote an artist to impress a specific market. Another difference is the relationship between company and artists, the relationship between Sean and his artists are friends more than employer and employee.

Speaking of crossover between 88rising and K-pop, despite what 88rising's approach to finding talents is different from K-pop. However, Sean and his team understand the importance of K-pop in Asian culture, that is why traces of K-pop can be found throughout their YouTube channel such as videos from American rappers freestyle to popular songs from K-pop group.

3.2.3 Early YouTube Videos of 88rising

From the early videos on 88rising's YouTube channel, it is clear that Sean and his team know what the western audience expect from Asia culture. The first video available on its channel featured one of the American trending rappers named Sidney Royel Selby III (Also known as stage name "Desiigner") performing his popular debut single "Panda" in a "Shrine" of 88rising (88rising, 2016). The "Shrine" is set up by Sean and his team as a place for interview or performance. The space is compact but unique. There are purple and light blue ambient lights, Chinese traditional guardian-lion statues, a neon light with 88 and two Chinese characters "升起" (means rising in Chinese), random posters on the wall and green planets and so forth. Most of their early rapper performance videos were filmed in this space. At the beginning of the video, there is a short introduction of the animal panda. The team of 88rising tried to create a retro cinemagraph by combining video clips of the panda, a piece of Chinese flute background music and voice over with vintage and retro effect. It creates an illusion so that the audience will think the introduction is from a documentary

about panda. When the voiceover says “In the USA, there is a new panda on the rise.” with the intro of Desiigner’s single Panda, the audience will then realise 88rising produced this introduction instead of taking from an existing documentary. The aesthetic in the next part where Desiigner performs his single in the shrine is a statement of their content style. There is Chinese subtitle in the video, the subtitle is karaoke style, and the translation is purposely not very accurate to make it interesting and funny for the audience to watch. Besides the subtitle, there are Japanese animation audio and visual effects inserted into the video associated with the lyrics (see figure 1). Hua Hsu described the video as “A cute, if self-eroticising, a way for 88rising to emphasise its Asian identity.” (Hua, 2018) The video was a successful attempt and experiment on combining the popular Asian and internet culture with trending American artist. The video has more than 1.48 million views until the time of writing. It drew the attention of the audience from west and east at the same time and also helped 88rising to establish an image of what they are trying to do: creating a hybrid cultural content and build a bridge between both sides.



(Figure 1)

88rising booked not only Desiigner but also quite a few popular rappers and artists to perform and to be interviewed in the shrine. However, besides shrine, Korean karaoke bar is another location for performance and interview. An interesting example is a video featured an American rapper Miles Parks McCollum (as known as stage name “Lil Yachty”) freestyles to 5 popular karaoke tracks from one of the most famous K-pop boy band “Big Bang.” In the 20 minutes video, “Lil Yachty” freestyles in front of the famous boyband’s cardboard cutouts. Although the content seems

random and meaningless, videos like this are an effective strategy that can attract fans of “Big Bang” as well as fans of “Lil Yachty” to generate an audience base of 88rising from both sides.

By gaining enough audience base, they then started to gradually change the representation of Asian culture in the west with more contents. Reaction video is a popular video category/meme (An element of a culture or system of behaviour passed from one individual to another by imitation or other non-genetic means (Oxford Dictionaries)) on YouTube. Sean and his team understand the power of internet meme culture, few months after Rich Brian’s song “Dat Stick” went viral, 88rising gathered 11 famous rappers from the states to watch the music video of “Dat Stick” and record their reaction. The reaction video went viral as well with more than 17.5 million views on YouTube. At the beginning of the video, rappers seemed to be confused and speechless about this Asian boy who wears a pink polo with a fanny bag and tries to act tough, but when Brian started to rap, they were all surprised how good he is. By the end of the music video, these rappers welcomed him as a colleague, one of the rappers even volunteered to do a remix with him (Hua, 2018). It is a wise move for 88rising because when “Dat Stick” took off, people on the internet argued if the song is a cultural appropriation to African Americans, the video provided the internet with a new angle: what if rappers like the song? The reaction video not only introduced Brian to those rappers but also to the hip-hop community, to hip-hop fans globally. Through reaction videos, 88rising promoted their artists as well as itself to the world.

Non-musical video series on 88rising’s channel is a unique part which separates it from a record label. Along with the globalisation, food from Asia had already spread around the global, Chinese, Japanese, Korean restaurants can be found in any major cities. Food is an element that creates a connection between different cultures. Thus, 88rising created two series of food “Eighty Ate” and “Seoulfood.” The first video of “Eight Ate” series is “The greatest Asian food in the world. Eighty Ate.”, in the information section of the video, 88rising describes it as “We will spotlight modern chefs with Michelin stars as well as traditional flavours, and everything in between from adobo to zhangmian (A type of noodle originally from China but extremely popular in Korea).” (88rising, 2016) From the video, we could see Sean’s vision and ambitious of 88rising was not only a record label but also a channel that creates a cultural connection between Asia and the west. The beginning of the video features a short clip from the interview with an American rapper (who also appears in the reaction video to “Dat Stick”) about his favourite Chinese dish, after the short clip, a Japanese fusion EDM track called “cherry blossoms explode across the dying horizon” faded in with title of the video, as the music progress to a fast pace, the video then cuts to video clips for famous Asian dishes and the process of preparing ingredients, cooking to the display on the plate. The 1 minute

50 seconds video features the cooking process from start to finish of 11 different dishes from Asian countries. To condense the progress of 11 dishes into a video less than 2 minutes could be a difficult task, but by using plenty of fast jump cuts associated with the beat of the music, 88rising successfully showcases the Asian food culture including the ingredients, cooking process and more. Some of the food series videos is also a collaboration with existing YouTuber such as “Peaceful Cuisine,” a YouTube channel of a Japanese chef making a fantastic peaceful cooking tutorial for Asian food.

Besides food videos, there is a video series called “Japan’s Greatest Bartender”. The series features one of the best mixologists in Japan named Hiroyasu Kayama teaching the audience on the internet how to make Asian infusion cocktail or non-alcoholic drinks. 88rising also started documentary video series “88 Stories” which presents small stories about a location or person in Asia. There are also random videos, for example, an educational video about Japan origin streetwear brand “Bape”, videos combine 90s Japanese commercial with disco music, videos introduce mainstream or non-mainstream photographer, artists. It covered so many fields yet delivered high-quality content all the time. The non-musical content of 88rising is another statement of what they represent and what 88rising is bringing to the world.

2016 is the starting point for 88rising and its YouTube channel. In around one year’s time, they uploaded 123 videos on the channel, and 19 videos of them are about artists from 88rising. Apart from interviews, performances of artists and reaction videos, 88rising had done a large number of experimental videos in this year, not all of them ended up with a high volume of views, but they figured out what works and what not from these experiments. Using YouTube channel as a promotion platform, artists that were based in Asia at the time such as Rich Brian, Higher Brothers introduced themselves successfully in the western market, it provided a solid foundation for their further development in 2017.

3.2.4 Development in 2017

3.2.4.1 Introduction

2017 is no doubt a year that 88rising and its artists started to take off. As a hybrid management media company based in New York, although the communication in the information age is convenient, it was still not an easy task to manage artists in Asia remotely. Furthermore, building a bridge between the west and east through only the internet is not enough, it is necessary to have these artists to be in the western market physically. At the same time, to be recognised in the

hometown of hip-hop culture is the goal for rappers around the world. Unlike Keith Ape who was already in the USA, 88rising needed to move Rich Brian from Indonesia to the USA in 2017. Surprisingly, the audience, artists, and media from the USA all welcomed the young Asian rapper. 88rising then utilised their resources to get Brian appealed in different interviews, collaborated with well-known artists and performed in concerts around the country. At this stage, 88rising already established a mature image of a record label for young rappers from Asia in the western environment.

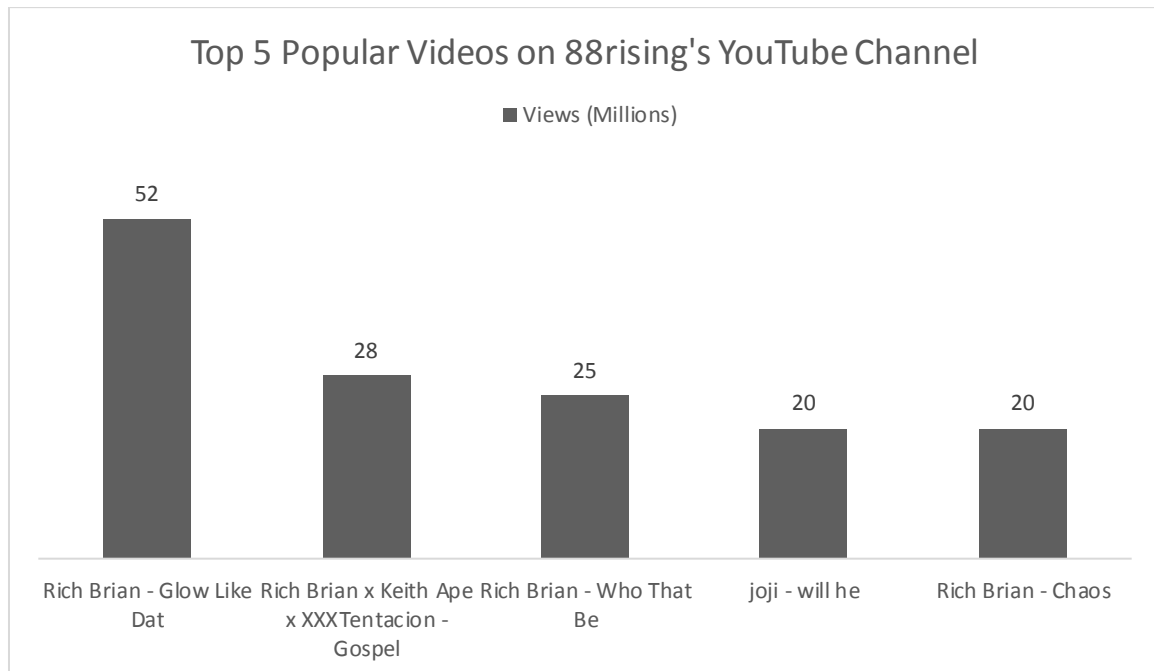
3.2.4.2 Rich Brian

As mentioned, Brian moved from Indonesia to the USA this year, and officially started his career as a rapper with 88rising. At the time he was only 18, and it was his first time visiting the USA, it was not only a challenge for Brian but also for 88rising. Before Brian moved to the USA, the communication methods between both sides were through Facetime, Twitter, and other online communication tools. Even though they were located in different time zone, 88rising were able to publish new songs, music video remotely from their New York office. There were four songs and music videos released on 88rising's YouTube channel including remote collaboration with a rapper from Wu-Tang Clan who reacted to Brian's "Dat Stick," as well as a collaboration with well-known EDM producer "Skrillex" and "ZHU." The way how 88rising worked with Brian before is a reflection of how musician from new generation works with each other in this information age, artists can collaborate with each other even if they are not in the same cities or even countries, this is quite normal especially in hip-hop and electronic dance music industry.

However, considering a long-term career development, working remotely for the company is not the most efficient way. Especially when 88rising's ambition is to bridge Asian culture with Western culture, it is necessary for artists of the company to be accepted and recognised in the western market to change the perception of Asian culture. Thus, soon after Brian moved to the USA, 88rising started to introduce him to the mainstream music market. He was invited to an online talk show series which started and hosted by Pharrell Williams to talk about himself and his music few days after he arrived. Then he started to perform in different festivals and shows with other artists in 88rising around the country. At the same time, 88rising and Brian kept publishing new songs and new music videos not only on YouTube but also on music streaming platform like Spotify, Apple Music and so on. 88rising is good at reaching out to the famous or trending musicians in the western market and created collaboration songs to increase the exposure of Brian in the industry, after gained awareness and popularity, the 88rising team then release Brian's music.

The strategy worked quite well, as a new artist from Asia, 88rising and Brian found themselves a place in hip-hop industry in the USA.

Looking at the top 5 most popular videos on 88rising's YouTube channel (Figure 1): Four of these videos are music videos from Rich Brian. Among the four, three of those music videos are published in 2017. The second most viewed video is a collaboration song called "Gospel" with 88rising's artist Keith Ape and XXXTentacion (American rapper started on SoundCloud platform in 2014 and known for his aggressive music style, he is one of the representations for new generation rappers) which was published on 11th of May, 2017. Three months after the collaboration, a single from Brian called "Glow Like Dat" was published on the channel and quickly became the number one viewed video with more than 52 million views. Besides the production quality of both music and music video, previous collaborations with different artists also played an essential role in the popularity of Brian's video. Essentially, the successful instance of Rich Brian was a signal to both Asia and the West: there is a potential market for Asian artists in the western music industry, especially hip-hop, and 88rising is the platform for the connection of two sides. Before Brian, people might not know there are artists in Asian who can make hip-hop music and rap, and 88rising is trying to tell people around the world: there are Asian artists who can make hip-hop music and rap as good as artists in the west.



(Figure 2)

3.2.4.3 “Made in China” from Higher Brothers

While Rich Brian was touring around the USA, 88rising started to use the experience learned from the marketing for Rich Brian to promote the Chinese hip-hop group: Higher Brother. Throughout 2016, there were quite a few music videos from Higher Brothers posted on 88rising’s channel, but these videos did not have the same influence as Rich Brian’s “Dat Stick.” The audience can only see there is a rap group in China, but they would not know who they are and what is their relationship with 88rising. However, in 2017, especially after 88rising posted Higher Brother's music video “Made in China,” people on the internet and in the west finally started to pay attention to the Chinese rap group.

There are two perspectives why “Made in China” went viral: Internal and external reason. From the internal perspective, the beat of the song is well chosen. First of all, the genre of the music is Trap which as mentioned is a popular genre in the western music industry. Secondly, a traditional Asian stringed musical instrument Chinese Zheng (could be Japanese Koto which has a similar sound to Zheng) is implemented in the beats as the lead instrument and also throughout the whole track. It is different from the regular composition of Trap music which can separate itself from a regular Trap song. Thirdly, the lyric is a mixture of different languages; there are Mandarin Chinese, English and a Chinese dialogue from Higher Brother’s origin: Sichuan Province. For people who do not speak Chinese, they can sing along in some part of the track. Finally, the aesthetic of their music video stands out. The tone of the music video is red which is a symbolic colour of China. The music video was shot in ancient-style Chinese buildings with elements like Chinese lanterns, hand fan, Mahjong (a four players tile-based game that invented in China since Qing dynasty(1644 to 1912)). All members of the group all dressed red with western, more specifically, hip-hop influenced style. For example, one of the members of Higher Brother Masiwei has dreadlocks hairstyle, wearing a full red tracksuit and gold chains. Hip-hop as an underground sub-culture has developed in China in the last decades but for the west, the combination of Chinese culture and hip-hop music is still a fledgling.

From the external perspective, one of the reasons why it went viral in the first place is because the song is a collaboration with a famous American rapper Dexter Gore Jr. also known as stage name Famous Dex. 88rising understands that a fast way to sell Asian artists to western market is to have these artists collaborate with an artist that is trending in the west, this strategy is used quite often to promote artists related to 88rising. Another main reason is the reaction video of “Made in China” by American rappers which were published on 13th of June, 2017. The video has over 2.8 millions of views on YouTube at the time of writing also boosted the views on the original “Made in China”

music video to more than 10 million. The concept and form are the same as the reaction video for “Dat Stick”, but rappers that were invited to watch the “Made in China” music video is different. Among these rappers, there are Migos, an American hip-hop trio from Atlanta, who has singles entered “Billboard” top 10 such as "Bad and Boujee" (featuring Lil Uzi Vert) (peaking at number one on Billboard in 2016), Jordan Terrell Carter also known as Playboi Carti who is a young American rapper also from Atlanta has multiple singles entered “Billboard” top 100, Lil Yachty from the freestyle to popular K-pop track video, Omar Pineiro as known as stage name Smokepurpp who is an example of SoundCloud rapper who successfully entered the mainstream music market and other rappers. In the reaction video, rappers all found it enjoyable to watch, one of the rappers named Xavier Wulf commented in the video: “They bring their culture into this. That’s what sticks, that’s what makes it amazing!” and “I don’t know what they are saying but it doesn’t matter that delivery is hitting me, and I’m liking it”, another rapper named Smino said “I appreciate that my culture, our culture reach so far, all the way around the world bro, when the sun down here, the sun up there.”, Smokepurpp also describes the Higher Brothers as “You know what I like about them too, they keep it mad authentic, not acting too hard. They are not trying to be accepted by hip-hop culture, hip-hop community or none of that, they are just themselves.” In the end, a few rappers wanted to collaborate with the Chinese group for new songs in the future (88rising, 2017).

88rising team combined the internal and external factors well and successfully created awareness of the Chinese group in the western market especially in hip-hop community, 2 months after the reaction video, Higher Brother released the debut album “Black Cab” which has multiple collaborations with artists from all over the world including 88rising’s Keith Ape, American rapper Famous Dex, Korean-American hip-hop star Jay Park and so on. Together with Rich Brian, 88rising sold another Asian hip-hop artists not only to the west but also to the world.

3.2.4.4 Joji

Hip-hop is the core of 88rising’s musical content, but the development of Joji in 2017 indicates that 88rising’s ambition to promote Asian culture is not limited to hip-hop. Joji is the stage name of a Japanese-Australian singer, producer and Internet meme creator named George Miller.

George was formerly a YouTube skit-and-prank comedian famous for his characters Filthy Frank (a squawking, anti-P.C., antisocial nerd with a self-destructive streak) and Pink Guy (a sex-positive Lycra-clad alien with the same predilection for destruction, only he rapped, too) (Hua, 2018). Joji, under his Pink Guy identity at the time, is responsible for the Harlem Shake meme in 2013. The

meme is about people upload videos of themselves dancing to a Trap song name Harlem Shake produced by an American artist named Baauer. These videos usually are 30 seconds long; the first 15 seconds features one person dances to the intro of “Harlem Shake” while people around this person ignoring the music and dance, when the build-up finishes and the bass drops, all the people in the video starts to dance wildly with strange custom or outfits. The reason why Joji and his friends did the “Harlem Shake” video was because they thought the music was cool and wanted to dance to it, but to their surprise, one day after they uploaded the video on YouTube, everybody started to do the same thing and more than 12,000 versions had been uploaded to YouTube on that day (Web.archive.org, 2018). The creation of this meme was unintentionally, but it made Joji realising the power of the Internet, which plays an essential role in 88rising’s marketing and growth strategy, he mentioned in an interview with Bloomberg: “That taught me a lot about Internet, people just want to be a part of something, from that point on, something changed, I was a little better at understanding demographics and people, you know, what they want to see and what they want to hear.” (Bloomberg, 2017) After that, Joji continued as a comedian content creator on YouTube with sizable internet fanbase. At the same time, Joji started to try transforming into a musician from his comedian Internet persona, In January of 2017, he released the Pink Season mixtape, a 35-track album that hit the number 9 spot on Billboard’s U.S. Top R&B/Hip-Hop albums, and peaked at 70 on the Billboard U.S. 200. (Highsnobiety, 2017) On a meeting with Sean discussing about creating viral videos, the founder of 88rising heard demos from Joji and suggested that they should focus on Joji’s music. (Hua, 2018) He then was signed to 88rising as a singer and producer under the name Joji and stopped updating his Filthy Frank and Pink Guy YouTube channel. As a result, he became an essential part of 88rising for curating viral content and also developing his career as a musician.

Joji released his debut EP “In Tongues” through 88rising on the 3rd of November, 2017. The next morning, his EP was in eighth place on the iTunes Music Store chart (Leonard, 2017) and topped Spotify’s Global Viral 50 (Highsnobiety, 2017). The general style of his last mixtape “Pink Season mixtape” is Trap, but in “In Tongues” EP, the style changed dramatically from Trap to lo-fi R&B with sad and depressing delivery. Joji described the theme of his EP as depressing, lonely and hornyness. He can express his personal feeling about himself as a naturally conflicted person and also come to a realisation of it is okay to be a conflicted person under the theme. “will he” is one of the singles in the EP which released together with its music video. The music features a repeating softly, and lo-fi piano melody combines with trap style drum, and Joji’s vocal with dreamy effects, sadness and depressing are the main tone of the music, the musical hype website described: “will he” opens enigmatically. It is melancholy, indulgent, and heavy. Despite the weight carried by the

sound and vibe, the sound is lovely and well-produced. Joji delivers respectable vocals, singing the sad lyrics with passion and authenticity (The Musical Hype, 2017). The music video was also a viral hit with over 20 million views on 88rising's channel; the video has the same sad and depressing feeling that music delivers, Joji played as the main character in the music video: a heartbroken man feels sad about his ex-girlfriend when she finds herself a new boyfriend. The music video indicates the man showed up to her ex-girlfriend's doorstep, potentially murdered her, then he lying in a bathtub full of blood and walking on the street wearing cloth with blood. The EP received good feedback overall and fans who know him as Pink Guy was surprised by his musical talents. Together with 88rising, Joji successfully transformed from YouTube comedian to a serious artist.

Joji's successful attempts in a different genre other than hip-hop proves that 88rising is not only a hip-hop label. It can also be a platform for an artist like Joji to break into the mainstream music market. As an artist coming from the Japanese and Australian background, with an experience of Internet content/meme creation. Joji not only represents the bridge of connecting Asian culture with the west itself but also provided 88rising knowledge of Internet culture.

3.2.4.5 Touring in Asia

Towards the end of 2017, 88rising announced that Keith Ape, Rich Brian, Joji and Higher Brothers would start their first Asian tour in China, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Philippines, and Indonesia. While 88rising was making an impact in the west, people in Asia also started to notice 88rising and what they were doing. As a result, the tickets of 88rising's Asian tour was sold out quickly. For 88rising, as a company who shoulders the responsibility of connecting Asian culture with the west, it is also crucial for the company and their artists to be recognised in countries where their roots are. For their audience in Asia, there is no better way to appreciate their music than being at a live performance. It is also worth to mention that at the time 88rising's Chinese rap group Higher Brothers have not had any physical contact with 88rising at the time, they were communicating remotely through Facetime. It is the first time for Higher Brothers to finally had a chance to meet Sean and his team. Moreover, although Sean has Asian root, he grew up in the USA; it is also his first time to travel in Asia. Thus this is a good time for him and his team to learn about the audience, the market and culture of Asia which will be the foundation of 88rising so that 88rising would be able to curate content for Asian cultures as well.

3.2.4.6 Non-musical content

In 2017, 88rising inherited some of the non-musical series from 2016 such as “Seoulfood” but created many series that are related to Asian culture. They created a new series “RICEBALLERS” where they invite the Instagram famous Milan based sushi artist Yujia Hu, who makes sneaker/streetwear/celebrities shape sushi by hand, to make sushi-making a video for artists who associated with 88rising. Beside video related to Asian food or drink, 88rising also posted a video tribute to Japanese music producer Jun Seba, as known as stage name Nujabes, who passed away tragically in a traffic collision. Speaking of Hip-hop in Asia, Nujabes is one of the most iconic artists, although he is not the first one who combines jazz with hip-hop, his approach to blends two elements together is smooth and comes with a touch of Japanese cultural influence which makes his name stands out in an international level. He is an inspiration to most of the lo-fi hip-hop producer nowadays; there are even traces of influence from Nujabes can be found in Joji’s EP “In Tongues.” In 88rising’s video to honour Nujabes, they asked their audience around the world what Nujabes meant to their lives and include their comment within the video; the video was produced together with a Tokyo based audiovisual expression group “BRDG.” Through the visual created by “BRDG,” people would be able to associate those comments with Nujabes’ music which created an emotional connection between 88rising and its audience.

88 Worlds is a video series that showcases cities in Asia to the world in an aesthetic way. It could be regarded as an extension of 88stories, instead of telling a story of a person or location using subtitles or voiceover, 88 worlds uses only visual and audio to convey a theme. The first video of 88 worlds is titled “IN THE KONG Skating through HK.” There is a word “skating” in the title, but the purpose of this video is not to showcase any skating techniques or skaters. The video is using skateboard as a transportation tool to show the city through local skater’s perspective. It is a rare experience that even someone who visited Hong Kong could not experience. Also, as we know, skating is a sub-culture for young people that can be found almost in every city, via showcasing Hong Kong through skating, it connects skaters around the world. The second video from the series is called “a camera through Japan,” This video is by a director named Julian Lucas, he went to Japan for a holiday with his camera, filmed what he saw there and created this video. Unlike the skating video, the pace of this video is slow and steady. The slow camera movement combining with light ambient sound and background noise created a peaceful atmosphere. There is no conversation throughout the whole video, only one beautiful shot to another which could be from buildings, streets, train stations, parks, gaming rooms and so on. It takes the audience to an enjoyable and peaceful video trip to Japan. After “A camera through Japan,” 88rising published the

third video from the series to showcase Shanghai, it is a different style from the previous two videos, shots from this video are filmed on 16mm film, digital camera, and iPhone. The creator assembles random clips he filmed during a 48-hour layover in Shanghai, there is no background music, only ambient sound and background noise. The style of the video can only be described as random; if the Japan video is a peaceful trip, this Shanghai video will incite curiosity to explore the city among the audience because it is so different from what people from the west sees every day. Video series like 88 worlds is no doubt one of the most important reasons to differentiate 88rising from a record label; these videos are tools to connect the west with Asian culture besides music and define the meaning of a hybrid media company.

Among all the video series, there is one promotion video series named “Save My Seoul” brought the content of 88rising to a higher and humanistic level. “Save My Seoul” is a documentary about revealing the prostitution and sex trafficking situation in Seoul, Korea. It is an open secret in Korea that no one talks about it, the purpose of the documentary is to address the issue to the world and raise awareness of it. Although 88rising did not produce the documentary, the role of 88rising in here is to promote the documentary to its audience around the world as a media platform. The four-part promotion trailers were posted on their channel one week after the reaction video of “Made in China” and gained over 2.5 million views until the time of writing. By addressing a social issue like this, 88ring shouldered more responsibilities than an online entertainment channel. Instead, they are a hybrid cultural media company about Asian culture: from creating high-quality music and videos to face the hidden problem beneath the culture.

3.2.5 2018 to present

3.2.5.1 Introduction

After the successful tour in Asia, 88rising decided to announce more tour in 2018, these tours including American tour for all artists of 88rising, European tour for Rich Brian, and Australia & New Zealand tour for Rich Brian and NIKI which will start on 16th of May, 2018. However, there were much more happening besides tours.

3.2.5.2 From Rich Chigga to Rich Brian

As Brian became well-known around the world, there was more criticism around his name “Rich Chigga,” it is mentioned in Hua’s article that Brian received a great number of fiercer comments

about using the word “Chigga” in his stage name after 88rising announced the release of his debut Album “Amen.” After many conversations with Sean, they decided to change his stage name from “Rich Chigga” to “Rich Brian” on 1st of January, 2018. Although his initial intention for choosing the name was because of his Chinese root. But for the long-term development of his career, it can cause more problem. People who do not know where the name comes from may find it offensive, even some of 88rising’s staff found the name offensive in the first place. Also, the name changing the name is a way to create a topic that will draw attention from the public, especially the release of Brian’s debut album is around the corner.

The debut album was released in February features a variety of artist: from famous rappers such as Offset (a member of Atlanta rap group Migos) to 88rising’s artists: Joji and so forth. The album overall has excellent production quality, and most feedback from critics in the music industry are positive, for example, The New Yorker commented: “Amen” became the first album by an Asian artist to top iTunes’ hip-hop charts. Given the novelty of “Dat Stick,” few listeners could have anticipated the charm of “Amen,” which is filled with moments of teenage innocence—one track is about Imanuel losing his virginity—and earnest contentment (Hua, 2018). There is also criticism such as “When a guy comes all the way from Jakarta, that is unique, and you want something unique from him. Amen falls way short of that.” (Dart, 2018). Nevertheless, it is already a success for 88rising and Brian because before this; it is scarce to see a rapper from far east in the mainstream western market, not to mention to be accepted by Hip-hop culture and receive feedback from industry critics. It is a good start for Brian’s career and 88rising’s development.

In early 2018, Brian was also selected on the XXL freshman list. XXL is a USA based hip-hop magazine founded in 1997; it is one of the crucial magazines for hip-hop culture. Starting from 2007, Every year XXL will release a freshman list to showcase new/underground rappers who are on the rise. Top 10 rappers in XXL freshman class will be on the cover of the magazine, and there will also be a freestyle battle between these rappers to showcase their style. The freshman list is an indication of who are trending rappers in hip-hop culture at the moment, and it is what hip-hop fans around the world are looking forward to every year. For example, Kendrick Lamar, who won the Pulitzer Prize for music recently because of his album “DAMN.”, was on the top 10 freshman list 2011. It is not common to see a rapper from Asia in the hip-hop cultural magazine like XXL, even if Brian may not be able to enter the top 10 freshman list, it is already an inspiration for Asian artists. For 88rising, to be able to find an Asian rapper and be selected as XXL candidate will provide them more credit as a music label for Asian artists, as well as for western music industry.

3.2.5.3 From China to the USA: Higher Brother

From Higher Brothers' interview with VICE news, they always wanted to make it in the USA. In the interview, they contacted Sean through Facetime and asked him when they will be able to travel and perform in the USA. Sean promised them it would be arranged after their Asian tour. As a result, for the first time, Higher Brothers travelled all the way from China to the USA.

Tickets for their events were quickly sold out, and they performed from one city to another for last few months before the time of writing. Together with Sean, they were invited to talk at Harvard to discuss Asian hip-hop and 88rising. When talked about the reason why they wanted to come to the USA, one of the four members MaSiWei said: "We love hip-hop. We love rap music. It is from here, so we need to be here, we need to tour here, take a look around here so we can know the culture. We should learn the history. In the spirit of bringing Chinese hip-hop culture to the world." (Hu, 2018).

Hip-hop has always been an underground sub-culture in China. There is no massive record label dedicated to hip-hop culture or platform/magazine such as XXL to promote and celebrate the culture. Before, the primary way for Chinese audience to listen to hip-hop music is from large record labels such as Sony Music or Warner music. However, thanks to the fast development of the Internet, nowadays Chinese audience would have access to artists around the world, which provides soil for artists like Higher Brothers to grow. 2017 was a particular time for Chinese hip-hop because of the first-ever Chinese hip-hop rap reality show "The Rap of China". The show was trying to turn the underground culture into the mainstream and essentially a multi-million dollar business. It quickly became one of the hottest show in 2017 and made numbers of underground rappers popular. However, the fledgling hip-hop culture in China was banned by the mainstream media because one of the rappers who won the show was accused of having an affair with a married celebrity. Unfortunately, the ban was not only against this rapper but also triggered a crackdown on the entire music genre (Bureau, 2018). Hip-hop became a sensitive topic in China because of the ban. It is around the same time when 88rising started to take off globally, although neither 88rising nor Higher Brothers were involved in "The Rap of China" and rapper who triggered the ban, they were still affected by the ban. One of the Higher Brothers members, MaSiWei, did TV advertisement with Sprite to commemorate Chinese New Year right before the ban, but the advertisement was taken down because of the incidence. The Chinese market is a special environment because platforms like YouTube, Spotify, SoundCloud, and Facebook are also banned, it would be a great opportunity for 88rising to gain more mainstream exposure because of the advertisement. It was a reminder of the cross-cultural knowledge required to credibly enter any Asian market (Hua, 2018), especially

China. As Sean mentioned in the interview with Forbes: “we do need to be more mindful about certain aspects of our music, many our employees are also white or African-American, not just Asian, and at the end of the day we’re a Western-based company, so we need to be especially careful and double- and triple-check everything that goes out.”(Hu, 2018)

3.2.5.4 Non-Asian and female artist

In 2018, by keeping hip-hop as 88rising’s core, Sean and his team continue to explore possibilities in different music genre and tries to expand the diversity of their artists. 88rising and Sean never limited themselves to an Asian or Asian American audience, to bridge East and West to celebrate youth cultures from both sides are their philosophy. He mentioned in the speech in Harvard: “When somebody comes on to our YouTube channel, we never want to give the feeling that it is not for somebody. Or like ‘Hey, I do not belong here, because this is so Asian.’” (Chu, 2018) Although there are quite many contents around non-Asian artist (such as the reaction video mentioned above or promotion video for the non-Asian artist) and female artists (for example video about photographer Christina Paik or New York-based Korean-American producer Yaeji), there was no non-Asian and female artist managed by 88rising until this year.

AUGUST08 is the first non-Asian artist in 88rising; however, at the time of writing, there is limited information about him available online. AUGUST 08 is an African-American R&B singer that is born in Los-Angeles and based in Korean town; he was signed to 88rising. At the moment there is only two single of his and one featured song on Brian’s album “Amen” are available on Spotify, also music videos of these songs on 88rising’s channel. It is unclear what his role in 88rising is, but his appearance in the company represents the combination of western and Asian cultures.

Besides AUGUST 08, there is also a female artist known as stage name NIKI who is signed by 88rising in 2018. She is an Indonesian singer who started as a YouTuber to cover pop songs and write original songs of her own under her born name Nicole Zefanya. The contents she created gained her over 40,000 subscribers. However, since she joined 88rising as an R&B singer, the previous content was all deleted on her channel. Similar to AUGUST 08, she was featured on Brian’s album, and there are only four songs of hers available on 88rising’s channel. According to the latest videos uploaded to 88rising’s channel, there will be more content of NIKI coming out. By signing NIKI to 88rising, it creates diversity and balance so that the content they created will be able to access more audience.

3.2.5.5 Non-musical contents

There weren't many non-musical contents were published in 2018 for far. Compare to last two years, the numbers of this kind of video decreased. Food series such as "Eighty Ate" and "Seoulfood" have not yet been added with more content, only one video of "Japan's Greatest Bartender" and one sushi making video series "RICEBALLERS" were posted on 88rising's channel. It is clear that the focus of 88rising is on the musical content and tours at the time of writing. As more artists joined the team and increasing numbers of musical projects, we can assume that at the moment they lack the capacity for non-musical content.

However, even though their energy might be focused on musical content, they managed to create a new collaborative series with K11 Art Foundation called "From China, With Love." K11 Art Foundation is a registered non-profit organisation that promotes the development of the contemporary art scene in Greater China by providing support for emerging Chinese artists and taking them to the international stage. Not only does KAF nurture artistic talents, but it also serves as an incubator for professional practices of promising young curators. (K11 Art Foundation, 2018) The collaborative series using short video documentary as a tool to introduce Chinese contemporary artist to the world. There are only two videos so far; these two videos are two introductions of an artist names Liang Yuanwei and a painter called Zhao Yang, in the video, they both talked about their experience, inspiration, confliction and struggle. They kept the production at a high standard while introducing these Chinese artists to the world.

3.2.6 What is next for 88rising

Based on an interview with AdAge and Hua's article of the company, 88rising will continue being active around the world. Regarding artists, while keeping more content updating for existing artists such as Rich Brian and Higher Brothers, there will also be more artists who will be joining the company just like NIKI and AUGUST 08. Sean mentioned that they are looking to sign some Chinese A-list star this year, which will make them more accessible in a massive market like China. However, they have to be careful whom to choose as well because of the potential constraints from the Chinese government.

Content-wise, besides singles or Eps for their new artist. There will be an album named "88 Degree and Rise" coming out this year. (Hua, 2018) It will be a crew album which all 88rising artists will be participating. Also, the company will be curating their festivals in the USA and China, taking

part in film business which Sean described as “Storytelling franchises for bigger platforms so we can continually scale from a native digital brand to both offline and online brand.” (Hua, 2018)

Essentially, the goal for 88rising is to create a Disney-like entertainment company: Just like Disney, there will be different types of media, from physical spaces such as store and theme park to virtual products for example music, movies and so on. (Hu, 2018) Compare to other entertainment media companies which cover culture, what 88rising wants to do is not only to bridge eastern culture with western culture but also to mix them well and then create a culture of their own, similar to what Disney did.

Chapter 4 – Data Analysis

4.1 Comparison with other new media companies

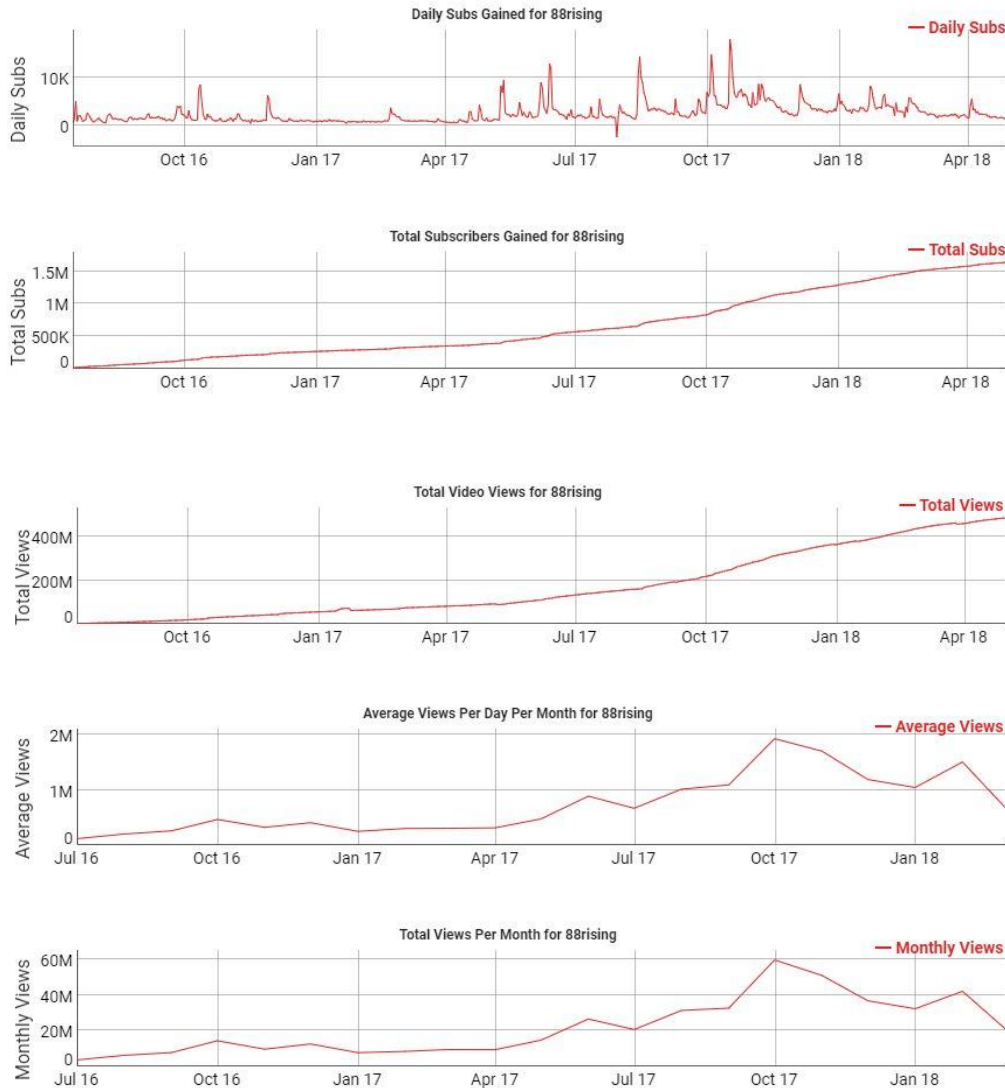
	88rising	Hypebeast	Highsnobiety
Founded Year	2015	2005	2005
Based in	USA	Hong Kong	Berlin
Type of Company	Hybrid Media	Digital Media / E-commerce / Blog	News & Digital Media / Blog
Content Coverage	Original Art, Music, and Cultural content	News in Fashion, Art, Music, and Culture	News in Fashion, Art, Music, and Culture
YouTube Channel Subscribers	Over 1,638,000	Over 507,161	Over 249,871

(Figure 2)

88rising is a fledgling company compare to other two which were both founded in 2005. It is interesting to see the geographical locations at the information age are not as influential as it was in the past. Hong Kong-based company Hypebeast does not necessary represents Asian culture. However, 88rising as a USA based company is focusing more on Asian culture. Also, 88rising stands out from these companies because they do not cover cultural content in a news or blog style like others. Instead, they have more original content and utilise them as a tool to create culture. From a global perspective, the audience these three companies are targeting is the younger generations who are interested in fashion, artistic, musical and cultural content. Hypebeast and Highsnobiety will have more general global audience whereas, for 88rising, there is a higher ratio of Asian audience. For Hypebeast and Highsnobiety, YouTube is not their primary channel to engage with the audience, unlike 88rising. Hypebeast has its news feed/blog website, and mobile

apps, Highsnobiety’s website is quite similar to Hypebeast where 88rising’s at the time of writing has only simple information about tour time. For only two years’ time, the number of subscribers for 88rising is already approximately three times more than Hypebeast and seven times more than Highsnobiety.

4.2 88rising YouTube Channel Statistical Data



(Figure 3: Detailed Statistics of the channel from Socialblade. (Socialblade, 2018))

According to the statistical data graphs above, the growth of 88rising can only be described as slow and stable in 2016. The views and subscribers increased gradually since the channel opened. However, there are also some small peaks throughout the year. In the “Daily Subscriber Gained”

graph, there is a peak around October of 2016, by comparing with the video uploading record of the channel, we can notice the remix version of Brian's "Dat Stick" with rapper "Ghostface Killah" from Wu-Tang Clan was the reason. It proves that the strategy of collaborating Asian artist with famous American rapper is successful.

Also, from the graph, we can conclude that 2017 is an essential year for 88rising's YouTube channel. There are several peaks on "Daily Subscriber Gained" graph, compared to the upload record, these peaks are all corresponded to content uploading of different artists especially Rich Brian. For example, the highest peak is around the same time as Brian released his new song "Glow Like Dat", the video also has the highest views on the channel. (See figure 1 in 3.2.4.2) October is a crucial month for the channel, "Average Views per Day & Month" graph reaches around 2 million and "Total Views per month" arrive at 60 million. However, these two graphs start to decrease after October which is related to the fact that they were focusing on tours more than uploading content. However, that does not mean they are losing the audience, on the contrary, by engaging more with their audience in physical space through concert or performance, subscribers of 88rising kept growing smoothly.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Hybrid Management

As one of new media companies in the information age who targets youth culture, 88rising classifies itself as Hybrid Management Media Company. From Sean's explanation (3.2.1), the concept of Hybrid Management was not defined in the initial stage when the company started. It evolves with the development of 88rising and has a strong connection to Sean's background and experiences. It is necessary to re-examine the definition of Hybrid Management: for 88rising, the hybrid management means that they are a hybrid culture company targeting audience from the Asian and western culture to connect both sides through their content. Essentially, their goal is to create a hybrid culture. Unlike traditional record label that focuses on musical content, the core of 88rising is not only music but also cross-culture communication for the west and Asia. Moreover, unlike other new media companies, 88rising covers contents in fashion, music and art as well as creating a culture of their own.

5.2 Characteristics of 88rising

5.2.1 Introduction

88rising as a culture-driven company based in a western market with a global audience. There is no doubt it is a fledgling business model. From the research, there are three primary characteristics can be noticed during the development of the company. They are Uniqueness, Creativity and Diversity. Details of each characteristic will be presented in the next section.

5.2.2 Uniqueness

First of all, there are companies who have been trying to connect both cultures already, generally speaking, they are company which based in Asia, and operated by mostly Asian: K-pop, as mentioned from 3.2.2, will be one of the most substantial examples who falls into this category, Or record labels that are based in the USA and operated by Asian-American community targeting mainly western market. For the first type of company, Asian culture is often not their core, musical and visual content (music video and dance and so on) are what drew attention in the western market. For the second type, because most of their artists tend to be born in a western environment, they are more exposed in the west than Asia. However, 88rising's approach is a combination of these two types which gives them more advantages: they are more familiar with the market in the west than K-pop companies at the same time have artists from Asia who has knowledge of Asian market than USA based Asian-America record labels. However, it is a series of exploration and experiments which makes 88rising a unique type of company. Its founder, Sean's hybrid background and experience with VICE, provide a solid foundation at the beginning because there is no existing path or similar business model.

The way they use viral content creating (meme-driven) strategy as a marketing tool for their artists is also not commonly found in new media companies or record labels. 88rising chosen YouTube as their primary content publishing platform is a crucial factor for their meme-driven strategy. Joji, as a former YouTube personal who created "Harlem Shake" meme, has a deep understanding of the power of Internet meme which offers Sean and 88rising significant benefits when it comes to artists marketing activities. The viral reaction videos of Rich Brian (3.2.3) and Higher Brother (3.2.4.3) are good instances of the strategy. It becomes a unique symbol for 88rising that makes it stands out from new media companies.

5.2.3 Creativity

Creativity is a critical characteristic that runs through 88rising's development. From the content perspective, the priority goal is to make their video different from others by adding cultural elements. It can be combining Asian cultural elements to an American rapper's performance video, such as the video of Designer Performs "Panda" (3.2.3), or adding a western touch to an Asian music video, for example, Higher Brother's "Made in China" (3.2.4.3). That makes their video more creative and more accessible to the audience from the different cultural background. They also push their creative boundaries by adding their twist on Asian cultural content, for instance, in "IN THE KONG Skating through HK" video from "88 Worlds" series (3.2.4.6), 88rising created an experience that neither local nor visitor would not be able to experience: Showcase the beauty of Hong Kong from a skater's perspective.

The way they managed their artists remotely cross continents is also creative. Although these artists all went to the USA to seek for the further career development eventually, 88rising still set a precedent for other companies: In the information age, it is possible to recruit talents remotely regardless the distance or culture. They can also be successful and well-accepted by audience or market of a different culture. Keith Ape, Rich Brian and Higher Brothers are good instances. Primarily for Keith Ape and Higher Brothers, even though they speak a language where the audience may not necessarily understand, but it would not stop the audience or other artists to appreciate their music.

5.2.4 Diversity

Another characteristic is diversity. The diversity of 88rising comes from two aspects: Content and Artists. Firstly, the content coverage of the company is broad. It can be divided into two types: musical content and non-musical content. Regarding musical content, they cover music video for their artists, reaction video from famous rappers, and introduction/music video/performance for non-88rising musicians/artists. For non-musical content, they covers food & beverage (such as: "Eight Ate", "Japan's Greatest Bartender" etc.), travel ("88 Worlds" video series), promotion/introduction video of Asian brand or artist (for example "From China, With Love" video series with K11 Art Foundation) and even video addresses social issue ("Save My Seoul").

From 88rising's development, we can also see that artists of the company are becoming more diverse. By keeping hip-hop as its core, the company are promoting not only artist in Trap genre (Keith Ape, Rich Brian, Higher Brothers) but also in R&B genre (such as AUGUST 08 and NIKI

who recently joined 88rising), even sub-genre like lo-fi R&B (Joji's "In Tongues" EP). At the time of writing, they have artists from China, Indonesia, Korea, Australia and the USA. According to Sean, their team will expand in 2018 which will increase their diversity even more.

5.3 Limitation

From the observation of its development. Some factors need to be considered for the further growth of 88rising. A primary factor is cross-culture localisation need to be adjusted in different countries. Taking China as an instance, it is clear that China is a market with massive potential. As a company represents Asian culture, Chinese naturally becomes one of 88rising's target market. However, from 3.2.5.3, we can learn that it requires more carefulness when it comes to Chinese market, for example, at the time of writing hip-hop is banned in China, even though 88rising's Chinese artists are not involved with the incidence that triggered the ban, the company still needs to be mindful about what content to be published. Similarly, rules, regulations and culture vary in different countries, as a company that tries to connect these cultures, cross-culture localisation might limit its development.

Another limitation is that at the time of writing, Sean is not only the founder but also in charge of the creative strategy as well as the operation of the company. In fact, before early 2018, he was still managing 88rising's social media accounts. It might be an excellent way to keep full control of overall content, but it will not be as efficient when the company keeps growing. From the observation from 3.2.5.5, numbers of cultural content uploaded decreased in early 2018 because of the increasing tours and concerts which is an indicator. There should be a clear division of roles within the company. Otherwise, it will also limit 88rising's further growth.

5.4 Conclusion

88rising, as hybrid management Media Company, shoulders the responsibility to connect Asian culture with western youth culture. While successfully bridging cultures of both sides, it also created its own hybrid culture which is unique, diverse and creative.

From a business perspective, new media companies are becoming more irreplaceable as a communication channel in information age for the younger generation. 88rising, as a successful and unique business model, stands out from new media companies with the similar target audience. It provided a reference and example for other media companies that are heading in a similar

direction. Moreover, they also created a meme-driven marketing approach: by publishing one viral video at a time, 88rising not only drew attention from Asia and the west but also gained a significant amount of the audience base globally. From a cultural aspect, 88rising is gradually changing Asian representations in the west, especially in the music industry. Before 88rising, it is rare to see Asian hip-hop musician on iTunes hip-hop chart or any other music charts, but 88rising and their artists created the history: Rich Brian's debut album topped the hip-hop the USA iTunes chart after released, multiple tracks of Joji's debut album appeared on Spotify's Global Viral 50 chart. Therefore, Asian hip-hop musicians finally have an opportunity to be recognised and accepted by the hip-hop community and western market. Through content publishing platform especially their YouTube channel, they deliver high-quality cultural content as well as musical content to the world, shorten the distance of youth culture in different cultural environments. The work from 88rising's artists will be able to reach further and be appreciated by the audience around the world. Sean and his team are ambitious, their vision of 88rising is to build a Disney-alike entertainment company: by bridging Asian culture with the western culture, they are going to create an influential hybrid culture which covers physical space such as festival, concerts or even theme park to virtual products including music, video, movie and so forth.

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