

## **Urban Identity and Emotional Distance: Hofstede's Cultural Values Dimensions on *APT* by Bruno Mars and ROSÉ**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the song *APT* by ROSÉ and Bruno Mars using Hofstede's cultural value dimensions to analyze how the lyrics represent the complexities of urban life and cultural identity. The song's metaphor of the apartment (아파트) symbolizes both physical closeness and emotional distance, highlighting the tension between collectivist and individualist values, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, femininity in modern cities. Through its bilingual lyrics, the song bridges cultural divides and addresses universal themes of emotional longing and isolation. The analysis reveals how the song challenges traditional norms, promoting egalitarian relationships and emphasizing spontaneity over stability, which contrasts with South Korea's traditional high uncertainty avoidance. The conclusion of this analysis is *APT* offers insight into the evolving cultural dynamics of South Korea, showing how the song blends local and global influences while resonating with audiences through its exploration of connection, freedom, and modern relationships.

**Keywords:** collectivism and individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, femininity

### **INTRODUCTION**

*APT* appears as a song which delivers significant cultural meaning, reflecting the themes of emotional connection and distance through the metaphor of apartment living. The song utilizes a bilingual structure, with Korean lyrics by Rosé and English verses by Bruno Mars in order to create a universal narrative that relates across cultural boundaries. Apartment appeals as the key elements of this study. It is mentioned as *apateu* on the song as a symbol of modern urban life, especially in South Korea. In urban areas, high-rise apartment buildings often symbolize a contradiction between being physically close and feeling emotionally and socially distant. Research indicates that residents of densely populated urban areas may experience fewer social interactions, contributing to feelings of isolation. At *Journal of Urban Design* notes that "high-rise apartment buildings are often criticized for their negative social impacts, such as social isolation and low levels of interaction and social cohesion" (Nguyen, et al., 2024)

This study applies Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory as a valuable framework to analyze how cultural values shape the interpretation and reception of *APT*. They are *individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, femininity* which offer insights into the cultural nuances embedded in the song's lyrics. By analyzing how these

dimensions are represented in the bilingual lyrics, this study highlights the song's role as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultural values.

*APT* transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries by integrating universal emotional experiences with specific culture values. The Korean lyrics express a collectivist longing for connection in a fast-paced urban environment, while the English verses emphasize personal emotions and self-expression, the characteristics of privacy and individualist cultures. This connection not only enriches the song's vibes but also fosters intercultural understanding by presenting shared themes through diverse cultural lenses.

## METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative content analysis in order to examine the lyrics of "APT". It focuses on their cultural and emotional significance which are represented on the lyrics. Hofstede's dimensions of *individualism vs. collectivism*, *power distance*, *uncertainty avoidance*, *femininity* are selected as the primary theoretical framework for interpreting the lyrics. The analysis involves a close reading of the song's bilingual lyrics, identifying themes that represent cultural values and their implications for feelings and social connection.

Primary data for this study is the lyrics of "APT," with particular attention to the Korean lines sung by Rosé and the English verses performed by Bruno Mars. The Korean lyrics provide a lens into collectivist cultural norms, particularly those associated with urban living in South Korea. The English verses, on the other hand, present individualist values commonly found in Western cultures. Secondary data, such as academic literature on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and studies on urban culture, support the interpretation of the song's themes.

This analysis also examines the metaphorical role of the apartment in the song. As a cultural symbol, the apartment reflects shared living spaces and the emotional isolation that often accompanies urban density. By examining how this metaphor resonates differently across cultural contexts, the study aims to uncover the interplay between physical spaces, cultural values, and emotional states. Furthermore, the study explores how the song's bilingual structure contributes to its intercultural appeal. The juxtaposition of Korean and English lyrics allows for a broader exploration of cultural values, highlighting both shared emotional experiences and distinct cultural interpretations. This approach not only enriches the analysis but also underscores the role of language in shaping cultural understanding.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### ROSÉ and Bruno Mars APT Lyrics

#### [Intro]

채영이가 좋아하는

랜덤 게임

랜덤 게임

Game start

#### [Chorus: ROSÉ]

아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
Uh, uh-huh, uh-huh  
아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
Uh, uh-huh, uh-huh

**[Verse 1: ROSÉ]**

Kissy face, kissy face  
Sent to your phone, but  
I'm tryna kiss your lips for real (Uh-huh, uh-huh)  
Red hearts, red hearts  
That's what I'm on, yeah  
Come give me somethin' I can feel, oh-oh-oh

**[Pre-Chorus: ROSÉ]**

Don't you want me like I want you, baby?  
Don't you need me like I need you now?  
Sleep tomorrow, but tonight, go crazy  
All you gotta do is just meet me at the

**[Chorus: ROSÉ]**

아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
Uh, uh-huh, uh-huh  
아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
Uh, uh-huh, uh-huh

**[Verse 2: Bruno Mars]**

It's whatever (Whatever), it's whatever (Whatever)  
It's whatever (Whatever) you like (Woo)

Turn this 아파트 into a club (Uh-huh, uh-huh)  
I'm talkin' drink, dance, smoke, freak, party all night (Come on)  
건배, 건배, girl, what's up? Oh-oh-oh

**[Pre-Chorus: Bruno Mars]**

Don't you want me like I want you, baby?  
Don't you need me like I need you now?  
Sleep tomorrow, but tonight, go crazy  
All you gotta do is just meet me at the

**[Chorus: ROSÉ & Bruno Mars]**

아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
Uh, uh-huh, uh-huh  
아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
아파트, 아파트  
Uh, uh-huh, uh-huh

**[Spoken: ROSÉ, ROSÉ & Bruno Mars]**

Hey, so now you know the game  
Are you ready?  
'Cause I'm comin' to get ya, get ya, get ya

**[Bridge: ROSÉ, ROSÉ & Bruno Mars]**

Hold on, hold on  
I'm on my way  
Yeah, yeah, yeah-yeah, yeah  
I'm on my way  
Hold on, hold on  
I'm on my way  
Yeah, yeah, yeah-yeah, yeah  
I'm on my way

**[Pre-Chorus: ROSÉ & Bruno Mars]**

Don't you want me like I want you, baby?  
Don't you need me like I need you now?

Sleep tomorrow, but tonight, go crazy  
All you gotta do is just meet me at the

[Chorus: ROSÉ & Bruno Mars, ROSÉ, Bruno Mars]

아파트, 아파트

아파트, 아파트

아파트, 아파트

Just meet me at the (Uh-huh, uh-huh)

아파트, 아파트

아파트, 아파트

아파트, 아파트

Just meet me at the (Uh-huh, uh-huh)

아파트, 아파트

아파트, 아파트

아파트, 아파트

Just meet me at the (Uh-huh, uh-huh)

아파트, 아파트

아파트, 아파트

아파트, 아파트

Uh, uh-huh, uh-huh

## Findings

The song *APT* by ROSÉ and Bruno Mars uses the concept of the apartment (아파트) as a cultural and emotional symbol, providing insights into the complexities of modern urban life. When analyzed through Hofstede's cultural value dimensions, the song reveals significant aspects of collectivism versus individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity versus femininity. These dimensions help uncover the layers of meaning within the lyrics, particularly as they reflect South Korea's collectivist culture while simultaneously appealing to a global audience.

Firstly, the tension between collectivism and individualism is evident in the song's narrative. The repeated use of "아파트" reflects the collectivist aspect of South Korean society, where living in close proximity is common. However, the lyrics also highlight the emotional disconnection often experienced in urbanized environments. Lines like "*Don't you want me like I want you, baby?*" emphasize the longing for intimacy despite physical closeness, illustrating the duality of collectivist and individualist tendencies in modern urban life. Hofstede (2001) explains, "Collectivist societies value tight social frameworks, while

individualist cultures prioritize personal independence” (p. 210). This duality is a central theme in the song, where shared living spaces underscore both connection and separation.

Secondly, the song challenges traditional hierarchical norms by presenting an equal and casual collaboration between ROSÉ and Bruno Mars, aligning with low power distance cultural values. This dynamic is particularly evident in the playful, mutual dialogue between the two artists, which reflects changing cultural norms within collectivist societies. The partnership represents a blending of respect and equality, moving away from traditional hierarchical structures often found in high power distance cultures like South Korea’s. As explained by Tan Soo Kee, “The Korean leadership style has been perceived as autocratic and group focused, especially” (2015).

Additionally, the lyrics reflect a low uncertainty avoidance, as the song encourages spontaneity and carefree living. For instance, the line “*Sleep tomorrow, but tonight, go crazy*” signifies a willingness to embrace uncertainty and prioritize immediate gratification. While South Korea traditionally has a higher uncertainty avoidance, where planning and risk aversion are emphasized, the song portrays a modern urban culture that values taking risks for personal fulfilment. This shift is indicative of the evolving cultural dynamics in urban settings.

Finally, the song aligns with femininity-oriented cultural values by focusing on emotional connection and relational harmony rather than material success. The lyrics, such as “*Don’t you need me like I need you now?*” emphasize emotional expression and relational depth, which are hallmarks of cultures with a higher focus on interpersonal relationships. Hofstede Insights (2023) supports this perspective by noting that femininity-oriented cultures prioritize relational well-being over competition. The song encapsulates this ethos, portraying relationships and emotional fulfilment as central to the urban experience.

## **Discussion**

The findings presented in the analysis of *APT* reveal how the song encapsulates significant cultural themes through the lens of Hofstede's cultural value dimensions, highlighting the complexities of modern urban living. The juxtaposition of South Korea’s collectivist values with globalized individualism demonstrates the dynamic nature of culture in an increasingly interconnected world. *APT* serves as both a reflection of and a commentary on the shifting cultural landscape in South Korea and globally, offering insights into how urbanization, globalization, and changing social values shape emotional connections in contemporary society.

A key aspect of this analysis is the tension between collectivism and individualism. The song's repeated refrain of "아파트" emphasizes the collectivist nature of urban living, where people are physically close but often emotionally distant. The apartment, as a space of proximity, is a metaphor for the broader theme of living in dense, urban environments that can foster feelings of isolation despite physical closeness. This paradox is particularly poignant in South Korea, where high-rise apartments are common and symbolize both the achievement of modernity and the emotional detachment that can result from fast-paced, competitive living. The lyrics—especially lines like “*Don’t you want me like I want you, baby?*”—express a longing for deeper emotional connections, yet they are framed within a setting that is culturally defined by individualism. This represents the tension within South Korean culture, where traditional collectivist values (group harmony, social cohesion) clash with the modern reality of personal autonomy and emotional isolation.

The song's blend of Korean and English lyrics also demonstrates how global influences are reshaping cultural expressions. Hofstede (2001) discusses the concept of cultural dimensions evolving in response to global interactions, and *APT* is a clear example of this process. By incorporating English into the narrative, the song reaches a wider audience and makes its emotional appeal more universally relatable. This fusion of languages and cultural references highlights the fluidity of cultural boundaries in a globalized world. It reflects how music can serve as a bridge, bringing together diverse cultural backgrounds while preserving specific cultural elements. In this sense, the song not only resonates with South Korean listeners but also speaks to global audiences who can relate to themes of love, longing, and emotional connection.

Additionally, the interplay between collectivism and individualism in the song is mirrored in the relational dynamics between ROSÉ and Bruno Mars. Their collaborative performance suggests a cultural shift toward more egalitarian interactions, particularly in South Korea, where power distance has traditionally been high. The equal partnership between the artists, with both contributing to the emotional narrative, exemplifies the declining importance of hierarchical structures in relationships, both personal and professional. In this context, the song challenges the traditional boundaries of authority and status within Korean culture, offering a more egalitarian perspective that aligns with global trends in communication and relationships. Moreover, the song's promotion of spontaneity and risk-taking ("*Sleep tomorrow, but tonight, go crazy*") underscores a more relaxed attitude toward uncertainty. This is in contrast to South Korea's higher uncertainty avoidance culture, which typically values stability, predictability, and careful planning. The carefree attitude reflected in the song can be seen as a sign of the changing cultural attitudes in South Korean society, especially among younger generations living in urban environments. The song represents a cultural shift where the focus is on immediate emotional gratification and the desire to live in the moment, rather than adhering strictly to long-term goals or conventions. This mirrors broader trends in global youth culture, where individual freedom and self-expression often take precedence over traditional cultural norms.

## CONCLUSION

*APT* by ROSÉ and Bruno Mars provides a rich text for understanding the cultural dimensions of contemporary urban life. Through the lens of Hofstede's cultural values, the song reveals the complex interplay between collectivism and individualism, high and low power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity versus femininity. The bilingual lyrics, the fusion of cultural references, and the exploration of emotional depth suggest that urban environments—especially in rapidly modernizing societies like South Korea—are breeding grounds for new cultural expressions and relationships. The song not only captures the emotional challenges of living in modern urban spaces but also serves as a cultural artifact that speaks to the universal desire for connection and fulfilment in an increasingly interconnected world.

Moreover, *APT* exemplifies how music can be applied as a bridge between traditional and evolving cultural norms, reflecting shifts in societal values. The blending of Korean and Western influences, both linguistically and thematically, highlights the globalization of culture while retaining a sense of local identity. This duality focus on how urban life fosters a dynamic

environment where traditions are reinterpreted, and new cultural narratives emerge. By encapsulating these transitions, the song becomes more than entertainment; it serves as a lens through which audiences can explore the shared human experience of navigating emotional and cultural complexities in a rapidly changing world.

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