

The Globalization of Hallyu Phenomenon: Impact on Malaysian Young Female's Attitude and Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Hallyu phenomenon is a globalized cultural product from South Korea that has spread uncontrollably into many parts of the world, and Malaysia was no exception. With the aid of media and the internet, the domination of its significant products such as K-drama, K-pop music, K-Food, K-Beauty, and technology brands left an indisputable impact on society. Hallyu's wide acceptance in Malaysia, however, received backlash from the anti-Hallyu group who criticized it for degrading the value of Malaysian culture, specifically targeting young females in Malaysia for their "obsession" with this foreign culture. This paper aimed to examine the relationship between the globalization of Hallyu phenomenon and young females in Malaysia. It employed a quantitative method to explore the impact of Hallyu on young females' attitudes and behaviour by distributing online surveys to 300 targeted respondents with prior knowledge regarding the topic. The findings showed that the most popular Hallyu cultural product is K-Pop, which consequently further influenced their attitude and behaviour towards other Hallyu products. The success of Hallyu culture among young females in Malaysia owed a lot to the internet and social media as the tools to disperse information, hence shaping their thoughts, attitudes and behaviour on the issue. The results also noted a few behavioural changes among the respondents in terms of time and money spent on Hallyu products. Overall, this study suggested that most respondents have a positive attitude towards Hallyu and that any behavioural changes were still within their control, hence denying the claim of "obsession" and "degrading one's cultural value" as claimed by the anti-Hallyu group.

Keywords: Hallyu phenomenon, globalization, South Korea, cultural products, young females

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INTRODUCTION

Hallyu is a Chinese term which translated to "Korean Wave", a collective term that refers to the phenomenal growth of Korean popular culture ranging from music, movies, drama, online games to Korean food. The Hallyu phenomenon penetrated other countries in Asia since the late 1990s, and soon after, spurred by the internet and social media, to other parts of the world. The Hallyu phenomenon began as part of South Korean economic policy reform during the 1997 Asian financial crisis that saw the South Korean government injecting more funds into its entertainment industry. The export of Hallyu cultural products contributed to 0.2% of Korea's GDP in 2004, amounting to approximately USD1.87 billion. According to Korea Foundation for International Cultural Exchange, Hallyu contributed USD9.5 billion to the Korean economy in 2018, and rose to USD12.3 billion in 2020, up 22.4% from 2018 (Martin, 2021 and Huang, 2020).

The spread of Hallyu culture first began in China through one of its products, K-drama. A Korean drama titled "What is Love" was so popular that it had 150 million Chinese viewers. That same year, popular music caught the attention of Chinese teenagers through a radio broadcast, Seoul Music Room that was aired in Beijing. The trend, though recognized first by the Chinese, finally spread among the Koreans themselves (Soo, 2012). The popularity of Hallyu Phenomenon led to many researchers analyzing its effects on East Asia, the Middle East and Southeast Asian regions that had shown the presence of fandom movement that nurture the success of Hallyu culture (Roll, 2020). According to Roll, the Korea Foundation reported a 89 million hallyu fans in 113 countries in 2019 where over 70 million lived in Asia and Oceania, 11.8 million in the Americas and 6.6 million in Europe.

Hallyu, in particular, is essentially an embodiment of soft power in South Korea (Kiymet & Murat, 2016). South Korea yielded its influence by featuring visual attractions to the eyes of the world that indirectly facilitate its competitiveness at the international level. The cumulative effect of movies, music, dramas and games has been tremendously positive to the Korean economy and the Korean country image in the region.

However, it did not escape from receiving backlash from the anti-Hallyu group who claimed that such phenomenon inflicted a negative impact on the existing cultures in Malaysia. A study conducted by Anslie, Limpura & Lim (2017) perceived Hallyu as a "low" cultural product that does not meet the aspect of modernity and sophistication. Zamsari (2014) wrote that Hallyu fever led to people abandoning their own culture to learn and practice Korean culture instead, which led to a concern of people forgetting their roots. The anti-Hallyu believed that the Hallyu phenomenon depreciated the Malaysian culture, and attacked young females for being "obsessed" with Korean celebrities. Despite substantial studies on how people were drawn into Hallyu products, a deeper investigation is needed to look into the effects of the Hallyu phenomenon on the attitude and behaviour among young females in Malaysia. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the relationship between the Hallyu phenomenon and its impact on the attitudes and behaviour of young females in Malaysia. The study was guided by two research objectives while incorporating the concepts of globalization and Korean soft power to determine the results.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population, Sample Size & Sampling technique

The population of this research comprises young females aged between 15 and 30 years old, and currently staying in Malaysia. They possessed similar background being active Hallyu followers who consumed its popular cultural products. The sample size was 300 female respondents to represent young female population in Malaysia within the youth age range. A snowball sampling method was used by sending the Google form to the key-person of a few group fan bases, namely "Carat Big Family Seventeen", "X1 Old OneIt", and "BTS Army Sarawak" on Twitter.

Data Collection

An online survey was distributed through social media, namely Twitter and WhatsApp to reach respondents who are actively following the Hallyu phenomenon, also known as "fandom". The fandom movement is widely active on both social media platforms, hence the reason they are expected to participate in the survey. Constructed in Google Form, the online survey comprised both close-ended and open-ended questions to obtain critical information such as the demographic profile of the respondents, popular Hallyu cultural products among young females in Malaysia, and attitudes and behaviour towards Hallyu cultural products. The data visualisation generated from the results of the survey became the primary source for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was carried out with the aid of SPSS. Data derived from the demographic section were essential to construct the demographic profile of Hallyu followers, and whether factors like age, marital status or occupation have influence over them. The analysis also generated a three-point scale result which will depict the highest Hallyu product score that contributed to the attitude of young females. A thematic analysis will be applied to explore the effects of Hallyu products on their attitude and behaviour. The data analysis will determine the characteristics of Hallyu products that might result in changes in their attitude and behaviour.

RESULTS

Demographic data of young females in Malaysia

The demographic factors in this study were age, marital status and occupation. Figure 1 showed the age of respondents which ranged from 15 to 30 years old. Out of 300 respondents, 68% belonged to the 19 - 24 age group comprised of young females who were either university students or working. The age groups of 15 - 18 and 25 - 30 held the same percentage of 16% respectively. The former comprised young females still in high school while the latter were either still studying or already working.

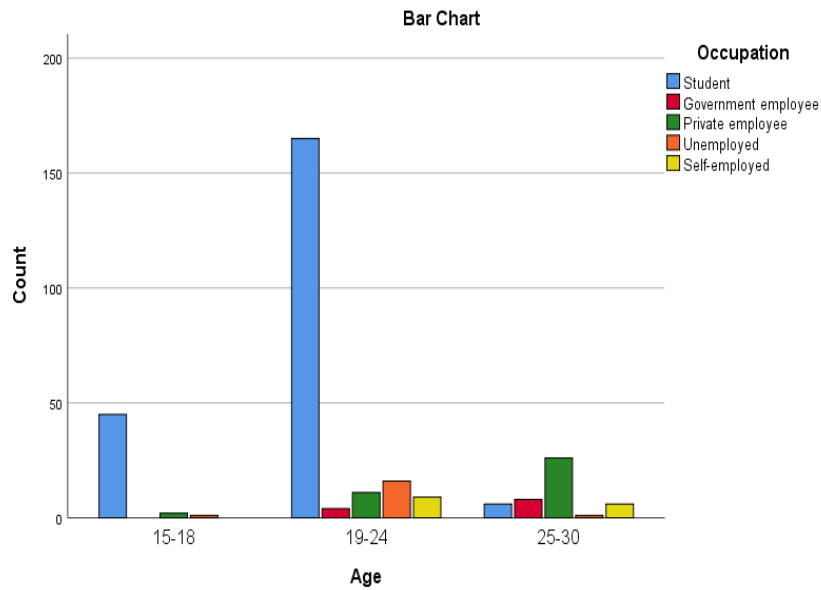


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age and Occupation

With regard to occupation as shown in Figure 2, 72% were still studying in high school and university, 4% were government servants, 13% worked in the private sector, 6% were unemployed and 5% were self-employed. The majority of the respondents were still single, 7 of them were married while only 1 was a divorcee.

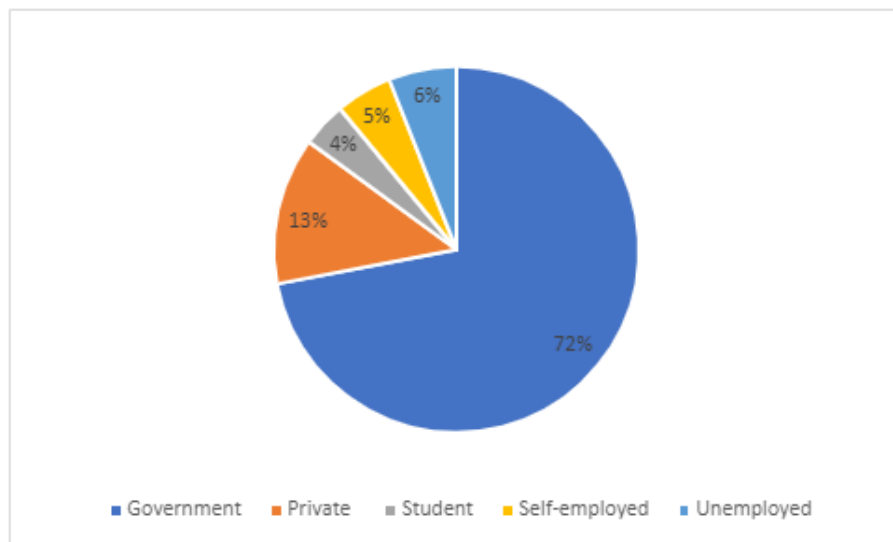


Figure 2: Occupation

Types of Hallyu cultural products that are popular among young females in Malaysia

The data collected depicted five main components of Hallyu cultural products popular among young females in Malaysia, namely K-Drama, K-Pop, K-Food, K-Beauty and K-Technology as shown in Figure 3. In the survey, open-ended fields were provided for the respondents to supply the names or brands of their favourite Hallyu cultural products, which were then analysed thematically due to their wide variation.

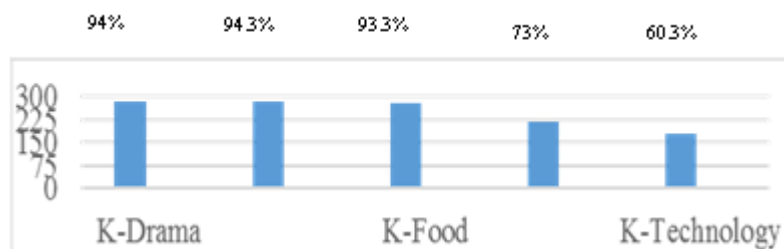


Figure 3: Most Favourite Hallyu cultural products

K-Drama was the earliest Hallyu cultural products that penetrated many parts of the world, including Malaysia. The first K-Drama that had established popularity across the neighbouring Asian countries was Winter Sonata. In Malaysia it was aired on the TV3 network. In August 2002, it was reported that Winter Sonata had 1.5 million Malaysian viewers when it was first broadcasted (Hariati, 2012). The survey garnered 282 responses for K-Drama with 94 different K-Drama favourite titles albeit with similar characteristics, that were released from 2016 to present, such as “Goblin” and “Scarlet Heart Ryeo”, except for “Boys over Flower” which was released in 2009. At the time of the release, these respondents were around the ages 19 to 24 years old, or 25 to 30 years old now). Five years ago, in 2016, they would have been in school and had more time to indulge in watching K-Drama.

K-Pop music was also one of the most successful Hallyu products, drawing 283 responses which provided the names of K-Pop idol groups and artists of their favourite. In 2006, TVXQ was the first K-Pop idol group to hold a concert in Malaysia, opening a pathway for other K-Pop groups to perform in this country such as Girls Generation, Super Junior and Wonder Girls (Hariati, 2012). Overall, 47 K-Pop idols were named, ranging from individual artists, idol groups and idol bands, mainly from the 2nd Generation (early 2000's) to the 4th Generation (present) groups. 93% of the respondents were fans of idol groups such as BTS, SEVENTEEN and EXO; five (5%) preferred idol bands such as DAY6 and FT Island while only two (2%) were fans of individual artists, namely IU and Ailee.

The popularity of K-Drama and K-Pop ignited interest in Korean food, inadvertently leading to the opening of many Korean restaurants in Malaysia such as Mr Dakgalbi, K-Fry, Seoul Garden, Pelicana and many others. 280 respondents named 23 favourite Korean traditional food such as *tteokbokki* (rice cake), noodles like *ramyeon* and *jjajangmyeon*, and variety of stew (*jjigae*) such as *kimchi jjigae*, *soondubu jjigae* (tofu stew), and *budae jjigae* (army stew). Other familiar K-Food that made the list was *kimbap*, a dish that is similar to Japanese *sushi*, *bulgogi* (stir-fried meat) and *dakgalbi* (stir-fried chicken).

Additionally, Korean Beauty products also flourished especially among the youth in Malaysia even though the responses recorded, 219, were slightly lower than the previous three Hallyu products. The respondents shared and bought K-Beauty products such as mask sheets, toner, volcanic clay mask, mist, perfume and essence. Among the popular brands are Innisfree (36.1%), The Saem (12.3%) and Etude House (8.2%).

The last component of Hallyu cultural products, K-Tech, collected the least responses and only nine (9) names of K-Tech products or brands were mentioned by the respondents. From 181 responses, 86% named Samsung as their favourite technology brand, and this include Samsung products such as Samsung Smart TV and mobile phones. Others named brands such as LG Electronics, Hyundai, G-Market, Kia motors, water dispenser brands like Coway and Cuckoo, and other high-end technology features, such as Korea's high-end toilet bidet and door security.

Reasons why they like Hallyu Products

The respondents were asked to choose one Hallyu cultural product that they most liked, and why. Figure 4 showed a clear analysis of the respondents' choices.

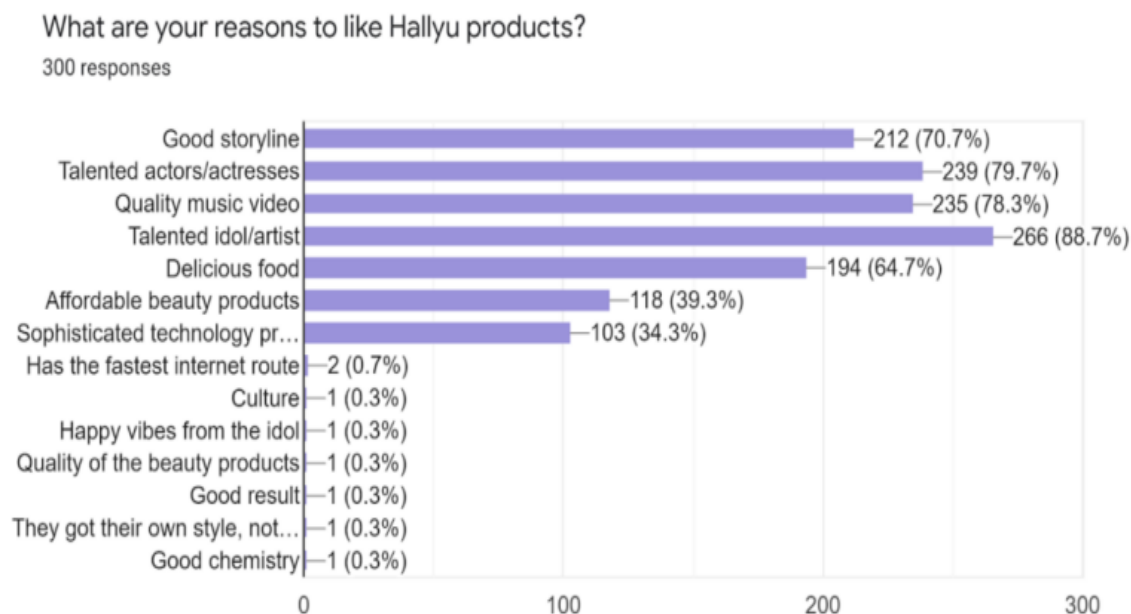


Figure 4: Reasons why respondents like Hallyu products

For K-Drama, a significant number of respondents (70.7%) selected "good storyline" and (79.7%) "talented actor/actresses" as the reasons why they like K-Drama. One respondent shared that "good chemistry" between actors was the reason that encouraged her to like K-Drama. Meanwhile, since a majority of the respondents were fans of K-Pop, the highest frequency of factors associated with K-Pop were "quality music video" and "talented idol/artist". Two respondents shared their reasons for liking K-Pop; one thought that the "idols bring her happiness" while another believed that the "idols are uniquely charismatic without copying others". The respondents also agreed that "K-Food items were delicious", and though none of them chose K-Technology as their favourite product, they still acknowledged it as "sophisticated technological products". K-Beauty, in particular, received a fair amount of responses and was appreciated for its "affordable price, quality and the promising results it gave to consumers".

DISCUSSION

Impact of Hallyu culture on young female's attitude

The discussion focused on the attitude of young females in Malaysia towards Hallyu culture. Different people reserved different judgment and thoughts when it comes to the purpose of consuming any products. It was apparent that the respondents have positive attitudes towards Korean. Most admitted they like watching Korean dramas as the storyline depicted real-life situations and contained values that resonated well with young females in Malaysia, for example, Reply 1988, a nostalgic drama portraying a real-life relationship between friends and family. This echoed earlier findings by Gan (2019) and Juliana, Hassan & Nor Hafezah (2018) that similarity to real people that touches dominantly on human sensitivity such as lifestyle, value and family has propelled the success of Korean dramas in Malaysia. Korean dramas were said to satisfy Asian audiences' emotional needs as they were easily assimilated into a similar lifestyle, cultural proximity and expressiveness (Juliana, Hassan & Nor Hafezah, 2018, p.13).

Similar to K-Drama, K-Pop also received positive responses from young females where fewer "No" answers were given. As one of the most successful Hallyu products that garnered interest from the younger generation in Malaysia, Korean idols and celebrities showcased creativity and enthusiasm in their music videos, and imparting great values where they could even become the ambassador/idol for the youth. For instance, in conjunction with the 75th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2020, BTS represented UNICEF with its "BTS Love Yourself" Campaign. BTS delivered a heartfelt message to the youth who were struggling during the pandemic to remind that they were not alone in facing the depression and frustration during the unprecedented time of COVID-19 (The Jakarta Post, 24 September 2020). There was a high probability (88%) that the respondents will continue to like K-Pop. Ideally, the positive values portrayed by the Korean celebrities construed the real concept of soft power which was essential to entice public opinion of the Korean culture.

Besides being influenced by K-Drama, another driving factor that encouraged people to try out Korean traditional food was the *mukbang* videos, a popular eating show in South Korea. Of the total respondents, 50% admitted to trying K-Food after watching the mukbang videos. There were 169 respondents who claimed that K-Food suits their palate while the rest were uncertain (33%), and those likely to dislike the taste of K-Food formed the least percentage (10.3%). However, despite this uncertainty, there was a high possibility that the respondents would try K-Food recipes in their own homes. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the respondents stated that they occasionally had Korean food, and 28% had Korean food sometimes. Only a small percentage (9%) of young females admitted to having Korean food often. The craze over Korean cuisine even drove Malaysian fast-food chains such as McDonald, Texas Chicken and Domino's Pizza to introduce Korean-fused items in their menus (The Malaysian Reserve, 29 July 2019) to tap further into the local market.

As mentioned in the previous section, the attitude responses for K-Beauty and K-Tech were slightly lower compared to other Hallyu products. Two main reasons the respondents bought K-Beauty and K-Tech products were because of the quality (50%) and good reputation of the brands (67%). Meanwhile, those who answered "No" and "Maybe" were unlikely to purchase or use these products. When K-Beauty in Malaysia began to be popular in 2014 under AmorePacific, Korea's renown cosmetic company, Etude House became the first Korean cosmetic line-up that reached Malaysia, followed by Laneige, Innisfree and Mamonde. Malaysians are typically exposed to tropical climate with long humidity, and certain Etude House brands incorporated skincare-makeup combination that are made specially for Asian skin. Positive judgement towards K-Beauty in this study is parallel to what Bervin (2019) mentioned that K-Beauty promised better results and more variety for different type of skins.

In 2020, Samsung Electronics was honoured as the 1st in Asia's Top 1000 Brands, and that was for ten consecutive years. Samsung produces vast variety of electronic devices such as smartphones, washing machine, refrigerator, and flatscreen television, among others. While Samsung remained the trusted brand in Malaysia in general, the respondents gave the least responses to K-Tech presumably because of the preference towards other brands such as Apple and Panasonic which came in 2nd and 3rd after Samsung for Asia's Top 1000 Brands 2020 (TechNave, 2020). Nonetheless, even though K-Tech received the least responses, the respondents still acknowledged the sophistication of Korean brands.

When asked to elaborate, the respondents stated their willingness to continue purchasing, buying and using K-Beauty, but there was a high uncertainty in doing so when it came to K-Technology. This consumer behaviour depended on the level of respondent's engagement with K-Pop and K-Drama; whereby respondents were more inclined to support products in which their favourite celebrities were ambassadors. Since the purchasing behaviour was majorly driven by the idol factor, that explained the lack, or, selective purchase of K-Tech products among the respondents.

Impact of Hallyu culture on young female's behaviour

The two biggest key influence of behavioural changes among the respondents was the media and technology. Information and updates on Hallyu culture happened every day through the vast usage of the internet across the world, the push factor in the globalization process that helped the spread of Hallyu culture in Malaysia.

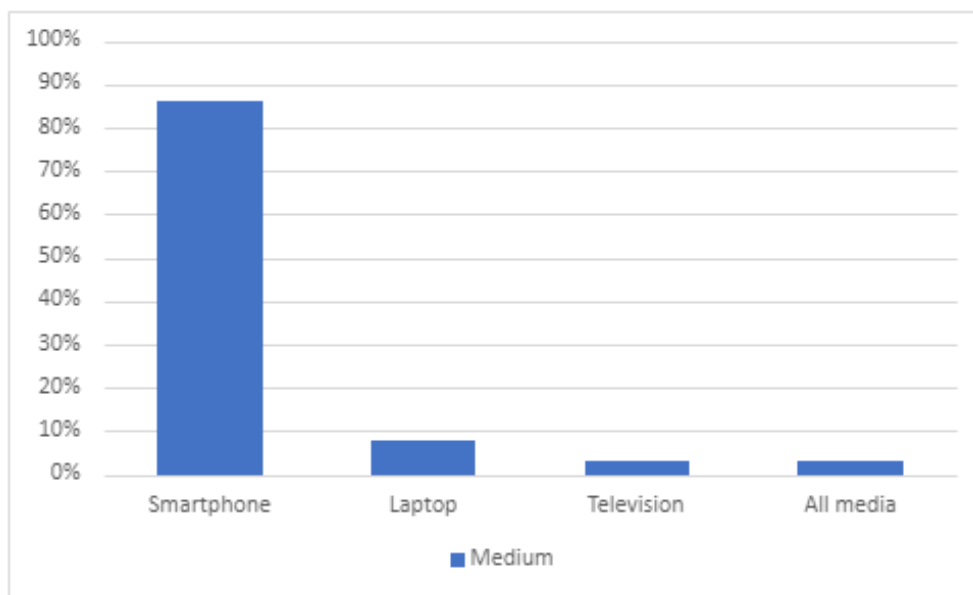


Figure 5: Medium used to watch/listen/learn about Hallyu products

Figure 5 recorded that as high as 86% of young females used smartphones to watch, listen and learn about Hallyu products. In addition, respondents were asked to choose more than one social media platform that they used to share information related to Hallyu products. Instagram had the highest frequency, followed by Twitter, and WhatsApp. These three platforms in general are the most engaging, and the Korean celebrities have their own social accounts to interact with fans by updating their pictures on Instagram and status on Twitter. Meanwhile, on WhatsApp, fans created their own groupchat to interact with each and discuss their favourite idols. Smartphones became the most used medium obviously due to their convenience of mobility and smart features that provide information to humans just with a tap of their fingers. 8% and 3% of respondents used laptops and televisions respectively to gain information. Televisions used to be the first media that broadcasted elements of Hallyu, but over the years, the importance of televisions as the medium to disseminate information have dwindled and usurped by smartphones. Most countries in Southeast Asia that are actively following Hallyu such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore are using the streaming platforms instead of TV. However, TV viewership in the Philippines remained the highest among other Southeast Asia countries, especially during the containment of pandemic period (Nadhirah, Tan & Raul, 2020). Only 3% of respondents stated they used all the above-mentioned media interchangeably to watch Korean movies and drama or listening to Korean pop music.

Involvement with Hallyu-related products

Table 1 showed the time spent by young females in Malaysia watching K-Drama or listening to K-Pop music every week where the highest frequency recorded was more than six hours (39%), slightly lower for between four to six hours (38.3%) while only 22.7% spent one to three hours. The significant amount of time allotted on watching or listening to Hallyu products fit the culture of binge-watching foreign dramas that were easily accessible as they were made available on digital platforms such as Netflix, Viu, and Amazon Prime Video.

Table 1: Time spent watching K-Drama/K-Pop per week

Time spent	Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative Percent
1-3 hours	68	22.7	22.7
4-6 hours	115	38.3	61.0
More than 6 hours	117	39.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	

The clustered graph in Figure 6 indicated that the 19 - 24 years old age group spent the most time watching K-Drama and K-Pop per week. This could be related to their occupation as most were comprised of university students whose time was more flexible than those working. The lower graph pattern for between 25 - 30 years old age group could be explained by the lack of time to indulge in such pastimes as they were working, thus their activities were restricted by their working hours. There are also those who belonged in 15 - 18 age group who spent more than 4 hours due to factor of the pandemic. When they are already done with online classes, their schedule is more flexible and unaccounted for. Generally, most of these age groups spent a lot of time with K-Drama and K-Pop. Therefore, it is important to know if these spent times on Hallyu products are affecting other responsibilities of young females. Based on the conducted survey, 67% believed that they are managing their time fairly, 22% did not spend more time on Hallyu, and there is only 11% who did spend more time on Hallyu than their other responsibilities.

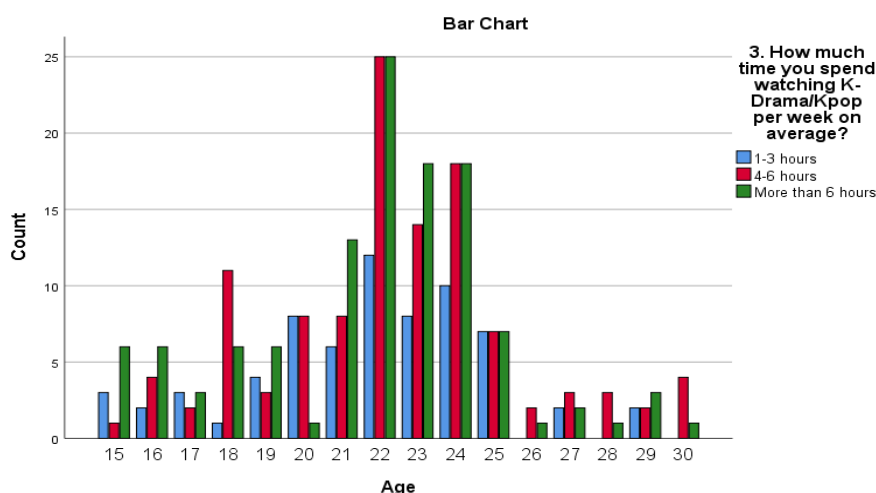


Figure 6: Age vs time spent watching K-Drama and K-Pop per week

Table 2: Amount of money spent on Hallyu products

Money spent (RM)	K-Drama	K-Pop	K-Food	K-Beauty	K-Tech	Not spending
0 - 100	9	95	25	22		40
101 - 500	4	67	1	19		
501 - 1000		16				
> 1000		1			1	
Total/%	13 (4%)	179 (60%)	26 (9%)	41 (14%)	1 (0.33%)	40 (13.33%)

The respondents also shared the amount of money spent on Hallyu cultural products, and the amounts varied across all five products. The results showed that the product that most young females spent on was K-Pop (60%), followed by K-Drama (45%), K-Beauty (14%), K-Food (9%) and K-Tech (0.33%). However, quite a number of them also did not spend on any of the products at all (13.33%).

Interestingly, as shown in Table 2, the amount spent on K-Pop products showed quite a huge gap, ranging from RM50 to RM5000. Some shared details of the items they bought, such as K-Pop merchandise, albums, photo cards, and concert tickets that could be worth more than RM500. Money spent on K-Drama items consisted of DVD set box, photo book, and subscription payment to online streaming worth RM15 to RM20. Meanwhile, K-Beauty items consist of makeup and skincare products from various brands. Similarly, spendings on K-Food

products included dining at Korean restaurants and purchase of imported Korean food from the supermarket. Only one respondent spent on K-Technology worth RM2000, while the rest did not make any spending on Hallyu cultural products at all.

This spending behaviour could be justifiably explained by demographic factors, specifically age group and employment status, whereby respondents who spent money on Hallyu products were the ones already working or university students who have pocket money either from parents, student's loans or part-time jobs. Only a small number of respondents aged 15 to 18 spent money on Hallyu products, and their purchases were also limited to items worth less than RM100. This trend reflected the lack of money for spending among this age group as they were still in high school.

Behavioural changes and thoughts

The Korean society set a certain characteristics that determined the "ideal" beauty standard to the extent that it has set the standard of beauty for Asians. They believed pretty faces and good appearances were the keys to success. The idea of what "true beauty" looks like was further enhanced by the media which dominated the life and breath of the youth. Emphasis on the importance of appearance consequently boosted the production of high-quality makeup products as well as cosmetic surgeries and expedite the sale of Korean beauty products in the Asian market. In comparison to other foreign brands that emphasised the stereotypical look with arched eyebrows and heavy contour, K-Beauty highlights the natural colours that incorporated smoothly with the skin to create porcelain-like texture and appear younger than the age (Bervin, 2019). Thus, respondents were asked if the contents they had encountered before made them thought of complying with the Korean beauty standard. 14% often thought of doing so, 36% only thought of it sometimes, 14% rarely thought that way while 32% did not put much thought on it at all. This negate the claim that with the growing influence of Hallyu, young females could not resist the urge to wanting the skin of Korean celebrities, especially the glass skin, the recent trend in K-Beauty. They might have thought about it, but the figures showed that the majority did not succumb to the temptations.

Finally, the respondents were asked to self-assess their involvement with Hallyu culture. Overall, 52% rated themselves as a moderate audience, 26% as a casual audience, where they watched, listened or used Hallyu cultural products casually, but without any attachment or deep engagement. Roughly 1/4, or 26%, claimed they are devoted audience, and this explained their willingness to invest a lot of time and money in Hallyu products as shown in the tables and figures above. The high rate of involvement and clear intention to continue to consume Hallyu cultural products showed there was no sign that the Hallyu phenomenon is diminishing, as evidence in the demands for Hallyu cultural products like K-Beauty that have steadily risen since 2018, propelling AmorePacific to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Shopee Malaysia in order to solidify its online presence in Southeast Asian beauty market.

CONCLUSION

The findings managed to classify types of Hallyu cultural products popular among young females in Malaysia. Across the demographic profiles, the majority of respondents have the strongest inclination towards K-Pop, followed by K-Drama, K-Food, K-Beauty and K-Technology. Most significant was the prominence of K-Pop influence on the respondents. The Hallyu phenomenon had influence on the attitude and behaviour of young females in the consumption of Korean cultural products. Overall, the respondents have a "positive" attitude toward Hallyu culture in which it was not as detrimental as claimed by the anti-Hallyus, and the Hallyu brands are still "trending". While the amount of time and money that some spent on Hallyu products could be described as "unnecessarily excessive", they maintained that they were still able to draw a clear line between entertainment and responsibilities.

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