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## Research Article

### Exploring Hallyu Content as South Korea's Soft Power: Its Influence on the Attitudes of Students of a State University in Cavite, Philippines

Benjie M. Banug Jr, John Paul G. Agustin, Precious Wrendy Lyn R. Dangué, Princess Izzy O. Deocariza, Kristine Mae P. Galpo, Katrina H. Lumanlan, Kyara M. Millian, Wencelle Mae R. Quitoriano, Haji B. Regalado, Jessa Thea A. Salon, Gionna Collyne G. Santos, Iddy Louise S. Saqui, Marnel Ann Vendiola, Jaysi T. Corpuz, Angel Rea Mae Y. Martinez, Elvira E. Pasagui

Cavite State University, Indang, Calabarzon, Philipina

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#### \*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

[benjie.banug@cvsu.edu.ph](mailto:benjie.banug@cvsu.edu.ph)

#### ABSTRACT

The Hallyu highlighted the global rise of Korean culture, particularly K-pop and K-dramas, and served as a crucial soft power for South Korea. Hallyu boosted South Korea's international influence via culture, without coercion. Hallyu significantly influenced students' socio-cultural attitudes and lifestyles, enhancing South Korea's soft power and economic image. This study sought to answer the central question: How does the Korean Wave (Hallyu), as a form of South Korea's soft power, influence the attitudes of undergraduate students at Cavite State University, Cavite, Philippines toward South Korea? Adopting a descriptive-qualitative research design, this study examined how students at Cavite State University engage with Hallyu content and how these experiences influenced their appreciation of South Korean culture and global image. A total of 64 participants were selected through purposive sampling, and data were collected using self-constructed interview questionnaires and analyzed using thematic analysis. The research indicated that students favored K-pop and K-dramas due to engaging narratives, which served as coping mechanisms. These preferences fostered new attitudes, including nonverbal respect and fashion changes that reflected Korean aesthetics, enhancing self-esteem. It also encouraged cultural integration, with students adopting the Korean language and values like tenacity and discipline. Participants appreciated the relevance of this content, noting life lessons and the portrayal of Korean artists. Many recognized Hallyu as a significant soft power that positively influenced South Korea's economy through tourism. The study concluded that Hallyu served as an effective soft power tool, reshaping students' socio-cultural identities and daily habits through engagement with K-pop and K-dramas. It promoted the adoption of Korean social ethics, aesthetic standards, and linguistic expressions. Additionally, Hallyu enhanced South Korea's global image and economic growth while fostering consumer awareness. Ultimately, it strengthened South Korea's international influence by merging Filipino and Korean identities.

**Keywords:** *Hallyu (Korean wave), soft power, socio-cultural appreciation, cultural integration, K-pop, South Korea*

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## **Introduction**

"Hall" Yu, popularly known as the Korean Wave, refers to the global spread and popularity of South Korean culture, particularly its pop music (K-pop), serialized dramas (K-dramas), and films. In the early 21st century, digital platforms, including social media, have played a crucial role in spreading Korean cultural content, driving the recent expansion of the Korean Wave and transforming South Korea into a global cultural powerhouse (Jin, 2024). This phenomenon significantly influences youth attitudes by promoting cultural exchange and inspiring interest in Korean language, cuisine, and traditions, thus enhancing South Korea's global standing.

The Hallyu Wave, fueled by digital platforms and social media, has become a potent soft-power tool for South Korea, boosting its economy and international relations. For background, the term "soft power" was first introduced by Joseph Nye. It is the capacity to use a nation's foreign policy, political ideals, and culture to persuade and attract people rather than to use force. It is a non-coercive form of diplomacy that fosters cooperation and kindness to accomplish goals, unlike hard power, which employs economic and military force.

Hallyu has become ingrained in Filipino popular culture, evident in the popularity of Korean clothing, skincare products, food, and even learning the language. Additionally, previous studies have shown that the Korean Wave has significantly influenced the youth in various countries. For instance, a qualitative study in Pakistan by Khalid (2024) found that young people constantly exposed to Korean culture tend to adopt certain behaviors, preferences, and even social values inspired by Korean entertainment. This shows how the Korean Wave extends beyond media consumption—it encourages lifestyle changes and shapes personal identity among its audience.

In a previous study conducted at Marinduque Midwest College by Semilla and Soriano (2017) identified the correlations between K-drama viewership and lifestyle changes among senior high school students, the study provided valuable quantitative insights into the lifestyle and behavioral impacts of Korean dramas on senior high school students, it lacks in-depth

exploration of the underlying motivations, contextual nuances, and potential influence on attitudes. The study identified factors influencing K-drama viewership and their impacts, but it lacks an exploration of why these factors are influential for each participant. The study suggested a different data collection such as in-depth interviews with open-ended questions that could explore the underlying reasons behind students' attractions and how these translate into lifestyle changes. Similarly, Posadas and Vargas (2021) studied students from Central Luzon State University and found that K-dramas made many students more interested in Korean habits, fashion, and entertainment. However, while these studies provide valuable evidence of Hallyu's impact, they offer limited insight into the underlying processes and meaning that shape these attitudes, they also focus more on general behavior and cultural exposure.

A descriptive-qualitative approach was highly applicable and was used in this study because there is a gap when it comes to an in-depth understanding of the complex and nuanced ways in which Hallyu content, as a form of South Korean soft power, shaped the attitudes, and worldviews of undergraduate students of the College of Economics, Management, and Development Studies (CEMDS) at Cavite State University – Don Severino Delas Alas Campus. Therefore, this research aimed to gain insights on how students interpret, experience, and internalize the influence of Hallyu in their personal and academic contexts, and how this popular culture phenomenon contributed to the understanding of international relations and cross-cultural interaction. This allowed the researchers to explore the underlying motivations, cultural meanings, and contextual factors that influenced their engagement with and interpretation of Hallyu; insights that quantitative methods alone cannot fully capture.

## **Research Questions**

1. What is the demographic profile of the participants in terms of age, year level, and program?
2. What Hallyu-related content did the participants prefer using?

3. What attitude do participants adopt from exposure to Hallyu-related content?
4. How has consuming Hallyu-related content shaped participants' attitudes toward Korean culture compared to before being exposed to it?
5. How does the participant's attitude toward Hallyu-related content contribute to CEMDS students and South Korea?

### Scope and Delimitation

The study aimed to examine the influence of Hallyu (Korean Wave) on the development of attitudes toward South Korea's international image and soft power. The main cultural elements of Hallyu studied were K-pop, K-dramas, Korean fashion, and Korean cuisine. The study participants were limited to undergraduate CEMDS students at Cavite State University – Don Severino Delas Alas Campus, given the relevance of their academic programs.

The study participants were limited to first- to fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in CEMDS at Cavite State University – Don Severino Delas Alas Campus during the school year 2025-2026. The study focused exclusively on Hallyu content and did not include pop culture from other countries. The study solely focused on participants' attitudes toward adopting South Korea, based on the Hallyu content they are exposed to, and its contribution to South Korea's soft power and to CEMDS students. Participants were restricted to undergraduate CEMDS students only; participants from other college departments within the university, as well as individuals outside universities, were excluded from this research. This study was derived from the insights on the influence of Hallyu among CEMDS students, and its findings are based on a localized sample from Cavite State University – Don Severino Delas Alas Campus. This limits the generalizability of results to broader populations. Cultural preferences, media access, and academic context may vary across regions and institutions. Comparative studies may be considered across multiple campuses or regions to validate and expand its findings.

### Significance of the Study

The researchers sought to discuss how the Hallyu, as South Korea's soft power, influenced the attitudes of undergraduate CEMDS students at Cavite State University – Don Severino Delas Alas Campus. The researchers believe that the results and findings of this study served as baseline information and was beneficial to the following:

**Students.** The outcome of this study would help them assess the influence of Hallyu on their attitudes toward the culture of the state of origin. As well as aiding students to discover its role as a soft power of South Korea and its contribution to building a global image through cultural exchange.

**Cavite State University.** The findings of this study would serve as a foundation for the institution in creating cultural exchange programs and in designing curricular and extra-curricular programs better aligned with local and international cultural studies. It may also contribute to the institution's mission, as this study benefits their students and shapes them to become globally competitive.

**Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).** Findings of the study may serve as one of the bases for HEIs in integrating Hallyu-related content into intercultural communication or media literacy programs to foster global awareness.

**Policymakers.** The result of this study may contribute to understanding the effectiveness of Hallyu as soft power, its role in shaping global image, and the opportunities it offers to the state of origin in diplomatic and international relations. It helps policymakers strategize and allocate resources effectively by crafting policies that improve cultural engagement and a foreign policy aligned with the state's national interests. Additionally, findings of the study shall provide insights to strengthen international relations and economic cooperation as policymakers can leverage cultural exports like Hallyu to strengthen bilateral ties, promote tourism, and enhance national branding. Recognizing youth as active agents of cultural exchange, these insights support the strategic use of soft power in shaping international perceptions and cooperation.

**Future Researchers.** The results of this study would serve as baseline information for those interested in exploring research on strategies for shaping a country's international image by promoting its culture through soft power—cultural exchange — and its growing success in international markets.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the terms are defined as follows:

**Attitude:** It refers to the evolving set of beliefs, preferences, perceptions, behavioral responses, and emotional responses shaped by the exposure to Hallyu-related content. In this study, it is reflected through the cultural appreciation, actions, and adoption of South Korean cultural practices by the undergraduates of CEMDS.

**Cultural Influence:** The influence of South Korea's shared beliefs, social norms, and customs on the perception and attitude of the individuals. Cultural influence in this study would be used to examine how the Korean Wave shapes students' awareness and perspectives.

**Hallyu (Korean Wave):** The flourishing dissemination and popularity of South Korean culture globally in the forms of music, dramas, cuisine, language, fashion, and beauty trends. In this study, Hallyu represented the cultural movement that shapes an individual's attitude toward South Korea.

**Hallyu-related content:** This refers to South Korean media and entertainment content consumed by CEMDS undergraduate students, such as K-pop, K-dramas, Korean fashion, and Korean cuisine. In this study, this served as indicators of the said students' attitude toward South Korea.

**Socio-cultural appreciation:** This refers to the genuine respect and understanding for elements of South Korean culture. It highlighted in this study on how the students would interpret and value Korean culture as part of their global cultural awareness.

**Soft Power:** The ability to influence and shape others' perceptions not through the use of traditional coercive tools but through cultural attractions. In this study, it would be utilized to form a cultural appreciation that

promotes understanding and connection in the form of entertainment and shared cultural experiences.

**State of Origin:** This refers to South Korea as the country from which Hallyu, or Korean wave, originated. In this study, it served as the primary source of cultural influences through various Hallyu-related contents.

**Students:** This refers to the learners under the College of Economics, Management, and Development Studies of Cavite State University Don Severino Delas Alas campus, who represented the younger generation often influenced by the global phenomena, specifically Hallyu, or Korean wave.

### **Review Of Related Literature**

This chapter presents a review of related literature that explored the influence of the Korean Wave, or Hallyu, on the participants' attitudes towards South Korea. This is to provide a foundation for the study by presenting previous research, theories, and findings related to the Hallyu as South Korea's soft power. This chapter aimed to provide a theoretical and conceptual foundation that guided the study, the local and foreign related literature, a synthesis of related studies to highlight key insights and patterns, and finally the research gap that identified what the study sought to address.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this section, an effort was made to establish the theoretical context, within which this research would proceed.

### **Soft Power Theory**

This study was primarily anchored on the Theory of Soft Power by James Nye Jr. This theory explained the country's ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercive pressure (Nye, 2017). It taught that a country, rather than using military forces, can also wield music, sports, and other cultural exports known as "soft power" to improve a state's global image, using it to attract partners and allies. Soft power paves the way to a nation's dedication to democratic ideals, respect for human rights, and adherence to the rule of law, thereby gaining admiration and legitimacy on the global stage (Saaida, 2023).

Those characteristics of soft power helped South Korea establish a positive image in the international community and get closer not just with states' governments but also with young people, including the Filipino youth, through Hallyu-related content as South Korea's soft power. According to Estoque (2022), Filipinos love a lot of things about Western culture and other Asian cultures, such as fast food, sitcoms, music, telenovelas, fashion, and beauty products, as well as many other things. And as cited by International IDEA (2020) from national data of the Philippines, more than 42% of Filipinos were under 18 years old and were poised to become influential participants in the Philippines' democracy. Moreover, the study of Bariquit et al (2025) illustrate the significant and multifaceted influence of Hallyu on the social behavior of Filipino young adults. Within this context, Hallyu's appeal is amplified, positioning South Korea as a cultural leader among young Filipinos. This study situates college students within this demographic, recognizing their potential as both consumers of culture and future participants in democratic processes.

South Korea's soft power strategy through Hallyu has been particularly effective in Southeast Asia, where cultural affinity and regional proximity enhance receptivity. Oliveira (2025) concluded that Hallyu represents a paradigm of soft power that blends cultural attractiveness, institutional support, and global market dynamics. In the Philippines, Hallyu-related content fosters not only admiration for South Korea's cultural creativity but also broader acceptance of its democratic values and global image.

This theory was essential in understanding how Hallyu-related content as soft power attracted and influenced the global youth audience, including the College of Economics, Management, and Development Studies, and described its characteristics that suggested a non-coercive means of diplomacy by South Korea, thereby increasing its acceptability among the students and further support for it as soft power.

This theoretical foundation positions the study as an extension of Soft Power Theory on youth cultural consumption in Southeast Asia.

While literature on soft power focuses on state-to-state relations, this research emphasizes the role of youth audiences as critical agents of cultural diplomacy. By analyzing how Hallyu shapes perceptions among Filipino students, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the reach of soft power, which magnifies its relevance in international politics and in everyday cultural experiences.

### **Media Effects Theory**

The media was associated with cultural diplomacy, a key component of soft power, as its primary driving force in disseminating the image that the country wanted to present in the international community. According to Bibi et al., (2025), media served as an essential medium for disseminating cultural values and influenced attitudes across borders. In the context of Hallyu-related content as a soft power, the media played a crucial role in disseminating its various contents.

This subsection presented two supporting Media Effects theory which were the **Use and Gratification Theory** and **Cultivation Theory** in order to describe the pattern on students' consumption of Hallyu-related media contents. These theories also helped the soft power described how it attracted the students and influenced their attitude.

### **Use and Gratification Theory**

The theory best explained why students were drawn to certain Hallyu-related content. According to Blumler and Katz (1974, as cited in Sichach, 2023) that people did not passively consume media. Rather, they actively chose what they wanted to learn, read, and listen to. Furthermore, audiences understood why they wanted to consume media and utilized that knowledge to choose media material that met their wants and preferences (Vinney, 2024).

In 1973, Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas developed a prominent framework consisting of five social and psychological needs satisfied through media consumption, which included:

- a) *Cognitive needs* - the necessity to obtain information and knowledge.

ex: Learning Korean language on YouTube, for some reason, such as a plan to move to the state of origin.

- b) *Affective needs* - the necessity of having emotional experiences is important.  
ex: Watching Korean drama which somehow reflected the audiences' status.
- c) *Integrative needs* - the mix of cognitive and affective needs),  
ex: Watching media content regarding a tutorial on using a Korean brand cosmetic product for the purpose of boosting self-esteem.
- d) *Social integrative* - the need to strengthen the relationship with others.  
ex: Watching Reply 1988, a K-drama which provided social relation lessons.
- e) *Escapism* - the desire to unwind and find an escape by diminishing one's self-awareness.  
ex: Watching Korean food ASMR on a social media platform.

The study of Falgoust et al., (2022) agreed with the five aforementioned above but in the context of students, who identified specific motivations that drove college students to participate in viral social media challenges on TikTok, including entertainment, convenience, socialization, seeking or spreading information, social support, and escapism. Although the study is limited to the TikTok challenge, a media instrument, it did provide motivational factors in selecting media content. To relate this in the context of Filipino youth or students with Hallyu-related content, for instance in K-drama, among the most impactful Hallyu-related content, the study of Posadas and Vargas (2021) concluded that it provided quality content including the story line, theme, and characters which fulfilled the satisfaction and interest of youth as it is relatable to the culture of the young generation thus made it relevant among them.

In addition to the motivation in selecting Hallyu-related content. In language learning, learners were driven by varied motivations: some wanted to understand Korean content without subtitles, while others saw language proficiency as beneficial for academic or career goals (Leon et al., 2025).

The findings from the provided articles enabled the Gratification Theory to describe why the Hallyu-related content is relevant among undergraduate CEMDS students of Cavite State University – Don Severino Delas Alas Campus as media consumers and explained how the Hallyu-related content led to specific attitudes that the students may adopt.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Lastly, the Cultivation Theory. The central hypothesis of cultivation analysis was that people who spent more time watching television perceived the real world in a way as most commonly depicted in television messages, as compared to those who watch less television but are otherwise comparable in major demographic features (Gerbner, 1998).

Moreover, with regard to the media consumption by the CEMDS students, this provided a lens to understand how repeated exposure to a particular Hallyu-related content could influence students' attitude toward the country of origin, South Korea. That is, according to Bae et al., (2024), if the students were repeatedly exposed to the positive portrayals of countries' culture, they might develop positive attitudes toward the country of origin. For instance, the Hallyu (Korean wave) had an impact on the students' lives through the incorporation of Korean products into their daily consumption (Pedroso, 2023). The way students perceived the Korean wave has fostered an interest in and comprehension of Korean culture.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The researchers developed a conceptual framework based on the results of this study to explain the study's flow. As shown, the common pattern of the study was soft power, specifically, Hallyu-related content which included K-pop, K-drama, Variety shows and K-movies. These Hallyu-related content could influence the attitude of the students, for example, Expanded Korean Cultural Awareness and Increased Curiosity and Desire for Korean Cultural Exploration. These two influences could have a positive side which were the adoption of Nonverbal Respect, Aesthetic and Confidence, Linguistic Integration and Routine, Adoption of Korean Standards of Living and Developed

Attitudes towards Korean Culture. As well as, these influences towards attitude could have a negative side similar to Critical Awareness.

Meanwhile, Hallyu-related content could contribute to economic growth and enhance South Korea's global image.

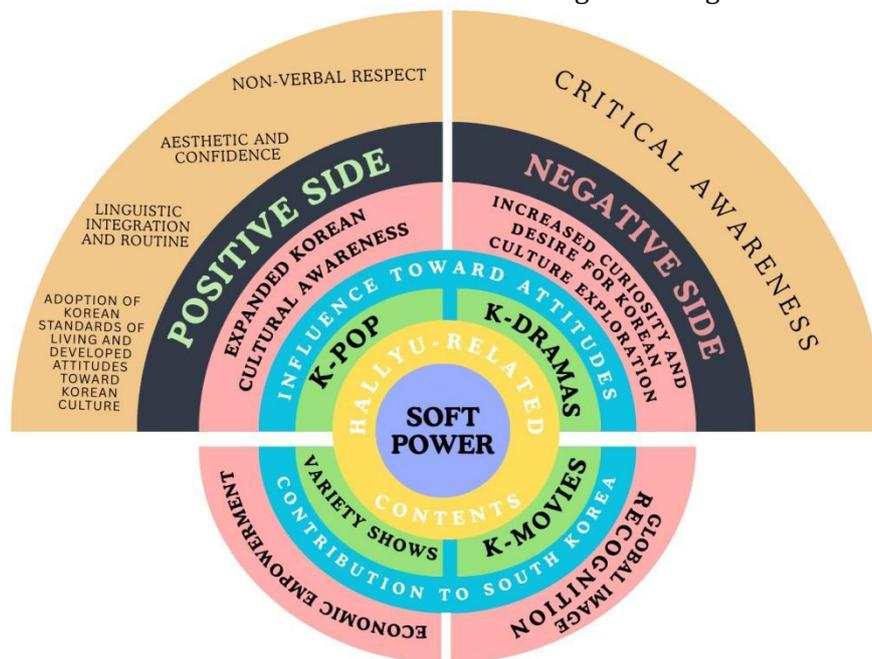


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### Review of Related Literature

The Korean Wave, commonly known as Hallyu, continues to influence global audiences, particularly youth, through various media forms such as K-pop, K-dramas, cuisine, and fashion. This section presents studies that explore the types of Hallyu content audiences engage with, the attitudes formed through exposure to these cultural products, and the broader influence of Hallyu as a form of South Korea's soft power.

#### Mostly engaged Hallyu content

According to Bhatti et al., (2022), K-pop was found to be the most engaged form of Hallyu content among young audiences. The study revealed that youth were highly involved in K-pop through listening to music, watching performances, and participating in online fandom activities. K-pop remained one of the main forms of entertainment among the younger generation.

A similar study by Sarma (2023) found that many young audiences had maintained long-term engagement with K-pop. The study found that fans continued to follow artists,

stream music, and join fan communities, showing that K-pop remained a consistent part of their daily media habits and social interactions.

Yalçın and Mutlu (2020) found that K-dramas also played a major form of Hallyu content engagement. Korean dramas continued to attract a large audience, especially young female viewers, because of their popularity and strong presence on various streaming platforms. K-drama viewing became a common leisure activity among many fans of Korean culture.

In the Philippines, Punzalan et al., (2023) found that Ilokano youth actively engaged with K-pop content such as music, videos, and merchandise. The study showed that they frequently engaged with Korean music, videos, and merchandise. It also found that female participants were more active in engaging with K-pop compared to male participants.

Aside from media, Korean cuisine, particularly samgyeopsal, also became part of Hallyu engagement in the Philippines. Ong et al., (2022) reported that samgyeopsal gained popularity, with many Korean restaurants opening in the country. The study showed that Filipinos

became more engaged with Korean food as part of their interest in Korean culture and lifestyle.

### **Attitudes developed by the participant's exposure to Hallyu**

To explore the In a study of participants' attitudes, Kim, H., and Cho, S. (2024) showed how the Korean Wave's cultural exports can shape the world. It changes languages and cultures, and it makes people think differently about who they are and how they connect in the digital world. As Hallyu grows, studying it helps participants understand culture, language, media, and globalization.

As mentioned According to Park et al. (2021), The Korean Wave's appeal lies in its aesthetics, messaging, and unique qualities, aligning with previous research. Attractive visuals, engaging storylines, and meaningful lyrics resonate with audiences. Participants find Korean culture's values accessible and appreciate the novelty, noting both similarities and differences with their own cultures.

A study by Kirin (2025) also reveals that K-pop culture exerts a notable influence on students' lifestyle practices, particularly in music and dance. Students demonstrate a high frequency of engagement with K-pop songs and choreography; driven by the music's melodic appeal and the positive emotions it elicits. The innovative and energetic choreography is a significant draw, motivating active participation. They indicate a substantial level of K-pop cultural adoption among students, suggesting a significant influence on their lifestyles.

Another study of Kiaer and Kim (2024) revealed how different levels of learners perceived non-verbal politeness differently. Beginners were unaware of Korean pragmatics and the significance of semiotic resources. While intermediate learners demonstrated a better grasp of non-verbal behaviour, it still lacked nuance. Advanced participants displayed a thorough understanding of non-verbal politeness.

In the Philippines, Pedroso and Nifras (2023) has stated that the Korean or Hallyu Wave has significantly influenced students' lives through the incorporation of Korean products into their daily consumption habits.

This phenomenon has shaped students' attitudes toward the Korean Wave, fostering an increased interest in and understanding of Korean culture. The widespread recognition of Korean cultural exports serves as an illustrative example of Filipino perceptions of K-dramas/movies, K-pop, and Korean products in general.

Miguel and Chavez (2023) also highlighted that Filipino fans readily embrace multimedia presentations of popular culture, consistently supporting K-pop across its first four generations. Each generation has cultivated a strong fandom in the Philippines, drawn to the vibrant aesthetic rooted in Korean culture. This enduring popularity significantly influences the country's multimedia landscape for years to come.

### **Influence of Hallyu as Soft Power on Attitudes of Students**

According to Kim (2022), South Korean culture has become increasingly well-known around the world in recent decades through government-led cultural initiatives that shifted from economic tactics to national branding and soft power. According to his article "The Growth of South Korean Soft Power and Its Geopolitical Implications", the successful democratization and economic growth of South Korea, the competitiveness of its creative output, and the development of digital technology are the three main facets of its soft power.

Research conducted in Metro Manila by Shelei et al. (2024) examined the behaviors and experiences of Filipino K-pop fans amid the Korean Wave's growing influence worldwide, including in the Philippines. The study claims that Filipino followers undergo remote social adaptation, adopting aspects of Korean culture without direct interaction. The study highlights how Filipino fans' enthusiasm for K-pop promotes intercultural communication and cultural adaptation.

The important influence of Hallyu on young Filipinos was investigated in the paper "The Influence of Korean Wave Among the Social Studies Students of UM Tagum College: A Qualitative Inquiry" by Aporbo et al., (2023). The results show that students are increasingly relating to Korean culture, adopting its

behaviors and patterns while reflecting on their Filipino identity. Amid concerns about transculturation, particularly in the Filipino and Korean film industries, many people said they wanted to learn Korean and adopt its ideals. Participants emphasized the importance of valuing one's own cultural history while also appreciating other cultures.

Despite the appeal of Hallyu Wave in South Korea, it also has detrimental effects on both domestic and foreign audiences. Kim (2025) argues that the aims of soft power favors big businesses and causes social and economic inequalities. Media like *Squid Game* and *Parasite* serves as examples of this. Additionally, the entertainment sector deals with problems of exploitative contracts and mental health disorders, which raise stress levels and increase of suicide rates of K-pop singers and actors. There is a culture of competition, and perfectionism worsens due to the government's push to expand the entertainment industry, causing a crisis of imperfection.

A study conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, examined how exposure to the Korean Wave influenced the eating habits and body image of female high school students to demonstrate its detrimental impact on global beauty standards. The findings demonstrated that regular exposure to K-pop and related media had a significant impact on youths' poor body image and higher risk of eating disorders. This suggests that the idealized physical appearances depicted in Korean media affect young girls' perceptions of their own bodies. (Habibah et al., 2021)

### **Contribution of attitudes to South Korea's Soft Power**

Lim (2025) discussed that Filipino millennials are greatly influenced by Korean popular culture, demonstrating the trends of media globalization. K-food's popularity has grown due to its availability in cities and its portrayal in dramas. Millennials embrace aspects of Korean culture in lifestyle and aesthetics. Still, they do so selectively, especially in fashion and beauty, which are influenced by cultural and financial considerations. Qualitative reflections reveal a strong emotional bond among many respondents, who identify with K-dramas. This

shows that engagement with Korean culture goes beyond mere consumption to include ambitions and personal growth.

South Korean entertainment has been gaining global prominence, and its impact in the United States is expected to grow in 2025, with additional content in the works. Rising interest and expanded fan bases have not only driven record sales for South Korean entertainment industries but also improved the country's brand image on the international stage (Intern, 2025).

According to Wullur et al., (2022), the influence of Hallyu, particularly K-pop, K-drama, and food significantly shaped students' perceptions of South Korea as a desirable tourist destination. Their study revealed that exposure to K-pop, K-dramas, and Korean cuisine each had a positive effect on students' intention to visit South Korea, suggesting that engagement with Hallyu content strengthened favorable attitudes toward the country. This indicates that the popularity of Korean culture contributed to South Korea's soft power by encouraging tourism through cultural attraction.

Leon et al. (2025) discussed the influence of Hallyu among Filipino learners which extends beyond entertainment, contributing to language learning and cultural understanding. The study revealed that exposure to Korean media, such as K-dramas, K-pop, and variety shows, facilitated incidental learning of Korean through repeated listening and engagement. Participants showed familiarity with Korean words, sentence patterns, and pronunciation even without formal education. Their motivation was driven by personal interest, social influence, and the desire to understand Korean content without subtitles. These findings indicate that Hallyu served as a medium for informal education and cultural exchange, and strengthened South Korea's soft power among Filipino audiences.

Oliveira (2025) averred that South Korea's rise during the Hallyu wave demonstrates that countries can improve their global reputation without resorting to force. It shows that cultural diplomacy, when aligned with a nation's holistic foreign policy and supported by strong institutions, can effectively influence international relations in today's media-centered

world. The Korean Wave (Hallyu) is more than just the spread of Korean culture. It's a smart strategy that changes how power is understood and used in a world shaped by identity, symbolism, and global media. Even as Hallyu receives increasing scholarly attention, a significant research gap remains regarding its workings within foreign policy frameworks.

A large portion of the literature focuses on its media or cultural aspects without adequately linking them to institutional, diplomatic, and geopolitical outcomes. Additionally, although South Korea's cultural exports are frequently praised for their global appeal, the difficulties, paradoxes, and constraints of using culture as a foreign policy tool have received less attention, especially in areas where Korean norms or representations may encounter opposition or ideological conflicts.

### **Synthesis of Related Literature**

The reviewed literature established K-pop as the dominant and most engaged form of Hallyu content among young audiences globally, driven by sustained activities like streaming and fandom participation (Bhatti et al., 2022; Sarma, 2023). In addition to K-pop, K-dramas continue to have a sizable fan base, especially among young girls, and are a popular pastime available on many streaming services (Yalçın and Mutlu, 2020). Local studies confirmed this emphasis on K-pop media and commerce in the Philippine context, citing higher engagement among females (Punzalan et al., 2023). Furthermore, Hallyu engagement continues to expand beyond media into lifestyle aspects, as evidenced by the growing popularity of Korean cuisine such as *samgyeopsal*, suggesting broader cultural immersion among Filipino fans (Ong et al., 2022).

According to the studies by Kim, H., and Cho, S. (2024), and Park et al. (2021), both agreed that Korean Waves successfully contributed to shaping South Korea's global image. Its effectiveness was the result of successful cultural exports such as language and culture. In line with these other studies, highlighting social, digital, and individual elements that incorporate Korean culture into everyday life is what propels the Korean wave (Hallyu) uptake. Kirin (2025) and Miguel and Chavez (2023)

found that individual knowledge, social media use, exposure to K-pop, and acceptance of K-pop were positively correlated. They also stated that social media improves the construction of cultural identities. Pedroso Nifras (2023) also details how the Hallyu Wave affected students' consumption patterns.

In this regard, Kim (2022) noted that several decades have passed since South Korea re-branded its national identity, leading to its successful technological development and rapid economic growth. Many studies have highlighted the success of South Korean cultural activities domestically and internationally, including those by Aporbo et al. (2023) and Shelei et al. (2024). In the Filipino communities, adaptation of South Korean dramas, K-Pop, variety shows, fashion, and culture are evident across local media. However, despite Hallyu's overwhelming success as South Korea's soft power, both Kim (2025) and Habibah et al. (2021) agreed that it has negative effects on consumers' mental health. They explained that it exploits people behind its success such as singers, artists, actors and actresses through mental and physical exhaustion that somehow leads to increasing number of suicide cases. Lastly, due to South Korea's high standard in beauty it affects audiences especially females and influences their view about their body and eating habits.

The literature strongly affirmed that the Hallyu wave is a strategic and highly effective tool for bolstering South Korea's soft power and enhancing its global reputation (Oliveira, 2025; Intern, 2025). This influence operated by cultivating favorable attitudes that transcend mere entertainment consumption. In particular, the allure of Korean culture has a direct positive impact on behavioral intentions, such as elevating the intention to visit among the exposed and making South Korea a desirable travel destination (Wullur et al., 2023). Particularly among Filipino millennials, personal participation is frequently selective yet leads to strong emotional ties and identification. This audience loves elements of Korean aesthetics and culture, such as K-food, and believes that participation goes beyond consumption to include aspirations and personal development (Lim, 2025).

According to the examined literature, Hallyu is a dominant cultural phenomenon driven by K-pop that deeply and sustainably engages young people, leading to lifestyle adoption and the development of personal identities and goals. This broad influence was a strategic and useful tool for South Korea's soft power, immediately boosting tourism intent, improving the country's international reputation, and encouraging inadvertent language acquisition. The industry's emphasis on rigid beauty standards, however, complicates this achievement by posing a real psychological risk to both performers and consumers. Thus, even though Hallyu is a strong cultural draw, it also poses a socio-psychological problem that needs more research.

### Research Gap

South Korea's popular culture, including K-pop, K-dramas, and other cultural products, influenced global culture, Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, has been the subject of several studies over the years. These studies revealed that this cultural influence strengthened South Korea's image and was used as soft power to promote its branding internationally. Despite this, the existing studies typically focused on the general consumer, their behaviors, and communities, with limited attention to the Philippine context of how South Korea's popular culture, or the Hallyu, influences the Filipino youth, particularly university students (Leon *et al.*, 2025; Lim, 2025). However, there remained a lack of studies on which specific Hallyu content students engaged with and how exposure shaped and developed their attitudes toward South Korea. The lack of academically focused studies is significant for university students because it helps them become culturally aware and informed on the importance of soft power. Additionally, few studies have explored this topic using an in-depth descriptive-qualitative approach to understand students' experiences and attitudes (Blas and Erestain, 2020; Leon *et al.*, 2025). By addressing the gap, this study assessed the influence of Hallyu, South Korea's

soft power, on the attitudes of undergraduate CEMDS students at Cavite State University – Don Severino Delas Alas Campus. Hence, popular culture continues to shape today's youth's attitudes.

### Methodology

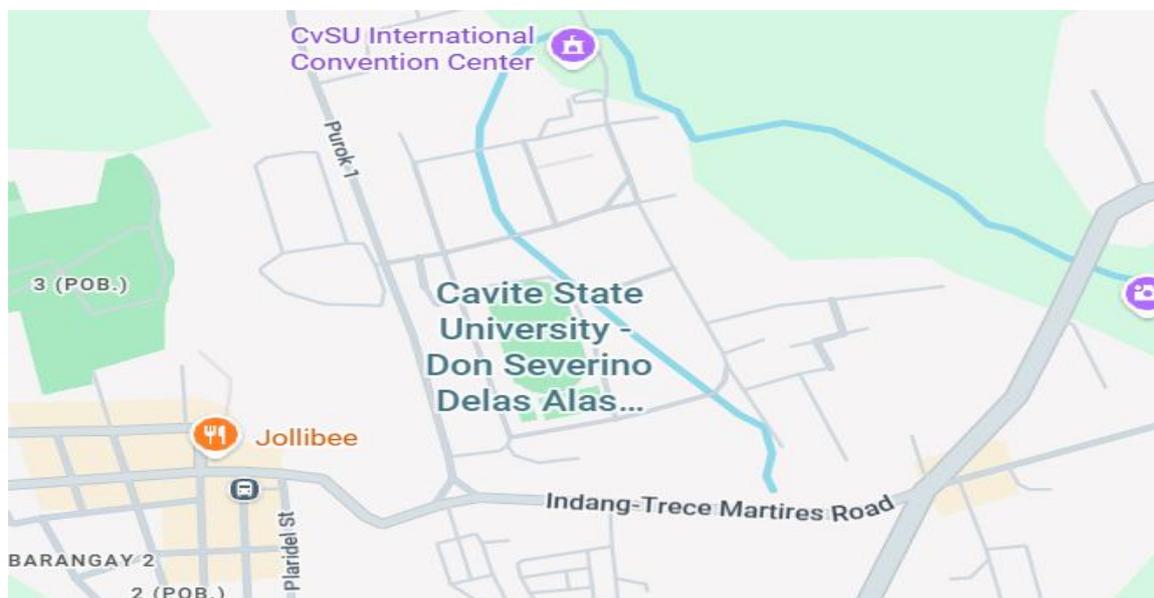
This chapter presents the research procedures that were used in the study. It discussed the research design, the research locale, population and sampling, and data-gathering procedure, as well as ethical considerations that the researchers applied in capturing the influence of Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, as a form of South Korea's soft power on the attitudes of undergraduate CEMDS students of Cavite State University – Don Severino Delas Alas Campus.

### Research Design

The researchers utilized a descriptive-qualitative research design to discuss how Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, functions as a form of South Korea's soft power, as interpreted by the undergraduate students of CEMDS at Cavite State University – Don Severino Delas Alas Campus. A descriptive-qualitative approach allowed the researchers to present a detailed account of how students were influenced by various content of Hallyu, including K-pop, K-dramas, Korean fashion, cuisine, and language, and how they engaged with it.

A case study design was used for the undergraduate students of CEMDS as the bounded case. This design is appropriate for discussing participants' exposure to the Korean wave and its influence on their attitudes. It also provided an in-depth exploration, identifying participants' engagement with Hallyu in terms of experiences, preferences, and influences rather than numerical data. Through this approach, the researchers aimed to capture how Hallyu influences students' sociocultural awareness, interests, and attitudes in their daily lives as learners exposed to global culture and global perspective.

## Research Locale



**Figure 2.** Research Locale

This study was conducted at Cavite State University - Don Severino Delas Alas campus (CvSU), located in Brgy. Bancod, Indang, Cavite. It is a public higher education institution (HEI) known for its commitment to quality instruction and responsive research and development activities in relevant educational opportunities. Cavite State University is also the main campus among its 12 satellite campuses across the province of Cavite. It offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs across different colleges, each with its own separate and recognized structure. One of them is CEMDS, which offers a range of programs in accountancy, economics, business management, development management, international studies, and related graduate programs.

This campus was selected as the research locale because it is a higher education institution (HEI) in Cavite that provides a suitable environment for the study, given that its students are exposed to diverse cultures and global affairs. The participants in this study were undergraduate students from CEMDS, due to their familiarity with international concepts and cultural influences, making them ideal for examining how Hallyu (Korean Wave)-related

content, as a form of South Korea's soft power, influenced the participants' attitudes.

### Population and Sampling method

The population of this study was the undergraduates of CEMDS at Cavite State University - Don Severino Delas Alas Campus. This population was the primary focus of the study, and its sample served as participants in the in-depth interviews, as the study aims to discuss the influence of Hallyu-related content as soft power on students' attitudes. In addition, the researchers also used Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) in gathering in-depth information, which consisted of two groups, with five (5) participants each, of CEMDS undergraduate students who served as the participants for the FGD and different participants such as a Korean language teacher, a person who's married to a Korean citizen, a South Korea OFW returnee, and Korean event organizer for the KII.

### In-depth Interview

An in-depth interview is a method that involves conducting one-on-one interviews using open-ended questions to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and

meanings in detail. This helped the researchers gather valuable insights and experiences from participants, free from social influence, regarding the impact of Hallyu-related content on them. The researchers used purposive sampling to select student participants across the CEMDS who had exposure to Hallyu-related content for the in-depth interview. A total of 50 participants were purposely selected who served as the sample for the CEMDS undergraduates. This method allows the researchers to gather meaningful, in-depth, and relevant information on how Hallyu, as a soft power, influences participants' attitudes and the attitudes they adopt by selecting those who meet specific characteristics that align with the study's purpose. To ensure that the participants have the information that supports the study's

objectives, they were purposely selected based on the following criteria:

1. Be a CEMDS undergraduate student.
2. Have exposure to various Hallyu-related content such as K-pop, K-drama, fashion, and food, etc.
3. Willing to share what attitude he/she adopts from his/her exposure to Hallyu-related content.
4. Able to explain how consuming Hallyu-related content shaped his/her attitude toward Korean culture compared to being exposed to it.
5. Able to share what are the contributions of Hallyu-related content to him/her.
6. Able to share their thoughts regarding his/her role and contribution, as consumer, to South Korea.

**Table 1.** Total number of In-depth Interviewed Participants

Number of In-depth Interview Participants
50

### Focused Group Discussion

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a qualitative research method that collects data through a moderated group discussion, allowing participants to interact with one another to explore perceptions, opinions, and experiences on a specific topic. The researchers used the FGD to gain shared insights and experiences through participants' interactions during the discussion. It enabled the researchers to understand how students' perceptions and attitudes toward Hallyu are formed and influenced socially, which may not be fully captured through individual interviews alone. The researchers also employed the Purposive Sampling Method to select participants, who were grouped into two groups of five (5) participants each for separate discussions. To ensure that the participants have the information that supports the study's objectives, they were purposely selected based on the following criteria:

1. Be a CEMDS undergraduate student.
2. Weren't previously interviewed from the other interview type of the conducted research such as the FGD and KII.
3. Have exposure to various Hallyu-related content such as K-pop, K-drama, fashion, food, etc.
4. Willing to share what attitude he/she adopts from his/her exposure to Hallyu-related content.
5. Able to explain how consuming Hallyu-related content shaped his/her attitude toward Korean culture compared to being exposed to it.
6. Able to share what are the contributions of Hallyu-related content to him/her.
7. Able to share their thoughts regarding his/her role and contribution, as consumer, to South Korea.

**Table 2.** Number of Focus Group Discussion Participants

FGD Group	Number of Participant
FGD 1	5
FGD 2	5
<b>Total</b>	10

**Key Informant Interviews**

A key Informant Interview (KII) is a qualitative data collection method that involves interviewing individuals with specialized knowledge, experience, or insight into a particular research problem or topic. The researchers also employed KII, which allows them to gain expert and contextual insights from individuals with specialized knowledge of the research objectives. This helped the researchers gather broader perspectives, validation, and a more mature understanding of the impact of Hallyu-related content as soft power on their attitudes. The participants were a Korean language teacher, a Korean national's spouse, a South Korean OFW returnee, and a Korean event organizer, all purposely selected. To

ensure that the participants have valuable knowledge and insights regarding the research objectives, the researchers provided criteria in selecting the participants such as:

1. Have been exposed to Hallyu-related content.
2. Have significant interactions regarding South Korea-related things such as cultural and social activities.
3. Able to explain how consuming Hallyu-related content shaped his/her attitude toward Korean culture compared to being exposed to it.
4. Willing to share how she/he integrates Hallyu-related contents to her/his daily life experiences.

**Table 3.**

Key Informants	Number of Participant
Korean Language teacher	1
Koreans' wife	1
South Korea OFW returnee	1
Korean event organizer	1
<b>Total</b>	4

**Research Instrument**

The research instrument used by the researchers was self-made. The research questions are purposely based on the objectives of the study, which discuss the role of Hallyu content as South Korea's soft power and its influence on the attitudes of undergraduate students from CEMDS. The first part consists of

opening questions to make the informants comfortable and ready for the content questions. Following are the content questions consisting of five main questions with sub-questions, including: (1) most engage Hallyu-related contents, (2) attitudes adopted from the exposure to Hallyu-related contents, (3) influence on participant's attitude toward Korean

culture compared to before they were exposed to it, (4) contribution of Hallyu-related contents to CEMDS students and South Korea.

The self-made interview questionnaire underwent expert validation by three faculty members specializing in qualitative research and cultural studies, whose feedback informed revisions to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives. A letter of approval was made addressed to the research adviser and to be signed before conducting an interview. The Researchers ensured that validation and approval of the research instrument were sought prior to the conduct of interview and focus group discussion with the target research participants.

To ensure the reliability, minimize subjectivity, and strengthen the credibility of the thematic analysis, intercoder agreement was established. The researchers were grouped into two. These groups of researchers independently coded the transcripts from the in-depth interviews, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). Any discrepancies in coding were systematically discussed and resolved through consensus, and a standardized coding protocol was maintained throughout the analysis to ensure consistency.

### Data Collection Procedure

The researchers prepared a letter of approval to conduct this study. The questionnaires were in the form of interviews, as the study's research design is descriptive-qualitative. The subject professor verified this questionnaire before it was distributed through in-depth interviews, online, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. The study was conducted at Cavite State University - Don Severino Delas Alas campus (CvSU), located in Brgy. Bancod, Indang, Cavite, because of the CEMDS students, who were the main participants in this study. The questionnaires were administered face-to-face to ensure honest and genuine answers for a reliable outcome. The researchers used a descriptive-qualitative approach to present a detailed account of how students are influenced by various aspects of Hallyu, including K-pop, K-dramas, Korean fashion, cuisine, and language, and how they engage with it. After the questionnaires were completed, the researchers collected them. The researchers used descriptive statistics for the participants' demographic profile, and inductive thematic data analysis for the remaining statement of the problem to facilitate appropriate interpretation of the data.

### Data Analysis Procedure

For data analysis, the following table presents the analysis method used for each research question:

SOP No.	Question	Method	Data Analysis
1.	What is the demographic profile Of participants 1.1 Age 1.2. Year level 1.3. Program	<b>One on one Interview</b>	<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>
2.	Which Hallyu-related content do participants engage with the most	<b>One on one Interview</b>	<b>Inductive Thematic Analysis</b>
3.	What attitudes develop from the participants' exposure to Hallyu-related content	<b>One on one Interview</b>	<b>Inductive Thematic Analysis</b>
4.	How does Hallyu as a soft power	<b>One on one</b>	<b>Inductive Thematic</b>

influence the attitude of the participants	Interview	Analysis
5. How do the developed attitudes of the participants from Hallyu contribute to South Korea' s soft power?	<b>One on one Interview</b>	<b>Inductive Thematic Analysis</b>

The researchers used a dual-approach analysis involving both descriptive statistics and Inductive Thematic Analysis. To organize and summarize the participants' demographic profiles, descriptive statistics were utilized. According to Kaur et al. (2018), this method provides a foundation for discussing variables within a sample and was specifically used here to explore the relationship between demographics and the influence of Hallyu.

For the qualitative data that were gathered through in-depth one on one interview, Focus Group Discussions, and Key Informant Interviews, the researchers followed the six-step Inductive Thematic Analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarization: Immersing in the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts.
2. Generating Preliminary Codes: Identifying and labeling relevant features of the data.
3. Searching for Themes: Grouping codes into potential themes that capture significant patterns.
4. Reviewing Themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Refining the specifics of each theme and generating clear names.
6. Producing the Report: Weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts to produce a coherent result.

This systematic process allowed the researchers to interpret the collected data and identify patterns that directly addressed the research questions. The final analysis involved weaving these thematic narratives with the extracted data to present insightful and evidence-based results

### Ethical Considerations

In conducting this study, the researchers followed research ethical standards to ensure the rights, privacy, and well-being of the participants. The following ethical considerations guided the researcher;

**Informed consent** - During data collection, the researcher obtained participants' consent. In doing this, the participants were informed about their rights and safety, that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any given moment. Each informant received a consent form, and the researcher explained the research. By signing the consent form, participants acknowledged that they willingly agreed to participate in the research and that they were adequately informed in accordance with ethical and transparent research conditions.

**Data privacy** - The researcher maintained data privacy throughout this study. The Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) was the law that protected individual personal information shared by participants. Participants were assured that the data they shared would be protected and used solely for intended academic purposes. Personal information, such as names, programs, and addresses, as well as interviews with participants, were not to be shared publicly to ensure anonymity. The data were not shared with unauthorized individuals. After completing this study, all collected data were properly disposed of and not shared to prevent unauthorized or inappropriate use.

**Vulnerability** - The participants in this study had a choice to be vulnerable due to their cultural sensitivity, peer pressure, and fear of judgement as students. They had the option not to participate in this study, and those who decided to participate were asked to sign a consent form. Even after signing the consent form,

they were still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and doing so would not affect their relationship with the researcher or their academic standing.

**Confidentiality** - All collected data, including interview responses, were securely stored and access was limited to the authorized research team. Additionally, all electronic data transmission was conducted through secure channels. The researcher and team members did not disclose any personal or identifying information to third parties without explicit consent. Upon completion of the study, all identifying data were protected. This fostered trust and encouraged honest responses by maintaining participant privacy throughout the research process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results, analysis, and interpretation of data gathered from participants' responses to the open-ended questionnaires. The said data were presented in tabular form, along with explanations in textual form, in accordance with the objectives of the study.

### The Demographic profile of the participants

Table 4 presents the findings for the first objective of our study: "What is the demographic profile of the CEMDS students in terms of age and year level?" This concludes the participants' profile based on their age and year level, providing context for their attitudes towards Hallyu content.

The demographic profile of the 50 CEMDS students who participated in in-depth interviews,

with 10 participants from each of the five departments (Office Administration, Accountancy, Economics, Development Management, and Management). Additionally, we conducted two focus group discussions, each with five participants from the Bachelor of Science in International Studies and the Bachelor of Science in Office Administration programs. It reveals that the majority of participants are aged 20 and 21, representing 56.7% of the sample. This age group is typically highly active in digital media consumption and cultural engagement, making them the most exposed to Hallyu content. The balanced representation across programs ensures that the study captures a variety of perspectives, as students in different fields might engage with Hallyu content in unique ways. The younger participants, aged 18 and 19 (25% combined), are usually in the early stages of their college experience and are also likely to be receptive to emerging cultural trends such as Hallyu. Older students aged 22 to 24 represent a smaller but significant portion (18.3%) and offer a broader range of perspectives shaped by longer or more mature exposure to global culture.

By year level, the distribution reflects distinct engagement stages. Third-year students (46.7%) are the largest group, suggesting a peak in Hallyu exposure driven by greater social interaction and digital access. First and second-years (35% combined) are in the initial phase, exploring interests with recent or pre-college Hallyu exposure. Fourth-years (18.3%) have focused priorities as they prepare for graduation, shaping their engagement.

**Table 4.** Age and Year Level Distribution of Participants (60)

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Year Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18	8	13.3	First Year	9	15.0
19	7	11.7	Second Year	12	20.0
20	16	26.7	Third Year	28	46.7
21	18	30.0	Fourth Year	11	18.3

22	6	10.0	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>
23	2	3.3			
24	3	5.0			
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.0</b>			

### Most preferred Hallyu content

Figure 3 presents a graph from the findings in determining the second objective of our study, which is “What type of Hallyu-related content the participants mostly prefer or engage with?”. The findings are based on the students’ most mentioned Hallyu-related content from all the in-depth interviews, and focused group discussions.

### K-pop and K-dramas as most preferred Hallyu content

Based on data from in-depth interviews and focused group discussions, the graph shows that K-pop and K-dramas were the most preferred Hallyu content. During data coding, preferences were identified by the frequency of mentions. Throughout the interviews, 117 preferences of Hallyu content were recorded from the participant’s responses. Figure 1 shows that K-pop was the most preferred type of Hallyu content, capturing 36.8% (n=43) of all coded responses, followed by K-dramas at 35.0% (n=41). These two types of Hallyu content accounted for more than two-thirds of total mentions, demonstrating their popularity among CEMDS students. In contrast, K-movies received 15.4% (n=18) of the responses, while Korean variety shows received 12.8% (n=15), indicating a lower prominence in participants’ narratives.

The following are some of the highlights of responses and narratives from the in-depth interviews, and focused group discussions;

*“I focus more on songs or K-pop since I prefer the songs or types of songs that they give.”* (Participant 16, in-depth interview)

*“The type of content I engage the most when it comes to the media from Korea*

*is mostly about K-dramas that have compelling plots because that's what I'm more used to and the things that I'm more interested in.”* (Participant 7, in depth interview)

*“I also watch variety shows wherein they feature K-pop idols and K-actors that I used to watch in a drama.”* (Participant 10, in-depth interview)

*“When it comes to K-movies, I'm not really a fan of movies, because I prefer longer types of videos.”* (Participant 11, in-depth interview)

*“More on K-dramas and K-movies but sometimes, I listen to K-pop songs, depending on my mood.”* (Participant 4 - Group 1, focused group discussion)

*“As for me, I'm into K-pop because I'm a big fan of many idols and also K-movies and K-dramas, but more on the action comedy genre”* (Participant 3 - Group 2, focused group discussion)

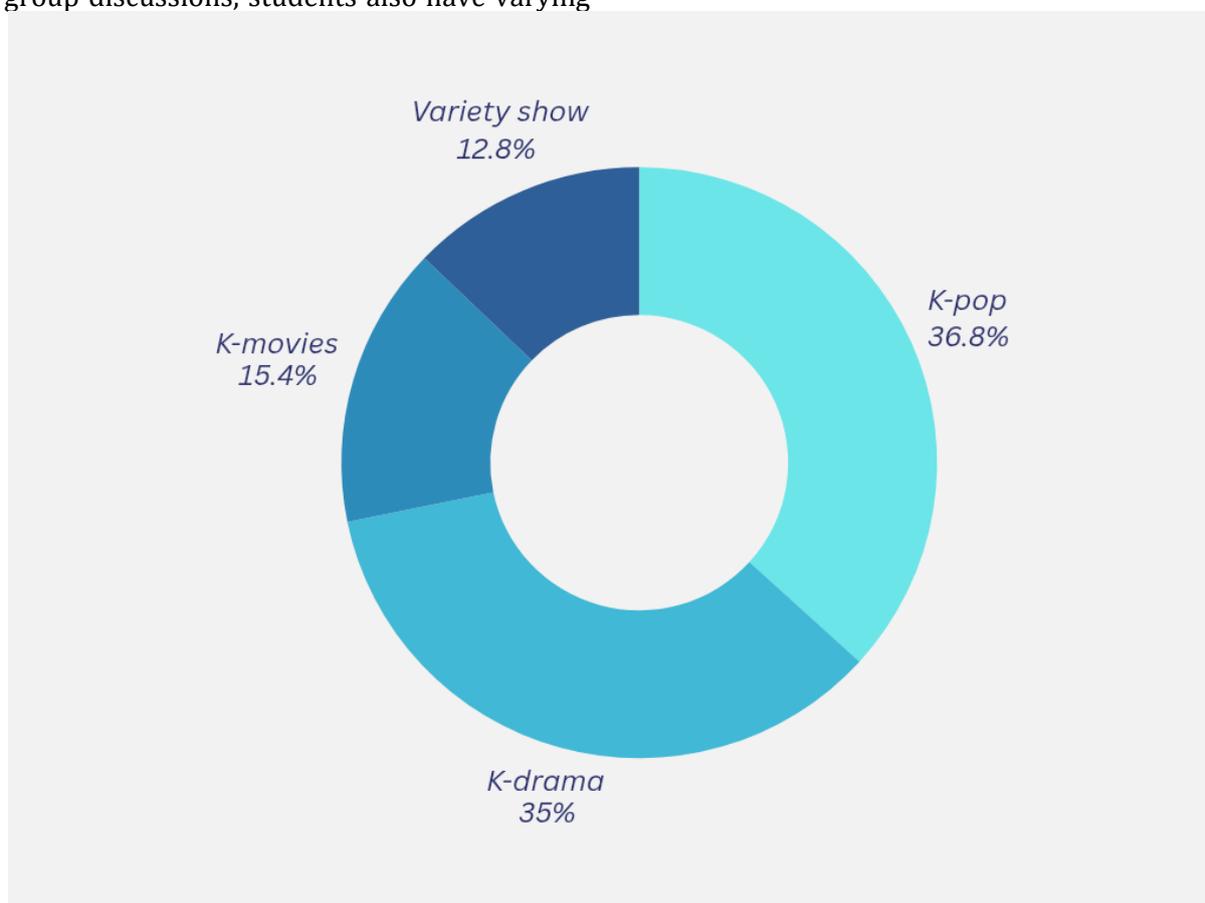
Due to the media's influence, students tend to use K-pop, making it the most popular form of Hallyu content. This popularity aligns with the study by Liu (2023), which found that over the last 30 years, K-pop idols have gained global popularity and a large fan base. They rely not only on brilliant look and packaging, but also on a fully sophisticated industrial system from content manufacturing. This includes exposure and promotion, as well as a steady stream of revenue from albums, music sources, concerts, and derivatives. The Korean wave has built a dedicated fan base through emotional bonding and plans to grow internationally.

Most students expressed their preference for K-dramas due to its intriguing storylines. This preference aligns with a study of Kumar

(2025), which found that the k-dramas' unique and diversified themes are a key influence in their audience's engagement. The drama series has evolved and addressed important societal concerns in South Korea. Its wide range of genres has contributed to its worldwide popularity. According to some students, their preference for Korean variety shows is likely due to the presence of K-pop idols and K-actors as guests, whom they found entertaining. One participant stated that they prefer lengthy videos, such as those found in K-dramas, yet K-movies are also being mentioned but aren't often discussed.

Similarly, from the responses in focused group discussions, students also have varying

preferences for Hallyu-related content. The most popular response continues to be K-pop content, that consists of both boy groups and girl groups. Furthermore, K-dramas and K-movies of various genres—such as action, comedy, and romance were discussed. Several students also mentioned how much they like K-pop variety shows like "Game Caterers". Lei (2024) highlighted that variety shows, as a form of popular culture, are rapidly popularizing and evolving through modernized communication methods across numerous channels, reflecting the audience's need for new stimuli and themes, as well as the evolution and adaptation of variety show technology and formats.



**Figure 3.** Most preferred Hallyu content

**Attitude adopted from the exposure to Hallyu-related content**

Table 5 outlines the themes and findings related to the third objective of our study, which aims to discuss, "What attitudes do the participants adopt from their exposure to Hallyu-related content?". It includes the

themes, subthemes and illustrative narratives. The four main theme are non-verbal respect, aesthetic and confidence, linguistic integration and routine,

**Theme 1: Non-Verbal Respect**

Non-verbal respect refers to the habit of bowing adopted by participants from exposure

to Hallyu-related content. Participant 14 in an in-depth interview mentioned that *"they are being (re)spectful, they are being respectful, because don't we see that Koreans, even when just crossing the street, we see that they bow as a sign of thank you. So, that's what I adopted from them."* Moreover, another participant in an in-depth interview said that *"I think when I watched Hallyu related content when I was young, I imitated their actions, even the way I bow..."*. The results relate to the study by Kiaer and Lim (2024), which found that learners at different levels perceived non-verbal politeness differently. Beginners were unaware of Korean pragmatics and the significance of semiotic resources. While intermediate learners demonstrated a better grasp of non-verbal behaviour, it still lacked nuance. Advanced participants displayed a thorough understanding of non-verbal politeness. As a practical implication, students exposed to Hallyu-related content may adopt the habit of bowing as a form of nonverbal respect.

### **Theme 2: Aesthetic and Confidence**

This theme refers to the clothing preferences participants adopted after exposure to Hallyu-related content. Participant 11 in an in-depth interview stated that *"Maybe when it comes to styles, the beautiful styles of Kpop artists and Korean actresses are truly inspiring.."* Another participant in an in-depth interview said, *"Their clothing style and Korean attire are like I've always wanted."* The results align with the study by Park et al. (2021), which found that the Korean Wave's appeal lies in its aesthetics, messaging, and unique qualities, and with previous research. Attractive visuals, engaging storylines, and meaningful lyrics resonate with audiences. Participants find Korean culture's values accessible and appreciate the novelty, noting both similarities and differences with their own cultures. The finding supports the theory of use and gratification, as it addresses affective needs among students exposed to Hallyu-related content.

### **Theme 3: Linguistic Integration and Routine**

This theme referred to the deeper influence of exposure to Hallyu-related content on participants' attitudes. Where the Korean language became part of their routine, and due to

exposure to the Korean wave, they became eager to learn it. Exposure to Hallyu contributed to their growing interest, routine, and admiration for Korean culture, particularly the Korean language (Hangul). The results showed that participants' adoption of Hallyu had led them to be more expressive, culturally curious, and communicative by incorporating Korean language. It fostered enthusiasm for language and intercultural communication. These results suggested the Korean language is perceived as a familiar and functional part of daily life. This showed that participants actively sought linguistic competence rather than remaining passive consumers of media. Through engagement with the media, the participants in the in-depth interview said, *"I've learned how to read and write hangul..."*. Another in-depth participant mentioned *"...there are also some Korean words I'm familiar with that I understand even without subtitles."*(Participants 21 in depth interview) KII 1 Participants also stated *"when it comes to teaching Korean to you, my students. In Korean? In elementary and intermediate? So basically incorporated, I encourage my students to watch Korean dramas or Korean shows for them to easily learn how to pronounce words, how they deliver communication when it comes to Korean..."*

According to Touhami, B., and Al-Haq, F. (2017), the Korean wave became popular due to the widespread popularity of Hallyu content. The majority of Algerian fans are captivated by the culture and language from K-pop and K-drama they watch. They expressed a desire to learn Korean. Based on the results of their study, Korean fans expressed that the Korean language was easier to learn than it seemed. The majority of them used Korean in their daily conversations because they found it more expressive for conveying their points and felt connected to Korean culture. In general, practically every aspect of Hallyu's effects on participants was unavoidable, particularly when it came to adopting terms and changing word spellings. The Gratification Theory was appropriate for the theme "Linguistic Integration and Routine" because it framed the participants as active individuals who used Korean wave content to meet suitable cognitive and social needs. The findings showed that participants

actively pursue linguistic skills and desire to learn, rather than simply absorb the language.

**Theme 4: Adoption of Korean Standard of Living**

The Adoption of Korean Standards of living refers to a strong preference for Korean beauty products, particularly in skin care, and for Korean food, due to exposure to Hallyu content. The influence of Hallyu has extended beyond digital consumption, increasingly manifesting in the physical lives and personal choices of its global audience. Through participants' engagement with the Korean wave, they were inspired by portrayals of daily life and incorporated what they learned. Sub-theme 1: Skin care usage concerns how Hallyu influences participants to try Korean beauty products. Participants 10, in-depth interview *"Yes, I have incorporated some Korean lifestyle habits, such as using Korean skincare products and following simple K-beauty routines."* Another participant mentioned *"Yes, I use Korean skin care products a lot, I am also into Korean beauty"* this indicated that the media has influenced the interest of participants to consume and purchase their products and become part of their daily consumption. In sub-theme 2, Korean food culture, this illustrates how Hallyu influences participants to try and adopt Korean food culture in their practices. Participants mentioned *" I also adopted their way of eating with chopsticks and the different Korean foods"* (Participant 3,

*Fdg*), Participants 41 also mentioned *"I often buy Korean snacks and Korean products related to things I see in movies and Kdramas I watch."*, *KII Participants 4* narrated *"I've also been using chopsticks more often while eating, and my love for spicy food has even worsened..."*. It encouraged participants to embrace unfamiliar cultural practices due to their exposure to Hallyu.

The findings of this theme supported Putri, A. I. (2021) regarding skin care use; they showed that K-drama and television are two ways South Korea markets its beauty industry. Increased exposure to these programs enhances the perceived value of purchasing products to emulate the lifestyles they see in the media. In the study of Wijesinghe, H. et al., (2025), K-dramas make a significant influence on Sri Lankan fandoms' dietary patterns. They recognized K-drama as a medium for promoting Korean food. Korean entertainment did make a major influence on people's life, and this influence was so influential that it could even influence the food preferences of the audience. This theme utilized Cultivation Theory to analyze how participants adopted Korean lifestyle standards. Its theory explained how the participants' long-term consumption of media can shape their reality. Participants moved from passive observation to active imitation by adopting K-beauty and K-food into their lifestyle.

**Table 5.** Themes generated on Attitude adopted from the exposure to Hallyu-related content

Themes	Sub themes	Illustrative Narratives
Non-verbal respect	Habits of bowing down	<p><i>"They are being (re)spectful, they are being respectful, because don't we see that Koreans, even when just crossing the street, we see that they bow as a sign of thank you. So, that's what I adopted from them."</i></p> <p><i>"I think when I watched Hallyu related content when I was young, I imitated their actions, even the way I bow..."</i></p> <p><i>"Maybe their bowing manner especially when we're crossing the street, that's where I bowed to."</i></p>

<p>Aesthetic and Confidence</p>	<p>Clothing Preferences</p>	<p><i>"Maybe when it comes to styles, the beautiful styles of Kpop artists and Korean actresses are truly inspiring.."</i></p> <p><i>"Their clothing style and Korean attire are like I've always wanted "</i></p> <p><i>"The way they carry their clothes and style made me want to always try Korean attires."</i></p>
<p>Linguistic Integration and Routine</p>	<p>Incorporation of Korean language</p>	<p><i>"...there are also some Korean words I'm familiar with that I understand even without subtitles."</i></p> <p><i>"Their language is what I used in everyday life"</i></p> <p><i>"I've learned how to read and write hangul..."</i></p> <p><i>" ...And also, sometimes I imitate their language when I just feel like it."</i></p> <p><i>"when it comes to teaching Korean to you, my students. In Korean? In elementary and intermediate? So basically incorporated, I encourage my students to watch Korean dramas or Korean shows for them to easily learn how to pronounce words, how they deliver communication when it comes to Korean..."</i></p>
<p>Adoption of Korean Standards of Living</p>	<p>Skin care usage</p>	<p><i>"I think it's the self-care routine or like the beauty side because when I watch it, they look so good with their makeup, even teenagers. Their skin is so beautiful, so I'm following their routine."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, I have incorporated some Korean lifestyle habits, such as using Korean skincare products and following simple K-beauty routines."</i></p> <p><i>"Yes, I use Korean skin care products a lot, I am also into Korean beauty"</i></p>
	<p>Korean food culture</p>	<p><i>"...their food influenced me like that. I also learned to use chopsticks, it was like I forced myself to learn to use chopsticks even though it's not commonly used here."</i></p>

		<p><i>"I often buy Korean snacks and Korean products related to things I see in movies and Kdramas I watch."</i></p> <p><i>"..In terms of food, I've also adopted adding kimchi and nori to my meals."</i></p> <p><i>"I also adopted their way of eating with chopsticks and the different korean foods"</i></p> <p><i>"I've also been using chopsticks more often while eating, and my love for spicy food has even worsened..."</i></p>
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### **Transformation of the Attitudes Toward Korean Culture Through Hallyu Exposure**

Table 6. This outlines the themes and findings related to the fourth objective of our study, which aims to discuss "How has consuming Hallyu-related content shaped participants' attitude toward Korean culture compared to before being exposed to it?". It includes the themes, sub themes, and illustrative narratives. Three themes emerged such as Expanded Korean Cultural Awareness and Understanding, Increased Curiosity and Desire for Korean Cultural Exploration, and Developed Attitudes Toward Korean Culture.

#### **Theme 1: Expanded Korean Cultural Awareness and Understanding**

'Expanded Korean Cultural Awareness and Understanding' referred to the cultural awareness of participants toward South Korea compared to before being exposed to Hallyu-related content. The narratives in the theme 1 indicate that sustained engagement with Hallyu-related content helped participants understand Korean culture, leading to appreciation, acceptance, and integration of these experiences that shaped their perception and attitude toward South Korea. Participants reported that continued exposure enabled them to develop a deeper and more nuanced awareness of South Korean social norms and practices, educating audiences and promoting a positive perception of Korean culture through ongoing engagement with media. One

participant mentioned, "...now that I know Korean culture, my perspective has broadened. And when your perspective broadens, you understand others better—especially when it comes to their beauty standards" (Participant 18, in-depth interview, 21 years old). Another participant said, "...it's like I understand now why they do certain things. For example, the use of a red pen. For them, writing someone's name in red is considered bad luck" (Participant 14, in-depth interview, 21 years old). The results were related to the study of Kim (2022) which tells South Korean culture has become more well-known around the world in recent decades because of the government-led cultural initiatives that switched from economic tactics to national branding and soft power. According to his article "The Growth of South Korean Soft Power and Its Geopolitical Implications", the successful democratization and economic growth of South Korea, the competitiveness of its creative output, and the development of digital technology are the three main facets of its soft power.

The results reflect the Cultivation Theory, which suggests that sustained exposure to multimedia shapes the perceptions of audiences based on what they read or hear. The findings suggest that sustained engagement with Hallyu-related content can serve as an effective tool for cultural education and awareness.

## **Theme 2: Increased Curiosity and Desire for Korean Cultural Exploration**

The theme 'Increased Curiosity and Desire for Korean Cultural Exploration' referred to the curiosity activation and desire of the participants toward Korean culture as influenced by consuming Hallyu-related content compared to before being exposed to it. The narratives in the theme 2 showed that the more the participants became aware of and understood elements of South Korea such as culture and society, the more they dove deeper into it due to the aesthetic culture in terms of values, customs, practices, lifestyle, food, and so on, which they generally saw on media and which attracted them to explore more about Korea's cultural and societal elements and develop a desire to further engage with these cultural aspects. This fascination drove them to actively seek knowledge about specific cultural elements like food, beauty routines, and social customs, going far beyond just watching the content and, in some cases, motivating them to act on this interest. One participant expressed her curiosity: "...I wanted to visit there to see if what I saw on social media was actually real. So, when I consumed Hallyu content, I was more inclined to visit and see if what I saw was real..." (Participant 7, in-depth interview). Another participant mentioned, "Maybe my attitude was shaped more by curiosity. Of course, when you were curious about something, you became more interested in learning what they did and understanding their culture" (Participant 3, Focused Group Discussion 1, 21 years old). Another participant expressed cultural desire toward Korean culture: "I was motivated to learn how to read and write Hangeul and also learn the Korean language for months" (Participant 38, in-depth interview, 19 years old).

The widespread global appeal of Korean pop culture, or Hallyu, worked like a subtle but powerful influence, in other words, soft power. Instead of merely enjoying the entertainment, people became genuinely curious about South Korea, which made them want to learn the real facts about the culture, not just what they saw in the media. For instance, audiences did not just accept Korean beauty standards but started thinking critically about things like

beauty ideals and cosmetic surgery practices. Enjoying popular features of another country, like K-pop or K-dramas, became a way to start learning about culture. It went beyond just entertainment and created a deep curiosity in learning more about the culture. This curiosity also motivated audiences to learn the Korean language.

The results are aligned with what Kim, et al., (2009) discovered. They found that when people around the world are exposed to Korean popular culture (like K-Pop, dramas, etc.), it genuinely sparks their curiosity about the culture and may develop into a desire to further engage with it. This curiosity then pushes international audiences to look for much deeper information and sustained involvement, and even direct, personal experiences related to Korean society. Similarly, Nye (2004) points out that a country's cultural products are a form of "soft power." Essentially, they're tools that attract people in other countries and get them excited about the originating countries' values and their way of life by transforming curiosity into cultural desire. Leon et al. (2025) reported that exposure to Hallyu content among Filipino learners encourages engagement with Korean language and cultural understanding beyond entertainment. In the context of Hallyu, according to Choi et al., (2025), how people view Korean culture plays a significant role in shaping what they want to do next. When people watch K-dramas, they form ideas and feelings about Korea's cultural, historical, and societal attributes, which makes viewers feel interested, impressed, and curious about the country. In simple terms, K-dramas help people learn about Korea and feel emotionally connected to it, fostering admiration, curiosity, and cultural desire toward Korean culture.

The results illustrated the concept of soft power, showing that things like Hallyu were not just for entertainment but were also powerful tools of attraction by their country of origin. They made people truly fascinated by new places, driving them to want to visit and motivating them to continue learning about those cultures for a long time. The Use and Gratification Theory related to this theme, as the audiences' desire to explore more about

South Korea, triggered by their curiosity, eventually became their cognitive needs or knowledge satisfaction regarding the aspects that interested them.

### Theme 3: Developed Attitudes toward Korean Culture

'Developed Attitudes toward Korean Culture' referred to the attitudes, particularly value admiration and cultural integration, that participants developed through consuming Hallyu-related content compared to before being exposed to it. The narratives in the theme 3 showed that as participants' interest in Hallyu-related content grew, they cultivated more positive attitudes toward Korean cultural aspects, including admiration for values and integration of cultural practices. Regarding value appreciation, some participants noted that before immersing themselves in Hallyu, they regarded the culture as just entertainment or had a more critical viewpoint. However, after consistently engaging with K-dramas, K-pop, and various Korean media, they developed a deeper appreciation for Korean culture, especially values such as respect, expressiveness, hard work, creativity, talent, and a strong work ethic. In terms of cultural practices integration, participants reported adopting Korean cultural elements in their daily lives, such as becoming more mindful of appearance, skincare, fashion, and makeup inspired by Korean aesthetics, shifting tastes from Western to Korean styles, learning Hangeul to enhance their understanding of K-pop and K-dramas, and participating in Korean-related activities like making kimba, wearing hanbok, and joining Korean programs at school. One participant in an in-depth interview expressed, "...I came to realize how beautiful not only their culture but also their attitudes with one another. And then because of

that, I aspire to become as respectful and as expressive as them" (Participant 13, in-depth interview, 18 years old). Another shared, "...I started appreciating their hard work, values, and daily life. Now, I really admire and respect their culture" (Participant 37, in-depth interview, 21 years old). In terms of cultural practices, one participant noted, "...first, studying Hangeul or their language, of course, so you can understand K-pop content and K-dramas. I really tried to study Hangeul first, from writing to reading and pronunciation" (Participant 15, in-depth interview). Another participant added, "Before, during meals, we only had rice and one dish on the table. But when I was exposed to their culture, I ended up adapting their banchan" (Participant 4, Key Informant Interview).

This supports the study of Choi et al., (2025) which concluded that audience' engagement with Korean culture serves as a mediator that connects cultural perceptions and behavioral outcomes which enables them to turn their positive perceptions of Korea as a whole and passive engagement with its culture into real actions such as intention to visit South Korea. Their study also reveals that active participation in Korean cultural activities, such as trying Korean cuisine, learning the language, or exploring traditions, is a direct outcome of the audience's favorable views of Korean culture. The findings of this theme imply that sustained exposure to Hallyu-related content does not only influence how audiences think about Korean culture but also how they act upon it in their everyday lives. As admiration for Korean values grows, audiences move beyond passive consumption and begin integrating cultural practices such as language learning, food, and lifestyle adaptations.

**Table 6.** Themes on the Transformation of Attitudes Toward Korean Culture Through Hallyu Exposure

Themes	Sub themes	Illustrative Narratives
Expanded Korean Cultural Awareness	Cultural Awareness	"... now that I know Korean culture, my perspective has broadened. And when your perspective broadens, you

		<p>understand others better— especially when it comes to their beauty standards.”</p> <p>“...it's like I understand now why they do certain things. For example, the use of a red pen. For them, writing someone's name in red is considered bad luck.”</p>
<p>Increased Curiosity and Desire for Korean Cultural Exploration.</p>	<p>Curiosity Activation</p>	<p>“...I want to visit there to see if what I see on social media is actually real. So, when I consume Hallyu content, I'm more inclined to visit and see if what I see is real...”</p> <p>“Maybe my attitude was shaped more by curiosity. Of course, when you're curious about something, you become more interested in learning what they do and understanding their culture.”</p> <p>“I become an avid fan of their culture, I view their practices and beliefs into a more deeper sense. I am somehow wanting to get to know those culture in a more detailed as possible.”</p> <p>“... since they're already known in the world, I also ended up diving deeper into their culture.”</p>
	<p>Cultural Desire</p>	<p>“I actually learned the Korean language because I'm so tired of reading subtitles from Kdramas, and I want to understand my idols whenever they do live broadcasts.”</p> <p>“I was motivated to learn how to read and write Hangeul and also learn the</p>

		<p>Korean language for months.”</p> <p>“I include K-culture in my daily activities. Especially because I'm married to a Korean. But, as an individual, Hallyu content, whatever I do like driving, cooking, communicating, etc., boosts my confidence, mood, and keeps me energized.”</p>
Developed Attitudes toward Korean Culture	Values Admiration	<p>“... I came to realize how beautiful not only their culture but also their attitudes with one another. And then because of that, I aspire to become as respectful and as expressive as them”</p> <p>“... I started appreciating their hard work, values, and daily life. Now, I really admire and respect their culture”</p> <p>“... Like before, I would think that the culture of Korea is a bit weird, but now I think I enjoy their culture.”</p> <p>“... I thought their culture was overrated, but as I discovered it, I realized that it's the talent, fashion, and some good aspect in their lifestyle that attracts people with their culture.”</p> <p>“I developed a deeper appreciation for the culture's emphasis on respect, hard work, and creativity.”</p> <p>“... I really wanna appreciate countries' work ethics because I can see how hard-working they are...”</p>
	Cultural Practice Integration	<p>“...First, studying Hangeul or their language, of course, so you can understand K-pop</p>

		<p>content and K-dramas. I really tried to study Hangeul first, from writing to reading and pronunciation.”</p> <p>“Before, during meals, we only had rice and one dish on the table. But when I was exposed to their culture, I ended up adapting their banchan.”</p> <p>“... I became more inclined when it comes to participating in activities such as kimbap making or making hanbok.”</p>
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### Contribution of Hallyu-related content to South Korea

Table 7 outlines the themes related to the fifth objective of the study, which is “to identify the contribution of Hallyu-related content to South Korea”. It includes the themes and sub-themes derived from participants' repetitive and similar answers, as well as their verbatim responses, which can be found in the illustrative narratives' column. Three main themes emerged: Economic empowerment, Global Image Recognition, and Critical Awareness.

#### Theme 1: Economic Empowerment

The theme 1, Economic Empowerment, refers to the tremendous impact of Hallyu-related content on South Korea's economy, sustaining the longevity of its prosperity in the competitive, globalizing world. On subtheme 1, which is all about economic gain, a participant stated, *“To South Korea, their economy progresses is a one factor because of hallyu...”* (Informant 12, in-depth interview, 21 years old). This statement proves that as people consume the entertainment contents of South Korea, they gain from it as some contents involved purchasing to access it. Another participant remarked, *“...South Korea will get more investments, partnerships with other countries to promote stuff.”* (Participant 9, in-depth interview,

20 years old). The same participant further emphasized that, *“I think when we consume these media, it helps with their tourism because it engages us to go there and to try out...”* Which is also associated with a tourism boost that empowers the country's economy. Another participant also shared, *“I think the contribution of Hallyu culture in South Korea is obviously Tourism. The people from outside their country get encouraged to go there...”* (Participant 1- Group 1, Focused Group Discussion, 22 years old). This statement means that as one consumes the Hallyu-related contents, it makes them want to visit the country and try the culture themselves that definitely contributes to the country's tourism and eventually reflected to its economic empowerment.

In the study of Santos & Marques (2022), they showed that the phenomenon of Hallyu Wave brings a successful development on South Korea's economy and improves its tourism sector. Because of people's engagement with hallyu-related content and culture, they were able to influence people to buy their products and promote tourist attractions that boost their economic growth. This was caused by the events visible in both South Korea and the rest of the world, with K-pop and K-dramas leading the way.

The theme 1 somehow correlated with the soft power theory, which is one of the tools of cultural influence through the help of the media. This creates influence and extends beyond shaping perceptions and attitudes. It transcends economics by generating demand for South Korean products and other opportunities, totally empowering their economy. On the other hand, one of its practical implications is that the students who are drawn to South Korea will prefer the products that they produce.

### **Theme 2: Global Image Recognition**

The Global Image Recognition theme presents the shared perspectives of the participants on how Hallyu influenced the state of origin to gain recognition and establish a successful nation branding and increased familiarity with Korean culture abroad. During the interview, there were participants who expressed their positive view in South Korea's image, emphasizing the contribution of South Korea's hallyu-related content. One participant said: *"...people who like Hallyu tend to associate it with the whole country so sometimes they actually perceive South Korea as something that they actually watch in Kdrama. They view it as a very interesting and relatable country due to the Hallyu content they watch."* (Informant 10, in-depth interview, 21 years old). Media is indeed powerful to shape the viewers' perception, in this case the statement convey that the Hallyu-related content is a big contributor of how it shaped and idealized one's view of South Korea making them support, consume, as well as position them in the international arena. In the subtheme 2 cultural appreciation, a participant stated that, *"It makes the country highly visible, relatable, and culturally influential on a global scale."* (Informant 41, in-depth interview, 21 years old). With the appreciation of its culture, South Korea developed a favorable stance, trust and admiration that strengthen their image as a country. On other hand, as they gain trust, the popularity of people in the entertainment industry who are behind the creation of Hallyu-related contents are highly recognized to represent their country. For example, in 2021, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported that global K-pop Group BTS was appointed by their then president as special presidential

envoy, where they had a performance and delivered a speech as part of South Korea's diplomatic outreach, and since BTS is a globally recognized group they chose them to represent their country because of their influence—a proof a cultural public figure can be officially called upon to represent their country.

Through Hallyu-related content, South Korea became popular and influential across the globe. People are attracted because of the cultural and idealistic country presentation that they see in hallyu-related contents. They also view South Korea's strong image because of its country representation due to the influence of Hallyu. This shows that the influence of Hallyu contributes to a great success in establishing South Korea's global image.

This result is highly related to the theory of soft power, South Korea's global image recognition frames as a soft power when recognition and international admiration influence others through attraction rather than coercion. On the other hand, its practical implication, the policymakers can use their global image recognition to foster and strategize more cultural diplomacy in the international community.

### **Theme 3: Critical Awareness**

This theme shows how participants' attitude shifted from having an idealized view of South Korea to a more critically aware view of South Korea's real social conditions. People that are influenced by Hallyu became more affected by the idealized media driven image of South Korea, making them engaging and at the same time aware of South Korea's real-life society. In this theme, participants showed awareness that this portrayal does not fully reflect the reality of South Korea's society. One of the participants answered, *"...when they research after they became addicted to K-dramas, they're gonna find something they don't like, especially in South Korea's politics, that's not that liberating. Like, they're not liberated. They're conservative at most. And their issues about sex trafficking, bullying, that. So, although, it becomes a cover-up..."* (Informant 9, in-depth interview, 20 years old). After researching or exploring information about South Korea's socio-political condition, the researchers found issues such as political conservatism, social

inequalities, sex trafficking, and government image-management which lead people to shift from surface level admiration into deeper socio-political analysis. This revealed that people influenced by Hallyu are not passive to South Korea's image but more critically engaged towards the real-life issues in South Korea. Another rich insight from a Korean language instructor that shared, *"...when it comes to watching Korean dramas. But apparently, in fact, or in reality, if you're really going to ask for an interview with a Korean person, that's not the reality of Korea. It's not full of beautiful things, just the same as when you're watching Korean dramas."* (Participant 1, Key informant interview). In the study of Khil (2022), it was shown that South Korea is not as Beautiful as we see in Hallyu related contents, it is also wrapped with political and social inequalities; feminist distortion for instance that gained its critical view from the people engaged with their culture.

The theme delivered a unique view of a practical implication of the ability of participants to critically evaluate the information they get from Hallyu-related content and the actual situation in South Korea.

In a nutshell, the themes conclude that South Korea's economic empowerment and established global image were mainly contributed to by hallyu-related content that influenced people's engagement with Korean Pop Culture. The study of Santos & Marques (2022) emphasizes that Hallyu Wave has boosted South Korea's economy, primarily through the global popularization of its products, increased tourism, and attracting foreign investment. They agree that engagement with hallyu-related content directly influences people to spend on Korean products and to visit the country, thereby empowering its economy. In addition, South Korea established a strong, positive, and relatable global image through hallyu-related content. The content, such as K-drama and K-pop, makes the country highly visible and influential, leading to a generally positive perception of the nation on a global scale. However, despite the idealized image often presented in the media, viewers are not passive. Many people tend to find out South Korea's socio-political issues lead to a shift from mere admiration to a more realistic and critical understanding of South Korean society.

**Table 7.** Contribution of Hallyu-related content to South Korea

Themes	Subthemes	Illustrative Narratives
Economic Empowerment	Economic Gain	<p>"Me as a person, I spend a lot of money on merch so for their economy, whenever we purchase from them, we boost their economy."</p> <p>"For the economic growth of South Korea, the way we consume imported foods and K-pop merchandise."</p> <p>"... South Korea will get more investments, partnerships with other countries to promote stuff."</p>
	Product Preference	<p>"...Because a lot of people support K-pop merch and K-movies because of the fans."</p>

		<p>“Other people will have a preference to buy things from South Korea and to refer to South Korea”</p> <p>“...Because of Korean content I usually buy Korean food products.”</p>
	<p>Tourism Boost</p>	<p>“The culture of South Korea is becoming known so the Korean beauty products or Korean foods are becoming known as well. It opened opportunities for South Korea’s tourism.”</p> <p>“I think when we consume these media, it helps with their tourism because it engages us to go there and to try out...”</p> <p>“It gets to a point where we really personally want to go to South Korea to try the things they offer.”</p>
<p>Global Image Recognition</p>	<p>Cultural Appreciation</p>	<p>“Because of Hallyu, many people become attracted to Korea's culture, especially when it comes to their people. Therefore, attracting many people who want to engage in cross-cultural experiences such as program exchange, cultural exchange...”</p> <p>“It makes the country highly visible, relatable, and culturally influential on a global scale.”</p> <p>“...it made me more appreciative and open-minded toward Korean culture, cultural diversity and curious about traditions beyond my own.”</p>

	Representation	<p>“For example, the K-pop group SEVENTEEN became UNESCO ambassadors and it shows how South Korea can thrive without relying too much on their political power.”</p>
	Idealized Country Image	<p>“Yes, they display a positive image on their content and it promotes the overall image of their country. It becomes a way for people to assume that the lifestyle in Korea is ideal and they’re living a good life. Their country is generally appealing, so it really affects South Korea’s image.</p> <p>“... our positive attitudes towards Hallyu gave us positive views on South Korea.”</p> <p>“Yes, people who like Hallyu tend to associate it with the whole country so sometimes they actually perceive South Korea as something that they actually watch in Kdrama. They view it as a very interesting and relatable country due to the Hallyu content they watch. “</p>
Critical Awareness	Awareness of media and reality	<p>“When they research after they become addicted to K-dramas, they're gonna find something they don't like, especially in South Korea's politics, that's not that liberating. Like, they're not liberated. They're conservative at most. And their issues about sex trafficking, bullying, that. So, although it becomes a cover-up of the government, and that's a theory. It's a theory, but it's true that they're doing it as a cover-up of the</p>

		<p>government, these entertainments, so that the netizens won't notice, and the whole world, that they have a huge issue."</p> <p>"The severe bullying and bashing, especially in K-pop, is the negative side. I often see how it happens, and there are too many, especially with their fellow Koreans."</p>
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## Conclusion, And Recommendation

### Conclusion

After a thorough analyzation of the data gathered from the participants of this study, the findings concluded the following:

1. The participants showed a strong exposure to the culture of South Korea due to their consumption of different types of Hallyu contents. Based on the results, the majority of the participants engaged with K-Pop and K-drama the most and somehow influenced their exposure to the other types of contents. Evidently that the most engaged content was also the top contributor to the growing cultural image of South Korea in the global arena. In addition, participants expressed that engaging with their preferred Hallyu contents provides entertainment and motivation in their daily lives. It was clear that the growing popularity of the K-Pop industry helps boost the exposure of other Hallyu content, not just locally but also internationally, as well as the recognition of other provinces in the country. South Korea's creative way of spreading their culture across the globe has become a trend and influenced many countries to apply this cultural exchange method.

2. The findings of this study showed that participants have adopted various attitudes that were mainly influenced by their exposure to Hallyu contents. It demonstrated that the use of Hallyu as South Korea's soft power effectively influenced a vast number of individuals

across the globe. Participants expressed that engagement with Hallyu-related contents have influenced their lifestyle including their way of eating, approaching other people, and adopting some Korean cultures and mannerism. This only showed that strong engagement to Hallyu contents influenced the adoption of attitudes, practices, behaviors, and lifestyle choices that reflected a deep level of cultural engagement rather than a surface level entertainment consumption. Thus, the adoption of attitude from Hallyu gained a positive contribution to the evolving culture of South Korea.

3. Based on the results, participants expressed their positive attitudes toward the adoption of Hallyu contents relative to its benefits and personal relevance. It explored the various positive benefits that motivated the participants to adopt specific attitudes based on it. Hallyu content provides related activities that help individuals and somehow motivate them to adopt due to desire for improvements. The participants observed that the positive attitudes of Koreans that they have seen from engaging with Hallyu contents may contribute to their personal growth. Throughout the exposure of participants on Hallyu contents, they formed a desire to experience the culture they have seen on the internet personally and their curiosity grew deeper about the culture of South Korea. It was evident that their consumption of the Hallyu contents influenced their view toward South Korea's culture and the creative way of

cultural exchange has become a factor of a growing number of foreign visitors to their country. To conclude, both parties mutually benefited from the cultural exchange through Hallyu and it demonstrated that it effectively influenced individuals on adoption of the culture and its promotion globally.

4. The participants showed a deeper understanding of the contribution of Hallyu to South Korea. The findings of this study demonstrated a number of factors that helped the growing popularity of the culture and South Korea as a whole. The following factors such as economic empowerment, global image recognition and critical awareness of societal issues wherein the participants are aware of. They expressed their perceptions toward the contribution of Hallyu through their own experiences and exposure to it. Hallyu played a crucial role in promoting South Korea and maintaining its image and economic status. However, it is important to note that some participants pointed out that despite the rapid growth of South Korea the feedbacks are not only positive but there are also negative feedbacks, specifically the critical awareness of the negative side of the culture of South Korea. The participants have observed the negative side of South Korean culture through the Hallyu content they have seen and engaged with. This negative feedback influenced the perspectives of individuals toward the particular issues happening inside the country. Thus, the contribution of Hallyu as the soft power of South Korea boosts its economic development and global image.

### Recommendation

In light of the information acquired throughout this study, the recommendations were directed more precisely to guide the stakeholders, including the students, faculty, community, and policymakers.

1. To **Students**, given the strong attachment with Hallyu-related content among different age groups, the researchers recommend that students continue to explore the Korean wave in a balanced way of learning and use it as their source of entertainment while maintaining awareness of positive and critical aspects.

Grasping the influence of Hallyu on their lifestyle, confidence, and cultural attitudes, students are encouraged to align these cultural practices that they adopted in ensuring that they influence their attitude in a meaningful way and to channel these influences into significant activities such as participating in cultural society, joining discussions or events, or engaging in responsible fandom practices. By doing this, students can foster and deepen their cultural awareness, gain confidence, and responsibly incorporate Korean and Filipino cultural influences into their daily lives.

In addition, they should also acknowledge the contents that are being unrealistically portrayed by the media to avoid negative consumption. To embrace the neutrality between entertainment and the realities of life, for them to reflect on their own attitude. Subsequently, students can ensure that their participation in Hallyu continues to positively contribute to and support their social, academic, and emotional development.

2. To **Faculty**, recognize and acknowledge cultural diversity in coursework through application in discussions if applicable, specifically for those who are taking on cultural professions. It is recommended to enrich the student engagement with relevant and trendy examples, particularly subjects related to media, culture, globalization, language, and communication.

By exposing and guiding the student in these global interests, they are able to develop the students' critical thinking attitudes, personal representations, and awareness of cultural norms and possible societal issues reflected in the Hallyu content. On top of that, faculty can assist students in distinguishing between realistic depictions in the media and healthy cultural appreciation and enthuse to establish welcoming environments that value cultural familiarity. This will strengthen the learner's responsible consumer attitude in the context of Hallyu-related content.

3. To **Korean Wave Community and Enthusiasts**, the researchers recommend that communities continue to boost and promote inclusive services and informative spaces for the fandom groups and cultural organizations in a

responsible way. It is also suggested to the enthusiast to have mindfulness towards the content that they consume and it should not totally define who they are.

As the adoption of Hallyu-related content in the lifestyle, preferences, and practices influences the students and others, the community should use its lengths and resources to support everyone by organizing activities that can help with the integration of Korean cultural practices through events or programs. This will shape the positive environment for everyone, given the fact that cultural consumption really has an influence on the attitude, behaviors, ethics, and authenticity of the fans. By doing so, students can be empowered to express themselves further and embody the cultural appreciation they engage with.

**4. To Policy Makers, specifically in the field of Cultural Agencies,** it is suggested to encourage community engagement initiatives that involve the increasing influence of the Hallyu trend through building cultural programs and institutions to collaborate in supporting students and Filipino Hallyu communities. This could include cultural publicity through outreach programs and educational awareness, implementing campaigns, or expanding cultural exchanges and partnerships that promote foreign content and intercultural understanding, while supporting media literacy among students and communities.

By doing so, policymakers can strengthen global cultural awareness and help the community to reduce the spread of misjudgment that could ruin the image of foreign and local culture. It will also stabilize cultural diplomacy between nations, and help analyze local cultural identity that can enrich cultural appreciation of local identity and for the community to be informed.

**5. To Future Researchers,** the researchers suggest that future studies could explore and expand the study of Hallyu-related content's influence and attitude by considering more diverse studies and addressing different academic fields and communities. It is recommended to evaluate and magnify broader information about other aspects of the Korean

wave, as well as other global cultural trends and demographics. These efforts will contribute to broader academic understanding of cultural exchange, soft power, and youth engagement in global media trends.

The researchers encouraged the application of cultural theory and pop culture to expand the analysis of popular culture phenomena, not only for Hallyu but for other Asian popular cultures as well, as it provides a comprehensive lens of how popular cultures are shaped by social and ideological forces in the relationship between cultural meanings and other everyday practices (Storey, 2016). A central question for future studies could be, "How does Hallyu and other Asian global popular cultures influence youths' perceptions?". Given the positive and critical influence among the students, it is suggested to further specific studies.

Moreover, the recommendations of the researchers aim to help improve future studies by using the suggestion of trying other variables and viewpoints, such as perception and behavior, like critical awareness, and using soft power as the main variable. By conducting future studies, future researchers may also benefit from using another theory in their framework. The future researchers are also encouraged to consider using other methodological approaches by using quantitative or mixed methods to strengthen the data that will contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural influence and global media consumption influence. In addition, they could conduct other engagements of cultural influence and soft power to deepen understanding of global cultural phenomena and other cultural contexts.

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