



Research Article

Hallyu and the Social Behavior of Filipino Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The Hallyu phenomenon, or Korean Wave, has significantly shaped cultural consumption and social behavior worldwide, particularly among young adults. While numerous studies have examined its economic and entertainment impact, limited research explores how Hallyu influences social interactions and identity formation among Filipino young adults. This study investigates the motivations behind Hallyu consumption, the ways it shapes social behavior, and its potential long-term implications. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with young adults aged 18–25 from a state university in Los Baños, Laguna. The study examines the role of K-dramas, K-pop, and K-products (fashion, beauty, food) in shaping identity, communication styles, and interpersonal relationships. Findings highlight how media exposure fosters new social norms, transcends entertainment to become deeply embedded in personal and collective identity formation, and shared cultural experiences among Filipino youth. This also highlights the future directions of Filipino young adults in their consumption of Hallyu content. This study contributes to understanding transnational cultural exchanges and the evolving social behaviors of young adults in the digital age.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Most young adults worldwide have heard the following words: Korean culture, Korean wave, and Hallyu. These words are similar to one another and pertain to Korean culture's spread around the world. Korean culture has explicitly made its existence known throughout the world starting in the early 2000s. Its existence continues to rapidly spread throughout the world up until this day. The concept of K-Wave and Hallyu are two names that occur on the same phenomenon called Korean Wave (Glodev et al., 2023). From the United States and Canada in North America to Chile, Argentina, and Brazil in Latin America, fans across the globe are now enjoying Korean television dramas, films, popular music (K-pop), and digital games (Ji & Yin, 2020). Studies investigated the effect of the Korean wave in North America, Europe and other regions as the impact of Hallyu expanded to global level through diverse media channels (Choi, 2014, as cited in Oh, 2021). With the continuous popularity of Hallyu throughout the world, it influenced individuals on shaping their cultural identity, consumer preferences, and behavior. It has also affected the way people behave, interact, and make relationships with other individuals.

According to Che Wan Mohd Khair (2022), the Korean culture and products portrayed by the actors has influenced young people who watch Korean content are significantly more likely to purchase Korean products, particularly those featured through Product Placement (PPL) in advertisements. With this, it is not surprising that Hallyu also reached the Philippines. Korean skincare products are also all over the market whether it may be online or the malls. The effective PPLs has made it easier for people to associate that product to Hallyu. It is noticeable that everywhere we go, Korean culture can be seen and heard in the streets of the Philippines; from the trending K-pop songs that can be heard in the radios to the various food establishments serving Korean food to the individuals. This led Filipino individuals to incorporate Korean culture in daily lives from its fashion to the way an individual interacts with others. Pedrosa & Nifras (2023) revealed in a study that the participants are impacted by Hallyu to an average extent. Thus, it is noticeable that Korean culture has become the most widely accepted culture by most countries, even the Philippines. In other words, it can be concluded that Korean culture is the current generation's popular culture (Fortunata & Utami, 2021). It is a phenomenon that has swept the globe, including the Philippines (Lee, 2023).

A study showed that the multimedia presentation of popular culture is accepted by the Filipino fans and continuously stands throughout the first, second, third, and fourth generation of K-pop (Miguel & Chavez, 2023). With the continuous spread through social networking services

(SNS), the rise of Korean culture has also piqued the interest of most Filipinos, especially the younger generation consisting of young adults. Young adulthood is characterized by a focus on self-discovery, social experimentation, and significant life decisions regarding education, career, and relationships (Arnett, 2000). Therefore, one of the fundamental life stages is trying to figure out oneself. The Korean Wave is a highly popular foreign pop culture among local teenagers and females in the ages of 20s and 30s (Jang & Song, 2017). Therefore, making young adults one of the most affected individuals in the consumption of Hallyu in the Philippines.

A study conducted by Tan (2023), indicates that youth who engage more with Korean dramas and idolize celebrities are more likely to be influenced and buy from Product Placements (PPLs) to support and imitate their favorites. This explains why most young adults are the ones who reflect Hallyu more in everyday lives, whether in terms of buying physical items, watching Kdramas, listening to K-pop, and overall consuming Korean goods. According to Highley (2019), young adulthood is a period characterized by key developmental tasks that allow the young adult to participate in self-exploration to cultivate a personal identity and belief system, all the while gaining independence and autonomy. Therefore, the surrounding environment can still easily influence a person's life as they try to seek identification at this stage. Imitation behavior can be concluded, namely determining other individuals to become their role models and becoming examples in behaving in society as a process of finding true identity (Fortunata & Utami, 2021). Therefore, the continuous consumption of Hallyu can influence how an individual presents themselves to the world, including the way they behave and socialize towards others.

Due to the continuous spread of Hallyu, it connects different nations with different backgrounds. The consumption of Korean popular culture in general helps in acquiring knowledge about the Korean culture itself, as well as in grasping the Korean manner of speech and communication (Leon et. al., 2022). Therefore, it allows individuals to connect with others who share the same interest. The social connection made with others allows individuals to express and improve well-being. Kamarrudin (2012) defined social behaviors such as helping, giving, and donating can be viewed as an act of charity that has positive social consequences. This shows that social behavior can be broadly categorized based on the nature of interactions and their outcomes which can be identified through positive social behavior and negative social behavior.

It is undeniable that in today's world, Hallyu is one of the factors that influences the daily lives of individuals. Korea is probably the only country in the world that wants

to become the world's leading exporter of popular culture (Roll, 2020, as cited in Lee & How, 2021). Hallyu is becoming more accepted by society. Therefore, this study seeks to find significant information to know what the motivations of Filipinos towards Hallyu are and what are the possible future implications of Hallyu in the development of social behavior in the lives of individuals, especially the Filipino young adults. The enormous popularity of the Hallyu has penetrated Filipinos' lifestyles, perceptions, and decision-making behavior for almost two decades (Malabanan, Gono, Dela Vega, & Pantoja, 2022). Other than Korea, no country is yet to be able to duplicate the Hallyu phenomenon (Lim & Goiuvris, 2020). Thus, making Hallyu the phenomenon that is introduced globally.

The expressed identities through engagement with social media and digital platforms, forming online communities that enable self-expression and social interaction across cultural boundaries fosters the impact of Hallyu to the development of social behavior. However, the existing studies in connection to Hallyu do not highlight the direct and indirect possible implications of consuming Hallyu in the later years of development on the positive social behavior of Filipino young adults. Therefore, this aims to identify the possible directions regarding the development of social behavior of Filipino young adults in relation to Hallyu.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the Philippines. The participants were students from one state university located in Los Baños, Laguna. The said university is home for people from different places with different backgrounds and cultures which allows for a diverse experience. The university also has an organization catering students who are interested in Korean culture. In addition, a lot of Korean stores can be found near the vicinity of the said university such as the Seoul Kitchen, K-GO Korean food house, Yeonin, Korean Top Chef, and more. The chosen locale allows for a diverse people who consume Hallyu to become part of the study.

A qualitative approach to determine the influence of Hallyu in the social behavior of Filipino young adults in the Philippines. Qualitative research allows the study of the nature of phenomena and is especially appropriate for answering questions of why something is (not) observed, assessing complex multi-component interventions, and focusing on improvement intervention (Bussetto et al., 2020). In addition, this is also phenomenological research. It is also best known as the science of the essence of consciousness and perception, which describes the idea

and meaning of the lived experience of individuals (Badil et al., 2023).

The participants are male and female ranging from 19 to 22 years old as it is considered as a young adult (18 to 25 years old). A total of ten (10) Filipino young adults participated in the study. In selecting the study participants for the study, the following criteria were set: (1) a Filipino young adult, ranging from 18 to 25 years old residing in the Philippines; (2) enrolled in the state university in Los Baños, Laguna; (3) continuously consumes Korean culture either through Korean dramas, Korean pop culture, and other Korean products (skincare, make-up, or food) for the last 5 years.

The data was collected by using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow for an effective data collection method as they provide: (1) qualitative, open-ended data; (2) participant thoughts, feelings and beliefs about a particular topic; and (3) delving deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The study was also conducted online by using the platform Google Meet as it allows flexibility to both the participants and the researcher.

A thematic analysis was used to make sense of the participants' answers. It enables researchers to examine a data set gathered from various qualitative sources and identify overarching themes that emerge across the data, allowing them to derive meaningful insights (Rosairo, 2023).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As Korean popular culture continues to thrive in the Philippines, it has given rise to new patterns of communication, identity formation, and community engagement among young adults. This phenomenon has been particularly evident in how Hallyu fosters meaningful connections, promotes empathy and understanding, and encourages openness and communication. Therefore, the emerging themes before suggest interactions, values, and social outlook that are reshaped through consumption of Hallyu. Understanding these future directions offers valuable insights into how global cultural flows can influence the development of social behaviors in a localized context. This study found two (2) main themes. The descriptions elaborate on each theme, ensuring clarity and contextual depth for the following analysis.

The Shift and Low Engagement on Hallyu Interests

While Hallyu has gained widespread popularity globally, there has also been a noticeable shift among some individuals toward lower engagement over time, specifically to young adults. This theme referring to "The Shift and Low Engagement on Hallyu Interests" showcases

that the young adults' interests in Hallyu aspects change over time or as the individuals mature. This decline in interest can be attributed to various factors, such as content fatigue, evolving personal preferences, or even the saturation of Hallyu-related media (Ainslie et al., 2017).

One participant shared how she envisions herself in the next 10 years, if she would still be consuming Hallyu content as she mostly consumes K-pop. She shared that she wouldn't be as engaged into the culture as she is right now, but she would still be there. The shift in life priorities is mainly the reason why she thinks that there will be a decline in Hallyu consumption. To be exact, she stated that,

"I think more on hindi ganon kaengage pero something na nandun pa rin 'yung presence ko kasi iba naman 'yung life mo after mong- hindi ka na estudyante. Meron ka ng responsibilidad na kailangan gampanan sa buhay." (I think it's more like I'm not as engaged anymore, but my presence is still there somehow—because life changes after you're no longer a student. You now have responsibilities that you need to take care of in life.) (Participant 1)

Another participant shared the similar sentiment as participant 1, where he envisions himself to be still continuing to consume Hallyu contents as he has been consuming it for several years already. He will still consume but it would be limited due to the change in life priorities as he seems himself to be working in the next 10 years. He stated that,

"Feel ko ano yes pa rin pero limited na since working na. Since kasi ano sa simula palang nagcoconsume na talaga ako, kahit nganggang ngayon like oh my god- 9 years na? 9 years na akong nagcoconsume sa K-pop 'yun." (I feel like it's still a yes, but it's more limited now since I'm already working... Since the very beginning I've really been consuming it, and even until now—oh my god, it's been 9 years? I've been consuming K-pop for 9 years already.) (Participant 10)

Moreover, another participant shared the same sentiment where there will be limited consumption and she wouldn't be engaged as much but the interest in Hallyu, specifically to her favorite artists would still be there. She explicitly stated that,

"Feel ko ano like kahit hindi naman na- hindi na siguro siya gaano katindi ng pagengage ko right now. Feel ko ano like kunware 'yung mga immediate na contents siguro na narerelease, parang hindi ko na siya siguro masyadong lahat kailangan kong ano panoorin or bukas. Hindi na siguro magiging ganun ako kaengage with ganung types of entertainment na nilalabas ng idols ko." (I feel like even though I'm not as intensely engaged as I used to be, the interest is still there... I feel like, for example, with the immediate content that gets released, I don't feel the need to watch everything right away anymore. I'm probably not

going to be as engaged with those types of entertainment that my idols release as I used to be.)

(Participant 5)

All of the experiences of the participants shows that as individuals mature or encounter new interests and responsibilities, their engagement may naturally lessen or diversify. These concerns are based around the oversaturation of Hallyu, its aggressive marketing tactics and the inability of this industry to adapt to the very significant changes in this region (Ainslie et al., 2017). While Hallyu remains a strong cultural force because of its ability to attract individuals without using force. The shifts in interest patterns highlight the need for adaptive approaches to maintain meaningful fan involvement in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

Additionally, the participants were also asked if they think that consuming Hallyu will still create changes in their behavior in the next five to ten years. Most of the participants answered that there will be no major changes, however, they are still open to the possibility of changes in their behavior, more specifically their social behavior. They stated that,

"Feel ko enough na 'yung change na nakuha ko from my teenage days na nakuha ko from Hallyu. So wala masyadong changes ang mangayari sa akin dahil naging part na siya ng buhay ko since high school." (I feel like the change I got from Hallyu during my teenage years is already enough. So there won't be many more changes happening to me because it has already become a part of my life since high school.) (Participant 2)

"Parang hindi na ako nagaanticipate ng mga ganun ka-major na mga changes." (I'm no longer anticipating major changes like that anymore.) (Participant 8)

Development is a process for individuals, including young adults. In this study, this development is shown in decline in interest due to changing life priorities, which signifies the transition of the young adult to adulthood. Due to the declining interest in Hallyu, the participants' behavior changes in relation to Hallyu will also decline. Although the participants would still engage in Hallyu content, they do not see it as something that would bring about major changes in their behavior specifically when they are older. Additionally, controversies within the industry or perceived repetitiveness in themes and productions may reduce the appeal for certain audiences.

In the same study of Ainslie et al., (2017), one answer from the respondent reiterated that it is just a phase in life for teenagers where individuals leave this phase and new ones come in. Therefore, in summary, while the initial engagement with Hallyu greatly influenced the development of social behaviors—such as openness, communication, and cultural understanding—the gradual shift and declining interest over time also reflect natural stages of personal growth and changing priorities of young

adults.

As the young adults mature over time, they take on new responsibilities and move into different life phases, their interaction with Hallyu may become less intense, yet its impact remains embedded in their social perspectives. The foundations built through years of engagement, particularly during formative teenage years, continue to shape behaviors like empathy, open-mindedness, and global awareness even as active participation lessens. Thus, the decline in active consumption does not erase the social changes Hallyu helped nurture. Rather, it shows a transition where the influence persists in more subtle, long-term ways.

The Sustained and Continued Consumption of Hallyu

Despite the shifts and challenges brought by adulthood and changing life priorities, many individuals continue to engage with Hallyu in meaningful ways. Sustained consumption often stems from the deep personal connections and motivations, positive memories, and identity-building experiences formed during earlier years of consuming the different Hallyu facets, in this context, it is mainly focused on K-pop and K-drama. Hallyu remains a consistent part of their lives, offering comfort, entertainment, and a sense of community.

One participant shared how she sees herself to be still consuming Hallyu in the future. She added that in the next 10 years, she would probably have more money to spend on K-pop (as her main Hallyu facet consumed) since she will have a job by then. She stated that,

"I would say probably, especially kapag nagkatrabaho na ko, mas may pera na ako gumastos... Since sobrang grade 6 palang ako K-pop fan na ako tapos hanggang ngayon K-pop fan pa rin ako. Mga ilang– hindi more than 10 years na. Ayun so parang nakikita ko ano K-pop fan pa rin ako." (I would say probably, especially when I start working, I'll have more money to spend... Since I've been a K-pop fan ever since I was in Grade 6 and I'm still a K-pop fan up to now, it's been, like, more than 10 years already. So I can see that I'm still a K-pop fan even in the future.) (Participant 3)

Another participant also shared that she's very invested and engaged with Hallyu now and she does not see it to be declining in the future. Instead, she shared how she would be consuming it more in the future as she also envisions that she has enough money by then to spend and even visit the country of South Korea itself to personally experience the South Korean culture first-hand. She shared that,

"I am banking on the fact that I am very much invested in it na. 'Yung invested na 'yun parang– ay talagang rooted na 'yung buhay ko... Even more so, I'll be rich by then. So feeling ko kayang kaya ko na pupunta ng Korea." (I am

banking on the fact that I am already very much invested in it. And that investment—it's like my life is already deeply rooted in it... Even more so because by then, I'll be rich. So I feel like I'll really be able to go to Korea.) (Participant 7)

Additionally, since there is a sustained consumption of Hallyu, there will also be changes in behavior. The same participant shared her thoughts, stating that,

"Feeling ko meron at merong magbabago and to the-parang gusto ko lang ay if ever man may magbago, I hope it's for the better... I mean consuming the culture and exposing myself in the culture is also you know, a part of me is also changing na rin na that– that I wouldn't deny that. So like if such change– I mean such change is inevitable, I hope and pray that such change is good." (I feel like there will always be changes, and I just hope that if ever something does change, it will be for the better... I mean consuming the culture and exposing myself to it has also led to parts of me changing—and I wouldn't deny that. So, if change is inevitable, I just hope and pray that it will be a good and positive change.) (Participant 7)

Based on the participants' experiences, it can be seen that they have been long-time fans and consumers of Hallyu. It can also be seen how deeply invested they are in Korean culture, mainly focusing on one facet, K-pop. The consumers' experiences, beliefs, and values are shaped by culture, which is connected to attitudes, emotions, social norms, intentions, and behavior (Ong et al., 2023). Therefore, their positive experiences as well as their motivation to continuously consume Korean culture show in their behavior where they seem themselves still continuing to consume the culture.

Again, the huge potential of soft power of South Korea (Huang 2022), influences the Filipino individuals, mainly the young adults, to participate in the consumption of its culture. Since the young adults are mainly the target audience of Hallyu, there is a high chance of their behavior to change based on what they observe and consume from the different Hallyu facets. In terms of social behavior, the changes are particularly in how individuals perceive themselves and interact with others. As engagement with Korean culture becomes a consistent part of daily life even as the young adults mature and age, they develop stronger intercultural communication skills, greater empathy, and a broader worldview because of their sustained and continued consumption of the South Korean culture.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study illustrate the significant and multifaceted influence of Hallyu on the social behavior of Filipino young adults. Through continued engagement with Hallyu, many participants developed enhanced openness, empathy, and communication skills. Hallyu

served not only as entertainment but also as an avenue to form friendships, communities, and encouraging more inclusive and globally aware perspectives. This also shows the development of a young adult showing a glimpse of the transition in adulthood. What started as a leisure activity that piqued the interest of individuals also led the young adults' personal growth, shaping their values and interactions with other people.

Although some individuals noted a decline in engagement due to changing life priorities, the lasting impact of Hallyu on their social attitudes and behaviors remains evident. The research highlights how cultural phenomena like Hallyu can transcend entertainment to become deeply embedded in personal and collective identity formation. In addition, this study contributes to the growing body of literature emphasizing the role of transnational cultural flows in influencing youth behavior and offers meaningful insights into the evolving nature of social engagement in a globalized, media-saturated world.

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