



Beyond The Screen: The Psychological Effects and Motivations of Hallyu Fandom Among Southeast Asian University Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the psychological mechanisms and motivational drivers of South Korean popular culture (Hallyu) consumption among university students in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia (n=201). Employing a mixed-methods explanatory correlational design, the research explores how high digital immersion translates into behavioral aspirations and lifestyle modifications. Quantitative results, utilizing Spearman's rank-order correlation, demonstrate that intensive media engagement particularly with K-dramas ($r_s = 0.460, p < 0.001$) and K-pop ($r_s = 0.434, p < 0.001$) significantly predicts linguistic acquisition desires and cross-border travel intentions. Complementary qualitative thematic analysis reveals core consumption motivations centered on emotional comfort, aspirational emulation, and visual pilgrimage. Crucially, the findings challenge the assumption of total cultural assimilation by introducing a framework of "Selective Adoption". Students utilize Hallyu as a modern style toolkit for identity performance, yet they maintain strict boundaries against adopting foreign beauty standards or daily lifestyle habits. The study further identifies an "Academic Paradox," wherein Hallyu stimulates informal cultural curiosity but remains intentionally compartmentalized away from formal academic performance. Ultimately, this research refines the concept of a monolithic "Unified Wave" into a "Hybrid Participant" model. The findings suggest that Hallyu functions as a specialized emotional indulgence that reduces psychological distance and fosters global mobility aspirations, all while keeping Southeast Asian youth firmly anchored in their indigenous identities.

Keywords: Hallyu, Southeast Asia, Selective Adoption, Psychological Effects, Fandom Motivations.



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INTRODUCTION

The global proliferation of South Korean popular culture, collectively known as Hallyu, has transformed from a regional curiosity into a dominant cultural mainstay among Southeast Asian youth (Kim & Cho, 2024; Hong, 2017). In the context of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), this phenomenon has transcended digital screens to influence the linguistic (Samosir & Wee, 2023; Leon et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2026), aesthetic (Hue, 2025), and social preferences (Bariquit et al., 2025; Banug et al., 2026) of a generation. The expansion of Hallyu into food, merchandise, tourism, and other consumer practices further demonstrates that Korean popular culture is experienced through various and interconnected forms of engagement. This modern Hallyu phenomenon is primarily driven by digital immersion, where social media platforms function as the central architecture for fan engagement. Yu (2024) posits that these digital spaces have effectively dismantled geographical and communicative boundaries, allowing fans to pursue a "shared spiritual resonance." This environment encourages an active process of "self-actualization" and "identity performance" (Pan & Hassan, 2025), where fans utilize virtual communities to perform versions of themselves deeply connected to their idols. Consequently, while Galeon et al. (2026) identified a "Unified Wave" of Hallyu consumption among ASEAN university students, characterized by high digital immersion and standardized media appetites (Odrón & Tumapon, 2026), the psychological motivations and intensity underlying this shared pattern warrant closer examination.

To understand this phenomenon, attention must be paid to the ways in which university students consume Hallyu and their motivations for sustaining engagement. Empirical research reveals that consumption is multi-faceted; although entertainment primarily drives initial engagement, curiosity, emotional connection, peer influence, and social interaction encourage continued participation. For

instance, Alanzalon (2011) discovered that entertainment needs for Filipino youth are fulfilled by K-pop's music, choreography, and visual appeal. More recent research similarly points to personal and social motivations, with Leon et al. (2025) finding that interest in the Korean language combined with social interaction sustains Filipino fans' interest. Capistrano et al. (2022) likewise associated fan passions with online engagement and community formation. To understand the depth of this connection, recent literature distinguishes between an individual's internal affinity and their external social behaviors. Reysen et al. (2024) propose a framework distinguishing "fanship" (the individual's relationship with the media) from "fandom" (the social identification with a group). These emotional bonds often manifest as "parasocial relationships," where idols serve as "emotional surrogates" filling psychological gaps and providing blueprints for resilience in the face of academic or personal challenges (Wang, 2024).

The extent or intensity of this consumption provides another critical dimension of inquiry. Understanding the "Unified Wave" requires moving beyond measuring hours spent to examine how intensity alters perceived outcomes. Recent research indicates that exposure to Hallyu content contributes to greater cognitive interest and a desire to travel to South Korea (Kim et al., 2026), while increased spending on Hallyu products is often linked to language familiarity (Shin & Kim, 2026). This transition from digital consumption to physical aspirations such as travel and career goals is framed as a form of "pre-departure socialization" (Wang, Xu, & Zou, 2025). Social media serves as a vital bridge, allowing students to develop a cross-cultural identity long before physically visiting South Korea. This "Beyond the Screen" effect requires intensive emotional investment, identified by Yu (2024) as a form of emotional labor that solidifies the transition from passive viewer to active participant. Ultimately, this integration functions as an affective-behavioral nexus; Leshner et al. (2024) propose a serial mediation model where media interest only translates into significant psychological well-being when it moves from passive fanship into active fandom participation.

There are several aspects of young people's experiences affected by this intensity. Linguistic aspirations are stimulated by repeated exposure, with media functioning as an entry point into language learning and persistence (Wang, 2024). Similarly, interest in Korean food has been linked to media exposure and peer influence among Malaysian students (Raman & Im, 2024). However, despite this intense engagement, research indicates it rarely results in total cultural displacement. The concept of "Negotiated Convergence" helps explain this selective incorporation, where audiences adopt parts of Korean culture while maintaining clear boundaries around their indigenous identities (Cruz et al., 2024). Fans filter external elements through local values, utilizing fan communities as "sanctuaries" or "refuges" that allow for experimentation without abandoning national heritage (Aurora et al., 2024). Comparative research shows that audiences in Indonesia and Malaysia interpret Korean cultural products in light of their local, ethnic, and religious conditions, producing cultural hybrids rather than undergoing simple assimilation (Lee et al., 2020). This "Hybrid Participant" model is supported by Srimulyani and Paidi (2025), who note that for some cohorts, fandom is compartmentalized as "Private Leisure"—a functional tool for stress relief rather than a foundational lifestyle shift. Thus, Hallyu fosters intercultural sensitivity and "imagined futures" of global mobility, while allowing students to remain anchored in their own social norms (Leshner et al., 2024; Pan & Hassan, 2025).

It is especially important to take these nuances into account when looking at the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Although these countries share geographical proximity and high Hallyu exposure, their audiences exist in distinct cultural and social settings. While previous research has looked at language learning, fan involvement, cultural hybridity, and tourism intentions, these aspects have usually been studied in isolation. There is comparatively little understanding of whether the intensity of Hallyu consumption is statistically linked to perceived psychological and behavioral effects, how motivations connect to continued engagement, and if these patterns differ across these specific nations. Addressing this gap is vital in light of the apparent "Unified Wave" of consumption (Galeon et al., 2026), because similar media appetites do not necessarily imply identical motivations or outcomes across national contexts.

Against this background, the present study examines Hallyu consumption among university students in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia from three related perspectives. First, it identifies the primary motivations underlying Hallyu consumption. Second, it establishes the statistical relationship between consumption intensity including hours of consumption, preference, and spending and perceived psychological and behavioral effects. Third, it uses respondents' open-ended responses

to provide qualitative explanations for the quantitative findings, particularly illuminating the experiences underlying observed consumption patterns. By bringing together motivations, consumption intensity, perceived effects, and cross-national comparison within a single analytical framework, this study provides a more integrated account of Hallyu consumption. This approach extends existing research by examining not only what students consume, but why they sustain their engagement, whether their consumption intensity affects outcomes, and how these experiences manifest uniquely across three distinct Southeast Asian contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods explanatory correlational design to examine Hallyu consumption, its associated psychological and behavioral effects, and the motivations underlying students' engagement. The quantitative component provided the primary basis for determining the statistical relationships between indicators of Hallyu consumption intensity and perceived psychological and behavioral effects. Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine these relationships because the study involved non-parametric/ordinal measures and sought to determine the strength and direction of associations rather than establish causal effects. The qualitative component complemented the quantitative analysis by examining respondents' open-ended explanations of their reasons for consuming Hallyu. The themes obtained were then used as contextual explanations for the quantitative patterns; consequently, the mixed-methods design allowed the study to progress from identifying statistical relationships to looking at the motivations and experiences that could account for those relationships.

Population and Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to identify university students ($n = 201$) who actively consumed Hallyu content. The sample comprised students from the Philippines ($n = 135$), Indonesia ($n = 52$), and Malaysia ($n = 14$). Filipino respondents were recruited from a higher education institution in the Philippines, while respondents from Indonesia and Malaysia were recruited primarily through partner higher education institutions of the researchers, with participants from other participating institutions also included. The inclusion criterion was that respondents were university students who actively consumed Hallyu content. A mandatory screening question was employed at the beginning of the online survey, and only respondents who confirmed active consumption of K-pop, K-dramas, or other Korean-related products were permitted to proceed. Recruitment and survey distribution were facilitated through designated focal persons and transmittal letters. Respondents provided informed consent before completing the online survey through Google Forms.

Research Instrument

Data were collected through a structured, multidimensional survey questionnaire administered online through Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information on the participants' Hallyu consumption, perceived effects of Hallyu consumption, and reasons for engaging with Korean popular culture. The quantitative portion of the instrument consisted of measures of Hallyu consumption and perceived psychological and lifestyle effects, while an open-ended question was included to obtain qualitative explanations of the participants' consumption. The terminal study from which the present analysis was derived likewise employed a survey questionnaire to determine levels and effects of Hallyu consumption and included an open-ended question concerning respondents' reasons for consuming Hallyu.

First, the Consumption Intensity Scale measured indicators of Hallyu engagement across several forms of consumption. These included the amount of time spent consuming K-dramas and/or movies, engagement with K-pop, expenditure on Korean-related products such as merchandise, fashion, and cosmetics, and consumption of Korean food. The instrument also captured preference and frequency indicators associated with these forms of consumption. For example, viewing time for K-dramas and movies was recorded using categorical intervals of less than one hour, 1–2 hours, 2–3 hours, and more than 3 hours per week. Expenditure on Korean fashion and cosmetics was likewise measured using equivalent monetary categories across the Philippine peso, Indonesian rupiah, and Malaysian ringgit.

Second, the Psychological and Lifestyle Effects Scale measured perceived effects of Hallyu consumption across seven domains: linguistic interest, aesthetic preference, travel intentions, social proximity, academic interest, intercultural sensitivity, and personal life. Items were presented using a 4-point Likert-type response scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, with higher responses indicating stronger agreement with the stated effect. The terminal report shows the use of the four response categories- Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree- in reporting participants' responses. The same response structure was used for other perception and preference measures in the questionnaire.

Lastly, the Qualitative Motivation Inquiry consisted of an open-ended question asking respondents to explain their reasons for consuming Hallyu. These responses provided the qualitative component of the study and were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring motivations and experiences underlying Hallyu consumption. The terminal report likewise treated respondents' reasons for consumption as a distinct component of the inquiry.

Data were collected via a structured multi-dimensional survey administered through Google Forms. The instrument was divided into three primary sections: Consumption Intensity Scale: This section measured the independent variables: Digital immersion (daily hours spent on K-dramas/K-pop), economic expenditure (normalized across PHP, IDR, and MYR), and frequency of lifestyle integration (food/merchandise), psychological and Lifestyle Effects Scale: A 4-point Likert scale was used to measure seven effect domains: linguistic desire, aesthetic preference, travel intentions, social proximity, academic interest, intercultural sensitivity, and personal life impact. And qualitative Motivation Inquiry: An open-ended section prompted respondents to provide the "reasons" behind their consumption. These responses formed the basis for the thematic analysis used to explain the quantitative correlations.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

To address the non-parametric nature of the data and the unequal group sizes across nations, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient (r_s) was utilized to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between consumption levels and psychological effects. The qualitative data underwent Thematic Analysis. This involved an inductive coding process where raw responses were categorized into themes such as "Emotional Comfort," "Selective Adoption," and "Visual Pilgrimage." These themes were then triangulated with the quantitative results to provide a holistic explanation of the fandom's psychological impact.

Ethics and Data Privacy

The study was cleared by the University Research Ethics and Review Board (URERB). Digital informed consent was obtained from all participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of the study and the total anonymization of data. In compliance with regional data protection standards, no personally identifiable information (PII) was collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Psychological Catalyst: Media Immersion and Aspirational Shifts

The findings indicate that Hallyu consumption among ASEAN university students acts as a potent cognitive and emotional engine, driving significant shifts in linguistic interest and travel aspirations. Although Galeon et al. (2026) established a "Unified Wave" of digital consumption patterns across the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia, the current data suggest that the psychological impact scales proportionately with a user's level of digital immersion. Table 1 demonstrates this relationship, highlighting the significant correlations between specific media habits and their psychological outcomes.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficient between the Level and Effects of Hallyu Consumption

Level of Hallyu consumpti on	Correlati on coefficien t	Effect of Hallyu Consumption						
		Linguist ic	Aesthet ic	Travel Intentio ns	Social Proximi ty	Academi cs	Intercult ural	Persona l Life

Sensitivity							
y							
K-pop							
Number of hours spent	0.434** *	0.109	0.224**	0.248** *	0.284** *	0.271***	0.100
	0.000	0.124	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.156
K-drama and Movies							
Number of hours spent	0.460** *	0.277** *	0.379** *	0.365** *	0.288** *	0.207***	0.219**
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.002
Preference	0.390** *	0.337** *	0.430** *	0.350** *	0.290** *	0.290***	0.297** *
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Merchandise							
Amount spent	0.158* 0.025	0.040 0.575	0.099 0.161	0.115 0.103	0.182** 0.010	0.084 0.237	0.081 0.252
Number of items collected	0.215** 0.002	0.027 0.075	0.135 0.057	0.203** 0.004	0.222** 0.002	0.171* 0.015	-0.022 0.761
Fashion and cosmetics							
Amount spent	0.102 0.151	0.058 0.417	0.010 0.883	0.036 0.612	0.085 0.231	0.202** 0.004	0.055 0.440
Preference	0.386** *	0.360** *	0.330** *	0.279** *	0.232**	0.265***	0.356** *
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000
Korean food							
Number of times eating	0.054 0.444	0.208** 0.003	0.047 0.512	0.181** 0.010	0.026 0.710	0.048 0.501	0.296** 0.000
Preference	0.245** *	0.265** *	0.173* 0.173*	0.154* 0.154*	0.178*	0.278***	0.386** *
	0.000	0.000	0.014	0.029	0.011	0.000	0.000

Note: * Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$; ** Significant at $\alpha = 0.01$; *** Significant at $\alpha = 0.001$

Statistical analysis reveals a robust positive correlation between media immersion and linguistic engagement. Qualitatively, Filipino respondents emphasized a practical motivation to remove the "subtitle barrier," while Indonesian respondents categorized Hallyu as a "cultural gateway" for deeper integration. This "Linguistic Leap" signifies a transition from passive viewing to "Semantic Intimacy," aligning with the participatory culture framework where fans evolve into active producers of meaning (Aurora et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this immersion serves as "pre-departure socialization" (Wang et al., 2025), strongly predicting travel aspirations. However, qualitative data reveals a nuanced regional divergence: Filipino and Indonesian youths view South Korea as a window for future employment, whereas Malaysian students frame travel as a "virtual pilgrimage" for cultural exploration. This demonstrates that while digital platforms create a "shared spiritual resonance" (Yu, 2024), the resulting aspirational outcomes are deeply mediated by the fan's domestic economic context, humanizing the "Other" while driving distinct trajectories for global mobility.

Selective Cultural Adoption and the Boundaries of Lifestyle Integration

A central finding of this study is that intensive Hallyu consumption does not result in wholesale cultural displacement among ASEAN university students. Instead, these youths engage in a process of

"Selective Adoption," strategically filtering external cultural exports through their existing local values and identities. This phenomenon is most evident in the tension between their high admiration for Korean aesthetics and their firm boundaries regarding daily lifestyle integration, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Effects of Hallyu Consumption in Terms of Aesthetics

Statements	Level of Agreement			
	Philippines	Indonesia	Malaysia	All respondents
1. Influence of Korean Fashion/Style on Personal Fashion Choices	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree
2. Influence of Korean Culture on Beauty Standards	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree and Agree	Disagree
3. Style Preference on Korean Fashion/Style	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree

As Table 2 indicates, while students across the cohorts uniformly agree that Korean fashion is preferable and stylish, there is a statistically significant rejection of adopting Korean beauty standards as their own. This contradiction points to the presence of an internal "Aesthetic Filter". Unlike the broader East Asian fan culture observed by Wang (2024), which often demands moral and cultural "purity" from its idols, this ASEAN demographic maintains a more pragmatic and functional dynamic. Qualitatively, Filipino respondents appreciate the "visual attractiveness" and high production quality of the media, whereas Indonesian youths value the "Uniqueness and Novelty" without desiring to replace their indigenous beauty ideals. Consequently, Hallyu provides a "Style Toolkit"—a collection of adaptable, external markers that students utilize for "identity performance" (Pan & Hassan, 2025) to signal global connectivity while validating the "Negotiated Convergence" theory (Galeon et al., 2026), wherein foreign elements co-exist alongside national heritage.

This boundary between aesthetic appreciation and behavioral integration extends deeply into the students' personal lives, as demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Effects of Hallyu Consumption in Terms of Personal Life

Statements	Level of Agreement			
	Philippines	Indonesia	Malaysia	All respondents
1. Implementing Korean Lifestyle in Daily Life	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree
2. Consuming Korean Food as Part of Daily Meals	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
3. Buying Korean Products and Goods (e.g., gadgets, appliances, etc.)	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree

The quantitative data reinforce a strict lifestyle boundary, with respondents universally disagreeing with the prospect of implementing a "Korean Lifestyle in Daily Life". A significant paradox emerges when comparing these results to the initial correlation data: while the *preference* for Korean food correlates significantly with perceived personal life effects ($r_s = 0.386$), the actual *frequency* of consuming it shows a much weaker relationship ($r_s = 0.296$). This discrepancy suggests that Hallyu functions primarily as a "Specialized Indulgence" a temporary emotional escape rather than a foundational shift in daily existence. Interpreted through Reysen et al.'s (2024) framework, the ASEAN student experience remains largely confined to "fanship" (internal appreciation for emotional comfort) rather than a complete behavioral shift into "fandom". Thematic analysis corroborates this, with fans finding novelty in Korean traditions while remaining firmly anchored in indigenous social norms. Thus,

while the "Unified Wave" is a powerful digital and aesthetic reality, the lived, domestic experience of the ASEAN student remains resolutely local.

The Affective-Behavioral Nexus: Social Proximity and the Academic Paradox

Beyond aesthetic and lifestyle boundaries, intensive Hallyu consumption effectively reduces the psychological distance between ASEAN youth and South Korean society, fostering deep social proximity and an affective-behavioral nexus. The initial quantitative data (Table 1) revealed that K-drama ($r_s = 0.365$) and K-pop ($r_s = 0.248$) immersion significantly predicts a student's sense of closeness to Korean people, facilitating parasocial relationships where idols act as "emotional surrogates" (Wang, 2025). However, a qualitative regional divide emerges regarding this intimacy: Filipino and Indonesian students largely view Korean stars as "Role Models," drawing "Inspiration" from their resilience and work ethic, whereas Malaysian respondents frame Hallyu functionally as "Entertainment and Fun" or "Stress Relief". This highlights that fandom identities are context-dependent; in environments like Malaysia, media is treated as "Private Leisure" (Srimulyani & Paidi, 2025) and is decoupled from long-term self-continuity. This compartmentalization is profoundly evident within the university setting, creating an academic paradox illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Effects of Hallyu Consumption in Terms of Academics

Statements	Level of Agreement			
	Philippines	Indonesia	Malaysia	All respondents
1. Motivation to Study About Korea and Its Culture	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
2. Desire to Pursue Research about Korea and Its Culture	Disagree	Agree	Disagree and Agree	Agree
3. Academic Performance Due to Hallyu Consumption	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree

As Table 4 indicates, students uniformly agree that Hallyu acts as a gateway to informal, curiosity-driven scholarship, motivating them to study Korean culture. Yet, they simultaneously disagree that this engagement translates into better performance in core university subjects. This "Performance Paradox" demonstrates a clear cognitive boundary: students utilize digital spaces as knowledge-sharing hubs (Pan & Hassan, 2025) and a "sanctuary" for emotional solace (Aurora et al., 2024), carefully protecting their professional academic obligations from their leisure enclaves. The overarching psychological outcomes of this selective engagement are synthesized in Table 5, which maps the qualitative motivational themes to their corresponding statistical impacts.

Table 5. Snapshot of Core Motivational Themes and Associated Psychological Outcomes

Theme	Academic Definition	Representative Qualitative Evidence	Primary Statistical Link (Table 1)
Semantic Intimacy	The drive to acquire language skills to remove technological mediation (subtitles) and achieve authentic emotional resonance.	<i>"At first, I learned Korean only to watch K-drama more comfortably. But now, I find it's much more interesting than what I thought before... every habit, tradition and meme [...] make sense. And that's the interesting point for</i>	Linguistic Effect ($r_s = 0.460, p < .001$)

		<i>me, either when I'm listening to the songs or watching the dramas."</i>	
		<i>"To have an update about my biases and I'm loving their language."</i>	
Visual Pilgrimage	The cognitive transformation of media landscapes into tangible travel objectives and "imagined" future geographies.	<i>"I am amazed to the quality of movies, and music they publish, their culture that differs from us, their astounding environment that makes me want to go there, and more!"</i>	Travel Intentions ($r_s = 0.430$, $p < .001$)
		<i>"Learning their lifestyle, language, and being aesthetic are the reason why I consume Hallyu."</i>	
Affective Escapism	The functional use of Hallyu content as a tool for emotional regulation, stress relief, and psychological comfort.	<i>"... they became coping mechanisms for people who want a short escape from the harsh reality we live in."</i>	Social Proximity ($r_s = 0.365$, $p < .001$)
		<i>"In all honesty... they have become a place of comfort. They became my youth and added color to my life when it was dull... While kpop groups/artists become your friends through songs and their videos."</i>	
Selective Adoption	The intentional filtering of cultural exports where material goods are embraced while core identity markers (beauty/habits) are preserved.	<i>"Especially when it comes to beauty stuff, it Made me realize that every woman can be pretty as long as their caring their body but Ofcourse supporting the local products is more valuable than ever... I thought it would be better to Reducing the amount</i>	Personal Life (Relationship with preference $r_s = 0.356$)

of imports and must focus on Export."

"It's not wrong to go beyond your comfort zone but just take it in a positive way, just how i support korean culture... Above all, we still shouldn't overlook where we came from and still embrace it."

Aspirational Emulation	The perception of Korean artists and characters as moral or professional role models (primarily in PH/ID cohorts).	<i>"Because Korean culture teaches politeness, hard work, and persistence in trying."</i> <i>"Because I like their culture, like the idols who are there and can motivate me in everything... It gain my interest, keep me entertained, and my Korean idols continues to inspire me in some aspect of my life to be better."</i>	Academics ($r_s = 0.288$, $p < .001$)
Cultural Gateway	The use of pop culture as a springboard for broader intellectual inquiry into history, traditions, and social norms.	<i>"I've been used to consuming hallyu... since I was in middle school, and I'm interested in learning about their culture and language... I want to learn in-depth to integrate my knowledge and courteous personality by their influence."</i> <i>"In my opinion, Korean is just not about K-Pop or K-Drama. I love Korean tradition because I love tradition like wearing hanbok, chuseok celebration, etc."</i>	Intercultural Sensitivity ($r_s = 0.271$, $p < .001$)

Table 5 elucidates the triad of core motivations driving the "Beyond the Screen" phenomenon: the pursuit of emotional comfort, the desire for immersive media experiences, and a sense of inspiration derived from Korean role models. This synthesis aligns with Leshner et al.'s (2024) serial mediation model, illustrating that media interest only yields significant psychological outcomes when channeled

into active identity management. Ultimately, the data refines the concept of the "Unified Fan" into the "Hybrid Participant" a digitally connected student who leverages Hallyu to cultivate intercultural sensitivity and "imagined futures" of global mobility, while securely anchoring their primary domestic and academic identities in their local heritage.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the psychological mechanisms and motivations underpinning Hallyu fandom among Southeast Asian university students, specifically examining how consumption intensity relates to behavioral and aspirational effects. Addressing the primary research objectives, the findings demonstrate that intensive digital media immersion acts as a powerful cognitive and emotional engine. Statistically, high levels of K-drama and K-pop consumption are strongly linked to profound aspirational shifts, effectively translating passive viewing into active "Semantic Intimacy" (linguistic desire) and "Pre-Departure Socialization" (travel intentions).

In exploring the qualitative depth of these effects, the research identifies a framework of "Selective Adoption". While students express high admiration for Korean aesthetics and utilize Hallyu as a modern "Style Toolkit" for identity performance, they do not experience cultural displacement. Instead, they maintain firm boundaries regarding daily lifestyle integration and indigenous beauty standards, proving that Hallyu functions as a "Specialized Indulgence" that supplements, rather than supplants, local heritage. Furthermore, Hallyu serves vital psychological and social functions by reducing the psychological distance between fans and South Korean society through emotional resonance and parasocial relationships. However, this creates an "Academic Paradox": while Hallyu drives informal cultural curiosity and serves as either a source of professional inspiration or functional stress relief, it remains strictly compartmentalized away from formal academic performance.

Ultimately, the principal theoretical contribution of this research is refining the concept of a monolithic "Unified Wave" into a model of the "Hybrid Participant". The study establishes that for ASEAN youth, Hallyu is not an agent of cultural erasure but a symbolic resource used to navigate "imagined futures" and global mobility, all while the fan remains resolutely anchored in their national identity.

While limited by self-reported and cross-sectional data, these findings offer actionable pathways for stakeholders. Higher education institutions can capitalize on students' latent linguistic and cultural curiosity by integrating these informal Hallyu interests into structured Asian Studies or language electives. Additionally, cultural diplomats and content creators should focus on narratives of resilience and emotional resonance, as these themes drive the deepest cross-cultural engagement and social proximity among this demographic. Finally, future longitudinal research should investigate whether these digitally mediated "imagined futures" ultimately convert into actual global mobility or provide measurable psychological buffering against academic burnout.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides significant insights into the psychological drivers of Hallyu fandom, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the data relies on self-reported measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly regarding academic performance and cultural adoption. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the research captures a "snapshot" of student motivations but cannot definitively prove long-term behavioral shifts, such as actual migration or permanent language fluency. Finally, the imbalance in sample sizes across the three nations while statistically managed through non-parametric testing limits the ability to generalize specific national differences to the broader population of each country.

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